

4 Respiratory System

4.1

Cold Syndrome (Flulike Infection)

A cold (common cold, upper respiratory infection, flulike infection) is a benign catarrhal inflammation of the upper and middle respiratory tract caused by a viral infection. It may present as rhinitis, pharyngitis, laryngitis, laryngotracheobronchitis, or less commonly as sinusitis or tracheobronchitis.

4.1.1

Risk Factors

It is widely believed that people are more likely to contract a cold after being exposed to low temperatures – hence the popular term for the disease. Yet experiments under controlled conditions have failed to prove that lowering the body temperature induces colds or even increases susceptibility to a rhinoviral infection. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence to support a link between exposure to cold and a decreased resistance to infection. In one study, for example, the incidence of colds among crew members on modern, air-conditioned cargo ships was almost twice that seen in workers on non-air-conditioned ships of the same line traveling the same route (Schwaar, 1976). The most likely explanation is that workers on the air-conditioned vessels were exposed to greater and more frequent ambient temperature changes, especially in tropical regions.

Experiments have shown that cooling of the feet is associated with a transient, reflex fall in the temperature of the oral, pharyngeal, and tracheal mucosae (Demling et al., 1956; Pollmann, 1987; Schmidt and Kairies, 1932). The partial restriction of blood flow, leading to cooling of the mucous membranes and a local decrease in mucosal resistance, could promote invasion by pathogenic organisms already adherent to the mucosal surfaces (see Sect. 4.1.2).

Whether the infection will incite a symptomatic illness or will be successfully combated with no overt symptomatology depends on preexisting nonspecific host defense mechanisms as well as the condition of the mucosa, the mucosal blood flow, the thickness and condition of the epithelium, the thickness and composition of the mucous layer, the local concentration of antibodies and interferon, the commensal flora colonizing the mucosae, the replication factors in the host cells, and the virulence of the pathogenic microorganisms. Every viral infection impairs the

mucociliary clearance mechanism of the upper respiratory tract, paving the way for the bacterial invasion of areas normally free of bacteria, such as the paranasal sinuses, middle ear, and tracheobronchial tree (Germer, 1985).

4.1.2

Viruses and Host Defenses

All told, there are about a dozen different groups of viruses with more than 150 serotypes that have a demonstrable association with upper respiratory infections. The viruses that show a predilection for the respiratory mucosa include rhinoviruses, coronaviruses, respiratory syncytial (RS) viruses, adenoviruses, and parainfluenza viruses.

The confinement of rhinoviruses to the surfaces of the upper airways is due in part to the very limited temperature range that is optimum for their growth (Mims, 1976): they proliferate well at 33°C, the temperature of the nasal epithelium, and less well at the normal body temperature of 37°C. In theory, inhaling hot steam (which may contain essential oils, Sect. 4.2.2.2) could alter the temperature milieu of the nasal mucosa and make it less hospitable to viruses. There is still no experimental proof of this hypothesis, however.

In evaluating the efficacy of immunostimulants (Chap. 9), it is helpful to review the strategy that has emerged in the conflict between cold viruses and specific host immune responses during the course of their joint evolution. There are two mechanisms by which cold viruses attempt to evade host defenses:

- By very rapid proliferation combined with a very short incubation period of 1–2 days. The host organism needs 5–7 days to produce specific antibodies, and usually the infection has already run its course by the time the host has mounted a specific response (Fig. 4.1).
- By antigenic variations that constantly generate new viral types, delaying and weakening the primary response of the immune system.

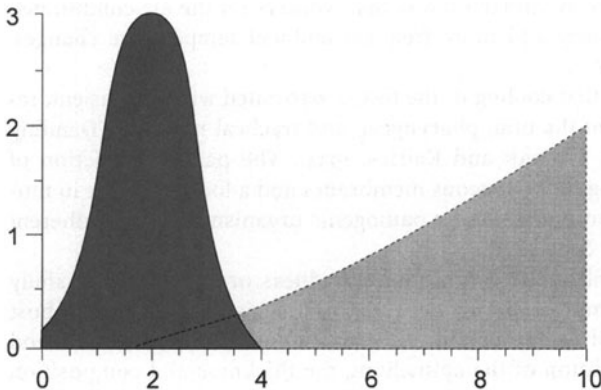


Fig. 4.1. Immune response to an upper respiratory viral infection. Through rapid proliferation, the infecting viruses evade much of the immune response. Dark area: proliferation of viruses; light area: host immune response (antibody formation).

It is likely that interferon plays a major role in the active host defenses against cold viruses. It has been shown that interferon can protect the organism within a few hours after the onset of an infection (Jork, 1979). When a cell is invaded by viruses, it responds by releasing interferon for several hours prior to its own destruction. The interferon from the doomed cell travels to healthy neighboring cells by diffusion, and its interaction with the cells confers absolute protection from viruses for about a 24-h period. It has not yet been proven that this interferon induction mechanism actually checks the cold viruses. There are no known cases in which a congenital defect of interferon production would allow observation of the progress of a cold in a human body unprotected by interferon. Nor are there any suitable animal models in which the effects of interferon could be selectively eliminated for experimental purposes. The mechanism of action of interferon suggests that its antiviral activity is protective and not curative. Clinical studies with human leukocyte interferon support this view, showing that intranasally applied interferon protects against respiratory viral infection (Merigan et al., 1973). There have been no reports of curative effects.

4.2

General Phytotherapeutic Measures

Herbal remedies can make a significant contribution to the relief of cold symptoms. Remedies should be selected that do not further compromise the mucociliary clearance mechanism of the upper respiratory tract. Disruption of this mechanism by the viral infection can promote the bacterial invasion of normally germ-free areas (paranasal sinuses, inner ear, tracheal mucosa). If bacterial complications arise, herbal medications can be administered as an adjunct to antibiotic therapy.

4.2.1

Teas for Cold Relief

A proven and recommended home remedy for the initial stages of a cold (scratchy throat, malaise) consists of hot teas and gradient foot baths (starting at about 33°C and increasing the water temperature over a 20-min period according to tolerance) followed by warm bed rest to promote diaphoresis. Teas made from elder flowers, linden flowers, and meadowsweet flowers are particularly recommended for colds. Willow bark is also a component in many tea formulas (see Sect. 4.2.1.5).

4.2.1.1

Elder Flowers

Elder flowers are derived from *Sambucus nigra* (Fig. 4.2), a deciduous shrub that is widely distributed in Europe and central Asia. The flowering tops, which are flat compound cymes, are gathered, dried, and separated by sifting into individual flowers and peduncles and pedicels. These latter are then discarded. A crude drug of low-



Fig. 4.2. Cymes of *Sambucus nigra*.

er quality is made by drying and cutting the flowering tops, without separating the flowers from the peduncles and pedicels. Elder flowers have a faint, distinctive odor, an initially sweet taste, and an acrid aftertaste. It has not been proven that elder flowers contain diaphoretic principles. Elder flower tea is prepared as follows according to the German Standard Registration: pour boiling water (150 mL) over about 2 teaspoons (3 g) of dried elder flowers, steep for 5 min, and strain; drink 1–2 cups very hot.

4.2.1.2

Linden Flowers

Linden flowers are derived from two species of linden tree that are native to Europe and are often planted ornamentally along city streets: the early blooming summer linden (*Tilia platyphyllos*, Fig. 4.3) and the winter linden (*Tilia cordata*), which blooms about 2 weeks later. The crude drug from both species is made by gathering and drying the fully developed, whole flowering tops including the bracts.

Dried linden flowers have a pleasant, distinctive odor different from that of the fresh blossoms. They have a pleasant, faintly sweet, mucilaginous taste.

