



As temperatures drop and daylight hours shorten, winter brings unique challenges to our health and well-being. The colder months usher in a slog of sniffles, coughs, and seasonal ailments that can leave us and our family members feeling depleted and under the weather.

I often remind my patients that it's not bad to get sick once in a while. A few days snuggled up in bed with a good book or lazing around on the couch with a head cold is part of life! That said, if ailments are too frequent, severe, or long-lasting, we want to address that. Fortunately, with the right toolkit of natural

remedies and strategies, we can better navigate these common winter ailments and take steps to prevent them, too.

Winter stressors

Winter's impact on our health extends beyond just catching a head cold. The combination of dry, cold air, reduced sunlight, and more time spent indoors creates a perfect storm for various health issues. Dry air can irritate mucous membranes and respiratory passages, making us more susceptible to infection. Heating systems further reduce indoor humidity, exacerbating these challenges. Decreased sunlight leads to lower vitamin D



SICK AGAIN?

Here's How to Stay Healthy!

Your Winter Wellness Toolkit

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levels, and less fresh air means more exposure to circulating viruses. Our immune systems must work harder during winter, so it's crucial that we support them.

Homeopathic support

Homeopathy is ideal for this because it stimulates the body's natural healing processes. We individualize the remedy selection based on the person who is sick, not on a diagnosis. This is one reason among many that I love homeopathy. It invites me to pay close attention to my patients, to understand their complaints in the context of their entire system, and to offer a medicine chosen

specifically for them at that moment in time. For instance, if I see four kids with earaches in a given week, they may need four different homeopathic remedies, depending on how they experience their earache, how it impacts their digestion, sleep, mood, and more.

If you're just beginning to use homeopathy at home or in your practice, common winter illnesses are the perfect place to start. Your child or friend or client or patient is putting a lot of energy into creating symptoms—their vital force is engaged—which often makes it easier to choose an effective remedy by focusing

on their new, unique symptoms of illness. Acute homeopathic prescribing aims primarily at the person's latest symptoms of acute illness. See *Winter Wellness Remedies* on page 25 for a snapshot of some of the most common remedy presentations seen in acute prescribing for winter illness.

Constitutional or acute?

However, some people who fall ill with a winter ailment will do best with a dose of their constitutional remedy—a more broad-acting remedy aimed at the whole person—rather than an acute remedy aimed more narrowly at the illness. When these people are stressed (by a virus or dry air, for example), they respond to the stress in the same way they usually respond; that is, they produce symptoms that are consistent with their typical constitutional state.

How can you tell whether a person would benefit from their constitutional remedy rather than an acute remedy? Here are three clues:

1) The person's new symptoms of illness fit the profile of the constitutional remedy—even if the symptoms are not usual for the person.

Example: In the past, the person has benefited constitutionally from the remedy *Nux vomica* for digestive issues and irritability. They now come down with a head cold; their nose and sinuses feel full, but they can't get any mucus out. This "wants to, but can't" feeling is a classic symptom of *Nux vomica*.

2) The person's physical general symptoms have not shifted; that is, the symptoms that affect their whole body (such as sensitivity

to heat or cold, cravings for certain foods or drinks, or sleep position) have not changed.

Example: The person with a head cold feels very chilly. But they have a tendency to feel chilly even when they don't have a cold; and this aligns with their constitutional remedy *Nux vomica*.

3) The person's temperament has not shifted.

Example: The person is more irritable with their cold. But they have a tendency to be irritable even when they're not sick, and irritability fits their *Nux vomica* constitutional profile.

If these three points apply, then instead of looking for an acute remedy, such as those listed on page 25, consider giving the person another dose of their constitutional remedy in the last potency that was effective.

We individualize the remedy selection based on the person who is sick, not on a diagnosis.

Constitutional homeopathic prescribing requires advanced knowledge and experience, so it's usually the realm of professionals. If you are not a person who prescribes constitutional remedies, however, you can still ask questions to perceive whether a person is in their usual constitutional state—or whether a winter stressor has bumped them into a different, acute remedy state. This concept can explain why a seemingly



WINTER WELLNESS REMEDIES *for Your Toolkit*

Here are some of the most helpful homeopathic remedies for addressing common acute winter conditions. With homeopathy, remember that less is often more: I usually recommend the 30c potency; I give one dose and see how the person does; if it helps a little and then wears off, I give another dose, but I do not routinely give doses over and over. As symptoms improve, I extend the time between doses and discontinue dosing once improvement is maintained.

