

## ***Build a Natural Defense Against Cold and Flu This Winter***

With cold weather knocking on the door, many are concerned about falling victim to colds and flu. Flu vaccine—the most effective way to prevent the flu, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—remains a controversial subject. First, most flu vaccines still contain thimerosal, a mercury-based preservative. Second, because of the unpredictability of upcoming flu strains, the available vaccine often doesn't match the strain of flu that hits the population.

But even if the vaccine corresponds with the circulating flu strain, it is not that effective. A recent study found that the overall effectiveness of vaccines against flu-like illness in the elderly was 23 percent when vaccine matching was good, and “not significantly different from no vaccination when matching was poor or unknown.” Well-matched vaccine, however, may effectively prevent pneumonia and decrease hospitalization rates due to pneumonia or flu, according to the study.

Some believe that the best protection from flu is flu itself. Recent research shows that the theory may actually have validity. In the past 20 years, deaths from flu in the elderly—the group most vulnerable to flu consequences—have decreased. At the same time, flu vaccination has increased by 45 to 50%. Researchers concluded, however, that flu vaccine didn't help decrease deaths from flu—people simply acquired natural immunity to the emerging strain of flu.

With flu vaccine effectiveness unclear, many are looking into natural ammunition against winter viruses.

### **Garlic**

Garlic has been used as a health food for more than 5,000 years and touted for its antibiotic properties and effect on allergies, cancer and general immunity. Research shows that it improves cardiovascular health and inhibits carcinogenic activity. In addition, a recent study found that a group of people treated with an allicin-containing garlic supplement for a period of 12 weeks between November and February had significantly fewer colds than the group that took a placebo (24 colds vs. 65) and recovered faster if infected.



In the group treated with the garlic supplement, 24 people came down with the common cold, which lasted for 1.52 days, compared with 65 people in the no-treatment group who had colds that lasted 5 days on average.

Garlic therapy should be discontinued at least two weeks prior to surgery to prevent excessive bleeding. People on anticoagulants should consult their physicians.

### **Tea**

Green and black teas have been studied for their effects on the cardiovascular system and cancer. Both show promising results. A recent Harvard study looked at tea's role in boosting the immunity system. Participants who drank five cups of black tea a day for 2 to 4 weeks increased their levels of interferon, an important immune defense hormone—up to 4 times normal levels. Drinking the same amount of coffee for 12 weeks produced no such effects. The researchers suggest that the key was in L-theanine, a substance in tea that increases immune response in fighting bacteria, infection, viruses and fungi. Excessive doses may cause insomnia, headache, dizziness, and diarrhea.

### **Vitamin C**

The role of vitamin C in the prevention and treatment of respiratory infections has been widely researched. The verdict, however, is not in yet. Some studies suggest that vitamin C can affect the duration or severity of symptoms. Others have shown no effect on the symptoms, but suggested

that vitamin C can reduce susceptibility to colds.

A recent study compared 29 clinical trials in which participants received 200 mg or more of vitamin C daily. The researchers found that vitamin C prevented flu or colds in people who were exposed to “brief periods of severe physical exercise and/or cold environments.” In those who regularly take vitamin C, they concluded that vitamin C plays some role in their defense mechanisms, helping them to recover from their colds faster and reducing the severity of symptoms. People with kidney disease should not use vitamin C.



**Echinacea**

Echinacea has been widely used to prevent and treat colds. Research on the plant, however, has produced conflicting results. A recent study that focused on 3 preparations from echinacea root found no clinically significant effects on the common cold. The critics of the study believe, however, that the dose of 900 mg per day was too low. Echinacea treatment may lead to minor and uncommon abdominal upset, nausea and dizziness. It may be contraindicated in people with autoimmune conditions or HIV.

**Zinc Lozenges**

Zinc lozenges are another home remedy for fighting winter viruses. Although research on this remedy is conflicting, a recent study on zinc gluconate glycine lozenges in school-aged children showed shorter cold duration and fewer colds with the therapy. Zinc lozenges, however, come in different formulations, and more research is needed to assess their effec-

tiveness. In addition, long-term use of zinc lozenges may lead to problems, including impairing the body’s immune responses. Excessive zinc in the diet can lead to copper deficiency and may also decrease the levels of HDL (“good”) cholesterol in the blood.

**Stress Reduction**

Because research on natural remedies’ role in fighting respiratory infections shows conflicting results, scientists turn to another powerful factor that influences health—stress. Here’s what research shows:

- Chronic stress, such as unemployment or interpersonal difficulties with family and friends that last a month or longer, may substantially increase the risk of catching cold.
- Children with a history of recurrent colds and flu have higher rates of exposure to stressful experiences, stress-prone personality traits, and signs of emotional disturbance than healthy children.
- Stress management reduces the duration of flu and colds.

Acupuncture may be effective against preventing and curing the common cold, as well. Many chiropractors have also noticed that chiropractic adjustments have helped prevent or reduce the duration of their patients’ colds. Preliminary results of an ongoing chiropractic study show that chiropractic may increase immunoglobulin A levels and that it decreases the levels of glucocorticoid cortisol, a major component of stress. Chiropractic may affect the common cold through stress reduction; however, more research is needed to confirm this.

*For references, go to [www.acatoday.com/publications/Dec05/Health\\_Well\\_01.shtml](http://www.acatoday.com/publications/Dec05/Health_Well_01.shtml).*

Your doctor of chiropractic has the knowledge, training, and expertise to help you understand what your problem is and, in many cases, manage it successfully. Remember, however, that the treatment program can be successful only with your active participation. If your doctor of chiropractic feels that he or she cannot help you, he or she will direct you to another health care provider.

FOR MORE  
INFORMATION

For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, go to the Patient Information section on ACA’s Web site at [www.acatoday.com](http://www.acatoday.com) or call 800-986-4636.

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