

1-9-2018

Tip for That #13: Integrative Medicine Competency: Health Conditions (Influenza)

Kristen Reynolds

Aurora Health Care, kristen.reynolds@aurora.org

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Recommended Citation

Reynolds KH. Tip for That #13: Integrative Medicine Competency: Health Conditions (Influenza). *Integrative Medicine (Aurora Health Care Digital Repository)*. 2018 Jan 9.

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Tip for That #13
Integrative Medicine Competency: Health Conditions (Influenza)

More Ways to Shoo the Flu

Brought to you by
Aurora Integrative Medicine
January 5, 2018

- **Wash your hands and cover your cough and other sensible things**
 - Wash hands with warm soap and water for at least 20 seconds; turn off faucet with disposable towel; or use hand sanitizer
 - Cough or sneeze into your elbow; flu is spread through air droplets.
 - Avoid sharing utensils and drinks
 - Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth unless you have washed your hands; viruses are spread through mucous membranes

- **Get adequate sleep**
 - Studies show that those who sleep “an average of fewer than 7 hours a night . . . were three times as likely to get sick as those who averaged at least 8 hours.” (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, 2009;169(1):62-67.)
 - If you do get a cold or flu, your first and most important medicine is sleep

- **Exercise**
 - Studies show that those who exercise moderately every day have fewer colds and flu; exercise boosts immunity! (*American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*, 2011; 5 (4): 338-345.)

- **Meditate daily**
 - Dr. Richard Davidson at the University of Wisconsin Madison has shown that those who meditate have a more robust antibody response to the influenza

vaccine. Meditation improves immunity! (*Psychosomatic Medicine*, 2003; 65:564-570.)

- Start by sitting quietly for 5 minutes twice daily, let the thoughts that come into your mind gently flow away, like a river. Work your way up to 20 minutes or more, and discover the benefits that a calm mind has on your body.

- **Eat nourishing, whole foods**
 - Avoid sugar
 - Avoid processed foods
 - Minimize alcohol
 - Emphasize whole fruits and vegetables (preferably organic – see the dirty dozen at www.ewg.org), nuts, beans, free-range eggs, whole grains such as quinoa and healthy protein sources such as grass-fed beef, bison, chicken, pork and fish
 - If you get a cold or flu, avoid dairy, as it is mucous-producing

- **Hydrate**
 - Pure water (not sweetened or artificially sweetened beverages)
 - Herbal, green or bamboo leaf tea (see www.bambooleaftea.net)

- **Optimize vitamin D levels**
 - Randomized controlled trials in children with low blood levels of vitamin D during winter have found that vitamin D supplementation cuts the risk of respiratory infection in half. (*Am J Clin Nutr*, 2010 91(5):1255-60. *Pediatrics*, 2012; 130(3): e561-67.)
 - People with low vitamin D levels are more likely to get a respiratory infection compared to people with higher levels. (*Arch Intern Med*, 2009; 169(4):384-90.)
 - Ask your doctor to check your 25-hydroxyvitamin D level – it should be over 40.
 - Adults can take 2000-4000 units of Vitamin D3 daily; breastfed infants and children or infants taking in less than one liter of milk or formula (respectively) per day should be supplemented with 400 IU Vitamin D3 daily. (*Am Fam Physician*. 2010 Mar 15;81(6):745-748.) Evolving evidence suggests that these doses may be too low in certain populations.
 - Higher doses can be taken at the first sign of cold or flu symptoms for the first 2-3 days to help boost immunity.

- **Get adequate Vitamin C**
 - 500mg daily for prevention
 - 1000mg three times daily at the first sign of cold or flu symptoms

- **Eat fish, or take a fish oil (omega-3) supplement**
 - Essential fatty acids help reduce inflammation that can prevent the immune system from achieving its full potential.
 - Research has shown that a modified omega-3 fatty acid inhibited influenza virus replication in mice; this omega-3 fat, given two days post-infection, was nearly as

effective as a prescription anti-viral in preventing death. (*Cell*, 2013 Mar 28;153(1):112-25.)

