

Naturopathic Treatment of Upper Respiratory Infections

An Informational Guide Prepared by Clinicians from Nature Cures Clinic

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Introduction

All naturopathic therapies aim to support the body's ability to fight infections and recover health. This also applies to the treatment of acute illnesses of the upper respiratory tract. A combination of therapies are selected that will enhance the body's capacity to fight bacteria and viruses, while also helping to remove cellular waste products. This allows a person to recover as quickly and comfortably as possible, while not compromising his or her overall health.

Many of the symptoms of an upper respiratory infection (URI) are caused by the body's efforts to get rid of invading viruses or bacteria. The most common URIs, including colds and the flu, are caused by viruses, not bacteria, so antibiotic treatment is not appropriate. However, our immune systems have the ability to fight off viruses. Naturopathic treatment of acute URIs is based on both scientific research and empirical evidence (practical knowledge) gathered through many years of clinical experience.

Along with specific treatments for each condition, naturopathic physicians will often recommend supportive treatments that can speed recovery from any illness:

- 1) Drink plenty of water: In order to get rid of any waste material that is created while the body fights an infection, there must be enough water available to the cells and systems of the body. Pure water is recommended in addition to any other fluids you take in during an illness.
- 2) Rest: The body must repair cells damaged by infections. Getting enough rest gives your body the energy it needs for this process.
- 3) Decrease intake of sugars: Eating simple carbohydrates (sugar) lowers the body's ability to fight infections.¹ During any infection it is best to lower or stop your intake of simple sugars and carbohydrates such as sweets, breads, pasta, sweetened fruit juices and foods made from refined (white) flour. It is also important to avoid food allergens. You may know what foods you are sensitive to, but sometimes allergy testing is needed.
- 4) Avoid stress – Research shows that stress lowers the body's ability to fight infections.² Avoiding or reducing stress is an important way to help the body fight infections and avoid them in the future.

¹ Ringsdorf WM Jr, Cheraskin E, Ramsay RR Jr. "Sucrose, neutrophilic phagocytosis and resistance to disease." *Dental Survey*, 1976; 52(12): 46-8.

² Segerstrom SC, Miller GE. "Psychological stress and the human immune system: a meta-analytic study of 30 years of inquiry." *Psychological Bulletin*, 2004; (130)4: 601-630.

Specific Naturopathic Treatments for Upper Respiratory Infections

Not every patient with one of these conditions would necessarily receive every therapy listed here. Naturopathic medicine focuses on treating every case individually, with each treatment plan designed specifically to address the unique needs of each case. Therapies not listed here would probably also be used to enhance the person's full potential for a quick and comfortable recovery.

NOTE: Items marked with two asterisks () indicate supplements that can be toxic if taken in inappropriate amounts. Taking more than the standard recommended dosage should only be done under the supervision of a qualified health care professional.**

The Common Cold (Rhinitis) and Sinusitis

The common cold is caused by a virus, while sinusitis can also be caused by bacteria or fungi. Naturopathic treatment of colds and sinus irritation includes supplements to increase immunity against viruses, bacteria and fungi, along with supportive care to make you as comfortable as possible.

- Vitamin C – 1-2 grams every four hours at the first sign of a cold.^{3,4}
- Bioflavonoids – used with vitamin C to fight viruses.
- Proteolytic (protein breakdown) enzymes – Bromelain is the best known of these. Taken on an empty stomach, bromelain and similar enzymes thin mucus and can help relieve a stuffy nose.⁵
- Vitamin A** - Helps the mucus membranes fight off viruses, but must be used with extreme caution during pregnancy.
- Zinc** - Too much zinc can be toxic, but at appropriate doses zinc's antiviral effects can help a cold go away faster.⁶
- Botanical medicines – A number of herbal medicines (Echinacea, goldenseal, Oregon grape and others) that increase immunity can be used to help fight the common cold.
- Nasal lavage – Flushing the sinuses with a saline (dilute salt) or acidophilus solution can help restore the proper environment to the membranes and reduce irritation and discomfort.

³ Hemila H, Herman ZS. "Vitamin C and the common cold: a retrospective analysis of Chalmers' review." *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, 1995; 14(2): 116-123.

