
TO CATCH A COLD

LOCAL REMEDIES FOR WHAT AILS YOU

BY KATHERINE JAMIESON

The season of sneezing is upon us. As if low temperatures, frigid winds and falling snow doesn't test us enough, now is usually the time of year when rhinovirus, otherwise known as the common cold, stops in for an extended visit. Colds have been tormenting humans since the dawn of time—ancient Egyptians carved hieroglyphics for “nose” and “coryza” (cold symptoms) next to each other—and despite our best efforts, they show no signs of slowing down. According to the National Institute of Health, Americans endure 1 billion colds each year, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that they're responsible for 22 million missed school days each year.

For those of you coughing, aching, sniffing and sneezing your way through winter, it may be time to nix the Nyquil: this year, the FDA warned for the first time against the use of over-the-counter cough and cold remedies for children under two years old. Pediatricians are now pushing to extend the warning to a recall of these medicines for children under six, citing lack of scientific proof of their effectiveness and evidence that thousands of children end up in emergency rooms each year with drug reactions. Possible drug interactions put many people at risk, including pregnant and breastfeeding women, older people and those with chronic disorders including diabetes, alcoholism and high blood pressure. Sue Lowery, MD, a family practitioner in Montague comments, “We have to own responsibility for what we put in our bodies, or acknowledge that someone else decides for us.”

Predating the promises of pseudoephedrine, oxymetazoline and dextromethorphan by over 2000 years, herbal medicine is still the primary course of treatment in China. Pondering cold etiology in the 18th century, Ben Franklin hypothesized that, “People often catch cold from one another when shut up together in small close rooms, coaches, etc. and when sitting near and conversing so as to breathe in each other's transpiration.” Though no one could verify his supposition (viruses were not discovered for another 150 years), his prescription of exercise, bathing and moderation in food and drink to prevent colds is reflected in many current holistic treatments.

When it comes to dealing with a cold, Tylenol versus Advil is far from our only option. Deb Rose Hayes, a holistic health educator and herbalist in Monson, recommends a number of herbs to prevent and treat colds. In her “Herbal Almanac,” she cites the Chinese herb astragalus as a “deep immune tonic, which helps in the prevention of not only colds and flu, but more serious afflictions like cancer and lyme disease.” Hayes also recommends mullein, which grows rampant along roadsides and in fields throughout America; prepared in a tonic or tea, mullein has a “tonifying effect,” dispelling mucous and soothing coughs. And, the versatile eucalyptus plant is a “powerful respiratory aid,” which you can take as a tincture, a liquid or in a capsule.

These herbs, and many more, can be found locally at the Goldthread





Photographs: Christopher Pride





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Herbal Apothecary in Florence. In addition to offering their own line of medicinal plant preparations, created with organic herbs grown on their own 4-acre farm in Conway, Goldthread runs a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, available all year. Shareholders receive a seasonal supply of medicines that address not only colds, but flus, digestive issues, sleep and stress difficulties and minor skin problems. This year, a fresh crop of Echinacea (which doesn't necessarily prevent, but may help speed a cold's duration) is an ingredient in several honeys, teas and tinctures.

Sandra Guerrara, a local holistic health counselor, identifies un-managed stress, fatigue and depleted immune systems as a main cause of colds. Her prime recommendation is miso soup, made from soy-bean paste. Prepared correctly (not overheating the miso paste), the soup is "rich in food enzymes that help the body with digestion, and thus divert its energy to fighting the cold." Sea vegetables, brimming with vitamins and minerals, can be added, along with vegetables of your choosing, like carrots. And, conveniently enough, the Valley has its own local miso source in Conway's South River Miso. Though no one has come close to vanquishing the common cold yet, it is possible to bypass the drugstore on the way to feeling better. Most natural remedies are inexpensive, simple and completely harmless. And when all else fails, there's always that beloved standby, a steaming bowl of chicken soup.

