

HEALTH

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TCM

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Cold comforts

According to western medicine, colds are generally caused by rhinoviruses, and flu is the result of influenza viruses.

Chinese medicine, rather than taking a microscopic approach, adopts a holistic concept to explain the onset of colds or flu.

It says such illnesses are caused by unfavourable influences from climatic and seasonal environments. These are classified as exogenous evil *chi* or exogenous evils.

Chinese medicine uses the concept of exogenous evils to explain bacteria or viruses, but uses different diagnoses and prescribes different treatments.

There are six evils: wind, summer heat, fire, dampness, dryness and cold. Wind is considered to be the leading evil that causes colds and flu. But an evil seldom attacks alone. For example, wind-cold evils are more prevalent in winter, whereas wind-heat evils are more prevalent in spring and summer.

Traditional treatment for colds and flu aims to restore the body's harmony, rather than focus on removal of a virus.

This means the virus or bacteria can no longer find a good habitat to survive, and the symptoms should gradually recede. Common symptoms

are the result of a battle between the body's protective *chi* and the invading exogenous evil *chi*.

Protective *chi* is a kind of vital energy that circulates through the skin and muscles in the body.

Fear about cold or aversion to cold temperatures is a first sign of colds or flu. It's an indication that an evil is attacking the body. Protective *chi*, being warm, fights against this. This can lead to a rise in body temperature and fever. The higher the fever, the fiercer the fight against the exogenous evil, and the more severe the cold and flu. The degree of fever helps differentiate what kind of evil *chi* is causing the illness.

Based on the type of evil causing the cold and flu symptoms, a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner can recommend a prescription of herbs that can be taken as a tea. They may also recommend traditional prescription pills. For example, wind-heat colds and flu can be treated with honeysuckle

and forsythia powder (*yin qiao san*). This is available in tablet and soluble granule forms from pharmacies and Chinese medicine supplement stores.

For wind-cold type colds and flu, schizonepeta and saposchnikovia powder may be used. Similar herbal formulas modified from this can be found in pharmacies. Other remedies commonly prescribed include ginger tea for wind-cold ailments and chrysanthemum and peppermint tea for wind-heat.

Interventions to help prevent colds or flu include eating foods that allow the body to ward off invasion. Herbs such as cordyceps and mushrooms – lingzhi (*Ganoderma lucidum*) and yunzhi (*Coriolus versicolor*) – can be taken in supplement forms or incorporated into dishes such as soups.

Wind-heat colds and flu occur most commonly, the symptoms being fever, fear of wind or aversion to windy conditions, headache, thirst, sweating, nasal congestion with thick secretions and a red, sore throat.

Symptoms of wind-cold ailments include fear of cold, chills, mild fever or absence of fever, general soreness, headaches, a preference for hot drinks, nasal congestion with watery secretions and a cough.

Rose Tse and Angela Collingwood are editors for Sheng-Nong, a subsidiary of Integrated Chinese Medicine. Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or general practitioner

