



## HEALTH WATCH: Combating the Common Cold, Naturally

by Lisa Price, ND

“A family is a unit composed not only of children but of men, women, an occasional animal, and the common cold.” – Ogden Nash

Medical technology and therapies have come a long way in the past two centuries, curing or at least preventing many diseases, but there is one ailment old as time eluding cure: the common cold. Even Dr. Spock, in the precocious science fiction series, *Star Trek*, comments on the conundrum when complimenting *Bones* on his medical proclivity, “You may yet cure the common cold.”

### The Cold Facts behind the Common Cold

The common cold, also known as upper respiratory infections, or affectionately by some as, the crud, is a viral infection easily spread through contact with an infected person. Those who are afflicted with it have mucus that contains the virus. When they cough or sneeze, they spray vaporized mucus into the air. Or, they may cough or sneeze into their hands and touch a handrail, the top of a desk or other surfaces that are frequently shared by others. These are all sources of contamination for healthy people.

When you pick up the virus and it reaches your mucus membranes, it begins to multiply, with an incubation time of approximately one to five days before you begin to see symptoms. Once present, the virus stimulates immune cells in your body to get rid of the foreign invader. This creates an inflammatory response that helps to eliminate the virus, but also is the cause of a lot of the uncomfortable symptoms we experience.

Symptoms usually begin with a runny nose, cough and a sore or scratchy throat. These may progress to a mild fever and one might even experience chills. Other symptoms may include headaches, fatigue, weakness and loss of appetite. These symptoms typically resolve in about seven to ten days, but may linger for a couple of weeks. The common cold is usually not dangerous except in very young children, but it can wear your immune system down and make you more vulnerable to secondary infections.

The best “cure” for the common cold is prevention. If you’re already infected, the next best course is to nurture a healthy immune system, which will decrease the length of the illness and the chance of developing secondary infections.

### Prevention

The first line of defense is to decrease stress, which throws a major monkey wrench into an optimally functioning immune system by using up many of the body’s resources. To reduce stress...

- Get plenty of rest.
- Eat well. (Varying your diet to contain an assortment of whole grains, vegetables and fruits cannot be over emphasized.)
- Take a quality multiple vitamin and mineral supplement daily.
- Exercise 20 to 30 minutes a day.

Secondly, hygiene. Try to stay away from people with colds and wash your hands frequently during cold season, which extends from the start of fall through the spring. If you have a cold, cough and sneeze into your arm and be extra diligent about washing your hands frequently.

If you have a fever, do yourself and others a favor and stay home. The viral load is usually highest when you have a fever, meaning that’s when you are most likely to infect others.

### Treatment

Once you’ve been infected, alternative therapies can be helpful for treating symptoms. There are a number of botanicals (herbs), foods, vitamins, minerals and other natural treatments that have been reported to reduce the duration and severity of colds. These include garlic, Echinacea, zinc, ginger, tumeric and boswellia. They should not, however, be used continuously. A naturopathic physician or other knowledgeable licensed provider can show you how to get the maximum benefit from them.

**Garlic** contains chemicals that have been shown to do more than keep vampires away. It has been used effectively for centuries as an anti-viral and also anti-inflammatory agent throughout the world.

**Echinacea**, also known as the common coneflower, is native to the Americas and can be seen adorning quite a few yards in the Pacific Northwest. This flower contains chemicals that help specific immune cells fight viral infections. Naturopathic physicians find Echinacea based supplements to be effective, especially those containing a combination of all three species of the flower.

**Zinc** is a vital mineral and yet many people are deficient in it. It supports proper immune function and many critical enzymatic processes. Recently, studies have suggested that zinc

is also able to shorten the life of a cold.

**Antioxidants**, such as turmeric, boswellia, ginger, and quercetin, help clean up the damage caused by inflammation, and in doing so provide some cold symptom relief. Most also have anti-inflammatory effects, as well.

**Rest & Hydration** are perhaps the best remedies. Give your body adequate time to repair and regenerate itself.

While the therapies mentioned above can be found over-the-counter, it's good advice to check with a qualified healthcare practitioner before taking a new product, particularly if you are taking other drugs or have a co-existing medical condition.

Colds lasting longer than a week, or with fevers over 101° lasting more than two days, should be seen by a healthcare provider. ❖