

Preparing for the Cold and Flu Season

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As the winter months approach, clinicians should be considering herbal medicinals to have on hand to prevent colds and flu rather than just waiting for acute patient presentations. While there are highly effective herbal formulas for targeting cold/flu pattern presentations, clinicians must not forget the advantages of avoiding disharmony before it arrives. There are diverse array of herbs, which can be used to boost the immune system. These days most discussions concerning cold/flu issues target treating acute symptoms. I have discussed the pros and cons of using echinacea in a past column, so I will not address this concern here but encourage readers to refer to this article for useful clinical information.

One of the most obvious formulas chosen to boost immune response prior to the winter season is the TCM formula *Yu Ping Feng San*. This elegantly simple formula can be used as a base formula upon which the clinician can build custom formulas to fit unique individual body types or pattern presentations. The following are some useful examples to have on hand in the clinic:

Yu Ping Feng San Modifications

Two of the best additions are *Dong chong Xia Cao/ Cordyceps* and *Ling Zhi / Reishi* Mushroom. These two medicinals greatly compliment the base formula of *Huang Qi*, *Bai Zhu* and *Fang Feng*. Both address both *qi* Vacuity and *Yin* Vacuity signs. I have addressed these TCM medicinals in-depth in past articles, please refer to these for more in-depth discussions on clinical options. Another excellent TCM medicinal to add to *Yu Ping Feng San* is *Tai Zi Shen*. Besides boosting *qi*, *Tai Zi Shen* promotes the production of body fluids which helps to protect the delicate lung viscus and prevents the dry effects of fall weather from creating future respiratory issues. *Xi Yang Shen* /American ginseng can also be used in a similar fashion and is a great addition for seniors who suffer from chronic respiratory issues in the winter season. *Dang Shen* can also be used but it is not as effective as *Xi Yang Shen*. It can be used as a substitute due to the often high prices of American ginseng. Royal Jelly can also be a useful adjunct to *Yu Ping Feng San* and is often found in liquid form combined with *Ren Shen* and *Xi Yang Shen*.

Another foundational formula, which can be used in conjunction with *Yu Ping Feng San* to prepare patients for the cold/ flu season is *Yue Ju Wan*. This formula addresses all common types of stagnation and is a great adjunctive formula to take along with *qi* tonic herbs to prevent further stagnation which could potentially arise with strong *qi* supplementation. *Sha Ren* can also be added to *Yue Ju Wan* to work with *Chen Pi* to allow the body to assimilate strong *qi* tonics. The Ayurvedic paste Chyavanprash is also an excellent formula to be taken along with *Yu Ping Feng San* and particularly lends itself to pediatric use. Clinicians can also instruct patients to use *Huang Qi* root as soup stock or in a powder form added to rice. Using *Huang Qi* enriched rice or soup or a combination of both are a great way to boost the immune system in individuals who are non-compliant with taking medicine in tea or pill formats. Shitake mushrooms can also be added to soups and has similar actions to *Ling Zhi*.

Two other key areas to instruct patients how to avoid cold/flu issues are vitamin D3 status and the use of probiotics. It is crucial for patients to have their vitamin D3 status evaluated by their primary care physician prior to the winter season and this is an extremely simple procedure to request. Numerous studies have also shown the benefit of probiotic supplementation in preventing colds /flu. Both vitamin D3 and high quality probiotics greatly compliment the actions of *Yu Ping Feng San* and its aforementioned modifications.

While this article was shorter than my past articles, it is in no way less important. Too many clinicians wait until patients present a cold/flu rather than teaching patients how to prevent them. These simple formulas and foods are a boon to patient's health, vitality and well-being. Don't forget the role of the clinician as teacher as well as physician. Besides our herbal pharmacy and taking care of patients, we also have to teach patients to take care of themselves.

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