



# Views On

# I M M U N I T Y

ADVICE FROM THREE HEALING TRADITIONS ON  
HOW TO BOLSTER YOUR DEFENSES.



NATUROPATHIC



CHINESE



AYURVEDA

By LISA JAMES

Are you hearing more sneezing, sniffing and coughing among the people around you? It wouldn't be a surprise, given that we're moving into the season when colds become more prevalent. Adults tend to get two to four colds each year; youngsters catch an average of six to eight.

In addition, public health authorities estimate that between 5% and 20% of the US population will develop influenza, which is more likely to cause fever, headache, severe body aches and debilitating fatigue than a cold. The flu can result in potentially dangerous complications for the very young, the very old

and people with medical conditions such as asthma and lung or heart disease.

Colds account for more doctor visits than any other ailment. However, most colds and mild cases of the flu are amenable to self-treatment. (Call your practitioner if you experience high and/or persistent fever, breathing difficulties and dizziness or confusion.)

Natural options abound for treatment and prevention of mild upper respiratory infections (URIs). Let's see what three healing traditions—naturopathic medicine, Traditional Chinese Medicine and Ayurveda—have to offer.

# Views On

## I M M U N I T Y

### NATUROPATHIC MEDICINE

Conventional medicine tends to focus on treating disease. Naturopathic medicine sees health as an optimal state of well-being; naturopathic physicians (NDs) use clinical nutrition, herbalism and other practices to promote disease prevention.

NDs have no problem with properly used antibiotics but see “the state of a person's internal environment as more important in determining disease than the pathogen,” says Michael Murray, ND, speaker and author of numerous books, including (with Joe Pizzorno, ND) *The Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine* (third edition, Atria; [www.doctormurray.com](http://www.doctormurray.com)).

Naturopathy sees diet as the key to immunity. “There are a number of dietary factors that depress immune function, including nutrient deficiency and excess consumption of sugar,” says Murray. “Numerous studies have shown that almost all elderly Ameri-



cans are deficient in at least one nutrient and most are deficient in many.”

To maintain peak immunity, Murray recommends a diet in which whole, natural foods predominate, with “ade-

quate, but not excessive, amounts of protein” and five or six glasses of water a day. He also suggests regular exercise, deep breathing and relaxation practices, at least seven hours of sleep a night, a positive outlook on life and “a good high-potency **multivitamin and mineral supplement**.”

A strong immune system may not prevent all colds, but Murray says those that do develop should last only three or four days. He notes that in addition to rest and liquids, 500 to 1,000 milligrams of **vitamin C** every two hours may help reduce cold duration by a day. **Zinc** lozenges sweetened by glycine can be used for up to seven days. Murray also recommends **medicinal mushrooms** (see the story on page 40) and **umcka**. **Echinacea** can be helpful; look for a supplement that contains the herb's active compounds in standardized form.

*American Association of Naturopathic Physicians: [www.naturopathic.org](http://www.naturopathic.org), 866-538-2267*

### TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

While Western medicine focuses on the body's substance, Traditional Chinese Medicine tries to influence its energy flows, which are organized into sets of paired opposites such as *yin* and *yang*. This elemental energy, called *qi*, flows through *meridians* that can be accessed not only by acupuncture—the aspect of TCM best known in the West—but also by Chinese herbalism and other practices.

In TCM, a type of energy called *wei qi* “corresponds with what we now know as immune function,” says Steve Given, DAOM, LAc, dean of clinical education at American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine in San Francisco ([www.actcm.edu](http://www.actcm.edu)). “There are acupuncture and herbal protocols for supporting *wei qi*.”

Ailments are seen as patterns of

disharmony in TCM. Given says upper respiratory infections often fall into a pattern called *wind-cold*. “The wind is coming in from the outside so the practitioner is trying to expel a pathogen from the outside,” he



explains. This pathogen generally enters through *tai yang* channels running down the back of the body, including the arms and legs.

Given explains that Chinese herbs

are generally prescribed in standard formulations as described in China's ancient medical texts. For example, he says the formula *yu ping feng san* “contains three herbs designed to support immunity and its traditional indication is a patient who easily gets upper respiratory infections. It's a classic formula used for both colds and the flu, and for immune-deficient patients, such as those undergoing chemotherapy.”

