

# Can Supplements Shorten Cold Duration?

## Find out what the medical evidence says about whether supplements can make you feel better faster.

So you've taken care of yourself, but still you've caught a bug. Maybe you've heard that certain supplements can cut short the common cold. But do they really work? The National Center for Complimentary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) says some studies show possible benefits, but there is no *conclusive* evidence that dietary supplements or other alternative therapies can prevent colds or reduce cold duration.

However, recent research published in the *British Journal of Nutrition* suggests that the vitamins found in fruits and vegetables might help prevent and shorten the common cold. In the study, German researchers used a fruit and vegetable supplement that contained vitamins C, E, beta carotene, and folate. Two hundred and sixty-three of the participants (mainly women nurses whose average age was 39) took four capsules of the supplement daily for eight months, while 266 participants took a placebo. The subjects reported the number of days they experienced moderate or severe cold symptoms over six months, with the supplement group reporting an average of 7.6 days with such symptoms and the placebo group reporting 9.5 days.

Here are recent findings about other supplements commonly used as cold remedies:

- **Vitamin C.** According to the NCCAM, a recent review of 30 trials involving more than 11,000 people found that taking vitamin C regularly (at least 0.2 grams a day) did not lower the chance of catching a cold, but it was shown to possibly reduce the duration and severity of cold symptoms. Talk to your doctor about whether taking vitamin C is right for you.
- **Zinc.** "Probably the best evidence supports the use of zinc lozenges to reduce the intensity of cold symptoms," Novey says. A recent review found that doses of more than 70 milligrams a day did reduce the duration of colds. But other studies found no benefits. And in 2009, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration warned against the use of zinc-containing nasal cold remedies after receiving reports of the loss of smell in some people.
- **Echinacea.** Many believe this herb can prevent or treat the common cold. Study results about echinacea have been mixed. Reviews of the research show there could be some benefits in adults, but three NCCAM-funded trials found no benefit at all.
- **Probiotics.** Although there have been some studies that suggest so-called "good bacteria" found in many yogurts can help prevent or fight a cold, Novey believes they don't work.

While it may be nearly impossible to avoid all colds, Novey says hand-washing, especially before eating, is very powerful tool: "Try it — it really works."

Source: <http://www.everydayhealth.com:80/cold-flu/can-supplements-shorten-cold-duration.aspx>