



One pill won't make you small Busting the myth of weight-loss supplements

In the “summer of love” in 1967 San Francisco, the band Jefferson Airplane (named after my favorite president, and what used to my favorite mode of transportation back in the U.S. Air Force) released an interesting song based on the book “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland.”

The lyrics—with one slight modification—tell you everything you need to know about the supplements taken by a generation of women attempting weight loss.

*“One pill doesn’t make you small
And the ones that mother gives you
Don’t do anything at all.
Go ask Alice, when she’s ten feet tall.”*

The summer of love may be long over, but this surrealistic song endures. And unfortunately, so do unrealistic weight-loss pills.

But I urge you—don’t be lost like Alice in the wonderland of weight-loss supplements.

As this summer winds down and all of the holidays in which food and drink play a prominent part approach, you may be thinking about using weight-loss supplements to make a preemptive strike against excess body weight. But beware...

I have always said there is no such thing as “weight loss” pills and other supplements.

Weight loss is achieved by reducing the amount of calories

you take in, cutting carbs, and maintaining physical activity. Not by popping a pill supposedly “guaranteed” to melt off fat or turbocharge your metabolism.

Nor can you simply sweat off the pounds. In a May *Daily Dispatch* (“This is your father’s weight loss advice—it really works”), I reported on new research that shows you can’t lose weight just by increasing your workouts alone—even if you spend all day in the gym (although that might be enough to make you lose your appetite altogether).

You must reduce caloric intake by choosing healthy, nutrient-dense foods like fruit, vegetables, eggs, fish, meat, and seafood; cutting sugar and carbs; and strictly limiting portion sizes.

And there is no way around these simple truths.

Of course, that doesn’t mean you should avoid all supplements if you want to lose weight.

The supplements you should be taking

Some dietary supplements are very important when you are restricting food intake. They help make sure you get enough of the vitamins and minerals that are not only essential for good health, but that also keep your metabolism at optimal levels. Shutting down metabolism in an attempt to lose weight is self-defeating.

So if you’re cutting calories, make sure you get enough vitamin C (500 mg twice per day), vitamin D (10,000 IU per day), and vitamin E (400 IU per day). And don’t forget a high-quality vitamin B complex that contains at least the following dosages: 50 mg each of thiamine, riboflavin (B2), niacin/niacinamide, B6, and pantothenic acid, plus 400 micrograms of folic acid/folate, 12 mcg of B12, and 100 mcg of biotin.

I also recommend supplements containing South African “aspal” (red bush) or *Sutherlandia frutescens* (the “African ginseng,”), as well as dandelion. These herbs help keep you naturally hydrated and energized while you lose weight.

And they help you detox naturally. You see, when you break down fats by restricting calories, your body releases fat-soluble toxins

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(like pesticides, pollutants, and heavy metals) from the tissues into the blood. The “herbal hero trio” of aspal, African ginseng, and dandelion helps keep your blood, liver, and kidneys healthy so they can filter and flush these excess toxins out of your blood.

But supplements that claim to cause weight loss are another story. I have never been able to get evidence that any of them really work.

The supplements you *shouldn't* be taking

Pushing the natural products industry to provide credible, scientific information about weight-loss supplements is like pushing a pile of Jell-O. The U.S. Federal Trade Commission agrees. When I was serving as one of the first consultants to the FTC on natural and nutritional health during the 1990s, the No. 1 category for false claims and fraudulent advertising was weight-loss supplements.

And that certainly hasn't improved in subsequent years. In a March *Daily Dispatch* (“You may not like what you find behind the curtain in the Land of Oz,”) I reported on what was perhaps the single most spectacular failure on “The Dr. Oz Show” (among a long list). A “doctor” with highly questionable credentials was allowed onto the show to promote green coffee beans as a weight-loss supplement.

