

## **EXPERTS IN THE FIELD: A New Attitude Toward Fevers**

CLINICIAN of the Month; Phillip Incao, M.D.

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**JLML:** Dr. Incao, can you give us a thumbnail sketch of what Anthroposophic medicine is?

**PI:** Certainly. Anthroposophic medicine is an extension of Western medicine based on the teachings of the visionary Austrian scientist Rudolf Steiner. It takes into account not just the physical body, but also the spirit, the soul, and the life force or "chi" of the human being. All of these aspects of the human being work together in human physiology and pathology, and we need to consider all of them in healing. Through working with these principles in my practice since 1971, I've gradually come to learn the deeper levels of human illness and healing.

**JLML:** One of the hallmarks of your treatment approach is that fevers are beneficial, and that by suppressing a fever with Tylenol or antibiotics, we're often doing a child more harm than good.

**PI:** That's very true. We have a tyranny of fear in the U.S. about fevers and infections, which is understandable, but which is a terrible obstacle to healing what ails us as individuals and as a society. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century many children died of pneumonia, scarlet fever or diphtheria. Today U.S. children very rarely die from any of the acute infectious/inflammatory feverish illnesses that often claimed their lives before 1900. That has more to do with modern progress in plumbing, sanitation, hygiene and even literacy, than with medical interventions such as vaccinations and antibiotics.

In any case, it's very important to understand that it's our own immune system that creates our fevers and that fevers are our *main defense* against our body's toxicity and the germs which feed on that toxicity. Parents are over-anxious to lower a fever, and assume that when it goes down the child is healthy, which is often not the case.

We have a mindset that says it's bad to have an illness, and that health is the absence of illness. This isn't always true. Fever is the healing flame, the great cleanser of the body, and a critical part of developing a child's immune system. An immune system that is vigorously exercised through fevers in childhood is a much stronger and more able adult immune system than one that has been suppressed since birth with vaccinations, antibiotics and fever-reducing medications. The "use it or lose it" adage applies well here.

**JLML:** Why do you think it is that children have more fevers, and higher fevers, than adults?

**PI:** Children often get fevers when they are *stressed*. Also, childhood is the time of most rapid growth and dramatic change, and a child will remodel and renew his body many times as he grows. Every remodeling job requires some demolition, a breaking down of old cells and tissues

which results in toxic waste and debris, which the body normally cleans up as it rebuilds new cells and tissues. This demolition, cleansing and rebuilding is silently going on in us all the time through our immune system, but more so in growing children. Every so often this ongoing inner remodeling process of the immune system shifts into high gear, either because we are unknowingly taking a bigger developmental step than usual, or because we've become toxic from too much stress.

This shifting into high gear inwardly of our immune system has an unwelcome outer result—it makes us sick with inflammation, fever and discharge of mucus. Thus, we come down with a cold, flu, vomiting, diarrhea, strep throat, etc. In this way the immune system expels from the body mucus, pus, germs and other toxic waste and debris that have been nourishing the germs.

The crucial fact is that the *symptoms* of the illness are also the *healing* of the illness. That is because the symptoms are caused by inflammation, and inflammation is what our immune system does in order to detoxify and heal us. There is tremendous confusion in modern thinking, by both doctors and consumers, on the healing function of acute inflammation, as opposed to chronic inflammation.

When we diminish symptoms with Tylenol, ibuprofen, decongestants or antibiotics, at the same time we diminish the healing, cleansing, expulsive power of our innate immune system.

It follows that repeated use of such drugs cools down the acute, hot inflammatory response of our innate immune system, thus increasing our tendency to allergies, asthma and other cool, chronic inflammations.

**JLML:** So do germs cause us to become ill?

**PI:** Well, we all live in balance with trillions of germs in our bodies from soon after birth throughout life, including some nasty bugs, and we only get ill when other factors and stressors disturb this balance. Germs usually act more like scavengers than predators. At a deeper level germs don't really cause illness, but they certainly feed on them, and they intensify them by triggering our immune system to create inflammation, i.e., fever, pain, redness and swelling. Every inflammation, in children or adults, every cold, sore throat, earache, fever and rash is a "healing crisis." A healing crisis is an intense action of the immune system to cleanse and detoxify the body. It is a strong effort by the human spirit to remodel the body so it can be a more suitable dwelling.

**JLML:** Wow, that's a different and beautiful way to look at a process that every parent goes through many times during childhood.

**PI:** Yes, and this process continues throughout our adult life. It's a process of development and growth on all levels of our humanness. It's amazing what a different parental attitude toward a fever can do for a child's healing process. Children seem to intuitively know this is something they need. Children usually don't have severe aches and pains with their fevers that adults suffer, because children's bodies are less dense and hardened than adult bodies, and offer less resistance

to the fever surge of warmth flowing through them. A five-year old boy I knew said to his worried mom during his fever, "Don't worry mom, I'm just growing."

