Chicken Soup Cure May Not be a Myth

Chicken soup may provide relief from the symptoms of the cold season through neutrophilic action. There are an estimated 20 to 50 million influenza virus infections annually in the United States, resulting in 24 million patient visits, 300,000 hospitalizations, and 20,000 to 50,000 deaths.¹ The synergistic properties of chicken soup may decrease the inflammatory response associated with viral illnesses.

■ The Neutrophil Response
The body responds to cold symptoms in the form of a hypersensitivity reaction.² During this reaction, the human body experiences an inflammatory response that Cohnheim describes as having three characteristics: 1) blood vessel dilation, which increases blood flow to the area, 2) increased vascular permeability, and 3) adherence of white blood cells to the inner walls of vessels at the site of injury. This inflammatory response is nonspecific even on subsequent exposures to the same stimulus.² It is a self-limiting response taking generally 8-10 days.²

■ Neutrophilic Suppression
In the October 2000 issue of Chest, the authors state; “colds are associated with the generation of neutrophilic chemotactic activities.”³ The body’s response is in the form of a hypersensitivity reaction. The authors add that suppressing neutrophilic action could minimize symptoms associated with a cold or virus.

■ Natural Remedies
Chicken soup has been considered a remedy for cold and viral symptoms for centuries.⁴,⁵ Inhaling its warm vapors raises the temperature of the respiratory passages and loosens thickened secretions.⁶

An in vitro project initiated in 1998 and later published in October 2000 tested the effectiveness of market brand soup products for the ability to inhibit neutrophilic activity.¹ The project found that soup significantly inhibited neutrophil migration with activity responsive in the solution or liquid part of the soup mixture.³

■ Hot Water or Hot Soup?
Nasal airflow resistance was measured in 15 healthy subjects before drinking hot water, chicken soup, and cold water, and then in 5- and 30-minute intervals.⁷ The researchers concluded that drinking hot fluids helped to increase nasal mucous velocity partially or completely through the inhalation of the vapors. Hot water was superior to cold water, but not as effective as hot chicken soup. Hot tea and chicken soup helped to improve the function of protective cilia guarding the body from entering contagions.⁶

■ The Ideal Recipe
The active ingredients in traditional recipes include: celery, onions, carrots, parsley, mushrooms, and parsnips. These are known for their medicinal and antioxidant properties.⁸

Rennard et al. noted that aromatic seasonings enhanced opening and removal of purulent mucous.³ They tested 14 commercially available soups and compared neutrophilic chemotaxis with a positive control labeled “Grandma’s recipe.”³ The larger the chemotaxis, the greater the ability to inhibit neutrophils during cold symptoms. “Grandma’s recipe” contained most of the same ingredients as traditional recipes including spices such as parsley, sage, thyme, salt and pepper.

Thirteen of the 14 brands inhibited neutrophil movement less potently than “Grandma’s recipe.” One brand, Campbell’s Ramen Noodles, Chicken Flavor, had a greater amount of chemotaxis than the control recipe. In this project, tap water was heated and accounted for a higher rating due to its vaporous quality.

■ Patient Management
More research is needed to find out which ingredients are most effective. Focusing on our body defenses through chemotactic activity may minimize medications.

Chicken soup provides nutritional support, helps alleviate dehydration, and can be an effective tool for patient care management.

REFERENCES

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