The problem? There's no credible science to back up this claim. The FTC fined the so-called “celebrity nutritionist,” but only after he had made millions by selling green coffee beans after touting them on Oz TV. Seems the only thing green that worked with these coffee beans was the credulous consumers' money lining his pockets.

In 2014, the well-respected *British Medical Journal* published a study showing that your chances of getting accurate information on Dr. Oz and other pop TV doctor shows are about 50:50.¹ You need, want, and deserve better than that. And you would think any real doctor would insist on better scientific evidence for his or her audience.

But despite the lack of serious science, many people still fall for “lose weight quick” supplements' claims. According to the National Institutes of Health, about 15 percent of all Americans have tried a weight-loss supplement. And they spend a total of \$2 billion a year for these dubious products.²

Based on the most credible research on “weight-loss” supplements, I've ranked them in order of worst to first. The worst not only don't help you drop pounds, but also are dangerous for your health.

Diuretics and laxatives. These adulterants are often snuck into so-called “natural” weight-loss supplements. In fact, a recent study of 26 supposedly “herbal” weight-loss products found that five had a diuretic listed on the ingredients panel, and another three actually had hidden diuretics.³

Diuretics and laxatives can temporarily create the illusion of weight loss by purging the body of water and waste. But this can lead to dehydration and diarrhea—not to mention probable negative effects on beneficial probiotic gut bacteria. The irony, of course, is that a growing body of evidence shows that the healthier our gut, the healthier our weight.

Bitter orange extract. This extract from Seville oranges is often found in weight-loss products. It's reputed to increase metabolic rate

and fat breakdown, improve stamina, and mildly suppress appetite.

Studies have linked this herb to cardiovascular events, but have been clouded by use of non-standardized extracts.⁴ Still, why subject yourself to any potential risk of a heart attack or stroke? Don't get taken to the barbershop by purveyors of Seville orange extract.

Green tea extract. The caffeine in green tea may help lead to some weight loss. But a large review of studies involving nearly 2,000 people found that various types of

green tea products and supplements produced only small reductions in weight.⁵

As I reported in the April 2014 issue of *Insiders' Cures* ("The sinister secrets swirling inside your teapot"), the benefits of green tea in general have been overstated. And there are several health risks. Bottom line: There are much safer, more effective ways to lose weight than by taking green tea supplements.

Chromium. Our bodies need this essential mineral to break down carbs. Chromium has also been

reported to promote healthy insulin levels, reduce food cravings, and increase metabolic rate.

So it's no surprise that many weight loss supplements include chromium. But a review of studies on this mineral found that 200 to 400 mcg a day only leads to a very small level of weight loss.⁶

Many quality nutritional formulations contain chromium. I recommend you get your dose of this important mineral that way, rather than in a weight-loss supplement

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Unfit fitness foods

The burgeoning "fitness food" industry seduces people into thinking that designer candy bars and so-called "trail mixes" can actually make them more fit. But new research shows quite the opposite.

A study published in June in the *Journal of Marketing Research* analyzed three studies on trail mix involving more than 500 people. (That was a fitting place to publish this research because this gimmicky product category has a lot more to do with marketing than with medicine.) The researchers found that the participants who were given trail mix actually ate more and exercised less after eating it.

Plus, the people who were most worried about their weight ate the most trail mix. And exercised the least.¹⁰

In other words, trail mix does not appear to be a cue for hitting the trail. But rather for hitting the couch.

The researchers said they somehow expected that "restrained eaters" would work out more after eating a "fitness food" because they would want to burn off the extra calories. And they would be encouraged by the fitness label to reach their exercise goals. But the researchers actually found the opposite to be true. Hardly a surprise.

Food manufacturers have long lured us with images of athleticism and fitness—ever since Wheaties starting putting pro athletes and Olympic medal winners on its cereal boxes. What a brilliant marketing stroke. Getting people to buy grains originally intended as horse fodder.

Research should be done before launching a product if the manufacturer wants to make a "fitness" claim (FDA or FTC anywhere?). Instead, the only pre-market research seems to be about how to get people to buy more junk by disguising it as "fitness."

