

## **Now I'm Sick – What now?!**

Ok, we have seen Round One of the Nasty Winter Bugs already....you know, the one that either you or someone you know has had for the last several weeks. Coughing, coughing, and then more coughing, right? Now what are you going to do (other than following the advice in last month's newsletter)? And even if you did follow those suggestions, you may be wondering, "how *did* I get sick?" Here are some factoids and healthful tips to help shorten the duration and severity of a winter illness, plus some interesting research.

### **Was it from being out in the cold weather, just like Grandma said not to do?**

Well, no and yes. I say no first because the theory that staying out in the cold/wet weather makes you sick is *sort of* an 'old wives tale'. In the mid 1940's, the British did some experiments that otherwise disproved that theory. Here is what they did: 1 group of people took hot showers, and then stood in the cold weather for a few hours wearing wet bathing suits and then got into bed with wet socks. (Prisoners, no doubt!) None of these people got colds! The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> groups had cold viruses sprayed into their noses; one group followed the same hot shower-stand-in-the-cold routine as the first group, while the 3<sup>rd</sup> group got to stay warm and dry. In 2 of 3 tests, the warm and dry group got more colds than the cold/wet groups!

What does it all mean? It means that yes, it's okay to work out in the cold and wet weather as long as you take measures to stay healthy, such as eating and sleeping well, and staying hydrated. If you are fatigued, or otherwise not taking good care of yourself, then yes, you probably have a better chance of catching something.

### **Treatments, old and new**

In the old days, whiskey was an oft-recommended cold remedy (hmmm...sounds enticing), and then patent medicines containing alcohol and morphine were peddled as cure-alls. Sadly, we haven't progressed much further than that, as today's cold medicines contain nearly twice the amount of alcohol found in wine. Your body causes the symptoms you experience with most viral illnesses. Fever raises body temperature making life rough for viral invaders. Mucus is created to trap and remove bugs from your nose and lungs, and congestion is caused by increased blood flow, which brings immune cells to the fight. While these symptoms are bothersome, do your best to live with them as letting them work will actually speed healing. Taking commercial cold medicines stops these processes from occurring, which may potentially lengthen your illness. Your symptoms are evidence that your immune system is in the fight. Drugs that suppress symptoms cripple your immune response.

Guess what the main symptom-fighting ingredients of these medicines are? Ephedrine, which is a vasoconstrictor (to reduce congestion), antihistamines to counter the 'speediness' of the ephedrine, and alcohol that in general makes you sleepy. Acetaminophen is a pain reliever, but is hard on the liver.

I do occasionally recommend a cough suppressant, especially when a cough prevents one from sleeping. Lack of quality sleep will keep you sick, longer. A 'wet' or productive cough is generally good, you are getting stuff out. A dry, hacking cough is one that you may want to suppress.

Other things you can do:

- Gargle with very warm salt water if you have a sore throat.
- Stay warm, if not hot as much of the time while you are sick. If you can even slightly increase your body temperature, this simulates a fever.
- Inhaling steam from the sink, with a bit of eucalyptus oil will lessen nasal congestion. Make a tent over your head with a towel to keep the vapors in.
- Sleep with a couple of pillows to keep your head up to assist with drainage.
- Rest, rest, rest. Why are you so tired when sick? Because your body is expending a tremendous amount of energy trying to kill the bugs off. So give yourself some extra rest.
- Hydrate. This will make the phlegm easier to remove, and may lessen the severity of a hacking cough.
- Nutraceuticals: There are many helpful natural medicines out there; I recommend different ones based on a person's symptoms and type of illness. Look out though; there is a lot of junk out there too. Call if you have a question about a supplement.

Lastly, remember the 'Neck Check': If your symptoms are above the neck, then it's probably okay to train. If they are below, then you should probably rest. Also just listen to your body when considering a workout when you are under the weather.

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