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HEALTH

10 Health Benefits of Echinacea

There's more to this herb than meets the eye

Gina Kelly UPDATED OCT 13, 2021 FACT CHECKED

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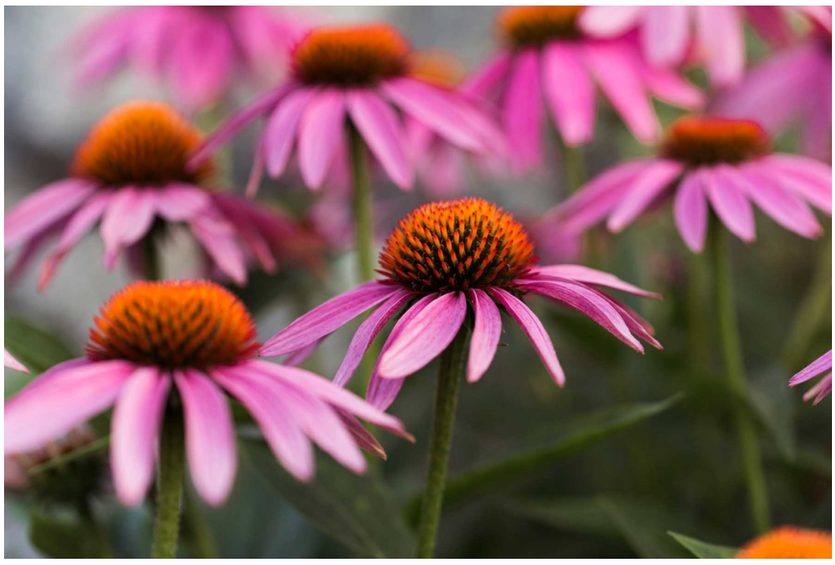

Echinacea isn't just a pretty purple flower. It has some impressive healing properties. You may already know it helps the common cold—more on that below—but there are a lot of other health benefits of echinacea.

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01 | SHORTENS THE COMMON COLD

A lot of people turn to echinacea at the start of a cold and with good reason. Research shows that echinacea possesses chemicals that may help increase the

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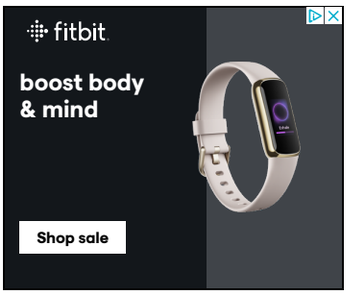

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number of white blood cells in your body. White blood cells support your body while you fight off infections. Echinacea is a great immune-boosting supplement to keep on hand when you start to feel under the weather.

02 | REDUCES INFLAMMATION

Acute inflammation is good for you. It helps defend your body against infections and physical injuries, but it's usually short-lived. When inflammation sticks around after the initial threat to your body subsides, it becomes a serious problem. Chronic inflammation may lead to illnesses such as heart disease, cancer, and Alzheimer's disease. Echinacea may be an effective natural treatment against inflammation. In one small study, participants who were non-responsive to non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs experienced reduced pain and anti-inflammatory results using a ginger and echinacea extract.

03 | TREATS ECZEMA

Not only does inflammation cause internal distress in the body, but it can also cause external skin conditions. Eczema is one example of a skin disorder caused by inflammation. Unfortunately, many of us are plagued with that itchy, red skin and go to great lengths to find relief. Fortunately, echinacea may be a natural and effective treatment. One study found that echinacea extract reduced pro-inflammatory cytokines, and when applied topically, echinacea cream improved eczema.

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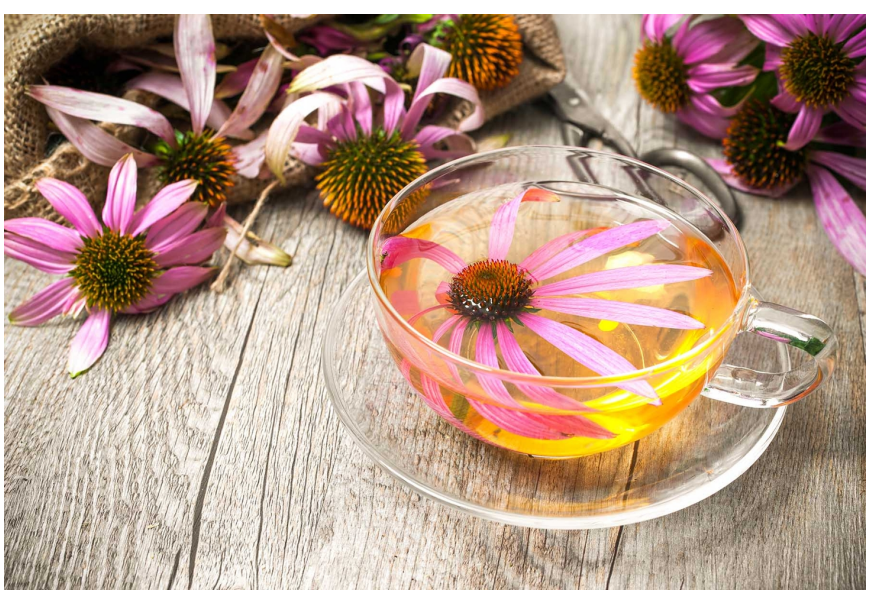
04 HELPS TO REDUCE RESPIRATORY ILLNESS AFTER TRAVEL

