

CATARRH

Catarrhal conditions and associated sinus problems are characterised by congestion, excess mucus, headaches, runny nose, postnasal drip, sore throats and ear problems. In addition there may be associated pain, redness and swelling over the facial sinuses. Commonly, catarrhal problems occur with an upper respiratory infection such as colds or influenza. Chronic catarrh, all year round, may be associated with allergic tendencies

If an allergy is suspected, a degree of investigative work is required to isolate the offending substance. Local irritants may include fumes, smoke, chemicals, pollen, fungal spores and perfumes. Dietary changes and herbal remedies can be introduced to help strengthen and boost the body's immune system and ability to deal with allergies.

NUTRITIONAL FACTORS

Certain foods are considered to be mucus forming, making catarrhal conditions worse. Dairy products are most commonly considered mucus forming, but also refined carbohydrates, wheat flour products and sugars can exacerbate the problem.

FOODS TO AVOID

Dairy products: Milk, butter, cheese, cream, ice cream, yoghurt, milk chocolate.

Check sauce ingredients.

Refined Carbohydrates: White bread, white rice and pasta, cakes, puddings, biscuits, pastry and anything containing refined sugars e.g. Sweets, sugar, syrup, fizzy drinks, diluting juice.

Fried foods, peanuts, and eggs can also promote mucus formation in the body.

FOODS TO INCREASE

Vitamin A plays an important role in strengthening the mucus membranes of the respiratory system. The following foods contain **beta-carotene**, which is converted to vitamin A in the body. This is a safer way of taking vitamin A as the body converts only as much as it needs thus removing the risk of taking too much. **Red, orange and yellow fruit and vegetables such as red peppers, carrots, beetroot, berries, mango and tomato contain beta-carotene**

Antioxidants: Vitamin C and Zinc are antioxidant nutrients, enhancing immune system function, helping to fight off infection and supporting the immune system against allergic reactions. **Vitamin C is found in most fresh fruit and vegetables. Good sources of zinc include shellfish, chickpeas, pumpkin seeds and Wheatgerm.**

Fresh fruits and vegetables - especially raw, provide essential vitamins and minerals, and have a gentle cleansing action on the body.

Garlic, onions and leeks - Garlic and onions contain volatile oils with antiseptic and decongestant properties. Raw garlic has the most powerful action; the volatile oils are blown off via the lungs making garlic a valuable remedy for mucus congestion and respiratory infection.

Herbs and Spices - culinary herbs including **ginger, chillies, cayenne, horseradish, thyme and sage** are known to have antiseptic and decongestant properties and can be easily included in the diet.

Whole grain cereals - buckwheat, millet, oats, brown rice, spelt, quinoa and amaranth

Oily fish - e.g. mackerel, herring, sardines.

Pulses (beans) - kidney beans, chickpeas, lentils, sprouted beans.

Herbal teas -for example, elderflower, peppermint, eyebright, plantain.

EAT IN MODERATION

Nuts and seeds - almonds, walnuts, pumpkin and sunflower seeds.

Dried fruits - especially apricots, mango and peaches.

Natural sweeteners - as an alternative to refined sugars e.g. honey, maple syrup, malt extract.

GENERAL ADVICE

Avoid large, heavy meals. Get plenty of sunshine, fresh air, exercise and sleep. Avoid dusty, polluted or smoky atmospheres where possible.

INHALATIONS

Essential oils or herbal infusions can be used as inhalations to help decongest the sinuses and eliminate bacteria. Inhalations should be carried out on a regular basis. Essential oils or herbs that are especially beneficial to catarrhal problems are eucalyptus, tea tree, lavender and peppermint.

- Place 3 to 6 drops of essential oil, or a handful of herbs, into a bowl.
- Pour on boiling water.
- Place a towel over the head and inhale the steam.
- Be careful! The steam is hot and the herbs are strong. You need to take shallow breaths at first, or even come up for air.
- Continue inhaling the steam until it cools.
- Do not throw out the water but place the bowl near to your bed and you will continue to benefit from the vapours evaporating through the night.

For children you can place essential oils in a saucer with a little water and place this on a radiator in the child's room. Alternatively essential oils can be used in a humidifier or diffuser.

Facial massage with lavender oil over the sinus area, using small circular motions, can also be beneficial to help decongest and soothe inflamed sinuses.