

An Herbalist's View

Approaches to Colds and Flu

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Introduction

This handout is to help people learn about using herbal medicines to treat the two most common types of respiratory viruses, the common cold and the flu. While this seems simple enough, there are a lot of questions about these frequent ailments and some of these considerations are listed below. It also includes some complex questions such as what to do about vaccinations or strep throat. While information is provided, no answers are given as individuals will need to make their own decisions, based on their own situations.

Please read through the considerations below to help prepare yourself for the next time you are treating someone with one of these illnesses.

There is more that can be said about treating these illnesses, but hopefully this will provide some practical and creative ideas for helping yourself and others.

Considerations

1. First question, should you do anything at all? Why not just get sick and go through the process?
2. Learn basic differentiation, are your symptoms caused by;
 - A virus such as a cold, flu or gastroenteritis ('stomach flu').
 - A bacteria, such as strep throat or other bacterial secondary infection
 - An allergy, such as hay fever or allergic asthma
 - Irritation of the respiratory tract, caused by indoor heat such as a wood stove or other irritants
3. Botanical names are used throughout this handout, there is a list below where the common and botanical names are cross-referenced.
4. Think *categories* while treating. What are the causes and symptoms you are looking to treat. This is why being able to differentiate is important. For example, are you looking to kill an organism with antimicrobial herbs, or treat pain with antiinflammatories?
5. Formulation considerations
 - Consider the relative strength of each herb. If a plant has strong actions (i.e., with broad antimicrobial effects like *Ligusticum*) less can be used in the formula. With less potent plants (such as demulcents like *Althaea*) a larger amount may be needed.
 - Single herbs ('simples') and formulas may need to be changed during the course of a sickness. The change could affect all of the herbs in a formula, just a few, or the percentage of each in the formula.
 - Changing the medicines may depend on whether the medicines are having the desired affect or if the symptom picture is changing.

6. Dosage considerations
 - Frequency and quantity are two major considerations each time a medicine is administered. Frequency is how often it is to be taken. Quantity is how much of the medicine is taken per time.
 - When an herb or formula is altered, the dosage might need to be changed as well.
7. Vaccinations for the flu. This is a complex topic where a number of factors should be taken in consideration. It is helpful for individuals to be informed to help themselves and their families make appropriate decisions. Note, there are no vaccinations for the common cold.
8. Keep herbs and preparations stocked in your home. When someone does get sick they will have the medicine on hand and can start taking them right away.
9. There are a few household items that are helpful when someone is sick. These include; cayenne, lemon, honey, ginger and garlic.
10. Antibiotic use
 - Antibiotics do not affect viruses (such as colds or flus), they are used primarily for bacterial infections such as strep or bacterial pneumonia that can accompany these viruses.
 - Antibiotics are encouraged by many health care workers for strep throat infections, due to the possibility and seriousness of acute rheumatic fever. Learn more about this to make an informed decision.
 - Should one take antibiotics and herbal medicine together? This is a personal choice but herbal medicine may help reduce the symptoms while taking antibiotics and together they might work better.
11. A basic question is when to suppress symptoms or to express them, such as with coughs or fevers. This can be challenging as both coughs and fevers may play a role in recovering from an illness but they are also uncomfortable and can interfere with sleep. See below under 'Cough Notes' and 'Fever Notes' for more details.
12. Reye's syndrome is dangerous and can occur from giving aspirin to people under 18 years old when they have a viral illness. It is not known whether plants high in salicylates may cause this reaction. Inform yourself.
13. A major concern from having these viruses include a number of complications, from serious secondary infections like pneumonia (more likely following a flu than cold) to quality of life issues such as difficulty sleeping due to coughing. For some people these symptoms can last up to a few weeks making daily life more difficult. Learn remedies and treatments that help with the below conditions.

