



Change of Season: Cold and Flu Prevention

Ancient Chinese consider the Change of Seasons as a dangerous time health-wise, because invasion of external pathogens, such as wind, cold and damp, will cause acute illness such as cold and flu. In Canada, we are subject to the weather as the seasons evolve. So at least twice a year our bodies must contend with a radical change in temperature and humidity.



Technically speaking a cold is caused by bacteria, and a flu by a virus. A flu infection is more severe; often accompanied by a fever of more than 3 days, body chills and aches. Flu is often followed by a secondary bacterial infection because the virus will cause inflammation which allows bacteria to grow in the respiratory tract. This is why, even though an antibiotic will not destroy the virus, it will prevent a secondary bacterial infection.

Each year, and every season, there is one virus or bacteria that seems to dominate the cold and flu season. Flu vaccines are intended to prime our immune reaction to the current virus, but because they are created long before the season arrives, it is only a best guess. Naturopathic alternatives involve using homeopathic preparations which tend to have a higher efficacy rate than flu vaccines, with no side effects.

When we think about how to protect ourselves against cold and flu season, the first thing we think about besides frequent hand washing, is our immune system. Anything that weakens this system, makes us more vulnerable to infections. And anything that strengthens this system, makes us more resistant.

Going back to the Chinese pathogen theory, it is considered best to protect our bodies by covering the neck and kidney areas with scarves and coats. They say this protects our Wei Qi, the Chinese equivalent of the immune system, and access to the body of external pathogens.

In the modern world we know that taking vitamin C, garlic, and eating chicken soup will strengthen the immune system. As a herbalist and naturopathic doctor, I always recommend herbs like astragalus and echinacea, but often antimicrobial herbs will be needed as well. Adequate vitamin D is important for people of all ages, as are minerals such as selenium and zinc. Daily probiotics are well researched in their role at preventing systemic infections. For people vulnerable to infections while in daycare or school, taking a good probiotic and a daily dose of astragalus will reduce the frequency of infections.



Often acute infections start as a sore throat. Using a throat spray, a medicinal herbal tea, and going to bed early are a good way to deal with the onset of illness. How often do you notice a cold or flu following a late night out with friends, drinking and eating bad food? Consumption of sugar, for example, is said to inhibit the immune system for 3-4

hours after eating it.

Lifestyle habits go a long way in protecting a person from acute infections. Exercise in the fresh air is always one of the best preventions. In the fall and winter, we often live and work in sealed buildings where bacteria and virus float on particles in the air. So opening the windows of your home daily is important to keep air quality.

As always, good health goes back to the basic tenets of hygiene, healthy food, adequate sleep, fresh air, exercise, and the kind of medicine that supports a healthy immune system. Taking care of your family's health is the most valuable gift you can give. Wishing you a happy and healthy season!

Yours in health,

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