

Cold and Flu Season, and H1N1: A Naturopathic Perspective and a Comprehensive Approach

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We are starting to get calls about how to handle cold and flu season this year, and then some specific concerns about H1N1. This information is designed as a general response; specific treatments will depend on symptoms and your overall health. This is not a discussion about vaccines, that conversation can be had on an individual basis.

First and foremost, pay attention and listen to your body. Most of us know when we are starting to come down with something: unusual fatigue, scratchy throat, tired eyes, and swollen glands in the neck, or body aches that don't fit our recent activity level. Don't wait until you are "full blown sick" to decide to take action. Prevention can take many forms from complete prevention to the reduction of symptoms and the prevention or treatment of secondary complications.

Symptoms

The symptoms of H1N1 are similar to seasonal influenza (flu) including headache, chills and cough followed by fever, loss of appetite, muscle aches and fatigue, runny nose, sneezing, watery eyes and throat irritation. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may occur in adults as well as in children. In more severe cases, or in people with chronic conditions, complications such as pneumonia may develop.

If you are experiencing these symptoms you should immediately contact your health care provider, including your Naturopathic Doctor (ND). Do not leave your home if possible until you have spoken to your health care provider. People should only go to Emergency Rooms if they have severe symptoms.

Naturopathic Philosophy

In general, naturopathic physicians (NDs) are the physician-level experts on natural medicine and the use of herbs, nutrients, diet, and lifestyle changes to treat disease and promote health and wellness. Trained in the basic medical sciences and conventional diagnostics, naturopathic education includes therapeutic nutrition, botanical medicine, homeopathy, natural childbirth, classical Chinese medicine, hydrotherapy, naturopathic manipulative therapy, pharmacology and minor surgery. NDs practice true preventive and primary health care – engaging patients in health promotion and treating those with chronic disease to manage the entirety of their health.

Naturopathic Doctors can help you support your immune system with a natural approach to health. A strong immune system not only reduces the risk of getting sick, but may also reduce the severity of illness if you do get sick. Although viruses such as influenza don't respond to antibiotics, there are anti-viral therapies NDs can suggest to you to support your immune system's ability to fight viruses and therefore lessen the severity of many illnesses caused by viruses. As Naturopathic Doctors we are trained to diagnose and will refer you to another health care provider where appropriate or necessary. Naturopathic Doctors are the most highly-trained physicians in natural approaches to illness in the United States and we are licensed, primary health care providers in Montana. Even if you have a conventional family doctor (MD), your Naturopathic Doctor can complement their care with naturopathic treatment options."

First and foremost, don't wait until you are sick to decide how you might proceed with getting help

BE PROACTIVE: MAKE A PREVENTION APPOINTMENT: Call us, (406) 542-2147, and schedule a prevention appointment so I can advise you about what to keep on hand for prevention and treatment, based upon your specific health care picture. Everyone is different and there are many ways to support the immune system naturally and many anti viral herbs and natural treatments. This way, if you do get sick, it may just be a telephone consultation to get you started on a treatment plan.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT: In the words of Hippocrates, “Let Food Be Your Medicine and Medicine Be Your Food”. Food is the fuel your body needs to do the work in needs to do. Eating a diet high in complete protein, essential fatty acids, complex carbohydrates and plenty of fruits and vegetables is a strong way to support your immune system. And, don’t forget your culinary herbs. Herbs, such as thyme, rosemary, oregano and garlic are powerful medicines, whether taken as a supplement or as an addition to your meals. Definitely, avoid processed and sugary foods, and this includes concentrated juices and “energy” drinks.

HANDS OFF AND RESPIRATORY ETTIQUETE: Washing your hands regularly and thoroughly is one of the simplest ways to prevent the spread of germs. When you sneeze, do so into your sleeve, keep telephones and personal music devices wiped clean, wash your hands after being in public or after being with those you know are sick. If someone is sick in your home, give them a paper bag they dispose of frequently for tissues and keep something on hand, natural or conventional, to disinfect door knobs, etc...

