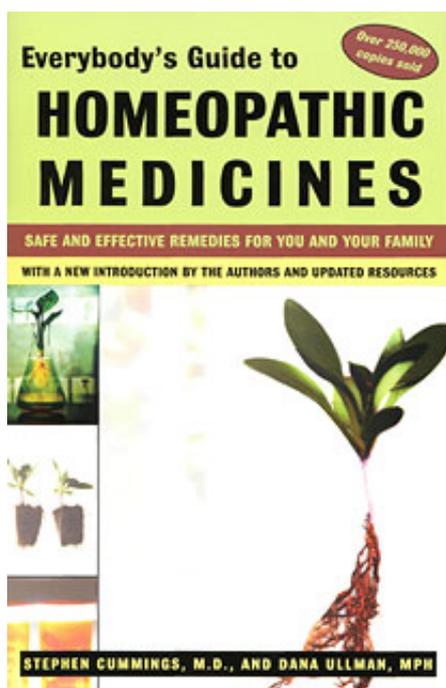


# Cummings / Ullman

## Everybody's Guide to Homeopathic Medicines

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## CHAPTER



# FEVER AND INFLUENZA

FEVER is NOT A DISEASE, but it so commonly accompanies many kinds of illnesses that we have covered it separately here. Influenza, on the other hand, is a specific type of viral infection. We include it in this chapter because fever often is one of the only symptoms of the flu. We also include a brief description of Reye's syndrome, a rare but very dangerous condition associated with viral illnesses including influenza.

## FEVER

Fever can accompany almost every type of infection and occurs in other illnesses as well. Fever may be the only apparent symptom of an illness, especially in the early stages. But if symptoms other than fever also are present, consult the chapter that covers those symptoms as well.

Don't be frightened by the fever itself—fever is usually a beneficial phenomenon. Not only is it a valuable warning that an infection is taking place, but the fever is itself part of the body's defense against the infection. Ancient physicians, such as Hippocrates and Celsus, considered fever a means by which the body "cooks," separates, and eventually eliminates the disease. In more scientific terms, the ability to increase body

temperature has come to be understood as a basic defense shared by all organisms that can regulate their own internal temperature.<sup>1</sup>

Fever may help fight infection in various ways. Simple elevation of temperature reduces the growth of or even kills some disease-causing organisms. More indirect effects of fever include enhancement of such innate immune defenses as increasing the production of interferon (a substance made by the body that inhibits viral reproduction) and increasing white blood cell mobility and activity. Fever, indeed, is an important positive response of the body.

#### **WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT FEVER**

Fever is defined somewhat arbitrarily as a rise in body temperature to above 99.5°F (measured orally). Actually, normal body temperature varies from person to person and, for each person, with time of day, activity level, and other factors. The traditionally normal reading of 98.6°F (37°C) is only an approximate average; your own temperature may range from a little higher than 96°F to about 99°F when you're perfectly healthy. Also, temperature elevations (as high as 103°F in children) can occur after exercise or from being overdressed.

The body's regulatory mechanisms limit fevers to a maximum of 105°F to 106°F during simple acute illnesses in normal individuals. Higher temperatures can be harmful, but unless there is something else complicating the acute illness, a fever rarely gets so high that it threatens health. Dehydration that results from fever can be dangerous, especially in children and the elderly, but it can be prevented by making certain that extra liquids are consumed (see chapter 9).

High fevers also sometimes cause seizures in children. Such "febrile seizures" usually occur while the temperature is rising rapidly, and end once it has reached its peak. They are most likely to occur in boys between six and twenty-four months old. In children who are otherwise healthy, the seizure tends to affect the whole body, not just one part or one side, and to last no more than twenty minutes, usually much less. Any deviation from this pattern may indicate an underlying neurologic disorder.

1. M. J. Kluger, "The Adaptive Value of Fever," in P. A. Mackowiak (ed.), *Fever: Basic Mechanisms and Management* (New York: Raven Press, 1991): 105; N. C. Klein and A. C. Burke, "Treatment of Fever," *Infectious Disease Clinics of North America* 10:1 (March 1996) 211.

der. Although all children who have seizures during a fever need to be medically evaluated, simple febrile seizures tend to happen only once or twice and cause no lasting ill effects. They are not uncommon and generally do not represent a serious health problem.

What all this means is that the fever accompanying an acute illness is not ordinarily a cause for concern. Instead of worrying about the fever, you should pay attention to the illness responsible and try to aid the healing efforts of the body. So long as it is not too high, the fever is best left to continue its work as part of the body's effort to heal.

