

Cold News this summer



After years of medical studies on cold remedies, the medical community is coming to understand the value of some herbal remedies for colds. The medical term for herbal preparations and dietary supplements is “nutraceuticals.” This month there was a large re-evaluation of medical studies on Echinacea. The conclusion: Echinacea works! (Lancet Infectious Disease July 2007) Echinacea not only shortens the duration of colds by almost a day and a half, but it also seems to decrease the chance of getting a cold by 58%. This is big news for the growing nutraceutical industry. With an estimated 1 billion colds in the U.S. every year, there are a lot of medicines on the market that work and do not work. Adults average 2 to 4 colds and children average 6 to 10 colds a year. With each cold lasting 7 to 10 days, any help with avoiding colds or getting better faster is a common desire for all of us. We’ll buy almost anything to help us feel better. So why not buy what works! Here are a few hints to keep in mind;

WASH YOUR HANDS. Frequently. Throughout the whole day. At home. At work. And especially at play. **NOTHING** prevents colds better than this. Buy alcohol-based foam or gel and carry it with you for when you aren’t near a sink. Use it a lot. Just remember, the door handles and surfaces you touched today were likely touched by hundreds of other people who might not be as concerned with cold prevention as you. Wash up before you start at your work station. Use your alcohol gel before you eat. Colds don’t start in your nose. They start on your hands.

Echinacea seems to work. You can use it to prevent colds and use it to decrease the length of colds. The pill is a mixture of nine different flowers, so make sure your choice has the “USP-verified” label on it.

Androgaphis seems to work. Start within 72 hours of cold symptoms and take it for at least 5 days. It is usually paired with Ginseng, so read the label. It is unclear if it prevents colds.

Vitamin C. Probably the most studied vitamin for colds. Vitamin C at any dose does NOT prevent colds. Despite Dr. Linus Pauling's efforts to promote this, medical studies show no benefit in cold prevention. Taking increased doses of Vitamin C, however, seems to decrease cold symptoms by 1 to 1.5 days. Discuss appropriate doses with your health-care provider.

Zinc. Like Vitamin C, zinc does not prevent colds. Zinc lozenges may help decrease the length of a cold, but medical studies are mixed. One interesting finding is that the bad-tasting zinc lozenges seem to work better than the flavored lozenges. Because these lozenges require very frequent dosing, check with your health-care provider about any interactions and appropriate dosing for you.

Combination Nutraceuticals: There are lots of celebrity testimonials and personal testimonials about the latest and greatest mixtures of vitamins, herbs, and supplements. Unfortunately, there is no medical evidence for many products. Approach with caution. If you are unlucky enough to get a summertime cold, you have the most current information. If not, remember that cold season is just a few months away.