EARLY COLD SYMPTOMS

Aconite – at the onset of symptoms, particularly when they appear suddenly after exposure to cold, dry conditions; anxiety or worry along with restlessness; fever, thirstiness, chilliness; by the time a patient sees me in my office, they have usually passed the *Aconite* stage of the ailment

Belladonna – intense symptoms come on suddenly; high fever, red face, dilated pupils, and throbbing sensations (often in the head); the person is flushed, with a palpably hot head, yet cold extremities

Bryonia alba – cold and flu symptoms develop slowly; characterized by dryness—dry cough, dry mucous membranes, great thirst for large quantities of cold water; the person is cranky and snappish; feels worse with any movement and wants to lie perfectly still; all symptoms, especially achiness, worsen with motion and improve with rest and pressure

Ferrum phosphoricum – early stages of any inflammatory condition, including a cold or flu; symptoms not yet clearly defined, but the person feels unwell overall, with mild fever and tiredness

Gelsemium – my go-to for winter ailments when fatigue is profound, with weakness and aching muscles; the person feels heavy, droopy, and can barely keep their eyes open; they want to be left alone to lie down to rest and drift off; they have chills running up and down spine

Rhus toxicodendron – cold and flu symptoms with severe aching and stiffness, worse in the morning and worse on first movement, better with ongoing movement; the person feels restless despite feeling unwell; gentle movement and warmth relieve the aching sensations; person feels best in a hot shower or hot bath

COUGH AND RESPIRATORY SYMPTOMS

Antimonium tartaricum – rattling cough; chest sounds full of mucus, but the person struggles to bring it up; they feel as if they are suffocating and feel better sitting up; often indicated after a person has been sick for weeks and has gone through multiple stages of illness (remedy states) before worsening to this *Antimonium* state

Drosera – dry cough in fits or spasms, especially worse at night; coughing bouts so severe they end in gagging or vomiting; coughs that come from deep in chest

Hepar sulphuricum – cough sounds croupy or barking; person is very chilly and hypersensitive to cold; slightest draft of cold air triggers coughing fits; they are very irritable and want to be left alone

Rumex crispus – cough triggered by cold air or by going from a warm to a cold environment; the person covers their mouth with a mask or scarf when they go outside, as breathing cold air immediately triggers coughing; dry cough from a tickling sensation in the throat

SORE THROATS

Apis mellifica – sore throat with stinging, burning pains and visible swelling; it may look puffy and red inside; cold drinks relieve pain temporarily; the person has little thirst despite the burning sensations

Lachesis – sore throat that's worse on the left side or begins on the left and moves to the right; intolerant of tight clothing around neck; the pain gets worse as they are drifting off to sleep; throat may appear dark red or purple inside

Mercurius solubilis – sore throat with excessive salivation, bad breath, and swollen glands; metallic taste in mouth; throat pain extends to the ears; symptoms are worse at night

Phytolacca – sore throat with a dark, red appearance; pain radiates to ears on swallowing; a rough, narrow feeling in throat; warm drinks worsen the pain while cold drinks ameliorate it

SINUS CONGESTION AND PRESSURE

Hydrastis canadensis – chronic sinus conditions with thick, yellow discharge and post-nasal drip; excessive congestion with blocked sensation in sinuses; raw feeling in throat from copious post-nasal drip

Kali bichromicum – thick, stringy, yellow-green mucus that's difficult to expel; pressure at the root of the nose; sinus headache with congestion

Silica – chronic sinus issues that don't resolve easily; a tendency to catch frequent colds; the person may be chilly, sensitive to drafts, and have a generally low resistance to infection



well-indicated acute remedy does not help; it's because the person actually needed a dose of their constitutional remedy.

What follows is the story of a patient with a winter ailment—and how I decided whether she needed her constitutional remedy or an acute remedy.