The pleasant taste is based on the interaction of astringent tannins (about 2%) with mucilage and aromatics. However, the flowers have not been shown to have constituents with a specific diaphoretic action. The diaphoretic effect of linden flower tea (like that of elder flower tea) is based at least partly on the heat of the liquid itself combined with warm bed rest. It should be noted that the response to thermal



Fig. 4-3.
Drooping cymes of the linden
(*Tilia platyphyllos*).

stimuli follows a marked diurnal pattern. Hildebrandt et al. (1954) found that heat applied in the morning had little or no effect, while heat applied in the afternoon and evening induced profuse sweating.

4.2.1.3

Meadowsweet Flowers

The crude drug consists of the dried flowers of *Filipendula ulmaria* (formerly *Spiraea ulmaria*), an herbaceous perennial of the Rosaceae family native to northern Europe. The dried herb consists mostly of brownish yellow petals accompanied by numerous unopened buds. Commercial herb of good quality has a faint odor of methylsalicylate and a bitter, astringent taste. Meadowsweet flowers contain 0.5% flavonol glycosides, mostly quercetin-4'-glucoside (spiraeoside). The astringent taste is due to the presence of tannins. Hexahydroxydiphenic acid esters of glucose have been identified as components of the tannin fraction. The aromatic fraction consists of salicylaldehyde, phenylethyl alcohol, anisaldehyde, and methylsalicylate (methyl ester of salicylic acid).

Meadowsweet flowers are used in the form of a tea infusion, either alone or mixed with other tea herbs, in the supportive therapy of colds. Infusions contain only trace amounts of salicylates, so meadowsweet tea is considered an aromatic remedy rather than a salicylate medication.

4.2.1.4

Willow Bark and Salicylates

The treatment of inflammatory disorders with salicin-containing plant extracts was known to the physicians of ancient Greece. Dioscorides (ca. 50 AD), in his book *De Materia Medica* recommended willow bark preparations as a remedy for gout and other inflammatory joint diseases, suggesting that it be taken “with some pepper and wine.” Extracts from parts of the willow tree (*Salix* species) were also used in medieval folk medicine for their pain-relieving and fever-reducing properties. In 1829, the French pharmacist Leroux isolated the glycoside salicin as the active principle in these extracts. Six years later the German chemist Löwig was the first to synthesize salicylic acid. Because he had extracted the parent compound, salicylaldehyde, from plants of the genus *Spiraea*, he named the product spiric acid. This name later became the root for aspirin (a-acetyl, *-spir-* spiric acid, *-in* suffix), first marketed in 1896. Acetylsalicylic acid is better tolerated than salicylic acid and has made salicin-containing plant drugs obsolete.

The following calculation illustrates the problems posed by the continued use of willow bark preparations: A single aspirin dose of at least 500 mg is necessary for effective analgesia. Allowing for differences in molecular weights, 500 mg of aspirin is equivalent to 794 mg of salicin – an amount contained in no less than 88 g of willow bark. Moreover, when the powdered herb is used, salicin is not released quantitatively. As far as orthodox scientific medicine is concerned, willow bark is purely of historical interest today.

Willow bark is indicated in phytotherapy for “febrile diseases, rheumatic complaints, and headache” according to the Commission E monograph of 1992. Accordingly, the herb is a common ingredient in diaphoretic and antirheumatic teas. The source plant, identified simply as willow bark, has not been specifically defined. Various *Salix* species and varieties with a high salicin content are used, most notably *Salix alba* (white willow), *Salix fragilis* (brittle willow), and *Salix purpurea* (purple willow). In addition to salicin, willow bark contains 8–20% tannins. Presumably, the bitter taste and known irritant effect of tannins on the gastric mucosa would limit the use of higher doses in the form of powdered herb or infusions.

4.2.1.5

Tea Formulas

Indications: Febrile upper respiratory infections in which diaphoresis is desired.

Preparation and dosing guidelines: Pour boiling water (about 150 mL) over 1 tablespoon or 1–2 teaspoons of the dried herb, cover and steep for about 10 min, and strain. Drink one fresh cup several times daily.

Directions to patient: Take 1–2 teaspoonsful per cup (about 150 mL) as an infusion several times daily.

Diaphoretic tea according to DRF (German Prescription Formula Index)

Rx	Elder flowers	
	Linden flowers	aa 25.0
	Mix to make tea	
	Directions (see above)	

Diaphoretic tea according to Meyer Camberg

Rx	Linden flowers	
	Elder flowers	aa 30.0
	Chamomile flowers	40.0
	Mix to make tea	
	Directions (see above)	

Diaphoretic tea in Swiss Pharmacopeia 6

Rx	Linden flowers	40.0
	Elder flowers	30.0
	Peppermint leaves	20.0
	Pilocarpus leaves	10.0
	Mix to make tea	
	Directions (see above)	

Cold-relief tea I according to German Standard Registration

Rx	Linden flowers	30.0
	Elder flowers	30.0
	Meadowsweet flowers	20.0
	Rose hips	20.0
	Mix to make tea	
	Directions (see above)	

Cold-relief tea IV according to German Standard Registration

Rx	Willow bark	35.0
	Elder flowers	30.0
	Thyme	20.0
	Rose hips	5.0
	Licorice root	5.0
	Mallow flowers	5.0
	Mix to make tea	
	Directions (see above)	

Diaphoretic tea according to Suppl. Vol. 6 (German Pharmacopeia)

Rx	Willow bark	20.0
	Birch leaves	20.0
	Elder flowers	20.0
	Linden flowers	20.0
	Meadowsweet flowers	10.0
	Chamomile flowers	0.5
	Pilocarpus leaves	0.5
	Mix to make tea	
	Directions (see above)	

4.2.2

Essential Oils

There is much empirical evidence to show that essential plant oils such as peppermint oil and eucalyptus oil are beneficial for subjective complaints involving the nasopharynx, particularly nasal airway obstruction. Surprisingly, rhinomanometric measurements after menthol inhalation showed no objective change in nasal airflow, which seems to contradict general experience. But when a patient with a stuffy nose has the sensation of being able to breathe more easily after inhaling peppermint oil and is able to sleep better after this therapy, the response must be characterized as something more than a placebo effect (Eccles et al., 1988).

Essential oils for topical application are available in various forms: nasal ointments, nosedrops, aerosol inhalants, steam inhalants, or as an ingredient of lozenges, troches, or gargles.

4.2.2.1

Nasal Ointments and Nosedrops

Menthol, camphor, and essential oils are lipophilic substances that, when processed into medicines, can be incorporated only into lipophilic bases. White petroleum jelly or lanolin alcohols are used for nasal ointments, and fatty plant oils are used for nosedrops. As a rule, rhinologic medications should not disrupt the normal protective functions of the nasal mucosa. Hydrophilic preparations are preferable in this regard as they do not disrupt the normal function of the ciliary apparatus. Fatty preparations have two serious disadvantages: they do not mix with the nasal mucous so they do not make adequate contact with the mucosa, and the high viscosity of hydrophobic bases can significantly retard ciliary motion.

The effect of menthol on the nasal mucosa appears to depend on the concentration. Higher concentrations (>5%), which generally are not used, cause local irritation. According to Nöller (1967), the application of menthol to the nasal mucosa elicits a two-phase response: an initial phase lasting about 30 min in which the nasal air passage becomes constricted or even obstructed, followed by a period of improved nasal airflow. Despite the initial, objective increase in mucosal swelling, test subjects consistently report a pleasant, cooling sensation and a feeling of being able to breathe more easily. This purely subjective improvement in rhinitis-associated complaints by menthol application may relate partly to the action of menthol on temperature and pain receptors (Bromm, 1995; Göbel, 1995). Cold, fresh air has a similar effect on nasal stuffiness, most noticeable on walking outdoors from a heated room (Fox, 1977).

