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On Recovering From a Pernicious Flu, Gluten-Free

by on Friday, January 28th, 2011 | No Comments

The raging sore throat has settled into a dusty patch at the back of my throat. Malaise has given way to a modicum of energy. The pounding earache is only a little pulse of pain.

I might just be on the mend.

Last week, besieged by a miserable flu, I relented. Frayed along the edges of flu for four days, I finally faced the truth — you're sick, you silly Shauna. Give in to it. And yet, I had to let out a little sad sigh before I collapsed, letting you know why I wouldn't be offering up words every day here.

I'm serious. I'm so moved by this community.

The doctor helped, and he seems to be right. This was a bad virus, and I just needed to rest it to the ground. However, when I asked him about treatment for my piercing earache and the lymph nodes in my neck swollen to the size of kumquats, something beyond ibuprofen and sleep, he shrugged and said, "Anything your grandmother might have recommended."

Um, my grandmother, sadly, never offered me a single helpful word. What to do?

Here is what has been nursing me back to health, from the best of your comments and suggestions, in case anyone reading might be fighting that creepy feeling in the back of your throat and along your muscles: hot baths with lavender. Ah, yes. I love the delicious thrill of extending my toes into soapy water, then slowly lowering the rest of me in. Somehow, when I'm busy, baths feel like a distant memory. When I am sick, they are a necessity.

Hot lemon water with ginger and cayenne pepper. There's something soothing about lemons and heat. Fresh ginger (I pulled out the dried one for the photograph, because I had run out of all the fresh ginger from using it this week1), a touch of honey, and a dash of cayenne pepper for a kick. I must have drunk twenty-two cups of this in three days.

Gargling with salt water. Old trick, I know, but a good one. This works. Just don't swallow.

Reed's ginger brew. The Chef brought back a bag full of bottles of this, the first morning I finally admitted I was sick, after a trek to the store for healing supplies for me. I love the spicy carbonation, and it makes me feel like I'm drinking beer again! Oranges and satsumas and kumquats — oh my! Citrus fruits rock. I love peeling them and stripping the pith and feeling the squelch of juice in my mouth. Vitamin C, of course, helps too.

Sleep and more sleep. The first day, when I finally gave in, I slept all day long, with little feverish waking periods rapidly followed by more sleep. When the manuscript is due and I have a hundred things let to do, this felt decadent. But the next morning, I awoke feeling halfway to human again. To that end, I was happy to discover that Nyquil is gluten-free. Yeah! Chicken stock. The Chef made me quarts and quarts of it. I drank it hot and turned it into soups and slurped up more until my throat started feeling not so sore.

Sex and the City and Law and Order: SVU. Someone suggested, wonderfully, all six episodes of the BBC version of Pride and Prejudice, in a row. If I had not watched that, just before meeting the Chef, I would have indulged again. Besides, I could only watch in little bursts before I fell asleep again. The Chef, however, has hooked me on SVU, which I had never seen before. Beware: if you watch it before going to bed and taking Nyquil, you're going to have weird dreams.

Comments from my readers. When I would wake up and see that several more of you had sent in suggestions, I felt loved. And when I could start writing again, I felt a fervent urgent desire to write, for you. Thank you.

The Chef's love. Sorry, everyone else, you can't have this one. But hopefully, you have someone equally tender and solicitous. My entire life, since leaving my parents' house, when I have been sick, I have done it alone. This time, I woke to him kissing me, walked into the kitchen to find breakfast made, answered the phone to tender questions and silly jokes. I have never felt so loved. That has to build the immune system too.

Saying yes. About the middle of the first day, when I was feverish and fretting about losing a day of writing time, I looked down at my wrist and say it again: yes. Yes, I have the flu, it seemed to be

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nudging me. And, what are you going to do, fight it? Part of the reason I had that tattoo emblazoned on me is to remind me: say yes to every moment as it arises, even if you don't like it at first. Here I was, perniciously sick. Would I make myself any better by shouting no, no, no — I can't be sick?! Silly Shauna. Say yes. Accept. Surrender.

I think, in the end, that made the biggest difference.

Well, that, and the hot toddies.

HOT TODDIES FOR THE FLU

1 good-sized shot of Scotch
1 tablespoon sugar
juice of 1/2 lemon
enough hot water to fill your cup

Pour the Scotch and sugar into the cup. Stir. Squeeze the lemon juice in and listen to it sizzle against the alcohol. Fill the cup with hot water, just enough to cover if you want this strong, all the way to the top if you like your toddies weak. Stir. Drink. Repeat, every night, until you are rested and wide-eyed with energy.

POSTSCRIPT, literally: Many of you have written to me, in the comments and on the flickr page, to warn everyone reading that Emergen-C is not safe for celiacs. Apparently, the raspberry and mixed berry have sometimes been found with traces of wheat in them. Or is it the other flavors? I've only had a few Emergen-C packets in my life, and one of them on the first full day of the flu. I haven't had a reaction. Then again, maybe I would have been better that day without that one packet. Best to be on the safe side and ignore them completely.

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