

Winter aches and pains

The on-going fight against cold and flu

Compiled by SARAH MURPHY

Although it is an illness of short duration, the common cold is a plague to every Canadian, a painful reminder of the blahs of winter.

Likely to haunt you for 7 to 14 days, the common cold, unlike the flu, does not usually produce fever. The first symptom is often a 'tickle' in the throat, a runny or stuffy nose, and sneezing. Victims of the cold virus also tend to have a sore throat, cough, headache, fatigue, and loss of appetite.

Several different viruses can cause the common cold, each virus

Preventing Cold and Flu

On average, people catch a cold six times during a year. Factors that lower the immune efficiency and can lead to increased colds and flu include

- Alcohol use
- Tobacco consumption
- Many prescription drugs
- Illegal drugs
- Elevated glucose levels
- High cholesterol levels
- Excessive sugar consumption
- Allergies
- Chemical exposure
- Food additives
- Stress (physical, mental, emotional)
- Negative Attitudes (cause the release of compounds, which interfere with the immune system)

having its own pattern of symptoms and severity. Over 100 cold viruses are known.

Infection may be facilitated by excessive fatigue, emotional stress, and other factors that weaken the body's immune defenses. There is no evidence that cooling the body induces a cold.

Bacteria present in the nose and throat can increase in numbers dramatically and can cause secondary infections such as sinusitis and

muscle aches in the back and legs, and headaches are common. Soon after, the throat, lungs, nose and eyes become affected. There can be a

Generic ingredients to look for to reduce symptoms of the cold and flu:

Stiffness and nasal congestion:	pseudoephedrine, phenylpropanoamine, oxymetazoline
Pain:	Ibuprofen, acetaminophen
Clear drainage:	Diphenhydramine, chlorpheniramine
Cough:	Dextromethorphan

bronchitis.

The common cold results from breathing in virus particles spread through the air by sneezing or coughing, or from person-to-person contact. The contagious phase of the disease may last for two to four days after symptoms appear.

Time is the only real remedy against the common cold. A variety of over the counter drugs can be taken to reduce symptoms but they will not cure the infection.

The flu, a more specific viral disease characterized by fever, runny nose, cough, headache, malaise, and swollen nose and throat mucous membranes, usually occurs in epidemics. Caused by the influenza virus type A, the virus changes slightly from year to year, but is predictable.

Symptoms usually appear 24 to 48 hours after exposure, and vary in every individual. High fever, chills,

severe cough. Muscle pain and fever are the hallmark features which differentiate the flu from the cold.

These symptoms may begin to resolve after two or three days, but cough can persist for weeks.

An influenza infection can be severely debilitating for individuals who are very young, very old or for people suffering from lung disease. The flu can result in pneumonia and may be fatal in these patients with weakened immune response.

Like the common cold, the flu is transmitted from person-to-person by direct contact and airborne droplets resulting from coughing or sneezing.

Elderly people, pregnant women, patients with heart or lung disease, and medical professionals are encouraged to get a flu vaccination every year. The vaccine is very safe. Two anti-viral medicines are

also available by prescription. These will reduce fever, aches, and chest symptoms of the flu.

The common cold and flu can be prevented by washing your hands frequently, cover nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing. Also, people are more susceptible to such infections when tired or stressed, or lack a proper diet.

What to do if you catch a cold or flu

Following these guidelines will minimize the effects of a cold or flu:

Get plenty of rest and sleep.

Drink lots of liquids. Liquids help dilute solutions in the blood and help keep the respiratory tract from dehydration.

Avoid intake of sugar. Glucose (blood sugar) and Vitamin C compete for transport sites in the white blood cells. Decrease in Vitamin C levels due to excessive sugar consumption can result in significantly reduced white blood cell function.

Take a multi-vitamin/mineral supplement.

Increase your Vitamin C intake.

To avoid the "achy feeling," increase your intake of absorbable calcium. Calcium is the body's number one mineral, essential for the production of white blood cells, and instrumental in the maximum absorption of Vitamin C by the body. If your body does not have adequate calcium to draw on, it will literally rob your bones to provide sufficient levels for the blood -- hence the aches and pains often associated with colds and flu.

Support your thymus gland

In addition to minimizing or eliminating factors which lower immune efficiency from your daily routine, research shows that supporting your thymus gland can improve your general health and help reduce your chances of getting a cold or flu.

The health of the thymus gland is directly related to the health of the immune system. The thymus gland naturally undergoes involution, or shrinkage, as you age. However, other external factors can contribute to the premature involution of the thymus such as stress, infection, radiation, and chronic illness.

If you consume a diet which is rich in fruits and vegetables that provide nutrients, such as vitamin C, vitamin E, Selenium, Zinc, and Beta Carotene, you will be supporting your thymus gland nutritionally and are likely to beat the cold or flu.

The information for this article was taken from HealthyWay™ Health Links, a site maintained by Peter J. Casano, M.D. For further information see: <http://www.pei.sympatico.ca/HealthyWay.html>