

Common Methods for Prevention of Colds from Chinese Medicine Perspective

Colds may occur all year round but is especially common in winter and spring. They mainly manifest as blocked or runny nose, sneezing, cough, headache, aversion to cold, fever and general discomfort. According to different pathogenic factors, colds can be classified as common cold and influenza. The latter presents as an epidemic of similar and more serious cases in a period of time.

1. What is common cold from Chinese medicine perspective?

According to Chinese medicine theories, “wind”, “cold”, “summer-heat”, “dampness”, “dryness” and “fire” are six weathers of nature. They are called “six qi” (六氣). Human bodies have to adapt to changes in these “qi”. If our adaptability to these changes is low, or if there is abnormal or sudden change in weather, such as having cold instead of warm weather in summer or extreme change in temperature, diseases may occur. Under these circumstances, “six qi” become “six qie”(六邪), meaning external factors causing diseases.

The main cause of common cold is “wind”. Common cold caused by “wind” is often associated with abnormal or sudden change in weather, large variation in temperature, body being wet by rain or blown by wind after sweating. “Wind” often combines with other seasonal weathers e.g. “cold” in winter, “heat” in spring, “dampness” in summer and “dryness” in winter to cause different types of illnesses. The common ones are the “wind-cold” type and “wind-heat” type in winter and spring respectively. The following are some examples of common colds.

1.) Wind-cold type: caused by cold weather or exposure to wind after body being wet by rain.

Manifestations: aversion to chill, mild fever, headache, sore limbs, lack of sweat, blocked nose, clear nasal discharge, itchy throat, cough with clear and thin sputum, no thirsty feeling or thirst with preference to hot drinks.

2.) Wind-heat type: caused by “wind” and “heat”.

Manifestations: Fever, slight aversion to wind, inhibited sweating, distending headache, sore throat, cough, blocked nose, yellow sputum and nasal discharge and thirst with desire to drink.

3.) Summer-heat and Dampness Type: caused by “summer-heat”, “dampness” and excessive cooling in summer.

Manifestations: Fever, slight aversion to wind, little sweating, heavy or sore limbs, heavy and distending pain in head, cough, white sticky sputum, blocked nose, cloudy nasal discharge, restlessness, feeling of oppression in the chest, sticky and greasy feeling in the mouth, thirst without drinking much water, abdominal distension, nausea, loose stools and scanty dark urine.

2. What is influenza from Chinese medicine perspective?

Influenza is attributed to exogenous infectious factor spread by secretion in air while infected individuals cough, sneeze or speak.

Influenza is highly contagious and can cause epidemics. There is usually an abrupt increase in number of people being infected and it can spread very rapidly. Main symptoms include aversion to cold, fever, general body ache, malaise, cough, sore throat, sneezing, nasal discharge and obstruction.

Influenza usually presents as a more serious illness and complications may develop, affecting other organs or leading to other diseases.

In diagnosing and treating colds, Chinese medicine practitioners shall take into account the cause, pathogenesis, constitution of individual patient and the actual clinical presentation so that the most suitable treatment regime can be provided. To avoid delay in treatment, Chinese medicine practitioners should be consulted if symptoms suggestive of colds appear.

3. Who is more susceptible to colds?

a.) People who are not cautious in their daily activities, blown by wind after sweating, catch a chill after being wet by rain and those over-strain themselves will have their functional activities, defending and rehabilitating abilities impaired. Those having weak body constitution have lower resistance to exogenous pathogenic factors will also be more susceptible.

- b.) Some elderly, with degenerating body functioning, adaptability, tolerance to cold and defending abilities are also vulnerable to various pathogenic factors and get infected.
- c.) Internal organs of children are not mature, and their resistance to diseases is lower. Therefore, they are also more susceptible to colds.

4. How to prevent colds?

Chinese medicine emphasizes on prevention. Environmental and personal hygiene, regular daily schedules, suitable amount of food at regular time, appropriate level of work and rest, traditional exercise and a healthy mental state are all important elements to ensure health. The following methods are specifically recommended for prevention of colds.

- a.) Maintain good ventilation to reduce indoor pathogenic factors. This will also enhance our adaptability to cold. Ultraviolet radiation in sunlight helps disinfecting the air and thus reduces the chance of infection.
- b.) Keep away from sources of disease, for example, staying away from public places during influenza epidemics and taking protective measures while looking after patients.
- c.) Develop good living habit. Washing face with cold water will increase our resistance to cold, soaking legs in hot water promotes circulation and induces sleep. We should also observe good personal hygiene, like washing hands frequently, no spitting and avoid sharing cutlery with each other.
- d.) Pay attention to weather changes. We should protect ourselves from wind in spring, heat in summer, dampness between summer and autumn, dryness in autumn and cold in winter. Wearing appropriate amount of clothes is also very important. In spring, weather changes a lot and we should not wear too little. Otherwise, we may catch a chill. In mid-autumn, the weather becomes cooler but we should put on more clothes at a later time to enhance our resistance to cold.
- e.) Set an appropriate level of work and rest. Over-straining in physical, mental and sexual aspects should be avoided. On the other hand, resting too much will inhibit the flow of “qi” and “blood” and result in debility. Therefore, it is not desirable

either.

- f.) Maintain a suitable level of physical activities such as performing traditional exercises like Tai Chi Quan(太極拳) and Ba Duan Jin(八段錦). When we do exercise, our psychological state, breathing pattern and body posture should harmonise with each other. Moreover, we should do it persistently.
- g.) Use food and drug to maintain health. Regular consumption of spring onion, garlic, ginger and vinegar helps preventing colds. Some Chinese medicines good at “clearing heat” can also be used for prevention of colds. For example, Flos Lonicerae and Flos Chrysanthemi can be boiled with water and served as tea.

5. Points to note

- a.) Use of Chinese medicines differs between individuals. Chinese medicine practitioners should be consulted before consuming Chinese medicines. Overdose and prolonged use should be avoided. It is especially important for elderly, children, pregnant women and patients with chronic illnesses to use Chinese medicines under the guidance of Chinese medicine practitioners to prevent and treat colds.
- b.) During epidemics of colds, we should stay away from sources of disease e.g. public places, take protective measures, observe good environmental and personal hygiene, wash hands frequently, no spitting and avoid sharing cutlery.
- c.) If infected with colds, one should put on a mask, take more rest and maintain a balanced diet. Eat more fresh fruits and vegetables, drink more water and have less raw, cold, greasy, spicy and irritating food.
- d.) If you feel discomfort after consuming Chinese medicines, stop using it and consult Chinese medicine practitioners as soon as possible.

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