

A Good, Healthy Illness

by Dr. Sara Ohgushi, Naturopathic Physician

Q: I think I'm getting a cold. Is there anything I can do to avoid it?

A: Maybe you shouldn't avoid it, and the chances are that you can't. I don't think acute illnesses are necessarily unhealthy. Many of us in this society have overfull lives in which we rush around, don't always eat well and don't get enough sleep. Even if we had the perfect diet and a relaxing life, we are surrounded by a variety of environmental toxins. A smart body at some point will say "STOP and take care of me!" If you haven't pushed it too far, your body may be accommodating and let you get through that test or deadline and save your illness for the weekend or vacation.

Pay attention when you're given a cold. It's not time to just take some pills and go to work as usual. Instead, put on some warm pajamas, curl up with a hot water bottle and REST. Eat simple foods like soup, okaiyu (rice gruel), toast, steamed vegetables. Avoid fatty foods and dairy, which increases mucous production in many people. And drink TONS of liquids (water, herbal tea, diluted juice- not coffee, soda or milk) because the opportunity here is DETOXIFICATION.

You can take it a step further. It can be a time to get some perspective on your life. What is really important? Try a "tissue meditation": Get a nice soft box of tissues and consider what you are willing to let go of with every blow. Rent a video that really makes you laugh. Make a list of FUN and fulfilling activities and consider how you can do them regularly.

If you develop a fever, marvel at your body's natural strong defense that can kill viruses and bacteria while making the immune system more efficient. Fevers rarely go above 104 F, and can cause no permanent harm until at least 107 F. Dehydration is the main concern. (In babies and older people fevers may be a more serious symptom; consult a healthcare provider. Also consult if your gut feeling is that the illness is more serious.)

If you're cold try a hot foot bath with a blanket wrapped around the rest of you. If your throat hurts try gargling with salt water several times a day. Support your immune system with some extra Vitamin C (try 1000 mg several times a day, until it causes loose stools) and perhaps some immune support herbs such as Echinacea (take a dropperful of tincture or a capsule

every couple hours when coming down with something). The goal is not necessarily to eradicate all symptoms, but to avoid deeper complications.

It is normal for young children to go through a cold every couple months: they are “meeting their environment” and developing antibodies. Individual constitution also does play a role in how often we get sick. Children are generally better at getting good fevers than adults. They should have periods in between illnesses when they are healthy, with good energy and no mucous. It is NOT normal to have a never ending runny nose and fluid behind the eardrum, for example. These cases call for a good search for underlying problems and constitutional treatment: consider seeing a naturopathic physician such as myself.

However, many acute illnesses need no physician’s care. Viral infections often take 10-14 days to resolve, no matter what you do. You won’t need to stay in bed all those days, but continue to slow down, get excessive sleep, eat cleanly and drink lots of fluids. You’re likely to feel better than ever after a good, healthy illness!

Note: This article is not meant to substitute for direct medical advice. For more details, references to this article or questions, email Dr. Ohgushi at sao@imagina.com, or call her at 503-703-7825 to schedule a free 20 minute consultation. OFFICE: 2304 E. Burnside, Suite 101, by appointment only.

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