

SUNDAY
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FOOD

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Laura Hunt Angel photo

The ingredients for chicken soup, the most popular remedy for colds and flu, are pictured.

Curious remedies: The cure for what ails you?

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Unless you have been hiding under a rock, hiking through Nepal or binge viewing the entire collection of *Downton Abbey* on DVD, you're probably aware that it's cold and flu season. Unfortunately, even if you consented to a flu shot, you still stand a good chance of catching one of the bugs going around. But before we give ourselves over to utter panic, a little perspective is in order, because it could be worse. Much worse.

You Dirty Rat

It could be the Black Death. In the autumn of 1347 at the port of Messina, Sicily, most of the crewmen aboard an arriving cluster of trade ships were found dead. Those still alive were suffering from a litany of symptoms including high fever and black sores. The residents of Messina turned the ships away, but it was too late. Within five years, as much as 50% of the entire population of Europe had died from this disease, also known as bubonic plague.

From their experience with the Black Death, medieval physicians believed that many diseases seemed to be linked to water and/or ships, but they did not understand the exact means of transmission. The theory of "miasma," or noxious air akin to swamp gas, became the accepted explanation. With some diseases such as tuberculosis, the idea of transmission via poisonous air persisted well into the 20th century.

Treatments for the Black Death included a felicitous combination of confession of sin and housecleaning. Additionally, some physicians — including those of Pope Clement VI — ordered that roving plague-stricken communities to purify the air. People shut themselves up in closed rooms for weeks, while others inhaled strong fumes such as urine in attempt to drive out the sickness.

When Yellow Was The New Black

Nearer to us in both time and locale were frontier era epidemics of cholera, yellow fever and typhoid. In 1873, a cholera outbreak swept through



Wikipedia.org photo

The slime from snails like this one was often used in medieval medicine.

Kentucky, but Dr. J. W. Prichett, a Madisonville physician of the day, reported to the 43rd State Congress that Hopkins county was largely spared.

In his 1877 compendium, *History of Henderson County*, Edmund Lyne Starling describes the 1822 outbreak of an "aggravated bilious fever" that descended upon the river towns of Kentucky, including nearby Henderson. The disease, dubbed yellow fever or "yellow Jack", reached its height in July, August and September of that year. Miasma was believed to be the culprit.

The year after Edmund Lyne Starling published his work, one of the largest outbreaks of yellow fever hit towns along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, including Memphis, Tennessee and Hickman, Kentucky. In a move similar to that regarding the Black Death centuries before, ships from points south of Paducah were ordered to obtain permission from the city of Henderson before approaching any nearer than five miles. The same applied to trains coming from further south than Guthrie.

Starling reasoned that the large number of stagnant ponds and marshes in the region helped spread the illness, and he was partly correct. It wasn't until about 1900 that physicians at Walter Reed determined that a virus carried by mosquitoes.

The prescribed treatment for yellow fever was similar to that of all fevers, and included a distasteful combination of blood letting, inducement of vomiting, quinine and liberal doses of wine or brandy. Early residents of Hopkins County were more likely to suffer from typhoid than yellow fever but were treated much the same way.

This Might Sting A Bit

In addition to physician's advice, early medical books included recipes, perfumery and general household helps. John Bate, author of a 1635 publication titled, *The Mysteries and Nature of Art*, wrote that tying a live toad around the neck of a patient suffering a nosebleed would induce a fear strong enough to pump the blood away from the nose, and toward the heart instead.

Often, the lack of understanding of disease mechanisms led to treatments that we would consider bizarre today. Such was the case with flux, or what some of us might call "stomach flu." In his *Myrrour or Glass of Health*, c1535, Thomas Moulton wrote that a sure cure for flux was to roast a whole onion and place it, piping hot, between the buttocks of the afflicted. Ouch.

For gunpowder burns to the face, frequent applications of

cow dung were recommended. Snail slime was the proper treatment for restoring eyelashes, and a copper penny could ease the pain of a wasp sting. Radishes appear to have been quite useful for a number of conditions, including wart removal. And as a bonus, be advised that a large radish will kill a snake with a single bop on the varmint's head.

See? I told you it could be worse.

The Recipe

In lieu of live toads or questionably placed onions, you may actually want to try these more conventional methods for easing a common cold or the flu.

Short-Cut Chicken Soup

Old fashioned chicken soup usually requires boiling the bird and making homemade noodles. This version combines a few fresh vegetables with pantry staples and cuts cooking time by more than 2 hours.

2 tablespoons olive or other cooking oil
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/4 cup onion, finely chopped
3 stalks celery, thinly sliced
3 medium carrots, thinly sliced
2 10-ounce cans chicken breast
6 ounces (about 2 cups) uncooked medium egg noodles
2 26-ounce cartons low sodium chicken stock
3 tablespoons dried parsley
Salt and pepper to taste

Heat oil in the bottom of a large



Matt Morgan photo from 1873

An artistic rendering of the dreaded yellow fever, titled, *Yellow Jack Monster*.

pot and saute the garlic, onion, celery and carrots until fragrant, about 5 minutes. Add remaining ingredients, bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 15-20 minutes, or until noodles and vegetables are tender. Season with salt and pepper to taste. If you like, add some pep to your soup with a squeeze of lemon juice or a pinch of cayenne. Serves 4-6.

Horehound Cough Drops

Of course you can buy horehound cough drops but this is the way our grandmothers made them. Most of us don't grow horehound anymore, but if you would like to try this recipe, you can order it dried in bulk from Mountain Rose Herbs at: <http://mountainroseherbs.com/>. A candy thermometer would be handy as well.

You'll first need to brew some horehound tea, by bringing 4 cups water and 4 cups dried horehound to a boil. Take the tea off the burner and let it steep for about half an hour.

For each cup of brewed tea, you will also need:
1 1/2 cups honey
1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar

Add honey and cream of tartar to the tea and boil until it reaches 300 degrees F., or the hard crack stage. While it is boiling, butter a jelly roll or other shallow baking pan. Once the correct temperature is reached, carefully spread the hot syrup evenly onto the pan.

When the syrup has slightly cooled but not completely hardened, score it into lozenge shaped pieces, then let it harden completely. When ready, break it into pieces along the score lines; wrap each lozenge in wax paper squares or store in an air tight container.