The effects of camphor and eucalyptus oil are similar to those of menthol. Detailed investigations (Burrow et al., 1983; Eccles and Jones, 1982; Eccles et al., 1987, 1988) showed that all three substances stimulate the cold receptors in the nasal mucosa and lead to subjective improvement of complaints, despite the fact that there is no measurable decongestant effect. The absence of this effect is advantageous, however, when one considers that the inflammatory response is a natural process and that suppressing it could delay or prolong recovery.

Interestingly, Bromm et al. (1995) and Göbel et al. (1995) found significant differences between the effects of peppermint oil (main component: menthol) and euca-

lyptus oil (main component: cineol) on temperature and pain receptors when applied topically to the scalp.

In summary, the local application of peppermint oil and eucalyptus oil can significantly improve subjective nasal stuffiness without compromising natural host defenses. So far, no comparable studies have been done on other essential oils contained in cold remedies. The anhydrous bases used in many formulations (fatty oils, petroleum jellies, paraffins) are incompatible with normal functioning of the ciliary apparatus. Ciliary motion is not hampered by dosage forms that deliver the active ingredient to the mucosa through inhalation (chest rubs, cold balsams, inhalant solutions, nasal sprays) (see Sect. 4.2.2.2).

Camphor, menthol, and other medications that contain highly aromatic substances or their essential oils should not be applied to the face and especially the nasal region of infants and children under 2 years of age due to the risk of glottic spasm and respiratory arrest.

4.2.2.2

Inhalation Therapy

Essential oils reach the nasal mucosa in much lower concentration when administered by inhalation than when applied topically. Unfortunately, no studies have yet been published on the effects of inhaled essential oils on the nasal mucosa. It is conceivable, for example, that small amounts of essential oils reaching the mucosa could actually stimulate ciliary motion rather than suppress it. In one clinical study, the inhalation of cineol led to significant improvement in ciliary clearance in patients with chronic obstructive bronchitis (Dorow, 1989). Extrapolating observations on the expectorant effects of inhaled alcohol (Boyd and Sheppard, 1970) on the nasal mucosa suggests that essential oils could stimulate the flow of secretions. The fact that secretions inhibit drying of the nasal mucosa is important because mucosal dryness can seriously disable the ciliary apparatus. For this reason, keeping the mucosae moist is perhaps the most important supportive measure in the management of colds.

Two basic methods are available for administering essential oils by inhalation: steam inhalation and dry inhalation. Steam inhalation is a simple, effective method when applied by any of three techniques:

- simmering chamomile, peppermint leaves, or anise in a pot and inhaling the rising vapors while the head is covered with a towel (head steam bath);
- adding 1 teaspoon of lemon balm spirit to a steam vaporizer; chamomile extracts and other products containing essential oils can also be used;
- taking a hot bath to which a bath salt containing essential oils has been added.

Inhalation devices can be purchased and used for dry inhalation, but a simpler method is to place several drops of peppermint oil on a handkerchief or on the pillow near the head at bedtime and inhale the vapors through the nose. Several breaths should be enough to produce a sensation of easier breathing. As menthol stimulates the cold receptors in the nasal mucosa, it intensifies the patient's sensation and awareness of air streaming through the nose. This is a subjective response that need not be accompanied by an objective change in the nasal air passage (Burrow et al., 1983; Eccles et al., 1987, 1988). Meanwhile, it is a physiological fact that thermoregulation is linked to vasoregulation, i. e., cold stimuli tend to induce vaso-

constriction. Therefore, it may be hypothesized that essential oils, by activating cold receptors in the nose, can induce reflex vasoconstriction and thus exert a decongestive effect (Leiber, 1967). Hamann and Bonkowsky (1987) supported this hypothesis by demonstrating objective improvement in the nasal airway.

Risks and contraindications to the topical use of essential oils should be noted. In particular, various mint oils, including peppermint oil, should not be used in the facial region of infants and small children, especially near the nose, due to the risk of inducing reflex respiratory arrest. Spruce needle oil, pine needle oil, and turpentine oil may exacerbate bronchial spasms in asthmatics and in patients with whooping cough.

4.2.2.3

Lozenges, Troches, and Gargles

Lozenges, troches, and gargles are used to soothe local inflammation in the mouth and throat and inhibit the urge to cough.

The cough accompanying a common cold may develop as a result of nasal airway obstruction. As the pharyngeal mucosa dries out, the cough receptors in the throat become more irritable. Even in the absence of objective clinical studies, it is reasonable to assume that lozenges, by promoting the flow of saliva, can keep the mucosa moist and indirectly quiet the cough.

A major ingredient of throat lozenges is sugar, which may be in the form of sucrose, corn syrup, glucose, maltose, fructose, or the substitutes sorbitol and xylitol.

Troches differ from ordinary tablets in their significantly longer dissolving time, achieved by omitting the disintegrants and forming the troches under much higher pressure. Another difference is that the troche masks the taste of the drug substance itself (e. g., plant mucilage). Besides the sugars, essential oils also serve as flavor correctives and thus perform a dual function.

Gum lozenges derive their name from their content of the raw material gum arabic. The base consists of sugar, gum arabic, and possibly other hydrocolloids. The liquid mass is mixed with solid drug substances, plant extracts, and essential oils and formed by pouring into molds. Essential oils may be the only medicinal substances that are incorporated into cough drops and gum lozenges. The most important essential oils are anise oil, eucalyptus oil, fennel oil, menthol, peppermint oil, thyme oil, and tolu balsam (Table 4.1).

Cough drops and gum lozenges are held in the mouth for 20–30 min while they dissolve. One function of the essential oils in them is to impart a pleasant flavor that stimulates salivation. The increased salivation promotes more frequent reflex swallowing, although voluntary swallowing is also useful for suppressing an imminent urge to cough.

Gargling involves taking a fluid into the mouth without swallowing it and holding it suspended in the throat by forcing air through it while exhaling. Gargling exerts a massaging action that is mostly confined to the pharyngeal ring and largely spares the tonsils. Thus, gargles are indicated for inflammatory diseases of the oropharynx and have two essential functions: to cleanse the mouth and pharynx while exerting an anti-inflammatory action on inflamed mucous membranes. The most common ingredients in gargles are essential oils and aromatic herbs that contain volatile oils. Herbs with anti-inflammatory properties are also used, most notably chamom-

Table 4.1. Essential oils commonly used in cough remedies.

Essential oil (Latin name)	Source	Main constituents	Sensory qualities
Anise oil (Anisi aetheroleum)	Ripe seeds of <i>Pimpinella anisum</i> (aniseed)	90% <i>trans</i> -anethole	Spicy odor of anise; sweet taste.
Eucalyptus oil (Eucalypti aetheroleum)	Fresh leaves of <i>Eucalyptus</i> species that contain cineol	70% Cineole (= eucalyptol)	Camphor-like odor; taste is initially acrid, then cooling.
Fennel oil (Foeniculi aetheroleum)	Ripe fruits of sweet fennel, <i>Foeniculum vulgare</i> var. <i>vulgare</i>	50–70% <i>trans</i> -anethole, 10–23% fenchone	Odor similar to anise; taste is initially sweet, then becomes bitter and camphor-like.
Peppermint oil (Menthae piperitae aetheroleum)	Flowering tops of <i>Mentha piperita</i> (peppermint)	40–55% Menthol, 10% esters of menthol, 10–35% menthone	Pale yellowish liquid with the pleasant, refreshing odor of the peppermint plant; taste is initially acrid, then cooling.
Thyme oil (Thymi aetheroleum)	Fresh flowering tops of <i>Thymus vulgaris</i> (thyme)	30–70% Thymol, 3–15% carvacrol	Colorless liquid that gradually turns red; has a phenolic (medicinal) smell and acrid taste.
Tolu balsam (Balsamum toluatanum)	Balsamic resin seeps from the damaged bark of <i>Myroxylon balsamum</i>	Esters of benzoic and cinnamic acid (not well analyzed)	Doughy, reddish-brown mass with an odor reminiscent of vanilla; has a somewhat bitter, acrid taste.

mile and tannin-containing herbs. Oral antiseptics is no longer considered a therapeutic goal, for it is known that only transient antiseptic effects are obtained even when highly active concentrations are used.

