Cough

Cough is a symptom of many diseases. Most coughs come from simple viral infections, such as the common cold. Sometimes but not always mucus is produced with the cough. If the color is green or yellow, it may be a hint of a more serious bacterial infection, although this is not a reliable indicator. If the color is red, there may be bleeding in the lungs. Any cough that produces blood or blood-stained mucus, as well as any cough that lasts more than two weeks, requires a visit to a medical professional for diagnosis.

Herbs that may be helpful: A number of herbs have a rich history of use for treating coughs due to colds, bronchitis, or other mild conditions. Only a few studies have examined the effectiveness of these herbs. Among those herbs that have been shown to have some degree of cough-relieving activity are marshmallow,1 sundew,2 and coltsfoot.3 Coltsfoot has also been shown to increase the activity of the ciliary hairs lining the bronchial passages, thereby helping expel mucus and the viruses and debris it traps.4

Two other herbs traditionally used for cough are elecampane and mullein, however these have not yet been shown to help a cough in scientific investigations. Both may be helpful in dealing with the underlying cause of the cough if it is infectious. Both have documented effects at killing bacteria and viruses.5 6
The mucilage of slippery elm gives it a soothing effect for coughs. Usnea also contains mucilage, which can be helpful in easing irritating coughs. There is a long tradition of using wild cherry syrups to treat coughs. Other traditional remedies to relieve coughs include bloodroot, catnip, comfrey, horehound, lobelia, ephedra, and red clover.

The early nineteenth-century Eclectic physicians in the United States (who used herbs as their main medicine) not only employed eucalyptus oil to sterilize instruments and wounds but recommended a steam inhalation of the vapor of the oil to help treat asthma, bronchitis, whooping cough, and emphysema.

Thyme has a long history of use in Europe for the treatment of dry, spasmodic coughs as well as bronchitis. Its antispasmodic actions have made it a common traditional recommendation for whooping cough. Many constituents in thyme team up to provide its antitussive (preventing and treating a cough), antispasmodic, and expectorant actions. The primary constituents are the volatile oils, which include the phenols thymol and carvacol. These are complemented by the actions of flavonoids as well as saponins. Thyme, either alone or in combination with herbs such as sundew, continues to be one of the most commonly recommended herbs in Europe for the treatment of dry, spasmodic coughs as well as whooping cough. Due to the low toxicity of the herb, it has become a favorite for treating coughs in small children.
Are there any side effects or interactions? Refer to the individual herb for information about any side effects or interactions.

References:


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