

Strictly Embargoed until 00:01hours (GMT), 25th January 2006

Some evidence that Echinacea can treat, but not prevent, common colds

Nine of 16 trials found that extracts from the aerial parts of the plant *Echinacea purpurea* could reduce the symptoms of colds in adults if started early enough. One further trial showed a trend towards this effect. This was the conclusion of an updated systematic Review published in the latest update of The Cochrane Library.

While there are signs of promise, the Authors sound a note of caution. "Our systematic review found some evidence that preparations based on the aerial part of *Echinacea purpurea* might be effective for the early treatment of colds in adults, but results are not fully consistent," says lead author Dr Klaus Linde, who works at the Centre for Complementary Medicine Research in Munich, Germany.

Preparations of the plant are widely used in some European countries and in North America for common colds.

The Review Authors found positive effects from alcoholic extracts and pressed juice preparations of the aerial parts of the plants, but they were not able to find benefits from other preparations.

"Consumers and clinicians need to realise that Echinacea products differ greatly in the species of plant utilised, the parts of the plant used, way they have been prepared and in the active agents they contain," says Linde. "In addition, the overwhelming majority have not been tested in clinical trials," he adds.

The Review Authors found two further trials that looked at whether the extract could prevent people catching colds. None of these showed any effect. "Other preparations of Echinacea might have preventative effects, but the effect has not been shown in independently replicated, rigorous randomised trials," says Linde.

This update restricted its focus to preparations that contained extracts from only Echinacea plants, but other preparations exist that contain extracts from additional herbs. Concentrating on just Echinacea extracts reduced the variation in the treatments considered. Even so, Echinacea extracts contain a mixture of different active components, each of which may act on their own, or the effect may only be achieved as they act together. "If this synergistic action does occur, then the exact composition of the extract will greatly affect its performance," says Linde.

- Ends -

Notes for editors

1. Review Paper: Linde K et. Al: Echinacea for preventing and treating the common cold. *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2006, Issue 1. Art. No.: CD000530. pub2. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD000530.pub2.

2. The Cochrane Library contains high quality health care information, including Systematic Reviews from The Cochrane Collaboration. These Reviews bring together research on the effects of health care and are considered the gold standard for determining the relative effectiveness of different interventions. The Cochrane Collaboration (<http://www.cochrane.org>) is a UK registered international charity and the world's leading producer of systematic Reviews. It has been demonstrated that Cochrane Systematic Reviews are of comparable or better quality and are updated more often than the Reviews published in print journals^a.
3. The Cochrane Library can be accessed at <http://www.thecochranelibrary.com>. Guest users may access abstracts for all Reviews in the database, and members of the media may request full access to the contents of the Library. For further information, see contact details below.
4. A number of countries have national provisions by which some or all of their residents are able to access The Cochrane Library for free. These include:

Australia	www.nicssl.com.au/Cochrane
New Zealand	http://www.moh.govt.nz/cochranelibrary or http://www.nzgg.org.nz/ or http://www.cochrane.org.nz/
Denmark	www.vifab.dk or www.sundhedsportalen.dk or www.deff.dk or www.cochrane.dk
England	www.nelh.nhs.uk/cochrane.asp
Finland	www.terveysportti.fi
Ireland	All residents within the Island of Ireland can access The Cochrane Library for free, thanks to funding for a national provision by The Health Research Board in Dublin and The Research and Development Office in Belfast.
Norway	www.cochrane.no
Scotland	http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/
Spain	http://www.update-software.com/Clibplus/ClibPlus.asp
South Africa	http://www.sahealthinfo.org/evidence/databases.htm
Sweden	www.sbu.se
Wales	All residents of Wales with access to the Internet can access The Cochrane Library for free, thanks to funding provided by The Welsh Assembly Government.
The Canadian Province of Saskatchewan	www.thecochranelibrary.com
The US State of Wyoming	www.thecochranelibrary.com
5. There are also several programmes, such as the Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative (HINARI) that provide access in developing countries. To find out whether your country is included in any of these programmes/provisions, or to learn how to get access if you don't already have it, please visit: <http://www.thecochranelibrary.com>.

If you would like to see a full list of Reviews published in the new issue of The Cochrane Library, or would like to request full access to the contents of The Library, please contact.

Contact: Polly Young
 Tel: +44 (0)1243 770633
 Email: pyoung@wiley.co.uk

^a Jadad AR, Cook DJ, Jones A, Klassen TP, Tugwell P, Moher M, et al. Methodology and reports of systematic Reviews and meta-analyses: a comparison of Cochrane Reviews with articles published in paper-based journal.