

Andrographis paniculata:

Natural Cold and Flu Relief

There are a vast number of natural products available on the market for the relief of cold symptoms. For example, Echinacea has become extremely popular over the past several years. Andrographis paniculata, which is also known as Chiretta, King of Bitters or Kalmegh, is another plant that has shown potential for cold and flu relief.¹ Andrographis is relative new comer on the immune support scene in North America, but it has a long history of use in Scandinavia as a cold and flu remedy as well as in traditional Ayurvedic and Chinese medicine as a fever reducer.² Pharmacological studies have shown that this herb has antiviral, antipyretic, anti-inflammatory and immune enhancing properties. Studies in humans are beginning to show impressive effects as well, suggesting that this herb could be the “new Echinacea.”



Symptom Relief from Andrographis

In one study evaluating the effectiveness of Andrographis 223 patients were treated with either 200mg of Andrographis or a placebo for five days during an upper respiratory tract infection.¹ Symptoms including cough, expectoration, nasal discharge (running nose), headache, fever, sore throat, earache, malaise/fatigue and sleep disturbance were assessed on days 1, 3 and 5 of treatment. The results of the study showed that from days 3 to 5 the majority of symptoms measured remained unchanged or were worse in the placebo group; whereas symptom severity decreased significantly in the Andrographis group.¹ Overall the results showed that Andrographis was 57% more effective than the placebo for reducing the severity and duration of symptoms.¹



These results are further supported in a systematic review of the use of Andrographis.² The Review evaluated seven clinical trials using this herb for the treatment of cold symptoms and concluded that it is a safe and promising treatment for the symptoms of uncomplicated upper respiratory tract infections.² In another study comparing the effectiveness of Andrographis against acetaminophen (Tylenol™) for the relief of sore throat and fever, a dose of 6g per day of Andrographis was found to be as effective as the acetaminophen for controlling symptoms.³ Research has shown that Andrographis can also help to prevent infection altogether. In one three month long study involving 107 eighteen year old students, participants were given either a placebo or 200 mg of Andrographis daily. At the end of the three months twice as many individuals in the placebo group had reported having a cold as compared to individuals taking Andrographis!⁴ These results suggest a strong protective effect for Andrographis, likely due to its immune system enhancing properties.

What about Echinacea: Does it Work?

Echinacea is currently one of the most popular supplements on the market and is generally taken to help prevent the common cold. A number of studies have shown that this supplement can help to reduce cold symptoms, duration and frequency. There remains some debate, however, as to whether or not this herbal remedy is truly effective.



Recently, several large-scale trials have put the herb to the test without significant results. One study involving nearly 400 college students found that supplementation with the equivalent of 900mg of dried Echinacea root daily had no significant effect on the duration or severity of cold symptoms.³ In another trial, a dose of 6 g of unrefined Echinacea or Echinacea root on the first day of infection, and 3g per day for each subsequent day of the illness also had no effect on cold symptoms in 150 students.⁴ Another very large trial including 524 children between the ages of 2 and 11 supplemented with Echinacea syrup or a placebo did find a slight reduction in the frequency of upper respiratory tract infections (URI's) in children taking Echinacea. They found that those taking the Echinacea supplement

experienced 337 cases of URI's compared to 370 cases in children taking the placebo over a four-month period. However, once again, no benefit for reducing infection duration or severity was observed. Furthermore, the researchers involved in the study pointed out that taking Echinacea also increased the risk of developing a rash in the children taking it, and therefore did not recommend Echinacea supplements in children under the age of 11.⁵

In the end there is still a great deal of uncertainty regarding this herb's effectiveness. Adding to this issue is the fact that the Echinacea preparations available on the market vary widely in terms of their standardization, method of preparation and even the species they contain! Currently, the exact benefits of Echinacea remain uncertain. While it may provide some measure of immune system support, it certainly does not live up to the conception that it is a "cure for the common cold".

Which is Better?

The question remains, what is the best natural herb to take to help relieve the symptoms of colds and the flu? One study has actually compared the effectiveness of Andrographis and Echinacea to determine which was actually more effective.⁸ The study included 138 children between the ages of 4 and 11, who were diagnosed with an uncomplicated upper respiratory tract infection. The children were placed into one of three groups: a control group, a group receiving 510 mg of Andrographis extract daily and a group receiving 30 drops of Echinacea extract daily over the course of ten days. Overall the researchers found that the Andrographis was more effective than Echinacea for reducing the severity and duration of symptoms.⁸ Andrographis was especially effective for reducing nasal secretion and congestion, and resulted in an accelerated recovery time, whereas Echinacea did not.⁸ Overall the study concluded that Andrographis was well-tolerated and more effective than Echinacea in helping to reduce cold symptom duration and severity.⁸ There is some evidence that both Andrographis and Echinacea can help protect against infection, however when it comes to symptom relief Andrographis is the clear winner.

In the end it seems that Andrographis may be an emerging star in the area of natural cold and flu relief. Its ability to help prevent and treat viral infections makes it a great choice for both everyday immune system support as well as for short term relief of cold and flu symptoms.

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