

Mother Nurture

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Your Holistic Medicine Chest

I'm really nervous about this flu season, and the baby and the rest of us getting sick. Besides getting a flu shot, what can we do?

Conventional medicine is great for things like stitching up our daughter's hand the time she accidentally cut it open with a steak knife. But when it comes to more subtle, "systemic" matters like preventing colds or recovering quickly if you still get one, we've found more help from nutritional or Chinese health care.

Here are the essentials of our own holistic medicine chest, with a focus on dealing with colds and flus. Of course, you should also do other, sensible practices for turbocharging your immune system, including:

- Eat lots of fresh vegetables
- Eat protein with every meal
- Get as much sleep as possible
- Exercise routinely
- Do what you can to lower your stresses (which suppress your immune system)
- Minimize sugar (which also depresses immune system function)
- Minimize exposure to contagious people

In the Medicine Chest below, we'll describe dosages for a typical woman. Adjust them depending on the body weight of your partner or children. Get high-quality supplements from our website www.nurturemom.com or a health food store.

The Medicine Chest

- Basic MultiVitamin/MultiMineral supplement – Use a supplement that recommends four to six pills a day. For kids, look for flavored tablets or liquid.
- 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 is a system of medicine in which a substance is diluted and shaken many times, so that usually there are no molecules of the original material left, perhaps just its "electromagnetic fingerprint." (This is one way of saying that no one really knows how homeopathy works!) Nonetheless, a number of studies have substantiated its benefits, and both of us have experienced many homeopathic successes, sometimes dramatic.

Remedies usually come in the form of little sugar pills, and they cannot do any harm if they don't work, so they're great for children (they were a lifesaver with our daughter's ear infections, but that's another story . . .).

A single dose typically consists of four or five of the little pills (but more won't hurt you) placed under the tongue to dissolve; try not to eat or drink anything for at least ten minutes before and after taking the remedy. Do not store remedies near anything that produces electrical fields (e.g., microwaves, computers, telephones), and do not use menthol products or coffee during the period you are using a remedy.

Homeopathy 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:

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

§ Bryonia Alba and Gelsemium Sempervirens – These remedies 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 Oscillococcinum at the very beginning, and then if a flu still develops, try Gelsemium or Bryonia.

For more information, we recommend *Everybody's Guide to Homeopathic Medicines* by Dana Ullman.

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 13 and 16. 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.)