Echinacea

url: https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/echinacea  
  
  
Echinacea  
Common Names: echinacea, purple coneflower, coneflower, American coneflower  
  
Latin Names: Echinacea purpurea, Echinacea angustifolia, Echinacea pallida  
  
Background  
There are nine known species of echinacea, all of which are native to North America. They were used by Native Americans of the Great Plains region as traditional medicines.  
Echinacea is promoted as a dietary supplement for the common cold and other infections, based on the idea that it might stimulate the immune system to more effectively fight infection. Echinacea preparations have been promoted for topical use (application to the skin) for wounds and skin problems.  
Several species of echinacea, most commonly Echinacea purpurea or Echinacea angustifolia, may be included in dietary supplements.  
How Much Do We Know?  
Many studies have been done on echinacea for the common cold and other upper respiratory tract infections. Much less research has been done on the use of echinacea for other health purposes.  
What Have We Learned?  
Taking echinacea might slightly reduce your chances of catching a cold. Echinacea has not been shown to shorten the length of a cold.  
There isn t enough evidence to show whether echinacea is helpful for other health conditions.  
Recent NCCIH-sponsored research suggests that the effect of echinacea on immune cells may depend on the types and amounts of bacteria within the echinacea plants and that the composition of the soil in which the plants are grown can affect this bacterial community. However, these findings come from laboratory studies of isolated cells, not studies in people.  
What Do We Know About Safety?  
For most adults, short-term oral (by mouth) use of echinacea is probably safe; the safety of long-term use is uncertain.  
Although some preliminary research has been done on the use of echinacea during pregnancy, the safety of using echinacea during pregnancy or while breastfeeding remains uncertain.  
The most common side effects of echinacea are digestive tract symptoms, such as nausea or stomach pain.  
Some people have allergic reactions to echinacea, which may be severe. Some children participating in a clinical trial of echinacea developed rashes, which may have been caused by an allergic reaction.  
Current evidence indicates that the risk of interactions between echinacea supplements and most medications is low.  
Keep in Mind  
Take charge of your health talk with your health care providers about any complementary health approaches you use. Together, you can make shared, well-informed decisions.  
For More Information  
Using Dietary Supplements Wisely  
Know the Science: How Medications and Supplements Can Interact  
Know the Science: How To Make Sense of a Scientific Journal Article  
NCCIH Clearinghouse  
The NCCIH Clearinghouse provides information on NCCIH and complementary and integrative health approaches, including publications and searches of Federal databases of scientific and medical literature. The Clearinghouse does not provide medical advice, treatment recommendations, or referrals to practitioners.  
  
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ODS seeks to strengthen knowledge and understanding of dietary supplements by evaluating scientific information, supporting research, sharing research results, and educating the public. Its resources include publications (such as Dietary Supplements: What You Need To Know) and fact sheets on a variety of specific supplement ingredients and products (such as vitamin D and multivitamin/mineral supplements).  
  
Website: https://ods.od.nih.gov  
  
Email: ods@nih.gov(link sends email)  
  
Key References  
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Taylor JA, Weber W, Standish L, et al. Efficacy and safety of echinacea in treating upper respiratory tract infections in children: a randomized controlled trial. JAMA. 2003;290(21):2824-2830.  
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