

Herbal Support and Prevention of the Flu

The Amazing Power of Natural Medicines for Flu Prevention

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Herbal medicines are so molecularly complex that viruses develop no resistances to them. There are studies showing that herbs can shorten the duration of influenza by one or two days, lessen its severity, help rehydrate, lessen diarrhea, and help relieve cough and fevers. Anti-bacterial herbs can be used to help fight the secondary infections in the lungs. Herbal medicine helps at these crucial stages; this help may mean the difference between a life threatening flu and just a case of being uncomfortable for a few days with the flu symptoms. There are herbs and herbal formulas to boost the immune system to help optimize our natural immune defenses to help us fend off flu viruses before they take hold.

The “magic bullet” approach of modern medicine to “blitz the bug and spare the host” is not possible with a virus; a virus becomes part of the host, in fact, coming alive when it becomes a part of the host cells. This is why unlike the antibiotic approach used to fight bacterial infections, there are very few pharmaceutical antiviral drugs available. However, there are many plant extracts with proven antiviral activity. Plants generate chemicals as medicines to protect themselves. Plants have evolved from the same “sea of viruses and bacteria” and they, too, have been generating defensive compounds to protect themselves for some three and a-half billion years of life. Anti-fungal, antibiotic, antiviral and pre-infection anti-microbial compounds protect plants from invading pathogenic organisms.

If an immune system is a method an organism uses to protect itself from another organism, then it could be said that plants have immune systems. Not an active human immune system, with macrophages, antibodies, or interferon, etc., but plants have mechanisms of protection. For example, they can produce anti-fungal compounds to protect their roots. Chicory roots produce anti-fungal compounds that are so strong that, if they are kept moist for long periods on a plate, they will not mold. The chemical secretions of some plants are poisonous to many organisms, which greatly enhance the chances of survival for the plant. Plants have the ability to generate many anti-bacterial and antiviral to help them survive over their evolution. Hundreds of viruses and bacteria have attacked plants each year, for millions and millions of years.

What are viruses?

There are over 400 different viruses known to infect humans and cause diseases - ranging from the common cold to some forms of cancer. A virus is a fragment of genetic material (RNA or DNA depending on the type of virus) enclosed within a protein “coat” (known as a capsid) “a piece of bad news wrapped up in protein.”

For comparison, bacteria are giants to viruses; viruses can be thousands of times smaller than bacteria. Bacteria are single-celled living organisms. When a virus is not inside a host cell it has a stable crystalline structure. An inert lifeless particle, that comes to life inside a cell. Viruses can exist in an inert crystal-like state maybe indefinitely. Viruses are not capable of living outside their host, but, once inside their host, they are capable of hijacking the cells to replicate themselves many times over, they also mutate so swiftly that the body's immune system is always aiming at a changing target.



Herbs combat viruses by stimulating the immune system and thus producing more immune cells and immune chemicals that disrupt the replication cycle. This happens through many possible pathways; phyto-chemicals enhance the body's general immunity, for instance by increasing the total number of lymphocytes and helper T-cells, or by increasing the activity of natural killer cells or macrophages, cytokines (e.g. interferon, interleukins). Herbs, such as andrographis, are believed to interfere with the enzymes that a virus needs for replication.

Herbal formulas used during the SARS virus outbreak.

Hong Kong issued herbs for prevention to its healthcare workers. Herbal medicine was also used to help treat SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) in the 2003 outbreak caused by variant coronavirus, yet herbs were used successfully along with conventional medicine. The Asian Weekly reported in 2003, "More and more evidence shows: TCM and Chinese herbs do have a miraculous effect in treating SARS cases while the condition is better in mainland where adopting the method of combination of western medicine and TCM than that in Hong Kong where only using Western medicine, and more patients in mainland (China) can be cured."³ It seems TCM was used to support the body and to modify the severity of symptoms.

There are herbal formulas such as Protect (*Yu Ping Feng San*), that are so respected that in the middle of the SARS outbreak in Hong Kong the government issued them to the Hong Kong healthcare workers to help boost their immune systems. When in the middle of SARS outbreak the hospitals were so busy many were treated by TCM herbs and doctors. The Asia Weekly reported in 2003 that "the chairman of the Administrative Committee of the Research Center of Hong Kong Chinese University, Liang Bing Zhong, revealed (*the base of the Protect Formula*) included herbal ingredients that have been clinically proven to be effective for anti-viral effects. The committee is planning to provide for medical personnel first and then subsequently they can be made available to the people of Hong Kong in general."³

Herbal Prevention and Support Pack:

These herbs and formulas help us manage the symptoms and progressive stages of the flu. If severe enough, get to an Emergency Room. Herbal antiviral agents are expected to have their best effect at the earliest sign of infection and for the phase of the disease where the amount of virus is exponentially growing, perhaps the first three days of symptoms for influenza.

Symptoms might include nasal discharge, nasal stuffiness, sore throat, earache, cough, fever, headache, and malaise, tiredness, shivering, sore throat, and muscular aches.

1. **Protect.** (*Yu ping feng san*) This is the formula the Hong Kong authorities were giving to healthcare workers. Also known as *Gyokuheifusan* in Japanese,⁴ and uses *Astragalus* as the main ingredient. *Astragalus* enhances immune function by increasing the activity of certain white blood cells, which increases the production of antibodies. It also increases the production of interferon (an anti-viral and anti-tumor agent naturally produced by the body) and stimulates natural killer cells. In addition to boosting immunity, *Astragalus* has antiviral effects. According to James Duke, Ph.D., a leading authority on healing herbs, *Astragalus* increases production of the body's own antiviral compounds alpha-and gamma-interferon, which generally protect against viral invasion.¹ *Astragalus* also enhances T-cell production and stimulates macrophages² that help other immune cells fight bacteria, viruses, parasites, fungi, toxins, and diseased cells.³



2. **Vir-Assist.** Andrographis has been used for more than ten years as a primary herb to combat flu and upper respiratory infections. Andrographis has demonstrated significant success in fighting the common cold and flu viruses. (I have had great success using andrographis for treatment of Hepatitis B and C.) The most significant compounds in andrographis are diterpene lactones, known as andrographolides, which produce significant antimicrobial activity.³ Several clinical trials investigated the effect of andrographis extract on uncomplicated upper-respiratory tract infections. In all of them there was significant improvement in the symptoms of subjects who took the herbal extract versus those who took a placebo.

