

Treating Winter Ailments With Chinese Medicine

by Krista J. Essler, L.Ac.

Winter is a time for repose, an occasion to slow down, as well as a period for inner reflection and fortification of the mind, body and spirit. Animals hibernate and plants take refuge deep within the soil. Before the advent of modern conveniences, people in colder climates endured a season of stillness huddled together for protection from the elements.

In the traditions of Chinese Medicine, Winter is the time of Yin. It is Cold in nature and conducive to contraction and inward movement. In western North Carolina, Winter is also known to be Damp and Windy. These three elements (Wind Cold and Damp) are considered external pathogens (disease-causing agents) in the philosophy of Chinese Medicine. They have tendency to cause colds and flus and exacerbate the frequency and intensity of arthritic conditions. In a healthy body the Cold nature of the climate will cause the pores to contract thereby protecting the interior of the body from an invasion of Wind. When the body is out of sync with its surrounding environment or in disharmony with itself, Wind will easily enter the body and carry the Cold and Dampness along with it.

Colds and flus caused by Wind Cold and Damp will present symptoms of a runny nose with white discharge, body aches which move from place to place, chills and fever with the chills being more prevalent, as well as headache and stiff neck. These symptoms worsen when exposed to a damp, cold or drafty environment.

Strengthening the immune system can prevent or lessen the severity of colds and flus experienced during this season. A tasty at-home immune tonic is **Ginger Lemon & Honey Tea**. Take a **one-inch piece of ginger**, sliced, and pour **16 fl oz of boiling water** over it. Let it steep for 10 minutes. Wash a lemon, cut it in half. Squeeze the **juice of half the lemon** into the ginger. Then add the rind. It contains the lemon oil, which helps to fight infection. The juice contains vitamin C to fortify immunity. Ginger's warming nature will expel the Cold that has invaded the body. The **honey**, added to taste, will direct this decoction to the Lungs. Additionally, the Lung channel governs the skin

and the pores so by strengthening this organ and its energetic pathway, you not only expel the pathogens, but you help to protect the body from future attacks.

Other food therapy that will strengthen the body against the invasion of Cold includes cooking with various *warming herbs* such as *cinnamon, clove, and garlic*. Since raw foods are Cold in nature, eat more cooked vegetables than salads during the cold season.

A key Chinese Herbal remedy to strengthen the Lung Qi (energy) is the Jade Windscreen Formula. This can be used preventatively or at the first signs of the onset cold and flu symptoms. Once the pathogens enter the body, there are several different formulas available, prescribed based on the manifestation of symptoms including Minor Blue Dragon formula if runny nose and sneezing are prevalent, and Yin Qiao (pronounced chow) San for long standing symptoms where the nasal discharge changes color from white to yellow or even green.

Acupuncture can be used preventatively to strengthen the body and in conjunction with the herbal remedies to hasten the process of the elimination of the pathogens and expedite the healing process.

Another common ailment experienced in the winter months is an exacerbation of arthritic conditions. Similar to the pathogenesis of the common cold, Wind brings Cold and Damp into the body and settles in the joints causing swelling, pain, discomfort and a limitation of mobility. A key-note symptom of this condition is that pain moves from joint to joint and is experienced intensely.

Acupuncture is an effective treatment for this disorder. Wind Cold and Damp can be expelled from the body to bring about immediate relief of symptoms. Needles will be placed in and around the joints that are a source of pain as well as inserted in distal points in the body to bring about harmony within the channels and expel the Wind Cold Damp pathogens. Dietary changes such as eating more nutrient-rich foods such as whole grains and green vegetables (lightly steamed) and eating less white nutrient-depleting foods such

as sugar, flour and white rice will make the effects of the Acupuncture treatment long-lasting.

Aromatherapy suggests an application of Rosemary oil for Damp conditions and can be rubbed on the joints directly. Also cooking with this herb may prove effective. In addition to Acupuncture, herbal formulas may be added to the therapy to affect specific parts of the body.

In preparation for blossoming Spring, relax, rejuvenate and restore the body to harmony. Eat foods that are warming and that strengthen the immune system. Dress for the weather and use the extra hours of darkness to get a deep relaxing sleep. If following this Winter health regimen doesn't keep you in optimum condition, Acupuncture, Herbology and Aromatherapy can help give your body the extra boost it needs.

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