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bronchitis • Earaches • Difficulty sleeping • Lack of appetite | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pneumonia • Sinusitis • Strep throat |
|---|--|

Cold and Flu Differences

General Notes

1. All of these differences are generalizations which vary with the type of virus and the individual's reaction. It can be hard to tell the difference.
2. The symptoms are related to the body's response to the virus. They cause a release of inflammatory mediators which give rise to the symptoms.
3. The common cold is associated with over 150 viruses making it harder to vaccinate against.
4. The common cold is the most common infectious disease in the US
5. Differences between cold and flu. The flu often has sudden onset with more severe symptoms along with extreme fatigue and high fever. Colds more often affect the upper respiratory tract.

| Symptoms | Cold | Flu (Influenza) |
|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Onset of symptoms | Slow | Sudden |
| Symptoms last | 7-10 days | 5-14 days |
| Fever | Uncommon | Common |
| Headache | Uncommon | Common |
| Body aches | Mild | Moderate to severe |
| Fatigue | Mild | Moderate to severe |
| Coughing | Common-with mucous | Common-dry |
| Chills | Uncommon | Common |
| Sore throat | Very common | Occasional |
| Runny/stuff nose | Very common | Occasional |
| Symptoms in general | Milder than the flu | More severe than a cold |
| Complications | Uncommon | Common |

Fever Notes

1. Fever is a *symptom* not a disease within itself.
2. Fevers can be caused by many factors including; infections (both bacterial and viral), inflammation, drugs, and other vectors.
3. Fever occurs when the body alters its normal physiological temperature set point, it is set higher, and the body will try to reach this new set point by both behavioral and internal responses, such as shivering which raises core temperature.
4. It is helpful to know what an individual's normal body temperature is, as it may vary by a degree or so.
5. Temperature also varies about 1°F each day with late afternoon being the highest point and early morning the lowest
6. Besides these variations, body temperature is a fairly stable control, and any change may signify a condition that needs addressing
7. Important, the condition needs addressing, not necessarily the fever.

8. A fever is a normal body response and may not need to be addressed, as it could help aid in getting through an illness
9. Diaphoretics are a class of remedies to help the body move through a fever by increasing peripheral circulation and increase sweating.
10. If choosing to reduce a fever, try and determine what is causing the fever and treat that if necessary.
 - If an infection, try to kill or stop progression of microbes with antimicrobials
 - If inflammation, reduce with antiinflammatories.

Cough Notes

1. Coughs are problematic as they are uncomfortable, painful and can keep people awake. They are also worrisome as they can indicate an illness.
2. Coughs can be due to a number of conditions including; colds, flus, allergies, heartburn, medications, pollutants and other causes.
3. Coughing is a way for the body to rid the respiratory tract of microbes, secretions, and irritants.
4. Before treating a cough, try to determine the cause to help determine which category of herbs and preparations to use.
5. A basic question is whether to suppress a cough or allow it to continue to remove mucous from your respiratory tract.
6. Coughs are often divided into productive and non-productive, though these descriptions are a bit misleading. Productive is when mucus is brought up during the coughing process. Non-productive is a dry, often hacking, cough. Dry coughs are what generally follow a respiratory infection and may last from days to weeks afterwards.
7. Categories of cough medicines include cough suppressants, antiinflammatories, expectorants, and demulcents. Herbs from different categories can be mixed together for a better overall effect.
8. Demulcent herbs have a thick consistency but can also be helpful with mucousy coughs.
9. Since coughing can spread microbes, covering your mouth while coughing during the infectious period is helpful to the people around you. And washing your hands afterwards.
10. Reducing the irritation at the back of the throat can sometimes help reduce coughing, gargles can help here.

Mucous Notes

1. Mucous lines those parts of the body that interact with the outside world, including the mouth, nose, sinuses, throat, respiratory tract and lungs.
2. It covers and protects these surfaces as they need to stay moist.
3. Mucous traps unwanted material such as dust and bacteria.
4. Mucous contains antibodies and enzymes increasing the body's microbial resistance.
5. The human body makes approximately 1 to 1.5 liters of mucous daily

6. What does the color of mucus mean?
 - Clear generally indicates a lack of an infection, it might be due to irritation or allergy. However, mucous is often clear at the beginning and end of an infection
 - Yellow and green mucous may be an indication of an infection. This is due to the white blood cells called neutrophils. They contain a greenish-colored enzyme that turns the mucous this color.
 - There is not much difference between what these two colors indicate.
 - Early morning mucus is often yellow or green and viscous. It is not an indication of sickness, it is this color from being expelled during the night.

