



Echinacea

Stock #262-6 (50 capsules)
Stock #263-8 (180 capsules)

As a result of much scientific research and many clinical studies, echinacea is now considered one of the best-known and extremely safe immune strengtheners available. This humble annual herb has been shown to fight bronchitis, colds, flu, infection, strep throat, and other immune and respiratory problems. Taking echinacea at the first sign of cold or flu can arrest the problem and shorten the duration of symptoms. In fact, Dr. Mahady, Ph.D., who assisted the World Health Organization in reviewing the world's scientific literature on this powerful herb, reports that echinacea will shorten the duration of a cold even if it is taken after an individual has become sick.¹

The mechanism by which echinacea strengthens immune function to counter bacterial and viral infection is remarkable. Echinacea contains polysaccharides which resemble bacteria, causing the immune system to regard them as foreign invaders. In turn, the immune system builds up its defenses against echinacea, increasing the body's production of white blood cells, thereby becoming stronger and more capable of fighting a real bacterial invasion. Even after exposure to a virus, echinacea can block virus receptors on the surface of cells, preventing the virus from "taking hold." Echinacea also normalizes body temperature, whether high or low.²

Echinacea polysaccharides also produce an anti-hyaluronidase effect—the ability to protect hyaluronic acid from being dissolved by a foreign enzyme. Hyaluronic acid forms a protective gel around cells to prevent viral penetration. In addition, echinacea contains a caffeic acid ester called echinacoside, which functions as a natural antibiotic, enabling the herb to fight and even prevent infection in much the same way as penicillin. Furthermore, echinacea contains fat-soluble substances called alkylamides which provide additional antibacterial and antifungal activity, as well as mild anesthetic effects.^{2,3,6}

Researchers have confirmed echinacea's ability to increase the immune system's production of interferon—the substance which fights viral infections in the body—as well as its ability to increase production of T-lymphocytes (T-cells) and other white blood cells which fight bacterial toxins. In fact, scientists at the University of Munich found echinacea stimulates infection-fighting T-cells more than 30% in comparison to other pharmaceutical immune stimulants. Echinacea also stimulates macrophage activity to help keep the lymphatic system operating efficiently. Macrophages are large cells in the lymph nodes which locate, filter out and destroy foreign particles, bacteria and toxins in the lymph fluid—a process known as phagocytosis. Such immunostimulating activity enables echinacea to effectively protect the body against virus-related diseases, including canker sores, herpes and influenza.^{2,3}

German researchers published a study in *Planta Medica* which demonstrated that *E. purpurea* increased viral resistance 80% in mouse cells treated with the herb 4 to 6 hours before exposure. Additionally, treated cells remained resistant for roughly 24 hours. Another study, involving 180 individuals with flu-like symptoms or feverish upper respiratory infections, concluded that those receiving 900mg of *E. purpurea* root daily experienced significant improvement of cold symptoms over both the placebo group and the group receiving only 450mg of echinacea daily.³⁻⁵

Echinacea is a blood and lymph cleanser and has been shown to be quite effective against *Streptococcus*—a genus of bacteria which can cause gastrointestinal, respiratory and urinary tract infections, among others. Echinacea is also regarded as an effective remedy for abscesses, blood poisoning (septicemia), boils, chronic infections, diphtheria, fungal problems, gangrene, gingivitis, laryngitis, malaria, meningitis, pyorrhea, sinusitis, skin diseases (applied externally for acne, herpes, and psoriasis), swollen glands, tonsillitis, typhoid, slow-healing wounds, venereal diseases and postviral fatigue syndrome, also known as myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME). Echinacea is currently being studied as a possible treatment for HIV and AIDS.^{6,7}

Recent studies show echinacea reduces inflammation, perhaps owing to the cortisone-like activity identified in the plant and its ability to stimulate production of adrenal cortex hormones. Echinacea also inhibits the discharge of fluid and other materials from cells and tissues, usually resulting from inflammation or injury.³

For individuals suffering from impaired immune function, recent research data indicates that long-term usage of echinacea can provide long-term benefits. Individuals are typically recommended to take echinacea for 8 weeks, followed by a 1 week reprieve. Furthermore, an extensive review of both published and unpublished research was conducted to determine the safety of echinacea usage. Results of the review confirmed that echinacea is safe for use by individuals of all ages, "from infants to adults."^{3,8}

Individuals with allergies to daisies should avoid taking echinacea, as some allergic reactions have been reported. Avoid applying an echinacea tincture directly to inflamed tissues: for throat infections, take the tincture with warm water as a gargle; for topical application, dilute the tincture approximately 1:6.^{1,5}

Although controversial, the official German echinacea monographs suggest possible contraindication in cases of "progressive systemic diseases like tuberculosis, leukosis, collagen disorders, or multiple sclerosis," thereby suggesting the exercise of caution with any autoimmune condition. However, there has been no controlled study conducted to-date to confirm any adverse effects in autoimmune diseases.^{5,8}

References:

- 1 McCarthy, Paul. "Natural Remedies: Echinacea for Dummies." *Natural Health*, Jan/Feb 1998.
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- 3 Murray, Michael T. *The Healing Power of Herbs*. Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing, 1995.
- 4 Wacker, A. and Hilbig, W. "Virus-inhibition by *Echinacea purpurea*." *Planta Medica*;1978, Vol. 33, 89-102.
- 5 Bergner, Paul. *The Healing Power of Echinacea, Golden seal, and Other Immune System Herbs*. Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing, 1997.
- 6 Chevallier, A. *The Encyclopedia of Medicinal Plants*. NY, NY: Dorling Kindersley, 1996.
- 7 Bown, Deni. *Encyclopedia of Herbs & Their Uses*. NY, NY: Dorling Kindersley Inc., 1995.
- 8 McCaleb, Rob. "Echinacea Safety Confirmed." *Herbalgram*; Number 42, 15.