

Consumer summary: Garlic for the common cold

A review of the effect of garlic supplements for the common cold was conducted by researchers in the Cochrane Collaboration. After searching for all relevant studies, they found one study. Their findings are summarised below.

What is the common cold and why take garlic supplements?

Symptoms of the common cold are well-known and can include runny nose, sore throat, fever and headache. On average, children have six to eight colds per year, and adults have two to four. Since the common cold is caused by many different types of viruses, it is hard to develop an effective universal treatment.

Garlic (*allium sativum*) is believed to have antibacterial and antiviral properties. Therefore, garlic supplements are widely used to try to prevent the common cold or relieve its symptoms. We don't know exactly how garlic might work. When raw garlic is crushed, an agent called allicin is produced. It has been suggested that the effect of garlic supplements may vary according to the amount of allicin in the supplement. Garlic supplements are usually taken as capsules or tablets.

What does the research say?

Not all research provides the same quality of evidence. The higher the quality, the more certain we are about what the research says about an effect. The quality of the evidence is either ranked as high, moderate, low or very low.

This study compared people who took one capsule of a garlic supplement daily for 12 weeks to people who took placebo capsules.

We are very uncertain whether garlic supplements can reduce the number of occurrences of the common cold or can reduce the length of the cold.

No serious adverse effects from garlic supplements were reported, but some people in the study experienced bad breath or minor skin irritations.

Table of results

What was measured	Placebo	Garlic	Quality of evidence
Number of occurrences of the common cold	We are very uncertain whether garlic reduces the number of occurrences of colds		⊕000 Very low
Length of the common cold	We are very uncertain whether garlic reduces the length of a cold		⊕000 Very low
Adverse effects	Minor adverse effects were experienced, like bad breath or skin irritation.		

Where does this information come from?

The Cochrane Collaboration is an independent global network of volunteers, dedicated to summarizing research about health care.

This information is taken from this Cochrane Review: Lissiman E, Bhasale AL, Cohen M. Garlic for the common cold. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2009, Issue 3. Art. No.: CD006206. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD006206.pub2.

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garlic compared to placebo, no treatment or standard treatment for common cold

Patient or population: patients with common cold

Settings: community

Intervention: garlic

Comparison: placebo, no treatment or standard treatment

Outcomes	Illustrative comparative risks* (95% CI)		Relative effect (95% CI)	No of Participants (studies)	Quality of the evidence (GRADE)	Comments
	Assumed risk placebo, no treatment or standard treatment	Corresponding risk garlic				
Number of occurrences of the common cold		The mean Number of occurrences of the common cold in the intervention groups was 0 higher (0 to 0 higher) ¹		146 (1 study)	⊕○○○ very low ^{2,3}	
Duration of symptoms (number of days)		The mean Duration of symptoms (number of days) in the intervention groups was 0 higher (0 to 0 higher) ¹		146 (1 study)	⊕○○○ very low ^{2,3}	
Number of days to recovery		The mean Number of days to recovery in the intervention groups was 0 higher (0 to 0 higher) ¹		146 (1 study)	⊕○○○ very low ^{2,3}	

*The basis for the **assumed risk** (e.g. the median control group risk across studies) is provided in footnotes. The **corresponding risk** (and its 95% confidence interval) is based on the assumed risk in the comparison group and the **relative effect** of the intervention (and its 95% CI).

CI: Confidence interval;

GRADE Working Group grades of evidence

High quality: Further research is very unlikely to change our confidence in the estimate of effect.

Moderate quality: Further research is likely to have an important impact on our confidence in the estimate of effect and may change the estimate.

Low quality: Further research is very likely to have an important impact on our confidence in the estimate of effect and is likely to change the estimate.

Very low quality: We are very uncertain about the estimate.

¹ We did not enter the results due to the very low quality of evidence

² Authors states that poor blinding of participants may have biased outcome reporting. Outcomes were self-reported. Participants noticed a "smell" when burping. In addition, the statistical analysis and primary outcomes did not appear to have been decided in advance. Unclear if the randomization procedure was unbiased and the allocation concealment is unclear.

³ Only one study with few participants