When we fly, we encounter countless people and their microbes, and the dry air circulating throughout the plane cabin dehydrates our bodies. Unfortunately, this makes us more susceptible to colds and the flu. However, echinacea may act as a defense against the germs we encounter when we travel. In one study, participants were asked to take either echinacea or placebo tablets before and during air travel. The echinacea group reported that they had lower respiratory symptoms compared to the placebo group.

05 BOOSTS ANTIOXIDANTS



When antioxidants are introduced to the body, they can delay or stop the damage from oxidative stress. Oxidative stress can damage our DNA, lipids, and proteins. It's even linked to neurological diseases, kidney issues, and rheumatoid arthritis. Certain species of echinacea contain high levels of cichoric acid, which is a powerful antioxidant. By taking echinacea, the boost in free-radical fighting antioxidants may decrease the damage caused by oxidative stress.

06 DECREASES ANXIETY

For far too many of us, **anxiety** is a debilitating disease. The constant panic and persistent worry take a toll on our physical and mental health, and anxiety disorders can lead to drug abuse, depression, and insomnia. Fortunately, echinacea may help to reduce anxiety. In one study, participants who were administered a higher dose of echinacea experienced reduced anxiety levels after just three days of use and these reduced levels remained stable throughout the study.

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07 | PROTECTS AGAINST CANCER

There's been some interesting research surrounding echinacea and its effects on certain cancers. In one study, researchers discovered the cichoric acid from *Echinacea purpurea* extract decreased colon cancer cell activity and eliminated some cancer cells. In another study, echinacea extract caused the death of lung cancer cells. Researchers need to conduct more research on these effects, but these results are significant.

08 | REDUCES THE NEED FOR ANTIBIOTICS

Bacterial infections linked to ear infections, pneumonia, and sinus infections may require antibiotics. However, if antibiotics are used too frequently, it can lead to antimicrobial resistance and wipe out the "good" bacteria in our bodies. In a search to discover alternative treatments, scientists administered echinacea or vitamin C to a group of children. The children given **echinacea** were less likely to have respiratory illnesses that could develop into bacterial infections thus reducing the need for antibiotics.

09 | RELIEVES SORE THROATS

Although sore throats are often thought to be associated with strep throat, most are caused by viral infections. With a virus, you must wait for it to run its course and find symptom relief in the meantime. As a natural treatment option, echinacea has proven to be effective in relieving the symptoms of sore throats. Researchers studied the differences between an echinacea/sage spray and a chlorhexidine/lidocaine spray when participants reported throat pain. The echinacea/sage spray was equally effective as the chlorhexidine/lidocaine spray in reducing pain, proving to be a viable treatment for sore throat.

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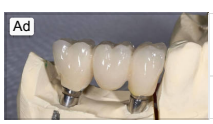

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10 | REDUCES ACNE

Acne is often caused by inflammation, bacteria, and clogged hair follicles. Just as echinacea can calm eczema, there's evidence that it can do the same for acne. In a lab study, P acne—a type of bacterium acne—induced secretion of pro-inflammatory cytokines. When researchers introduced echinacea, it brought cytokine numbers back to normal, supporting the use of echinacea as an effective acne treatment.

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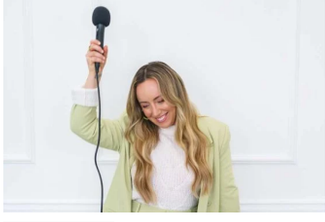

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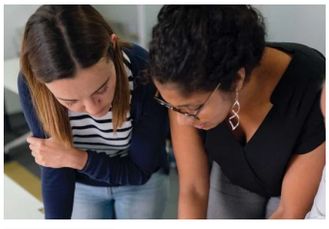

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