

Acupuncture Works!

Questions and answers with the experts in Chinese Medicine
By Tom Elman, AP, LMT

Tom Elman, AP, LMT, runs Jade Tree Wellness Center in St. Petersburg, where he practices Chinese Medicine.

Question: Should we be worried about “bird flu?”

Answer: Probably not as much as the media has suggested. Although reports vary, there appear to have been fewer than 200 known cases of humans being infected with the H5N1 avian influenza virus, or “bird flu.” Furthermore, there do not appear to have been any cases of human-to-human transmission of the virus. And that’s where the big concern lies. Typical human flu viruses spread very easily, because the virus is carried in droplets that can be expelled when we cough, sneeze, or even breathe. The virus can remain viable and infectious as it floats through the air, and even after it has settled onto hard surfaces. This is why washing your hands frequently helps so much in the prevention of disease – touching something with the flu virus on it and then putting your hand to your mouth or nose can infect you with the virus.

However, according to an article in *Nature* dated March 23, the bird flu virus cannot be so easily transmitted from human to human. Viruses attack cells by attaching to certain sites on the cell walls. Human influenza viruses attach to sites that are frequently found on the cell walls in the upper respiratory tract. The bird flu virus can only attach to sites which are common on cells located deep in the lung. It may be that this makes it difficult to cough or sneeze out any bird flu viruses – they are simply located in the wrong part of the respiratory tract to be expelled easily. Nevertheless, concern remains that this virus could mutate, and start invading the upper respiratory tracts of humans. That could spell trouble, but there would also need to be a number of other mutations at the same time to make this possible.

Regardless of the likelihood of these mutations occurring, it makes good sense to take care of our immune function. At this time, the best way to avoid the bird flu remains avoiding infected birds – not too difficult for most of us. But we’d like to avoid other illnesses as well. So, here are a few pointers for keeping any kind of contagious illness at bay. Wash your hands frequently. Despite all of our advancements in knowledge and technology, this remains the easiest and most important infection control technique available to us. Get plenty of rest. Pathogens succeed when our immune function becomes low. Simple exhaustion can cause this. Eat right. Seriously! Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables – they’re full of vitamins your body needs to bolster immune function. They also contain enzymes that help your digestion. Stay away from “natural antibiotics” like Echinacea. If you do not have an infection and you are otherwise healthy, you should generally not be taking an antibiotic, even a “natural” one. Antibiotics drain you, even “natural” ones. Think about the word: “anti” means “against” and “bio” means “life.” Antibiotics are meant to kill bacterial life. They are not designed to prevent infection in the first place. Exercise moderately. Research shows that exercise improves immune function. And finally, don’t let your feathers get too ruffled – remember that stress hampers immune function!

Tom Elman is a Diplomate of the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, an experienced herbalist, and holds licenses as both an Acupuncture Physician and a Massage Therapist.

We look forward to your questions! You can contact us at tom@jadetreewellness.com, at 727-344-8690, or at www.jadetreewellness.com. Jade Tree Wellness Center is located at 6701 - 38th Ave. No. in St. Petersburg.