

What's the Story with Echinacea?

Part 1 of 2

Many herb teas contain it, and many people swear by it as a cold remedy.

Echinacea, also known as purple coneflower, has gained popularity in recent years as a nutritional supplement that proponents believe is helpful in staving off the common cold and shortening its duration.

But given the variation between dosages and formulations—

such herbs are not regulated as medical drugs by the U.S Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and so makers have little incentive to standardize—it's hard to get definitive answers as to Echinacea's effectiveness.

Historically, Native Americans relied on the root of Echinacea to numb toothache pain and treat dyspepsia as well as snake, insect and spider bites. While some modern day folks rely on Echinacea just based on this anecdotal evidence, scientific studies have verified that the herb can be effective. To wit, a 2008 University of Connecticut review of 14 different clinical trials of Echinacea use found that taking the supplement reduced the chances of getting a cold by 31 percent, and helped people get over cold and flu symptoms a day and a half earlier than those who didn't take it.

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