

Colds and flu

Introduction

After having seen many patients with this year's royal flu, it did not surprise me that I managed to contract it myself. If you have experienced it, it certainly is a nasty strain this year. In clinic I have seen it affect either the respiratory system or the gastrointestinal system. As such, I have included some helpful strategies to either protect yourself against catching it or if you have, some strategies to help speed your recovery. Sometimes we need a reminder of how valuable and effective our foods and medicines are!

Development of the common cold

- A cold virus is deposited into the front of the nasal passages by contaminated fingers or by droplets from coughs and sneezes.
- Small doses of a virus (1 - 30 particles) are sufficient to produce infection.
- From the time a common cold virus enters the nose, it takes 8 - 12 hours for the viral reproductive cycle to be completed and for new common cold viruses to be released in nasal secretions. This interval is the incubation period.
- Common cold symptoms commence shortly after the virus is first produced in the nose (10-12 hours).
- The time from the beginning of the infection to the peak of symptoms is typically 36 - 72 hours.

Signs and symptoms

- Common symptoms include: bad breath, fever, inflammation, fatigue, muscle pain, cough, laryngitis (hoarseness), nasal congestion, pharyngitis (sore throat) & "scratchy" throat, or headache.
- Symptoms generally last from a few days to two weeks.

Cold and flu prevention

Cold and flus tend to typically emerge during stressful times or immediately afterwards (depends on the type of person you are). As we experience stress, our adrenal glands, which produce stress hormones, use up to 80% of our stored vitamin C. This of course reduces our immune response and makes us more susceptible to catching bugs.

Encourage Vitamin C

One of the most important things you can do is as soon as you feel a cold or flu coming on is to take ½-1g of vitamin C hourly (adult dose) and rest as much as possible. Please be mindful that children need to have their dose individually assessed based on their height, weight and age. Side effects of excessive vitamin C consumption are diarrhoea, so watch for your individual bowel tolerance.

Vitamin C rich foods

In addition, it is best to encourage vitamin C rich foods such as Red chilli, guava, red capsicum, Brussels sprouts, citrus juice concentrate, papayas, kale, parsley, collards, kiwi fruit, blackcurrants, mango, cabbage, broccoli, strawberries, lychees, oranges, sprouts, lemons, tangerines, honeydew melon, spinach, tomatoes.

Reduce your stress

Obviously another crucial aspect to improving your immune response in the initial stages is to reduce your stress levels and rest. Please remember that stress is not purely psychological but can be physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, nutritional and lifestyle triggered. Being stressed from work is just as detrimental as being nutritionally stressed such as skipping meals or eating the wrong foods.

Rest, rest, rest

Resting is one factor that we are all familiar with but often ignore until we absolutely have to. Ensuring that you spend time outdoors, socialise with friends and family and nourish your soul will certainly create positive health benefits for you generally and will stimulate your immune system.

Avoid caffeine, sugar and other stimulant foods

Over-straining our bodies during a crucial time of an immune defence is understandably illogical. Always remember that sugar consumption will reduce your natural immune response for the next 30 minutes to 6 hours.

But its already taken hold!

If you're one of the unlucky ones, and your cold or flu has already taken hold, below are a few tips and strategies to help you recover quickly.

General tips and strategies

- Rest as much as possible
- Ensure you take hygiene precautions to avoid infecting others

Nutritional supplements

- ½-1g of vitamin C hourly (adult dose)
- Zinc, vitamin A, vitamin E

Herbal medicines

- Echinacea can significantly reduce the duration of a cold/flu if taken early enough. Additionally, it can be taken as a preventative between April—September
- There are many other herbal medicines, however, an individual prescription is advisable.

Foods

- Garlic—if you're brave swallow whole cloves or else make foods rich in freshly crushed garlic e.g.: mashed sweet potato with garlic, olive oil and fresh parsley
- Drink warm beverages, soups and foods
- Don't force yourself to eat heavy, rich meals. Follow your cravings and instincts and eat small, nutritious and easily digested meals.
- Salt gargling to alleviate sore throats
- For tickling coughs: Spoonfuls of raw honey can assist or sucking ice cubes

Aromatherapy

- Inhalations of eucalyptus, tea tree, lavender and peppermint oils either by vaporiser, chest rubs (mixed with vitamin E cream) or cupping a mug of hot water.
- Inhaling steam from showers to 'break up' the mucous
 - You can also put 2-3 drops of essential oils before you get into the shower so that the steam can enable easy inhalation while you bathe.

Massage

- Chest massages
- Gentle 'cupping' (tapping) of back to release chest congestion - best to be done whilst leaning over and having someone tap from behind

Remember

Always speak to a health professional to provide professional advice before taking any herbal medicines and/or nutritional supplements or if symptoms worsen or persist.

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