#### **GENERAL HOME CARE**

Rest and plenty of liquids (to replace the body fluid lost due to sweating) are still important in the care of a person with a fever. It is normal for fever to be accompanied by a diminished appetite, so don't force-feed the patient. Since heat is dissipated through the skin, allow for good air circulation in the room and make certain the patient isn't heavily covered or dressed—clothing should be the minimum necessary to prevent chilliness. Often these steps are all that's necessary to relieve a mild fever. We don't recommend treatment with either conventional or homeopathic medicines for minor fevers.

Sometimes bringing the fever down is a worthwhile goal in itself—if the temperature is 103.5°F or higher for more than an hour, if at any time it climbs above 105°F, if the patient is a child who has had febrile seizures, or if the fever simply has lasted long enough to be exhausting or really uncomfortable. But remember, fever is a protective response, and you should consider suppressing a fever only for the reasons just mentioned.

Although there is some controversy about its efficacy, sponge bathing is recommended by many clinicians as an effective, drug-free way to bring down fevers of mild or moderate illnesses—and should be used immediately if the temperature rises to 106°F or if the patient becomes delirious or has a fever-related seizure. If the patient can put up with some discomfort, sponge bathing works more quickly than conventional medicines. Actually, research shows that sponge bathing works best in combination with acetaminophen given to reset the body's "thermostat" about a half-hour before—but if you've decided to use conventional medicine, you probably won't need to bother with a sponge bath.

In any case, here's the technique: Just have the person sit in a basin or tub in waist-deep, lukewarm water (don't use alcohol). Gradually lower the water temperature by letting a little cold water run into the tub.

Use a wet sponge or washcloth to bathe all exposed skin, including the face, and get the hair wet as well. Continue for ten to fifteen minutes. Then pat-dry the largest drops of water and allow the skin to air-dry in a cool room, protecting the person from drafts.

When fever is too high, too uncomfortable, or has lasted too long, and if the homeopathic medicines are not working rapidly enough, you may want to use medication such as acetaminophen, aspirin, ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil), or naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn). All these drugs work to reduce fever, but keep in mind that there is good scientific evidence that they also interfere with the body's own immune defenses. Each has its pros and cons and should not be used with any other. In general, we prefer acetaminophen if one of these drugs must be used. In any case, you must be absolutely certain they are stored in a safe place so accidental poisoning cannot occur. Seek medical advice before giving any of these medicines to a baby younger than two.

When used correctly, acetaminophen is safe and rarely causes side effects, and it is easier to give to children because it is available in a liquid and in suppositories. However, overdoses can cause serious poisoning with potentially irreversible liver damage. *Be especially careful to follow package directions when using the liquid forms of acetaminophen.* The drops meant for babies are much more concentrated than the liquid intended for older children, which has led to poisonings when parents confused the two forms.

Aspirin should not be given to children or teenagers because it has been implicated in Reye's syndrome, a rare but often fatal disease covered more in detail at the end of this chapter. Aspirin also can produce side effects and allergic reactions in relatively low doses. Still, it's inexpensive and time-tested, and a good choice for adults who are not allergic to it.

The newer over-the-counter drugs ibuprofen and naproxen work much like aspirin and share its most serious side effects, although they are less likely to cause ringing in the ears. Their effects last longer than acetaminophen's, so you can take them less often—but this is a disadvantage when you're trying to minimize your interference with the body's natural healing process.

### CASETAKING QUESTIONS FOR FEVER

**Character of the symptoms:**

- Did the symptoms seem to begin after a particular stress? For example, from exposure to cold air or wind, loss of sleep, or overindulgence in food or drugs?
- How recently did the fever start? Within the last 12 hours, or earlier than that?
- How quickly did the symptoms begin?
- Is the face flushed?
- What is the person's mental condition—is he dull or confused, delirious, restless and anxious, irritable, or clingy and tearful?

**Modalities:**

- Does the person feel warm or chilly? How do external heat and cold make him feel?

### HOMEOPATHIC MEDICINES

If you decide that the illness should be treated and fever is the only obvious symptom, consult the homeopathic information in this chapter for help with choosing the right medicine. If there are other symptoms as well (sore throat, earache, and so on), consult the appropriate chapter for relevant homeopathic medicines.

