



Flu Fighters and Prevention

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We are all hearing about the flu this season and indeed, it has been very prevalent. Many doctors, pharmacies, the media and the government are all pushing everyone to get flu shots. Some people decline this from mistrust and not wanting foreign substances injected into them. In fact, the results from this year's flu vaccine have been very disappointing to say the least, and this has been reported widely in the news. Some say it's only 10 percent effective, and this means that many people are getting the flu even after having the vaccine.

As we know, the government, the World Health Organization and private sector scientists who are engaged in the difficult task of creating the vaccines must guesstimate, often more than a year ahead, what specific viruses will be in circulation. This is because the flu viruses change a bit each year—just enough to evade the human immune system that has adapted to fight off previous strains.

I write a lot about seasonal health, but what about seasonal disease? Flu is unusual in this regard and it is also a nomadic disease—travelling to the US each year from Southeast and East Asia where the majority of flu viruses originate.

Flu season in northern latitudes is from November to March and it looks like this year it is peaking right now in early February.

But why in the winter? There are several theories:

- Does it have to do with suppressed immunity from lowered vitamin D levels because of less sunlight and shorter days (and maybe lowered melatonin levels as well)?
- Less activity and more time indoors close to others, especially with children from their close exposures in school?

These are clearly part of the story, but some scientists have proposed that the winter climate itself is the crucial factor, so it is interesting that the name “influenza” is an Italian word that originated in the mid-18th century as “influenza di freddo,” or “influence of the cold.”

Flu viruses spread through the air in little respiratory droplets that are more stable in cold air. Low humidity also helps the virus particles remain airborne longer. These factors contribute to the virus infecting more people. When the humidity increases the droplets pick up water, grow larger and fall to the ground more quickly.

By contrast, common cold viruses are spread primarily by direct contact such as when people touch a surface that has itself been touched by someone with a cold, or shake hands with an infectious person.

Similar to the concerns with many diseases, **the best approach is prevention!** That has to do with taking good care of ourselves and our loved ones.

This self-care starts with the 5 Keys to Staying Healthy:

1. Good Nutrition
2. Regular Exercise
3. Managing Stress
4. Quality Sleep
5. Healthy Attitudes

You can review this more thoroughly on my website (www.ElsonHaasMD.com) and in my book, *Staying Healthy with NEW Medicine*.

The end-of-year holidays challenge nearly everyone with rich and congesting foods, more stress, and less sleep. Excess sugar and decreased exercise may also be factors that can contribute to a weakened immune system. Luckily there's extra love and family, but on the other side of that, travel is often challenging and offers greater exposure. Many people get sick after plane trips, and airplane travel is also one of the ways the flu spreads.

This is why in January and February, I do a general detox program and simplify my diet, avoiding sugars and floury foods, alcohol, and rich foods. I stay warm and continue my exercise and stretch program. I take vitamin





C, D, some A and zinc, and various herbs, and use fresh garlic and ginger in my diet. Below are more ideas about what you can do if you start to get sick this winter.

Overview and Underlying Energetic Factors

Prevention of colds and flu comes from protecting ourselves with a strong immune system as well as a clean body, which means healthy cells and tissues receiving all of their needed nutrients with a minimum of interference from toxins. Our attitude and belief system also help protect us and support immunity. We all have an energetic field that shields us from damaging forces and possibly even germs.

From the Chinese Medicine perspective, this protective field is based on many factors. We get out of balance not just from exposure to outer conditions, but also from internal emotions like fear or anger, which stress our organs and weaken our tissues. Then there are the external factors that include the extreme climates like cold and damp or heat or wind that can disturb our body/mind and disrupt our energies. The cold and damp Winter climate stresses us more than most other seasons. All of this can lead to symptoms, illnesses and diseases. It's a different conceptual model than the Western medicine, but it is useful to think from the inside out and not just from the outside in when it comes to the causes of disease.

What do we need to do to keep our cells and tissues healthy? I believe that the body state and the internal health and strength of the host—each of us—are more important factors in whether

we get sick, than the microbes to which we are exposed; yet, germs still do affect us. That's why I encourage everyone to practice high-level, healthy living, as I have written about for decades. I have often said, "healthy bodies rarely get sick."

WHAT TO DO FOR FLU AND COLDS

If you do get a cold or the flu, it is best to take action immediately.

Drink lots of fluids, especially water, fresh juices and hot herbal teas. Make a good pot of vegetable soup (with chicken or not) and add ginger and garlic to it.

Exercise to sweat if you have enough energy.

Take a sauna or steam, as the increase in body heat may stimulate your immune activity.

Vitamin C—I start with hourly vitamin C of 500–1000 mg.

