

traditional Chinese cold and flu treatments

Have you ever come down with a cold after being caught out on a rainy or blustery day? Traditional Chinese herbalists believe exposure to excess Wind may be to blame, and recommend treatments that consider this and other factors, as well as the specific symptoms you're experiencing. Naturopath **Paul Keogh** explains.

Chinese herbalists view colds, flu and other respiratory infections as being caused not just by a virus or bacteria, but also the body's vulnerability to those infectious organisms.

According to traditional Chinese philosophy, susceptibility to colds and flu is closely related to the strength of your Qi (pronounced 'chee'), the vital life force that flows throughout the body providing the energy you need to function.

Among others, factors traditionally believed to deplete or dissipate Qi and increase the likelihood of viruses or other disease-causing organisms entering the

body include stress, working too hard, excessive fatigue, not exercising appropriately and exposure to excess Wind.

In most cases of cold and flu, excess Wind combines with either excess Cold or excess Heat to cause illness. The specific pattern of the energetic imbalance involved will traditionally determine the herbal remedies considered most appropriate for your illness. Treatment is best taken as soon as possible after symptoms appear.

Wind

From the traditional Chinese viewpoint, exposure to excess Wind is a major

contributor to the development of colds and flu, especially if it's encountered at a time when your Qi is deficient or compromised.

In colds and flu, excess Wind is often accompanied by Cold, Heat, Dampness or Dryness, which produce different symptoms.

Many Chinese herbs that clear excess Wind also dispel Cold, Heat or Dampness. For example, forsythia clears Wind-Heat and magnolia flower clears Wind-Cold, while Japanese catnip clears Wind in either Heat or Cold conditions.

Wind-Cold

When you've got a cold or case of the flu

associated with a combination of excess Wind and Cold, you'll probably have a pale face, feel tired and easily worn out, and be prone to shivering and feeling chilly. You may also have a headache, itchy throat and muscle aches and pains. These Wind-Cold symptoms are often experienced during the early stages of a cold.

Chinese herbs traditionally used to help clear Wind-Cold during colds include magnolia flower and Japanese catnip.

Wind-Heat

If you've got a cold or flu and are feeling feverish, with red eyes, a flushed face and disturbed sleep, it's likely you're affected by a combination of excess Wind and Heat. Other symptoms may include congestion of the nose or throat, headache, and a cough with thick, yellow mucus. These symptoms associated with Wind-Heat may not develop until the later stages of a cold.

Chinese herbs traditionally used to help clear Wind-Heat during colds and flu include forsythia and honeysuckle.

Dampness

Dampness sometimes joins Wind to exacerbate ill health. Colds and flu characterised by excessive phlegm or mucus, often accompanied by lethargy and muscle or joint stiffness, are an example of this scenario.

Magnolia is traditionally regarded as being particularly beneficial for Damp conditions, and is taken to help resolve excess mucus.

Dryness

On the other hand, when Dryness accompanies Wind, it can lead to an unproductive or persistent cough, along with feelings of dryness in the mouth, nostrils or sinuses.

Licorice is an example of a herb that moistens Dryness in the respiratory tract. It is commonly combined with inula to address coughs, or honeysuckle and forsythia for sore throats.

Taking all this into account, Chinese herbs are often taken in combination formulas that have been carefully balanced to expel Wind and clear Cold, Heat and Dampness, without causing Dryness. ☐

Paul Keogh is the executive and technical director for Global Therapeutics P/L trading as Fusion Health. Paul is a qualified naturopath and medical herbalist with 25 years combined experience in clinical practice and the development of integrated Chinese and western herbal medicines.

The best time to act is before you get sick

Around 4,500 years ago, the Chinese physician Qi Bo wrote, "To take medicine when you are sick is like digging a well only when you are thirsty – is it not already too late?"

This fundamental tenet of Chinese medicine – that it's better to take steps to preserve and enhance your wellbeing every day than to think about your health only when you're sick – is still valid today, and is particularly relevant to the immune system.

A number of Chinese herbs have traditionally been used to enhance



Astragalus is one of the most highly prized Chinese immune system tonics, and its traditional reputation is supported by scientific studies demonstrating that it stimulates key immune system cells and may help reduce susceptibility to viral infections such as colds.

Astragalus may be especially helpful if you have a tendency to catch frequent colds or are feeling stressed out or tired.

Its warming properties are considered particularly beneficial for restoring Defensive Qi and Lung Qi, and protecting the body against excess Cold and other potential causes of ill health.



Atractylodes is often taken with Astragalus to enhance immune health and reduce the incidence of colds and flu. It enhances Qi, aids resistance against disease and has drying properties to help resolve Dampness, which can lead to symptoms such as stuffiness of the head and chest, coughing, and shortness of breath.

Schisandra improves the ability to cope with physical, mental and emotional stress, all of which can be debilitating to the Defensive Qi and increase your susceptibility to catching colds and flu. It is traditionally regarded as being a Qi-boosting tonic medicine for the Lung organ-meridian system, and may be particularly beneficial if you're affected by a long-standing or recurrent cough.



Reishi mushroom has traditionally been used to build Qi, strengthen resistance against disease, and improve energy levels during times of weakness and fatigue. Research indicates that it has widespread effects in the immune system, and may help fight infections by interfering with viruses' ability to multiply.