



Treating the common cold

*After the season of cheer and beer,
Comes champagne and the New Year:
You're sailing high, you're feeling bold.
A fortnight later, you feel queer;
Somehow lose your immune veneer:
You start to sneeze, you're suddenly old,
Your year begins with a blasted cold.*

The common cold is caused by a wide variety of viruses, to which we are all constantly exposed. Most of us only catch a cold once or twice a year—usually when our resistance is low (or we've overindulged). Although medicine tells us there's no cure, many alternative methods can help.

Sugar and liquids

Avoid sugar—even 'natural' ones like honey or orange juice. Sugar lowers vitamin C and, thus, immune function (*Am J Clin Nutr*, 1973, 26: 1180-4). Also, the old adage about drinking plenty of fluids is true. Dry mucous membranes encourage viruses, so drinking lots of liquids and/or using a vapouriser will keep your membranes moist (Murray MT, Pizzorno JE Jr. *An Encyclopaedia of Natural Medicine*. Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing, 1990: 229).

Exercise

Regular moderate exercise can lower your risk of catching a cold. Sedentary people are at medium risk, and elite athletes in intense training are at high risk (*Int J Sports Med*, 1997; 18: S69-S77). Adopting an exercise regime can lead to fewer/shorter infections (*Med Sci Sports Exerc*, 1998; 30: 679-86).

Herbs

- ◆ **Inhale steamed herbs** such as *Matricaria recutita* (German chamomile) to alleviate cold symptoms (*Eur J Pharm*, 1990; 183: 728-9).
- ◆ ***Andrographis paniculata*** (green chiretta) taken at the first signs of a cold significantly reduces the duration and severity of symptoms (*Phytomed*, 1999; 6: 217-23).
- ◆ ***Radix Astragali membranacei*** (milk-vetch root) can reduce colds and their duration by boosting interferons, which help to prevent viral infection (Chang HM, But PPH. *Pharmacology and Applications of Chinese Materia Medica*, vol 2. Teaneck, NJ: World Scientific Publishing, 1987: 1041-6).
- ◆ ***Fructus Ligustri lucidi*** (privet fruit) has similar beneficial effects (*Arzneim Forsch*, 1985; 26: 1069-75).
- ◆ ***Echinacea angustifolia*** as a tea can shorten the duration of cold symptoms (*J Alt Complement Med*, 2000; 6:3 27-334).
- ◆ ***Panax ginseng*** (Korean ginseng)—100 mg/day for 12 weeks—reduced the number of colds, and might boost the effect of flu vaccine (*Drugs Exp Clin Res*, 1996; 22:65-72).

Homeopathy

During the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918, which killed up to 50 million people, US homeopaths recorded mortality rates of 1.05 per cent or less, while conventional physicians had mortality rates of around 30 per cent (*J Am Inst Homeop*,

1921; 13: 1028-43). More recently, four randomised controlled trials of various homeopathic remedies and combinations for the common cold all achieved positive outcomes (*Zeitschr Allgmeinmed*, 1997; 73: 308-14; *Br J Clin Pharmacol*, 1989; 27: 329-35; *Drug Res*, 1988; 38: 578-82; *Drug Res* 1981; 31: 732-6). The lattermost two reported results similar to those with aspirin.

Nutritional supplements

So far, the evidence for most vitamins as a cold preventative or treatment are inconclusive, possibly because most studies have looked at supplements on their own. Only one trial of zinc in adults found a positive result (*Ann Intern Med*, 2000; 133: 245-52). Yet, zinc with selenium was preventative, according to a large study of elderly institutionalised patients (*Arch Intern Med*, 1999; 159: 748-54).

Saunas

Saunas once or twice a week for six months can lower the incidence of colds (*Ann Med*, 1990; 22: 225-7).

Acupressure

Relieve nasal congestion by applying acupressure to the *ying xiang* acupoints (LI20; half an inch on either side of the nostrils, along the crease running from the nose to corner of the mouth (*Am J Rhinol*, 1999; 13: 77-9).

De-stressing

Get rid of stress. Stress hormones released by the adrenals shrink the thymus gland, the major gland of immunity. Nutrition is key for a healthy immune system, but other factors include: alcohol and smoking; high blood sugar, triglycerides and cholesterol; excess sugar; allergies; chemical exposure (environmental); and prescribed/recreational drugs.

Your programme at a glance

- ◆ **Bedrest**, if possible
- ◆ **Large amounts of diluted vegetable juices, soups and herbal infusions**
- ◆ **No sugar** (including fruit sugars)
- ◆ **Vitamin C** (up to 1 g/day, but decrease if diarrhoea ensues)
- ◆ **Bioflavonoids** (1 g/day)
- ◆ **Beta-carotene** (200,000 IU/day)
- ◆ **Selenium plus zinc** as supplements
- ◆ **Homeopathy, or *E. angustifolia* or *R. A. membranacei* (or *F. L. lucidi*)** three times daily during the illness as:
 - tincture (1:5): 5 mL-1 tsp
 - fluid extract (1:1): 0.5-2.0 mL (1/4-1/2 tsp)
 - powdered solid extract (4:1): 250-500 mg
 - dried root (or fruit) or infusion: 1-2 g
 - freeze-dried root (or fruit): 500-1000 mg.

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