One study demonstrated that andrographis had a high degree of effectiveness in reducing the prevalence and intensity of the symptoms in uncomplicated common colds beginning at day two of treatment. No adverse effects were observed or reported.⁴

In yet another study, 95 patients took andrographis, and 90 patients took the placebo. After five days, the individuals who took the herbal extract showed great improvement. The researchers concluded that andrographis, in addition to having a positive effect on upper respiratory infections, also helps reduce the inflammatory symptoms of sinusitis.⁵ There is also preliminary evidence that andrographis produces a preventative effect.⁶

Dosage: 2 capsules, 3 to 4 times daily; considered most effective for conditions associated with fever.

3. **First Defense.** Based on the famous TCM formula, Yin Qiao. Use as a first defense against symptoms. This may be the most popular flu herbal formula within TCM, used especially for heat and fever. For epidemic “heat toxin” modified with isatis leaf and root (adding isatis the antiviral percentage of this formula) against symptoms with more fever, heat in throat etc.

The base of the First Defense formula is Yin Qiao: One study treated 1,150 common cold cases treated with the coarse powder form of this formula, and reported the results as follows: after one day of treatment, fever was reduced across the board, the less severe cases were significantly improved, and the more severe cases experienced quick alleviation of symptoms while taking a somewhat longer time to recover fully; on average, all cases recovered in 2.7 days.¹ Influenza: Of 50 flu cases treated with this formula in a study, all cases showed a speedy decrease in body temperature, self-reported significant improvement in symptoms, and were resolved in two to four days.² In another study, this formula was given to 1,480 people as a preventive measure against influenza (treated with 1-2 pills daily for 1.5 months), and the results were: the treatment group had a flu contraction rate of 2.6%, while the comparison group had one of 17.55%.³

Dosage: 2 to 4 capsules, 3 to 4 times daily..

4. **Honey Loquat Cough Syrup.** Use as needed mixed with warm water or by itself.
5. **Bronchio-Cool.** Supports the lungs, clears-out heat, and transforms phlegm from the upper respiratory tract.
6. **Dry-Ease.** Drying combination for respiratory health; stops post-nasal drip.
7. **Sinus-Ease.** Supports and keeps the sinus passages clear.
8. **Emphy-Soothe.** Herbs to soothe, moisten, and calm irritation in the lungs.
9. **Throat-Ease.** Eases and soothes a sore or red throat.

Combinations of herbs can be taken at the same time. You can take any of the above herbs together. If a patient has been on andrographis preventatively, and begins symptoms of the flu, they can now increase the andrographis and then start First Defense; if a fever begins to get higher, add “White Tiger” decoction to the Yin Qiao and Andrographis.



Dosaging: Aside from the Andrographis which I recommend as standardized. One 500 mg. capsule for every 25 lbs. For 150lbs = 2 capsules three times a day (3 grams). However this is a typical dosage and can be increased or decreased as needed. Do not be timid with dosaging especially during a flu.

Hot caffeinated tea is also very helpful for headache, sore throat, and cough. We are taking advantage of the pharmacologic effect of caffeine, long recognized as an excellent herbal therapy for these problems. Hot or cold tea is also a mild stimulant that improves the sense of the patient's well being.

Diarrhea needs to be treated to lessen the risk of dehydration.

Dia Relief Formula. The herbs in this formula, plantain leaf, bilberry leaf marshmallow root, fennel seed, bilberry leaf, goldenseal root, barberry root, have all been used successfully to stop diarrhea. Often diarrhea is merely a symptom of disharmony in the intestinal function of re-absorbing water from the wastes passing through it. It may be nature's way of flushing some toxins from the system, often from bacteria or parasites. For mild diarrhea, consider mixing the herbs with a mixture of white potato and sweet potato. If your child is off his or her diet, try mixing the formula with apple juice. Marshmallow root cools, soothes and helps to rehydrate the mucosa while stimulating the immune system. Plantain helps to pull out toxins, cools inflammations and helps to reduce pain. It is considered by TCM to clear heat and dampness, helping the intestines to process water. Goldenseal root acts as an herbal antibiotic, and barberry strengthens the intestinal lining, stimulating bile flow from the liver. Fennel helps with pain and gas, drying dampness and promoting normal digestive function.

Fluids: Oral Rehydration Solution. If patient is dehydrated, this combination will improve symptoms quickly. The formula is:

- 4 cups of clean water
- 3 tablespoons of sugar or honey and
- ¼ tsp table salt.

If the patient has become dehydrated because of diarrhea, you can substitute the salt in the formula with ½ tsp of baking soda (if available) because diarrhea leads to loss of alkali. (This is the maximum dose.)⁷

** The statements in this article have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. These products are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.*

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Disclaimer: There is no clinical evidence (only empirical experience within the TCM tradition) that the specific herbs or herbals formulas mentioned above provide any protection from or effective treatment for influenza (or related disorders). The information about these formulas and herbs is given to illustrate the types of ingredients that practitioners of Chinese herbalism consider (such practitioners are usually licensed acupuncturists.)

