

FIGHTING THE COMMON COLD



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This time of year as we say goodbye to the summer and watch the beautiful colors of fall transform our city, we too are shifting, settling back into the routine of school and work. The change in season also marks the coming of cold and flu season. In this brief article, learn about the common cold, how to help avoid catching one and simple ways you can lessen the blow if you find yourself affected.

Most people know that the common cold is caused by a virus, but did you know that there are over 200 different cold viruses? Any one of these viruses can infect your upper respiratory tract causing a cold, and the symptoms we know all too well: runny nose, sneezing, sore throat, malaise, fever, headache, upper respiratory congestion, cough etc. These symptoms are actually the byproduct of our own immune system fighting off the invading cold virus. It takes a lot of energy for your immune system to work this hard, also, in the process of killing the invading virus, some of your own cells are damaged, this repair causes further fatigue, pain (sore throat, for example) and malaise. Finally, all the dead and damaged cells need to be cleared; this is done, in part, through increased production of various secretions which manifest as sneezing, sinus congestion, runny nose and coughing. The best way to shorten the duration of your cold is to help your immune system do its job and win the war against the cold virus sooner. See below for tips on how to do this. You may also know how the a cold virus is spread from person to person, either by physical contact, such as shaking hands with an infected person who has rubbed their nose or covered a cough with their hand or, by inhaling droplets from the cough or sneeze of an infected person. Taking measures to help prevent your contact with the virus will also help you avoid getting sick, see below for tips on preventing a cold. You may be wondering how many colds in a year are normal and how many are too many. The average adult will get between 1 and 4 colds per year while children can contract as many as 10. For children, this is normal! Each cold helps to train your child's immune system and gives him/her lasting immunity to that particular strain of cold virus; it is because their immune systems are still new and learning that they are sick more often. Colds in infants (under 1 year) have the potential to become serious and should to be monitored more closely, if you are concerned or have questions consult your ND or MD. Remember, for sick infants breast milk is the best medicine! The remainder of the article will discuss tips on how to treat and prevent the common cold.



Tips for Treating a Cold:

-The most important thing you can do is **rest**! Taking a day off work to stay in bed and get some extra sleep may seem like a burden in the short term, but it will speed your recovery thereby actually increasing your productivity in the long run. Also, it will help to prevent the spread to your co workers!

-Don't forget the tried and true **chicken soup**. Chicken soup has actually been shown to be anti inflammatory this can be helpful when you are suffering from a cold! Remember homemade is generally best; fill your soup with plenty of healthy vegetables and herbs.

-**Breast feed!** Breastfeeding is so important; one significant benefit to breast feeding is the transference of passive immunity to your child, this is the passage of your antibodies (part of your immune system) to your child to specifically protect them from the cold virus currently in circulation. Human breast milk contains several antimicrobial factors and helps to prime and train an infant's immune system. If your child is sick and still breast feeding, breast milk is his/her best medicine!

-Tune up your **diet**. It is always best to stay away from sugary and highly refined foods, but when you are sick this is even more important as these foods temporarily weaken your immune system! It is also important to stock up on plenty of colorful vegetables and leafy greens; they are nutrient dense and contain plenty of antioxidants important to fighting a cold. Other things to avoid while you are sick include alcohol and second hand smoke.

- **Fluids!** Increasing your fluids will help flush toxins out of your body and speed your recovery. In addition to consuming extra water, consider lemon, ginger, chamomile or peppermint tea to sooth a sore throat and help fight off the chills! You might also consider the opposite, making ice chips from these teas to sooth a sore throat.

-**Vitamins and minerals** known to be helpful in fighting the common cold include the B vitamins, beta carotene, vitamins C, D and E, as well as, zinc. You can find these nutrients in the form of supplements or in your food, consult your naturopathic doctor for the best form for you, as well as, dosing instructions.

-**Probiotics**. The bacteria in our gut have an intimate relationship with our immune system, having healthy gut flora is important to maintaining a healthy immune system and can shorten the duration of your cold.

-Antimicrobial and immune stimulating **herbs** to tip the balance in favor of your immune system include: garlic, Oregon grape, myrrh and Echinacea. See your ND for the right herb combination and dose for you.

-2-3 drops of antimicrobial **essential oils** such as lavender, eucalyptus or rosemary in a bowl of hot-warm water, made into a steam inhalation by forming a tent over your head with a towel can be soothing and helpful in killing bacteria and viruses. Use caution to avoid steam/ water burns!

-Take a **bath** with Epsom salts. Baths are a great way to relax, and adding Epsom salts can help ease aching muscles. By adding any of the above essential oils can give you a two in one effect; you will breathe the vaporized oils like a steam inhalation, while relaxing in the bath. Always add your oils after you have gotten in the tub as essential oils are highly concentrated and direct contact with your skin may cause burns.

-Seeing your naturopathic doctor or homeopath for a homeopathic prescription can also be very helpful, these remedies are given based on your individual symptoms and temperaments. Some commonly used **homeopathic remedies** include: apis, allium cepa, ferrum phos kali bic or nux vom

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-Avoid antibiotics. Antibiotics are not effective against cold viruses and overuse of these drugs contributes to the development of antibiotic resistant organisms.

Preventing a Cold:

Simply put, incorporate healthy habits into your everyday life.

-get adequate amounts of **sleep**

-**exercise** regularly

-**manage** and minimize your **stress**

-eat a **healthy balanced diet** rich in a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables

-Drink a minimum of 2L of **water** per day

-**wash your hands** frequently and stay home if you are sick to prevent the spread of the virus

If you find you are especially prone to colds, consider making an appointment with a naturopathic doctor to look into underlying factors that may be linked to your frequent illness. Your naturopath will consider all of your individual health history to develop a treatment program to help increase your resistance to infections on a more long term basis.

***Always remember to consult a qualified health professional before beginning any supplement or natural health product to ensure proper dosing instructions and prevent unfavorable interactions with other medications or supplements. Special caution and consideration should always be taken if you are pregnant, nursing or have any concomitant health conditions. Always avoid use of substances you know that you are allergic to.*

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