Because TCM is based on an entirely different view of the body, its diagnosis methods have no allopathic equivalents. As a result, “you need someone who is trained to do a diagnosis,” says Given. “Chinese medicine has hundreds of formulas. Which combination of herbs is the most appropriate in each case is best determined by someone who is trained in the use of Chinese herbs.”

*National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine: [www.nccaom.org](http://www.nccaom.org), 904-598-1005*



## AYURVEDA

One of the more recent additions to alternative medicine practice in the United States, Ayurveda is India's traditional healing system. It sees each person as a unique combination of three body-mind-spirit types called *doshas*: *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*.

"Traditional Ayurveda views the immune system as 'that which provides the body with protection'; the Ayurvedic term for this is *ojas*," says Marc Halpern, DC, CAS, PKS, president of California College of Ayurveda in



Nevada City, California ([www.ayurvedacollege.com](http://www.ayurvedacollege.com)) and author of *Healing Your Life: Lessons on the Path of Ayurveda* (Lotus Press). "Ojas is not one thing but refers to all of the processes that protect the body. The management of ojas is the most important feature of Ayurvedic medicine."

Ayurveda sees the digestive process as a key to immune health. "In someone who might have low or weak ojas, we look at the level of their digestion and how much *ama* they have—*ama* means 'toxins,'" says Cheryl Silberman, CAS, HTP, director of the Kanyakumari Ayurveda & Yoga Wellness Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin ([www.kanyakumari.us](http://www.kanyakumari.us)). "Ojas is a refined

result of digestion and metabolism, absorption and assimilation."

Halpern recommends "foods with high ojas-building potential such as almonds, cashews, ghee [clarified butter], grains and milk. They must be taken in healthy portions, chewed well and consumed in a calm environment." He supports regular neti pot use and breathing exercises to keep the respiratory system healthy. If you do get sick, Halpern suggests squeezing fresh lemon juice into hot water and adding a pinch of black pepper and ginger.

Ayurveda uses a cleansing protocol called *panchakarma*, which can include practices such as massage, steam therapies and internal detox. The idea "is to strengthen the digestive fire so *ama* won't accumulate in the future," says Silberman. She also suggests self-massage, or *abhyanga*, saying, "A daily massage is important to open up the channels in the body, eliminate toxins and pacify the doshas, all of which are crucial for immunity."

Spices such as **cumin, fennel, coriander, turmeric, ginger and black pepper** "help improve the digestive fire and reduce the *ama*," Silberman says. Two herbal

combinations she suggests are *triphala*, which can be helpful during changes of season for people prone to upper respiratory problems, and *chavanprash*, an ancient immune-support formula. Ayurveda also uses **ashwagandha**, an adaptogenic herb, to help build ojas.

*National Ayurvedic Medical Association:* [www.ayurvedanama.org](http://www.ayurvedanama.org), 800-669-8914

**ETWEB  
EXTRA**

For more of what Murray has to say about naturopathic medicine and immunity, see [www.energytimes.com](http://www.energytimes.com).

## NATURAL IMMUNITY BOOSTERS

An impressive array of plants, and plant-derived substances, have been found to provide assistance to the immune system. Among them is **andrographis** (*A. paniculata*, pictured below). Credited with helping to stop an Indian flu epidemic in 1919, it contains substances that have increased the production and effectiveness of white blood cells and promoted the release of interferon in studies. **Olive leaf** has demonstrated the ability to fight fever-causing microbes, including those that cause colds and flu, and to help neutralize the kind of free radical damage that can harm white blood cells. In addition, a special type of fiber taken from the Western larch called



**arabinogalactan** (ARA) boosts the immune system directly by stimulating its constituent cells into action and indirectly by feeding the beneficial probiotic bacteria that make their home within the intestines, which helps to shut out hostile microbes.

Probiotics inhabit the entire length of the digestive tract, including the mouth, throat and nose. One strain of friendly bacteria, **S. salivarius K12**, dominates the upper respiratory tract. It produces *bacteriocin-like inhibitory substances* (BLIS), proteins that in lab studies have demonstrated the power to target harmful organisms.