

## **Making Ripples**

### **The Science of Natural Cold Remedies**

by Amanda Bancroft

According to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, there is no strong scientific evidence that natural remedies are effective against a cold or flu. They also cite, two paragraphs down, that 2011 studies have shown Zinc to reduce the length and severity of colds when taken within 24 hours after symptoms appear, and that taking low doses for five months reduced the number of colds in children.

If that sounds contradictory, well, it is. They call it “inconsistent findings,” which is a fancy way of saying they don’t know. The scientific literature’s stance on chicken soup: studies done in 2000 and 2012 indicate that chicken soup ingredients (with vegetables included) actually do kill viral cells and prevent the growth of new ones, but all they can say is that the evidence points more in its favor rather than against it, and it still may not be a safe treatment because small children could choke on chicken bones. While the scientists argue about the degree of certainty we have regarding natural remedies, there are a few safe things commonly found in a person’s diet that you can try to soothe your symptoms.

Garlic is heralded on WebMD for use in many conditions, including building the immune system and treating fever, coughs, and sinus congestion. It’s more effective to use fresh garlic cloves, not powder. Comically, the science is stronger in suggesting that people who take garlic get fewer tick bites compared to the insufficient evidence that people get fewer colds. Still, science shows garlic has strong antifungal properties and it tastes pretty good!

Lemon, which contains vitamin C, and honey both contain antimicrobial properties that studies have shown to inhibit the growth of infection-causing microbes, strengthen the immune system, and as an effective cough suppressant and sleep aid.

The scientific jury is still out on the use of probiotics, but some studies find that “probiotics have generally decreased the number of respiratory infections among regular users.” Echinacea has been shown to reduce cold symptoms in certain people, making it a “promising candidate for cold prevention through immune system support,” according to HealthLine.com. Vitamin C studies have demonstrated mixed results, too, but there’s moderate evidence that it can help treat a cold, and is a frequently used remedy that is considered safe. Goldenseal may be the most promising, since the only research that has been done indicates that berberine, a compound in goldenseal, has significant antibiotic and antiviral properties, but again because no research has been done on its use against the common cold, science can’t recommend its use – yet. Perhaps the best way to evaluate a natural remedy for your own cold is to ask: “Is it considered safe when taken in this way, and is it helping me personally?”

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