

## **Herbalism for Babies and Children**

Our herbalists have organised special **mother and baby clinics** (suitable for children up to twelve) and have specialised in dealing with the problems of childhood and motherhood. We find that children respond very well to herbal medicine, and usually need only small doses over quite a short time. This small dose can be disguised in fruit juice, if necessary, to make it more palatable, and we find that a cold herbal tea mixed with fruit juice is the best way of giving medicine to a baby or small child. Even a couple of spoonfuls of tea can help a small child.

We always recommend that before treating your child yourself, you arrange a full consultation with a qualified herbalist. The symptoms you try to treat just might be symptoms of a more serious condition, and the herbalist will give their time and skill to uncover the reasons for the illness, and treat that, so that the symptoms will disappear.

In particular, we recommend that you do not treat a child under two years of age yourself, but always seek the advice of a qualified medical herbalist. The experience of our **Mother and Baby Clinics** is that quite a small number of problems make up the vast majority of cases we see. Amongst these, colic is perhaps the most common.

### **Colic**

This is a problem that responds very well and quickly to treatment. If the mother is breastfeeding, then normally the herbalist will give the medication to the mother, and she will automatically pass it to the child in a trouble-free way through her milk. If the baby is bottle-fed, then treatment can be given by drop doses of herbs added to their milk. (This, though, should only be done under the guidance of a qualified herbalist).

It should always be remembered that the mother's diet can have a big effect on the breast-fed baby. Coffee and dairy products in particular, when taken by the mother, seem to act as triggers for baby colic.

*We strongly recommend that you seek professional advice before using over the counter remedies to treat your child.*

### **Teething**

This can indeed be a difficult time for children, and it is not really any comfort to realise, or to be told, that it is a natural thing, and will eventually end. As every mother knows, teething problems are not confined to the mouth and gums, but can also trigger nappy

rash, runny nose, and general fractiousness. A tea made up at half strength, from chamomile flowers, has long been used at this time.

### **Nappy Rash**

Our herbalists recommend that you do not use lotions or 'medicated' wipes on the child's bottom, but use plain water instead. A gentle cream made up from calendula herb, is always soothing.

### **Eczema**

This is a problem that affects about three in every hundred children. It is most common immediately after birth, and at around three months. It can be caused by food intolerance, contact allergies or diet, when it is known as atopic eczema. A very common trigger is found to be cows' milk and other dairy products. If this is the cause, then help should be sought to change the child's diet, while at the same time ensuring that the child still receives all the necessary nutrients.

There are many different types of eczema, but treatment for them all is basically the same. The cause of the eczema should be sought and removed, while at the same time soothing creams and lotions, perhaps based on *starflower oil*, *chickweed herb* and *chamomile* may be applied. A tea made from *chamomile*, *nettle* and *plantain herbs* will support the system.

### **Glue Ear**

This common problem is caused by a build-up of mucus in the inner ear, which in turn causes pressure on the ear drum resulting in attacks of acute pain. Lying down stretches the eardrum, and this can often worsen the pain. As a result, a loss of sleep for child and parent can ensue.

Children often simply grow out of glue ear, as the ear tubes grow big enough to drain away the excess mucus. Again, there may be hidden causes for glue ear, and an allergy to dairy products can act as a trigger. The child may be very run-down after repeated attacks of glue ear, so skilled assistance should be sought to help in restoring the immune system. Eardrops should never be used by the parent in cases of glue ear, in case the eardrum is perforated.

**This is certainly one of the occasions when professional help is very strongly indicated.**

### **Head Lice**

This very common problem of school or nursery children is best treated by regular and frequent combing with a metal lice comb. A gentle herbal shampoo based on the herb *Quassia* is often

recommended. Quassia does not have any side effects, and is safe for children of all ages.

### **Water Warts**

This is a viral condition, properly known as *Molluscum contagiosa*. It responds very well to herbal treatment, but really must be treated in consultation with a herbalist.

### **Herbs to Help**

A number of herbs have traditionally been used for dealing with the everyday problems of childhood. Advice from our knowledgeable Dispensary assistants can always be sought.

Suitable herbs might include:

- *Marigold/wheatgerm and coconut oil* when mixed together provide a soothing healing breast balm, which will prevent your nipples from becoming cracked and sore.
- *Chamomile* – possibly the most valuable herb for babies and nursing mothers. Internally chamomile helps to relieve colic and provide a restful sleep. Externally the oil of chamomile can be used to massage your baby and combines well with borage oil for this purpose.
- *Fenugreek* - Fenugreek stimulates the production of breast milk. It combines well with *raspberry leaf, fennel* and *chamomile*, helping to prevent colic.
- *Quassia* – when used externally as a rinse or shampoo Quassia provides us with an excellent alternative to conventional lice treatments. It can be used for children of all ages safely and without side effects.
- *Echinacea* - An important herb for the immune system improving our resistance to bacteria and infection. Nursing mums can take this herb and their babies will benefit from its action through the breast milk. Otherwise give 1 drop of tincture of Echinacea per year of age in fruit juice or water to your child.
- *Starflower oil* – the oil of starflower is very soothing and moisturizing to the skin. It is the herb of choice for dry skin and eczema.

**Essential oils** can always be used in massage, the bath and in an oil burner. *Lavender* is perhaps the most popular and useful for children, and this can be combined with *Roman chamomile* and *rose absolute* in a suitable carrier oil. *Mandarin* dropped onto the pillow can be useful for a restless sleeper.

*Eucalyptus smithii Essential Oil* - an essential oil suitable for use with young children. It is also used as an insect repellent.

**As with all health problems, we strongly recommend that you consult a qualified medical herbalist to create a specific prescription and treatment plan to meet your individual needs.**

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