

Viruses the Bane of Winter Months

We count ourselves lucky if we get through the winter without a cold or 'flu'. Even the healthiest of us can get hit by seasonal viruses. But, as Dr. Moira Williams explains, the good news is that there is a herbal remedy that can help.

The common cold and influenza are amongst the most prevalent illnesses at this time of year and we count ourselves lucky if we do not succumb to at least one of these viral infections over the winter months. Help is at hand, however, in the form of a plant root extract Eleutherococcus Senticosus Maxim, or ES for short.

STRENGTHENING IMMUNITY

The ability of ES extract to strengthen the immune system and prevent or reduce the severity of common viral illnesses was scientifically verified by the pharmacologist Prof. Isreal Brekhman in Russia during the 1950s. Prof. Brekhman classified Es as an 'adaptogen', a substance which allows that body to adapt more efficiently using the body's own physiological and biochemical processes. ES is the best adaptogen available so far and is particularly renowned for its ability to strengthen the immune system. More than 1000 research projects have followed Prof. Brekhman's work, mostly looking at the effects of stress on the immune system, especially during times of stress.

The largest studies took place in the *Volga Automobile Plant* and *Russian Mining and Smelting Works* where over 1000 workers were given ES during the harsh winter months for periods upto seven years.

The results showed that there was a remarkable decrease in the incidence of colds, 'flu' and other common illnesses among the workers taking ES (in some cases by as much as 90%). 838 children under school age who were given ES also showed reduced rates of colds and chest infections. The implications of these results are enormously significant in showing how easy it can be to not only reduce the unpleasant suffering caused by viruses, but also to cut the amount of time taken off work and school.

In Germany in 1987, Prof. Bohn and his colleagues looked specifically at the effects of ES on the cells of the immune system in healthy volunteers. They were impressed and surprised by the results.

They demonstrated an increase in the numbers and activity of the T-lymphocytes, white cells (which are responsible for protecting against viruses), with a particularly marked increase in T-helper cells. This confirmed that ES does strengthen the immune system and so protects against viruses and other immune related disorders.

BOOSTING BODY DEFENCES

The immuno-protective effects of ES are so pronounced that ES is commonly used in Russia to protect the immune system against the toxic effects of certain drug treatments and against radiation. Patients using ES maintain a far stronger immunity that would otherwise be expected.

ES is derived from the root of a thorny shrub which grows only in the exacting climate of eastern Siberia. The active ingredients are called eleutherocides, these glycosides and are the chemical fingerprints of an active ES supplement.

STANDARDISATION IS ESSENTIAL

In order for the extract to be of any value, it must be standardised. Standardisation is the only way to ensure that the quantities of eleutherocides present are pharmacologically adequate and produce the desired effects consistently in every dose.

Products which are not standardised likely contain variable and generally inadequate amounts of the active extract. Moreover, some may even contain negligible amounts of ES – or even none at all. Standardisation is done through HPLC (High Performance Liquid Chromatography) with only a few centres worldwide specializing in the process. Extraction, concentration and standardization of ES, together with pharmaceutical preparation into capsules, are reflected in the cost of a good ES product.

ES takes up to three months to reach its maximum effectiveness in the body. A fit and healthy individual may only realise the immune strengthening effects of ES in retrospect when reflecting that fewer colds have been experienced and that convalescence from viruses has been much faster than usual.

POST-VIRAL FATIGUE AND STRESS

Post Viral Fatigue Syndrome (also known as ME and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome) affects a large number of people and is often difficult to diagnose. It affects young and old alike and can strike down even the fittest people, even top-class athletes. Stresses such as overwork, family difficulties, bereavement, worry, lack of sleep, excessive physical activity and other external influences such as poor diet and pollution can all weaken the immune system. This in turn may lead to increased vulnerability to viral infections, poor convalescence and the development of fatigue and potential relapses.

ELEUTHEROCOCCUS HELPING AGAINST HERPES

Further evidence for the immuno-protective effects of ES were reported following a double-blind placebo-controlled trial carried out over a six month period by the *Herpes Virus Association* using a standardised Eleutherococcus product, *Elagen*. The results suggested a significant decrease in the frequency of viral recurrences, the duration of each attack and the severity of those attacks which did occur in those taking *Elagen*. The results of this study were published in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* in July 1995.