

Simple Thai Herbal Remedies for Colds, Sore Throat, and Sinus Congestion

From information provided by Kelly Bornt Kidson and Bob Haddad. Original web source: associatedcontent.com .

For many of us, when the weather starts to turn cooler, we start to think about boosting our immune systems to ward off winter's cold and flues. In Thailand winter is warm by Western standards. The Northeast tends to be generally cooler than the south, with temperatures dropping into the mid 20°C. As the winter chill sets in many turn to simple, yet effective natural remedies to warm the body and build up the immune system. Next time you're feeling unwell, try some of these Thai herbal remedies!

The first on our list is **Ginger**. Ginger is called "khing" in Thai. It really is the "king" of the Southeast Asian herbs so it gets the #1 place on our list of effective remedies, even though it is very simple. Ginger is the most frequently used herb in Thai Herbal Medicine. It is considered a "hot" herb by traditional doctors, and it has been proven to stimulate circulation and reduce congestion. A simple tea may be made from either dried or fresh ginger root, but use fresh ginger whenever possible. To make the tea, select a piece of ginger around 2-3 inches long (5-8 centimeters). Wash it, cut it into smaller pieces, and then crush the pieces with a blunt object. Add the ginger to a small pot with 2-3 cups of water. Bring to a hard boil, then cover and simmer for about 15 minutes. Let it cool and then strain. You may drink it plain or add a few drops of lemon and/or honey to taste.

For sore throat and mucous, an excellent variation is to add a small Thai chili to the tea. Small Thai chilies are high in vitamin C, and they help to break down mucous and alleviate congestion. Add the chili after you boil the ginger, when the tea is simmering, but do NOT cut or chop the chili, or it will make the tea extremely spicy. Just add it whole to the simmering water with the ginger, and then strain, flavor with honey and lemon, and drink.

Another simple Thai herbal remedy is inhaling herbal steam. Steam therapy is very common in Thailand and it is easy to do in your own kitchen. Bring to a slow boil about 4 cups of water in a pot. Add one handful of chopped ginger and lemongrass, and one handful of eucalyptus leaf. If you don't have fresh or dried herbs, you can use about 8 drops of eucalyptus essential oil (or a few drops each of peppermint and eucalyptus oil). In this case, add the essential oil as soon as you remove the pot from the heat. Cover your head with a towel and hold your head at a comfortable height above the steam for 3-4 minutes. Breathe deeply. If it is too intense, come out of the "tent" for a few seconds, and then return to the steam inhalation. Continue this process for about 3-5 minutes.



The steam helps to thin mucus in the respiratory tract, relieving congestion, and increasing circulation. Eucalyptus is considered an antiseptic and antibacterial herb so it has a toxic effect on a variety of bacteria that cause common colds. Another variation to this is to combine all the ingredients in a cheesecloth bundle and add to a hot bath. You get not only get the benefits of the herbs but a hot bath will help relieve the aches of your cold.



For portable sinus relief, Thai people use nasal inhalers called **ya dom**. They contain a blend of essential oils: usually combinations eucalyptus, camphor, peppermint and cloves in a handy lip balm container. Ya dom are found everywhere in Thailand, but in the West, you can often buy them at Asian markets, and online. One source is grocerythai.com, or do a search for "Ya Dom" or "nasal inhaler." It can be carried in your pocket throughout the day for frequent sniffing and sinus relief.

You may also use a soothing **vapor rub** to help relieve sinus congestion. You can find common Thai balms at local Asian markets, or check Amazon.com. These balms contain essential oils of camphor, eucalyptus, cinnamon, peppermint and clove in an ointment base. Apply to chest and throat, and take care not to use near eyes.

You can also make medicinal balm by melting a few natural ingredients in the microwave. Ingredients are one part soy wax to one part oil (such as canola or olive). A little beeswax (about 5-10 percent of the whole mixture) helps to keep it solid. Melt the beeswax and soy wax only for a few seconds. Use a small plastic cup for this or another container that will not melt in the microwave. When this base is liquid, you can mix in the canola oil and some essential oils to make the balm. Pour the mixture into small containers to cool.

Most recipes for tiger balm include camphor, eucalyptus, mint oil (menthol) and clove oil. You can double or triple recipes to make larger amounts. Camphor, clove and mint have anesthetic properties. There are many varieties of tiger balm prepared and sold in Thailand. Many white varieties are a mild and are often used to treat itching and pain. A white colored exception is Royal Bee Brand extra white, which is quite strong. Most medium and hot balms in Thailand are yellow in color, and these are used, often mixed with lotion or hand cream, to give foot massage. Red balm is also available in Thailand, and works well for muscle soreness.

Homemade Thai herbal balm

Adapted from C. Pierce Salguero, Kelly Born Kidson, and other sources.

In Thailand, traditional herbal recipes are often more popular than commercial items. People there easily see the benefits of using homemade natural remedies instead of the mass-produced chemical alternatives. Herbs, roots, rhizomes, plant leaves and tree bark are used for their natural tonifying, rejuvenating, and antibacterial properties.

A favorite topical application for soothing sore muscles, medicated rubbing balm is also great for colds, congestion, and sinusitis, when applied to the chest and throat.

Here is a basic recipe:

Ingredients

10 drops essential oil of peppermint
10 drops essential oil of eucalyptus
5 drops of camphor oil
5 drops essential oil of clove
60 ml coconut oil
15 g beeswax

Heat oil and beeswax in a double-boiler over low heat. Stir until wax is melted. Remove from heat. Stir in the essential oils, and pour into small glass jars or metal containers to cool.

Note that commercial Thai balm is available in several strengths, so you may adjust quantities of essential oils in this recipe. This recipe calls for essential oils, but extremely strong decoctions of fresh herbs may be used as well by combining fresh herbs in a pan with a pint of water. Boil to reduce water by 70%. Strain, and combine the liquid with oil and wax, and continue cooking over low heat until water has evaporated, making sure not to boil the oil. Remove from heat and cool.

