

Chicken Soup for the Holidays!

by Leonard J. Hoenig, M.D.

The holiday season is a time for joy and celebration. Sometimes coughs and colds get in the way of the festivities. There is one useful therapy that should not be overlooked when you or a loved one gets sick: chicken soup.

All of us can remember coming home on some wintry night with a bad cold, sore throat and fever. We would climb into bed and someone would give us a nice hot, delicious bowl of chicken soup that made us feel better.

Interestingly, chicken soup has been used since antiquity to treat illness. The Talmud (Shabbos 145b) suggests that Rabbi Abba used something akin to chicken soup for medicinal purposes. More recently, scientists have studied chicken soup and found it to have beneficial effects on the respiratory system.

How chicken soup works is unclear. Is it the aroma, humidity, temperature, calcium content or some other mysterious property that gives it its effectiveness? I suspect these researchers are spending too much time looking at the chicken soup itself instead of focusing on what goes into the making of the chicken soup. The real ingredients behind the magic of chicken soup are the following:

LOVE: Nothing can compare with a mother's love for her sick child. Mom always knew how to make you feel better. Every bowl of chicken soup carries within it the memory of mom's love.

WARMTH: By warmth I am not referring to temperature. Rather warmth is the special feeling that exists between close friends or family. A gentle caress, a compassionate smile and just being there for someone are examples of how people show warmth for one another. When you are sick and someone makes you chicken soup, you know they really care about you.

TENDER LOVING CARE: There is more to a cure than giving a pill. The healing process involves a therapeutic relationship between two people. When someone is sick, they get better much more quickly when their spirits are uplifted through another's compassion and caring. Tender loving care is part and parcel of the healing properties of chicken soup.

Although pneumonia, influenza, coughs and colds affect millions of persons worldwide each year, there is a much more serious epidemic we all face. Today we live in a cold, cruel world that is unfortunately filled with hostility, war, terror and hate. Our leaders have established a United Nations and peace keeping forces to find an answer to armed conflict.

These are important steps toward peace. Perhaps what civilization really needs is to get back to the basic human relationship and promote more love, warmth and tender loving care between people and their neighbors. Maybe the answer to what ails humanity can be found in something as simple as chicken soup!

Happy Holidays to All!