

Keeping Healthy – Common Sense and a Cup of Tea

By Leah J. Matuson

As if our lives aren't hectic enough juggling jobs, families, and responsibilities, then BOOM! The holidays are here. You're running from store to store, you're tired, you're hungry and you just want to sleep. Although it's a festive time of year, it can also be stressful, and too much stress can set us up for getting sick. So how can we keep ourselves healthy?

For starters, use common sense. Wash your hands frequently, get enough sleep, exercise often, eat right, and drink 6-8 glasses of water a day. This combination is our first line of defense for staying healthy.

"The body is a great machine, you just need to take care of it," says Gary Kracoff, Natick resident and pharmacist for over 20 years at Bailey's Pharmacy in Allston. Bailey's is both a traditional and natural pharmacy, working with traditional physicians and naturopathic practitioners to coordinate a patient's health regimen.

"At the first sign of cold or flu, take echinacea," says Kracoff. He recommends taking two 400 mg. capsules every four hours, but not more than 10 capsules a day. If you haven't gotten any better or feel worse after a couple of days, see your doctor. "During the cold and flu season," continues Kracoff, "healthcare workers can boost their immune systems by taking one capsule of echinacea daily for two weeks, stop for a week, then take it for another two weeks. This will help build up the body's immunity so it's more resistant to infection."

"Flu-Ban tablets have been found to be very effective if taken at the first sign of flu," says Kracoff. In addition to echinacea, Flu-Ban contains olive leaf extract, which is a great antiviral, antibacterial and anti-fungal, neem leaf, monkshood, banewort and yellow jasmine. Keep them on hand so you have them when you need them."

Although Kracoff feels that the proper use of herbs can be beneficial to the body, he issues this caution. "Just because something is natural doesn't mean you should be taking it. And if you do take something natural, know why you're taking it. Get your information from a reliable source, not just because your friend is taking it or you read about it in a magazine."

Dr. Camilla Parham, a board-certified physician in private and community practice for 11 years, has taken a holistic approach to medicine, treating the patient as a whole person rather than just isolated symptoms. She works side by side with complementary practitioners such as chiropractors and homeopaths. Says Dr. Parham, "the simplest way to stay healthy is to wash your hands a lot, get enough rest and take vitamin C."

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Dr. Parham is also an advocate of drinking herbal tea for healing purposes – teas like Gypsy Cold Care Tea, Echinacea Plus, and Throat Care by Traditional Medicinals. But why drink tea instead of taking a pill? “You usually need to sit down to drink tea,” says Dr. Parham, “you can’t pop it in your mouth and run out the door. Drinking tea is soothing, and it gives you time to rest, even if it’s only for a few minutes. Look at it as a self-nurturing ritual.”

“When you have a scratchy throat and you’re congested, try eucalyptus,” says Dr. Parham. Throw some eucalyptus leaves into a shallow pot of boiling water. Then remove the pot from the heat. Take a towel, put it over your head, lean over the pot and inhale deeply. (Take care not to get too close to the pot.) Try this three times a day and you’ll find relief.

What can we do when our kids get sick? Since very few kids actually like taking medicine, Dr. Parham suggests that parents try tasting the medicine first. Even though the label says “Yummy Fruit Flavor,” the flavor may not really mask the bitterness of the medicine. Try different brands to see what tastes best. They need to take it in order for it to work.

“And above all,” says Dr. Parham, “read labels. You don’t want to give your kids an over-the-counter cough medicine that contains an antihistamine when you’re already giving them an antihistamine separately... Try to eliminate dairy since it creates a lot of mucous. Give them light foods like broth-based soups and crackers, and stay away from pizza, pasta and sweets. Sugar depletes the body of immune boosting nutrients such as vitamin C.”

In addition to the common sense approach for keeping healthy, Roger Moreau, Nutritional Herbal Consultant for over 16 years and owner of the Whole Health FARMacy in Lexington, recommends taking a probiotic supplement. (A probiotic supplement is beneficial bacteria.)

“Probiotic supplements have a powerful effect on your immune system... They keep out unwanted bacteria, viruses and yeast... and babies and children under five years of age can take bifidus infantus daily to boost their immune systems.” Moreau also feels that taking a high-quality multi-vitamin is a good idea, though it’s not a replacement for eating right.

Moreau talks about other ways to keep the body’s immunity high, starting with taking two Kyolic garlic capsules a day. “Garlic has great bacterial properties and kills many pathogens, but it doesn’t kill the good bacteria,” remarks Moreau, “and drink two cups of ginger tea a day, or take two ginger capsules a day. Ginger is an ancient Chinese root noted for its amazing properties as a pain reliever, digestive aid, and antioxidant.”

For coughs and congestion, Moreau recommends drinking Elderberry tea, or tea made with wild cherry bark, mullein leaf, fenugreek and licorice. These herbs help with inflammation of the sinuses and lungs, and can be found together in pre-made teabags. Grapeseed extract, diluted in tea or juice, acts as a natural antibiotic for sore throats. Zinc lozenges are good for sore throats as well.

Says Moreau, “Herbs are effective in building and strengthening the immune system. They help break up toxins, cleanse, and nourish the body... I’m all in favor of antibiotics, but they need to be used judiciously like a secret weapon that you pull out when you really need it.”

Okay, so what have you learned? You want to work with your body, not against it. And if you get sick with a cold or flu, try not to think of it as a bad thing-- it’s your body detoxifying itself. Dr. Parham put it a little more eloquently, “How you deal with sickness isn’t about right or wrong, it’s about making an educated choice for your body and your system of beliefs, how you want to heal — and if that’s too much to swallow when you’re feeling sick, just have some chicken soup and go right to bed. It couldn’t hurt.”

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SIDE BAR #1 **Helpful Hints for Keeping Healthy**

- ✓ Before taking any natural / herbal preparation, check with your health practitioner.
- ✓ Wash your hands frequently.
- ✓ Get enough rest and exercise.
- ✓ Try to eat at least five helpings of vegetables and two servings of fruit daily.
- ✓ Take a high quality multiple vitamin.
- ✓ Take walks in the woods or park. Watch the stars. Enjoy life.

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SIDE BAR #2

Common Herbs and Vitamins

Cherry Bark calms the body's cough impulses.

Echinacea, also known as the purple coneflower, is a powerful immune-enhancing herb. Echinacea's anti-inflammatory, antibacterial and antiviral effects have been shown to be active against sore throats, coughs, fevers, ear infections and the common cold. Note: If you are allergic to plants in the sunflower family, do not take this herb.

Garlic detoxifies the body and enhances the body's immune function. It acts as an antibacterial and anti-fungal, lowers blood pressure and improves circulation. Aged garlic (such as Kyolic) is odorless.

Ginger is an ancient Chinese herb used as an anti-inflammatory agent, digestive and anti-nausea aid, and strong antioxidant.

Mullein leaves aid the body's expectorant abilities.

Vitamin C (Ascorbic Acid) is an antioxidant, enhances the body's immunity, protects against infection, increases the absorption of iron, and promotes healing of wounds and burns. And these are just the highlights.

For more information on these and other herbs, check out [Prescription for Nutritional Healing](#) by James F. Balch, M.D. and Phyllis A. Balch, C.N.C.

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