The gargle may be used in the form of a warm tea infusion or a liquid commercial product. The phytotherapeutic components of commercial gargles include essential oils as well as extracts from chamomile (anti-inflammatory), sage (essential oils, bitters, and tannins), or tormentil rhizome (tannins). Partially evaporated aqueous extracts from Iceland moss are also used.

4.3

Herbal Cough Remedies

Three basic methods are available for the purely symptomatic treatment of cough:

- reduction of local throat irritation,
- peripheral suppression of the cough reflex,
- central suppression of the cough reflex.

Cough as a response to local throat irritation can be treated by physical and pharmacologic measures or a combination of both. Physical measures include humidification of the air, steam inhalation, oral fluid intake, and baths. Pharmacologic mea-

tures include adding herbs or essential oils to baths or inhalants and the use of mucilaginous herbs in antitussive teas.

Inhibition of the cough reflex by pharmacologic cough suppression is appropriate for a persistent, dry, nonproductive cough. It should be noted that the cough reflex is part of the normal defense mechanism for cleansing the tracheobronchial tree. Caution is advised in suppressing a productive cough as this may cause an undesired and potentially hazardous retention of airway secretions.

Some herbal remedies act as peripheral cough suppressants, the primary example being ephedra (Hosoya, 1985; Aviado, 1972).

There are no true examples of medicinal herbal extracts among the central-acting cough suppressants – a group that includes the opium-derived alkaloids codeine and noscapine, their transformation products (ethylmorphine, hydrocodone, dihydrocodeine), and purely synthetic drugs such as levopropoxyphene and normethadone.

4.3.1 Mucilaginous Herbs in Antitussive Teas

Coughing as a reflex act is triggered by mechanical irritation of the respiratory mucosa. The pharynx, larynx, and trachea contain receptors that are highly sensitive to mechanical stimuli (Gysling, 1976; Hahn, 1987). The mucilages in plants can inhibit cough by forming a protective coating that shields the mucosal surface from irritants (Kurz, 1989). This effect is limited to the pharynx, however, since plant mucilages probably are not absorbed as macromolecules and thus cannot reach the tracheobronchial mucosa following oral administration. Mucilaginous herbs have no known adverse effects, although coltsfoot leaves may be contraindicated due to their content of pyrrolizidines (hence the omission of this herb from Table 4.2). While it is true that the content of potentially carcinogenic pyrrolizidine alkaloids is very low, implying a very small risk, it is always possible that products may contain varieties of coltsfoot leaves that have a higher alkaloid content or are mixed with butterbur leaves (*Petasites hybridus*), which contain pyrrolizidine alkaloids. Thus it is best to avoid the use of coltsfoot altogether, especially since mallow leaves and english plantain leaves make acceptable substitutes. Other suitable mucilaginous herbs are listed in Table 4.2.

Besides containing mucilaginous herbs to reduce local irritation, most cough-soothing tea mixtures also contain herbs that serve as odor and flavor correctives. Thus, antitussive teas have basically the same composition as bronchial teas, and both are often referred to collectively as cough and bronchial teas. Formulas for these teas are listed in Sect. 4.4.5.

4.3.2 Essential Oils in Cough Remedies

Throat lozenges and other intraoral cough remedies may contain essential plant oils singly or in combination with other medicinal agents. Anise oil, eucalyptus oil, fennel oil, menthol, peppermint oil, thyme oil, and tolu balsam are commonly used (Ta-

Table 4.2. Mucilaginous herbs used in teas or lozenges to soothe coughs and sore throat.

Herb (Latin name)	Source plant (family)	Constituents	Preparation
Marshmallow root (Althaeae radix)	<i>Althaea officinalis</i> (Malvaceae)	5–10% Mucilage	2–5% Infusion or cold-water maceration (1–2 teaspoons/150 mL)
Iceland moss (Lichen islandicus)	<i>Cetraria ericetorum</i> and <i>C. islandica</i> (Parmeliaceae)	About 50% mucilage of glucan type, including lichenin as the main component	1–2% Infusion (1–2 teaspoons/150 mL)
Mullein flowers (Verbasci flos)	<i>Verbascum densiflorum</i> and <i>V. phlomoides</i> (Scrophulariaceae)	3% Mucilage of unknown structural type	1–2% Infusion (3–4 teaspoons/150 mL)
Mallow leaf (Malvae folium)	<i>Malva sylvestris</i> and <i>M. neglecta</i> (Malvaceae)	About 8% mucilage of unknown tertiary structure; arabinose, glucose, galactose, and galacturonic acid also occur as basic components	2–3% Infusion (3–4 teaspoons/150 mL)
Mallow flowers (Malvae flos)	<i>Malva sylvestris</i> ssp. <i>mauritaniana</i> (Malvaceae)	About 10% mucilage as in mallow leaves	2% Infusion (2 teaspoons/150 mL)
Plantain (Plantaginis lanceolatae herba)	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i> (Plantaginaceae)	About 6% mucilage, including a rhamnogalacturonan, an arabinogalactan, and a glucomannan; iridoid glycosides including 1–2% aucubin	2% Infusion (3–4 teaspoons/150 mL)

ble 4.1). The function of the essential oils is to produce a pleasing taste sensation that stimulates the production and secretion of saliva, which in turn activates the swallowing reflex. Voluntary swallowing can also suppress an impending cough. Lozenges and cough drops can aid patients in their efforts at voluntarily controlling the urge to cough (Walther, 1979).

4.3.3 Ephedra

The crude drug consists of the dried, young stems of *Ephedra sinica* and other *Ephedra* species that contain ephedrine, such as *E. equisetina* and *E. intermedia*. *Ephedra* species are herbaceous perennials (family Ephedraceae) that grow to a height of 1 m and resemble horsetail. *Ephedra* tops contain up to 2% alkaloids with (-) ephedrine as the principal alkaloid.

Preparations made from ephedra stems exert the peripheral vasoconstricting, bronchodilating, and central stimulatory actions of ephedrine. Whole herb extracts reportedly have a less pronounced hypertensive action than pure (-)-ephedrine (*Brit Herb Pharmacopoeia* 1983, p 83).

Coughing induced by stimulation of the tracheal or bronchial mucosa in anesthetized animals is suppressed by ephedra extracts (Hosoya, 1985) much as it is suppressed by ephedrine itself (0.01 mg/kg b.w.). This suppression of the cough reflex results from the bronchodilating action of ephedrine, although a pronounced antitussive effect is obtained even in nonasthmatic subjects (Aviado, 1972). One disadvantage is that ephedrine lacks an expectorant action and has even been shown to reduce airway secretions in laboratory animals.

The indications for ephedra preparations are mild forms of airway disease, especially those resulting from spastic disorders. A single dose of ephedra extract should deliver 15–30 mg of alkaloids, calculated as ephedrine. The maximum daily dose for adults is 300 mg total alkaloids calculated as ephedrine. The maximum daily dose for children is 2 mg/kg body weight. Today ephedrine is usually administered in pure form rather than as one component of a whole plant extract. Potential adverse effects are palpitations, blood pressure elevation, sleeplessness, anorexia, and urinary difficulties.

