

PREVENTION AND HOME TREATMENT FOR COLDS AND FLU:

"Of all the experiences I have had in the last 12 months of my visit to America, nothing has surprised me more than the general belief that there is no cure for the common cold... As one who has always been cured by medication whenever afflicted with colds and flu in my native land, the People's Republic of China, I am... intrigued by this situation." Hong Uu, Oklahoma State Medical Association Journal, 1984

What we call "colds" and "the flu", the Chinese call Wind Chill or Wind Heat. Oriental medicine long recognized the close connection' between the lungs, sinuses and throat and the skin. When a person's immune system is weakened, their susceptibility to illness associated with draft increases.

In this medical theory, the lungs regulate the "protective chi", which guards the skin, keeping out drafts and disease. The lungs are called the "delicate organ". They are especially sensitive to temperature changes, extremes in temperature, and drafts. If you sneeze when you step from a warm environment to a cold one, or when a slight draft hits you, and frequently catch colds which quickly turn into a cough, the protective qi of your skin and your lungs has been weakened. It can be strengthened through acupuncture, herbs, careful attention to diet and a program of self-massage on associated acupuncture points and meridians.

Often exposure to a draft precedes catching a cold, especially the wind chill type. The parts of the body most sensitive to wind are located on the head and ears, the back of the neck and shoulders, the throat and the upper chest. To prevent colds, wear jackets with high collars and lapels that close across the chest to cover it, and hats and scarves which protect the "wind points" of the back of the head and neck. Keep these areas warm, dry and protected from drafts, especially after sweating.

Perspiring opens the pores of the skin, and can allow wind to more easily penetrate the protective chi. Many people catch colds after leaving the spa or hot "tub still hot, with wet hair, and hitting the cold wind outside, or from sleeping with still-wet hair in the draft from an open window.

Colds can attack without your becoming chilled. If you get a sore throat after exposure to others who have the flu, you have probably contracted their virus -- which' the Chinese call Wind Heat.

The best prevention for both Wind Heat and Wind Chill is a strong immune system and general good health, which the Chinese call righteous chi. Righteous chi is the product of a good diet, a balanced, well-rested lifestyle and emotional well-being. However there are times when one or more of these factors is disrupted, and you may feel a cold coming on.

At these times you may wish you had on hand the wonderful medications for cold and flu mentioned by Hong Liu in the beginning quote. You don't have to go all the way to the PRC to get them, but you won't find them at Longs Drugs, either. They are available from most acupuncturists, at Ancient Roots Medical's pharmacy and some of them are carried by stores like Way of Life, Staff of Life and the Herb Room.

They are effective only if taken in the first 24 hours, so it's best to have them on hand already. If you begin taking them at the first sign of a cold, and you also rest, you can generally head off the attack completely. If you can't slow down, taking them may help you ward off the cold until the weekend, when you can more conveniently be overcome and collapse. Try as we may, there is no remedy in the world that will work without rest, if exhaustion is a major contributing factor.

Once you have the remedies, you must know which one to use, and when. If you take the wind heat remedy for wind chill, it will make you worse, as will taking wind chill herbs for wind heat.

Wind Chill symptoms begin with feeling quite chilled and tight, and possibly slightly feverish. You'll want to be covered up. You may get a sudden headache and/or feel stiff and sore all over, especially the upper back and neck. Next may come sneezing and a clear runny nose, post-nasal drip, or stuffy nose. The third stage is a cough with clear phlegm.

Avoid eating cold or raw foods, and anything very fatty or greasy, as fats tend to increase phlegm production. Drink liquids warm. People who are cold in general tend to get more wind chill colds than wind heat.

Wind chill stage one remedy: Chuan Xiong Cha Tiao Wan, taken with green tea. Fondly known as "Sneezy Pills," these can head off wind chill headaches, stiff neck, aches and sneezes. Take 8 pills every 2-3 hours. At the time for the next dose, ask yourself how you're feeling. If you're still feeling the same, you may need to take a larger dose (10-12 pills) sooner. If you're much better, you may wait another hour. Continue with a dose at

least every 4 hours for the first 24. (Don't wake yourself up to take them.)

Miso soup with fresh ginger, garlic and scallions has a similar effect. Drink the broth until you sweat to drive out the wind chill. If sweating produces a relaxation of muscle tension and the chill and headache subside, bundle up, stay warm and rest, and you should soon be clear of the cold. At this stage a sauna or hot foot soaks can also help you break a sweat.

If you've already been sweating and it hasn't relieved your symptoms, you need more help than home remedies can give.

Wind chill stage two remedy: This varies widely, depending on the condition of your sinuses, and whether you have a tendency to generate a lot of phlegm. The more phlegm, the harder the condition is to get rid of, because more phlegm reflects a deeper imbalance in your righteous chi in general. If you can't shake the cold at this stage, it is best to get treatment and a formula prescribed for your specific situation before it goes into your lungs.

The sinus wash will relieve a runny nose and post-nasal drip. If your nose is stuffed, put your face over a steaming pan of hot water with eucalyptus oil in it to soften the congestion.

Wind chill stage three: Cough. This is too individual to safely recommend an over-the-counter herbal remedy. If your immune resources haven't pulled you through within a week, you may need help to keep from getting exhausted while fighting it off.

