Herbal Medicine Approach to Respiratory Dysfunction

(Adapted from The College of Integrative Medicine Module 30 – Clinical Botanical Medicine)

Dr. Wayne Sodano DC, DABCI, DACBN, CFMP, CICP, BCTN

“Minor common disorders of the respiratory system can often be successfully treated with phytotherapy and it can be helpful as a supportive measure in more serious disease, such as bronchitis, emphysema and pneumonia.”

C. Cold and flu-like virus infections, decongestants (e.g. menthol and eucalyptus), Broncholytics and expectorants (including ipecacuanha, thyme and senega), demulcents (e.g. mallow), antibacterials and antivirals (e.g. linden and elder flowers, pelargonium) and immune system modulators (e.g. echinacea, andrographis) are popular and effective.

Herbal treatment and management strategies

(Caution in individuals with known allergic reactions to specific herbs):

- Inflammatory catarrhal (Mucous) conditions of the upper respiratory mucosa (e.g. common colds, rhinitis, sinusitis, otitis media)
- Acute bronchial and tracheal infections.
- Hemidesmus (hemidesmus).
- Allergic rhinitis.
- Nervous coughing patterns.
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (e.g. chronic bronchitis, bronchiectasis, emphysema, silicosis).
- Asthma.
- Chronic tracheiti.
- Tarazacum officinalis radix (dandelion root)
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Definitions

- **Stimulating (Reflex) expectorants** - Provoke increased mucociliary activity by reflex stimulation of the upper digestive wall.
- **Warming expectorants** - Increase blood flow to the respiratory mucosa.
- **Respiratory demulcents** - Soothing and anti-inflammatory action.
- **Respiratory spasmolytics** - Relaxation of the bronchioles.
- **Anticatarrhal** - Treatment of mucosal conditions.

- **Antitussive** - Allay coughing.
- **Decongestants** - Remove congestion of mucous membranes.
- **Antiallergic** - Treatment of over-reactive immune response.
- **Anti-asthmatic** - Treatment of mild to moderate asthma.
- **Respiratory tonics** - General tonic for the lungs and respiratory system.

**Stimulating Expectorants**

**Indications**

- Cough linked to bronchial congestion; bronchitis; emphysema.

**Contraindications**

- Dry and irritable conditions of the lungs; asthma; young children; dyspeptic conditions.

**Application**

- Best taken in hot infusions or as tinctures of fluid extracts, before meals.

**Primary Herbal Medicine(s)**

- Angelica archangelica (Angelica root)
- Asclepias tuberosa (Pleurisy root)
- Inula helenium (Elecampane)
- Polygala tenuifolia (Polygala)
- Glycyrrhiza glabra (Licorice)

**Adult Dosage Consideration**

- Angelica root > 5 to 20 mL/week (1:2 liquid)
- Pleurisy root > 10 to 20 mL/week (1:2 liquid)
- Elecampane > 20 to 40 mL/week (1:2 liquid)
- Polygala > 20 to 60 mL/week (1:2 liquid)
- Licorice > 10 to 40 mL/week (1:1 liquid) or 2.0 to 3.0 g/day (tablet)
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Warming Expectorants

Indications
Productive cough associated with cold; bronchitis; emphysema; profuse catarrhal conditions; congestive chronic infections and inflammatory conditions.

Contraindications
Gastroesophageal reflux disease

Application
Best taken immediately before meals (hot infusions)

Primary Herbal Medicine(s)
- Illicium sativum (Garlic)
- Foeniculum vulgare (Fennel)
- Pimpinella anisum (Aniseed)
- Zingiber officinalis (Ginger)
- Cinnamomum zeylanicum (Cinnamon)

Adult Dosage Consideration
- Aniseed > 20 to 40 mL/week (1:2 liquid) or 350 to 700 mg essential oil/day
- Cinnamon > 10 to 30 mL/week (1:2 liquid)
- Garlic > 40 to 80 mL/week (1:1 fresh plant liquid) Allicin-releasing enteric-coated tablets containing 6 to 18 mg alliin per day
- Ginger > 5 to 15 mL/week (1:2 liquid) or 0.9 to 1.2 g/day (tablet)
- Fennel > 20 to 40 mL/week (1:2 liquid) or 20 to 50 mg essential oil/day

Relaxing Expectorants
# Herbal Medicine Approach to Respiratory Dysfunction

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## Indications
Spasmodic coughing, bronchitis, pneumonia causing inflammation and irritation to the respiratory tract.

