

As we approach the darkest and coldest time of the year in the Northern Hemisphere, I am compelled to share with you one of my favorite and most effective strategies for avoiding colds and flus. I have used this method many times myself, and I have guided hundreds of patients through this process over the last decade.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), colds and flus are considered to be the result of “external pathogenic influences” that work their way through the surface of the body to enter the deeper layers. Going to bed with wet hair, sleeping next to a cold draft, or leaving your neck unprotected from a cold wind are all examples of how “Cold”, as a pathogenic factor, can penetrate the surface of the body and begin the disease process.

This environmentally based theory of disease precedes the advent of microbiology and the ensuing discovery that colds and flus are both communicable and are associated with specific microorganisms. In TCM terms, during the onset of a cold or flu, the defensive “Qi” or “Wei Qi” (immune system) of the body interacts with the pathogenic influence as it affects the biological terrain. Strong “defensive Qi” protects the body from the breakdown of equilibrium, even in austere conditions, while weak “defensive Qi” leaves the individual susceptible to even relatively mild pathogenic influences. Once the internal terrain is environmentally compromised, opportunistic infections can take hold.

Like most disease processes, the treatment of colds and flus is most effective during the earliest stages, and before an infection has established itself, there is a window of opportunity for us to change the state of our internal environment, and stop the infection from getting established.

### **Tips for avoiding colds and flus:**

Learn to identify your earliest signs and symptoms i.e. sore/dry/scratchy throat , stiff neck, slight cough, itchy ears, tingling scalp, mild fever, chills, fatigue, light headedness, sneezing, runny nose, achiness, lack of focus, or whatever these might be for you. The key is to be able to identify the onset of a pathological invasion at its *earliest stage*.

Take action at first sign:

1. Eat a bowl of hot and sour soup with extra spice

2. Take diaphoretics – plants that help induce a sweat. Yin Qiao San tablets are a classic remedy and are often taken every 2-3 hours at the onset of a cold or flu. A diaphoretic tea with linden flowers and mint is good too.
3. Drink extra water
4. 30 minutes after taking diaphoretics, take a hot bath with Epsom salts or mustard bath to induce a sweat
5. Stay bundled when getting out of bath. It's important to stay hot, and keep a sweat going, even if it's somewhat uncomfortable .
6. Go to bed early and get to sleep
7. Repeat as needed unless very fatigued
8. If symptoms progress, change strategy