Wind Heat symptoms always begin with a scratchy or sore throat. If your throat is involved, it's a virus, at least. (If you have a history of strep, you may need to get a throat culture. There are herbal antibiotic remedies for strep, but they need to be taken with the same consistency and respect as Western antibiotics. Strep is nothing to treat lightly.) People who tend to carry excess heat in their bodies generally will tend to get more Wind Heat colds.

Other Wind Heat symptoms may include achey joints, mild headache, fever with a hot dry baked feeling, mild chill -- a much less pronounced chill than with Wind Cold. If you already have Liver heat, you may also experience painful eyes, stronger headache, irritability and impatience.

Wind Heat stage 2: Body aches, malaise and mild to very high fever, with or without perspiration. You just want to lie in bed and do nothing.

Stage 3 goes into the lungs. The main symptom is cough. It is advisable to get professional help diagnosing and prescribing for this stage.

Complications from the flu can evolve into measles, mumps, pneumonia, rheumatoid arthritis, and chronic fatigue syndrome, so if you don't respond to home treatment and rest, get professional help.

Wind Heat Stage 1 Remedy: Yin Qiao Jie Du Pian. Take 4-6 every two hours for the first 24 hours. Ask yourself, "Do I still feel the symptoms?" Expand the time between doses as the symptoms improve.

If loose stool occurs, this formula is too cold for your digestive system. Take it with ginger tea and eat white rice.

Gargle frequently with salt water. (1 c. non-chlorinated water to 1 t. sea salt.) Add echinacea extract for best results. The Native Americans who gave us this wonderful herb chewed on the root -- turns out it activates the immune system through receptors in the mouth. Take lots of Vitamin C.

Stage 2 Wind Heat: Gan Mao Ling or Zhong Gan Ling contain strong antiviral herbs. Zhong Gan Ling is better for muscle pain.

Stay in bed and drink lots of fluids. Rest is the main therapy.

If you got this sick, it's probably because you were exhausted already. With chronic viral diseases on the rise, none of us can any longer afford to treat an acute virus with casual disrespect.

Stage 3: Get professional help.

Avoid eating or drinking anything spicy, hot or greasy, as these will aggravate the Heat condition, and will irritate the stomach and Liver. Cayenne and other peppers, fatty meats and soups, nuts, nut butters, coffee, chocolate and alcohol are among the worst offenders.

Eat simple, nutrient-rich foods that are easy to digest. Congee (rice porridge -- 1 part rice to 7 parts water, cook a long time) is one of the best. Avoid refined flours or sugars and soft drinks. Refined foods have had so many vitamins and minerals removed that they rob the body of its vitamin and mineral reserves at a time when the immune system most needs them to fight infection.

Non-fatty vegetable soup broths are excellent. Research has shown that chicken soup has antiviral properties. Miso is also rich in vitamins and minerals and the friendly bacteria that bolster the immune system. Acidophilus is even stronger, and with Probioplex, will help the immune system, as will vitamin C with plenty of bioflavonoids to counter inflammation. Cod liver oil is especially nourishing to the lungs and mucous membranes. The body also uses vitamin A and zinc to fight infection.

Drink plenty of liquids to offset the evaporation of body fluids by the fever. Even though the disease is hot, drink all fluids at room temperature to avoid damaging the digestive system. Avoid taking tonic herbs like ginseng, codonopsis or astragalus, which will trap the heat inside before it can be expelled.

If you are very dry, pears and pineapple, both the fruit and the juice can generate fluid, as does honey and milk. These are contraindicated strongly if there is excessive phlegm. Mullein leaf tea also moistens.

If you have lots of phlegm, your condition is more complicated, and needs to be carefully evaluated by your acupuncturist. Contrary to general western opinion, citrus juices are not ideal where there is a lot of phlegm and dampness in the body.

Both Stage I Wind Heat and Wind Chill can be relieved by a simple technique called scraping. If you are chilled, use fresh ginger tea or onion tea to moisten the neck, shoulders and upper back, then scrape them vigorously with the edge of a porcelain Chinese soup spoon or the rounded edge of a juice glass. You can also apply olive or safflower oil to the area first to avoid rubbing the skin raw. Strange as this sounds, this can greatly relieve the tension of Wind Chill and the heat of Wind Heat.

Cupping is another technique which your acupuncturist can teach a family member if you are frequently plagued by upper respiratory problems. It is also useful for both wind heat and wind chill.

If you tend to catch colds more easily before your period, you may want to consider treatments to balance your hormonal and immune systems.

Summary of Medications:

Wind Chill Stage 1: Chuan Chiong Cha Tiao Wan, 8 pills/2-4 hours

Wind Heat Stage 1: Yin Qiao Jie Du Pian, 4-6 pills/2-4 hours

Stage 2: Gan Mao or Zhong Gan Ling, 4-6 pills/2-4 hours

Virus Prevention: Gan Mao Ling can be taken half dose 3 times a day if you are exposed to a lot of people with the flu.

For children under 10, reduce the dosages of the above medications by half.

Ancient Roots Pharmacy carries many cold and flu medicines which have been especially formulated for children. They are available in liquid or powder for children who can't swallow pills.