

# Beating the Fall Viruses!

*By Rachel Abrams, M.D.*

Welcome to the sunny, crisp days of fall in Santa Cruz County! We love it and so do the viruses that wreak havoc on our respiratory system. Fall encourages more indoor time and the return of the young to classrooms where viral colds, coughs and flu spread from hands and mouths and the air we breathe. And everyone is particularly concerned about the threat of swine flu (which in most folks seems to be a low-key “normal” flu). How can you bask in the season’s harvest and protect yourself from the season’s ills? Here are some tips!

- Boost your immune system: Most of us are aware that when we are “run down” we get sick more easily. The best immune booster is good, solid sleep, at least 7-9 hours nightly, depending on your needs. Kids need more—9-11 hours. Exercise also improves immune strength. Gentle exercise, such as tai chi, qi gong and yoga, is particularly good for reducing the negative effects of stress on the immune system and is energizing for those who feel fatigued.
- Eat well: Lots of anti-oxidant rich dark fruits and veggies, beans and omega-3 rich nuts will nourish your body’s ability to fight disease. Fall and winter provide us naturally with antioxidant and vitamin C rich fruits—apples, kiwis, pineapple guavas, and all citrus fruits. And if you don’t eat well or simply want to optimize your health, a good multivitamin can help. Research shows that the Chinese herb astragalus has immune powering properties and is safe and effective to take preventatively during the cold and flu season. A little extra vitamin C (in citrus or taken as a supplement) can also help. Traditional Chinese medicine and homeopathy can also assist in strengthening your immune system for the season.
- Limit your exposure: Just like your mama said, wash your hands (and encourage your sick friends and children to do the same)! Cough into your elbow, where the germs can stay, rather than into your hand where they can easily spread.
- EXPOSED! So now your adorable viral-laden niece or neighbor just sneezed in your face, or you simply feel that scratchy-throat, tickly nose, “I’m about to get sick” dread...what to do? As a mother of pre-school aged toddler twins, I perfected my cold-avoidance strategies and here’s my secret formula:
  1. As much sleep as you can get
  2. Avoid caffeine as much as possible (your body needs its strength for fighting illness, don’t push it further)
  3. Only gentle exercise, meditation or stretching (ditto the above)
  4. Vitamin C 1000 mg, three times daily
  5. If you (or your kissing partner) can take it, fresh garlic chopped and mixed in honey applied to the back of the throat every several hours throughout the first day or two of illness
  6. A combo immune herb/supplement containing echinacea, astragalus, andrographis, vitamin C, zinc, and garlic—my favorite is Wellness Formula by Source Naturals (which also supplies the zinc, vitamin C and garlic—three tablets, three times daily with LOTS of water)
  7. The Chinese herb Yin Xiao (three tablets, three times daily)
  8. And chicken soup (or the vegetarian equivalent) really does help clear mucous—not to mention help you feel loved, which is the only real benefit of being ill in the first place! So enjoy the brilliance of Fall, stay strong in body and spirit, and keep those nasty viruses at bay! NOTE: Please consult your physician regarding any interactions between medicines you are taking and the recommended herbs and supplements

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