

Echinacea

You may have heard of it. You may even know how to pronounce it (eck-ih-nay-sha). But do you know how it may be able to help you this flu season?

The fact is it is one of the most clinically studied herbs in the world. There are nine species of this botanical, all native to the Midwest, and commonly called purple coneflower or snakeroot. The American Indians used it more than any other plant to fight a variety of illnesses. It was used externally for burns, wounds and insect bites, and internally for all types of infection, toothache, and as an antidote for rattlesnake bites. While many eclectics and some physicians continued to use it throughout the 1900s, it wasn't until 1980 that its immune-enhancing powers were rediscovered and popularized.

Today, *Echinacea* is used most often in the treatment of the common cold. While many parts of the plant have been used clinically, it appears to be the root extract of the *Echinacea purpurea* species that exhibits the greatest effects. In one study, the extract was given to healthy males three times per day for five days and the result was a 120% increase in immune cell activity. Most notably, its antiviral activity seems to be effective against influenza and herpes viruses. Several studies have shown a decrease in cold and flu symptoms when taken at early onset of the illness and a decrease in the number of days the symptoms are experienced. More research is being done on its purported ability to destroy tumor cells, regenerate tissue and reduce inflammation.

For general immune-boosting purposes during the winter months, the usual recommendation is 300 to 1000 mg per day, ideally in divided doses. It is important to use a high-quality *Echinacea purpurea* root extract as not all preparations, brands, or varieties are equally effective. Before taking *Echinacea*, consult with a physician if you have been taking prescribed medication or if you suffer from an immune system disorder.

Source: Textbook of Natural Medicine. 2000. Murray, M. and Pizzorno, J.

The nutritional suggestions presented in this newsletter are not intended to treat, mitigate or cure disease, and should not be used as a substitute for sound medical advice. This information is designed to be used in conjunction with the services of a trained, licensed healthcare practitioner.