

Preventing Colds and Flu



My alternate title for this article was “Children are adorable cesspools!” It seems inevitable that about one to two weeks after I see that first school bus on the road, the office is flooded with calls about fevers, runny noses and coughs. Even if you don’t have a child in your life, someone close to you does and our schools, bless them, are the breeding ground for some of our favorite viruses. It is no coincidence that Airborne, a favorite herbal cold remedy, was invented by a second grade teacher!

Teachers are pros at trying to avoid catching what’s going around and are always working to keep their classrooms as healthy as possible. I thought for this back to school issue of the newsletter we would explore some stay healthy tips for us all.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has several recommendations for staying healthy this year:

Wash or sanitize your hands frequently. Now that’s a common recommendation familiar to us all, but do you know how to wash your hands? I’d been doing it wrong for years! The CDC studied most effective (meaning fewest germs left on the hands) techniques and found that you need to use hot water and lots of soap and scrub VIGOROUSLY for the length of time it takes to sing the “Happy Birthday” song (in your head please.) Unfortunately we don’t often do this so many germs survive the cursory cold water splash we send their way in the restaurant bathroom.

You may have noticed that Dr. Ogilvie and I, more often than not, use a sanitizing alcohol hand rub in our

office before we examine you. The CDC compared alcohol hand rubs to the quickie hand washing done by most health care professionals and found it to be significantly more effective in eradicating most bacteria and viruses. They made the exception with visibly soiled hands in which case good old soap was the most effective cleanser. The message here is, unless you can picture yourself singing the birthday song in a flurry of scalding water, it wouldn’t hurt to have a little bottle of Purel or other alcohol hand sanitizer in the purse or glove box.

Interestingly, there was very little benefit to “antibacterial” soap vs. regular soap and some are investigating the possibility that “antibacterial” soap may contribute to drug resistant bacteria.

Don’t cough or sneeze into your hand. Teachers now ask their students to use the crook of their arms. If you would like to avoid the extra laundry but still protect the next person you shake hands with, the CDC recommends coughing or sneezing into the air away from other people.

Don’t touch your face. Unconscious rubbing of the nose and especially eyes is the most likely way we inoculate ourselves with the virus we picked up from the door knob five minutes ago.

Get frequent outdoor exercise. Exercise improves circulation, getting the cells of your immune system out to where the action is. It also airs out the parts of your lungs that don’t get used sitting in front of the TV. Getting this exercise out doors exposes you to more humid air (remember rain?) Overheated dry indoor air can irritate the mucous membranes of our nose and lungs making them more susceptible to infection.

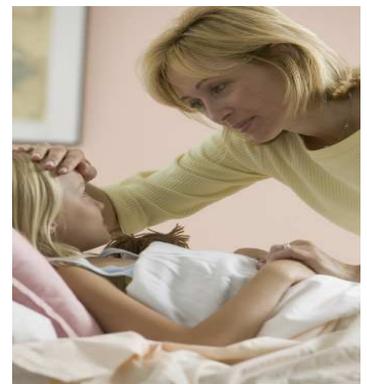
Drink less alcohol. While moderate drinking may be healthy for the heart, overindulging can suppress your immune system, making it too sluggish to do its job!

Avoid Cigarette Smoke. Do I need to explain this?

Take a sauna. This one surprised me. All those crazy Finnish folks were on to something. If you have a sauna at your disposal you may want to indulge because apparently breathing air that is more than 80 degrees has a disabling effect on viruses that are in the respiratory tract but have not yet taken hold.

Manage Stress. I realize that this falls into the easier-said-than-done category, but it merits your attention. No one can ask for a stress-free life, but finding a tiny portion of every day to intentionally de-stress through prayer, meditation, music, etc. has been shown to increase chemicals called interleukins necessary for fighting viruses! Haven’t you ever wondered why you catch that nasty cold at the worst, most stressed-out time?

Herbal Cures? Let me preface this by saying that herbal remedies are notoriously difficult to study in a rigorous scientific fashion due to inconsistent amounts of the active ingredient in various preparations. For example, Echinacea comes in pills, drops, capsules, tea (where concentration is affected by brewing time) and yummy fizzy drinks. Which one do you study? Suffice it to say that Echinacea, Airborne, and Zinc lozenges (not spray) are safe. Studies of their effectiveness are conflicting and inconclusive. It would be safe to say, however, that due to the miracle of effective marketing 9 out of 10 school teachers recommend Airborne!



Cold Medicine 101

When was the last time you ventured into the cold medicine aisle at your local drugstore? Both sides of the aisle are stacked high with remedies -- brand name, generic, homeopathic, "natural," "new and improved," bubble gum, grape, cherry flavored, chewable, and now even in quick dissolving strip form! And yet, only two or three are ever among those I recommend to my patients.

Most cold medicines contain multiple ingredients and often only one of those ingredients is needed. This leaves the leftovers to create unwanted side effects. While I could write paragraphs about studies suggesting the ineffectiveness of most cough syrups, the dangers of using some nasal sprays, and the shaky science behind Echinacea's popularity, I would rather empower you with a glossary of common ingredients and their generic names. If you become a label reader, you can avoid unwanted and unneeded "extras" in your medicine cabinet and hopefully avoid unpleasant side effects.

