



## DIETARY SUPPLEMENT FACT SHEET

<http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/dhpw/Wellness.aspx>

### Echinacea

**Also known as:** Purple Coneflower

**Historical perspective:** The echinacea plant was first used by Native Americans to treat a variety of ailments. Of the existing Echinacea species, the roots and the flowering leaves of *Echinacea purpurea*, *Echinacea pallida*, and *Echinacea argustifolia* are the most commonly used in supplements.

**Common Uses:** Echinacea is used to treat colds and upper respiratory tract infections. It is also thought to boost the immune system.

**Form(s) Ued:** Echinacea extract is available in tinctures, capsules or tablets. It is also available in herbal teas and throat lozenges.

**Potential Side Effects:** Short term fever, nausea, or vomiting.

**Food-Drug-Supplement Interaction:** Echinacea may decrease the effectiveness of immune-suppressing drugs such as cyclosporine and corticosteroids. It may also have a negative interaction with hepatotoxic medications like anabolic steroids, amiodarone, methotrexate, and ketocorazole.

**Contraindication to Use:** Individuals with autoimmune disorders should not take echinacea. Individuals with asthma or those sensitive to grass pollens should also not use echinacea due to a potential allergic reaction.

**Research Data on Safety and Efficacy:** Preliminary clinical trials indicate that echinacea may boost the immune system, but additional research is needed. As far as echinacea protecting against the common cold, the research provides conflicting results. Oral echinacea appears to be well-tolerated, but the safety of long-term use is unknown. The German Commission E recommends taking echinacea no longer than 8 weeks.

**Bottom-Line:** Echinacea may be effective to boost the immune system. Taking oral echinacea for no longer than 8 weeks appears well tolerated and safe. However, be sure to note the contraindications as mentioned above.

#### References:

The Health Professional's Guide to Popular Dietary Supplements, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Allison Sarubin Fragakis, MS, RD. The American Dietetic Association. 2003.