- More human studies need to be done, but eating some extra fish can't hurt. Choose fish low in mercury such as wild caught Alaskan salmon, sardines and anchovies.

- **Consider zinc supplementation**

- Zinc deficiency has been associated with increased susceptibility to infections, (*Adv Nutr* 2013;4(2):176-90.), but the data for zinc supplementation for colds and flu is mixed.
- Eby et al. showed a 7-day reduction in duration of common colds in 1984 using 23mg zinc gluconate throat lozenges (*Antimicrob Agents Chemother*, 1984;25(1):20-4).
- Over the next 25 years, 14 double blind, placebo-controlled, randomized clinical trials produced widely differing results with about one-half showing success and the remainder showing failure. Ionic zinc (iZn), but not bound zinc, is thought to be the active ingredient in zinc lozenges, as it is in vitro against rhinoviruses; variations in iZn are hypothesized to have produced the widely varying clinical results (*Med Hypotheses*, 2010 Mar;74(3):482-92.)
 - Due to inadequate iZn in lozenges, very few of more than 40 different brands of zinc lozenges on the US market are expected to have any effect on the duration or severity of colds or flu.
 - Zinc lozenges (preferably zinc acetate) slowly dissolved in the mouth over a 20-30 min period releasing adequate iZn (18 mg) dosed every 2 hours are hypothesized to shorten common colds by 6-7 days.
- If you take zinc supplements, remember that too much (over 50mg daily over an extended period of time) can be dangerous; inhaled zinc can damage your sense of smell.
- For prevention of cold and flu, try boosting zinc intake through food. The following foods are rich in zinc:
 - Seafood, beef, lamb and chicken
 - Pumpkin seeds and cashews
 - Beans
 - Spinach
 - Cocoa/chocolate (yay!!)

- **Consider Astragalus**

- Studies show that Astragalus root taken daily may reduce the risk of getting a cold or flu (*Natural Medicine Database*)
- Doses of 4-7 grams per day for prevention of cold and flu are common
- Nature's Way is a reputable brand (green top, 3 caps twice daily)
- Astragalus can also be purchased as a whole root and cooked in soups (or break open the capsules and put in soup – easy dosing for kids!)

- Caution if you are immunosuppressed or taking immunosuppressant medications, seek the advice of a medical professional, as Astragalus can make the immune system more active.
- **Utilize essential oils**
 - Research indicates that most viruses, fungi and bacteria cannot live in the presence of many essential oils, especially those high in phenols, carvacrol, thymol, and terpenes, such as “Thieves” proprietary blend which contains essential oils of clove, lemon, cinnamon bark, eucalyptus and rosemary. (Named after four thieves in France who covered themselves in these aromatics while robbing plague victims, these thieves stayed healthy!) The Aurora Integrative Medicine department carries a similar blend named “Cold and Flu”.
 - Diffuse your bedroom, common areas or office space with such oils to eliminate airborne bacteria and boost the immune system
- **If you do get the flu, consider taking Oscillococcinum®**
 - Oscillococcinum® (*Anas barbariae hepatis et cordis extractum* 200CK HPUS) is a patented homeopathic preparation manufactured by a French-based company (Boiron Laboratories), marketed and widely used for the treatment and prevention of influenza symptoms. In clinical trials, Oscillococcinum® has been shown to reduce the severity and shorten the duration of influenza symptoms within a few days (*Br Homeopath J, 1998;87:69-76, Br.J Clin.Pharmacol, 1989;27(3):329-335*).
 - Despite modest positive findings for treatment, additional studies are needed to evaluate its effectiveness in preventing influenza.

In Health,
Kristen

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Kristen H. Reynolds, MD

Medical Director, Aurora Wiselives Center

8320 W. Bluemound Rd., Suite 125, Wauwatosa, WI 53213

☎ (414)302-3800 📠 (414)302-3813

Program Director of Integrative Medicine, Aurora UW Medical Group

1020 N 12th St., 4th Floor, Milwaukee, WI 53233

☎ (414)219-5900 📠 (414)219-5914