A homeopathic medicine should be given every two to six hours depending on the severity of the symptoms. Generally, the ill person will recover quickly or at least after one night's rest. If the fever isn't gone or much lower by the next morning, you'll probably want to try another medicine.

*Belladonna* and *Aconite* are the best medicines to try during the first stages of a sudden fever. *Belladonna* is by far the most commonly given medicine for people with simple fever. It's the medicine to give first unless another is clearly indicated.

The classic picture of the *Belladonna* fever includes a red flushed face, intensely hot skin, reddened mucous membranes, and glassy eyes with dilated pupils. The skin can be so hot that you notice the heat lingering on your hands after you touch it. Although *Belladonna* patients are mentally dull and may not fully comprehend what's going on around

them, they may well be restless and agitated. Children may even hit, bite, tear at things, or exhibit strange behaviors such as speaking incoherently about scary or violent hallucinations. Of course, most people who need *Belladonna* don't have these extreme symptoms. Still, they often do show some nervous excitability and their senses often are more acute. As the illness progresses, they may develop muscle twitching, which, like many of the *Belladonna* symptoms, comes and goes suddenly.

Choose *Aconite* when fever comes on suddenly and the patient is anxious, restless, and fearful, especially if the illness begins after exposure to dry and cold air or wind. The *Aconite* patient is mentally alert—unlike *Belladonna*—but frightened, and he may toss in his sleep or throw off his covers or clothes. In the classic case, he has dry skin, dry mouth (perhaps with unquenchable thirst for cold drinks), and a dry cough. The pupils may be constricted.

*Ferrum phos.* is another medicine to consider early in the course of a fever. Choose this remedy when symptoms develop gradually, rather than all of a sudden as in *Belladonna* and *Aconite*. You can give *Ferrum phos.* also when *Belladonna* seems indicated but doesn't work after two or three doses.

The chief indication for *Nux vomica* during a fever is that the patient feels extremely chilly. The chills are worsened by uncovering or even slightly moving the blankets—she can't move under the covers without setting off a wave of chilliness. The symptoms of *Nux* patients often begin after overeating, going without sleep, or using too much alcohol or drugs of any type. The person also may have various digestive symptoms, such as constipation or nausea, and may have a sensation of heaviness of the head. The symptoms are worse in the morning and in the open air. Irritability is typical.

Although *Pulsatilla* is more often used when there are clear symptoms of a cold or ear infection, you can give it when fever is the only symptom. Choose *Pulsatilla* when the characteristic mental and general symptoms of this medicine are evident (see the *materia medica* section). Individuals who need *Pulsatilla* are weepy and clingy, craving affection. Their moods are changeable. They may be irritable, but the irritability is more whiny than angry or strong. They are intolerant of external heat, and they feel much worse when warmly covered or in warm rooms. The symptoms often begin after the patient has eaten too much rich or fatty food, and tend to get worse at night. Classically, the *Pulsatilla* patient isn't thirsty, even with a fever.

### REMEDY SUMMARY FOR FEVER

**Give the medicine:** Every 2 to 4 hours at first, gradually less frequently as the patient improves, for up to 3 days. **When to try another** medicine: If there is no significant improvement within 2 hours (if the fever is high and the person is quite ill) to 24 hours (in mild illnesses).

#### BELLADONNA\*

##### Essentials

- The most common medicine for the early stage of fever (first 12 to 24 hours), especially with sudden onset
- Red flushed face, reddened mucous membranes, glassy eyes

##### Confirmatory symptoms

- Skin very hot, heat lingers when you touch the skin
- Mental dullness, confusion, agitation

#### ACONITE

##### Essentials

- Also indicated during the early stages of a sudden fever
- Acute fever accompanied by anxiety, fear, restlessness

##### Confirmatory symptoms

- Symptoms come on after exposure to cold air or wind

#### FERRUM PHOS.

##### Essentials

- Early in fevers when the symptoms develop gradually
- Patient is more alert, less restless or anxious than with *Belladonna* or *Aconite*
- If no remedy seems clearly indicated, try this if *Belladonna* hasn't helped (see p. 53 for instructions on how long to wait before switching remedies)

##### Confirmatory symptoms

- Flushing of the face may be confined to circular patches

**NUXVOMICA**

**Essentials**

- Great chilliness, worse from uncovering or from moving the blankets

**Confirmatory symptoms**

- Symptoms beginning after overindulgence, overwork, loss of sleep
- May be accompanied by queasy stomach
- Irritability

**PULSATILLA**

**Essentials**

- Weepy, clingy mood, craving affection; changeable moods *and/or*
- Worse in warm rooms or when warmly covered; unusually little thirst

**Confirmatory symptoms**

- Symptoms may have started after eating rich food

**BEYOND HOME CARE**

See "Beyond Home Care" following the section on influenza below.

