

Echinacea

What is Echinacea?

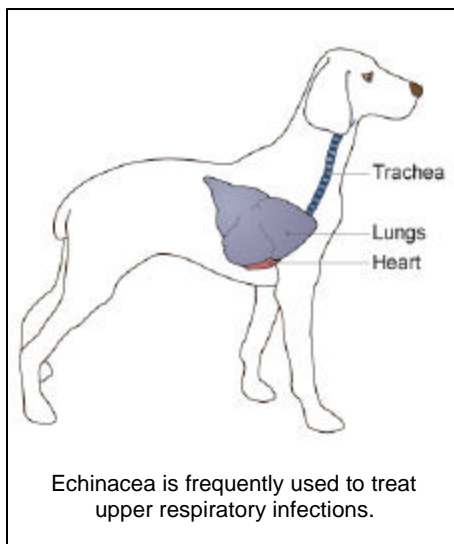
Herbal remedies made from the Echinacea plant are exceedingly popular. Different chemical effects are observed with different species and different plant components. It is thus advisable to use a blend of Echinacea, containing *E. purpurea* herb and *E. angustifolia* root. Echinacea is of interest as an immune stimulant.

Why recommend administration of Echinacea to my pet?

In people, Echinacea is often used for preventing or treating the common cold, flu, and upper respiratory tract infections (URIs). Some studies have shown that Echinacea shortens the duration and severity of colds and other upper respiratory infections (URIs) when given as soon as symptoms become evident. Echinacea may also help prevent the incidence of URIs altogether, especially when combined with vitamin C and propolis. The incidence of URIs in children receiving this combination for three months were reduced by over 50 percent in one large placebo controlled study. Some studies have not shown any clinical benefit of Echinacea in the treatment or prevention of human adult URI, but most of these studies either did not use standardized extracts or did not use mixtures of the various species. Extracts standardized to give a maximum amount of alkamides, cichoric acid and immune polysaccharides appear to produce the most benefit.



Echinacea has not been extensively studied in veterinary medicine. One study in horses showed that Echinacea extract increased red blood cell and hemoglobin counts (important for carrying oxygen in the blood); stimulated white blood cell numbers and function. The favorable impact of Echinacea on red blood cell counts was speculated to potentially improve athletic performance.



Only one study of Echinacea has been reported in dogs. The study consisted of the treatment of chronic respiratory infections in canines over an eight-week period with a 1:3 Echinacea powder, at a dose of 1g/10kg per day. Resolution of symptoms was reported in 39 of the 42 dogs by 4 weeks. Treatment was initiated at a variety of different stages of illness. No adverse effects were reported. No placebo control group was used.

Echinacea in veterinary medicine has not just been used for the treatment of URIs, but also as a topical salve with other herbs such as *Calendula* (see specific handout on this supplement) to reduce wound infection and inflammation, and stimulate wound healing. Other conditions considered to potentially benefit from immune stimulation have also been treated with Echinacea, including stomatitis (inflammation of the oral structures) and generalized demodicosis (a skin disease caused by the demodex mite). Feline stomatitis appears to respond poorly to Echinacea alone. Further reductions in itching and lesions are commonly seen when Echinacea is added to conventional protocols to treat demodex.

What species of animals are being treated regularly with Echinacea?

Any pet can be treated with Echinacea. Given the clinical importance of recurrent upper respiratory infections in dogs, cats, horses, and rabbits, these species might especially benefit from Echinacea.

How safe is Echinacea?

Echinacea is considered to have a wide margin of safety. It produces no known adverse drug interactions.

Previous recommendations to use Echinacea for only a brief period at the onset of an infection do not appear to be supported by the research, with Echinacea showing an obvious clinical benefit when given at any stage of infection for months at a time.



The German Commission E monographs caution that Echinacea preparations are not to be used internally in people with autoimmune disorders. This same general precaution has been repeated for pets. However, these precautions were made based on theoretical considerations and not on any reports of adverse findings. It may be safe to use Echinacea in patients with these conditions, but consultation with a veterinarian is advised before doing so.

Where do I obtain Echinacea and do I need a prescription?

The efficacy of Echinacea may vary profoundly depending on the species of Echinacea used and the method of extraction. It is very important, therefore, to consult with your veterinarian regarding trusted brands. Pet owners are cautioned against buying supplements without knowledge of the manufacturer, as supplements are not highly regulated and some supplements may not contain the proper species, plant parts, or active ingredients.

This client information sheet is based on material written by Steve Marsden, DVM ND MSOM LAc DiplCH AHG, Shawn Messonnier, DVM and Cheryl Yuill, DVM, MSc, CVH.

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