PEARLS

Practical Evidence About Real Life Situations

Should we be taking zinc to prevent and treat the common cold?

Clinical Question	How effective and safe is zinc supplementation for prevention and treatment of the common cold?
Bottom Line	This review showed that supplementing with zinc may lead to little or no difference in the proportion of those developing a cold over five days to seven months and did not reduce the number of colds that developed in people supplementing with zinc. However, those taking zinc supplementation to treat colds had a significantly shorter duration of their illness by about 2.4 days. No serious adverse events were noted in the studies. There was an increased risk of non-serious adverse events for those treating the common cold with zinc. The most common side effects were aberrations of taste, gastrointestinal discomfort, oropharyngeal or nasopharyngeal dryness, pain, irritation or sensitivity of the mouth or nose, and headache.
Caveat	Overall, there was wide variation in interventions (including concomitant therapy) and outcomes across the studies, which needs to be considered when drawing conclusions on the efficacy of zinc for the common cold.
Context	The common cold is an acute, self-limiting viral respiratory illness. Symptoms include nasal congestion and mucus discharge, sneezing, sore throat, cough, and general malaise. Given the frequency of colds, they are a public health burden and a significant cause of lost work productivity and school absenteeism. There are no established interventions to prevent colds or shorten their duration. However, zinc supplements are commonly recommended and taken for this purpose.
Cochrane Systematic Review	Nault D, Machingo TA, Shipper AG, Antiporta DA, Hamel C, Nourouzpour S, Konstantinidis M, Phillips E, Lipski EA, Wieland LS. Zinc for prevention and treatment of the common cold. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2024, Issue 5. Art. No.: CD014914. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD014914.pub2. This review contains 34 trials which included 8526 people.

Pearls No. 747, May 2024, written by Assoc Professor Vanessa MB Jordan.

Systematic review link:
https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD014914.pub2/full