

# The Use of Botanicals in Eclectic Pediatrics

by David Winston, RH (AHG)

Eclectic physicians were general practitioners, ministering to entire families, from birth to death. It was unusual in their day to have specialists as we have come to expect in modern medicine. Thus, most general books on Eclectic practice will have some information on treating pediatric diseases, but only a small handful of titles actually focus on this specific topic.

In the 19th century pediatric practice differed little from adult practice. The major differences between infant, childhood, and adult physiology were unknown in their time and young patients were simply seen as smaller versions of their parents. The Eclectics used their most powerful medications (Aconite, Gelsemium, Veratrum, Belladonna, Bryonia, Nux vomica) for childhood diseases without apparent concern about potential toxicity. Reduced doses for children helped to prevent problems, but the Eclectic method of dilute dosing (i.e. 5-10 gtt of a Specific Medicine in 4 oz of water, mix and take 1 tsp every 2-4 hours) was probably equally responsible for preventing toxic side effects.

It should be noted that the dosage recommendations for many Eclectic remedies were for Lloyd Brothers Specific Medicines and not simple tinctures. Thus the doses in some cases may be on the low side, as Specific Medicines were claimed to be 2-4x stronger than a pharmacopoeial tincture. The average doses listed here are for children ages seven to eleven years, averaging 60-80 pounds. Clark's rule was used to increase or decrease dosage for larger or smaller children:

## Pediatric dose

$$\frac{\text{child's weight in pounds}}{\text{average adult weight}} = \frac{X}{150 \text{ lbs.}}$$

$$\text{Example: } \frac{25 \text{ lbs}}{150 \text{ lbs}} = \frac{1}{7} \text{ the adult dose}$$

The vast area of pediatrics is too extensive to cover in great detail, so in this overview we will look at six common childhood maladies and some of the Eclectic

treatments used to remedy them. This article excludes many of the toxic remedies used by the Eclectics, as they are neither safe nor practical for common use today. Likewise, some of the methods used by earlier physicians (inducing vomiting to cure colic, lancing the gums to treat teething, giving opium to quiet irritable or fussy children), are now inappropriate. This article does mention some toxic botanicals that are currently accepted herbs in naturopathic clinical practice. However, it is still recommended that such herbs not be used with children. **Toxic herbs are identified by an asterisk (\*).** Botanicals are presented in alphabetical, not priority order, for each condition, and for historical, not prescriptive purposes.

## ■ OTITIS MEDIA

This condition is much more common today than during the 19th and early 20th century. Weakened immune systems, food and environmental allergies, nutritional deficiencies (especially Vitamin C and Zinc), indoor pollution, and the overuse of antibiotics, all have contributed to this problem. Nonetheless, the Eclectics routinely treated this condition. They felt local applications of dry heat were best for relieving pain and they often avoided the use of liquids, especially oils in the ear.

### Specific medications for otitis media

*\*Aconitum napellus* (Aconite) root – acute inflammation of the middle ear, the pulse is small and frequent.

Dose: Tincture (1:10) 2-5 gtt. in 4 oz. water, mix. Take 1 tsp. every 1/2-1 hour

*Anemone spp.* (Pulsatilla) herb – severe neuralgic pain in the ear, often caused by colds. It can be combined with Gelsemium.

Dose: Tincture (1:2) 1/2-1 gtt. every 2-3 hours



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*Aralia racemosa* (Spikenard) root – serous otitis media with feelings of pressure, sinus congestion.  
Dose: Tincture (1:5) 10-20 gtt. q.i.d.

\**Gelsemium sempervirens* (Gelsemium) root – was used in acute catarrhal otitis media. It thins the secretions, allowing drainage and reduces pain.  
Dose: Tincture (1:10) 5 gtt. in 4 oz. water, mix. Take 1 tsp. every 2-3 hours

*Matricaria recutita* (Chamomile) flowers – earaches and mild ear infections caused by colds, with excessive mucous discharge from the nose and eyes.  
Dose: Tea – 1-2 tsp. dried flowers, 8 oz. hot water, steep 30 minutes (covered) and take 2-4 oz. as needed

*Nicotiana tabacum* (Tobacco) leaf – blowing warm tobacco smoke in the ear is effective for relieving the pain of acute otitis media.

*Verbascum thapsus* (Mullein) flower – Mullein flower oil has a reputation among herbalists as an effective local treatment for earache and otitis media. The Eclectics did not recommend using oils in the ear, but did frequently use a product called Mulleined Oil. This product is not actually an oil at all – it is a semi-fermented liquid made from fresh Mullein flowers. It was used to relieve pain and inflammation.  
Dose: Mulleined Oil – 1-2 gtt. in the ear, several times per day.

