

A New Attitude Toward Fevers: An Interview With Philip Incao, MD

Written by Philip Incao, MD

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Interview originally conducted for the John R. Lee, M.D., Medical Letter.

No one is happy when their children are not feeling well. But there's one symptom that has long had a bad reputation...which is finally starting to change. In this conversation, noted physician Dr. Philip Incao walks us through how fevers can help restore a child's wellness, and why suppressing them can be a bad idea.

Dr. Incao, can you give us a thumbnail sketch of what anthroposophic medicine is?

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.

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SCIENTIFIC HEALTHCARE

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INTERVIEW ORIGINALLY CONDUCTED FOR THE JOHN R. LEE, M.D., MEDICAL LETTER

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Dr. Incao, can you give us a thumbnail sketch of what antiempiric medicine is?
Certainly. Antiempiric medicine is an acronym of Western medicine based on the teachings of the vitamin-sy American 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.

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. That's very true. We have a tendency 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 19th to the 20th century many children died of pneumonia, scarlet fever or diphtheria. Today U.S. children very rarely die from any of the acute infectious/inflammatory febrile illnesses that often claimed their lives before 1900. That has more to do with modern progress in glutathione, sulfonides, hygiene and even vaccines, 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 often 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 vigorously escalates 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

never reducing medications. The "use it or lose it" adage applies well here.

Why do you think it is that children have more fevers, and higher fevers, than adults?
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 heating down of old cells and tissues that results in toxic waste and debris, which the body normally cleans up as it rebuilds new cells and tissues. This demolition, cleaning and rebuilding is already going on in us all the time through our immune system, but more so in growing children. They so often fall into ongoing remodeling 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 inward shifting into high gear of our immune system has an unfortunate side effect -- 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 accumulating in 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. Chaining, expelling 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.

So do germs cause us to become ill?

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 stresses disturb this balance. Germs usually act more like scavengers than predators. At a deeper level germs don't really cause illnesses, but they certainly feed on them, and they intensify them by triggering our immune system to create inflammation -- e.g., fever, pain, redness and swelling. Every inflammation, in children or adults, every cold, sore throat, sneeze, 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.

Wow, that's a different and beautiful way to look at a process that every parent goes through many times during their child's youth.

Yes, and this process continues throughout our adult lives. It's a process of development and growth in 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 3-year old boy I knew said to his worried mom during his fever, "Don't worry, Mom, I'm not growing."

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

Oh no, definitely not. This is a time when children should not, 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 rosy 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.

So much for the germ theory!

In its time, the germ theory was a great revelation. The discovery that bacteria could influence the course of illness helped to 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 1995, 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 while 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

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