

Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis* and *S. nigra*) is the fruit of the elder tree, and as a supplement it is often used for colds and flu.

Why do people take elderberry?

Elderberry extracts are natural remedies with anti-inflammatory, anti-viral and anti-cancer properties. Elderberries contain natural substances called **flavonoids** and **rutin** which boost the immune system, especially when used in conjunction with Vitamin C. Elderberries, which happen to be a very powerful **antioxidant**, have been used for centuries in folk medicine, as well as today, to treat colds, influenza, and wounds (when applied topically).

There are many natural remedies, foods and other techniques that can enhance immune function, but in the case of battling common viruses specifically, elderberry has been shown to possess an especially high rate of efficacy. It is hypothesized that black elderberries may include a specific compound, which **coats viruses and keeps them from penetrating and infecting healthy cells.** Elderberry has been shown to be effective in treating cold viruses and strains of influenza including the traditional (common flu), H1N1 (swine flu) and H5N1 (avian or bird flu). Elderberry extract has even shown to be effective against the herpes simplex virus. A 2004 study published in the National Library of Medicine commented on reduced duration of flu symptoms when using elderberry: "**Symptoms were relieved on average four days earlier** and use of rescue medication was significantly less in those receiving elderberry extract compared with placebo."

Studies have found that elderberry eases symptoms like fever, headache, sore throat, fatigue, cough, congestion, bodyaches diarrhea and indigestion. One study found that elderberry could **cut the duration of flu symptoms by more than 50%.** A few studies have suggested that elderberry could help with bacterial sinus infections or bronchitis. More research needs to be done.

How should you take elderberry? The benefits seem to be greatest when started within **24 to 48 hours** after the symptoms begin.

Available Forms

Elderberry is available as a liquid, syrup, and tincture, as well as in capsule and lozenge forms. Dried elder flower is usually standardized to at least 0.8% flavonoids. Sambucol is standardized to 38% elderberry extract for adults and 19% for children. Sinupret contains 18 mg of elder flower.

How to Take It

Pediatric-Do not give elderberry or any product containing elder to a child without first talking to your pediatrician.

Adult -

- **Sinupret:** 2 tablets taken three times a day for bacterial sinusitis
- **Sambucol:** 4 tsp. a day for three days for colds and flu
- **Tea:** Steep 3 - 5 g dried elder flower in 1 cup boiling water for 10 - 15 minutes. Strain and drink three times per day.

Precautions

- The use of herbs is a time-honored approach to strengthening the body and treating disease. Herbs, however, can trigger side effects and interact with other herbs, supplements, or medications. For these reasons, you should should herbs only under the supervision of a health care provider.
- Do not use unripe or uncooked elderberries. They may be poisonous.
- Elderberry appears to have few side effects when used properly for short periods of time (up to 5 days).
- Pregnant and breastfeeding women should not take elderberry.
- If you have an autoimmune disease, such as rheumatoid arthritis or lupus, you should ask your doctor before taking elderberry, as it may stimulate the immune system.

Possible Interactions

If you are being treated with any of the following medications, you should talk to your health care provider before taking elderberry:

- **Diuretics (water pills)** -- Diuretics help the body get rid of excess fluid and increase the amount of urine your body makes. Elderberry may also act as a diuretic, so taking it along with a diuretic could make that drug stronger and raise your risk of dehydration. Diuretics include:
 - ❖ Hydrochlorothiazide
 - ❖ Bumetanide (Burinex)
 - ❖ Furosemide (Lasix)
 - ❖ Amiloride (Midamor)
 - ❖ Metolazone (Zaroxolyn)
- **Diabetes medications** -- Elderberry may lower blood sugar levels. If you are also taking drugs for diabetes, taking elderberry may increase your risk of developing hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar.
- **Chemotherapy** -- Elderberry may interact with some chemotherapy drugs. If you are undergoing chemotherapy, ask your oncologist before taking any herb or supplement.
- **Laxatives** -- Elderberry may act like a laxative and should not be taken at the same time as other laxatives.
- **Theophylline (TheoDur)** -- Elderberry may reduce levels of theophylline, a drug taken for asthma and other respiratory conditions. That could make the drug not work as well.
- **Drugs that suppress the immune system** -- Because elderberry may stimulate the immune system, it could interfere with medications taken to suppress the immune system. These medications include corticosteroids (prednisone) and medications used to treat autoimmune diseases. People with organ transplants should also avoid elderberry.