On top of that, portion sizes for sports foods are often smaller, meaning people overestimate the appropriate serving sizes. And they are given the go-ahead for more "guilt-free" eating by labels such as "low fat."

Of course, low fat usually just means high sugar and carbs—a bad idea for fitness, weight, and health. But what a great deal for manufacturers, which charge more for smaller products just by finding the right fitness-sounding name.

Meanwhile, there is a more basic flaw in the whole "fitness foods" concept. Real athletes do need more food and calories. But people trying to lose weight need to consume less food and fewer calories. So how can a "fitness" food designed for an athlete make any sense for anyone trying to lose weight?

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that can be adulterated with unsafe and useless ingredients.

Capsaicin. This active ingredient in chili peppers has been shown to increase energy expenditure after a meal and reduce appetite. A recent analysis of 20 studies found that taking a minimum of 2 mg a daily of capsaicin is equivalent to cutting 50 calories a day.⁷

Sounds great, until you do the math. Most people need to cut at least 500 to 1,000 calories per day for meaningful weight loss. You likely would have a hard time—and a hot time—consuming that much chili pepper every day.

But that doesn't mean you should


avoid this fiery food or supplement. Capsaicin in small doses, or in normal food quantities, is an excellent ingredient for pain and joint health. And chili peppers are also a great source of vitamin C and other nutrients.

Coffee and caffeine. I've written before about the many health properties associated with coffee and caffeine. And research shows that consuming at least 300 mg a day (about two to three cups of coffee) may have some beneficial effects on weight loss.

That's associated with caffeine's effect as a central nervous system stimulant. One study showed that

drinking coffee increases energy expenditure for several hours after consumption.⁸ And another study showed that people who drink coffee may eat less food shortly afterwards.⁹

You can buy caffeine pills as a weight loss supplement, but they can also include dangerous adulterants. That's why I recommend skipping the sketchy supplements and just drinking three to four cups of coffee per day to get the real health benefits for body and brain.

So when it comes to dropping a few pounds, remember there is a role for some dietary supplements—just not any of the ones labeled as “weight-loss” supplements. 

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9 ways to get a balanced diet on a balanced budget

The government tells us there is virtually zero inflation. Of course, that's in the feds' make-believe world of budgeting.

In the real world the rest of us live in, we're certainly seeing prices go up. Take insurance, for example. Costs have skyrocketed over the last few years for auto, home, professional, and healthcare insurance—especially under the partisan “Affordable” Care Act.

And though the price of oil and gasoline has gone down over the past year, that's done nothing to slow the rising costs of energy utilities in our homes and offices. Because, of course, the government keeps utility costs to consumers artificially high as a backhanded way to mandate “conservation” of energy. But ironically, the reason gas prices have dropped is because of a glut of energy.

However, while navigating through the fantastical world of government

energy and budgetary policy, there is one area in which you *cannot afford to skimp*.

I'm talking about what you eat and drink.

Plenty of evidence shows that diet and nutrition is the single most important element for health promotion, disease prevention, and managing common medical disorders.

To some extent, you do have to pay more for better, healthier, tastier food—which is a sad comment on both “big food” and the modern agriculture industry, as well as our social values.

But the good news is that eating healthy does not have to break your budget. Just follow these 9 simple steps to cut out the waste. And as an added benefit, many of the same measures will help you cut back on your waist as well.

1. Forget fad foods

Slashing your grocery bill begins

with avoiding food gimmicks, fads, and flaky diet ideas.

Some food manufacturers learned long ago that it costs far less for them to make hyped-up claims about supposed “new, improved” products than to make real innovations or provide better quality. I've often found the cheaper the ingredients, the bigger the breathless (and usually groundless) claims.

Unfortunately, the same rule tends to apply as much in the “natural” products world as it does with big food.

