

# Materia Medica for the Respiratory system

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## Anti-catarrhals

### Catnip herb

A gentle, cooling decongestant that also has strong antiviral properties, Catnip is also relaxing and helps with restful sleep during a bad cold. Hot tea, alone in combination, is generally indicated.

### Goldenrod leaf and flower

This herb is a rich source of bioflavonoids. It tones respiratory mucous membranes, while thinning secretions and lessening the sensitivity of the airways. Tincture doses range from ½ to 1 tsp. 3-4 times a day; it also makes a good tea.

### Elder flower

While some might classify this herb as a circulatory stimulant and diaphoretic (it encourages warmth and sweating during a fever, helping it to 'break'), I use the tincture ( ½ tsp. 3 times a day) or tea for gentle decongestion during a cold or flu.

### Nettle leaves, fresh

An excellent decongestant for colds and allergies. Only works if made from the fresh (not dried) leaves, or fresh-freeze-dried capsules. Take 1 tsp. 2-3 times a day of the tincture.

## Anti-infectives

### Echinacea root, leaf, flower, seed

Excellent immune enhancer and antiviral herb adept and containing symptoms of respiratory infection if taken early and often in the course of an illness. Use 1 to 2 tsp. of the tincture every 2-3 hours, especially if there is a sore or inflamed throat (this herb is a specific inhibitor of *Strep* bacteria). I find the tea much less effective.

### Garlic bulb

Strongly antibiotic, garlic protects the lungs from deeper infection and can assist in managing conditions such as sinusitis. Increase consumption to a whole head daily for conditions such as bacterial bronchitis or infective pneumonia. If this dose cannot be tolerated, a capsule is adequate.

### Thyme leaf and stem

This herb can be taken internally in the form of a strong, hot tea for containing bacterial infections and improving breathing. Its essential oils fight infection deep in the lungs as well as in the sinus cavities; a steam made by inhaling the vapors from the hot tea or essential oil may very well be the best way to experience its power.

## Anti-tussives

### Wild Cherry bark

Helpful to quiet a dry, painful cough and allow for a little restful sleep, this bark should not be overused as it does suppress the cough reflex. Syrups can be prepared by simmering the bark for 15 minutes then sweetening with honey. Essential oils such as Thyme and Eucalyptus can be combined with the syrup to reduce bacteria and encourage more gentle expectoration.

### Coltsfoot leaf / flower

This herb is not as suppressive, though it helps quiet and control a dry cough. It also encourages active elimination of the byproducts of infection, making it a safe and effective choice for short-term use in any bad cough. The tincture is used at doses of ¼ to ½ tsp, 3-5 times daily.

## Demulcents

### Licorice root

This root is also antiviral, expectorant, and anti-inflammatory. If there is no elevated blood pressure, it can be used safely to loosen painful coughs, soothe sore throats, and fight off viral infections. I like the tea, or chewing on the dried root. The tincture works well too: even just one dropperful, every few hours, can turn a cough around very quickly.

### Marshmallow root

A quintessential soother, this root can be powdered and mixed with a little water or honey to form a *pastille* that dissolves slowly, coating the throat and reducing inflammation.

## Expectorants

### Mullein leaf

The first-year leaves of this plant resemble the ciliated tissue of the respiratory system, and are brewed into an excellent tea that reduces intense coughing while also encouraging elimination from the lungs.

### Elecampane root

This strong expectorant is much more warming and spicy, helping to loosen old conditions and begin moving them towards resolution. The tincture's dose is ½ tsp. 3 times a day.

### Lobelia leaf, flower, seed

Take only tiny doses (5-10 drops of the tincture) of this plant. It is a strong emetic if overused, but when applied judiciously, it relaxes the lungs while also increasing their elimination of mucus. It is particularly helpful in chronic conditions, but an important ally also in the more damp, dangerous conditions such as pneumonia.

### **Pleurisy root**

Originally named after a condition of inflammation involving the lining of the lungs, this root is a combination demulcent / expectorant, especially indicated if coughing produces much pain in the ribcage. Take 1 tsp. 2-3 times a day of the tincture made from fresh root.

## **Lymphatics**

### **Red Clover blossoms**

A tea made from these flowers is one of the best remedies for the common cold, perhaps combined with a little Ginger and/or Elder. It removes byproducts of infection, dries the upper respiratory passages, reduces swollen glands and post-nasal drip, and has an expectorating action as well.

### **Calendula flowers**

A tea made from Calendula is most indicated in allergic congestion, or in chronic conditions of stagnation that would welcome a little heat from these bright flowers. A tincture can also be used, at doses of ¼ to ½ tsp. three times a day.

## **Respiratory and Immune tonics**

### **Astragalus root**

A Chinese tonic, it strengthens the lungs specifically and immunity in general. It is most indicated for those who regularly succumb to respiratory infection, or those convalescing after a protracted illness. It also tonifies anemic constitutions and strengthens asthmatic lungs. Do not use in acute, feverish conditions. Take ½ tsp. of the tincture 2 to 3 times a day, or drink a pint of the decoction daily.

### **Red Reishi mushroom**

Invaluable for oversensitive, allergic, and asthmatic conditions, this medicinal mushroom dries respiratory passages and re-aligns immunity to reduce respiratory inflammation. Take 30-60 drops of extract once or twice a day.

### **Usnea lichen**

An amazing lung tonic that strengthens the organ, tones mucous membranes, and enhances immunity while also having a broad anti-pathogenic action on fungi, bacteria, viruses. It can be eaten whole: one small, balled-up lichen thallus twice a day. The tincture, which is difficult to prepare, can be taken at doses of ½ tsp. twice daily, or more.

### **Elderberry**

Rich in bioflavonoids and vitamin C, the juice from this berry can strengthen us overall and possesses anti-viral properties as well, making it very useful for those who succumb frequently to the colds and flus of winter. It is commonly found in syrups, where the dose ranges from a teaspoon to a tablespoon, either once or twice a day as a tonic or every few hours in the case of acute illness.

## **Circulatory stimulants**

### **Ginger rhizome**

Warming and spicy, Ginger helps to drive out transient winter infections, and can be used to “reactivate” a stagnant, chronic respiratory condition to make it more treatable. It is helpful in feverish states as well, and can balance out cool formulas. It is most often used as a tea blend ingredient, and taken warm.

### **Hot compresses**

Herbs such as Ginger, Thyme, Elecampane or Eucalyptus can be used by brewing a tea and soaking a cloth in the warm brew. This warm, moist compress is placed on the chest to encourage circulation, expectoration, and the removal of pathogens.

## **Alkaloid-rich sympathomimetics**

These plants are rich in substances that activate the fight/flight response, which includes a marked opening of the airways. As such, they are usually strongly stimulating. This can tax a physiology already struggling with an acute respiratory infection, and should be used judiciously. They are helpful in asthmatic conditions as well.

Some examples: Coffee (caffeine), Chocolate (theophylline / theobromine), Ephedra (ephedrine), Bitter Orange (synephrine).