Conditions that would contraindicate ephedra preparations or limit their use are hypertension, thyrotoxicosis, pheochromocytoma, narrow-angle glaucoma, and prostatic adenoma with urinary retention.

In the United States, the central-nervous-system stimulation effects of ephedra are often potentiated by the addition of caffeine-containing botanicals. Such combination products have frequently been used on a chronic basis to promote weight loss or to enhance athletic performance. Very high doses of these products have also been employed as euphorants or intoxicants, so-called legal highs. As of 1996, the Food and Drug Administration had recorded some 800 adverse reactions, including 22 deaths, which it attributed to such misuse of ephedra products (Dickinson, 1996).

Following two meetings of special advisory groups, the Agency indicated it would act on ephedra's continued marketability prior to 1997. However, no action was taken before the self-imposed deadline. In the meantime, several states have passed legislation restricting the availability of ephedra.

There is also concern in the U.S. that clandestine chemists may use ephedra as a starting material for the synthesis of illegal designer drugs, such as methamphetamine. Although possible, it is not likely because of the difficulty in separating the product from accompanying plant material. A much more likely starting material is pseudoephedrine which is readily available in pure form. Large-scale sales of that alkaloid are now monitored by the Drug Enforcement Agency.

4.4

Herbal Expectorants

4.4.1

Mechanisms of Action

Often in practical use a strict distinction cannot be drawn between antitussives (Sect. 4.3) and expectorants. Mucus in the bronchi stimulates coughing, so expectorants produce an indirect antitussive effect. Conversely, vigorous coughing intensifies the secretion of mucus, so antitussives can reduce excess mucus production

(Kurz, 1989). According to their pharmacologic definition, expectorants are agents that can influence the consistency, formation, and transport of bronchial secretions.

Herbal expectorants have been used on an empirical basis for centuries. They are believed to act by three mechanisms: a reduction of mucus viscosity (owing partly to the water content of tea preparations), a gastropulmonary reflex mechanism, and the liquefaction of secretions, which is accomplished mainly by direct effects of the essential oils on the bronchial glands (Ziment, 1985).

4.4.1.1

Reduction of Mucus Viscosity by Water

The ability of expectorants to reduce mucus viscosity is due at least partly to the fluid that is ingested with certain preparations. This particularly applies to many bronchial teas, 3 or more liters of which may be consumed daily in a palatable form without causing undesired pharmacologic effects (like those of caffeine in caffeinated beverages).

The quantity of water administered by inhalation is very small by comparison. With a standard regimen of 20 min of inhalation 3 or 4 times daily, water aerosols should have no impact on mucociliary clearance. Thus, inhaled water would appear ineffectual for hydrating airway secretions or altering their rheologic properties (Medici, 1980).

Although animal experiments have failed to confirm the efficacy of increased water intake in liquefying airway secretions (Irwin et al., 1977), this is widely acknowledged to be one of the most important benefits of expectorant medications (Nolte, 1980; Dorow, 1984; Endres and Ferlinz, 1988).

4.4.1.2

Neural Mechanism Based on the Gastropulmonary Reflex

It is known that irritation of the upper digestive tract induces vomiting as afferent impulses are relayed to the vomiting center from visceral sensory fibers in the gastric mucosa. Vomiting starts with increased salivation and a feeling of nausea. Reflex expectorants are administered in a dose sufficient to induce a preliminary stage in which a thin, watery secretion is produced in the goblet cells and in the bronchial glands.

All substances that induce vomiting when taken in large amounts can act as expectorants when taken in a smaller dose (1/10 of the emetic dose). The prototype for this drug action is emetine, an alkaloid obtained from ipecac root. The saponin-containing herbs may have a comparable mechanism of action (see Sect. 4.4.2). Reflex expectorants include acrid-tasting spices that irritate the gastric mucosa and induce nausea when taken in large doses. Spices such as long pepper, cubeb, ginger, and curcuma are common ingredients of cough remedies in traditional Indian and Chinese medicine. Onions and garlic, cooked in milk, are used in European folk medicine as mucolytic agents to help clear congested airways.

4.4.1.3

Liquefaction of Secretions by Direct Action on the Bronchial Glands

Bronchomucotropic agents (Ziment, 1985) directly stimulate the bronchial glands and increase their activity. These agents may be inhaled externally or administered orally for subsequent excretion (and action) via the bronchial tree. Essential oils and aromatic herbs have bronchomucotropic properties.

A study of the direct actions of the terpene preparation Ozothin (see Sect. 4.4.3) on the bronchial glands showed that this agent selectively stimulates the serous glands but depresses the function of the mucous glands. The net result of these actions is a liquefaction of bronchial secretions (Lorenz and Ferlinz, 1985).

Ethyl alcohol is an effective expectorant when inhaled in low concentrations (Boyd and Sheppard, 1969) and is classified as a mucotropic agent. Like the essential oils, alcohol acts as a local irritant, but its overall action is probably based partly on its surfactant properties, i.e., its ability to alter surface tension.

A solution of essential oils in ethanol, rather than essential oils alone, can be added to a steam vaporizer in order to utilize the expectorant effects of both substances (e.g., a tablespoon of citronella spirit or the compound spirit described in German Pharmacopeia 6). The ethanol dose in these spirits, at about 4 g, is too small to produce central alcohol effects in adults.

4.4.2 Saponin-Containing Herbs

Saponins are glycosidic plant constituents with a terpenoid aglycone component. They are like detergents in their tendency to form a durable foam when shaken with water. Saponins have an acrid and/or bitter taste and are irritating to mucous membranes. In finely powdered form, saponins cause sneezing, eye inflammation, and lacrimation. In addition to their surfactant properties, saponins alter the permeability of all biologic membranes. Higher concentrations entering the blood or tissues have a generally toxic effect on cells. Due to their polar nature, saponins are only sparingly absorbed from the gastrointestinal tract so they usually produce no systemic effects when administered orally. Their expectorant action is thought to be mediated by the gastric mucosa, which reflexly stimulates mucous glands in the bronchi via parasympathetic sensory pathways. Higher doses of saponin-containing expectorants cause stomach upset, nausea, and vomiting. Even ordinary doses may cause adverse side effects in patients with a sensitive stomach.

The saponin-containing herbs that are most commonly used as expectorants are listed in Table 4.3. The list does not include licorice root. The glycyrrhizin contained in licorice root is often classified as a saponin, and its chemical composition would support this. But licorice does not have all the biologic and pharmacologic properties that are characteristic of saponins. As a result, licorice root and its preparations are not included in the class of reflex expectorants. The mechanism by which glycyrrhizin exerts its expectorant action requires further study. In any case, licorice and licorice extracts are useful as flavor correctives in teas and cough syrups.

Some combination products contain preparations from *Gypsophila* species as their saponin component. These plants are perennial herbs or shrubs that prefer a dry climate (e.g., tall gypsophyll). Gypsophila-derived saponin is a complex chemical mixture. It is the standard saponin used to determine the hemolytic index as described in pharmacy texts.

Small amounts of saponins are also contained in *Grindelia*, a tincture of which is a component of several combination products. The aerial parts of *Grindelia* species, native to the southwestern U.S., are gathered during the flowering season and dried to

Table 4.3. Saponin-containing herbs that are used as expectorants.

