

TOWNSENDLETTER.COM

Townsend Letter

The Examiner of Alternative Medicine

DECEMBER 2012 | ISSUE #353

**Mucus in
Respiratory Illness**
Friend or Foe?

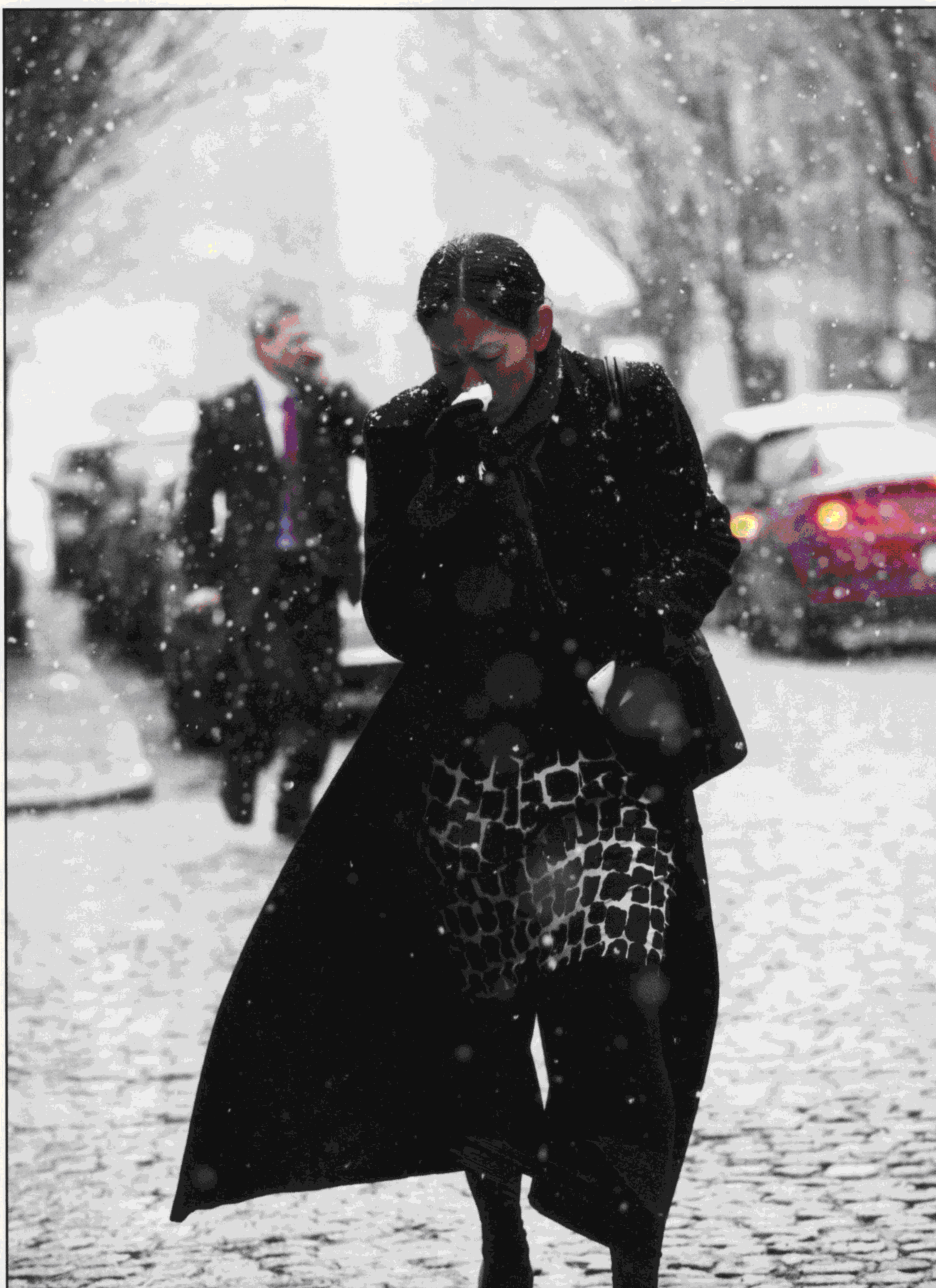
**Community-Acquired
Pneumonia**
Strategies for Integrative
Management

**Saline Solution for
Sinusitis**
The Most Effective Formula

**Vitamin C and
Influenza**
Practical Treatment
Considerations

Probiotic Foods
Which Are Most Beneficial?

**Sun Spots and
Hyperpigmentation**
An Anti-Aging Approach



\$7.50



Dr. Julie

by Julie T. Chen, MD
www.makinghealthyez.com

Vitamin D: Our Lungs' Best Friend

It appears that all the hype about vitamin D being good for us is not just about bone health; it is also phenomenally beneficial for our lungs and at decreasing our risk of respiratory infections. Studies dating back many years suggest a positive effect on lung health in regard to our friend vitamin D.

Every once in a while, I still hear from my patients that their primary care doctor isn't checking their vitamin D levels and they are taking vitamin D on their own because of what they are reading online or in articles. This concerns me on multiple levels.

