

Glossary

5-Lipoxygenase – An enzyme in the body which catalyzes the transformation of EFA's, such as arachidonic acid and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), to leukotrienes. Leukotrienes cause pathological symptoms of asthma and other inflammatory conditions.

Abortifacient – Agent capable of inducing a miscarriage. This is a highly misused term.

Adaptogen - Herbs that normalize and restore bodily functions and increase the body's ability to handle stress. The mechanism seems to be one of usually by acting on the hypothalamus to restore endocrine function.

Alterative - Term used to define herbs that gradually restore health and vitality to the body by improving the metabolism (alteration) and elimination of toxins and humors from the lymph and blood. May also be referred to as "blood cleansers" in old literature.

Analgesic/Anodyne – Agents that relieve pain.

Antacid -Substances that neutralize excess acid in the stomach and intestinal tract.

Anthelmintic - Agent which kills worms and/or expels them from the GI tract.

Antibiotic- Substance that inhibit the growth of, or destroy, bacteria.

Anticatarrhal - Substances that dissolves or counteracts the formation of excess catarrh (mucus, humors, etc)

Anticholinergic – These substances block the liberation of acetylcholine resulting in sedation or deliria.

Anticoagulant- Agents which impede blood clots by interfering in the clotting cascade. Also referred to as platelet aggregation inhibitors.

Anti-diarrheal – Agents which may work to slow or control frequent, loose bowel movements.

Anti-fibrotic – These agents decrease the formation of a fibrous connective tissue in an organ. Frequently employed to support those with cirrhosis.

Antifungal – Agents which either kill (fungicide) or inhibit the growth of (fungastatic) fungi.

Antihistamine – Agents that inhibit the allergic response by blocking the body's production of histamine or the degranulation of mast cells

Anti-inflammatory – Agents which reduce redness, heat and swelling of inflammation through a variety of mechanisms, including inhibiting cyclooxygenase or 5-Lipoxygenase.

Anti-lithic - Herbs that act to dissolve and discharge urinary and biliary stones and gravel.

Anti-microbial - Assists the body in resisting and destroying microbes. Anti-septics, anti-viral, anti-bacterial and anti-fungal are all anti-microbials which focus on a particular type of pathogen.

Anti-neoplastic – An agent which works to dissolve or slow the growth of abnormal growths such as tumors or cysts.

Antiphlogistic – Agent which reduces localized inflammations, itching and swelling.

Antipruritic - Substances which inhibit itching.

Antipyretic – Agent which have the effect of reducing fever.

Antirheumatics – Agents which have shown to relieve aches and pains associated with the musculoskeletal system.

Antiseptic - Substances that can be applied to the skin to prevent the onset of bacterial infection.

Antiscorbutic - Substance that contains Vitamin C and prevents scurvy.

Antispasmodic – Substances which prevent or relax muscle spasms.

Antitussive— Substance which suppresses a dry cough.

Antivertiginous – Agents which work to decrease vertigo.

Anxiolytic – Agents which inhibit acute anxiety. Also referred to as antipanic.

Aperient – These agents mildly stimulates bowel movement by increasing digestive secretions.

Aphrodisiac - Substances said to stimulate or enhance sexual function.

Aromatic - Substance that generally contains high amounts of volatile oils. May be spicy or pungent and usually stimulate depressed function.

Astringent – Agents which cause constriction of tissues and closure of pores due to tannins present.

Bitter – This is a sensory characterization. The bitter taste stimulates gastric function by increasing the secretion of various fluids in the GI tract including saliva, bile, and stomach acid.

Bronchodilator – Substances which are capable of dilating and expanding the bronchi.

Carminative - Promotes digestion, expels gas, and relieves spasmodic pain in the bowels due to flatulence.

Cathartics - Substances containing anthroquinones which stimulate excessive purgation. Heavy-Duty laxatives.

Cholagogue – Substances which the flow and discharge of bile into the small intestine consequently promoting gall bladder function.

Corrigent – An herb added to a formula as a flavor enhancing agent- useful in balancing the energetic properties.

Cyclooxygenase Inhibitor – These agents inhibit the production of the enzyme necessary for the formation of prostanoids in the body, consequently inhibiting the inflammation process. Ideally we want to use agents with a high COX 2 specificity to avoid side-effects common with NSAIDS.

Decoctions – Modernly decoctions are herbal preparations made by simmering hardy plant material such as roots, barks and berries in water or wine. Historically, decoctions were the aqueous extract of choice. Culpeper, for example, does not mention tisanes or infusions in his herbals, rather he instructed ingredients to be added to decoctions in the following order: barks, herbs, seeds, flowers, spices advising that those decoctions made with wine lasted longer than those made with water.

Decongestants - Agents which alleviate congestion of the sinuses. Often by reducing swelling of nasal passages.

