



## Supplements popular to treat colds

The birds are singing, plumeria is blooming, and you are coming down with a sore throat and runny nose. Even your voice sounds deeper. Is it possible that you are catching the dreaded "spring -- nearly summer cold virus"? You want to treat these cold symptoms before they get out of hand.

Most of us are familiar with the anti-inflammatory and antihistamine drugs that do a good job of decreasing the symptoms. However, there are now dietary supplement and herbal products that claim to decrease the symptoms and even shorten the time you have a cold.

The three most popular of these are vitamin C, zinc, and the herb echinacea.

Vitamin C has been promoted for the prevention of colds since the early 1970s. Since then, research has shown large doses of vitamin C don't prevent sore throats and the common cold, but taking 1 gram of vitamin C per day as an over-the-counter drug can help to reduce the duration of some colds. The antihistamine properties of vitamin C also can help to reduce the severity of some cold symptoms.

Zinc lozenges are another hot item being used to treat the com-

mon cold. If taken within the first 24 hours of symptoms, they may help to reduce the severity of the cold symptoms. However, it is not wise to take zinc lozenges for long periods of time or to prevent a cold when you do not have any symptoms. High intakes of zinc can interfere with the absorption of other important trace minerals, like iron and copper.

Echinacea (pronounced ek-ahnay-sha), an herb known for its immunostimulating properties in preventing colds, is the newest popular over-the-counter cold treatment. Even though some people can't pronounce it, they are using it.

Echinacea is also known as purple corn flower, snake root, or hedgehog. Research indicates echinacea primarily functions by stimulating the immune system. Taking it at the very beginning of a cold may help to stop it before the cold really gets going.

Echinacea should not be taken for long periods of time without medical supervision. It is not healthy to have a chronically stimulated immune system. Some of the nasty things that the stimulated immune system does to microbes and viruses can be hard on

our own healthy cells too. And as an immunostimulant, echinacea should not be used by individuals with diseases of the immune system such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, or HIV/AIDS. Also, echinacea (a member of the daisy family) should not be used by individuals with allergies to the daisy family.

There aren't many good guidelines on how to use echinacea for cold prevention. Herbal expert Varro Tyler points out research supports gargling with the proper dilution of a standardized echinacea extract and that taking echinacea pills probably won't do much. Echinacea lozenges might make sense, but research is lacking.

Also, due to the United States herbal supplement labeling laws, it is not necessary for manufacturers to provide information about the concentration of active principles in their product. It is a buyer beware market.

No matter which treatment route you choose, don't ignore good nutrition. Drink plenty of water, include lots of fruits and vegetables in your diet, and get adequate sleep.

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