## Contraindications
Specific to herb.

## Application
Best taken before or with food as a warm infusion.

### Primary Herbal Medicine(s)
- Pimpinella anisum (Aniseed)
- Glycyrrhiza glabra (Licorice)
- Drosera rotundifolia (Sundew)
- Marrubium vulgare (White horehound)
- Euphorbia hirta (Euphorbia)

### Adult Dosage Consideration
- Aniseed > 20 to 40 mL/week (1:2 liquid) or 350 to 700 mg essential oil/day
- Euphorbia > 5 to 12 mL/week (1:2 liquid)
- Licorice > 10 to 40 mL/week (1:1 liquid) or 2.0 to 3.0 g/day (tablet)
- Sundew > 10 to 20 mL/week (1:5 liquid)
- White horehound > 15 to 40 mL/week (1:2 liquid) or 0.6 to 1.2 g/day (tablet)

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## Respiratory Demulcients

### Indications
Profuse catarrhal or congestive conditions of the mucosa.

### Contraindications
Dry, irritable, non-productive cough; asthmatic wheezing / tightness; cough in children.

### Application
Best taken before meals; cold aqueous infusion.

### Primary Herbal Medicine(s)
- Althea officinalis (Marshmallow leaf)
- Drosera longifolia (Sundew)
- Glycyrrhiza glabra (Licorice)
- Plantago lanceolata (Ribwort)
- Ulmus spp. (Slippery elm)

### Adult Dosage Consideration
- Marshmallow root > 20 to 40 mL/week (1:5 liquid).
- Sundew > 10 to 20 mL/week (1:5 liquid).
- Licorice > 10 to 40 mL/week (1:1 liquid) or 2.0 to 3.0 g/day (tablet).
- Ribwort > 20 to 40 mL/week (1:2 liquid).
- Slippery elm > 1.6 to 4.0 g/day (capsules).
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Primary Herbal Medicine(s)

- Armoracia rusticana (Horseradish)
- Capsicum spp. (Cayenne, chili)
- Hydrastis canadensis; (Goldenseal)

Adult Dosage Consideration

- Horseradish > 25 to 50 ml/week (1:2 liquid)
- Cayenne > 0.5 to 3mL/week (1:3 liquid)
- Goldenseal > 15 to 30 mL/week (1:3 liquid) or 1.0 to 2.0 g/day (tablet)

Indications

Asthma and related complaints; wheezing; congestion.

Contraindications

Specific to herb.

Application

Taken anytime for immediate relief.

Decongestants
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Antitussives

**Indications**
Nonproductive, severe or persistent cough refractory to expectorants; cough due to external irritation or obstruction (e.g. tumor).

**Contraindications**
Specific to herb class and should be used only as needed and limited as soon as practical.

**Application**
Best taken before meals; short-term only.

**Primary Herbal Medicine(s)**
- Prunus serotina (wild cherry bark)
- Lactuca virosa (wild lettuce)
- Althaea officinalis radix and folia (Marshmallow root and leaf)

**Adult Dosage Consideration**
- Wild cherry > 15 to 30 mL/week (1:2 liquid).
- Marshmallow root > 20 to 40 mL/week (1:5 liquid).
- Wild lettuce > dosage varies (appears that tincture may be preferred).

Anti-Catarrhals (Reduce the formation of mucus)

**Application**
Best taken before meals; short to medium term.

**Indications**
Catarrhal condition especially of the upper respiratory tract; sinusitis, otitis media, allergic and other hypersensitivity conditions.

**Contraindications**
Anti-catarrhals are generally regarded as gentle and safe; see herbal class.

**Primary Herbal Medicine(s)**
- Euphrasia spp. (eyebright)
- Plantago lanceolata (ribwort)
- Sambucus nigra (elder berry)
- Nepeta hederacea (ground ivy)
- Solidago virgaurea (goldenrod)
- Verbascum thapsus (mullein flowers)
- Hydrastis canadensis (goldenseal)

**Adult Dosage Consideration**
- Elder berry > 4 to 8 g/day (tablet)
- Eyebright > 15 to 30 mL/week (1:2 liquid) or 2.0 to 2.6 g/day (tablet)
- Golden rod > 20 to 40 mL/week (1:2 liquid) or 2.0 to 2.6 g/day (tablet)
- Goldenseal. 15 to 30 mL/week (1:3 liquid) or 1.0 to 2.0 g/day (tablet)
- Ground ivy > 20 to 40 mL/week (1:2 liquid)
- Mullein > 30 to 60 mL/week (1:2 liquid) or 1.5 to 2.0 g/day (tablet; ribwort > 20 to 40 mL/weel (1:2 liquid)
## Anti-Asthmatics

### Indications

**Asthma**

### Contraindications

Specific to herb; severe cases of asthma may require co-management.

### Application

Best taken with meals; medium to long term.

### Primary Herbal Medicine(s)

- Albizia lebbeck (albizia)
- Angelica polymorpha (dong quai)
- Ephedra sinica (ma huang)
- Hemidesmus indicus (hemidesmus)
- Ganoderma lucidum (reishi)
- Tanacetum parthenium (feverfew)
- Tylophora indica (tylophora)

### Adult Dosage Consideration

- **Albizia**: > 25 to 60 mL/week (1:2 liquid) or 2.4 to 4.0 g/day (tablet).
- **Dong quai**: > 30 to 60 mL/week (1:2 liquid) or 2 to 4 g/day (tablet).
- **Feverfew**: > 7 to 20 mL/week (1:5 liquid).
- **Hemidesmus**: > 25 to 60 mL/week (1:2 liquid) or 1.5 to 2.5 g/day (tablet).
- **Reishi**: > 20 to 27 g/day (tablet).
- **Tylophora**: > 5 to 15 mL/week (1:5 liquid) for the first 10 day to 14 days of each month (dispense separately from other liquid herbs).

### References

2. Ibid.