Goji berries are an example. These dried fruits from Asia look like red raisins, and certainly are an acquired taste. At \$14 to \$18 per pound you can get much better value when it comes to antioxidants from actual raisins—not to mention one of my favorite fruits, blueberries. And think of how many pounds of other healthy, organic fruits and berries you can buy for \$18.

Another example is the ridiculous price of pomegranate juice—about \$25 for 16 ounces of the most popular brand, POM Wonderful. A UCLA study found that pomegranate juice does have more antioxidants than other juices, but researchers also rated the much-less-expensive concord grape and cranberry juices high in antioxidants as well.¹

Of course, you do want to watch the sugar content of any fruit juice. Have you noticed the small size of a so-called juice glass? There's a reason. Juices from whole fruits without added sugars or artificial ingredients can be a healthy treat—but only in moderation.

Another healthy drink option is to add a little spice to your favorite beverage or cocktail with sauces made from different varieties of chili peppers. Like pomegranates, these fiery peppers are also high in antioxidants and vitamin C. But unlike pomegranates, a little bit of chili pepper goes a long way in terms of your budget.

2. Substitute some spice

Part of avoiding overpriced foods and beverages is making smart substitutions when it comes to recipes. For example, you can usually use plain yogurt (check the nutrients label to make sure it's low in sugar) instead of higher-fat, higher-cost ingredients like sour cream or heavy cream.

The same is true when it comes to spices. Some exotic Asian spices that require trips to specialty stores are priced as if sailing ships laden with them still had to travel thousands of miles to isolated locations—as was done by traders on the ancient spice routes.

Take pepper, for instance. There are all kinds of exotic, pricey types of pepper for sale today, but don't be fooled. They all come from the same plant. Different colors are

often related to how the pepper is cultivated, harvested, and dried. But all pepper, no matter how colorful, has essentially the same beneficial ingredients and taste.

So instead of paying for exotic peppers in fancy packaging, invest in a good pepper mill and buy whole, black peppercorns. Grind only when ready to add to food on the stove or at the table.

Why? Well, with pre-ground pepper you can't really tell what you are getting. Plus, potency is rapidly lost when the natural shell or husk of the peppercorn is removed, cracked, or ground up.

When you buy whole peppercorns, and other herbs and spices in bulk (instead of pre-ground powders in packages), you also get better value. And you can buy more because most bulk spices stay fresh for one to two years. Powdered, ground spices typically last only six months.²

3. Snack smart

When it comes to snacks, I'm appalled at how many people pay ridiculous prices to eat absolute junk—salt, sugar, and fats with artificial ingredients.

But that doesn't mean you have to give up between-meal treats altogether. For instance, many of the spices I mentioned above can also be used to add flavor to healthy, inexpensive snacks.

Popcorn for one. It's not only low-cal, but also a good source of fiber and the complex carbs your body needs to produce energy. You don't need to add butter (and certainly not oil) to this tasty snack for flavor when hot peppers, herbs, or a sprinkling of Parmesan cheese can do the same thing with a lot fewer calories.

One thing to keep in mind, though: Essentially all yellow corn grown in

the U.S. is genetically modified, so look for organic, non-GMO popcorn kernels. Blue corn is a good choice.

Nuts are also a healthy snack. They can be expensive, but a little goes a long way. I've reported how study after study has found that just a handful of nuts a day can produce big benefits for your brain, blood sugar, and heart. Nuts are high in essential fatty acids and minerals, and they also help you feel full and satisfied—which can keep your weight down.

Also, while tree nuts (almonds, cashews, pistachios, walnuts) are relatively costly, the same health benefits have also been found for inexpensive whole peanuts. In fact, a new study reports that people who regularly ate peanuts were 21 percent less likely to die over a five-year period than people who didn't eat nuts.³ And that was true even for the people who smoked, were obese, or had high blood pressure or diabetes.

One of the worst offenders when it comes to both your budget and your health are so-called “snack packs.” Many candy bars, chips, and cookies are available in a 100-cal snack pack. But why waste 100 calories—not to mention several dollars—on absolute junk?