⁴ Nikolaev MP, Logunov AI, Tsyrunnikova LG, Dzhililov DS. "Clinical and biochemical aspects in the treatment of acute maxillary sinusitis with antioxidants." [Russian] *Vestnik Otorinolaringologii*, 1994;(1):22-6.

⁵ Bernkop-Schnurch A, Giovanelli R, Valenta C. "Peroral administration of enzymes: strategies to improve the galenic of dosage forms for trypsin and bromelain." *Drug Development and Industrial Pharmacy*, 2000;26(2):115-21.

⁶ Linday LA, Dolitsky JN, Shindledecker RD. "Nutritional supplements as adjunctive therapy for children with chronic/recurrent sinusitis: pilot research." *International Journal of Pediatric Otorhinolaryngology*, 2004; 68(6):785-93.

- Probiotic flora – Taking acidophilus and other healthy human bacteria orally (by mouth) can enhance overall immunity.⁷
- Hydrotherapy – In-office or home hydrotherapy stimulates vitality and speeds recovery.
- Homeopathy – There are thousands of homeopathic remedies; each is prescribed based on the patient's specific symptoms.

Sore Throat (pharyngitis)

- Vitamin C, bioflavonoids and zinc
- Vitamin A** - 50,000 IU daily for 5 days (women who are or could be pregnant can substitute beta carotene at 200,000IU)
- Echinacea and Goldenseal combination – These are usually taken as tea, tincture or capsules of dried herbs. Oregon grape root is often substituted for goldenseal.
- Zinc throat spray – It has been shown that a zinc throat spray can shorten the time a sore throat lasts.⁸
- Hydrotherapy – A series of hot and cold compresses are applied to the throat in the following order: 3 minutes with a hot compress, followed immediately by 30 seconds with a cold compress. This is repeated 3 times at least twice daily.
- Homeopathy – Remedies are prescribed based upon symptoms.

Cough

A cough indicates that there is an irritant or an infection present in the membrane of the throat. Naturopathic therapies focus on boosting the immune system both in the throat and in the neck area.

- Vitamin C, bioflavonoids, vitamin A (or beta carotene), and zinc^{9**}
- Hydrotherapy – Alternating hot and cold compresses are applied to the throat as described above. If fatigue (unusual tiredness) or early signs of a cold are present, hydrotherapy applied to the whole body may be appropriate.
- Homeopathy – Remedies are prescribed based upon symptoms.
- Botanical medicines – Demulcent herbs (including fenugreek, marshmallow, slippery elm and licorice**) soothe the mucus membranes and help throat irritations and infections get better more quickly.¹⁰ These can be combined into a tea and used to relieve both a cough and a sore throat.

⁷ Erickson KL, Hubbard NE. "Probiotic Immunomodulation in Health and Disease" *Journal of Nutrition*, 2000;130:403S.

⁸ Mossad, SB. "Effect of zincum gluconicum nasal gel on the duration and symptom severity of the common cold in otherwise healthy adults." *Quarterly Journal of Medicine* 2003;96:35-43.

⁹ Cohen HA, Varsano I, Kahan E, Sarrell EM, Uziel Y. "Effectiveness of an Herbal Preparation Containing Echinacea, Propolis, and Vitamin C in Preventing Respiratory Tract Infections in Children: A Randomized, Double-blind, Placebo-Controlled, Multicenter Study." *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* 2004;158:217-221.

¹⁰ Brinckmann J, Sigwart H, van Houten Taylor L. "Safety and Efficacy of a Traditional Herbal Medicine (Throat Coat[®]) in Symptomatic Temporary Relief of Pain in Patients with Acute Pharyngitis: A Multicenter, Prospective, Randomized, Double-Blinded, Placebo-Controlled Study." *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 2003;9(2):285-98.

Earache (Otitis Media)

Earaches in children are commonly caused by bacteria or viruses. However, use of antibiotics each time can contribute to the problem of antibiotic resistance. In the most common type of earaches, naturopathic therapies can relieve the symptoms while also increasing the child's overall immunity.

