

The Common Cold and Chinese Medicine

Chinese medicine can be highly effective in both preventing and treating symptoms of the common cold and flu. The symptoms are well known: fatigue, fever and chills, headache, sinus congestion and sore throat. From the biomedical perspective, the signs of the common cold are effects of different strains of viruses as they invade the body. From the Chinese medicine perspective, a person is treated according to a pattern of presentation characteristic of wind, damp, heat or cold type pathogens. For example, the same strain of the influenza virus may present with more fever in one person (heat) and chills in another (cold). From either view, how well the body can defend itself and recover, is the key.

The following are some general suggestions for preventing and coping with the common cold and flu:

- Get a quality full night's sleep every night.
- Drink plenty of fluids and eat seasonal, organic food.
- Stay warm in cool weather, including covering your neck from exposure to damp and drafts.
- Vitamin C has been shown to shorten the course of the common cold and may also be preventative.
- Zinc has antiviral properties and also may shorten the length of the cold.
- As with all supplements, consult your qualified health care professional for the best advice.

Many herbs in Chinese medicine have been found to contain antiviral and immune boosting compounds. For example: Astragalus (Huang Qi) has been shown in research to reduce incidence of and shorten the duration of the common cold. It is typical to combine different herbs together into formulas to treat the whole person. This means each individual with the same flu may take a different formula specific for their condition. This is one reason it can be difficult to effectively self-treat colds and flu with over-the-counter supplements. Working with a trained practitioner to bring the body into balance again is the key to making the immune system stronger and helping prevent the recurrence of common colds.

According to Chinese medicine theory, nutrition is the foundation for staying well and avoiding the common cold. Overeating or malnourishment can affect the digestive process. So, eating a healthy and moderate diet is the source of the body's energy, **qi**¹, the blood and the basis of the body's ability to fight disease.

Though the immune system is very complex, evidence shows that acupuncture can boost certain key components that create and build lasting immunity. This can happen even while the body is actively trying to fight off a cold. Even if you are scheduled to see your acupuncturist for some other condition, it is always a good time to have treatment. Early intervention can stop symptoms of a cold from lingering.



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¹**Qi** (pronounced chee) is an East Asian term whose meaning changes with context. In medicine, qi can mean breath, a substance which flows through the acupuncture meridians, or the vital movements necessary and present in every living system.