Vitamin A—I take and often suggest increased doses of vitamin A (not beta-carotene)—25,000–30,000 IUs 3–4 times daily for just 3–4 days and then lower that dosage to 10–25,000 IUs twice daily for a few days and then one cap (10,000 IUs) a day for a week. Then take a break for a few days since vitamin A can be toxic if taken too long in these higher amounts. Although when we are fighting off infections, it doesn't seem to be problematic and these higher amounts help us fight off germs in our mucous membranes.

Garlic—I also use fresh garlic, taking several cloves at a time, dipping them in honey and chewing them. I may repeat this several times for the first day; alternatively, you can press a few cloves into a bowl of hot soup. Garlic is a natural antibiotic and immune defender; you could also use the odorless garlic caps, several capsules three times daily, if you do not want the smell, but they are not quite as effective.

Echinacea and Goldenseal—an extract (in alcohol) can also be used to support immunity and cleanse the membranes; even the alcohol in them is a disinfectant. Remember not to take these herbs for longer than three weeks at a time.

Olive leaf extract—is a mild anti-viral herb and can provide some support.

Oregano oil—in liquid or caps may also help us fight off viruses. Try elderberry (good for fevers), licorice, astragalus and grapefruit seed extract, all of which have some antiviral/antibiotic effects. There are other herbal formulas that may help protect against and/or fight off viral infections.

You can also use herbs and spices—that are body heaters such as cayenne pepper and ginger root, which facilitate sweating and often help fevers and colds. Hot ginger root tea (simmer a few slices of root in a cup or two of water for 5–10 minutes) may

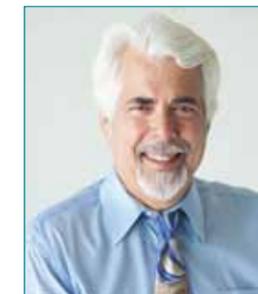
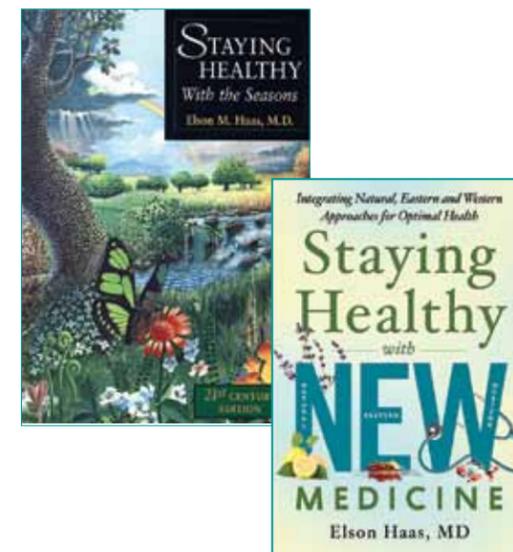
help with chest congestion and you can also use some of the tea to make a compress and place the soaked cloth over your upper chest. This is warming (which tends to stimulate blood circulation) and helps break up congestion.

Zinc lozenges—may be helpful for sore throats. For coughs and sore throats, also try slowly savoring and then swallowing a mixture of honey (one teaspoon) with one to two teaspoons of lemon juice and a pinch of cayenne pepper.

NOTE on Fever and Aspirin: Children and teenagers with flu symptoms (particularly fever) should avoid taking aspirin during an influenza infection (especially influenza type B), because doing so can lead to Reye's syndrome. In general (and with children especially), unless a fever is high avoid trying to lower it with medicines as the increased temperature is one way your body fights infections.

Rest—finally remember that extra rest helps in healing. Often, we get sick when we are out of balance or overdoing it, so we should take this opportunity to rest and sleep. Also, if we are not feeling too sick, this can be a chance to reflect and review our lives, to stay in tune with the more inward spirit of the Winter Season.

Stay Healthy! ■



Elson M. Haas, MD is a practicing integrative family physician since 1973 and is founder/director of the Preventive Medical Center of Marin (pmcmarin.com) in San Rafael, CA. Dr. Haas is the author of 11 books on health, nutrition, and detoxification, including *Staying Healthy with Nutrition*, *The Detox Diet*, *The False Fat Diet*, and the classic, *Staying Healthy with the Seasons*. His most recent books are *Ultimate Immunity* (Rodale 2015) and the just self published *Staying Healthy with NEW Medicine: Integrating Natural, Eastern, and Western Approaches for Optimal Health*. Learn more at ElsonHaasMD.com. Dr. Haas, as Dr. Sun, creates entertaining educational products for children and families, including The Anatomix Comix™ with CD of songs and also available as Apps at www.seasonsstudios.com.