The same goes for most “granola” bars, energy bars, and other candy bars disguised in pseudo-healthy packaging. How much is 100 calories of this kind of junk? About one handful. Just say “nuts” to that.

Another terrible idea is “lunch snacks,” or pre-packaged junk lunch meats with some crappy cheese product and crackers thrown in. In a March 15, 2013 *Daily Dispatch*, I revealed the horror story of how Lunchables were geared to the new generation of busy, working mothers and their children. The entire product

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category was 100 percent marketing and 0 percent optimum nutrition.

4. Know when to go organic

As I reported back in 2012, the U.S. government has turned the organic label into another quasi-government bureaucratic process—not to mention a procedure for essentially shaking down the little grower (check out “Deep into organic” and “Big food takes over the organic market” at drmicozzi.com). Since then, big food has found even more ways to infiltrate and pervert the organic labeling process.

But that doesn't mean the organic label is entirely unimportant for your health and nutrition. Every year, the nonprofit Environmental Working Group (EWG) publishes its “Dirty Dozen Plus” fruits and vegetables that are most contaminated by pesticides. These are the foods you should always eat organic.

This year, the list includes apples, peaches, nectarines, strawberries, grapes, celery, spinach, sweet bell peppers, cucumbers, cherry tomatoes, snap peas, potatoes, hot peppers, kale, and collard greens.⁴

I also recommend that if you eat corn and soybeans, choose the organic ones. Most of the conventionally grown versions are genetically modified. And you'll avoid dangerous growth hormones and antibiotics if you choose organic meat and chicken.

But there are some foods for which you don't necessarily need to pay extra for organic versions. Foods with peels, for instance. If you completely remove a peel before eating, you're not likely to ingest any pesticides. Although there is still the environmental impact of using pesticides to grow that food.

Along with “peel foods” like avocados, onions, pineapples, kiwi,

papaya, grapefruit, and cantaloupe, the EWG also put the following produce on its 2015 “Clean Fifteen” list for having the lowest concentrations of pesticides: sweet corn (although, as I said above, watch the GMOs), cabbage, frozen sweet peas, asparagus, mangoes, eggplant, cauliflower, and sweet potatoes.⁵

If you want to save money, buy conventional rather than organic versions of these foods.

5. Bag the bagged lettuce and salad dressings

One of the most wasteful and dangerous (in terms of contamination) food products is prepackaged lettuce and salads. Why seal your salad in artificial plastic bags when you can buy lettuce and other greens out in the open—where they can breathe and are also watered regularly by the produce staff at your grocery store?

That's why I always buy salad and other greens by the head. They're not only fresher, but less expensive and safer than bagged salads.

As with flowers, you can carefully slice the ends off the heads of greens and place them in water to maintain a “fresh-picked” appearance and flavor for days. Just make sure to wash them so they'll be free of salmonella and other contaminants that can make their way into salads that are bagged—and stay there.

Bottom line: bagged salads = bad idea.

Bottled salad dressings are also a bad idea. These expensive concoctions are typically loaded with sugars, fats, preservatives, and artificial chemicals. They're also loaded with calories, which negates the weight-loss effect of the salads they douse.

All you really need to make your salad sing is a little red wine vinegar and olive oil (which is one of the healthiest foods on the planet). Don't like vinegar? Try lemon juice instead. Add a dash of mustard (3 calories) and virtually any and all spices for extra flavor.

To keep olive oil fresh, buy only as much as you will use within three months. Vinegar is already “aged” and can be kept almost indefinitely.

6. Get more bang for your beef buck

Beef is expensive. But judging by its nutritional content, it should be. Beef provides essential fats, B vitamins, and bioavailable minerals, as well as protein—which most people don't get enough of, especially as we get older.

