



REAL ANSWERS for REAL PEOPLE

by Robert Corish, MD

Q: I seem to get the flu multiple times a year, even in summer.

I've had to miss work twice already this year because of the flu. Are there any natural ways to help prevent the flu?

A: The flu affects millions of people annually and the 2017-2018 season was the worst flu season in over 15 years. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the flu is responsible for a staggering 110 million cumulative sick days (missing work) in the workforce each year. Since the flu is a viral infection, antibiotics are not effective, but fortunately nature offers some great antiviral therapies. Three potent natural antivirals include elderberry, propolis, and *Glycyrrhiza*.

Elderberry has been used traditionally to support the immune system against viral infections and possesses some antibacterial properties too. One of the ways elderberry works is by preventing virus particles from entering your cells, thus stopping them from replicating. By reducing the viral load, elderberry allows our immune system to manage the insults and function more optimally.

Traveling can be stressful to your immune system, especially as it is challenged by multiple exposures such as poor air quality, a disruptive diet, stress, and a variety of microbial hazards, all of which greatly increase

your chances of contracting a viral illness, including the flu. Sometimes, despite your best efforts, the flu is unavoidable. This is when elderberry has been shown to reduce the severity of symptoms and promote a more rapid recovery. In one clinical study, participants who were traveling via airplane were given Austrian elderberry or a placebo. The elderberry group experienced significantly less flu symptoms with a shorter duration when compared to the placebo group.

Since elderberry preparations can vary greatly, look for one that is clinically studied, freeze-dried to preserve the plant's sensitive compounds, and standardized to anthocyanin content.

Propolis also has powerful antiviral properties, and its use as a therapy dates back to Ancient Egypt. Bees gather plant material from trees, shrubs, and buds, which is used to create propolis. Rich in compounds containing flavonoids and terpenoids, propolis is antiviral, antibacterial, and anti-fungal.

Being that propolis differs from hive to hive, it is best to obtain a propolis from a controlled hive environment, where the bees have access to premium plant species and yield a higher-quality propolis full of beneficial health compounds. It is also important to find a propolis that is purified and beeswax-free, which means more immune-supportive compounds, without the wax and impurities.

Glycyrrhiza glabra is a triterpene glycoside which is derived from the licorice root. The key active component of licorice is Glabridin, which has been clinically shown to possess anti-inflammatory and antiviral properties. Glabridin enhances production of interferon gamma—an antiviral compound secreted by your own T-cells, which inhibits viral replication. Glabridin also prevents viral attachment, internalization, and entry into cells. In essence, Glabridin boosts the immune

system and protects cells from viral invasion and replication.

Make sure to look for a deglycyrrhized licorice (DGL) *Glycyrrhiza glabra* root extract, which is standardized to contain 3.5 percent glabridin.

Other tips for preventing the flu:

- Get plenty of rest, at least 7 to 9 hours per night.
- Stay hydrated—ideally drink half of your body weight in ounces per day (e.g. 150 lb. person = 75 oz. of water per day).
- Wash your hands frequently.
- Limit sugar and alcohol consumption.
- Try to reduce stress as much as possible.
- Increase probiotic intake, especially probiotics with multiple strains: *Bifidobacterium bifidum*, *Lactobacillus plantarum*, *L. rhamnosus*, *L. casei*, and *L. brevis*.
- Supplement with zinc at the onset of symptoms, as it has been shown to shorten the duration of colds and flu.



Q: My job involves sitting at a desk for 8 hours a day. Sometimes when I leave, my legs feel heavy, swollen, and sore. A friend recommended compression socks. Are there other natural remedies you recommend?

A: Unfortunately, much of today's work environment involves prolonged sitting or standing. While compression stockings and socks are useful, they don't resolve the underlying problem and cannot compensate for chronic vascular problems and long periods of inactivity. Sitting has now been described as "the new smoking" due to the severe health consequences associated with prolonged sitting. In 2017, a study was published that demonstrated sedentary behavior was a significant risk factor for all-cause mortality. The risk was highest for those who sat for more than 13 hours each day—200% greater risk of death—compared to people sitting for less than 11 hours per day.

So what can be done to help offset some of the health consequences?

- Consider an adjustable-height sitting/standing desk.
- Stand up from your desk at least once every 1/2 hour.
- Walk around the office and stretch on breaks.
- Take a brisk walk before or after work and take the stairs whenever possible.
- Walk to a co-worker's desk, rather than sending an email.
- Find a partner who is also interested in walking more.

In addition to these recommendations, there are also some natural substances that can assist with the discomfort you are experiencing. Prolonged sitting may lead to circulation changes in your lower extremities, resulting in conditions such as chronic venous insufficiency (CVI), varicose veins, deep vein thrombosis (DVT) (also known as clots), and osteoporosis.

Red vine leaf extract has been clinically studied for its ability to relieve pain and swelling from conditions like varicose veins and CVI. In a clinical study, people with CVI were given either high-dose red vine leaf, low-dose red vine leaf, or a placebo. After twelve weeks, both of the red vine leaf groups experienced significant reductions in leg volume and circumference, meaning less swelling and enhanced circulation.

Butcher's Broom is also a well-known botanical for assisting with circulation and helping alleviate symptoms of CVI. In a clinical study, participants who received Butcher's broom experienced significant reductions in their leg volume—ankle and leg circumference—compared to placebo. Additionally, the Butcher's broom group reported an improvement of symptoms—with a reduction in tension, heaviness, and tingling in the legs.

Mesoglycan provides the building blocks required for healthy and strong

blood vessels. This is important because when you sit for long periods of time, it can take longer for the blood to travel back to your heart from the lower extremities, which can create 'pooling and stasis' of blood in the veins of your legs, and make you more susceptible to forming clots. Mesoglycan has been clinically studied for its positive effects on DVT, CVI, and clot prevention. To most closely mimic the compounds found in your body, mesoglycan derived from a porcine (pig) source is best.

The take home message is: The more you can get up and move, the better. Even short breaks of standing up, stretching and walking during the work day will make a significant difference in your health outcome and disease reduction. ■



Robert Corish, MD, is an expert in preventative medicine. His interdisciplinary approach incorporates conventional medicine with integrative medicine and orthomolecular medicine, a combination that offers many more tools to the physician. Dr. Corish describes himself as a "lifelong medical student" as he continues to study and research the latest breakthroughs—particularly in functional nutrition and preventative medicine strategies. He is a Fellow of the Health Studies Collegium, and an associate of the American College of Nutrition.