



NATURAL MEDICINE

## Empowering Winter Health: At-Home Remedies to Support Your Clinical Care

Craig Williams, LAc, AHG

As the fall season slowly fades and we inch closer to the winter season, now is an important time to educate patients on herbal remedies to have at home to prevent seasonal imbalances. Patient education is perhaps the most important part of my clinical practice and teaching patients to become observant of seasonal changes is one of the foundational ideas I consistently stress. As fall transitions to winter, the cold / flu season becomes an important consideration for patients and clinicians alike.

Let's discuss some important remedies for patients to have on hand to use at the initial signs of a cold / flu imbalance which, if used quickly, can prevent further complications from lingering seasonal imbalances.

It is not uncommon for patients to self-medicate when faced with winter seasonal imbalances. Often patients will choose herbal products based on marketing hype or use remedies which do not effectively target the initial stages of what we would refer to in TCM as Wind Heat or Wind Cold patterns. The following recommendations are remedies I teach all patients to have at home to be ready for potential cold / flu challenges. If patients have these remedies on hand for quick implementation at the first signs of imbalance, it will be much easier to effectively rebalance the patient's pattern of disharmony in the clinic.

Gan Mao Ling



This is one of the most clinically effective patent medicines for targeting the issues of common cold and is the largest selling patent medicine in China. *Gan Mao Ling* clears heat, resolves toxins, dispels wind, relieves cough, and opens the nasal passages.

There are many versions of this patent medicine, with companies often substituting herbs based on availability or pattern symptoms. Overall, this remedy is an important patent medicine for patients to have at home to quickly address symptoms such as fever with chills, headache, sore throat, stiff neck, nasal discharge, swollen lymph glands, and body aches.

I often encourage patients to take this remedy every three hours and administer with warm ginger tea. If patients have this on hand to quickly address initial cold / flu symptoms, the pattern of disharmony is often much easier to resolve with minimal clinical intervention.

### Elderberry Syrup

Elderberry syrup is an excellent remedy to have on hand for managing winter season imbalances. Elderberry syrup clears heat and resolves toxins, and if taken at the initial signs of cold / flu symptoms, can quickly shorten the duration of pattern disharmonies.

In this case, I educate patients on how to find a high-quality herbal extract with clinical potency and to avoid gummy bear or candy versions of this herbal remedy. Elderberry extract in syrup form works particularly effectively when taken in conjunction with the patent medicine *Gan Mao Ling*.

Keep in mind that while elderberry syrup is extremely effective for clearing heat and resolving toxins, it does not address the other potential complications of cold / flu patterns such as coughs, body aches and headaches. You must educate patients on this point.

If other symptoms are present at first sign of seasonal imbalance, treat the pattern presentation with the appropriate TCM medicinals and do not expect elderberry syrup alone to resolve all

patterns of cold / flu. For this reason, I always suggest using elderberry syrup in conjunction with *Gan Mao Ling*.

## Herbal Soups

In my clinical opinion, food therapy / quality nutrition is the most important aspect of staying healthy during the winter cold and flu season. I always teach my patients the importance of learning how to create healthy soups during the cold winter months.

Soups are a very effective way to add ample amounts of healthy herbs and spices into the diet, improving immunity and boosting the strength of the digestion or spleen *qi*. Adding spices such as cumin, coriander, fennel, oregano, black pepper, turmeric, star anise, caraway, mustard, and ginger to the diet daily in soups can go a long way in preventing seasonal imbalances, as well as improve overall health and vitality in any season.

I find that most patients do not consume ample spices daily, unlike many traditional cultures do in their daily meals. Soup recipes can be simple vegetable soups or bone broth / beef stocks, depending upon the preference of the patient. By encouraging the use of healthy soups, patients can learn to incorporate these powerful simple spices into their daily routines with minimal trouble.

I also always encourage patients to top the soups off with fresh garlic to further boost immunity and prevent seasonal imbalances. If patients have no digestive issues, eating chopped, fresh garlic with meals can be an important addition to dietary therapy to prevent and treat initial stages of cold / flu presentations. Of course, garlic powder can be added to soups along with other important spices; however, chopped fresh garlic is the most effective food remedy for treating and preventing seasonal imbalances, as well as improving all aspects of cardiovascular and respiratory health.

## Clinical Takeaway

These three recommendations are the foundation of my education to patients for preparing for the winter season. I also recommend that patients create new habits of drinking warm tea daily, particularly high-quality green / white tea and fresh ginger tea; lowering sugar consumption; adopting healthy sleep habits / sleep hygiene; and washing hands daily with warm water and soap. These simple recommendations can add up to significant health benefits and improve clinical outcomes if cold / flu presentation do appear. I hope you find these helpful and educate patients on how they can use these simple remedies to empower their winter health.

DECEMBER 2019