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Fighting the Flu

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Zinc-containing nasal cold remedies are unsafe.

Fighting the Flu

Elderberry reduces cold and flu symptoms.

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Every winter, millions of Americans spend time doing battle with the common cold and the flu bug. Unpleasant symptoms may include catarrh*, runny nose, fever, sore throat, watery eyes, congestion and cough.

Conventional anti-inflammatory and anti-fever medications, as well as decongestants, provide some relief of the symptoms. Other modalities have been suggested to boost the immune system or suppress the symptoms associated with colds and flu. Some of these things are effective, while others are not.

Some studies show *Echinacea* is ineffective at preventing or shortening colds. Others show a significant reduction in the severity and duration of cold symptoms when taken in the early stages of a cold. Results with herbal remedies are not always predictable since the purity and identity of the product may not be guaranteed, and the ideal dosage is often unknown.

Zinc lozenges or nasal sprays are an unreliable way to reduce cold symptoms. In 2009, the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) issued a warning against using three zinc-containing nasal cold remedies because they had been associated with a long-lasting or permanent loss of smell. The use of saline nasal drops will help to relieve nasal congestion, while a sore throat is temporarily relieved with a saltwater gargle.

Eucalyptus provides temporary relief of nasal and pulmonary congestion. It acts as a mild expectorant in cough drops and lozenges. Eucalyptus in a steam inhalation is a great decongestant, opening up nasal passages and sinuses.

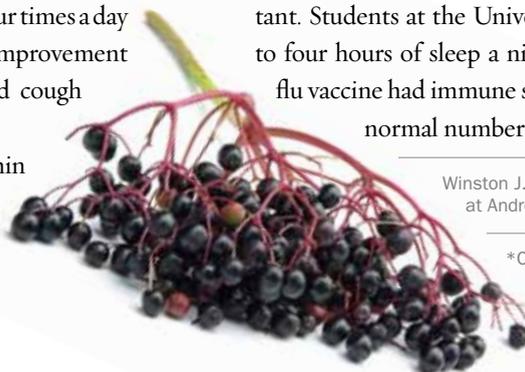
Elderberry has a long history of use for the treatment of colds and influenza. Patients having flu symptoms for less than 24 hours who took elderberry lozenges four times a day experienced a reduction in fever and an improvement in their headache, nasal congestion and cough after 48 hours.

In more than 30 clinical trials, vitamin C has been shown to be ineffective in preventing colds or reducing the severity of symptoms for the general

population, while there is a 10–15 percent reduction in the duration of colds. On the other hand, intense athletes, such as skiers and marathon runners, may experience a 50 percent reduction in the risk of getting a cold with C supplements.

Mullein flowers are useful for treating inflammation of the respiratory tract and alleviating cough and sore throats. Rooibos tea commonly is used for respiratory disorders. Sage has anti-inflammatory properties and serves as a mouthwash or gargle to treat inflammation of the throat and cough, while garlic commonly is taken to help fight upper respiratory infections. Mushrooms, such as reishi, maitake and shiitake, also may help your immune system.

To keep our immune system healthy, we must follow a healthy lifestyle. This includes eating meals rich in brightly-colored, antioxidant-laden fruits and vegetables, managing stress appropriately and getting regular exercise. Exercise, such as brisk walking, increases the level of natural killer cells and neutrophils. These immune cells stay elevated for about three hours after a 45-minute walk. Getting adequate sleep is important. Students at the University of Chicago who were limited to four hours of sleep a night for six nights and then given a flu vaccine had immune systems that made only one-half the normal number of antibodies.



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*Catarrh is a condition in which the nose and air passage become filled with mucus due to inflammation of mucous membrane.