



NATURAL ARSENAL
Let elderberry go wild on your flu.

Flu Fighters

No flu shot? No problem



The influenza virus will infect 50 million Americans this winter, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Unfortunately, your chances of being one of them got a lot better in a year when civic duty meant casting a ballot and skipping the flu shot. Time to dig deeper trenches and call for reinforcements. Here's our guide to identifying the enemy, fighting back, and surviving this season's germ warfare.

Know your enemy: Flu symptoms are often confused with the common cold, but knowing the difference early on is essential, says Mark Mengel, M.D., of the Saint Louis University School of Medicine. The flu hits suddenly and is marked by debilitating fatigue, high fever (102 degrees and up), and a headache. Many often experience chills, a dry cough, stuffy nose, and a sore throat.

Get tested: Results are fast. A doctor will swab the back of your throat or nose, and you'll know in 5 to 10 minutes if it's the flu. Tests are available at doctors' offices, clinics,

and emergency rooms. An early diagnosis will lessen the flu's impact, Dr. Mengel says.

Work fast: Antiviral medicines within the first 48 hours can reduce the flu's severity and duration. Your doctor will know which brand is right for you—then get it fast. The longer you wait, the less effective an antiviral will be. Ask your doctor about keeping a prescription on hand in case the flu hits, or even whether you should take an antiviral as a preventive measure. This is especially true for those at high risk who missed the vaccination, or those in the middle of a local outbreak.

Echinacea's Time and Place

When it works, and when it doesn't

ECHINACEA IS the third most popular herbal remedy in the United States. But it's not for everyone and is frequently misused, says Donald J. Brown, an herbal expert and advisor to the American Botanical Council. His recommendations:

USE ECHINACEA:

- » For uncomplicated colds and viruses.
- » For a short time. Brown suggests a course of 7 to 10 days.
- » In liquid or chewable form. It works best when in direct contact with the throat.
- » By itself. Products that contain a mix of echinacea and other herbs may not include enough echinacea to do the job.
- » As directed. Recommended dosages depend on the part of the plant used in the formulation, so read the label. A typical range is 900 to 1,200 milligrams a day for dried echinacea, and 15 to 16 milliliters broken into four doses during a day for liquid.

AVOID IF:

- » You're allergic to ragweed or other plants in the echinacea family, such as daisies.
- » You have an autoimmune disease, like lupus; echinacea revs the immune system.
- » You're pregnant or nursing. A recent study from Toronto rebuts this somewhat, but Brown advises caution until other studies confirm it's safe for mother and child.

Plan B: FluMist. You left the shots to the people who really need them. This nasal spray vaccine, approved by the FDA in 2003, is for healthy people ages 5 to 49. It costs more (about \$30), may not be covered by insurance, and is not as effective as a flu shot for some. But it *does* prevent the flu, Dr. Mengel says, and it's an especially compelling option in a season when vaccine shots are in short supply.

Berry it: Elderberry extract has been proven to fight the flu. A recent Norwegian study found that patients who took elderberry recovered from the flu 4 days faster than those in the control group. Symptoms were also less severe, with no significant side effects. Elderberry products can be found at health stores and online; Sambucol, used in the study, is about \$10 for a 4-ounce bottle. Elderberry is usually taken as a liquid (like cough syrup) or a lozenge. At the first symptoms, take 1 tablespoon of the syrup four times a day, or 1 lozenge four times a day. As a preventive measure, take 2 teaspoons daily or 1 lozenge twice a day.

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