

East/West Protocols for Winter Health

Craig Williams, LAc, AHG

As we are in the winter months, many of the patients coming to our clinics will have concerns about cold and flu issues, particular in light of the recent H1N1 flu strain. TCM has a colorful history of treating and diagnosing seasonal cold and flu symptoms. Texts as diverse as *Shang Han Lun* and *Wen Bing Xue* provide inspiration and guidance to effectively treat wind heat and wind cold patterns behind *gan mao*, or cold and flu presentations. In this series of articles I will discuss ways to effectively prevent and treat cold and flu symptoms and discuss ways to integrate Western herbs with TCM formulas in wind heat and wind cold pattern presentations.

One of the key ideas to keep in mind as practitioners is to educate our patients how not to get sick. Teaching prevention is not always popular in any system of medicine but prevention plays a foundational role. This short article will assume that readers will already be aware of basic protocols for hygiene that can prevent transmission of viruses. After teaching patients these basic guidelines, we should also be aware of basic TCM herbal formulas which can strengthen patients' resistance against contracting cold and flu viruses.

The most basic TCM formula to cultivate resistance to cold and flu viruses is *Yu Ping Feng San* which consist of *huang qi*, *bai zhu* and *fang feng*. This elegantly simple formula is an important foundational formula in which to add other herbs as appropriate for patients' unique constitutions. For example, two of my favorite TCM medicinals to add to *Yu Ping Feng San* are *dong chong xia cao* or cordyceps, and either *ling zhi* or reishi mushroom. Both medicinals can address concomitant *qi* and *yin* vacuity, and strengthen the body's resistance at the level of the *wei qi*, as well as addressing kidney vacuity issues that may allow a patient to contract cold and flu viruses. This modification is an excellent formula to prevent seasonal challenges and can help patients avoid complications of cold and flu viruses developing into deeper and more serious respiratory conditions. This modification should ideally be taken prior to the cold and flu season and is not used for acute cold and flu issues unless the patient suffers from considerable *qi* and *yin* vacuity with wind heat or wind cold presentations.

Another key idea is to educate patients to assess vitamin D3 levels. This is one of the most common vitamin deficiencies in the West. Vitamin D3 plays a crucial role in the function of the immune system in both acute and chronic health challenges. The new recommended dose for adults is 1,000 IU daily and 400 IU daily for infants and children. Vitamin D3 is fat-soluble and therefore should be taken with meals for proper absorption. This, taken along with the aforementioned *Yu Ping Feng San* variation, can provide a solid foundation for the prevention of cold and flu viruses.

Another simple therapy to teach patients is the use of the neti pot. This is commonly used in Ayurvedic medicine and has recently experienced a resurgence of popularity in the prevention of seasonal allergies in the West. The use of the neti pot to help irrigate the sinus cavity can play a crucial role in preventing seasonal colds, which can develop into deeper problems if left unattended. TCM states that

the lungs open into the orifices of the nose. Daily use of the neti pot to keep the nasal cavity clear and unencumbered can facilitate healthy breathing and prevent accumulation of mucus and phlegm in the sinuses. This can help the lungs circulate *wei qi*, which the formula *Yu Ping Feng San* and the above modification seeks to boost and strengthen. There are many sources to give patients on the simple use of a neti pot. I would encourage all practitioners to become familiar with this inexpensive and simple therapy and spread the word to their patients.

A final topic to address for prevention of colds and flu is the simple practice of sleep. Sleep deprivation is another widespread issue in the West and plays a pivotal role in the healthy function of the immune system. Regardless of how many acupuncture treatments or herbal formulas a patient may utilize, if they aren't getting adequate sleep, the immune system will not properly function. This is a key area in which practitioners must educate patients.

Adequate sleep and proper hygiene are crucial factors in preventing colds and flu viruses and must be the foundation upon which herbs and acupuncture are added. We must educate our patients that deep, restful restorative sleep is as powerful as herbs and acupuncture. Natural therapies work when we lead natural lifestyles, and the foundation of a natural lifestyle is adequate sleep.

FEBRUARY 2010