#### ■ PAINFUL DENTITION

The pain of teething hasn't changed over the past 150 years. Infants experience acute pain and associated fevers, irritability, intense crying, and sleeplessness (parents and child!). During the 1800s lancing the gums was a common practice, as was giving opium (Godfrey's Cordial, Laudanum) to "help" with early dentition pain. Both of these practices have disappeared, with frozen teething rings, topical analgesics, and acetaminophen being today's treatments of choice for many parents.

#### Specific medications for teething

\**Gelsemium sempervirens* (Gelsemium) root – convulsive seizures caused by teething, the face is flushed, eyes shiny, with severe pain.



*Pulsatilla patens*

Dose: Tincture (1:10) 10 gtt. in 4 oz. water, mix. Take 1 tsp. every 1-2 hours

*Matricaria recutita* (Chamomile) flower – peevish, irritable children, crying constantly, want to be held, buccal irritation.

Dose: Tea – 1-2 tsp. flower, 8 oz. hot water, steep (covered) 20 minutes, take 2 oz. as needed.

*Melilotus officinalis* (Sweet Melilot) herb – poorly nourished infants that develop spasms or seizures while teething.

Dose: Tincture (1:5) 1-10 gtt. t.i.d.

*Scutellaria laterifolia* (Scullcap) herb – teething with nervousness, facial tics, or clenching of the jaw.

Dose: Tincture (1:2) 10-15 gtt. 4-6 times per day

#### ■ PERTUSSIS

Pertussis, or whooping cough, occurs much less frequently today than in times past due to the prevalence of pertussis vaccinations. In the last 10 years, it has been discovered that adults can and frequently do get pertussis. The spasmodic barking cough is absent in adults, instead they develop a chronic, irritated cough that can last for months.

#### Specific medications for pertussis

*Cephaelis ipecacuanha* (Ipecac) root – persistent irritation in the mucous membranes with deficient secretions.

Dose: Tincture (1:5) 5-10 gtt. in 4 oz. water, 1 tsp. every hour

*Castanea dentata* (Chestnut) leaf – paroxysmal coughs.

Dose: Tea – 1-2 tsp. dried leaves, 8 oz. hot water, steep 20-30 minutes, sweeten and take 1/2-2 oz. as needed

*Zingiber officinalis*

*Drosera spp.* (Sundew) herb – dry, irritable, persistent coughs. Explosive or spasmodic coughs. It is very effective for pertussis, stopping the paroxysms of the disease.

Dose: Tincture (1:2) 2-3 gtt. every 1-2 hours

*\*Gelsemium sempervirens* (Gelsemium) root – spasmodic coughs with excessive mucous, fever with muscular twitching.

Dose: Tincture (1:10) 10 gtt. in 4 oz. water, mix. Take 1 tsp. every 1-2 hours

*Grindelia spp.* (Grindelia) herb – is useful for pertussis with a damp cough. It should be used with other more specific medications such as Gelsemium or Lobelia.

Dose: Tincture (1:5) 10-20 gtt. q.i.d.

*Inula helenium* (Elecampane) root – is used for persistent, irritating coughs with pain beneath the sternum and irritation of the trachea and bronchi.

Dose: Tincture (1:2) 5-15 gtt. every 3 hours

*Lobelia inflata* (Lobelia) herb/seed – relieves nerve irritability and respiratory spasm. It is used for pertussis (it can be mixed with Asafoetida) with oppressed breathing and tightness in the chest and a dry hard, barking cough.

Dose: Tincture (1:2) 2-5 gtt. every 1/2-1 hour

*Trifolium pratense* (Red Clover) blossom – a mild and soothing antitussive that is useful for paroxysmal coughs, including pertussis or the cough of measles. Combine with Inula, Prunus, or Drosera.

Dose: Tea – 2 tsp. dried blossoms, 8 oz. hot water, steep 40 minutes, take 2 oz. as needed

## ■ FEVERS

In young children high fevers (above 103°) have always been a cause of concern for parents. Infants and toddlers can quickly have spikes in temperature and develop convulsions, secondary infections, and delirium. Today, low fevers (what the Eclectics called febricula) are often treated at home. High fevers in the young are more often treated in the emergency room or doctor's office. The Eclectics commonly used baths (cold baths, hot baths, alkaline sponge baths, acid/vinegar baths) as well as medicines to regulate temperature and either stimulate sweating or lower a fever.

### Specific medications for fevers

*Achillea millefolium* (Yarrow) herb/flowers – sthenic fevers with little or no sweating.

Dose: Tea – 1 tsp. dried herb/flowers, 8 oz. hot water, steep 20 minutes (covered) take 2-4 oz. 2-3x per day.