The lost decades of government misdirection when it comes to beef (and also butter, cholesterol, eggs, and fats) are over—and the government finally admitted that its advice to avoid these foods was all wrong, all along. Now, we know it's important to include beef and other meat, as well as fish and seafood, in our diets at least twice per week.

Even if your grocery budget is tight, you can still afford beef. Stay away from the filet mignon and choose bottom round, shoulder, or tri-tip cuts instead. You'll get the same nutrition at a lower cost. These cuts can also be marinated in the same healthy spices, vinegars, and olive oil that add flavor to salads and other foods.

And, as I mentioned earlier, buy organic beef whenever you can. Also, research shows grass-fed beef is lower in unhealthy fats and higher in omega-3 fatty acids than conventional beef, which makes it good for your heart. It also has more cancer-fighting antioxidants than conventional beef.⁶

So it's worth the splurge for this healthier meat.

7. **Make sure you know beans about beans**

You can supplement your beef consumption with another excellent source of protein—beans. They're also high in fiber and the B vitamin folate.

And dry beans can be bought for bargain-basement prices. Although they must be rehydrated and rinsed to eliminate natural anti-digestive toxins. Canned beans are more expensive, but still make it easily onto the budget list.

Slow cookers are a good way to make convenient bean casseroles and dishes. One of my favorites is beans, beef, and chili peppers—better known as chili con carne or simply chili. There are as many delicious chili varieties as there are chefs, and they make a good year-round meal.

8. **Don't surrender in the battle of the beverages**

You already know how important it is to avoid all bottled soda and soft drinks, whether they're made with sugar, high-fructose corn syrup, or artificial sweeteners. They're as harmful to your health and your waistline (even "zero-cal") as they are to your bottom line.

Stick with water. For more information on what type of water, check out "The slimy secret water companies don't want you to know: Bacteria, arsenic, and carcinogens all found in bottled water" in the July issue of *Insiders' Cures*.

Or you can make your own fruit/vegetables juices with any or all of the healthy organic produce listed above. Investing in a restaurant-quality juicer will help ensure that you can juice just about anything.

9. **Remember there's no downside to downsizing**

In addition to choosing the right foods, controlling portion sizes is the single most important step to a healthy weight. Which, of course, helps promote a healthy life.

But portions of prepared foods at grocery stores and restaurants seem to keep growing and growing. I've found the best way to lessen the burden on your wallet and waistline is to share these supersized portions with another person—or yourself.

Cut your restaurant or grocery entrée in half and either share it with your dining partner or take it home. You will still get all the flavors, and you'll find yourself satisfied with less. Plus, you can sample more types of food (for those who have a hard

time making up their minds with the menu).

Do the same thing with meals you cook at home. Combining leftovers has led to some of the great inventions in cooking. Pizza, for example. Leftover vegetables can also be made into soups, or vegetable broth or stocks. And stale bread makes excellent breadcrumbs and croutons.

Another benefit to portion control is that you won't waste food. Americans squander a whopping 30 to 40 percent of our food supply—the equivalent of *20 pounds* of food per person per month.⁷

The mindless reading of expiration dates on perfectly good, unopened foods is another source of that waste. Don't throw out foods that still taste and smell all right. Your nose knows. On the other hand, choosing the later expiration dates on packages while still at the grocery store will postpone the point at which you even have to consider this issue.

Above all, be creative with cooking and leftovers. The kitchen is a place where virtually everyone can express themselves—which is healthy for body and mind. **IC**

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Treat your cold or flu with echinacea and elderberry—not Tamiflu

As your kids or grandkids go back to school, or you or family members head to a cramped, unhealthy office space, the sad truth is that you are going to be exposed to all kinds of viruses just waiting to make you sick.

Crowded, outdated public school

classrooms are breeding grounds for communicable diseases. And they bring home a lot more than homework starting in September—including viruses that make the rounds from children to adults.

But the good news is that as soon as you find yourself coming

down with a cold or flu, there are effective, scientifically-proven natural approaches you can take.

