

Fighting Colds & Flu the Natural Way

Ann Wang, Ph.D., L. Ac

Flu season is upon us. Is there a natural way to fight colds and flus? The answer is yes. In the Far East, Chinese Medicine has been using natural methods of treating cold and flu effectively for thousands of years. I would like to share my knowledge and information of the management of colds and flus with those who are either interested in eastern medicine or those who simply desire natural treatments. There are two ways to control colds and flus, prevention and treatment. Let's first discuss prevention, since it is the more desirable way to deal with disease.

Prevention

Preventative measures are divided into two categories: 1) avoiding pathogenic effects, and 2) strengthening the body's defenses.

1. **Avoiding Pathogenic Effects** — Suggestions for avoiding pathogenic effects are simple.
 - a. Avoid contact. Try to escape contact with people who have symptoms of cold or flu. Similarly, during cold and flu season, try not to be in public places where there is a high density of people, where you are likely to be exposed to the airborne viruses.
 - b. Keep surrounding air clean in the winter, especially in the bedroom where you sleep. Try to open the windows once a day for a few minutes to provide internal and external air exchange. This is best done in the morning when the air is generally cleaner. Since flu is a respiratory transferred disease, keeping air clean is a very basic way to avoid getting sick.
 - c. Eat more fresh garlic in the winter. According to Chinese Medicine, garlic allows the pores of the skin to open and to expel pathogens that may have already entered the body.
 - d. If possible, breathe through your nose. The nasal passage acts as an air filter to screen out pathogens.
 - e. Use herbal formulas. One effective formula is Ban Lan Gan Chong Ji, a very common formula that has been used in China for a few decades for prevention of the flu. It consists of only two herbs, Ban Lan Gen (Isatis root) and Da Qing Ye (Isatis Leaf), which are actually different parts of the same plant. Ban Lan Gen is traditionally used for its anti-viral effects.

These are natural ingredients and have no adverse side effects. This combination is safe for children and for pregnant women.

There are two situations for which Ban Lan Gan Chong Ji can be used:

- It can be used as prevention if you are exposed to someone with flu symptoms. Usually drinking a cup of the herbal tea once or twice each day for 3-7 days will ward off the undesired illness.
- If you are experiencing early symptoms like dry, itchy throat, fatigue, tightness in the neck and upper back, you may take the preparation three times a day for 3 days. Usually this is enough to avert full-fledged symptoms.

2. **Strengthening the Body's Defenses** — The second means of prevention is to strengthen the body's natural defenses. According to one classic traditional Chinese medical text, The Yellow Emperor's Guide to Internal Medicine, if you have a strong defense then no pathogenic effect can successfully attack you.
 - a. Change seasonal wardrobe gradually. In the spring and autumn it is important not to have drastic and sudden changes in dress. In the spring season begin to wear fewer layers slowly, dressing warmly as long as possible. Likewise, in the autumn, avoid heavy clothing for as long as seems appropriate. This awareness of transition gives the body time to adjust to the seasonal weather changes.
 - b. Limit temperature differential. It's best to keep the indoor temperature relatively cool in cold seasons, and not too cool in the warm seasons. In general, avoid sweating from the heat and then rapidly cooling down. When people sweat, the pores of the skin open leaving them vulnerable to pathogenic influences. When you are sweaty, don't go outside in the cold right away, and remain inside until your body dries naturally.
 - c. Do more winter exercise. Walking, jogging or other activity is very beneficial. If you don't have time to exercise every day, it is important to breathe deeply, when you are outside. Deep breathing allows air exchange from the deepest part of your lungs. Early morning air is usually cleanest and, therefore, preferable.
 - d. Use herbal formulas. For those with weak immunity, astragalus may be helpful. This herb is said to have the function of increasing immunity. The processed or cooked variety has a stronger effect, as does a combination formula rather than the single herb. One effective formula is Yu Ping Feng San (Quang Qi — Astragalus, Fang Feng-Siler, and Bai Zhu-Atractylodes) is commonly used for weak lungs.
 - e. Have acupuncture treatments. Acupuncture once or twice per month can balance the system and strongly aid immune functioning.

Treatment

So you've tried to avoid seasonal virus infection, and most of you probably did so successfully. Despite your efforts, there are still some people come down with symptoms. Of course, you should seek advice from your family doctor. In terms of Eastern medical practices and herbology, here are some ways to deal with cold symptoms:

1. **Early Stages**—Commonly early stage symptoms include scratchy nasal passages, stuffy nose, clear or watery mucous, headaches and head congestion, itchy or dry throat, tightness in the back or neck muscles, fatigue. For these symptoms you can try drinking Ginger Tea made with 3 1/4 inch slices of fresh ginger root and two scallions (the white part with the roots, not leaves, about 3 inches long), boil in 6-8 ounces of water for 3-5 minutes, then add one tablespoon of brown sugar. Drink it warm. The best time to drink this tea is before bedtime. A little sweating during the night can be a sign that the tea is working. Make sure to stay covered and warm, even if you feel hot.
2. **Flu with Chills**—If you have the following symptoms: fever with chills, no perspiration, aching muscles, cough, headaches, stuffy nose or watery mucous, and/or white coating on the tongue you may try taking Gan Mao Ling.

3. **Flu with Fever**—With the following symptoms: fever with little perspiration, mild chilly sensation, headache, thirst, cough, sore throat, red tip of the tongue with thin white or yellowish coating on it you may try taking Yin Qiao San.
4. **Dry Cough**—If you have dry cough and abundant sputum, difficult expectoration, chest distress and dry mouth, you may try taking Ju Hong Wan.
5. **Cough with Mucous**—With the symptoms of cough, slight chills and fever, and a thin white coating on the tongue you may try Zhi Sou San.

The recommended dosage for these concentrated herbal formulas is 3-5 grams, three times per day, for 3-7 days.

In summary, the key to flu prevention is to listen to your body and to make appropriate adjustments for weather changes. Prevent if possible, and early treatment is essential.