



The Common Cold: *A New Preventive Approach*

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Literature Education Series On Dietary Supplements

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If you've got a cold, there are many treatment approaches you can take from symptomatic relief using OTC remedies, to a more holistic offensive with vitamin C, Echinacea, Andrographis and similar natural substances. You might even take an integrative approach by hedging your bets and using all of the above.

In any case, these approaches are all reactionary rather than proactive. That is, you use the remedies to treat an existing cold rather than to prevent one from happening in the first instance. What I'm getting at, of course, is that there are measures you can take to prevent the common cold; or at least prevent a second one from occurring. Furthermore, some of these same measures can be applied to the treatment of an existing cold. Following is a discussion of some natural substances that can help you to take such measures.

North American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolium*)

North American ginseng or NAG (also known as simply American ginseng or Canadian ginseng) was used historically by many Native American tribes for medicinal applications ranging from digestive disorders to sexual problems.¹ More recently, NAG has been shown to have immune-enhancing qualities.² Consequently, it was not a complete surprise when research demonstrated a

benefit for NAG in treating/preventing the common cold.

A total of 279 men and women with a history of at least 2 colds in the previous year participated in a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study.³ One group of 130 subjects were given 400 mg of a NAG extract (200 mg capsule, twice daily), and the other group of 149 subjects were given a placebo. Compared to the placebo group the results showed that the group ingesting the NAG extract over 4 months experienced a significant reduction in the average number of colds per person, the proportion of subjects who experienced 2 or more colds, the severity of symptoms and the number of days cold symptoms were reported.

Furthermore, in a study⁴ of 42 institutionalized seniors, those ingesting the same amount of NAG extract during an early "cold and flu" season reduced the relative risk and duration of respiratory symptoms by 48% and 55%, respectively. Two similar randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trials⁵ of seniors showed similar benefits from NAG supplementation. This same research also provided evidence that NAG extract might reduce the risk of influenza in institutionalized elderly patients.

Zinc

Zinc's role in immune function is well established. As a matter of fact, a zinc deficiency impairs the immune response, making infections more likely. A zinc deficiency is also characterized by a low white-blood cell count and few antibody-forming cells—other indications of poor immunity. Even a mild zinc deficiency will impair immune response.⁶ Furthermore, double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical research found that zinc in the form of lozenges were able to

significantly reduce the duration of cold symptoms, including coughing, headache, hoarseness, nasal congestion, nasal drainage, and sore throat;⁷ although research has yet to be done demonstrating similar efficacy in non-lozenge forms of zinc.

Conclusion

The research of discussed on North American ginseng is specific the prevention of and treatment of colds. The use of FOS, tea and zinc is suggested to promote healthy immune function in general which is a prerequisite for the prevention of the common cold.

References

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