

The Common Cold and Massage.

We have finally reached winter's mid point. The temperatures are slightly increasing. The timid Sun peaks out from behind the clouds. We dare to spend more time outside, the only truly efficient remedy for the bout of cabin fever we've been nursing for the past few months. It is precisely in these transition times, at the change of seasons, that we are more susceptible to catch a cold.

A cold is probably the most common upper respiratory tract infection under our latitudes. It is a viral infection caused by any one of more than 200 viruses, which explains that symptoms tend to vary greatly. Contrary to popular belief, you do not catch a cold by exposure to cold weather. The seasonal transition however is often a time of stress on your immune system, increasing the possibility of getting infected with a cold virus.

Most adults are likely to have a common cold two to four times a year. Children may have common colds as many as six to ten times a year because their immune system is still developing.

We all know the symptoms. The frog in our throat, mild fatigue, watery eyes, runny noses are all the signs that we have been infected. The difference between the common cold and other viral infection is that you are unlikely to have a high fever. The symptoms usually last less than 2 weeks. The viruses may be present in the body up to 3 days before symptoms begin. This incubation period is also a contagious period, which can make the spread of the infection hard to control.

Most massage modalities have a profound effect on the body's circulatory system, facilitating the movements of fluid throughout your body. This is not good news if you are in the acute phase of the cold (typically the first 2 or 3 days of the cold). By moving fluids, we can spread the cold through the body much more effectively than would happen naturally. On the other hand, if you are on the post-acute side of the infection (4 or 5 days after the symptoms have appeared), massage may help to speed recovery time. Be aware however that it is possible that the day after the massage feels like you are having a relapse. The circulatory work provided by the massage is the equivalent of squeezing 3 days of recovery into one day of feeling symptomatic again.

We can also use hydrotherapy during the massage using hot and cold packs to boost the immune functions and shortening the recovery time. Additionally, aromatherapy can be combined with the treatment to help relieve some of the symptoms.

Season changes are usually associated with transitions and a heightened level of stress. Massage can also be used to reduce stress, a major factor in the health of our immune system.

As always after a massage and particularly during a cold, it is important to drink lots of fluids. My rule of thumb is to drink half one's body weight in fluid ounces. Water is best and coffee (or any other diuretics) doesn't count.

It is interesting to note that there is no evidence that taking a large dose of vitamin C reduces the risk of catching a cold. However there is some evidence that high doses of vitamin C — up to 6 grams a day (an EmergenC packet is 1 gram) — shorten the duration of the cold.

In conclusion, if you are developing a cold, it is probably better to reschedule your massage and get some rest. Once you are in the post acute phase of your infection, about a week after the first symptoms appeared, we can work together to ease the remaining discomfort and speed-up your recovery. Of course, if you have any doubt or questions, always consult your primary care physician and your massage therapist.

Be well!

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Sources:

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- '[Frequently Asked Questions About the Common Cold](#)' article reviewed by Jonathan Gelfand, MD for WedMD.com. Original article available at www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/top-10-questions-cold