

10 Natural Remedies for Flu Symptoms

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October 10, 2026

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Severe flu season can affect millions, but symptoms such as fever, tiredness, swelling, and mucus often show that your immune system is working to fight the infection inside the body
- A large systematic review found zinc lozenges may modestly shorten common cold and flu duration by 2.4 days
- Honey, propolis, royal jelly, and other bee products contain natural compounds that may act against viruses, but most evidence still comes from laboratory and animal studies rather than human trials
- Tea tree oil did not kill the flu virus directly, but lab tests found that it interrupted an early step the virus needs to multiply inside infected cells
- Fluids, rest, broth, honey, salt water, steam, and moist air ease symptoms, while diet, exercise, and sunlight support health. We also review elderberry, quercetin, zinc, vitamin A, vitamin C, NAC, vitamin D, echinacea, and andrographis

The flu is a common illness that spreads easily and comes back every year, though some years are worse than others. According to data from 2025-2026, doctor visits for flu-like symptoms have reached their highest level since the 1997-98 flu season.¹

While the risk of dying from influenza is low, it can lead to a few days of discomfort, causing you to miss school or work and stay in bed to recover. Once the virus enters the body, it sets off a chain of events that can affect nearly everything about how you feel

and function.

The good news is, your body is equipped with its own highly effective defense system: your immune system. As long as it stays one step ahead of the virus, you'll feel better again quickly. And while you recover, there are simple remedies and well-studied nutrients that may give your immune system the support it needs to stay ahead — we'll discuss them below.

When the Flu Strikes, Your Body Springs Into Action

According to West Holistic Medicine, when the influenza virus enters the body, the immune system launches a coordinated response designed to slow the viral replication and support recovery. Understanding that process can help explain why many common flu symptoms occur in the first place.²

- **Many flu symptoms are part of your body's defense strategy** — Fever helps make the environment less favorable for viral replication, inflammation calls immune cells to the site of infection, fatigue redirects energy toward healing, and mucus helps trap and remove viral particles.
- **How integrative and conventional flu care differ** — Conventional treatment typically focuses on relieving discomfort through measures such as reducing fever, suppressing coughing, and easing aches.

On the other hand, an integrative approach aims to support the body's natural healing response while managing symptoms. The goal is not only to improve comfort but also to promote recovery, reduce complications, and support long-term immune resilience.

While no nutrient can prevent or treat viral infections on its own, some have been studied far more extensively than others. Zinc is one of the best-known examples, and researchers have spent years investigating whether it can influence how long common respiratory illnesses last or affect symptom severity.

Can Zinc Really Help You Fight a Cold?

Published in the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, researchers analyzed clinical trials to evaluate the efficacy of zinc against the common cold. The review included 34 randomized controlled trials involving 8,526 children and adults from 13 countries. Some studies examined whether taking zinc regularly could prevent colds, while others evaluated whether zinc helped people recover faster once they became sick.³

- **The evidence challenged one of zinc's most popular claims** — Many people take zinc supplements daily in hopes of avoiding colds altogether. However, when researchers analyzed the prevention studies, they found that people taking zinc were about as likely to catch a cold as those taking a placebo.
- **The results became more encouraging after symptoms appeared** — While zinc did not seem particularly useful for prevention, the story changed when researchers looked at treatment studies. Among people who started taking zinc after becoming sick, colds were shortened by an average of about 2.4 days. This finding was rated low-certainty by the review authors, and results varied considerably from trial to trial.
- **Symptom relief was less impressive than many expected** — Researchers also examined whether zinc reduced the severity of cold symptoms. Some studies reported improvements in symptoms such as cough, sore throat, congestion, sneezing, and muscle aches, but these findings were inconsistent.
- **Mild side effects reported** — The review found that people using zinc experienced more mild side effects than those taking a placebo. The most common complaints included nausea, upset stomach, dry mouth, mouth irritation, and an unpleasant taste.

Zinc may not match every claim made about it, but its mixed results raise another question: Could other natural products affect viruses in different ways? For example, bee products, such as honey, propolis, and royal jelly, have been used medicinally for

centuries, and researchers are now taking a closer look at what they may offer.

Could Bee Products Have Antiviral Properties?

In a 2022 review published in the journal *Nutrients*, researchers attempted to determine whether compounds naturally produced by bees could help inhibit viruses and support immune function. They explored a wide range of bee products, including honey, propolis, bee pollen, bee bread, royal jelly, bee venom, and beeswax.⁴

- **Honey is one of the most studied bee products** — Laboratory and human studies have explored honey's effects against viruses such as herpes simplex virus, influenza, respiratory syncytial virus, rubella virus, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and even severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Researchers believe several plant-derived compounds in honey, including flavonoids and phenolic acids, may have antiviral effects.
- **There may be promise in propolis** — Often called "bee glue," propolis is rich in flavonoids and other bioactive compounds. Multiple studies reviewed by the authors found antiviral activity against herpes viruses, influenza viruses, rhinoviruses, HIV, adenoviruses, and coronaviruses. In some experiments, propolis extracts significantly reduced viral replication and appeared to enhance the activity of certain antiviral medications.