Pseudoephedrine: Sudafed is the most common brand name but it is a common ingredient in almost every cold medicine. It is also the "D" in over the counter allergy medicines such as Claritin-D. It constricts blood vessels in the nose to relieve congestion. It can also constrict other blood vessels leading to an increase in blood pressure. If you have high blood pressure, ask your doctor before using this. It can also make you jittery and cause insomnia. Don't take this before bedtime or you'll be sorry!

Guaifenesin: Common brand names include Mucinex in a long acting tablet, and Robitussin in its liquid form. This is my favorite ingredient because it loosens up mucous in lungs and sinuses where it likes to hide and breed bacterial infections. This ingredient is in most "non-drying" cold medicines and does a good job of preventing a cold from turning into an ear or sinus infection. At very high doses it could cause nausea, but in general has no dangerous side effects.

Dextromethorphan: This is the "DM" in some cough syrups and is the only ingredient in my favorite cough syrup Delsym. It is a very mild cough suppressant (meaning you will still cough but perhaps not as often or as violently!) It is safe to take in the daytime. For a severe night time cough you may want to ask for a prescription cough medicine from your physician as codeine and its derivatives are the only true cough suppressant.



Diphenhydramine: Benadryl is the name you would most likely recognize for this common antihistamine. This medicine is most effective for allergic reactions. It is a common ingredient in some night time cold medicines because of its side effect of sleepiness. It is used to combat the insomnia side effect of pseudoephedrine (see above). It is sedating for most people so should not be taken before driving. Some adults and children have the opposite effect and experience hyperactivity. Everyone should have this in the medicine cabinet for unexpected allergic reactions and for the occasional bout of insomnia. Take this instead of Tylenol PM to avoid unnecessary Tylenol! If you take this for a garden variety cold all you will do is dry out your nasal passages and risk a sinus infection when things can't drain properly.

Loratadine: Claritin, Alavert, Wallatin, etc! This dizzying array of brand names all refer to the same non-sedating antihistamine. Translated this means allergy medicine that won't conk you out! This is a great medicine for allergies but is very expensive. Knowing the generic name and becoming a label reader will possibly save you money as there are some significant price differences. Don't waste your money on this medicine for the common cold. Recent Claritin commercials have suggested that Claritin-D is good for your cold. Remember our cheap friend pseudoephedrine way back at the beginning of this article? That's the "D!" Save your dollars for some chicken soup and leave the antihistamine on the counter.

I hope this was a helpful guided tour through the cold medicine aisle. Please remember, however, that your health situation is unique. Ask your Vantage Physician if you are unsure about an over the counter cold medicine. Any cold symptoms lasting over two weeks should prompt a visit to our office. May you all have a happy and healthy fall and winter!

Flu Shots

October is Breast Health Awareness Month



Vantage Physicians will have a limited number of flu shots this year. If you are homebound and high risk, you can expect a call from us when the shipment comes in.

We recommend that anyone who has the flu shot available

to them in their community or work place obtain them there.

We will have pediatric flu shots available from the health department. Consider them if your child has asthma, premature birth, or is between the ages of 6-23 months. If you think you will be pregnant from October through March, you should get a shot as well.

If you are a healthy person aged 5-50 and hate shots but want to avoid the flu, call us for a prescription for FluMist. This is a nasal spray vaccination administered in our office. Your insurance may or may not cover this vaccine but it is almost 50% cheaper this year at around \$18-24 wholesale.

During the month of October, South Sound Radiology and Northwest Radiology will be offering routine screening mammograms at a discounted rate. This offer only applies to cash pay patients and a physician's order is required. Please contact our office to find out if you are due for a mammogram and to obtain a physician's order.



Other News

Vantage Clinical Research Group

VCRG, our clinical research neighbor (see the summer newsletter), is now enrolling for studies of Type 2 Diabetes, irritable bowel with diarrhea, chronic constipation, and atrial fibrillation. If you have any of these conditions and are curious about being a study participant, call Gretchen at 459-5515.



Open Enrollment

Open enrollment is coming up for many of you. If you are thinking of changing insurances, please check with Stephanie to make sure they are compatible with membership practices like Vantage Physicians. If a friend or co-worker is looking for a new physician after changing insurance, don't hesitate to mention us as we are still accepting new members.



Congratulations!!

Congratulations to Mary Ogilvie, RN. Mary will be taking a temporary leave of absence to pursue an opportunity that will allow her to refine and expand her already exemplary nursing skills. Mary's last day will be Thursday, September 21st, 2006. Please watch for updates on her journey in future issues of the Vantage Voice.



Nurse Mary

If you would like future publications of this newsletter emailed to you, please call us at 360-438-1161 or email your physician:

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Dr. K's Breakfast Smoothie

- Two to three blobs of non-fat vanilla yogurt (this is how I cook!)
- One handful of frozen strawberries
- Smaller handful of frozen blueberries
- Generous splash of skim milk
- Blend with hand held mixer then add one scoop of unsweetened whey protein powder
- Blend until smooth (hence the name smoothie.)



- Drink while scanning the Olympian's editorial page and you've had all the protein, calcium, vitamin C, fiber, and energy giving carbohydrate you need until lunch!

Addendum to the Patient Handbook

Beginning October 1, 2006, Vantage Physicians will be charging a \$35.00 fee for all checks or automatic checking withdrawals returned to us for non-sufficient funds.

The initiation of this fee has become necessary due to increasing bank rates.

Thank you for your understanding. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Stephanie, our Office Manager, at 360-438-1161.

