

Is Mucous Friend or Foe?

It's interesting to read various conventional, medical reports on mucus and find different answers. They all agree that mucus is our friend – unless we are really sick and overproducing it to the point we can't breathe.

Accounts vary from saying we produce 1 quart, 1.4 quarts, 2 quarts, or a gallon a day. We can safely say we produce a quart or more of mucus a day. This mucus lines our mucous membranes from our nose and sinuses throughout our digestive tract.

Mucus traps the dust, debris, and pathogens we inhale. When we swallow, the mucus passes to the stomach where stomach acid kills the swallowed pathogens. This system works well unless the body becomes overwhelmed by a bacteria or virus. Then the normally runny mucus thickens and we have to contend with a stopped up nose, dripping sinuses, or lung congestion.

The color of mucus

When we become ill, mucus thickens and changes color. First it will change from clear to white. It may then change to yellow, green, brown, or red. Here again, we find differing answers regarding the color of mucus. One bit of good advice is to not jump to a conclusion about the color of mucous if that color could be the result of trapped particles such as pollen.

Many believe thick yellow or green mucus is a sign of infection, with bacterial infection being confirmed by green mucus. Many conventional medical sites claim the color is not at all significant. Several (Web M.D. being one example) explain that the green color comes from enzymes released by neutrophils, white blood cells that combat pathogens – mostly bacteria and fungi. Which brings us back to the belief that green mucus is a sign of a bacterial infection. The CDC,

however, has a vastly different claim for the green color.

When germs that cause colds first infect the nose and sinuses, the nose makes clear mucus. This helps wash the germs from the nose and sinuses. After two or three days, the body's immune cells fight back, changing the mucus to a white or yellow color. As the bacteria that live in the nose grow back, they may also be found in the mucus, which changes the mucus to a greenish color.

How to manage mucus when you are ill

Fluids are essential in managing mucus. Drink lots of water. Your fluid intake is critical to keep mucus from being too thick and from drying out. Take hot showers, use steam (in the sink, a bowl with a towel over the head, or a sinus steamer). Eucalyptus drops in the water work well as an expectorant to help break up mucus and allow you to cough it up or blow it out, as do some herbs (see link to tincture recipe).

A neti pot

Another option is to use a neti pot to irrigate the sinuses. Be sure to use distilled water if possible. If not, make sure you boil and cool the water before use. A neti pot simply helps you to run salt water (often buffered with baking soda as well) through the nose and sinuses, hydrating and cleansing the tissues as it aids in breaking up mucus. For more information about the use of a net pot see the first source, and check the second one for strengthening the immune system. And check out the Herbal Snuff to clear sinuses and the Huff and Puff recipe to make an expectorant tincture). It's imperative that you keep the liver functioning at optimal levels, while keeping the immune system strong. We recommend

Black Radish Complex and check out *Bullet Proof Your Immune System*.

Recommended Supplements:

- Black Radish Complex – Professional Complementary Health Formulas
- Rose Hips Solid Extracts – Wise Woman Herbals
- Shillington's Herbal Snuff
- Neti Pot Starter Kit/Ceramic – Himalayan Institute
- Neti Wash Plus Daily Boost – Himalayan Institute
- Neti Stik – Himalayan Institute
- Neti Mist Sinus Spray – Himalayan Institute
- Other Supplements for Sinuses

Further Reading:

- *How To Use a Neti Pot For Sinus Infections*
- *Make Your Immune System Bulletproof With These Natural Remedies*

Sources:

- *Runny Nose Q&As – CDC*
- *The Truth About Mucus – WebMD*
- *Everything You Ever Wondered About Mucus and Phlegm – everyday Health*
- *Mucus – Sinus Wars*
- *Neutrophil in viral infections, friend or foe? – US National Library of Medicine*