The first concern is that physicians are still not checking vitamin D despite the research that suggests what an abundant level can do for the body. Another equally concerning fact is that patients are taking vitamin D without monitoring.

In addressing the first concern, there are many studies suggesting that vitamin D has a significant role in our immune function among other equally important functions of the body such as bone health and cancer risks. Patients who were vitamin D deficient in studies were at higher risk for cold and flu infections. Those with lung disease such as asthma and emphysema were especially more susceptible to vitamin D deficiency in regard to their risks in respiratory infections.

There is suggestion that vitamin D affects lung functioning. So, those with already debilitated or weakened lung functioning, as with chronic lung diseases, would be more greatly affected by a deficiency of this vitamin since it helps to optimize lung function.

In regard to my other concern, despite the great benefit to those with chronic lung disease and those with deficient

immune functioning susceptible to recurrent respiratory infections, vitamin D levels still need to be monitored to make sure that you are not taking too much. When you can target lung disease using vitamin D with responsible monitoring, the health benefits can be tremendous.

As with any other medicine, vitamin, herb, or food, too much of anything is not going to lead to optimal health outcomes. So, ask your doctor to check your 25-hydroxy vitamin D level as well as your PTH (parathyroid hormone level). These two measurements should help to make sure that you are getting optimal levels for your health goals without taking too much for your body's needs.

The goal is to maximize your levels without causing any negative effects on the side. Also, ask your doctor about what the studies show in regard to the ideal level of vitamin D for men versus women. Based on studies, there appear to be slight differences in goal targets for vitamin D levels in men and women and this should not be lost in the management of your vitamin D intake.

Take for example my patient, a 60-year-old woman with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in the form of emphysema and her recurrent risk of getting respiratory infections at least two to three times a year. She usually ends up requiring inhaled steroids and oral steroids as well as 10 to 14 days of antibiotics. When she came to see me, she was referred by another patient of mine who had succeeded at decreasing allergy and frequent infection issues using supplements.

I began with this woman, as I do with all my patients, with an explanation about how our bodies are machines and, as with other machines, there are fundamental building

Dr. Julie

blocks or tools that it needs to optimize its functioning. So as she jumped right in with getting blood work done and evaluating her diet and lifestyle, we discovered that her vitamin D level was an 8 – extremely low.

Once we saw that, I put her on daily vitamin D3 therapy and encouraged her to change her diet to an anti-inflammatory diet that is rich in vegetables of various different rainbow colors. She was also put on fish oil, amino acids, and curcumin for her chronic back muscle pains along with adrenal supporters such as ginseng and deglycyrrhized licorice for adrenal fatigue. Because of her history of osteopenia, I started her on calcium citrate at a moderate level and asked her to aim for consumption in vegetables and for her to avoid dairy since she tested sensitive to it. She was also tested for gluten and found to be sensitive, so she avoided that in her diet as well.

After several months of therapy on a diet and supplemental regimen, the frequency and severity of her respiratory symptoms improved and her bone density improved by 5% by the next year's recheck on her DEXA scan. During the treatment months and even now in the maintenance phase, we check her vitamin D level a few times a year to make sure that it stays at least in the middle range but not too high above 80. She has been doing well with her lung functioning and if she gets a respiratory

infection, which is now much rarer, it is usually mild and doesn't require oral steroids or significant prolonged antibiotic therapy.

This patient is a good example of how to address pulmonary issues and recurrent infections from a multidimensional approach, because the immune system is unlikely to recover with just changing one aspect of health. By optimizing her nutrient intake levels, changing her diet to work for her immune system and not against it, and removing the foods that trigger inflammation, her body did what it does best: heal. One of the nice little side effects that frequently occur when I address health issues in this fashion is that multiple health parameters improve (like the improved bone density issue in this patient), not just the presenting symptom issues that the patient first comes in to see me for.

So, the takeaway points are that vitamin D really is our friend in many health battles that we face with the aging body. But as with all our friends, you want to check in to make sure that it is doing well ... and that's why you need to be monitored when you are taking your vitamins and supplements. Even if they are good for you, you want to remember that too much or too little of anything in life rarely is a good thing.

Reference

Ginde AA; Mansbach JM; Camargo CA Jr. Association between serum 25-hydroxyvitamin D level and upper respiratory tract infection in the Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. *Arch Int Med.* 2009;169(4):384;doi:10.1001/archinternmed.2008.560.

Julie T. Chen, MD, is board-certified in internal medicine and is also fellowship-trained and board-certified in integrative medicine. She has her own medical practice in San Jose, CA; is the medical director of corporation wellness at several Silicon Valley-based corporations; is on several medical expert panels of websites as well as nonprofit organizations; is a recurring monthly columnist for several national magazines; and has been featured in radio, newspaper, and magazine interviews. She incorporates healing modalities into her practice, including but not limited to medical acupuncture, Chinese scalp acupuncture, clinical hypnotherapy, strain-counterstrain osteopathic manipulations, and biofeedback. ♦

