

Advice from the Elder

By Martha Libster, PhD RN

Recipes and Remedies TM
www.GoldenAppleHealingArts.com

Influenza is an acute respiratory illness accompanied by fever, headache, body aches and sore throat (not the “stomach flu”). The National Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports that the disease is caused by virus and is spread in “respiratory droplets caused by coughing and sneezing. It usually spreads from person to person, though occasionally a person may become infected by touching something with virus on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before getting symptoms and up to 7 days after getting sick. That means that you can give someone the flu before you know you’re sick as well as while you are sick.” (www.cdc.gov)

This influenza (flu) season 2004-2005, there will be a shortage of flu vaccine. The CDC has released health promotion information about ways to prevent flu other than vaccination. These recommendations include broad and basic suggestions such as drinking enough water, sleeping well, and managing stress. In addition, there are some time-honored complementary therapies that can not only mitigate the extent of a bout with influenza, but at times can prevent illness all together.

Here are just a few of the recipes and remedies you may want to consider this flu season:

Mitigating the Uncomfortable Effects of Influenza

Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*) Syrup

Elder is a shrub or small tree that grows in Europe, the United States, Asia, and North Africa. Small clusters of white flowers appear on the shrub in June or July and then berries form. In the fall, the fruit ripens into purplish-black berries. The flowers and berries are edible but the berries should not be eaten raw. The berries are an excellent source of vitamin C.

One of my favorite recipes to make at elderberry harvest is elderberry syrup. I simmer the berries in apple juice and honey and then reduce to a syrup consistency. When making a larger batch for storage in my refrigerator, I add one teaspoon of vodka per cup of syrup as a preservative. Elderberry syrup makes a delicious cordial (mix a few tablespoons in a small amount of herbal tea or hot water) in the fall, especially around flu season. If you make your own syrup be sure to have an herbalist or person knowledgeable about plants identify the berries with you before harvesting. Elderberry syrup can also be purchased at a health food store and some apothecaries.

The historical health benefits of elderberries are well known. They have been used traditionally for fever, especially associated with colds and flu symptoms. An infusion (tea) of the berry is used by the Cherokee Indian for symptoms related to rheumatism.

More recently in 1995, in a small research study (double blind clinical trial done in Israel by Zakay-Rones et al.) of 27 flu patients, Sambucol, an elderberry syrup, was shown to significantly improve the flu symptoms of 93% of those given the syrup within 2 days of developing symptoms whereas the symptoms in the group who did not receive the syrup did not resolve for over 6 days. The participants in the study had influenza B and antibodies to influenza A and B. Conclusion: Elderberry syrup may shorten the course of illness if you were to contract the flu this year. Clinical experience of more than 7 years with elderberry syrup has shown me that this is indeed the case and that often people who take elderberry syrup at early symptoms during flu season (e.g. scratchy throat, runny nose, irritability, restlessness, fatigue) do not develop the disease. In addition to taking elderberry syrup, it is best when exposed to the flu or when feeling early symptoms to support the body's natural immune response by decreasing extreme foods (extremely cold such as ice cream, extremely sweet such as sugary foods, extremely spicy such as chili peppers, or extremely damp such as dairy products). Do consider milder foods such as vegetables and soups and grains such as rice.

Preventing Influenza

Garlic (*Allium sativum*)

Fresh chopped garlic bulb and garlic bulb extracts have been shown in laboratory experiments to have antimicrobial and antiviral activity. Influenza is a virus so consider doing what many grandparents have done historically for preventing viral illness such as colds and flu. Eat some garlic!

Recipe for Garlic Mashed Potatoes:

Make fresh mashed potatoes. I like to use Yukon gold potatoes, butter, salt and a small amount of milk or organic chicken broth. Mince garlic cloves (one per every cup of mashed potatoes) and sauté in butter for 30 -60 seconds depending upon how coarse the garlic has been minced. DO NOT overcook the garlic. The garlic should still have a “bite” to it. The plant constituents causing the “bite” are important to the medicinal action. Garlic is a natural expectorant too (breaks up mucus) for those who do get a cold or flu.

Occilococcinum (o-sill-o-cox-see-num) – Made by Boiron Homeopathics

Take Oscillo at the First Sign of Flu. It is a non-drowsy over-the-counter medication with no drug interactions. Oscillo works best when taken at the first sign of flu, so make sure you have some on hand to fend off your flu symptoms at their onset. It is used by millions of people in 43 countries as a self-care remedy. Three small vials of tiny white sugar pilules come in one inexpensive box. Instructions are included for taking sublingually.

A bit about homeopathy: Homeopathy is a system of medicine that is based on the Law of Similars. Homeopathic medicines are drug products made by homeopathic pharmacies in accordance with the processes described in the Homeopathic Pharmacopoeia of the

United States the official manufacturing manual recognized by the FDA. The substances may be made from plants such as dandelion; from minerals such as sodium chloride; from animals such as the ink of the cuttlefish; or even from chemical drugs such as penicillin or streptomycin. These substances are diluted many times until little of the original remains. Although such infinitesimal quantities are considered by some to be no more than placebos, hundreds of years of clinical experience of homeopathy shows that the infinitesimal dose is effective: it helps unconscious people and infants, and it even helps animals. It is important to remember, however, that a medicine is homeopathic *only* if it is taken based upon the similar nature of the medicine to the illness. A medicine labeled as "homeopathic" will work only if it is *homeopathic* to the symptoms presented. For more information see web sites such as <http://www.homeopathic.org/index.html>.

For more herbal information see:

The Integrative Herb Guide for Nurses by Martha Libster