

Chill Out

Wellness for body, mind and spirit

It's a cultural tradition we love to embrace: From the end of November to January 1, we overlook our calendars, get little red, instill copious cocktails, and treat holiday buffets and dessert trays as if they were a cough. While this devil may care attitude toward our physical well-being may bring merry memories, it also wreaks havoc on our immune systems, leaving many of us with at least the sniffles, if not a full-on flu virus. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. flu season ranges from November through March, but peak flu outbreaks usually occur in January and February. And it's no wonder, considering the immune-suppressing qualities of alcohol, dairy and sugars found in the holiday season's most popular treats. "It's really about recovering from overindulgence this time of year," says Dr. Deborah Messo, owner and wellness director at Sea Change Healing Center. "We've taxed our systems and now they need to be revived."

With the shortages of vaccines last fall, 2005 may leave flu-susceptible folk like you who has a job and/or kids or teaches solitary classes especially vulnerable. Since you can't leave the flu with a quick fix of antibiotics, the afflicted are turning to natural remedies in record numbers—the CDC reports that 55 percent of Americans now combine alternative treatments with conventional medicines. This surging popularity has made for a selection and availability of quality products and services that extend far beyond the ubiquitous packets of Emergen-C. These therapies can alleviate symptoms with no side effects, shorten the lifespan of a virus and, if they're administered early, even prevent a debilitating episode altogether.

Herbal remedies

"The best treatment for the flu is prevention, meaning you should avoid junk food, exercise regularly, get adequate rest and stay emotionally healthy," says Flax from M.D. Frank Ligan, author of *Total Wellness: 7 Key Steps to Revolutionize Vitality, and Long-Term Health*. If you do start to feel the telltale symptoms—body aches, chills, headaches, itchy throat—Ligan says acting early is the key to the effectiveness of herbal remedies. At first signs of illness, he prescribes three tablets three times a day of Ebsertoxin (516, available at Vitamin Shoppe locations around the city), a popular German immune booster for more than 40 years. The therapeutic pills are an upgraded form of standard echinacea products, as they combine two potent echinacea extracts, along with Thujia leaf and wild ginger, and address a broader range of immune functions. In conjunction with Ebsertoxin, Ligan recommends Sambucol (516, available at www.ashwagandha.com), a black elderberry extract which has been gaining popularity in the last few years. Clinical studies have shown that the dark liquid has an immunoprotective and/or immunostimulatory effect, lowering viral antibodies and potentially reducing the duration of flu symptoms to three or four days.

The 1,000-year-old Chinese remedy Luo-Hao-Kuo (LHK) (520-524, available at Willow Chiropractic) is another viral-busting treatment recently made available in the U.S.

NO TINGE

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NEW SPA

Red & White

No matter the time of year, seeking refuge in the warmth of the new Red & White is a Valentine to yourself—and that's before you choose from the menu of spa options. This tony urban and suburban space offers a variety of facial treatments, including the Sea-C Spa Facial—a collagen-stimulating, intensive antioxidant treatment that tightens the aging process. The White Collar massage reduces balance and tension to the body with a combination of Swedish and deep-tissue techniques, while the Red Arabia massage offers a choice of essential oils. Big into the water? You've just seen for a White Pressure, which applies reflexology or hot/cold for the upcoming spring, by the Garden Pedicure, which features a soak in water infused with aromatic, dried flowers. —Sarah Robbins

COLD WAR

No flu vaccine? No problem. Alternative therapies can keep winter bugs at bay.

By Jennifer Remolón

Illustration by Lynda Nordell



3. **Nasal irrigation:** To the squeamish they may seem gross, but Neti pots have been used in Indian medicine for thousands of years as a natural way to decongest nasal passages. More-advanced techniques involve herbs and essential oils, but the simplest way to work the device is to make a lukewarm water and salt solution. Sit your head to the side, pour the liquid into one nostril and be wowed by what comes out the other one. Breathe Eucalyptus Neti Pot, \$28 (available at www.complementaryhealing.com), 476 Court Street between Fourth and Locust St., Carroll Gardens, 718-254-4075. —JR

At Brooklyn's [Complementary Healing](http://www.complementaryhealing.com) (476 Court St. between Fourth and Locust St., Carroll Gardens, 718-254-4075) flu survival techniques come in the form of two-ancient Eastern therapies. Co-owner Peggy Regis recommends a combination of acupuncture

and, this year's stranger-of-the-tribe trend, cupping to treat winter infections. Regis, a doctor of acupuncture and a certified Chinese herbalist, first identifies a patient's Chinese medicine "pattern"—"wind cold," which reveals itself in headaches, body aches and congestion with clear mucus, or "wind heat" which has symptoms of sore throat, thirst, fever and cold with yellow phlegm. After diagnosing a patient's pattern, she chooses the points on the body to treat. "Acupuncture helps strengthen the body and allows it to return to a more balanced state. It also breaks external pathogens from entering and quickens healing time," Regis says. When the needles are removed (after about 15 minutes), cupping therapy begins. The two-inch glass cups are adhered to the skin by creating a suction effect with a flick of the hand. What happens next feels like a wild pinching massage. Regis says the cups are bringing local oxygen to the surface and extracting toxins from under the skin. When the treatment is over, you'll feel a little worn out, especially if you were a sick. Regis recommends clients go home and take a hot bath or shower to promote sweating, keep hydrated and get plenty of rest. Just like mom used to tell you. ■