A graduate of the Iowa Nonfiction Writing Program, Katherine Jamieson is a freelancer specializing in health and food writing. Her work is forthcoming in Ode, Ms., Bust and Terrain.org. She abides in Whately with her fiancé, their sweet old dog and two destructive kittens.




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A STRONG SHOT OF JEWISH PENICILLIN

In the 12th century, the Jewish physician and philosopher, Moshe ben Maimonides, recommended chicken soup for respiratory tract symptoms. 800 years later, in 1993, University of Nebraska Medical Center researcher, Stephen Rennard, MD, found that chicken soup contains an anti-inflammatory mechanism that helps heal the common cold: he discovered that the movement of neutrophils—the most common white blood cell that protects the body against infection—was reduced by exposure to the soup; less movement of the cells leads to relief from cold symptoms. Rennard, who published his results mainly for amusement value, has now been cited by thousands of media outlets around the world for his pioneering work in chicken soup research.

CHICKEN VEGETABLE SOUP WITH FRESH HERBS

Many people in the Valley may be familiar with this soup, a Friday mainstay at the one-time Northampton cafe, Curtis & Schwartz. On chilly Friday afternoons, a stream of customers would come in, pull Mason Jars out of their bags and stock up on their supply for the week. The recipe is former owner Linda Schwartz's take on the chicken soup she grew up on, a Friday night staple her mother would serve each Shabbat. The soup is steeped in tradition, memories and very intense chicken stock, plus a few extra tips and unexpected additions.

For the stock:

- 1 5-pound chicken
- 3 stalks celery, washed and cut in thirds
- 2 onions, peeled and quartered
- 2 bay leaves
- 4 sprigs parsley
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme or a pinch of dried thyme
- 10 whole black peppercorns
- 2 whole cloves
- 4 quarts cold water or enough to completely cover the chicken*

Rinse the chicken in cold water and discard the giblets. Combine the chicken and all the remaining ingredients in a large stock pot. Bring to a boil, uncovered, over high heat. Adjust the heat so that the stock is just simmering. Cook for at least 1–2 hours. With a ladle, skim off any foam that rises to the top as the stock simmers.

When the stock is done, remove the chicken to a platter and let cool. Strain the stock through a colander into a large bowl or container. Press the vegetables with the back of a ladle or large spoon to extract any remaining liquid and then discard vegetables. As the stock sits, fat will accumulate at the top—remove this by dipping a



ladle just below the surface. If you have time, refrigerate the cooled stock—the fat will solidify on top and can be scraped off with a spoon. There should be about 3 1/2 quarts. Carefully separate chicken meat from the carcass, removing all the skin and cartilage. Shred meat into bite-sized pieces, checking again for bones, and set aside. There will be about 4 cups cooked chicken.

*To add depth to the chicken flavor, consider using chicken stock instead of water.

To finish the soup:

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 cups onions, cut in 1/4-inch dice
- 2 cups carrots, peeled and cut in 1/4-inch dice
- 1 cup celery, cut in 1/4-inch dice
- 1 cup red bell pepper, cut in 1/4-inch dice
- 2 cups green cabbage, cut in 1/4-inch dice
- 1 1/2 cups green beans, cut in 1/4-inch pieces
- Reserved chicken stock
- 1/4 cup parsley, chopped
- 2 teaspoons fresh thyme, chopped
- 1 tablespoons fresh dill, chopped
- 4 teaspoons salt
- Fresh ground pepper
- Reserved chicken meat

Melt the butter in a 6-quart stock pot over medium heat. Add all the vegetables and sauté 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the reserved chicken stock to the vegetables and bring to a boil, uncovered. Lower the heat to a simmer and cook 30 minutes more.

With a strainer or slotted spoon, remove about 3 cups of the vegetables and puree in a food processor or blender—add back into the soup. Add the fresh herbs, salt and fresh ground pepper. Add the cooked chicken and simmer 5 minutes more. Check seasoning.