- Diet therapy – Research has shown the relationship between sensitivity to some common foods and the occurrence of ear infections.¹¹ Naturopathic treatment for ear infections often includes removing the most common problem-causing foods (allergens) from the diet. These foods include corn, eggs, wheat and all forms of dairy. It is often helpful to test for food allergens so that specific foods can be minimized both during the infection and after.
- Vitamin C, bioflavonoids and zinc** - These supplements help the body fight viruses and bacteria. However, the dosage in children needs to be reduced to levels appropriate for the age.
- Essential fatty acids – Childrens' growing bodies need the essential fatty acids found in fish, nuts and some seeds to build cells and repair tissue. The immune system also needs these fats in order to work properly.¹²
- Probiotic flora – The presence of normal human bacteria in the small intestine and colon supports immunity. Many children growing up in Western societies may not have enough of these bacteria.¹³ Supplementing these bacteria in quantities that are appropriate for children of various ages can support overall immunity and enhance health.
- Homeopathy – When appropriately prescribed, homeopathy can reduce the number of treatment failures. Naturopathic physicians commonly use homeopathy in children with these conditions.^{14,15}
- Herbal ear drops** – Drops containing mullein, garlic and other bacteria-fighting herbs can help an infection clear up faster. This is only safe to use if a physician has checked to make sure that there are no perforations (holes) in the eardrum.
- Hydrotherapy – Alternating hot and cold compresses to the affected ear will increase circulation and flow of lymph to boost immunity in the area.

¹¹ Nsouli TM, Nsouli SM, Linde RE, O'Mara F, Scanlon RT, Bellanti JA. "Role of food allergy in serous otitis media." *Annals of Allergy*, 1994;73(3):215-9.

¹² de Pablo MA, Puertollano MA, Alvarez de Cienfuegos G. "Biological and clinical significance of lipids as modulators of immune system functions." *Clinical and Diagnostic Laboratory Immunology*, 2002;(9)5:945-950.

¹³ Bengmark S. "Ecological control of the gastrointestinal tract. The role of probiotic flora." *Gut*, 1998;42:2-7.

¹⁴ Jacobs J, Springer DA, Crothers D. "Homeopathic treatment of acute otitis media in children: a preliminary randomized placebo-controlled trial." *Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal*, 2001;20(2):177-83.

¹⁵ Frei H, Thurneysen A. "Homeopathy in acute otitis media in children: treatment effect or spontaneous resolution?" *British Homoeopathic Journal*, 2001;90(4):180-2.

Definitions of Terms

Naturopathy: A system of medicine that focuses on preventing disease and the use of nontoxic, natural therapies. Naturopathic medicine is founded on six basic principles:

- 1) First, do no harm
- 2) Use the healing power of nature
- 3) Treat the cause of the disease, not just the symptoms
- 4) Treat the whole person
- 5) Educate the patient about his or her health
- 6) Focus on preventing disease

Licensed naturopathic physicians have attended a four-year accredited naturopathic college or university. They are trained in the use of several therapies, including nutrition and nutritional supplements, botanical medicine, homeopathy, physiotherapy, IV (intravenous) therapy, hydrotherapy, minor surgery, physical medicine, counseling and lifestyle modification.

Hydrotherapy: The systematic application of hot and cold water to the body to enhance vitality and help the body recover from disease.

Homeopathy: A system of medicine that treats disease with a remedy matched to the patient's symptoms. The remedy is a highly diluted form of a substance that produces the same symptoms when given to a healthy person. This is known as the principle of "like cures like."

Nutritional supplements and quality control: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not currently regulate nutritional supplements. Testing of retail products has found that some contain little or none of the ingredients listed on labels. Supplements may contain additives and fillers that do not support health. If you are unsure about the quality of a nutritional supplement, ask a health care provider trained in the use and evaluation of nutritional supplements.

Physiotherapy: The use of machines that apply electric currents to the body in some manner in order to facilitate recovery from injuries, pain, inflammation, swelling and other complaints.

Physical Therapy: This type of therapy aligns the spine and joints in order to enhance the functioning of all systems of the body.

Minor surgery: Licensed naturopathic physicians practicing in the state of Oregon are licensed to perform minor surgery, so long as it is not done over the chest or abdomen. This typically involves wart and skin tag removal, as well as other minimally invasive procedures.

Allergen: A substance that creates an allergic response in the body.