

TITLE:

Echinacea, Is it for You?

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Abstract:

Echinacea is a plant that is sold as an over-the-counter supplement for the prevention and treatment of the common cold. Many preparations are available including different composition and different extraction methods. A review of studies in the prevention of illness showed no statistically significant improvement in the prevention of the common cold as compared to placebo. In studies comparing echinacea to placebo in the treatment of cold symptoms, results widely varied. One aerial form of the plant *Echinacea purpurea* was found to decrease the duration of illness and lessen the severity of experienced symptoms. There is however, no clear evidence that any kind of *Echinacea* beneficial for children. In fact, one report demonstrated an increase in the the occurrence of rashes among children taking *Echinacea*, as compared to the placebo group.

ECHINACEA, Is it for You?

WHAT IS ECHINACEA?

Echinacea is a plant from the *Compositae* family. Preparations of the echinacea plant are sold over the counter as supplements to aid in the prevention and treatment of the common cold. Products sold under the name "echinacea" vary widely because of their composition (variable plant material including stems and/or roots) and because of their extraction methods (alcohol and/or pressurized extraction.) In addition, many products have additives of different supplements or other components.

HOW CAN ECHINACEA CAN HELP ME?

Studies show that echinacea preparations cannot be used for prevention of the common cold. In contrast, some studies have demonstrated that a specific supplement derived from the aerial parts of *Echinacea purpurea* (*E. purpurea*) can be used to shorten the duration and decrease the severity of the common cold. Treatment benefits from other echinacea preparations may be possible, however these benefits have not been seen in formal clinical studies.

CAN MY CHILD BENEFIT FROM ECHINACEA?

There is no clear evidence that any kind of echinacea is beneficial for children. Side effects from echinacea products are rare however, one clinical trial reported an increase in rashes in children taking the supplement.

TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR.

It is important to speak with your physician prior to beginning any over the counter supplement regime.