

Immune Support: Preparing for Winter Health with Food and Herbs

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Immunity is the boundary of protection and integrity that interfaces your body and the larger world. Your immune system is your Ozone. Winter, the dark side of the year, is the time of the year for building and storing energy like a seed in the ground does in preparation for springtime's melting snow and sprouting green. Hibernation regenerates your strength and endurance.

If you feel a cold or flu coming on:

- Simplify your diet to veggies, grains, soups, bone/seaweed/and/or miso broths, tea, and fresh water. Take an immune tincture every 1-2 hours; dot diluted tea tree or other immune essential oil on your body and around your home/office. Sleep a lot.
- Keep warm – cover up your feet, neck, ears and lower back.
- Flu virus is transmitted in the nose and mouth, so keep them clean with light sea salt water rinses or a drop of tea tree oil in water as a rinse.
- Do an electricity or media fast to let your nervous system recuperate, and give your adrenal glands a rest: Turn off the radio, TV, computer, cell phone, newspapers, magazines, junk mail and shopping. This practice helps you slow down, hear your internal voice and de-stress.
- AVOID sweets and milk products, (raw milk ok) for a few days. Sugar feeds bacteria and increases inflammation, pasteurized cold milk increases mucus and congestion.

HEALING FOODS & HERBS FOR IMMUNE HEALTH~ Increase circulation and elimination with hot liquids while feeding your body healthful foods.

- Homemade veggie and miso broth with kombu or wakame seaweed, and long simmered bone broths are super healing to the digestive, immune and nervous systems. Miso tea/broth – alkalizes, grounds the body and reawakens intestinal flora. Stir a teaspoon of miso paste into hot but not boiling water (to preserve live enzymes and beneficial bacteria), and drink.
- Lacto-fermented veggies like sauerkraut and kim chi are anti-viral and probiotic, a traditional way to enjoy fresh veggies in winter.
- Tasty Immune Strength Miso Spread/instant soup paste: 1-2 T minced raw garlic and ginger, ½ c raw honey, mix. Add a pinch of cayenne and turmeric powder. Mix ¼ c miso paste, and ½ cup tahini. Use as a spread on celery or carrot sticks, toast or crackers.
- Top a fresh lemon wedge with local raw honey, and suck out the juice. Repeat.
- Garlic Honey- chop raw garlic into a spoonful of raw honey. They must both be raw for their medicinal, natural anti-biotic qualities.
- Garlic-honey-vinegar – chop 5-10 cloves garlic into 1 cup apple cider vinegar. Steep over night and add honey to taste in the morning. Drink by the heaping spoonful throughout the day. Cures lung and throat infections, soothes a cough.