Much of this evidence comes from laboratory and animal research (though some early human studies exist), so it is not yet clear whether the same effects would consistently hold up in people.

- **Encouraging findings for bee venom and royal jelly** — Bee venom contains compounds such as melittin and phospholipase A2 that showed activity against several viruses in laboratory studies. Royal jelly, meanwhile, demonstrated antiviral effects against SARS-CoV-2, herpes simplex virus, and coxsackievirus in a smaller number of investigations.

Bee products are not the only natural substances drawing interest. Some may work in broad ways, while others appear to affect one small part of an infection. Tea tree oil is one example, and its effect on the flu virus may not be what you expect.

How Tea Tree Oil May Interfere with the Flu Virus

Tea tree oil is perhaps best known for its use in skin care products and natural cleaning solutions, but researchers have also explored whether it has antiviral properties.

Published in the journal *Antiviral Research*, scientists investigated how tea tree oil affects influenza A (H1N1) virus after infection occurs.⁵

- **The study focused on one specific flu virus strain** — Researchers tested tea tree oil against influenza A/PR/8, an H1N1 influenza virus, using Madin-Darby Canine Kidney (MDCK) cells commonly used in influenza research. They also evaluated several naturally occurring tea tree oil compounds, including terpinen-4-ol, terpinolene, and alpha-terpineol.
- **Early results showed tea tree oil could slow viral replication but does not eliminate the virus** — Previous experiments found that tea tree oil reduced influenza virus replication at concentrations that did not significantly damage healthy cells. However, it did not directly kill influenza viruses, nor did it protect cells from infection before exposure.
- **Timing experiments revealed a very narrow window of activity** — When scientists added tea tree oil at different stages of infection, they found the strongest effects occurred within the first two hours of infection. This pointed to interference with an early stage of the viral life cycle.

Research into tea tree oil is only one part of the larger picture. When flu symptoms begin, several simple steps may help make the days more comfortable. Some are well known, while a few may be easier to overlook during a busy flu season.

10 Natural Ways to Help You Deal with the Flu

In the U.S., flu activity often begins in the fall, continues through the spring, and usually reaches its highest point between December and February. When symptoms leave you achy, tired, and congested, these simple home remedies can make the days easier.^{6,7}

- 1. Drink plenty of fluids** — Fever and sweating can cause your body to lose fluids. Drinking water, herbal tea, or clear broth throughout the day can help prevent dehydration and thin mucus. Avoid alcohol and too much caffeine because they can make dehydration worse.
- 2. Get more rest** — Your body needs extra energy while fighting an infection. Get plenty of sleep, avoid hard exercise, and keep your daily routine light.
- 3. Eat warm broth or chicken soup** — Warm bone broth or chicken soup provides fluids, sodium, and potassium, which may help replace what your body loses through fever and sweating. The warmth may also soothe your throat and make thick mucus easier to clear.
- 4. Gargle with salt water** — Warm salt water may help calm a sore, swollen throat. Mix one-quarter to one-half teaspoon of sea salt into a glass of warm water. Gargle for about 30 seconds and then spit it out.
- 5. Use honey for a cough or sore throat** — Adding honey to warm herbal tea may help soothe coughing and throat irritation. Ginger or peppermint tea may also feel comforting when you are sick and give you another simple way to increase your fluid intake.
- 6. Use essential oils carefully** — Breathing in the aroma of diluted tea tree or eucalyptus oil may help ease feelings of congestion. While the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) classifies some essential oils as Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) for use in tiny amounts as flavorings, this does not mean they should be swallowed at home. Never ingest [essential oils](#), place diluted oils inside your nose, or on the skin.

- 7. Run a clean humidifier** — Dry indoor air can worsen coughing and throat irritation. A humidifier adds moisture to the air, which may help keep your nose and airways from becoming too dry. Clean the device often to prevent mold and bacteria from growing.
- 8. Take a steamy shower** — Warm steam helps loosen thick mucus and briefly opens blocked nasal passages. A steamy shower is one of the easiest ways to try this. Avoid placing your face over very hot water because it may cause burns.
- 9. Sleep with your head slightly elevated** — Lying flat on bed can make mucus collect in your throat and sinuses, which may leave you feeling more stuffed up at night. If you're dealing with flu symptoms, using an extra pillow to raise your head may encourage drainage and make breathing more comfortable while you sleep. Once you're feeling better, however, it's generally best to [return to your usual sleeping position](#) rather than routinely stacking extra pillows.
- 10. Consider evidence-based nutrients** — Beyond home remedies and the nutrients already covered, several other supplements and herbs are commonly discussed for immune support during flu recovery.
 - **Elderberry** — Long used for respiratory support;⁸ may shorten flu duration by 2 to 4 days,^{9,10} inhibit viral replication,¹¹ and provide antioxidant support; best started at the first sign of symptoms.
 - **Quercetin** — Inhibits viral entry into cells,¹² helps modulate inflammation,^{13,14} and works synergistically with vitamin C¹⁵ and zinc.¹⁶
 - **Vitamin C** — Supports white blood cell function,^{17,18} antioxidant protection,¹⁹ and reduced duration/severity of respiratory infections.²⁰
 - **Vitamin A** — Maintains healthy mucous membranes and supports immune cell production;²¹ used short-term only, under practitioner guidance.

