

Ready to start planning your care? Call us at [800-525-2225](tel:800-525-2225) to make an appointment.

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Cancer Center

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Echinacea is a plant that belongs to the sunflower family. It's commonly used in herbal medicine. Echinacea also comes as capsules, pills, tablets, or liquid extracts.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

Echinacea is used to:

- Prevent and treat common cold
- Strengthen your immune system
- Prevent and treat influenza (the flu)
- Heal wounds

Echinacea also has other uses that haven't been studied by doctors to see if they work.

It's generally safe to use echinacea. But talk with your healthcare providers before taking echinacea

supplements. They can have higher amounts of the herb, and can also interact with some medications and affect how they work.

For more information, read the “What else do I need to know?” section below.

What are the side effects?

Side effects of using echinacea may include:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea (feeling like you’re going to throw up)
- Constipation (having fewer bowel movements than usual)
- Mild stomach pain
- Skin rash

What else do I need to know?

- Talk to your healthcare provider if you’re taking immunosuppressants like tacrolimus (Prograf®) or cyclosporine (Gengraf®, Neoral® or Sandimmune®). Echinacea may make these medications less effective.
- Talk to your healthcare provider if you’re taking etoposide (Toposar®, VePesid®, Etopophos®, VP-16). Echinacea can decrease your blood platelet count.
- Talk to your healthcare provider before taking echinacea in any form if you’re pregnant or breastfeeding. It may not be safe for you.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you’re not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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