Herb (Latin name)	Source plant (family)	Type of saponin	Remarks
Ivy leaf (Hederae folium)	<i>Hedera helix</i> (Araliaceae)	Neutral bis-desmosides, termed hederacosides, with oleanolic and 28-hydroxyoleanolic acid as aglycone; also hederin type of monodesmosides; total saponin content 3–6%	Not used as an infusion. Extracts used in drug products, with daily dose equal to 0.3 g of crude drug. Fresh leaves can cause skin irritation; the contact allergen is falcariinol, an aliphatic C ₁₇ alcohol with acetylene bonds
Primula root (Primulae radix)	<i>Primula veris</i> and/or <i>P. elatior</i> (Primulaceae)	Monodesmosidic triterpene saponins (5–10%), including the principal saponin primulic acid A	Used as an infusion or tincture, with daily dose equal to 1 g of crude drug.
Soap bark (Quillajae cortex)	<i>Quillaja saponaria</i> (Rosaceae)	Triterpene saponins (10%)	Single dose of 0.2 g of crude drug corresponds to 10 g of decoction (2%) or 1.0 g of tincture
Senega snake-root (Polygalae radix)	<i>Polygala senega</i> (Polygalaceae)	6–10% Bisdesmosidic triterpene saponins	Single dose of 1 g of crude drug corresponds to 20 g of decoction (5%) or 2.5 g of tincture (1:5)

make the crude drug, which also contains 0.3% volatile oil. *Grindelia* is believed to act as an expectorant, although relevant pharmacologic studies have not been performed.

4.4.3 Essential Oils as Expectorants

The principal essential oils that are used as expectorants are reviewed in Table 4.4. These oils cannot be strictly differentiated from essential oils that are used as anti-tussives (Table 4.1). The essential oils are well absorbed after oral administration and are partially excreted via the lungs. As the exhaled molecules pass through the bronchial tree, they can act on the bronchial mucosa to stimulate the serous glandular cells and ciliated epithelium.

Irritation of the mucous membranes is a property shared by all essential oils. Even trace amounts that have little or no detectable odor can exert demonstrable local effects on mucosal surfaces (Boyd and Sheppard, 1970 a). The specificity of the effects of essential oils is demonstrated by studies with Ozothin, a turpentine oil that has been purified with oxidants. Chemically, Ozothin represents a mixture of monoterpene alcohols, aldehydes, and ketones, most notably verbenol, verbenone, myrtenol, myrtenal, and pinocarveol. Its actions can be summarized as follows:

- stimulates serous bronchial gland function and suppresses mucous glandular cell activity following i.v. administration (Bauer, 1973);
- reduces surface tension (surfactant effect) (Zänker and Blümel, 1983);

Table 4.4. Essential oils that are used as expectorants in inhalants, cold ointments, or capsules. See also Table 4.1.

Essential oil (Latin name)	Source plant (family)	Main constituents	Remarks
Spruce-needle oil (Piceae aetheroleum)	<i>Pinus excelsa</i> , <i>Abies species</i> (Pinaceae)	20–40% Bornyl acetate along with α - and β -pinene and β -phellandrene	
Cajuput oil (Cajuputi aetheroleum rectificatum)	Leaves of <i>Melaleuca species</i> (Myrtaceae)	65% Cineole (= eucalyptol)	Reminiscent of eucalyptus oil (see Table 4.1)
Pine-needle oil (Pini aetheroleum)	<i>Pinus silvestris</i> (Pinaceae)	80% Monoterpene hydrocarbons, including α -pinene and 3-carene	
Myrtol	Exact botanical origin unknown	Mainly cineole (= eucalyptol), α -pinene and limonene	
Niaouli oil	<i>Melaleuca viridiflora</i> (Myrtaceae)	Like cajuput oil; principal constituent cineole (= eucalyptol)	
Rectified turpentine oil (Terebinthinae aetheroleum rectificatum)	<i>Pinus palustris</i> and other <i>P. species</i> (Pinaceae)	90% Monoterpene hydrocarbons: α - and β -pinene	Starting material is the tree trunk gum turpentine.
Citronella oil (Citronellae aetheroleum)	<i>Cymbopogon winterianus</i> and <i>C. nardus</i> (Poaceae)	Monoterpene alcohols such as geraniol, nerol, and corresponding aldehydes such as citral and citronellal	Often sold under the name of lemon grass oil or Indian grass oil.

- improves mucociliary activity and tracheobronchial clearance in concentrations of 10^{-7} g/mL or higher (Iravani, 1972).

Controlled clinical studies have been done to test the efficacy of certain medicinal products containing essential oils. A placebo-controlled double-blind study was done in patients with chronic obstructive bronchitis who were being managed with theophylline and a beta-adrenergic drug. This regimen was supplemented by treatment with an ointment containing menthol, camphor, eucalyptus oil, and conifer oil as its active ingredients. Statistical analysis showed that this regimen was significantly better than a placebo-supplemented regimen in terms of objective parameters (pulmonary function, quantity of sputum) as well as subjective parameters (cough, breathing difficulties, lung sounds) (Linsenmann and Swoboda, 1986). Placebo-controlled double-blind studies in patients with acute tracheobronchitis showed improved mucolysis following the administration of essential oils in capsule form (containing anethole, cineole, and dwarf pine needle oil) compared with a placebo (Stafunsky et al., 1989; Linsemann et al., 1989). Another study in patients with chronic obstructive airway disease showed that an orally administered combination of pine oil, lemon oil, and cineole was effective as ambroxol in increasing mucociliary clearance (Dorow et al., 1987).

When stimulus-response relationships are present, ordinary dose-response relationships hold only within a limited range. The expectorant action of essential oils is subject to a marked reversal effect in which very low doses are mucotropic (stimu-

late bronchial gland activity) while higher doses are inhibitory. This was first shown experimentally for citral and geraniol (Boyd and Sheppard, 1970).

Adverse effects and allergic reactions (type IV) are known to occur with essential oils. Inhalation can provoke bronchospasms, particularly in children and asthmatics. This danger can be reduced by placing the vaporizer farther from the patient and gradually increasing the inhaled concentration by moving the device progressively closer (Kurz, 1989).

Besides the familiar essential oil preparations listed in Tables 4.1 and 4.4, saxifrage root (*Pimpinella saxifraga*) is also considered an aromatic herb, and its preparations are found in several combination products. It contains 0.4–0.6% volatile oil with isoeugenol esters as a characteristic component.

4.4.3.1

Dosage Forms

Bronchial teas. There is no strict dividing line between antitussive teas and bronchial teas (see Sect. 4.3.1). Also, the efficacy of antitussive and bronchial teas is based only in part on specific pharmacodynamic actions. An essential part of any expectorant therapy is increased fluid intake; this measure, plus humidification of the air, helps keep bronchial secretions in a relatively nonviscid state and prevents drying of the mucous membranes. About 2–3 L of water should be consumed daily, except in cases where fluid intake is restricted due to heart failure or impaired renal function.

Oral dosage forms. Coated tablets, capsules, and drops allow for accurate dosing. They also permit the use of extracts that contain nonvolatile components.

Inhalations. These agents are administered by steam inhalation. The simplest method is to place about 1 L of water in a pan, bring it to a boil, let it cool slightly, and add the prescribed amount of agent to the hot water. The patient bends over the vessel and inhales the rising vapors as deeply as possible. A towel should be draped over the head and vessel to ensure that the essential oils in the inhalation do not evaporate too quickly. Since the water temperature falls rapidly, an adequate amount of steam is obtained only initially. Commercial steam vaporizers will keep the inhalation solution at a high temperature for a longer period.

Physically, the steam consists of water-saturated air mixed with essential oil vapors and possibly alcohol vapors, depending on the temperature of the medium. The gradient between the temperature in the water vessel and the temperature of the body will cause part of the rising steam to condense. The concentrations of water vapor and volatile medicinal agents (essential oils, ethyl alcohol) that reach the airways depend on the local partial vapor pressure at body temperature, with lower concentrations occurring in the lower respiratory tract. This is probably not a disadvantage with essential oils, however, since low concentrations exert a stronger mucotropic action than higher ones (the “reversal effect”). Boyd and Sheppard (1970) note that the rising vapors should have a barely perceptible odor.

