

The Longwood Herbal Task Force
(<http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/default.htm>) and
The Center for Holistic Pediatric Education and Research

Patient Fact Sheet

ECHINACEA

ECHINACEA, or purple coneflower, is related to the daisy. Two main species of echinacea are used as medicine: *Echinacea angustifolia*, and *Echinacea purpurea*. Herbal medicines can be made from the flowers, stems and leaves, or from the roots. They are available in capsules, tinctures (in alcohol), glycerites (in glycerine), teas, creams and ointments.

WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

- ◆ Echinacea has been recommended to prevent and treat many kinds of infections, including colds and flus, ear infections, bladder infections, and yeast infections.
- ◆ It is sometimes recommended to stimulate and support the immune system during cancer treatment.
- ◆ Creams and ointments made with echinacea (sometimes combined with other herbs) are used to treat scrapes and cuts, burns, and eczema and other skin rashes.

WHAT HAVE STUDIES SHOWN?

- ◆ Several studies show that adults who take echinacea at the first sign of a cold have colds that are shorter and less severe than in people who do not take echinacea.
- ◆ In a few studies, adults who took echinacea to prevent colds had slightly fewer colds, which were slightly shorter and less severe than in those who did not take echinacea. However, in other studies, echinacea did not help to prevent colds. If echinacea does prevent colds, the effect is very mild.
- ◆ Herbalists have traditionally recommended that echinacea be taken for less than eight weeks in a row. However, no problems have been found when it is taken by mouth for up to 12 weeks. There are studies showing a decrease in the helpful effects of echinacea when it is taken for longer than eight weeks, but in these studies the patients received echinacea by injection.
- ◆ There are no studies of echinacea's use for preventing or treating colds or other infections in children.
- ◆ There are no comparison studies of echinacea's use for other kinds of infections, for use during cancer treatment, or for skin problems.

(continued)

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

- ◆ The only known side effect is allergic reaction, which is very rare.
- ◆ Some people have a few seconds of tingling or numbness of the tongue after taking echinacea by mouth.

No long-term problems have been found from taking echinacea.

WILL IT INTERFERE WITH MY OTHER MEDICATIONS OR MY MEDICAL CONDITION?

- ◆ Echinacea is traditionally not recommended for people with autoimmune diseases like multiple sclerosis and lupus, or for people who have had organ transplants or who must take immunosuppressant medications, but there have been no scientific studies evaluating these recommendations.
- ◆ Tinctures are not recommended for people with severe liver disease because they contain alcohol.
- ◆ There are no studies of echinacea's safety for children or women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

IS IT SAFE FOR CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN?

There are no studies of echinacea's safety for children or women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. However, no problems have been reported.

WHAT ARE TYPICAL DOSAGES?

Typical doses for adults are:

- ◆ 500-1000 mg of root extract three to five times per day, OR
- ◆ 1-4 ml of pressed juice in alcohol tincture (1:5 in 45% alcohol) three times per day.

Echinacea tea is probably not very effective, because some of the active ingredients do not dissolve in hot water.

Products vary widely. Follow your health-care provider's instructions.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

- ◆ Always tell your doctor or nurse practitioner if you are taking any herb, and before starting any new herb. Your health care provider needs to know everything you are taking to help you make decisions about your health care. Herbs can cause problems with other herbs, dietary supplements, or medications.
- ◆ Herbal products may be contaminated with chemicals or other species of plants.