

Cures from the Hedgerows, with anti-ageing benefits too!

Can elderberry extract reduce the severity of symptoms and hasten recovery from influenza better than no treatment?

The ripe berries from *Sambucus nigra*, the Black Elder Tree have a long history and tradition in many countries of use for colds, coughs and influenza by herbalists, and are a known country remedy.



This remedy has attracted the interest and studies of various virologists throughout the world.

One study carried out in Norway was made to determine the efficacy of extract of elderberry against the influenza virus. A randomised double blind placebo clinical trial took place during the last weeks of 1999 and the early weeks of 2000. Sixty people were randomly selected suffering from the symptoms of 'flu. The criteria was that all the people on the trial were otherwise healthy, between the ages of 18 and 54, were not pregnant or breastfeeding, had no existing bronchial infection, had been on no recent anti-viral medication, had not taken part in any other recent trial, had not been vaccinated for 'flu and did not have any other chronic disease.

At the commencement of the study they were all tested for antigen confirmation of the influenza virus by "haemagglutination-inhibition antibody titre, with a positive influenza culture within seven days"¹ (Zakay-Rones *et al*, 2004)

They were issued with either Sambucol commercially produced elderberry extract “containing 38% elderberry extract”¹ which also contained a little honey, raspberry natural flavouring and citric acid, or they were issued with a placebo syrup produced by the same manufacturer with an identical flavour and the same ingredients except the elderberry extract. They were all in the same amber glass bottles. The instructions were to take a 15ml dose four times a day for five days commencing within 48 hours of the onset of ‘flu symptoms. They were also issued with rescue medication of paracetamol based painkillers, and a nasal spray to relieve symptoms to use if they felt it necessary, and to record everything they took. At the end of the trial they were to return all medication and packaging to enable confirmation of what they had used. This also confirmed they had been accurately taking the elderberry extract.

The symptoms throughout the trial and at the end were self assessed on a scale of 1 – 10 and included;

1. Coughing (severity and frequency)
2. Sleep quality
3. Nasal and bronchial mucous and discharge
4. Aches and pains
5. Side effects (including sedative effects)

Results showed that those taking the elderberry extract recovered on average in half the time of those taking the placebo, and all their symptoms were reduced with less rescue medication used.

The laboratory research indicates that the reason for the elderberry’s antiviral success is the extremely high anthocyanin content. (This causes the blue Pigmentation). Many other red, blue and purple fruits and vegetables contain anthocyanins which is a flavonoid, but the specific one in the elderberry is very high in it’s antiviral activity.

The trial carried out at the National Laboratory of Health in Norway was well set up, with positive testing for influenza virus presence, double blind extract/placebo and random selection of individuals, but the results could have been more scientifically analysed both during, and at the end of the trial by taking swabs and blood tests to check for presence of the influenza virus, antibody levels and cytokine levels rather than having patients record their own interpretation of how they felt. This leaves the trial results open to influence by personality differences of how a patient copes with illness and their individual experience of the influenza, in other words a qualitative, rather than a quantitative study. This has its merit and is an important factor in the patients well being, but is not so useful for a trial requiring facts and figures on evidence based research.

To the question of whether Black Elderberry is effective as an anti-viral agent, the clinical bottom line would appear to be that Sambucus Nigra can be shown to significantly reduce the severity of the symptoms of influenza and cut the length of time a person is debilitated by the illness by nearly half.

To read further on this information look at, www.sambucol.com or www.cochrane.org

The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, volume 1, no. 4. 1995 pp361-369 by Mary Ann Liebert. Inhibition of Several Strains of Influenza Virus in Vitro and Reduction of Symptoms by an Elderberry Extract (Sambucus nigra) during an outbreak of influenza B panama.

The Journal of International Medical Research 2004, 32: 132-140 Copyright Cambridge Medical Publications 2004
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Vaccination against influenza is the most commonly used preventative conventional treatment, although for this study I have not researched the

effectiveness. However, it is commonly thought that vaccination compromises the immune system for some time after administration leaving the individual open to other infections and viruses. It is also only effective against a pre-set number of influenza virus strains and cannot predict with absolute certainty which viruses will be circulating in the population at a given time. It also does not protect against bacterial infections associated with colds and influenza. My own conclusions are that in the absence of suitable alternative treatment, elderberry extract is a potent weapon against colds and influenza. The lack of side effects of this medication, which is also available commercially in childrens, and sugar free recipes, makes it valuable and suitable for everyone and could benefit the vulnerable especially, as a reduced duration of virus activity would lessen the chances of dangerous side effects of secondary bacterial infections, such as pneumonia.

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Anti-ageing and skin benefits

For those interested in the potential for cosmetic effects, the anti-ageing effects of anthocyanins are also well researched. Free radicals in our bodies are caused by pollution, unhealthy foods and just general by products of metabolism and have the effect of ageing our cells, including the skin. These are mopped up by the anthocyanins and disposed of. Meaning a slowing of the ageing process and less wrinkles. This beneficial effect is gained from all dark berries and fruits, red, blue and black.

It makes sense to avoid artificial and chemical ingredients in your cosmetic bodycare products, you will then be treating your body from the outside and the inside. *Green Wych* natural toiletries and *Clea natural mineral make up* is pure and contains no chemicals, artificial fragrances or colours, and is sold in Torquay exclusively at *Herbs & Honey* independent health shop, St. Marychurch, Torquay.

Anthocyanins are available in supplement form, elderberry extract is available made under the name of Sambucol and can be purchased from your local independent health shop, *Herbs & Honey, St. Marychurch, Torquay*. Get your fill of these miracle substances before the party season begins, and not only will your skin be glowing but you will feel great too!

References;

1. Zakay-Rones, Z., Thom, E., Wollan, T., Wadstein, J. (2004) Randomised Study of the Efficacy and Safety of Oral Elderberry Extract in Treatment of Influenza A & B Virus Infections. *The Journal of International Medical Research*, 32: 132-140
2. www.sambucol.com (internet) black elderberry.info; how it works
3. Jefferson, T., Demicheli, V., Di Pietrantonj, C., Rivetti, D. (2006) Amantadine and rimantadine for influenza A in adults. *Cochrane Reviews*, issue 4.

Further Bibliography of general research;

Mills, S., (1993) *The Essential Book of Herbal Medicine*. Penguin, London