General Treatment Strategies

1. It is helpful to give your body rest time. Bed rest is important as it can help your immune system function optimally. Many people resist this, but it can improve the rate of recovery.
2. About fluids, you should maintain your normal base rate of hydration. If you are vomiting or have diarrhea you will need to drink more to offset this.
3. Treatment may vary depending at what stage you start to treat the virus (see below).
4. To eat or not to eat. People often have a diminished appetite when sick, or are just too tired to get any food. You may not have to eat as much as you usually do, but you should try to get enough quality food to provide necessary nutrients for getting better
5. While sick try to eat healthy when hungry
 - Simple easy to digest foods
 - Broths, soups, teas
 - Avoid heavy oily foods or hard to digest proteins
 - Avoid too many carbs, such as wheat
1. Rest (you will be back at work soon enough).

Constitutional Approaches

1. While there are some herbs and preparations that would benefit most people with a respiratory virus; medicines and dosages can be also be tailored for individuals.
2. Ayurveda is used here as a constitutional model, a method of trying to assess treatment protocols based on various individual traits. *Doshas* are the more specific aspect of Ayurveda employed here. As with any model that tries to separate people into distinct groups, it is highly generalized and mainly applicable to people who hew closest to the specific delineations. There are many good books, classes and websites that discuss Ayurveda for anyone interested.
3. When preparing medicines for an individual consider how being sick has affected them in the past. What were their symptoms and how long did they last.

4. Each dosha could benefit from certain categories such as antimicrobials, antiinflammatories and pain relievers. The difference is often the dosage and how much of each herb is put into a formula.
5. Below are the three doshas and some categories, medicines and dosages to consider for each.

Ayurvedic Doshas

Vata-tendency for dryness, fast metabolism, light sleeper

1. Demulcents, nourishing herbs, hypnotics
2. Keep fed and hydrated
3. Nourishing soups, keep the calories up
4. Specific herbs-Glycyrrhiza, Ulmus, Althaea, Sambucus fruit, Nepeta, Matricaria, Zingiber, Thymus
5. Dosage-small to medium amounts

Pitta-tendency for inflammation, not willing to rest when sick

1. Antiinflammatories, sedatives
2. Convince that rest is important
3. Specific herbs-Matricaria, Filipendula, Scutellaria, Nepeta, Glycyrrhiza, Salix, Curcuma, Zingiber, Tanacetum
4. Dosage-medium to large amounts

Kapha-tendency for sluggishness, difficult to fever

1. Diaphoretics, warming and stimulating herbs
2. Specific herbs-Monarda, Mentha, Cinnamomum, Hyssopus, Thymus, Zingiber, Capsicum,
3. Dosage-Larger amounts

Treatment Approaches for Different Stages

Note-There are a number of considerations with adjusting treatment protocols for taking herbal medicines at different stages of sickness. These may involve altering specific herbs, the frequency or quantity of a medicine already being administered or the proportions of each plant in a formula. Be creative.

Prevention

1. Have a good stockpile of medicines at home
2. Careful hand-washing
3. Take immune supporting herbs such as Echinacea, Astragalus and Ganoderma if you are prone to getting sick

Early symptoms

1. Herbs that increase resistance such as Echinacea and Allium
2. Antimicrobial herbs such as Ligusticum, Berberis and Achillea

3. Take small to moderate amounts of medicine regularly. Example; an antimicrobial tincture, 2 ml every 4 hours.
4. Take it easy and get rest

Sick with full symptoms

1. Use antimicrobial, antiinflammatory and symptom reducing categories such as decongestants.
2. Take medium to large amounts often. Example; an antimicrobial tincture 2.5-4 ml every 2 hours.
3. Bed rest is important

Recovery

1. Take small amounts of antimicrobial medicines occasionally, 1-2 ml every 4 hours.
2. Symptom reducing medicines (i.e., cough medicines) as often as needed.
3. Take it easy for a few days, do not tax your body

Symptoms reappearing after partial recovery

1. Possibility of a secondary bacterial infection
2. Antimicrobial herbs and symptom reducing herbs as with ‘Sick with full symptoms’ above.