KEEPING THE BARRIER INTACT: Our mucous membranes (such as the lining of our nose) need to be moist in order to act as an effective barrier to bacteria and viruses. As you all know, this is hard to do in Montana, especially in the winter. Humidifiers at home or in the office will help, hot showers help, steam inhalations can be nice and just utilizing a saline nasal spray can be really helpful (*and if you come in to see me, bring a new saline nasal spray and I’ll put in some herbs to further promote health and which are antiviral*). Also, make sure you are drinking plenty of water, my general recommendation is to take your weight, divide that number in half and that’s the number of ounces daily you need.

KEEP YOUR FEET ON THE GROUND AND YOUR WITS ABOUT YOU: We all lead very busy lives, many of you are working more than one job, caring for children and spouses, running businesses, in school, or doing a combination of all these. It is important to keep a balance in your life, in whatever little ways you can to help reduce stress. Get a good night’s sleep, laugh, get a bit of exercise and find some joy in every day.

Support the Immune System

A multi-vitamin supplement, of a quality that your body can truly absorb, is critical. Even with the best diet, we all need one. The broad base of nutrients is crucial for optimal health.

Vitamin D3 is one of the most critical nutrients for our immune system, and is especially important to be aware of here in this northern latitude—we don’t get enough sun and the rays aren’t strong enough to keep most people’s vitamin D levels adequate. Testing is important, 25-hydroxy vitamin D, but supplementation is generally needed. The amounts of vitamin D3 in a typical multivitamin, or in a calcium formula, *are far from adequate*.

Vitamin C is critical for immune function, and when we are sick or injured our needs increase. Interestingly, only human, other primates, fruit bats and guinea pigs don’t make their own vitamin C; when more is needed it must come from the diet or our case, a supplement. For

adults, taking 3,000 – 6,000 mg daily is ideal; individuals are different, tolerance levels are not the same for all.

Vitamin A can be given in higher than usual doses for brief periods of time to support immune function and shorten the duration of an illness, but it also has to be decreased rather quickly to avoid toxicity.

Homeopathic Flu Remedies such as *oscillococinum*, are very good at general flu prevention and can also be used for treatment.

Treatment

Anti Viral Herbs

Start treating yourself as soon as you get sick. If you have a complicating health condition, you need to seek, or have already sought in advance, help from a qualified health profession.

There are many herbs which have known antiviral activity, and many of them are also anti-bacterial and/or anti-fungal, which makes them wonderful for use during the “cold and flu season” as they are broad spectrum treatments. In general, I am not intending to treat suspected or confirmed H1N1 any differently than other strains of the flu. As with any year, we find certain protocols work better than others, time will tell as the season wears on. But, the bottom line is that the flu of any kind is viral and Naturopathic Doctors have lots of anti-viral tools at our disposal.

Elderberry (*Sambucus*) has been shown to be effective against influenza B; Resveratrol has been shown to be effective against influenza A; *lomatium* is both anti-viral and helps clear respiratory passages, Lemon Balm (*Melissa*), Licorice (*glycyrrhiza*), and St John’s Wort (*hypericum*) are great general anti-virals and are usually included in my anti-viral formulas. This is just a short list of herbs; depending on your symptom picture, I’ll choose from these herbs and many more. Additionally, I use a garlic preparation both orally and in a nebulizer to treat a broad spectrum of infection, and in the case of the nebulizer to get the treatment directly to the respiratory passages.

IV Therapy

I utilize a number of nutrients to support immune function and several which have direct anti-viral and anti-bacterial function in intravenous treatments which generally greatly shorten the duration and reduce the severity of illness. Often this is the first treatment I can offer you, if you are an established patient, as my IV suite operates two days a week and an appointment with me is not necessary to get a treatment.

Supportive

Hydrotherapy, the therapeutic use of food, and herbal remedies and nutritional supplements can alleviate symptoms and make people more comfortable. Promoting sleep is an important element as becoming sleep deprived will slow the healing process.