Dose: Tincture (1:5) 20-30 gtt. in hot water, 2-3x per day

*\*Aconitum napellus* (Aconite) and *Asclepias tuberosa* (Pleurisy Root) – take 5 gtt. tincture of Aconite (dry, hot skin, muscles ache, restlessness, and a small, frequent pulse) and 20 gtt. tincture of Asclepias root, add to 4 oz. water, mix and take 1 tsp. every hour until diaphoresis occurs and the fever drops. If there is a nervous irritation, delirium, agitation, headache, or bright, glistening eyes, alternate every other hour with 10 gtt. of Gelsemium\* in 4 oz. water, 1 tsp. every 2 hours. If there is bronchial congestion and a rapid pulse, substitute Bryonia\* 10 gtt. in 4 oz. of water for the Gelsemium.

*\*Atropa belladonna* (Belladonna) herb – fevers with congestion, the patient is drowsy, eyes are dull and

*Trifolium pratense**Asclepias tuberosa*

dilated, the face is expressionless, and the extremities are cold.

Dose: Tincture (1:10) 5 gtt. in 4 oz. water, mix. Take 1 tsp. every 2 hours.

*Baptisia tinctoria* (Wild Indigo) root – for fevers associated with sepsis and impaired circulation, the face is purplish, and the tongue is bluish-red. Fevers associated with putrid sore throat respond well to Baptisia.

Dose: Tincture (1:2) 10-15 gtt. in 4 oz. water, mix. Take 1 tsp. every 1-2 hours.

*Cimicifuga racemosa* (Black Cohosh) root – known to the Eclectics as Macrotys, it is specific for fevers with sore muscles. Use with other fever remedies.

Dose: Tincture (1:2) 5-10 gtt. in 4 oz. water, mix. Take 1 tsp. every 2-3 hours

*Eupatorium perfoliatum* (Boneset) flowering herb – the fever of influenza, where the bones feel hot or ache, with little or no sweating, combine with Yarrow, Catnip, or Elder Flower.

Dose: Tea – 1 tsp. dried herb, 8 oz. hot water, steep 20 minutes, take 1 tbsp. every 15 minutes until the patient starts perspiring

Dose: Tincture (1:5) 10-15 gtt. in hot water

\**Venatrum viride* (False Hellebore) root – fevers with a full and bounding pulse, the skin is flushed, with a red stripe in the middle of the tongue.

Dose: Tincture (1:10) 5-10 gtt. in 4 oz. water, mix. Take 1 tsp. every 2 hours

## ■ CROUP

Croup (acute laryngotracheobronchitis) is an acute viral infection that causes inflammation of the upper and lower respiratory tracts. It is primarily found in children aged six months to three years, and the symptoms include subglottic swelling, dyspnea (especially on inspiration), fever (50% of cases), hypoxemia, and inspiratory stridor, especially at night. Mild cases are often treated at home with warm steam (running the hot water in the shower with the bathroom door closed to create a “steam” room). Proper hydration and rest are also important parts of treatment as fatigue,

dehydration, and crying can exacerbate the condition. Respiratory distress, tachycardia, cyanosis, and dehydration are all signs that the condition requires prompt medical treatment.

## Specific medications for croup

\**Aconite napellus* (Aconite) root – acute inflammation of the throat with fever, it can be used for catarrhal and spasmodic croup.

Dose: Tincture (1:10) 3-5 gtt. in 4 oz. water, mix. Take 1 tsp. every 30 minutes

*Cephaelis ipecacuanha* (Ipecac) root – persistent irritation of the mucous membranes, mucous croup, or membranous croup with dyspnea; excessive secretions that cannot be expelled.

Dose: 10 gtt. Ipecac syrup given frequently during the early stages of the disease, until nausea is induced, will often remedy this condition as well as bronchitis

*Lobelia inflata* (Lobelia) herb/seed – a dry, hard, barking cough, oppressed breathing, expectoration is difficult. It is effective for spasmodic or membranous croup.

Dose: Tincture (1:2) – 5 gtt. every 1/2-1 hour

\**Phytolacca americana* (Poke) berry – a succus of ripe Poke berry juice and alcohol (50/50) was used for membranous and spasmodic croup.

Dose: Succus (1:1) 2-5 gtt. every 1/2 hour

*Polygala senega* or *P. tenuifolia* (Senega Snakeroot) root – atonic mucous membranes with excessive mucous that is hard to expectorate. It is best used to relieve croup in the latter stages after the acute inflammation is resolving.

Dose: Tincture (1:5) 1-5 gtt. q.i.d.

*Sanguinaria canadensis* (Bloodroot) root – this herb is a useful adjunct for treating membranous croup, but should be combined with other more specific remedies. Dose: Tincture (1:5) 10 gtt. in 4 oz. water, mix. Take 1 tsp. every 1-2 hours

*Stillingia sylvatica* (Stillingia) root – irritation of the mucous membranes with deficient secretions and the

tissue is dry, red, and shiny (use with Lobelia for croup).