- Hot Ginger Honey Lemonade – Boil 2” minced ginger in 1 quart of water for 10 minutes or longer. Take off heat, add fresh squeezed lemons juice and raw honey, and sprinkle a few grains of cayenne in. Drink up and sweat it out!
- Sage gargle for strep throat - Boil 1 cup water, add 1 tsp culinary sage leaf and 1/2 tsp sea salt. Steep 5 minutes, gargle and spit. Can curb strep in a few hours.
- Horseradish condiment– mince fresh horseradish and mix with equal parts raw honey and raw apple cider vinegar. Store in fridge. Excellent lung strengthening condiment, and clears out the sinuses.
- Curried onions and greens are one of my favorite cold season foods: sauté a sliced onion with a Tbl olive oil, plus 1T each minced garlic and ginger and pinch of sea salt. Add 2 sliced shitake mushroom caps. Cover. Add a ¼ tsp turmeric, ½ tsp coriander and 1 tsp cumin powder (or 1 T curry powder), stir. Finely chop one washed bunch dark leafy greens, like collards or kale. Add to pan, add a splash of water to sizzle, and cover immediately. In 5 minutes you have a delicious side dish that’s great alone or with eggs, beans, toast, etc. Add cayenne to heat it up even more.
- Make Deep Immune Broth for use throughout the winter. This is a deeply restorative soup and excellent preventative medicine. Place several pieces of chicken (or turkey, beef, fish) in a pot with a few pieces of kombu, wakame or dulse seaweed. Add a small handful of each or any of the following herbs: codonopsis root, reishi mushroom, shitake mushroom, burdock root, astragalus root, turkey tail mushroom. You may also add garlic and ginger. Add ¼ cup raw apple cider vinegar, and cover pot contents with water. Bring to boil, then simmer for several hours, at least 2, and up to 24. Turn off heat, strain into another pot and cool. Remove meat from bones and add back to broth. You may add a teaspoon of miso paste, into each bowl upon serving. Freeze it for ready use throughout the season.
- Drink water, between 4 and 8 cups/day.
- Eat with the season. The winter storage crops of the Northeast are primarily root vegetables, (onions, garlic, carrots, beets, parsnips, turnips, potatoes, rutabega, Jerusalem artichokes, etc) dried beans and grains. Carnivores - long cooked meat stews and casseroles. Dark leafy greens like kale and collards can grow in early snowfall, freeze well, and are important vitamin and energy sources. Apples, plums and berries are our local fruits. Hot herbal teas, hot soups, roasted, cooked and baked foods instead of raw foods, sweet drinks/sodas, ice water, iced coffee, cold dairy products, cold cereal, salads, cold sweet desserts (like ice cream), fruit juice. These things are better suited for summertime.
- Make your own Echinacea tincture by filling a quart jar ¾ full with fresh or ½ full with dried herb. Fill the jar to the top with 80 or 100 proof vodka, shake and let sit for 2-6 weeks. Shake daily and strain on the last day, squeezing out every last drop of medicine before composting the herb material left (called the marc). This is a very inexpensive way to have a winter supply of tincture. I prefer to make and strain tinctures on a full or new moon to potentize the medicine. To make an alcohol-free herbal extract, use food grade vegetable glycerine (from a health food store), mixed 50% with distilled water, instead of alcohol.
- Make yummy anti-viral Elderberry Syrup. Harvest elderberries in early September, or buy dried berries. Soak in 3x their volume of water. Add ginger, rose hips, or other

- herbs such as elecampane roots, codonopsis roots, reishi or hawthorne berries. Cook, reducing the liquid mixture to ½ or 1/3. It takes a few hours. Strain, and compost the pulp. As the juice cools, dissolve raw honey to taste into the mixture. Preserve the syrup with raw apple cider vinegar and tinctured Echinacea or Brandy, or pure vegetable glycerine. You need to match the volume of cooked syrup to the volume of ‘preservatives’ you use. Store in the refrigerator and use within 3-6 months. Delicious flu remedy!
- Cook with culinary herbs which are also highly medicinal: Parsley, coriander, cumin, fennel, dill, thyme, oregano, sage, rosemary, basil, mint, ginger, cardamom, garlic, cayenne, cinnamon.
- Awareness of your body’s boundaries, listening to your inner voice, healthy self-esteem and a shield of protection are issues of immunity, this system is an energetic system as well as a physical one.
- Anti-bacterial and anti-viral room spray – use 9-21 drops of above mentioned essential oils in a sprayer bottle filled with distilled water. Shake and spray around home, office, etc. Avoid contact with eyes. Avoid near cats, their bodies cannot handle essential oil.
- Flower essences for the immune system: Echinacea, garlic, self-heal, nasturtium, morning glory, and yarrow. Flower essences work on the cellular, emotional, and spirit levels of the body. They are simple to make at home. See “the Complete Floral Healer” by Anne McIntyre for instructions.

References: Herbalists Nancy Phillips, Kate Gilday, Josephine Spilka, Atmo Abram, Amy Goodman, Annie Wattles, Guido Mase, Ms. Beatrice Waight, Rocio Alarcon, Hadar Sarit, Rosemary Gladstar. *The Holistic Herbal* by David Hoffman, *Full Moon Feast* by Jessica Prentice, *Healing with Whole Foods* by Paul Pitchford, *Nourishing Traditions* by Sally Fallon, *Wild Fermentation* by Sandor Katz, *The Complete Floral Healer* by Anne McIntyre.