**JLML:** But that doesn't mean they should be running around outside, right?

**PI:** Oh no, definitely not. This is a time when the child should rest, and it's extremely important for them to stay warm. My general rule of thumb is to dress them warmly enough so that their cheeks are rosy, and their hands and feet are warm, but there is no sweat or perspiration. The body needs to be hot to burn out the illness. If the body is harboring toxicity, then a discharging fever with a runny nose, vomiting, or diarrhea for example, could be just the housecleaning that the body needs. The discharge is a sign that the fever and inflammation produced by the immune system are "digesting" toxic waste and debris and releasing them from the body. Most people are actually healthier after they've had a fever.

**JLML:** So much for the germ theory!

**PI:** In its time, the germ theory was a great revelation. The discovery that bacteria could influence the course of illness helped us create a whole new level of public and private hygiene, which has given our immune systems much less work to do in some respects. But the germ theory is very limited. There was an article in *Scientific American* way back in 1955, titled, "Second Thoughts on the Germ Theory," about the observation that everyone harbors disease germs, but not everyone is sick. The conclusion was that whether or not we get sick depends on the condition of the host – your body – more than it does on the germs.

So we've known for a long time that germs feed on disease and weakness, they seldom directly cause it. That's why I prefer the word "inflammation" to the misunderstood and misleading word "infection" which strikes so much fear into people's hearts. In the case of inflammations involving germs, the germs are doing us a favor by helping to cleanse the body. Germs feed on the dying and decaying matter in our body which we are all continually producing—it's the normal life cycle of our cells. Because most of our cells are continually dying and being replaced, every normal, healthy child and adult harbors trillions of germs.

**JLML:** We've been so conditioned to think of fevers as dangerous, how does a parent know when it's serious?

**PI:** When a mother observes her sick child objectively, unclouded by emotions, her assessment is usually accurate. It's normal for a feverish child to be lethargic, flushed, hot to the touch and uninterested in eating or drinking. But if the feverish child is becoming weaker and weaker, losing eye contact or growing cool or pale, then the doctor or emergency room should be called. When my children had their fevers, I seldom took their temperature. A thermometer cannot tell whether a fever is benign or serious, you tell that by observing the child.

A typical parent will give a child a fever-reducing medicine if the temperature is one degree above normal. What that does is to cause whatever toxic matter was trying to come out of the body to settle back into the body more deeply. Nothing has really gone away, and when the Tylenol or ibuprofen wears off the child will be sicker than before. Children will get repeated

earaches or strep throats when the *first* earache or strep throat is not really healed but is only suppressed by an antibiotic. Although they can be lifesaving when really needed, when given unnecessarily, antibiotics weaken the immune system. As for anti-inflammatory drugs like Tylenol and ibuprofen, it is false advertising to say that they “relieve” symptoms. A true symptom-relieving medicine would actually facilitate, or share in the work that the symptoms are doing in cleansing the body, thus allowing the symptoms to work less intensely. This is what a healing herbal or homeopathic medicine can do, and what detoxification does, but drugs are unable to do.

Drugs *suppress* symptoms by suppressing the work of the immune system that produces the symptoms. Antibiotics, though suppressive, are sometimes necessary, but anti-inflammatory drugs like acetaminophen (Tylenol) and ibuprofen are unhelpful for fever, do not prevent convulsions at all, and are best avoided except for severe pain that is not relieved by detoxification, homeopathic medicines or other healing measures.

**JLML:** What about febrile seizures? The great fear of every parent is that their child will run a high fever and have a seizure.

**PI:** This is another example where parents have been unnecessarily scared out of their wits. The first misconception is that a febrile (fever-caused) seizure, also called a fever convulsion, is directly caused by a high fever. This isn't totally accurate, because 95 percent of kids have a high fever and don't get a seizure, and kids who do get a febrile seizure often don't have that high a temperature. A seizure is caused when the fever rises very rapidly, often before the parent even knows it's there. Some children will get a febrile seizure because the body doesn't go with the flow of the fever warmth surging through it. This often happens when the body, arms, hands, legs and feet are too cold and the warmth surge has difficulty penetrating the whole body. When a fever is rising the patient feels chilled and shivers and should be warmly covered.

The other misconception is that febrile seizures cause permanent brain damage – they don't. Generally, if a convulsion has not occurred in the first 24 hours of the fever, then it is less likely to occur at all.

The best way to avoid a fever convulsion is to keep the child warm and give plenty of fluids, so that the warmth of the fever can circulate throughout the body. If the child is throwing off the blankets, at least keep the belly, legs and feet warm. In many healing traditions around the world, children are wrapped in blankets when they have a fever.

**JLML:** How can our readers learn more?

**PI:** They can go to [PhilipIncao.com](http://PhilipIncao.com) and print out articles I've written on children's health, the immune system and vaccinations. Also on the site are my home remedy kit directions which go into the details of caring at home for fevers, infections and inflammations in children and adults. Following these guidelines enabled me to bring up my 3 children, who are now healthy, non-allergic, non-asthmatic adults, without ever having to give them Tylenol, ibuprofen or an antibiotic.