Categories

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|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Antiinflammatory | 6. Demulcent | 11. Pain relief |
| 2. Antimicrobial | 7. Diaphoretic | 12. Respiratory |
| 3. Corrigent | 8. Expectorant | 13. Sedative/Hypnotic |
| 4. Cough remedies | 9. Febrifuge | 14. Sore throat aids |
| 5. Decongestant | 10. Immune support | 15. Warming/Stimulant |

Antiinflammatories-reduce inflammation and severity of symptoms, including pain and stuffiness

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|----------|-------------|------------|
| Achillea | Echinacea | Matricaria |
| Althaea | Filipendula | Salix |
| Curcuma | Glycyrrhiza | Zingiber |

Antimicrobials-kill or suppress some bacteria and viruses

- | | | |
|----------------|------------------------|------------|
| Achillea | Eupatorium perfoliatum | Ligusticum |
| Allium cepa | Glycyrrhiza | Monarda |
| Allium sativum | Hydrastis | Propolis |
| Baptisia | Hyssopus | Sambucus |
| Berberis | Inula | |
| Echinacea | Larrea | |

Corrigents-flavoring agent for medicines

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|------------|-------------|------------|
| Cinnamomum | Foeniculum | Pimpinella |
| Citrus | Glycyrrhiza | Rosa |
| Elettaria | Honey | Zingiber |

Cough Remedies-reduce or suppress coughs

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|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Drosera | Marrubium | Verbascum |
| Hyssopus | Prunus | |
| Inula | Tussilago | |

Decongestants-help with nasal and sinus congestion

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|-----------|-------------|--------------|
| Anemopsis | Capsicum | Myrica |
| Armoracia | Ephedra | Piper nigrum |
| Bidens | Eriodictyon | |
| Brassica | Grindelia | |

Demulcents-soothing mucilaginous herbs

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|-------------|------------|-----------|
| Althaea | Gnaphalium | Symphytum |
| Glycyrrhiza | Malva | Ulmus |

Diaphoretics-promote sweating

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|------------------------|-----------------|----------|
| Achillea | Mentha piperita | Sambucus |
| Eupatorium perfoliatum | Nepeta | |

Expectorants-help expel mucous from the bronchial passages

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|--------------------|-------------|-----------|
| Allium sativum | Glycyrrhiza | Lobelia |
| Althaea | Grindelia | Marrubium |
| Asclepias tuberosa | Hyssopus | Prunus |
| Demulcent herbs | Inula | Thymus |
| Eucalyptus | Ligusticum | Verbascum |

Immune support-preventive medicines to increase immune competency

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|------------|-----------|
| Astragalus | Echinacea |
| Calendula | Ganoderma |

Sedatives and Hypnotics-sedatives reduce irritation and promote calm, hypnotics help with sleep. It is often the quantity administered that makes the difference.

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|------------|-------------|-----------|
| Avena | Passiflora | Valeriana |
| Matricaria | Piscidia | |
| Nepeta | Scutellaria | |

Pain Relief-reduce pain

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|------------|-------------|-----------|
| Humulus | Piscidia | Valeriana |
| Lactuca | Salix | |
| Matricaria | Scutellaria | |

Sore Throat Aids-remedies for helping with painful and infected throats

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|-----------|------------|----------|
| Achillea | Hydrastis | Salvia |
| Baptisia | Inula | Ulmus |
| Calendula | Ligusticum | Zingiber |
| Citrus | Monarda | |
| Hamamelis | Propolis | |

Warming/Stimulant-improve circulation, help with sluggishness

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|----------|--------------|------------|
| Capsicum | Piper nigrum | Cinnamomum |
| Curcuma | Zingiber | Brassica |

