With winter making a sudden entrance this year, it seems that many of us are already reaching for the dreaded box of tissues. Although this is a topic that we often touch upon, we are always asked for information on treating colds and flu. It is our hope that you will find the advice in this article helpful enough to carry you through a healthy, happy winter.

Colds and flu are similar in their presentation but should be differentiated between to allow treatment to be as effective as possible.

Typically, colds are self-limiting beginning slowly and lasting for 2 to 7 days. The first symptoms are usually a scratchy, sore throat, followed by sneezing and a runny nose. The body temperature is usually normal or only slightly elevated. A mild cough can develop several days later. Symptoms tend to be worse in infants and young children, who sometimes run temperatures of up to 38 to 39 °C.

According to Tibb, colds are contracted in one of two ways: The first, most common cause is through extreme changes in the environment. This is as a result of weather changes or in many cases, due to lifestyle and environment, going from artificially heated homes to the cold outdoors. The second and more serious cause is due to an imbalance within the body's homeostasis making it susceptible to viruses and infections. Flu or influenza usually presents with a sudden onset of a headache, dry cough, and chills. The symptoms quickly become more severe than those of a cold. The flu sufferer often experiences muscle aches especially in the back and legs. Fever of up to 40 °C is common. The fever typically begins to subside on the second or third day, and then respiratory symptoms like nasal congestion and sore throat appear. Fatigue and weakness may continue for days or even weeks.

As we know both colds and flu are caused by viruses and generally the viruses run their course in the system in between 4 to 5 days, although the flu is more difficult to treat. Symptoms of colds and flu are uncomfortable and distressing and as such need to be treated and managed. Most doctors agree that were you to take Antibiotics, they would not work in combating Colds and Flu's because it is a virus rather than a bacterial infection. Even if you may have a bacterial infection, the overuse of antibiotics over the past few decades has resulted in strains of influenza becoming more resistant, with very little relief for patients.

The age-old adage ‘prevention is better than cure’ applies as much to colds and flu as all aspects of healthcare. With immune boosters, vitamins, minerals, natural and herbal treatments now more readily available than ever before, we can strengthen our defense mechanisms enough to effectively manage colds and flu's without too much external intervention.

Other ways to build up the body's natural defenses are:

- Eat a balanced diet that is rich in fruit and vegetables - this allows you to consume through your diet the vitamins and minerals that your body needs. Some of these like vitamin C are natural anti-oxidants.
- Exercise regularly
- Don't smoke cigarettes - smoking lowers the immune system and the person is then more easily infected
- Keep warm - dress appropriately for the weather conditions
- Strengthen the entire system with an immune booster / anti-oxidant or with a product like Septogard.
Should prevention not be possible, then treatment of colds and flu varies and is mostly symptomatic i.e. reduce the fever, dry up the runny nose, stop the cough and relieve the pain associated.

Symptomatic treatment is effective but, a more holistic approach to relieve the symptoms and treat the conditions results in a quicker resolution to the problem helping to minimise the chances of secondary bacterial infections. Patients also return to optimum health much faster.

Colds and flu are extremely contagious and you should take the time to rest and recover instead of spreading the virus. Another method is to keep as warm as possible as sweating-out the fever is always beneficial. Remember that the fever is there for a reason; it is the bodies natural way of destroying the virus. Please note that extremely high fevers in infants and young children can be dangerous, therefore seek medical attention whenever you are unsure of the situation and especially when medication does not seem to be helping.

Complementary therapies such as Tibb offer the following valuable advice when dealing with colds and flu:

- **Get adequate rest.**
- **Drink plenty of fluids. Water is especially vital.**
- **Gargle with warm salt water several times a day to ease a sore throat.**
- **Avoid cold and sour foods and drinks.**
- **Add heating foods such as ginger and garlic to your diet.**
- **Hot chicken soup works wonders**
- **Increase your intake of Vitamin C**
- **Invest in a humidifier or vaporiser and leave it on throughout the winter months. Enhance the value of your humidifier with oils such as Eucalyptus and camphor.**
- **Keep your feet warm at all times**
- **Use a saline solution to wash out the nasal passages.**

Colds and Flu’s do not have to cause undue distress nor should they recur throughout the winter season. By following the advice above, and through respect for your body’s needs, you can maintain a positive well-being and remain healthy. Here’s looking forward to your good health, and the coming spring without any change of season colds or flu’s!