Demulcent - Contain mucilage. Protect and coat in a manner similar to mucus. They also trigger reflex mechanisms that travel through the spinal nerves effectively reducing inflammation, irritation and dryness. According to herbalist Jim McDonald, “Though it makes sense that demulcents coat tissues, the physical mucilage is actually very poorly absorbed by the

body, and certainly isn't traveling through the blood to the kidneys. Rather, the ingestion of mucilage seems to promote a systemic moistening of tissues throughout the body, with some demulcents being more specific to particular organ systems."

Deodorant - Neutralizes or prevents odors.

Diaphoretic (Stimulating) – Open the pores and promote perspiration. Per [Jim McDonald](#) "promote circulation out from the core to the periphery"

Diaphoretic (Relaxing) - Open the pores and promote perspiration. Per [Jim McDonald](#) "ease tension inhibiting outward circulation"

Diuretic -Substances that increases the flow of urine.

Electuaries – An herbal preparation made by mixing one part powdered herb with three parts honey.

Emetic – An agent which induces vomiting.

Emmenagogue - Herbs that promote and regulate menstrual flow. Not to be confused with an abortifacient.

Emollients - Substances that soften the skin by easing access of water to dehydrated tissue. Often contain mineral salts.

Endotoxin- A bacterial toxin confined within the body of the bacterium. Note: often bacteria secrete endotoxins as exotoxins when they die due to a compromised cellular membrane which is the way antibiotics destroy pathogens.

Escharotic- These are agents which are corrosive and have been employed in making salves which cause tissue to die and slough off.

Essential Oil – Aromatic constituents (sesquiterpene lactones) of a plant captured through the distillation process and marketed for use in aromatherapy.

Exotoxin - A toxin that is produced by a microorganism, such as a bacterium, and excreted into its surrounding medium.

Expectorant – Agents which aid **the** body in expelling mucus from the lower respiratory tract.

Stimulating expectorant -Stimulate the nerves and muscles of the respiratory system to manifest a cough.

Relaxing expectorants – Reduce tension in the lungs, often easing tightness, allowing natural coughing and flow of mucus to occur.

Amphoteric expectorant – May stimulate or relax depending on conditions present.

False Cold – “Cold exterior, hot core. often traces back to a sluggish liver which accumulates stagnant fluid, then develops inflammation this leads to constriction of the peripheral blood vessels, cold hands & feet ” ~ Ryn Midura [Common Wealth Center for Herbal Medicine](#)

False Heat - “Hot exterior, cold core. Heat arising from friction due to primary dryness, rather than high metabolic activity.” ~ Ryn Midura [Common Wealth Center for Herbal Medicine](#)

Febrifuge – Agents which act to reduce fever.

Fibrinolytic – Agents used to break up blood clots or prevent the clotting cascade.

Fixed Oils - Stable oils contained in plants which do not evaporate upon exposure to air, but may go rancid after a prolonged shelf-life. Often used as carrier oils, emollients, etc

Galactagogue – Those agents which promote lactation.

Hemostatic – Promotes hemostasis, stopping bleeding. May also be called antihemorrhagic.

Hepatic - Agents that strengthen and tone the liver.

Hepatoprotective – Substances which act against chemical or biological damage to the liver.

Histamine - A chemical held in the mast cells which degranulate to initiate an inflammatory reaction in the presence of damaged tissue or allergens.

Homeostasis - Refers to a state of equilibrium of the internal environment of the body that is dynamically maintained by feedback and regulation.

Hydroethanolic Extract – An herbal preparation which utilizes water and ethanol to extract constituents from plant material. Also known as a tincture.

Hydrosol – An herbal preparation obtained through the distillation of plant material and water. Also referred to simply as distilled waters.

Hypotensive— Agents that reduce elevated blood pressure.

Immunomodulator – An agent which has a modifying effect on the immune system. Includes those substances which suppress immune function, as well as those which improve immune response.

Inotropic - Agents that modify the force of muscular contractions. Cardiac inotropics are frequently prescribed for CAD.

Laxative - Substances that mildly stimulate bowel movement through peristalsis. Contain smaller amounts of anthraquinones than a cathartic.

Lymphatic – Supports the health and activity of the lymphatic system by stimulating flow and elimination of lymph.

MAOI - Thymoleptic agents which act by blocking the action of an enzyme known as monoamine oxidase which increases the level of catecholamines in the CNS.

Mycobacteria- A family of bacteria known for causing leprosy and tuberculosis. However there are many atypical mycobacteria which do not cause these diseases. Studies into the relationship between chronic infection with these pathogens and autoimmune disease are ongoing.

Nervine- A nervine is any substance that has an effect on the nervous system. These may act in a variety of ways. I owe my understanding of these subtleties to Kiva Rose and I refer you to [her very excellent discussion of nervines for more information](#).

Organ Affinity – Agents which are said to have an organ affinity, frequently are eliminated from the body through that organ. For example, terpenes, as gaseous substances, are eliminated via the bronchial passageways and ultimately through the pulmonary alveoli.