**INFLUENZA**

Though illnesses such as colds, digestive upsets, and other maladies are often called "the flu," technically influenza is an acute infection of the respiratory tract associated with a particular group of viruses. Practically speaking, the diagnosis is influenza if acute respiratory symptoms like runny nose or cough are accompanied by marked fever, general weakness, and muscular aching. The person with the flu looks and feels more ill than he would with just a common cold.

Though uncomfortable, influenza ordinarily lasts only three to five days in most healthy people. However, the severity of the illness varies from person to person and from year to year. Even the milder strains can lead to life-threatening disease among young children, the elderly, and those

debilitated by chronic illnesses—especially because severe bacterial infections such as pneumonia can develop when the system is weakened by the flu virus (ear and sinus infections also may occur). Also, the flu viruses mutate rapidly, and some strains have been much more virulent than others.

#### **GENERAL HOME CARE**

Home treatment for people with influenza is the same as for those with fevers and colds (see chapter 4). Avoid aspirin, especially when treating children under nineteen, as its use is associated with Reye's syndrome, as discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter. Antibiotics are unnecessary and actually can be harmful; they should be avoided unless a secondary bacterial infection has developed.

#### **CASETAKING QUESTIONS FOR INFLUENZA**

##### **Character of the symptoms:**

- Which are the more bothersome symptoms—tiredness, a heavy feeling, or aches and pains? (If fever is a predominant symptom, see the previous section; if there is significant runny nose or cough, see chapter 4.)
- Is there a headache, and if so, where is it located and what sort of pain does it cause? (If headache is severe, see chapter 11.)
- Does the person have chills?
- Is the person restless, or does she prefer to lie still?

##### **Modalities:**

- » How does moving about affect the pains?
- How do heat and cold affect the body aches, and do they make the person feel better or worse in general?

#### **HOMEOPATHIC MEDICINES**

One of the great success stories of homeopathic medicine concerns its superb treatment of epidemic influenza during the 1917—18 flu season. Records maintained by government medical officers at the time show that proportionally, far fewer patients treated homeopathically died from the flu or its complications than those who received conventional medical treatment.

To decide on a homeopathic medicine when flu symptoms strike, review the remedies described in this chapter as well as those discussed in chapter 4 on colds and coughs. Among appropriate flu medicines covered in other chapters are *Aconite*, *Belladonna*, *Arsenicum*, *Pulsatilla*, and *Nux vomica*.

In many ways, the symptoms of *Gelsemium* represent the classic picture of flu—this is the medicine to give if you can't find a better fit. The person mainly feels tired, weak, heavy, and sick. Generally, *Gelsemium* patients want to be left alone, not because they're especially irritable, but simply because it's too much work to interact with people. They don't feel restless, and although motion isn't painful, the patient just lies still because she's so weak. The eyelids look heavy and droopy, and the face may appear dull and lacking in expression. A *Gelsemium* flu is characterized by chills, which often run up and down the back. Typically, there is little thirst in spite of the fever. The nose may be runny and the throat may burn. Headaches are common, usually in the back of the head and extending to the top or forehead. More striking symptoms, however, are general weakness and tiredness.

There are two main symptoms that should lead you to choose *Bryonia* instead of *Gelsemium*: irritability with aversion to company, and physical aggravation from motion. If either or both of these are present, give *Bryonia*. Like the *Gelsemium* patient, someone who needs *Bryonia* doesn't want to be disturbed, but the *Bryonia* patient is truly irritable. He may snap when asked questions or refuse to answer them altogether. He may be preoccupied with worries about his business or other ordinary affairs. Motion makes *Bryonia* patients worse, and they feel better when lying still. They are likely to have generalized muscle and joint aches that are definitely more painful from motion. The patient lies still because it hurts to move, not just because he's too tired. A common *Bryonia* symptom is a headache that grows worse with motion, from walking, or even from moving the eyes. Light touch, eating, stooping, and talking also may make headaches worse, while applying firm pressure and lying still may relieve them. *Bryonia* patients generally feel worse in warm rooms and better in the cool air. They may have an intense thirst for cold drinks. A dry, hacking, often painful cough may accompany the flu symptoms. Constipation is also typical of *Bryonia*.

