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ECHINACEA AND GOLDENSEAL (4/14)

Background

Echinacea (pronounced Ek-i-NAY-See-a), commonly known as purple coneflower, is a Native American wildflower belonging to the sunflower family. It was used among American Indian groups, as well as physicians in the United States in the late 18th to early 20th centuries. Most of the credible scientific research on the plant group is from Germany over the past 50 years. Echinacea is now the most popular and effective herbal medicine and is enjoying a Renaissance in the United States today.

Goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*), a perennial herb native to eastern North America, is another herbal medication proven effective for fighting the common cold.

Activity

Medical studies show that *Echinacea purpurea* root works by boosting the activity of the immune system. Goldenseal has also shown remarkable immune activity stimulation separate from echinacea. Some components of echinacea stimulate the production of infection-fighting white blood cells (lymphocytes and macrophages), while others enhance the production of interferon (prevents virus replication and increases the activity of the body's killer cells). The most consistently proven effect of echinacea is in increasing phagocytosis, or the ingestion of invading organisms and abnormal cells. These are just some of the documented benefits. The end result is better defense against infection.

How To Use Echinacea

Health food stores and most pharmacies have Echinacea-Goldenseal combinations or formulas of each individual herb, along with other combinations. Look for labels that say Echinacea is prepared from expressed juice from *Echinacea purpurea* root or its dried-juice equivalent in encapsulated form. Due to the lack of government regulation of herbal treatments in the United States, many products on the market contain Echinacea in weakened or inactive forms (*Echinacea augustifolia*, *Echinacea purpurea* whole plant extracts). The only bioactive component is from the root of *Echinacea purpurea*. These differences may explain the equivocal results of medical studies on Echinacea in this country compared to Europe.

In general, Echinacea formulations vary among products; you may have to follow dosage directions on the bottle. Often, the appropriate dosage for children under 10 years old is half the adult dose. There are certain liquid preparations (*Herbs for Kids* 406-587-0180, etc.) specifically designed for young children. Most of these preparations are flavored and alcohol free.

The earlier you apply the treatment when an illness begins, the better will be the results. Echinacea loses its efficacy when taken continually; it is best to take it for 2 weeks at a time, alternating with 2 weeks off.

Indications

A rather embarrassing footnote for modern medicine has been the absence of an effective treatment for the common cold. Although not approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), echinacea is an excellent adjunct therapy for persons with recurring infections, such as ear infections, tonsillitis, sinusitis, and bronchitis. It is particularly useful when antibiotic therapy has failed. While echinacea should not be considered a substitute for antibiotics, which are the first line of treatment for recurrent bacterial infections, it may be used simultaneously to stimulate a sluggish immune system to more effectively resist infection.

Contraindications

Do not take echinacea if you have an autoimmune illness (lupus, scleroderma, sarcoidosis, scleroderma, dermatomyositis, Wegener's granulomatosis, etc.) or other progressive systemic diseases (tuberculosis, multiple sclerosis, HIV-infections, etc) because it may overstimulate the immune system. Avoid echinacea if you are allergic to flowers of the daisy family. Barring any of these contraindications, echinacea can be a very effective yet gentle part of your health care.