Percutaneous application. Most medications classified as chest rubs or cold balsams are ointments; some are oil- or paraffin-base solutions that incorporate essential

oils. The designated amount is applied to the skin of the chest and back. As lipophilic compounds, portions of the oils penetrate the skin, enter the circulation, and reach the bronchial mucosa. An unknown percentage evaporates on the warm skin and is inhaled.

Bath salts and oils. Essential oils are available in several forms for adding to bathwater: bath salts, bath oils, and essences (i.e., essential oils without other additives). The very large surface area of exposed skin allows for more extensive absorption and distribution than chest rubs. Portions of the absorbed essential oil components are excreted via the lungs, producing an expectorant action in the bronchial tree. The percutaneously absorbed and exhaled doses are further supplemented by the inhalation of essential oils from the air over the bathwater.

Observations in aromatherapy (Jackson, 1989) are consistent with the dose-response relationship found in experimental animals (Boyd and Sheppard, 1970) and support the value of moderate dosing. Just 7–9 drops of essential oil, equivalent to about 150–200 mg, is recommended for a whole bath consisting of about 30 L water.

Favorite essential bath oils for respiratory tract diseases are eucalyptus oil, pine needle oil, spruce needle oil, thyme oil, and cypress oil.

4.4.3.2

Cineole (Eucalyptol)

Approximately 70% of eucalyptus oil is cineole (Table 4.1). Cineole is an ambiguous term, referring either to the pure chemical substance that is isolated from cineole-containing eucalyptus oils by fractional crystallization or distillation, or to the commercial medication known as cineol. The pharmaceutical product has a cineole content of only 80–90% and is produced simply by treating eucalyptus oils with lye. This yields a clear, colorless liquid with a camphor-like odor and a pungent, cooling taste.

Cineole has antispasmodic, secretagogic, secretolytic, rubefacient (antimicrobial), and fungicidal properties. Experiments with cineole inhalation in rabbits showed that it exerts a surfactant-like action by reducing surface tension (Zänker et al., 1984).

Römmelt et al. (1988) investigated the pharmacokinetics of 1,8-cineole following 10 min exposure to a terpene-containing ointment (9.17% cineole) administered by steam inhalation. The C_{\max} in the venous blood following alveolar absorption was 200 ng/mL; the half-life was 35.8 min. Concentrations as low as 10 ng/mL were associated with an increase in ciliary frequency.

As for adverse effects, rare instances of stomach upset have been reported following the internal use of cineole, and external use occasionally causes hypersensitivity reactions of the skin. The LD_{50} in rats is 3480 mg/kg b.w. Cineole has a wide therapeutic range, and there have been almost no reports of cineole toxicity. Patel and Wiggins (1980) reported one case of medicinal poisoning with eucalyptus oil.

The usual therapeutic dose for adult patients is 0.3–0.6 g cineole daily.

4.4.3.3

Myrtol

Myrtol, an essential oil with a pleasant odor reminiscent of turpentine oil and eucalyptus oil, is a component of a drug product that has the following manufacturer-listed ingredients: not less than 25% lemonene, 25% cineole, and 6.7% (+)- α -pinene.

There is no information in the pharmaceutical literature on the botanical origin of the ingredients.

The chemical composition of myrtol suggests that its actions, adverse effects, and toxicologic properties are very similar to those of cineole and eucalyptus oil. No data are available on the pharmacokinetics of myrtol after oral administration. It is reasonable to assume that the monoterpenes of myrtol are rapidly absorbed from the gastrointestinal tract and that maximum blood levels are reached in 1–2 h. Some of the absorbed cineole and other monoterpenes are excreted via the lungs, a pathway that again brings them into contact with the bronchial mucosa.

4.4.3.4

Anise Oil and Anethole

Anise oil as described in German Pharmacopeia 9 is the essential oil obtained from the ripe fruits (often called seeds) of *Pimpinella anisum* (family Apiaceae, Fig. 4.4) or *Illicium verum* (family Illiciaceae). The principal component (80–90%) of anise oil is anethole which is obtained from anise oil by freezing.



Fig. 4.4.
Anise (*Pimpinella anisum*).

Anise oil is a clear, colorless liquid with a spicy odor and a sweet, aromatic taste that solidifies to a white crystalline mass when refrigerated. Anethole forms white crystals that melt at 20–22 °C.

The expectorant effects of anise oil and anethole are presumably based on their ability to stimulate the ciliary activity of the bronchial epithelium. Moreover, anti-spasmodic and antibacterial actions have been demonstrated in vitro.

Anethole is rapidly absorbed from the gastrointestinal tract of healthy subjects and is just as rapidly eliminated with the urine (54–69 %) and expired air (13–17 %). Its principal metabolite is 4-methoxyhippuric acid (approximately 56 %); additional metabolites are 4-methoxybenzoic acid and three other metabolites that have yet to be identified (Caldwell and Sutton, 1988; Sangister et al., 1987). Changing the dose does not alter the pattern of metabolite distribution in humans, contrary to findings in the mouse and rat (Sangister et al., 1984). These results do not support the assumption based on animal experiments that higher doses of anethole in humans could block the enzyme system responsible for its degradation.

Adverse effects consist of occasional allergic skin reactions (Opdyke, 1973). The LD_{50} in different animal species (rat, mouse, guinea pig) ranges from 2090 to 3050 mg/kg b.w. for trans-anethole. The cis derivative is at least 15 times more toxic. At present there are no regulations specifying a maximum allowable content of cis-anethole in anethole or anise oil. Animal studies have refuted speculations about a carcinogenic effect (Drinkwater et al., 1976; Miller et al., 1983; Newberne et al., 1989; Truhaut et al., 1989).

The indications for the internal and external use of anise oil and anethole are catarrhal diseases of the upper respiratory tract. The recommended single oral dose is 0.1 g (4 drops) for anise oil. It should be taken in diluted form.

4.4.4 Licorice Root

Licorice root consists of the dried rhizome and roots of *Glycyrrhiza glabra* (family Fabaceae). The genus name *Glycyrrhiza* is derived from the ancient Greek word for licorice (Gr. glykos sweet + rhiza root), which was later latinized to liquiritia and eventually modified to licorice.

The cut, dried herb consists of rough, fibrous, yellowish segments having a somewhat vermiform appearance. Licorice has a faint but characteristic odor and a sweet taste. It contains at least 4 % glycyrrhizin, which is a mixture of the potassium and calcium salts of glycyrrhizic acid.

Licorice root and its preparations are proven expectorants that have mucolytic and secretagogic properties. It is also postulated that glycyrrhizin, like saponins and emetine, increases the bronchial secretion and transport of mucus via a reflex pathway originating in the stomach (Schmid, 1983). This mechanism presumes that glycyrrhizin causes local irritation of the mucosa, but glycyrrhizin does not appear to have this property; indeed, its value in the treatment of peptic ulcers is based on its soothing, demulcent effect on the gastric mucosa.

Perhaps licorice root preparations are more correctly regarded as antitussive agents rather than mucolytics, comparable to the sugar in cough syrups and cough

drops. Sweet-tasting substances can influence the urge to cough, and voluntary swallowing can suppress an impending cough. Syrups, teas sweetened with honey or sugar, sweet cough syrups, and cough drops stimulate salivation and elicit more frequent reflex swallowing (Walther, 1979). The indirect antitussive effect of licorice root preparations may involve a degree of central suppression. Glycyrrhizic acid produced an antitussive action comparable to that of codeine when administered to laboratory animals (Anderson and Smith, 1961); further studies are needed to confirm this finding.

