

Mother Nurture

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Preventing Colds and Flus

Both my toddler and his big sister seem to have a runny nose half the year, particularly during the winter. And their dad and I also have a cold more often than we'd like. Any advice?

Studies show that women are more prone to colds and flus after having children - and kids themselves are exposed to germs continually in childcare and preschool. So it's smart to take up arms against those microbial invaders!

Of course, check with your doctors, especially if a cold/flu is intense or prolonged, or accompanied by a significant fever. But on your own, there are plenty of things you can do. Just adapt the ideas below - which include what moms and dads can do for themselves - for kids, depending on their age and weight.

Step 1 - Turbocharge your immune system to prevent illness in the first place:

- Get as much sleep as possible
- Exercise routinely
- Do what you can to lower your stresses (which suppress your immune system)
- Minimize exposure to contagious people (to reduce demands on the immune system)
- Eat protein with every meal
- Eat lots of fresh vegetables
- Minimize sugar (which depresses immune system function)
- Take a multi-vitamin/mineral supplement – Ideally, get a really good one from a health food store or our website, www.NurtureMom.com, that recommends four to six pills a day. For kids, look for flavored tablets or liquid.
- Take an essential fatty acid (EFA) supplement (which contains the "good fats") - Unless you are a strict vegetarian, we recommend high-quality fish oil that has been molecularly distilled to remove mercury (these days, to get all the EFAs you need from eating fish, you'd consume too much mercury, alas). Take about 1000 milligrams/day.

If you don't want to take fish oil, consume about 1 tablespoon/day of flax oil in salad dressings or other nonfrying uses; also be sure to take both a multi-vitamin and B-vitamin complex in order to digest the flax oil properly.

Step 2 - If you feel a cold coming on, or it's already breached your defenses:

- Vitamin A – This is the single best intervention we've come across for colds and flus. Use mycellized vitamin A in liquid form or vitamin A from cod liver oil in gel caps. At the beginning of a cold, take 50,000 International Units (IU) a day for three to five days; do not take more than that since it could be toxic for you. (One drop of vitamin A is about 5000 IU.)

WARNING: Pregnant women or women who have any possibility of becoming pregnant over the next several months MUST NOT TAKE DOSAGES OVER 5000 IU/day, which can lead to birth defects.

- Vitamin C – Routinely take one to two grams a day. Increase to four to ten grams/day at the first sign of a cold (but decrease if you develop diarrhea) and maintain that dose for the duration of the illness before dropping back down.
- Zinc – Often taken as a lozenge for a sore throat.
- Echinacea – Take at the first possibility of an infection (e.g., your son's best friend just got a bad cold) or sign of the sniffles. This herb comes in several forms, just follow the dosage instructions on the packaging. (If you use a liquid tincture, dilute it in a little water unless you want a numb tongue!)
- Chinese herbs – The formula, *Gan Mao Ling*, can reduce the symptoms and duration of a cold. It's often available in little black "BB" size pills, which are relatively easy for kids to take. Another formula, *Bi Yan Pian*, is especially good for flus.
- Homeopathy – This approach relies on being able to identify the correct remedy matched to an individual's exact symptoms. When it works, it's very evident, so if you try a remedy and do not feel noticeably better within twenty four hours, you should probably switch to another one. The most common remedies for the flu are:

§ Oscillocochinum – Take this general-purpose remedy as soon as you're exposed to infection or start to feel symptoms. It typically comes in small vials which can be divided into three or four doses. Initially take one dose every hour, and after three doses, decrease to about three doses per day.

§ Bryonia Alba and Gelsemium Sempervirens – These are similar to one another, and some homeopaths recommend that people alternate them. However, a subtle distinction is that Bryonia is more appropriate for a particularly irritable person, while Gelsemium would be more for the flu victim whose dominant experience is fatigue. Also, Bryonia is used when a person feels worse if she moves, so symptoms like "it hurts when I cough" might lead you to that remedy. Either of these remedies can be used in a potency called "30C," which will be on the bottle following the name, and can be taken every hour for a few hours, then reducing to three times per day.

§ In general, a good plan is to start with the Oscillocochinum at the very beginning, and then if a flu still develops, try Gelsemium or Bryonia.

To Your Health

Besides being an uncomfortable experience, a cold or flu in either your child or yourself can be one more draining experience that tips you further toward developing the Depleted Mother Syndrome, so it's important to do everything you can to prevent them. The best long-term cure for frequent colds and flus is to optimize your own health and well-being. If there is any question about that, we heartily recommend using our book, *Mother Nurture* (Penguin, 2002), to feel less stressed, stay energetic and replenished, and build teamwork and intimacy with your mate – all of which will help get you through the winter, and beyond, in great shape.

(Rick Hanson, Ph.D. is a clinical psychologist, Jan Hanson, M.S., L.Ac., is an acupuncturist/nutritionist, and they are raising a daughter and son, ages 14 and 17. With Ricki Pollycove, M.D., they are the first and second authors of Mother Nurture: A Mother's Guide to Health in Body, Mind, and Intimate Relationships, published by Penguin. You can see their website at www.nurturemom.com or email them with questions or comments at info@nurturemom.com; unfortunately, a personal reply may not always be possible.)