HERBAL PRODUCTS

There has been renewed interest in herbal products. Two recent randomized trials have shown Echinacea has no effect in adults 1 or kids 2 for the common cold. For ginseng in the form of COLD-FX a trial in 2003-4 reported a modest effect for prevention of colds but no significant effect for treatment (see below). In the Glucosamine/Chondroitin Arthritis Intervention Trial (GAIT), glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate alone or in combination was not more effective than placebo or celecoxib in reducing pain in patients with osteoarthritis of the knee after 24 weeks or after 2 years of treatment. A subgroup of patients with moderate-to-severe pain appeared to benefit at 24 weeks but this effect was lost at 2 years. In addition, glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate alone or in combination showed no benefit over placebo in slowing down loss of cartilage in knee osteoarthritis after 2 years. Even despite no direct evidence, LAKOTA’s (which contains glucosamine plus other ingredients) continued marketing efforts has generated much interest in herbal remedies.

### Table: Herbal Products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic/Trade (Strength and Formulations)</th>
<th>Possible Use/Limited Evidence</th>
<th>Contraindications</th>
<th>Initial, Usual &amp; Maximum Dosage</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>GINSENG ROOT EXTRACT</strong></td>
<td>tx at onset of cold/flu sx or help prevent cold/flu sx.</td>
<td>C allergy &amp; lactation, kids&lt;12, allergy to herb, MAOIs/neuroleptics</td>
<td>COLD-FX (200mg caps) Treatment:</td>
<td>~$21/5 days</td>
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<td><strong>COLD-FX</strong></td>
<td>• Activates macrophages/?? ↑ acquired immune response, only preliminary non conclusive evidence</td>
<td>&amp; may ↑ alcohol clearance from the body corticosteroids →herb may affect [steroid]</td>
<td>Day 1 – 3 caps TID</td>
<td>~$8/month</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>COLD-FX EXTRA</strong></td>
<td>• Less people acquired at least 1 cold in the tx group, any difference did not reach significance</td>
<td>&amp; may have additive effects reported on improvement in symptoms in osteoarthritis and postmenopausal bleeding</td>
<td>Day 2 – 2 caps TID</td>
<td>~$233/4 months</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>IMMUNITY-FX</strong></td>
<td>• Differences were statistically significant in favour of treatment for those suffering recurring colds</td>
<td>&amp; may inhibit reaperture of neurotransmitters &amp; ↑ tremor/mania thus ↑</td>
<td>Day 3 – 1 caps TID then 1 or 2 caps daily until feeling better (7d~25 caps)</td>
<td>~$12/month</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>GLUCOSAMINE</strong></td>
<td>Cold duration was ↑, however, cold or flu confirmation testing was not done. 4</td>
<td>&amp; may ↑ bleeds by itself or ↓ INR (Case reports 10)</td>
<td>Prevention: 2 cap daily x 4 month (Canadian study 7)</td>
<td>~$89/month</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LAJTOKO CARE 7</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>&amp; may cause GI AE such as diarrhea.</td>
<td>1 cap BID x 8-12wk (USA study 3£)</td>
<td>~$45/month</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LAJTOKO OSTEOT</strong></td>
<td>&amp; may be significant for patients with moderate to severe pain 9,11,12, however not recommended.</td>
<td>&amp; hypoglycemics/insulin →does not significantly affect BG or ↑ A1C; may cause insulin resistance</td>
<td>IMMUNITY-FX (200mg caps) 1 cap BID for general health/wellness</td>
<td>~$62/4 weeks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Summary of the COLD-FX trial for PREVENTING colds

**American Ginseng: Panax quinquefolium**

**BACKGROUND:** COLD-FX was studied in 323 adults age 18-65 with a hx of 2 colds in the previous year; COLD-FX was given 400mg/2 capsl/day vs placebo for ~4months from Sep 2003 to April 2004 in Edmonton, Alberta. (Trial funded by CV Technologies; 4 of 6 authors have connection with company.)

**EXCLUSION:** Vaccinated against influenza in the previous 6 months; if MS, TB, diabetes, cancer, lupus, HIV, heart/ lung/renal/liver/neurological diseases; if on immunosuppressives, corticosteroids, warfarin, phenalazine, pentobarbital, haloperidol or cyclosporine; & if pregnant, lactating or heavy smokers.

**RESULTS:** 55 vs 64% NS had 1 cold Jackson defined; 10 vs 22.8% had ≥ 2 colds during the 4 months; & Duration of cold: 8.7 vs 11.1days (2.4 days less) & may prevent precipitation of high tannin content.

**LIMITATIONS:** Pivotal ingredient & mechanism; Jackson vs 6 day score used thus only more severe illness were evaluated; not intention-to-treat analysis, symptom self-reporting & many excluded in adults, COLD-FX ↓ 0.25 colds/person in those who had ≥ 2 colds in the previous year. Further verification of this result is awaited.

**BOTTOM LINE:** *Handwashing, possibly gargling, & the influenza vaccine are proven to prevent upper respiratory infections. (other interventions lack evidence)*