- **N-acetylcysteine (NAC)** — Helps thin and clear respiratory mucus,²² and reduces oxidative stress during illness;²³ typically dosed at 600 mg twice daily.^{24,25}
- **Vitamin D** — Best optimized through sensible sun exposure. Remember to avoid direct sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. until you've cut back on seed oils for six months; the recommended level is 60 to 80 ng/mL — have your levels tested at least twice yearly to know if you are getting enough.
- **Echinacea** — An herbal plant in the daisy family; the root, flowers, and leaves support immune function;²⁶ typically taken preventively through the winter months.
- **Andrographis** — Also known as the "king of bitters," this traditional Ayurvedic herb is an immune modulator historically used for the common cold to ease cough and sore throat, and shorten duration of illness.²⁷

As with any supplement, it's worth talking with a healthcare provider about what's appropriate for you.

Flu Care for Kids

Flu season can feel more stressful when your child is the one who's sick. The following tips focus on concerns that are more specific to children, including fever care, safe supplement use, and signs that medical help may be needed:²⁸

1. **Don't rush to lower every fever** — Fever is a normal part of the body's response to infection. Children older than 3 months may not always need fever-reducing medicine if they remain comfortable and continue drinking fluids. However, any rectal temperature above 100.4 degrees F (38 degrees C) in a baby younger than 3 months needs immediate medical attention.

- 2. Ease fever discomfort gently** — For an older child who feels uncomfortable, try lightweight clothing, a cool compress, or a lukewarm bath. Avoid cold baths, ice, and heavy blankets. These may cause shivering and make your child feel worse.
- 3. Help clear congestion before bed** — Staying hydrated, using a saline nasal rinse or neti pot, and sleeping with the head slightly elevated may encourage mucus drainage and make nighttime breathing more comfortable.
- 4. Ask before giving supplements** — Children need different amounts of herbs and supplements than adults. Talk with your child's doctor before giving a new supplement. One more safety note: Honey should never be given to infants younger than 12 months old because of the risk of infant botulism.

With all these tips in mind, don't forget the basics that support your immune system every day, not just when the flu hits. Eating nutritious, whole foods, avoiding seed oils, getting enough exercise, and soaking up some morning sunlight all give your body the resources it needs to respond well when illness strikes.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Managing Flu Symptoms

Q: How do conventional and integrative approaches to flu care differ?

A: Conventional care often focuses on lowering fever, easing aches, and suppressing coughing. An integrative approach also manages discomfort, but it aims to work with the body's natural response through rest, hydration, nourishing foods, and other supportive measures that may make recovery easier.

Q: What did the large review in the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews find about zinc?

A: Researchers reviewed 34 clinical trials involving more than 8,500 people. Zinc did not appear to prevent most colds, but it may shorten symptoms by about 2.4 days for some people. Results varied widely, and side effects included nausea, mouth irritation, dry mouth, and a metallic taste.

Q: Why are scientists interested in honey and other bee products?

A: Honey, propolis, royal jelly, bee venom, and other bee products contain flavonoids, phenolic acids, and other natural compounds. These substances have shown activity against influenza and several other viruses in early research, although much of the evidence still comes from laboratory and animal studies.

Q: Why did tea tree oil become a promising antiviral candidate?

A: Laboratory tests found that tea tree oil slowed influenza replication without badly damaging healthy cells. Researchers later discovered that it may interfere with viral uncoating, an early step the virus needs to release its genetic material. These findings are promising, but they have not yet been confirmed in people.

Q: What simple steps may help you manage flu symptoms?

A: Drink plenty of fluids, get extra rest, eat warm broth, gargle with salt water, and use honey for coughing or throat irritation. A clean humidifier, a steamy shower, and sleeping with your head slightly raised may also make congestion and nighttime breathing easier.

**This article discusses research conducted in laboratory, cell culture, animal, and clinical trial settings; results from these studies may not directly translate to how a given remedy performs for any individual. This information is provided for educational purposes and is not a substitute for personalized medical advice.*

If you are pregnant, nursing, elderly, immunocompromised, managing a chronic condition, or caring for an infant or young child, or if flu symptoms are severe, prolonged, or worsening, talk to a qualified healthcare provider before trying any new remedy or supplement discussed in this article.

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