Ronnie's cough

Ronnie, a 30-year-old teacher, had felt under the weather for a few weeks before she came to me for “a cough that just won't go away.” I told her she should have come in sooner! “I've got a splitting headache, too,” she said. She was blowing her nose repeatedly, with clear to yellow mucus discharge, and drinking hot tea from a thermos. “The tea helps some, but I'm exhausted and pretty discouraged,” she told me.

“It's like a big insult when I step outside on these cold days,” she complained. Each time she went from her house to her car, she'd get a difficult coughing jag that would take minutes to subside. “I really hate this cold weather,” Ronnie said, “and everything and everyone irritates me—especially my partner!”

A slight person, Ronnie had been a patient of mine since her teens. She had previously sought care for cystic acne and constipation, and she'd always responded well to *Silica* as her constitutional remedy.

But as I listened to Ronnie, I knew she did not need *Silica* at this time. Her cough sounded croupy, loud, and barking—not the quieter type of cough we associate with *Silica*. And while *Silica* patients generally feel worse from cold, her reaction to cold air seemed more extreme than I would expect. Finally, her

irritable mood and aggravation from people were significant shifts away from her usual mild, yielding *Silica* temperament. Her presenting symptoms told me she needed a different, acute remedy rather than her underlying constitutional remedy.

Ronnie's strong, croupy cough, intense reactivity to cold temperatures, and pronounced irritable mood pointed to *Hepar sulph*. *Silica* and *Hepar sulph* are considered complementary, meaning that a person who benefits from one might benefit from the other at some point. Both *Silica* and *Hepar sulph* patients are worse from cold in general, but those needing *Hepar sulph* tend to have much stronger reactions to cold.

A few doses of *Hepar sulph* 30c helped Ronnie's cough resolve over the next two days, along with her headache. I also suggested she sip warm water with honey (one of the best ways to soothe irritated mucous membranes) and take additional self-help measures (see below for nutrition and lifestyle examples). As Ronnie's winter illness subsided, her irritability and aversion to her partner lifted, too.

If I see four kids with earaches, they may need four different homeopathic remedies.

Nutritional support

Supporting your immune system through nutrition forms another foundation of winter wellness. Side-step refined sugars and alcohol, as they can weaken your immune system. Focus on the following instead:

Warming, nourishing foods. Root vegetables, hearty soups, and slow-cooked stews give comfort while delivering essential nutrients. Onions, garlic, and ginger have natural antimicrobial properties and can be easily incorporated into warming, winter meals.

Mushrooms. Include a variety in your diet. They are rich in minerals, vitamins, enzymes, and antioxidants, and they boost white blood cell activity to fight infection. While some patients wrinkle their noses at the idea of mushrooms, they often change their minds when I describe the clear immune benefits, versatility, and ease of use—plus share a recipe or two. Add mushrooms to a veggie or tofu scramble at breakfast or slice them into a lunchtime salad. Stir them into tomato sauce for vegan sloppy joes or sauté them with broccoli for a restaurant-style side dish. Dried mushrooms are often more affordable, retain their medicinal properties, and rehydrate quickly during the cooking process.

Microbiome. This most miraculous system—a vast community of microorganisms that live in your body, especially the gut— influences digestion, hormones, cognition, mood, and most importantly, immune function. To have a thriving microbiome that is robust and diverse, include fermented foods and drinks in your diet, and consider taking a probiotic supplement. Also important are prebiotics—non-digestible fiber compounds that feed your gut microbes—found in fruits, veggies, and whole grains. Tip: Mix 1/8 teaspoon of powdered potato starch into most any food or drink to nourish your microbiome—it’s a terrific, affordable prebiotic that will not alter the taste or consistency of your food.

Vitamin D. In fall and winter when sunlight is limited, ensure you get enough of this immune-enhancing vitamin. Eat vitamin D-rich foods, such as mushrooms, egg yolks, and cold water fish, and consider supplements, especially if blood tests show low or low-normal levels (under 40 ng/mL).

Vitamin C. It supports immune function and can help prevent or shorten winter ailments. Include whole food sources, such as citrus fruits, peppers, and leafy greens, and consider taking a vitamin C supplement.