Dose: Tincture (1:2) 2-3 gtt. in water every 2-3 hours

#### ■ COLDS AND SORE THROATS

Colds and sore throats are just as common today in the age of antibacterial soaps, antibacterial toys, and disinfectants as they were 120 years ago. Treatments for these universal maladies haven't improved much, if any, with the exception of strep throat, which is beyond the scope of this article.

Colds are a viral condition with common symptoms including sore throats, nasal congestion, runny nose, fatigue, coughs, and possible low-grade fever. Today most people rely on over-the-counter nasal decongestants, expectorants, and antipyretics/analgesics (acetaminophen) for symptomatic relief. The Eclectics used medicines with similar actions, but also treated the specific symptoms. Many of the herbs they used also have antiviral, immune stimulating, and antiinflammatory activity as well.

#### Specific medications for colds and sore throats

*Aralia racemosa* (Spikenard) root – is used in the early stages of colds with congestion, hard to expectorate mucous, the patient feels worse from cold air and is not sweating. It is often used in cough syrups.

Dose: Tea – 1 tsp. dried root, 8 oz. water, decoct 10 minutes, steep 20-30 minutes (covered), take 2 oz. 3-4 times per day

Dose: Tincture (1:2) 10-20 gtt. in hot water as needed

*\*Arisaema triphyllum* (Indian turnip) corm – intensely painful sore throat, ulcerated, fetid odor with dark or purplish red mucous membranes.

Dose: Tincture (1:10) 1 gtt. diluted in water or juice, every 1/2-1 hour

*Asclepias tuberosa* (Pleurisy Root) root – chest colds with congestion, fever, coughs, and nervous irritability.

Dose: Tincture (1:2) 10-15 gtt., 4 oz. water, mix. Take 1 tsp. every 1/2-hour

*Eupatorium perfoliatum* (Boneset) herb – is the remedy for colds with pain in the chest, fever, a raspy voice, and muscular aching.

Dose: Tea – 1 tsp. dried herb, 8 oz. hot water, steep 20 minutes, sweeten, and take 1 tbsp. as needed.

Dose: Tincture (1:5) 10-15 gtt. q.i.d.

*Euphrasia* spp. (Eyebright) herb - acute catarrhal diseases with profuse secretion of acrid mucous from the nose. Nasal congestion, otitis media (use with Echinacea), sniffles in infants.

Dose: Tincture (1:2) 10-15 gtt. q.i.d.

*\*Gelsemium sempervirens* (Gelsemium) root – acute colds with heavy congestion and coughing, the eyes are glazed and shiny.

Dose: Tincture (1:10) 10 gtt. in 4 oz. water, mix. Take 1 tsp. every 2-3 hours

*Marrubium vulgare* (Horehound) herb – head colds, sinus congestion, sore throats with excessive catarrh, chest colds – all respond to the antiviral and antitussive effects of Horehound. This herb is also traditionally used to make cough drops and cough syrups (often with White Pine bark, Spikenard, and Licorice).

Dose: Tea – 1 tsp. dried herb, 8 oz. hot water, steep 20-30 minutes (covered), sweeten and take 1-2 oz. as needed

Dose: Tincture (1:5) 10-20 gtt. q.i.d.

*Matricaria recutita* (Chamomile) flowers – is an excellent remedy for the colds of children, it relieves irritability, gastric upset, lowers fevers, and reduces catarrhal discharges.

Dose: Tea – 1-2 tsp. dried flowers, 8 oz. hot water, steep (covered) for 30 minutes, take 2 oz. as needed

*Monarda punctata* (Horsemint) herb – a hot infusion of this fragrant herb is used to stimulate sweating, lower fevers, calm the stomach and bowels, and relieve wet coughs.

Dose: Tea – 1 tsp. dried herb, 8 oz. hot water, steep 15-20 minutes (covered), take 2 oz. as needed

*Nepeta cataria* (Catnip) herb – a warm infusion acts as a diaphoretic and will “break up a cold”. It is especially indicated for young children who are irritated and also have borborygmus.

Dose: Tea – 1-2 tsp. dried herb, 8 oz. hot water, steep 1/2 hour (covered), sweeten and take 2-4 oz. as needed

*Origanum vulgare* (Wild Marjoram) herb – colds without fever, upset stomach, nausea, and vomiting.  
Dose: Tea – 1 tsp. dried herb, 8 oz. hot water, steep (covered) 20-30 minutes. Take 2-4 oz. as needed.


\**Phytolacca americana* (Poke root) – enlarged tonsils, swollen glands, inflammation of the throat.  
Dose: Tincture (1:2) – 1/2-1 gtt. every 3 hours

\**Solanum dulcamara* (Bittersweet Nightshade) twigs – colds with wet coughs, nausea, and chilliness. Nasal or bronchial congestion with headache or dyspnea.  
Dose: Tincture (1:10) – 10 gtt. in 4 oz. water, mix.  
Take 1 tsp. every 3 hours

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