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Boosting your immunity naturally

It's cold and flu season again. Kids are coming home from school and day care sniffing, co-workers are sneezing and coughing – it's hard to get away from it this time of year. As well, we are exposed to cold, damp, windy weather, which tests our body's defences. All we can do is make sure our immune system is strong enough to keep the ever-present viruses from affecting us.

We all know someone who gets sick as soon as they so much as look at someone who is sniffing. On the other hand, there are those who never get sick, even if their entire family has the flu. What is the difference?

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), our level of immunity depends on the strength and integrity of our *Wei Qi*. This layer of semi-porous energy runs just beneath the skin, and is charged with keeping outside influences, such as viruses, bacteria, allergens, and atmospheric influences, out of the body.

The *Wei Qi* is most closely associated with the Lung energy, but also depends on the strength of all the other body systems. Often, those with low immunity will also have low general vitality, and may have other signs of weak Lung energy, such as allergies, skin issues, asthma, or frequent bronchitis.

Many of my clients come in to my clinic for a series of acupuncture treatments in the fall to get the boost they need to survive cold and flu season. Acupuncture involves placing fine, sterile needles beneath the skin to ensure a smooth, strong and balanced flow of energy through all the body's systems. Particular acupuncture points can help boost the immune system, as well as increase general energy and vitality.

As well, Chinese herbal formulas have been used for centuries to boost immunity. "Jade Windscreen" is an ancient formula that is traditionally taken for a few months in fall to strengthen *Wei Qi*. The herbs may be taken as a liquid extract (tincture), pills, or a tea. This simple formula shields us not only from viruses and bacteria, but also from allergens.

What if you do get a cold or flu? It happens even to the healthiest of people! First of all, stay home and rest! It is not a sign of strength to keep pushing through when you're sick! Not only will you pass it on to your co-workers and their families, but you also risk the illness going deeper into the body, perhaps becoming bronchitis, pneumonia, or a sinus infection.

As for home remedies, it's not one size fits all. As with everything in TCM, it's important to determine how the illness is manifesting in your individual body. For example, a "wind-cold invasion" (where there is more chilliness) is treated with more warming herbs, such as ginger and cinnamon. "Wind-heat invasion" (where there is more feverishness), is treated with more cooling herbs such as peppermint and lemon. As well, there are specific Chinese formulas for specific conditions.

Acupuncture and herbs excel when a cold or flu refuses to go away. I always tell my clients to stay home and rest during the initial contagious phase, but to come to me if a stubborn cough, sinus infection, or fatigue lingers after the initial illness!

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