Licorice root preparations are useful as flavor correctives in medications that contain bad-tasting or nausea-inducing drug substances. The sweet taste of licorice is due entirely to glycyrrhizin, not to its aglycone, glycyrrhizic acid. Glycyrrhizin is 50 times sweeter than sugar ($f_{\text{sac}} = 50$), meaning that the concentration of an aqueous glycyrrhizin solution is equivalent in sweetness to a solution containing 50 times that amount of sugar.

Adverse effects are not a problem when licorice is properly used. Overdosing can lead to a toxic condition that is clinically similar to primary aldosteronism. Martindale (1982) described the case of a 53-year-old man who had eaten 700 g of licorice in one week and developed aldosteronism manifested by cardiac complaints, hypertension, edema, headache, and general weakness. Another man was hospitalized for similar complaints after eating 70 g of licorice sticks daily for a period of two months.

The usual therapeutic dose is 1–2 g of dried licorice root, or equivalent amounts of its preparations, taken three times daily.

4.4.5

Suggested Formulations

Ipecac novum infusion according to DRF (German Prescription Formula Index)

Rx	Ipecac root infusion	0.5:170.0
	Ammonium chloride	5.0
	Anise spirit (5%)	5.0
	Marshmallow syrup	to make 200.0
	Directions: Take 1 tablespoonful every 2 h.	
	Shake before using.	

Explanations: Ipecac root is emetic when given in the proper dosage, owing to its content of the alkaloids emetine and cephaeline. The expectorant dose is one-fifth of the emetic dose. Ipecac, like ammonium chloride, belongs to the class of reflex bronchomucolytics.

Ammonium chloride is a colorless, odorless, crystalline substance with a strong salty taste. The ammonium ion has been recognized as an expectorant for centuries. Presumably it increases bronchial mucus secretion reflexly via the vagus nerve by irritating the gastric mucosa. Marshmallow syrup functions mainly as a flavor corrective. Some effort may be needed to find a pharmacist who is willing to compound a complex individual prescription. An alternative is to prescribe ipecac root in the form of a tincture.

Rx	Ipecac tincture	20.0 mL
	Directions: Take 10–20 drops with some liquid 3–5 times daily.	

Tea Formulas

Indications: bronchitis symptoms and catarrhal diseases of the upper respiratory tract.

Preparation and directions: Pour boiling water (about 150 mL) over 1 tablespoon of tea, cover and steep for about 10 min, and pass through a tea strainer. Drink one cup of freshly brewed tea slowly several times daily, preferably while the tea is still hot.

Antitussive tea according to German Standard Registration

Rx	Marshmallow root	25.0
	Fennelseed	10.0
	Iceland moss	10.0
	English plantain	15.0
	Licorice root	10.0
	Thyme	30.0
	Directions (see above)	

Chest tea according to German Pharmacopeia 6*)

Rx	Marshmallow root	40.0
	Marshmallow leaves	20.0
	Licorice root	15.0
	Mullein flowers	10.0
	Violet root	5.0
	Aniseseed, crushed	10.0
	Directions (see above)	

Chest tea according to Swiss Pharmacopeia 6*)

Rx	Marshmallow root	10.0
	Licorice root	10.0
	Marshmallow leaves	10.0
	Mullein flowers	15.0
	Cornflower	5.0
	Helichrysum flowers	10.0
	Mallow flowers	10.0
	Aniseseed, crushed	15.0
	Senega root	10.0
	Wild thyme flowers	10.0

Cough and bronchial tea I according to German Standard Registration

Rx	Fennelseed	10.0
	English plantain	25.0
	Licorice root	25.0
	Thyme	20.0
	Marshmallow leaves	5.0
	Cornflower	5.0
	Mallow flowers	5.0
	Pimrose flowers	5.0

Cough and bronchial tea II according to German Standard Registration

Rx	Aniseseed	10.0
	Linden flowers	40.0
	Thyme	20.0
	Iceland moss	5.0
	Mallow flowers	5.0
	Pimrose flowers	5.0
	Heartsease	5.0

Pectoral tea according to Hager (1893)*)

Rx	Marshmallow leaves	20.0
	Nettle leaves	10.0
	Horsetail	10.0
	English plantain	5.0
	Mallow flowers	5.0
	Linden flowers	5.0
	Fennelseed, crushed	5.0
	Mullein flowers	2.5
	Fenugreek seeds, crushed	2.5

*) Original formula modified by substituting marshmallow leaves for coltsfoot leaves.

4.5 Phytotherapy of Sinusitis

First among the 100 most commonly prescribed herbal medications in Germany (see Appendix) is a combination product, Sinupret, approved by Commission E in 1994 for use in the treatment of “acute and chronic inflammations of the paranasal sinuses.” A liquid form of the product has been available since 1934, and the coated tablet was introduced in 1968. The active ingredient in the tablet is a mixture of five powdered herbs: 6 mg of gentian root and 18 mg each of pimpernel flowers, sorrel, elder flowers, and European vervain. The liquid preparation contains a water-and-alcohol extract from the same herbs, also in proportions of 1:3:3:3:3. The Commission E monographs on these five herbs state that their actions are chiefly mucolytic, so Sinupret comes under the official heading of herbal expectorants.

Table 4.5. Double-blind studies comparing Sinupret (S) with a placebo (P). The comparison of the statistical results is based on the number of patients in the first two studies and on the percentage of patients in the last study.

First author, year	Number of cases (n)	Indication	Duration of treatment (days)	Study criteria: statistical result
Richstein, 1980	31	Chronic sinusitis	7	Headache: “relieved” + “improved” S vs. P = 12 vs. 6 (p = 0.03); X-ray findings: S vs. P p = 0.035
Lechler, 1986	39	Acute sinusitis (adolescent asthmatics)	?	X-ray findings: “normal” + “improved” S vs. P = 16 vs. 9 (p < 0.05)
Berghorn, 1991	139	Acute sinusitis	14	Total symptom score: outcome tended to be better with S than P, but difference was not statistically significant.
Neubauer, 1994	177	Acute sinusitis (160), chronic sinusitis (17)	14	X-ray findings: “normal” + “improved” S vs. P = 87% vs. 70% (p < 0.05). Patient self-rating “relieved” + “improved”, S vs. P = 96% vs. 75%.

A monograph published by the manufacturer (Bionorica, 1994) cites more than a dozen pharmacologic and toxicologic studies dealing with the combination product. Of the 12 controlled clinical therapeutic studies, 4 compared Sinupret with a placebo (Table 4.5) and 8 compared it with reference drugs (ambroxol, myrtilol, acetylcysteine, and bromhexine).

In the study by Neubauer (1994) in Table 4.5, there was an average difference of only 17% between the outcomes with Sinupret versus a placebo in patients on a basic regimen of antibiotics and decongestant nosedrops. But because three of the four placebo-controlled studies demonstrated a statistically significant superiority of sinupret, it is reasonable to conclude that the product is therapeutically effective. Unfortunately, the low individual doses (156 mg of the herbal mixture or 76 mg of the liquid extract) do not conform to the dosages normally used in traditional herbal medicine (Sect. 1.5.4). Given this fact and the relatively small differences in outcomes between the placebo and the true drug, there is a pressing need for placebo-controlled double-blind studies to furnish additional proof of therapeutic efficacy.

4.6 Drug Products

The category of "Antitussives/Expectorants" in the *Rote Liste 1995* contains more than 100 herbal products, mostly fixed combinations of active ingredients, and numerous products that contain a single active ingredient (Tables 4.1–4.4). The 100 most commonly prescribed phytomedicines include 22 antitussive/expectorant medications, consisting of 8 single-herb products and 14 combination products.

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