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Largest Echinacea trial proves prevention of colds and flu

Implications of Colds & Flu

Colds and flu are the most frequent diseases encountered in Western civilisation. Associated health care costs and loss of productivity are substantial, and estimated to be in the region of US\$40 billion in the United States alone.

Cold and flu infections have different clinical manifestations and severities. Today, around 200 different viruses are known to cause these infections and each year, new organisms capable of producing the well-recognised symptoms are discovered. These viral particles are most prevalent from autumn to spring, producing multiple peaks of infections during these months.

Despite decades of intensive research and the obvious commercial potential, no preventative drug has been developed against colds or flu. Flu vaccinations have perhaps come the closest, but are only effective against the influenza group of viruses, responsible for 10 to 15% of respiratory infections. The innate variability and mutability of viruses eventually hampers any attempt at direct pharmacological intervention, according to the classical 'lock and key' principle.

Immune System

An alternative approach is to 'strengthen' the immune resistance, supporting the defence mechanism of the host against infectious organisms. Extracts obtained from the purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) are successfully used for this purpose. These preparations exhibit good tolerability and are suitable for long-term use.

Very recently, results from pre-clinical studies have led to an intensification of research work involving a specific *Echinacea* extract (Echinaforce®) obtained by alcoholic extraction of the freshly harvested herb (95%) and root (5%). After the discovery of **direct anti-viral effects** in 2010 and the so-called "**individualized immune-modulation**" in 2011, the efficacy of Echinaforce® to prevent colds and flu has now been confirmed in a randomised, placebo controlled and double-blind clinical study.

New Clinical Evidence for Echinaforce®: Effective and Safe

This study, conducted at the Common Cold Centre at the University of Cardiff (United Kingdom), represents the world's largest clinical trial investigating the long-term use of *Echinacea purpurea*.

A total of 755 subjects were treated over 4 months with Echinaforce® or placebo. Considerably more cold episodes and days with colds occurred with placebo, and 52% more cold episodes, which required co-medication with analgesics ($p < 0.05$). Virally-confirmed infections were reduced by Echinaforce®, especially those caused

by the Influenza virus, Respiratory Syncytial Virus, Parainfluenza virus or Coronavirus.

The strongest benefit was seen in individuals with increased stress and/or recurrent infections - these were virtually halved ($p < 0.05$). At the same time, no further adverse events occurred in those taking Echinaforce® compared to placebo – meaning that the prevention over 4 months displays a favourable safety profile and tolerability.

Immune Support and Antiviral Effects

For the first time the newly published results reveal how Echinaforce® supports the immune resistance and furthermore acts directly against respiratory viruses. This appears to be an effective therapeutic approach, which not only works at the level of the host organism but also on the invaders. All of this, with a highly acceptable level of tolerability.

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