

## Herbs for Upper Respiratory Tract Catarrh & Inflammation

### Eyebright

The *British Herbal Pharmacopoeia* 1983 indicates that *Euphrasia officinalis* herb is anticatarrhal and can be used internally for nasal catarrh and sinusitis.<sup>1</sup> Eclectic physicians described Eyebright as an admirable remedy for acute catarrhal inflammations of the nasal and ocular membranes, with profuse, watery secretion of mucus. It was also recommended for coryza (common cold, rhinitis), mucous ophthalmia, catarrh extending to the ears, hayfever and to both prevent and relieve acute sinusitis. It was noted that Eyebright "proved especially useful in the epidemics of la grippe [1918 Spanish influenza] ... to control the profuse lachrimation".<sup>2</sup> Eyebright (part undefined) was used orally as a prophylactic for 'warm-humour' headache in medieval Persia. (Headache may result from alterations in or imbalance of the four humours.)<sup>3</sup> This may refer to sinus headache.

### Golden Seal

*Hydrastis canadensis* root and rhizome has a wide range of uses in western traditional medicine including upper respiratory catarrh.<sup>1,4</sup> Golden Seal was recommended by the Eclectic physicians both topically and internally for catarrhal pharyngitis, catarrhal sore throat following tonsillitis, subacute rhinitis, nasopharyngeal catarrh and "when thick gelatinous masses from the pharyngeal vault constantly drip into the throat causing hacking cough and nausea". The Eclectic physician Locke advised its use for nasal catarrh with thick, tenacious mucus and almost constant frontal headache. In all catarrhal conditions of the upper respiratory tract, Golden Seal should be administered for a prolonged period to obtain the best results.<sup>2</sup>

### Golden Rod

*Solidago virgaurea* herb is used in western herbal medicine for chronic nasopharyngeal catarrh or inflammation and influenza.<sup>1,5</sup> A contemporary view of the energetics of Golden Rod indicates that it resolves mucus damp, restores the mucosa and stops discharge. It is indicated for sinus congestion, allergic rhinitis and sinusitis.<sup>6</sup>

### Echinacea

Native Americans used *Echinacea purpurea* root as a cough medicine and for sore throat.<sup>7</sup> Regarding the medicinal use of Echinacea, *E. purpurea* does not have the wide variety of indications that *E. angustifolia* has, which may be due to the fact that the eastern tribes who used *E. purpurea* were resettled on western reservations (where *E. angustifolia* grew). Most records of the Native American uses of plants were made after the relocation.<sup>8</sup>

*Echinacea purpurea* root contains alkylamides,<sup>9</sup> constituents which have been shown to be immune enhancing *in vivo*<sup>10</sup> and bioavailable (as evidenced in a trial involving healthy volunteers).<sup>11</sup> Oral administration of *Echinacea purpurea* root tincture to healthy volunteers for 5 days increased the phagocytic activity of granulocytes in a placebo-controlled trial,<sup>12</sup> which is part of the front line of immune defense.

### Cayenne

Cayenne is one of the oldest cultivated plants on earth and was consumed by the indigenous populations of South and Central America as early as 7000 BC. The plant was introduced to Europe and other parts of the world following the return of Columbus from his exploration of America.<sup>13</sup> Due to its pungency Columbus named Cayenne a 'pepper' although it is not related to the *Piper* genus. Three of the five domesticated species, *Capsicum annuum*, *C. frutescens* and *C. chinense* share a mutual ancestral gene pool and belong to the *annuum* species complex.<sup>14</sup>

*Capsicum annuum* and *C. frutescens* have also been used medicinally. In western herbal medicine Cayenne has been used for acute colds, catarrh and sore throat.<sup>2,5</sup> As a circulatory stimulant Cayenne will bring improved arterial blood supply and toxin removal to cold, congested or cyanotic tissues.<sup>15</sup> Cayenne is used in Mexico as a traditional home remedy for colds, earache and tonsillitis.<sup>16</sup> The Mapuche of south central Chile used infusion of Cayenne internally to lessen headache.<sup>17</sup>

## Synergistic Formulation

These herbs would complement each other in a very potent formulation with the following actions:

- anticatarrhal,
- anti-inflammatory,
- immune enhancing,
- tonic to upper respiratory mucosa.

## Indications

- Catarrhal and/or inflammatory conditions of the nose or throat eg chronic sinusitis, hayfever, rhinitis, tonsillitis, common cold, sore throat and otitis media.

## Cautions and Contraindications

Echinacea is contraindicated in patients taking immunosuppressant medication (eg transplant patients). Short-term therapy only is suggested in this instance. Use with caution in the first trimester of pregnancy, due to the presence of Golden Seal. Caution in those taking theophylline as Cayenne may increase its absorption and bioavailability. Cayenne may interact with ACE inhibitors (theoretical concern).

## REFERENCES

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