

Natural Remedies to Help Fight the Flu

As almost everyone is aware by now, this year's flu shots have been less effective than they usually are in preventing the flu. This also means that for those who don't usually take them, the "herd immunity" provided by those who do will not be in effect.

While the efficacy of herbs in treating various ailments continues to be favorably studied, and sometimes even results in the discovery of new properties that we traditional medicine practitioners were unaware of, *these results rarely attract media coverage*. (as an example, I have pasted below from PubMed the abstract from the 2000 clinical elderberry trial in Norway, one of the earliest elderberry-for-the-flu studies.) Thus communities without an active holistic health network are sometimes deprived of knowing about simple and safe remedies that could be of great benefit.

I have listed below remedies drawn from several natural health care traditions. While these should not be considered "cures," they have been used effectively either to enhance prevention, or to reduce to the severity of the illness. The following recommendations are not intended to be an exhaustive list, they are simply the ones with which I am most familiar.

Prevention: The Chinese herb astragalus (contraindicated with blood thinners, immuno-suppressant drugs, and serious autoimmune conditions) is popularly used to enhance the immune system. Lysine (an amino acid) appears to increase resistance to viral illnesses by strengthening the connective tissue, especially in the sinuses. Both of these are intended to be taken during times when exposure risks are high. Both are available in veggie caps in health food stores. In addition, coconut oil, which also has anti-viral properties, can be used Ayurvedically to rub inside the nose as an antidote to winter dryness.

Treatments:

- My favorite is black elderberry, long a European remedy. It is available in health food stores in liquid form as "elderberry extract" or "elderberry syrup." Dosage varies according to the strength of the preparation, usually 2 T. or less every 3-4 hours. (Do not eat the wild berries raw--they are not considered safe for consumption until properly prepared—in extract/syrup form the herb is considered very safe). A clinical study done later than the one below reported that recovery time from the flu was reduced by approximately 50%.
- The Ayurvedic herb tulsi ("holy basil") is traditionally used to treat respiratory infections, and is taken as a tea or a decoction. Teabags are available in health food stores (*Om organics* makes several tulsi tea combinations in tea bags---my preferred combo for infectious illnesses is tulsi jasmine, (however jasmine is not recommended during pregnancy, and lots of tulsi may not be safe with blood thinners). Add a bit of honey, and drink frequently.
- Small amounts of the Ayurvedic herbs turmeric, licorice root, and garlic are also considered helpful adjuvants (caution for pregnancy)
- For students of Ayurveda, influenza is described in one of our ancient texts as

“vata-kapha jwar.” Fasting using boiled water or boiled light herbal teas (eg. tulsi) is recommended, until the appetite returns.

- Although I have never personally used it, a colleague in California recommends the homeopathic remedy, Oscillocoquinum. She reports having used it during several late winter residential Yoga teacher trainings in which one or more participants had the flu. Her experience is that it is quite effective in reducing symptoms and duration, but only if taken in the first day of illness.
- **Finally, and most importantly, if your symptoms are severe, please seek medical attention.**

Randomized study of the efficacy and safety of oral elderberry extract in the treatment of influenza A and B virus infections.

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Abstract

Elderberry has been used in folk medicine for centuries to treat influenza, colds and sinusitis, and has been reported to have antiviral activity against influenza and herpes simplex. We investigated the efficacy and safety of oral elderberry syrup for treating influenza A and B infections. Sixty patients (aged 18-54 years) suffering from influenza-like symptoms for 48 h or less were enrolled in this randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study during the influenza season of 1999-2000 in Norway. Patients received 15 ml of elderberry or placebo syrup four times a day for 5 days, and recorded their symptoms using a visual analogue scale. Symptoms were relieved on average 4 days earlier and use of rescue medication was significantly less in those receiving elderberry extract compared with placebo. Elderberry extract seems to offer an efficient, safe and cost-effective treatment for influenza. These findings need to be confirmed in a larger study.

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