

Elderberry for Flu Season **Petite berry packs a punch**

Elderberry has a lot going for it—and for you—during cold and flu season. This herbal immune booster contains dense antioxidant levels and helps relieve symptoms of the flu and common cold. Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra* L.) has been used to prevent and treat influenza since the time of Hippocrates in the 5th century BCE. In fact, the father of Western medicine referred to the elder tree as his “medicine chest.” It was also used by early American Indians to soothe fever.

Recent clinical studies confirm that elderberry can help prevent and relieve flu symptoms, including the H1N1 virus. One recent study showed that patients with flu symptoms who took elderberry lozenges for two days showed statistically significant decreases in fever, headache, and nasal congestion compared to those given a placebo.

Clinical trials of patients with the flu suggest taking the herb at the first sign of illness and continuing for three to five days. People given elderberry syrup in a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study found that their flu symptoms ended an average of four days sooner than those given a placebo syrup.

In a study published early in 2011, researchers found that elderberry liquid extract also promotes antimicrobial activity against *Streptococcus pyogenes*, the bacterium responsible for strep throat and other infections.

Deep healing

The berries develop from tiny cream-white flowers into deep bluish-red berries with a black tinge. The deep color indicates the berries contain high levels of antioxidants called flavonoids.

Other helpful compounds include anthocyanins; these anti-inflammatory substances help reduce the achiness associated with the flu. Elderberries are also high in quercetin and vitamin C, both of which ease allergies and strengthen the immune system.

The pleasant-tasting elderberry can be prepared in a variety of ways, including syrups and teas. A convenient new way to take it is in “fizz” form. Being able to “drop and dissolve” an elderberry wellness formula is great for travelers hoping to keep their immune system strong while on the road. The consumption of prepared extracts has shown no sign of toxicity at proper dosage levels and is safe for adults and children. A small percentage of the population is allergic to elderberry. TFL

SELECTED SOURCES The ABC Clinical Guide to Herbs, edited by Mark Blumenthal et al. (\$79.95, American Botanical Council, 2003) n “Colds and Influenza: A Review of Diagnosis and Conventional, Botanical, and Nutritional Considerations” by M. Roxas and J. Jurenka, *Altern Med Rev*, 3/07 n “Elderberry Enhances Immune Function by Increasing Inflammatory Cytokine Production” by Risa N. Schulman, 10/01; “Elderberry Extract for Treating Influenza Symptoms” by Marissa Oppel-Sutter, 11/09; “Flavonoids in Elderberry Bind H1N1 Virus and Block Its Host Cell Entry in Vitro” by Marissa Oppel-Sutter, 1/10; “Review of Pharmacology and Clinical Benefits of European Elderberry” by Mariann Garner-Wizard, 1/06, *HerbClip* n “Inhibitory Activity of a Standardized Elderberry Liquid Extract Against Clinically Relevant Human Respiratory Bacterial Pathogens and Influenza A and B Viruses” by C. Krawitz et al., *BMC Complement Altern Med*, 2/11 n “Randomized Study of the Efficacy and Safety of Oral Elderberry Extract in the Treatment of Influenza A and B Virus Infections” by Z. Zakay-Rones et al., *J Int Med Res*, 3–4/04

Sick Days Add Up

Each year, the US population contracts about 1 billion colds while the flu accounts for 25 million annual doctor visits. Kids are definitely not immune—the common cold results in 189 million lost school days per year.

Already Sick?

Take 1 teaspoon of elderberry extract or 2 teaspoons of syrup four times a day, advises *The Herb Companion*.