Zinc. This mineral plays a vital role in immune health for both prevention and treatment. Include zinc-rich foods such as pumpkin seeds, legumes, and lean meats in your winter diet. I like zinc lozenges, too, as they are absorbed into your bloodstream where they work to bolster immune function, but they also kill germs on contact if you happen to be brewing a sore throat or cough. Two or three 5-mg lozenges per day during

acute illness or a 15-mg capsule once or twice a day for a week or two can help. (Taking this amount for a longer time is not advised, as it risks driving down copper levels.)

Botanical medicines. I encourage my patients to keep some gentle botanical medicines on hand, including elderberry to support immune function and slippery elm to soothe irritated mucous membranes. Teas and tinctures are easy ways to take botanical medicines. You can also find non-alcohol tinctures made with glycerin, which are more appropriate for children.

Lifestyle support

Sleep well. Consistent, restorative sleep helps in preventing and addressing seasonal illness. The body’s natural circadian rhythms can get disrupted by winter’s reduced daylight, so establish regular bedtime and wake-up times. For those who struggle with seasonal affective disorder (SAD), consider sitting in front of a light box each morning to help with circadian rhythm and to directly counter the sad, heavy feelings.*

Consider using a humidifier, especially at night, to prevent indoor air from becoming intensely dry.

Keep moving. Regular movement, even when you’re confined indoors, supports circulation and immune function. Keeping your body active helps maintain energy levels and mood during darker months. Consider yoga, indoor walking, simple stretching, resistance-band workouts, online Zumba or other fitness classes, and more.

De-stress. When we are stressed out, our immune system takes a hit. You may have examples from your own life of receiving





bad news or going through a challenging time—and then also falling ill. Research from the field of psychoneuroimmunology confirms that the mind affects the nervous system and the nervous system impacts the immune system. That’s why managing stress is so important: we want to both lessen the stress we have and cultivate activities and actions that help dissipate our stress. So, polish off your skills related to mindfulness meditation, deep breathing, and the like, and lean into them in wintertime.

Connect. Good social connections positively impact our immune function. So, even when you don’t feel like it, it’s a good idea to get social events on the calendar during winter. Perhaps join a group that meets regularly at your church, gym, senior center, or kids’ school. Or pick up the phone and call a friend. If you feel like you just don’t have a friend anymore, it may be time to nurture some new friendships, at whatever age and stage of life you are. Joining a class or a team or other interest group that gathers regularly can improve your mood—and boost your immune system!

Air it out. Pay attention to good ventilation, even during cold months, by opening windows briefly each day to let fresh air circulate. This reduces the concentration of indoor pollutants and increases oxygen levels. Consider an indoor air filter: you can make your own by attaching an easily available furnace filter to a simple box fan. Watch a DIY video here: <https://naturemed.org/easy-diy-air-filter-for-the-home/>

Know your limits

While homeopathic remedies and natural approaches can help with common winter ailments, it’s important to recognize when professional medical care is needed. Seek immediate medical

attention if you or your loved one experiences high fever that doesn’t respond to treatment, difficult breathing, chest pain, or rapidly worsening symptoms.

For chronic conditions or if you’re new to homeopathy, consider consulting a qualified homeopathic practitioner who can provide personalized remedy selection and dosing guidance based on your constitution and symptom patterns. (Visit HomeopathyCenter.org/find-a-homeopath)

Build resilience

The keys to successful winter health management lie in preparation, early intervention, and supporting your body’s natural healing capabilities. With these tools at your disposal, you can approach the winter season as an opportunity to deepen your understanding of natural health and build lasting resilience for years to come. 💧

* For more on seasonal affective disorder, see Dr. Rothenberg’s article, “Beating the Winter Blahs, Feeling Happier All Year Long: Shining a light on seasonal affective disorder (SAD)” in the Winter 2015 issue of *Homeopathy Today* at HomeopathyCenter.org/magazine

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Amy Rothenberg, ND, DHANP, is a licensed naturopathic doctor since 1986. She is the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians 2017 Physician of the Year. Her book, *You Finished Treatment, Now What? A Field Guide for Cancer Survivors* is an Amazon Best Seller and Nautilus Book Award Winner. She and long-time partner and collaborator, Dr. Paul Herscu, founded and teach through the New England School of Homeopathy (www.nesh.com). They raised three wonderful now adult children and enjoy the good life in Western Massachusetts, including the arrival of their first grandchild.