Oxymel – A concentrated drink syrup made of honey and vinegar. Hippocrates mentions oxymel preparations in On Regimen in Acute Diseases and a period recipe appears in the Anglo-Saxon *Leechbook* as follows: *“Take of vinegar, one part; of honey, well cleansed, two parts; of water, the fourth part; then seethe down to the third or fourth part of the liquid, and skim the foam and the refuse off continually, until the mixture be fully sodden. If thou wish to work the drink stronger then put as much of the vinegar as of the honey...”*

Oxytocic - Substances that stimulate uterine contractions to assist and induce labor. Many oxytocic substances also serve as nervines due to their capacity to stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system.

Nitric Oxide Synthase Activator – Agents which stimulate the production of this enzyme responsible for catalyzing the production of nitric oxide from L-arginine

Nootropic – Agents which are cognitive enhancers which means they may have a mild effect on improving memory or concentration.

Parasympathomimetic – An agent which produces an effect similar to stimulation of the parasympathetic nervous system. Also called a cholinergic because they generally work via a mechanism which releases acetylcholine as nerve impulses jump synaptic gaps.

Partus Preparator – Agents used in the last weeks of a pregnancy to tone and prepare the uterus for labor.

Pectoral – Old-fashioned term for agents which strengthen and heal the respiratory system.

Periphery- Anatomically speaking this term refers to outer regions of the body-more specifically the areas in which nerve endings can be found.

Relaxant- Agents which reduce tension in tissue and may act as an anti-spasmodic.

Rubefacient - Substances that increase the flow of blood to the surface of the skin and produce redness. May be used to increase blood flow to an area to promote healing.

Salicylates – A term sometimes used to refer to those plants which contain salicylic acid-a precursor to acetylsalicylic acid (manufactured as aspirin)

Secretolytic - Agent which stimulated the production of serous mucus in the respiratory tract.

Sialagogues – Substances which promote the secretion and flow of saliva.

Specific – Substance that has a powerful and singular action on an organ or imbalance.

Stimulants – Increase the energy of the body, quicken circulation and break up obstructions and congestion.

Styptics- Hemostatic substances which arrest bleeding through the astringent actions. Usually used externally.

Sympatholytic Agent – Substance which effects the postganglionic functioning of the sympathetic nervous system by inhibiting the activity of catecholamines. This has the effect of

vasodilation which then lowers blood pressure and heart rate. Those sympatholytic herbs which stimulate the brain are known as “centrally acting.”

Synergy – Individual substances working together to produce an effect that is greater than the sum of their individual effects.

Thymoleptic Agents – These substances elevate depressive states through a variety of mechanisms.

Thyrostatic Agent – Substance which stabilizes (or reduces) the thyroid’s production of hormones. Also called goitrogens when they impede the growth of goiters.

Trophorestorative – Agents which act as a nutritional restorative for the body, usually with a strong organ-affinity. It corrects deficiency and weakness by tonifying and nourishing that organ or organ system.

[Per Kiva Rose](#): ”A trophorestorative is an herb, food or other substance that acts as a nutritive restorative for the body, usually with a strong affinity for an organ or organ system and corrects deficiency and weakness not simply through temporary stimulation but through the vital nourishment of that organ or organ system. It is a tonic in the deepest sense of the word, in that it provides substance for the building up of strength and function. In order to be a true trophorestorative it must not bring harm or have undue side effects and be able to be used over a long period of time safely. Also, while many herbs are nutritive, trophorestoratives are unique in that they can restore actual physical function to a debilitated organ or tissue, as is the case with Nettle Seed (kidneys), Avena (nervous system) and Ashwagandha (endocrine system).”

Per [Todd Caldecott](#): “The “trophic state” is representative of the vital capacity of a system or tissue in the body. In chronic states of irritation or depression some degree of vital deficiency will manifest in the affected tissue, with a gradual loss of functional capability.... In any case where an organ or tissue can be determined to be suffering from a vital deficiency, trophorestoration should be undertaken as a long-term measure to restore normal function.”

Tocolytic- Agents which inhibit uterine contractions.

Tonic – Agents which support wellness by improving the assimilation of essential nutrients by the organs, they improve systemic tone giving increased vigor, energy and strength to the tissues of either specific organs or to the whole body. Most tonics have an organ-affinity.

Unguent – A soothing preparation spread on topical injuries. It is similar to an ointment but less thick, often using lanolin as an oil and less beeswax.

Vasodilators – Agents which expand result in the dilation of arterial blood vessels. Agents that relax vascular smooth muscle- expanding and relaxing venous blood vessels and allowing increased circulation.

Venotropic – Agents which have an effect on veins includes venodilators, vasoconstrictors and venoprotectors.

Viriditas - Term coined by the medieval seer, Hildegard von Bingen, describing the Power of Nature. According to Sean Donahue, she found it in all living things, in the seed ready to burst forth; in youth and sexuality; and in the healing power of the green world.

Vermifuges - Agents which are known to eliminate worms from body.

Vulnerary – Agents that help the body to heal wounds by promoting cell proliferation and tissue repair.