

Health Supplements for Common Colds and Coughs

On average, adults can be infected with common colds between two to four times a year, whilst children could develop four to eight colds a year.

A common cold is often confused with influenza or the 'flu', which is far more serious. A common cold is not the 'flu' and is self limiting. Symptoms between a common cold and the flu are different. The main difference is that people who are down with common cold rarely suffer from fever, muscle weakness and pain, whereas those who suffer from influenza rarely experience nasal congestion.

Vitamin C (ascorbic acid)

Vitamin C is available in its pure form and in many multi-vitamin products. Vitamin C is thought to stimulate the immune system by increasing the activity of cells in the body that fight infection and as an anti-oxidant. However, there has been controversy for many years over its benefits on common colds.

Many people who take anti common cold drugs are not aware that they contain vitamin C. It is not known what dose of Vitamin C should be used to treat common colds. Some studies have used up to 1 gram per day and some even more. However, it is known that too much vitamin C can actually be detrimental to health, rather than improving it.

There is also controversy whether increased dietary intake is beneficial in preventing the severity and duration of common colds. It is advisable to eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables per day. This provides about 200mg of vitamin C, which is adequate for good nutrition.

Echinacea

Echinacea is used to stimulate the immune system and may also have anti-inflammatory properties. It has been suggested that Echinacea may reduce symptom duration and severity by 10% to 30%, while other studies have shown no benefit.

Echinacea may help to reduce symptoms and severity if taken from the first onset for 7-10 days. However, it does not prevent the onset of colds.

Zinc

It is not known how Zinc may reduce symptom severity or duration. Some believe that it may prevent the virus from entering the body's cells or its ability to reproduce.

Some studies suggest that zinc lozenges providing 9-24mg of elemental zinc per dose may help if taken in the first 24-48 hours after symptoms develop. Zinc supplements however do not prevent common colds from developing.

Panax Ginseng (or Asian Ginseng)

Panax Ginseng may stimulate the immune system, helping to prevent the onset of a cold. The exact mechanism is not known. There is not enough evidence to determine its benefits.

Garlic

Garlic has been used to prevent common colds from developing. It is thought to stimulate the immune system. The evidence suggests that it is allicin containing garlic supplements that may prevent cold. There is not enough evidence to recommend its use.

Camphor

Camphor (a FDA-approved product) is a topical rub for coughs that is applied to the skin. Ointment containing 4.7-5.3% camphor is applied as a thick layer to the throat and chest. The area can then be covered or left uncovered.

Remember...

There is not enough evidence for most herbal remedies to recommend their use to prevent or treat common colds.

It is important to always follow the instructions on a product and not to take many products at the same time as they may contain the same constituents, causing a potentially harmful overdose.

Many herbal remedies interact with conventional medicines, for example garlic and warfarin. **If you are taking any conventional medicines, always consult your doctor or pharmacist.**

The information in this leaflet is meant for educational purposes and should not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. Please seek your doctor's advice before starting any treatment or if you have any questions related to your health, physical fitness or medical condition.

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