In contrast with *Bryonia* patients, people with a *Rhus tox.* influenza are restless. The muscles become stiff and achy if the patient lies still for any length of time. Paradoxically, her pain feels most severe when trying to move after a period of rest, but it improves as soon as she moves about and limbers up. She may be unable to sleep, because it's so uncomfortable

keeping still. The *Rhus tox.* patient is likely to be chilly and feel worse in cold, wet weather, improving in warmth and with applied heat. Exposure to damp weather or overexertion may have brought on the illness. The patient is thirsty, sometimes only for sips of water at a time, and may sweat profusely. Mentally, she may be anxious, apprehensive, irritable, or depressed. Dry mouth and lips, dry sore throat, and hoarseness often accompany the general symptoms.

Severe aching and pain that feels as though it comes from deep inside the bones is the most distinctive symptom of *Eupatorium perfoliatum*. There is a bruised soreness all over the body, and the bones, especially in the back, feel as though they would break. Symptoms that confirm the choice of this medicine—but that aren't necessarily present—include a sudden nasal discharge with sneezing and redness in the eyes preceding the onset of the body aches. *Eupatorium* patients are subject to chills, especially in the morning between 7 and 9 A.M. Typically they have great thirst for ice-cold drinks, but liquids may cause digestive disorders. A dry, hacking cough that shakes the body also is characteristic.

One medicine to try early in the illness when there are few distinguishing symptoms is *Ostillocoainum*. Research published in the *British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* shows that *Ostillococtinum* is considerably more effective in treating influenza than a placebo.<sup>2</sup> *Oscillococdnum* has become the most popular flu medicine in France and is quickly gaining popularity in the U.S. It is most effective when given within forty-eight hours of onset of flu symptoms.

#### REMEDY SUMMARY FOR INFLUENZA

In addition to the medicines listed here, consider those covered in the sections on fever (if fever is the primary symptom) or colds (if a runny or stuffy nose is prominent).

**Give the medicine:** Every 6 to 8 hours for 2 to 3 days, stopping when there is definite improvement.

**When to try another medicine:** If there is no significant improvement after 24 hours.

2. J. P. Ferley, D. Zmirou, D. D'Admehar, et al., "A Controlled Evaluation of a Homeopathic Preparation in the Treatment of Influenza-like Syndrome," *British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* 27 (March 1989): 329-35.

**GELSEMIUM\***

**Essentials**

- Tired, weak, heavy sensation of the body
- Lies still and wants to be left alone because of tiredness

**Confirmatory symptoms**

- Chills running up and down the spine
- Little thirst
- Headache beginning in the back of the head or neck and extending upward

**BRYONIA**

**Essentials**

- Motion aggravates the pain and other symptoms
- Irritable and doesn't want people around

**Confirmatory symptoms**

- Thirsty for cold drinks
- Feels worse in warm rooms, better in cool air
- Headaches worse from motion, walking, or moving the eyes

**RHUSTOX.**

**Essentials**

- Restlessness
- Aches and pains while lying still; worse when first starting to move but get better with continued motion

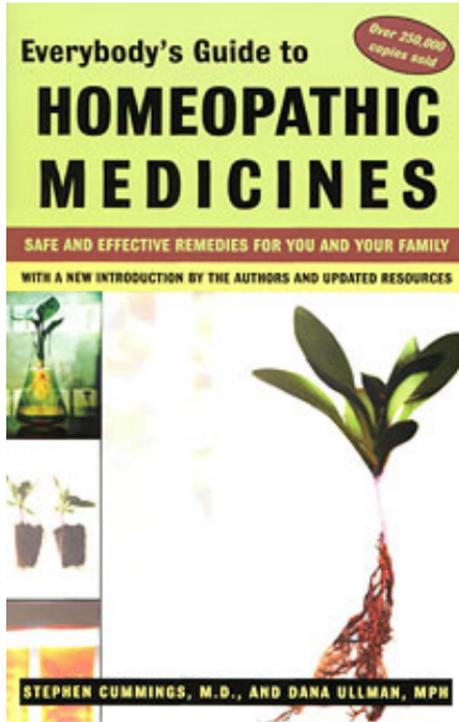
**Confirmatory symptoms**

- Chilly, feels worse in cold and damp air
- Thirsty for sips of water
- Dry mouth, dry sore throat

**EUPATORIUM PERFOUATUM**

**Essentials**

- Severe aching pain, feels like the bones are breaking



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