For decades, there has been growing research on the ability of the herb echinacea (the Native American purple cornflower) to prevent or limit

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the severity and duration of colds or flu.

And now, new research shows that echinacea combined with extract from elderberries is just as effective as the expensive and dangerous drug Tamiflu for reducing or ending flu symptoms.¹

Plus, people who take Tamiflu are over twice as likely to have their flu turn into pneumonia, bronchitis, or sinusitis than those who take echinacea and elderberry.

I wish I had known this when I was a young adult in medical training at the University of Pennsylvania—home to the nation's oldest hospital and medical school. There was not much that could keep me and my colleagues down. But we all dreaded getting the “chop rot” from the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHoP). Mysterious viruses would emerge from children cooped up in this hospital. And they could “chop” down a healthy young adult in the prime of life—at least for a few days.

Fortunately for those kids and my colleagues, Tamiflu wasn't around then. As I wrote in a May 2014 *Daily Dispatch* (“The game is over for Roche and Tamiflu”), this drug has serious side effects. Not only nausea, vomiting, and headaches—which are bad enough—but also kidney disorders and psychiatric syndromes.

But thanks to this new research, we now know an echinacea/elderberry combo is just as effective as Tamiflu, with none of the worrisome side effects. Let's take a look.

How the flu flew away

Researchers in the Czech Republic recruited 473 people who had had influenza symptoms for less than 48 hours. Each study participant was given either Tamiflu or a hot drink containing an echinacea extract supplemented with elderberry.

After one day, 2 percent of the echinacea group and 4 percent of the Tamiflu group had mild or no flu symptoms. After five days, 50 percent of the echinacea group and 49 percent of the Tamiflu group were symptom free. And after 10 days, 90 percent of the echinacea group and 85 percent of the Tamiflu group had recovered.

Plus, people who take Tamiflu are over twice as likely to have their flu turn into pneumonia, bronchitis, or sinusitis than those who take echinacea and elderberry.

Echinacea and elderberry were particularly impressive when it came to preventing more serious health issues. Seven percent of the Tamiflu group ended up getting pneumonia, bronchitis, sinusitis, or gastrointestinal issues like nausea or vomiting. But only 3 percent of the echinacea group had these respiratory problems, and none of them suffered from the gastrointestinal issues.

While this study used a proprietary echinacea and elderberry blend from Europe, other studies indicate that a daily dose of echinacea tea spiked with elderberry extract is effective and makes a pleasant hot beverage. I don't think there is sufficient evidence to recommend doses. Like many herbal infusions, just brew a concoction that tastes good and drink it often. The key is to start this process within 48 hours after your first cold or flu symptoms.

And remember not to take echinacea unless you are coming down with a cold or flu. Otherwise, you run the risk of chronically overstimulating your immune system. Which, ironically, could increase your susceptibility to colds and flu.

Other ways to fight colds and flu


Of course, most basically healthy people eventually recover from colds and flu without any treatment. But why be miserable any longer than you have to?

Bolster your immune system throughout the year, and you'll make yourself much less susceptible to the viruses your family brings home from school or work.

A good approach is to take a good-quality B complex every day, along with 500 mg of vitamin C twice per day. And don't forget daily doses of 10,000 IU of vitamin D, 400 mg of vitamin E, 200 mcg of selenium, and 35 mg of zinc—which you want to be taking anyway for their many brain and body benefits.

There is a lot of talk about high-dose vitamin C, but your body can only effectively make use of 500 mg at a time.

You can, however, really stock up on vitamin D. Some of my natural physician colleagues say from their personal and clinical experience, that it's best to take 20,000 IU of D per day when you feel you are coming down with a cold or flu. I'm not aware of any studies on that higher dose, however.

Finally, if you're reading this on a touch screen, make sure you frequently wash your hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers. That's a good idea in any circumstance, but particularly for touch screens, which are a great invention—for viruses and other diseases that are passed along by touching. 

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