

Question: What can we do to prepare for flu season?

Answer: Listen to what your mother told you! What's the number one, best medicine in the world? I know, you're expecting me to say Traditional Chinese Medicine. But you might be surprised instead to hear me say that the best medicine is rest. This applies both for prevention AND for treatment of illnesses. I've said it before, and I will say it again – if I could get all of my Patients to breathe properly and sleep well, 80% of their problems would probably be solved. So, make sure you get plenty of rest during the flu season. I know – it's hard to rest. There are holidays to prepare for, feasts to cook, shopping to be done, end of year crunches at work. But it doesn't change the answer, and it doesn't change the importance of rest! In fact, because of all of the additional stresses associated with this time of year, it is more important than ever to get rest.

Drink plenty of fluids. The humidity is down, and that's great. It's cooler, so you aren't sweating as much. But that doesn't mean that you aren't getting dehydrated. Some folks will have the heat on, some will be using electric blankets, some will be sitting in front of a fire as the temperatures drop. All of these factors contribute to evaporation of fluids from your body. Allowing yourself to become dehydrated will cause additional stress to your body, weakening your immune system. Here's a quick and dirty check to see if you are dehydrated. Gently pinch a bit of skin on the back of your hand. If it doesn't snap back into place immediately, you are probably dehydrated. But even if it does, you may need to be watching your water. Most people should drink enough fluids during the day to go to the bathroom about 5 times. If you don't, you may want to increase your fluid intake.

Don't load up on Echinacea. Echinacea has been used to treat colds after you get them, but is not good for prevention. The Chinese Formula, Yu Ping Feng San, contains Huang Qi (Astragalus), which has been shown to improve immune response. This is an excellent preventative formula, especially if you are not getting a flu shot. But don't just buy Huang Qi. The formula was devised to be well-balanced, with a minimum chance of side effects, where the single herb is not balanced. Also, do not take the formula at full recommended dose when you start. Begin with about an eighth of the recommended dose, and gradually work up to full strength in a week or so.

Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. Pears are especially good for nourishing your Yin, which the lower humidity dries up. Honey, mangoes, dates, apples, and pineapples also benefit your yin. Eat warm foods when it's cold, and avoid too many cold foods. That means fewer salads, but more steamed vegetables; fewer cold sandwiches and more hot meals. Eat foods that are warm in nature, like ginger, cinnamon, and pepper. And did I mention...get some rest!