

Immune Boosting Herbs

January 27, 2009

Jennifer Roth Caverly, Clinical Herbalist
Apothecary Tinctura

The immune system, what is it and how does it work? How will herbs support the immune system to prevent or aid in recovery of a cold?

- ~ The immune system is a set of connecting tubes, glands, and specialized cells.
- ~ The Chinese term the immune system as “defensive energy”
- ~ ¼ to ½ of all the cells in the body are exclusively dedicated to immune function.
- ~ The immune system determines what is not part of “us” and plays a role of getting foreign objects out of our body.
- ~ Organs that are specific to the immune system include: the thymus (found in the throat near the thyroid) and spleen (found in the upper left portion of the abdomen) a large lymphatic organ.

Key white blood cells that play a role in immunity are Phagocytes, Monocytes, Basophils, Neutrophils, Eosinophils, Lymphocytes, T cells (helper T’s and killer T’s), Natural Killer (NK) cells, B cells, and Suppressor T cells.

~ Herbs work to stimulate some of these cells so the body can be strong and ready when a foreign bacteria or virus enters the body. Some also increase the amount of cells present in the body when one is already sick and needs a little extra added boost to fight the cold or infection.

Herbs Used to Boost the Immune System

Echinacea angustifolia*, *E. pallida*, *E. purpurea – immunostimulating mucopolysaccharides are the constituents that increase the stimulation of white blood cells in the body to fight infection. They are also what cause the tingling sensation on your tongue allowing you to know if you have a good tincture.

The Native Americans used *Echinacea* for:

- ~ Toothaches, sore necks, burns, headache, menstrual cramps
- ~ Inflammation of the eyes, gums, mouth, throat, joints
- ~ fever, snakebites and other poisonous bites and stings
- ~ cough, colds, and tonsillitis
- ~ infectious diseases: mumps, measles, smallpox

Echinacea is an important immunomodulator, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antiviral, and vulnerary.

Cautions: Do not use if a person is on immunosuppressive drugs, due to its stimulating effect. Also being poached in the wild, so make sure you are getting your *Echinacea* from a good ethical source.

Echinacea can be taken up to every ½ hour when symptoms of a cold are beginning. The sort of dry itchy throat. 30-90 drops 4-6 times daily when a cold has already set in and taken hold.

Elderberry, *Sambucus nigra* – Extremely popular berries often made into a syrup for flus, colds, and upper respiratory infections. The flowers have flavonoids and mucopolysaccharides. The flowers are known for their diaphoretic action when drunk as a tea.

The berries contain lectins and cyanogenetic glycosides that exert immunomodulatory and antiviral effects for the common cold and flu. The flavonoids found in the flowers and berries have an anti-inflammatory effect on the respiratory system.

Garlic, *Allium sativum* – Another remedy that has been used for centuries. Many like to call this plant the herbal antibiotic. Very strong medicine. It has been used as a vermifuge to rid intestinal worms, boosts the immune system, and is a great external antiseptic.

One roasted garlic clove a day is a great way to help prevent colds.

Onion, *Allium cepa* – a strong antibacterial, anti-inflammatory. Internally onion helps with the inflammation and spastic conditions of the upper respiratory tract. Onion syrups are great for colds and allergies.

Ginger, *Zingiber officinale* - This very warming herb helps to move and drive other herbs to their specific places in the body. A diaphoretic herb that allows you to sweat through a fever. The volatile oils help to relax the intestines and soothe stomach irritation.

Fresh ginger root, hot water, honey and lemon is great at the onset of a cold.

Hibiscus, *Hibiscus sabdariffa* – high in bioflavonoids and vitamin C. This astringent herb is useful in treating mild flus, colds, swelling, and bruising. Rosehips are also used for the same conditions and have the highest amount of vitamin C found in the red hips that are harvested after the first frost of the fall.

Cinnamon, *Cinamomum spp.*- Not only is this a great tasting bark that is used to flavor teas, it is a great antimicrobial used in most teas for colds. Michael Moore recommends dosing of 20-40 drops of dried plant tincture, four times a day.

Goldenseal, *Hydrastis Canadensis* – This bitter root increases gastric juices and aids in digestion, but is more importantly an extremely powerful antimicrobial. Only cultivated Goldenseal should be used, it is at risk in the wild. This is a plant you would want to use if you were already sick, or the cold seemed to be rooting and taking hold. *Echinacea* and *Hydrastis* are a wonderful combination for battling a cold.

Moore recommends 20-50 drops of dried tincture, four times a day.

Rosemary Gladstar's Syrups:

Elderberry Syrup

1 cup fresh or ½ cup dried elderberries (blue elderberries)

3 cups water

1 cup honey

1. Place berries in a pan and cover with water. Bring the water and berries to a boil, then reduce heat to a simmer on low heat for 30-45 minutes.
2. Smash the berries before straining them using a fine-mesh strainer. Then add 1 cup of honey, or to taste.
3. Bottle and label the syrup and store in refrigerator. It will keep for about 3 months.

Ginger – Echinacea Cold Syrup

½ cup dried Echinacea root

½ cup fresh ginger root, grated or chopped

3 cups water

1 cup or less honey

1. Boil and reduce to simmer, the Echinacea and ginger same as directions above. Then add honey and pour into bottles or jars to store.

Chest Formulas:

Rosemary Gladstar's, [Formula for Lung and Chest Congestion](#)

2 parts licorice root

1 part cinnamon

1 part Echinacea root

1 part elecampane

¼ part ginger fresh (for syrup and tincture) tea could be fresh or dried

This is a good formula for clearing up bronchial congestion.

Good to have on hand as a tincture if one has many respiratory infections during the year.

Great as a tea, you can adjust the licorice, cinnamon, and ginger as needed.

Chest Salve

1. Prepare a salve. For each cup of oil, melt ¼ cup of beeswax or less in heated oil. Heat the oil in a Pyrex with in a pan of hot water. To check consistency, dip a frozen spoon in the hot salve. If it's too soft, add more beeswax. If it's too hard, add more oil.

2. Remove from heat, pour into glass jars and add drops of desired essential oils.

3. For chest colds, add 5 drops of eucalyptus essential oil and 5 drops of ravensara essential oil per each 1 oz jar.

~ The same essential oils can be used in a pot of hot water for an herbal steam. Place your face over the steaming water (carefully) with a towel over the head.

Rosemary Gladstar's High-C Tea

High-C Tonic Tea

4 parts rose hips

3 parts hibiscus

2 parts lemongrass

1 part cinnamon chips

Combine all of the herbs, place herbs in hot water and infuse for at least 20 minutes.

This tonic tea can be drunk all through the cold and flu season.

References:

Abascal, Kathy. [Herbs & Influenza](#). Tigana Press: Vashon, WA. 2006.

Collins, Elizabeth W., Berkoff, Nancy. [Echinacea and Immunity](#). Prima Publishing: 1999.

Gladstar, Rosemary. [Family Herbal](#). North Adams, Massachusetts: Storey Books, 2001.

Landis, Robyn. [Herbal Defense](#). Warner Books: New York, New York. 1997.

Mitchell, Jr., William A. Plant Medicine in Practice. Seattle, Washington.: Churchill Livingstone, 2003.

Saputo, Len, Faass, Nancy. Boosting Immunity. New World Library: Novato, CA: 2002.

Schar, Douglas. Echinacea: The Plant That Boosts Your Immune System. North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, CA: 1999.