

HERBAL TREATMENT FOR COLDS AND FLU

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What herbal remedies can help relieve the symptoms of colds and flu?

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By keeping your immune system strong you can help to avoid getting colds and flu in the first place. Before winter sets in, take immune boosting herbs such as Echinacea, Elderberry or Astragalus, to name but a few, which you can get from a qualified medical herbalist. Add warming spices like Cinnamon, Ginger, Turmeric and Garlic to your food - these protect against infection. Eat lots of fresh vegetables and fruit. They contain anti-oxidants, vitamins and minerals, particularly vitamins A,C and E and the mineral zinc, to help keep your immune system strong. Take a course of probiotics. Try to get some exercise and fresh air every day, but avoid getting chilled.

If you think a cold is coming on prepare for a short spell in bed! Put extra blankets or duvet on the bed and a couple of hot water bottles. Make a large flask of lemon and ginger or chilli to keep by your bed - add a small piece of chopped root ginger or half a chilli pepper to the juice of a lemon, top up with hot water, with honey to taste if you want. Have a hot bath then straight into bed. Drink plenty of fluids but not sugary, fizzy drinks, and sweat out the cold. Eat light meals such as vegetable soup, and drink herbal teas. Stay in bed and rest until you feel better.

Herbal teas are helpful in soothing the symptoms of colds and flu. Herbalists blend herbs together to increase the effect of the individual herbs. A popular traditional blend is Elderflower, Yarrow and Peppermint which promotes diaphoresis(sweating), reduces inflammation and relaxes smooth muscle. It acts particularly on the respiratory system, helping fight infection and dry up mucus secretions. Another herb, Boneset, is often added to relieve aches and pains. Limeflower and Chamomile teas are particularly good for children's colds.

If your nose is very stuffed up, steam inhalations are effective in reducing the inflammation, swelling and infected mucus in the nasal passages. Add 3 drops each of Chamomile essential oil and Tea Tree essential oil to a basin of hot water, sit over it and make a tent with a towel so that the steam doesn't escape. Do this for 15 minutes at least 4 times a day. If you can't be bothered with this just drink a cup of chamomile tea and breathe in the vapour at the same time, but it will be less effective.

If you are prone to colds going into your chest, try a chest rub. Add 4 or 5 drops of Eucalyptus or Thyme essential oil to a small cup of almond or

olive oil. Massage this over the front and back from the shoulders to the base of the ribs to cover the whole lung area.

For a sore throat, gargle with strong Sage tea (4 teaspoons to a cup of hot water, cover and infuse for 10 minutes, then strain). A simple throat spray can be made with Echinacea or Sage tincture and water.

A qualified medical herbalist employs many different herbs when symptoms are more severe or become chronic. Following a consultation, individual prescriptions are made up in these cases. Before taking herbs it is advisable to speak to a qualified practitioner, especially if you are pregnant, breastfeeding or taking prescribed medication for a medical condition.

Moira Ross
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