Formulas

1. **Diaphoretic Tea**-Mentha, Achillea, Sambucus flower, Eupatorium
2. **Soothing and Stimulating Throat Tea**-Zingiber, Capsicum (just a few grains). Add Honey and a squeeze of lemon
3. **Sage Tea**-especially as a gargle
4. **Garlic Tea with Honey**-aka 'dragon breath tea'
5. **Nervine Tea**-Nepeta, Scutellaria, Avena, Matricaria, Passiflora
6. **Respiratory Aid Tea**-Ligusticum, Grindelia, Verbascum, Tussilago
7. **Antimicrobial Throat Spray Tincture**-Calendula, Echinacea, Ligusticum, Baptisia, Hydrastis, Propolis, Thyme essential oil, Vegetable glycerin
8. **So, Who Isn't Sick Tea Blend**-Achillea, Althaea, Eupatorium, Echinacea, Filipendula, Glycyrrhiza, Ligusticum
9. **Stems**-add a small amount of essential oil to steaming water and inhale the vapor. Eucalyptus or Malaleuca

Preparations

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|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Aromatherapy | 6. Liniments | 11. Steam inhalations |
| 2. Baths | 7. Oils-Infused | 12. Syrups |
| 3. Chest rubs | 8. Oils-Volatile | 13. Tea |
| 4. Compresses | 9. Neti pot | 14. Tincture |
| 5. Gargle | 10. Smoking mixtures | |

Materia Medica-Botanical and Common Names

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| Achillea millefolium-Yarrow | Hamamelis virginiana-Witch hazel |
| Allium cepa-Onion | Hydrastis canadensis-Goldenseal |
| Allium sativum-Garlic | Hyssopus officinalis-Hyssop |
| Althaea officinalis-Marshmallow | Inula helenium-Elecampane |
| Armoracia rusticana-Horseradish | Ligusticum porteri-Osha |
| Astragalus membranaceus-Astragalus | Lobelia inflata-Lobelia |
| Avena sp-Oat tops | Lonicera japonica-Japanese honeysuckle |
| Baptisia tinctoria-Wild indigo | Malva spp.-Mallow |
| Brassica spp.-Mustard seed | Malaleuca sp-Tea tree |
| Monarda spp-Bee balm | Marrubium vulgare-Horehound |
| Berberis spp-Barberry | Matricaria chamomilla-Chamomile |
| Berberis/Mahonia spp.-Oregon graperoot | Mentha piperita-Peppermint |
| Calendula officinalis-Calendula | Myrica spp.-Bayberry |
| Capsicum annum-Cayenne | Nepeta cataria-Catnip |
| Cinnamomum spp.-Cinnamon | Passiflora incarnata-Passionflower |
| Citrus x limon-Orange peel | Pimpinella anisum-Anise |
| Curcuma longa-Turmeric | Piper nigrum-Black pepper |
| Drosera spp-Sundew | Propolis-Propolis |
| Echinacea spp-Echinacea | Prunus serotina-Wild cherry |
| Elettaria cardamomum-Cardamom | Rosa spp.-Rose |
| Ephedra sinica-Ma huang | Salix spp.-Willow |
| Eriodictyon spp.-Yerba santa | Salvia officinalis-Sage |
| Eucalyptus spp.-Eucalyptus | Sambucus spp.-Elder |
| Eupatorium perfoliatum-Boneset | Scutellaria lateriflora-Skullcap |
| Filipendula ulmaria-Meadowsweet | Symphytum spp-Comfrey |
| Foeniculum vulgare-Fennel | Thymus spp.-Thyme |
| Ganoderma spp.-Reishi mushroom | Tussilago farfara-Coltsfoot |
| Glechoma hederacea-Ground ivy | Ulmus rubra-Slippery elm |
| Glycyrrhiza uralensis-Licorice | Valerian spp.-Valerian |
| Gnaphalium spp.-Cudweed | Verbascum thapsus-Mullein |
| Grindelia spp.-Gumweed | Zingiber officinale-Ginger |