

Expert Herbal Reality Resource

Eyebright

Names

Botanical Name: *Euphrasia officinalis*

Family: Orobanchaceae

Common names: Euphrasia (deriving from the Greek word euphrosyne meaning 'gladness').

The name eyebright both relates to the eye like appearance of the flower and its historic use in treatment of eye conditions.



Description

Eyebright is a semi parasitic annual plant that grows wild in grasslands, meadows, heaths, and pastures of Britain, Northern Europe, Western Asia and North America. Eyebright grows to a height of 4-8 inches (10-20 cm) and has small axillary odourless flowers which are usually white with purple streaks, red spots and a yellowish palate.

The leaves are opposite, ovate or cordate and strongly ribbed.

By the doctrine of signatures (a concept that states that botanical features of herbs may indicate their therapeutic applications) the petals of eyebright resemble bloodshot eyes, suggesting the plant's name and its eye-clearing action. Downy hairs cover the stems, which produce toothed leaves.

Constituents

- Iridoid glycosides: aucubin, catapol, euphroside, ixoroside.
- Flavonoids: quercetin, apigenin
- Tannins
- Lignans
- Phenolic acids

Traditional use

A plant that has a long-standing use in herbal medicine, earliest recorded in 14th century Eyebright was said to 'cure all evils of the eye'. It was used for the treatment of eye conditions such as infections, conjunctivitis and blepharitis.

It has been used for a manner of mucous diseases, where stagnation and excess mucous present as symptoms. Its ability to counter catarrh means it is often used for infectious and allergic conditions affecting the eyes, middle ear, sinuses and nasal passages. It seems to be a plant that has an affinity to the sensory organs of the head.

Traditional actions

- Astringent
- Anti-catarrhal
- Anti-inflammatory
- Anti-histamine
- Antioxidant
- Mucous membrane tonic

What practitioners say

Respiratory system: Eyebright is used for all manner of conditions relating to the nasal passages, allergic rhinitis, asthma and the common cold especially where excess mucous is a presenting symptom (2, 3).

Both an antihistamine, astringent and anti-inflammatory, eyebright as an internal medicine (tea, tincture, capsule) is excellent for treatment of catarrh, hay fever, chronic sneezing, inflamed nasal mucosa, relaxed tonsils & sore throat, including where these symptoms are caused by allergy.

Specifically used to protect the eyes and mucosa during the catarrhal phase of measles, to avoid future problems (1, 2).

Immune system: Eyebright is used for treating both infectious & allergic conditions affecting eyes, middle ear, sinuses & nasal passages.

Eyes: Due to its astringency and anti-inflammatory actions, eyebright is an effective treatment for conjunctivitis as an eye bath. It is also traditionally used in blepharitis, red eye, stye, for poor visual acuity due to eyestrain or diabetes and corneal opacity (1, 3, 5, 6).

Skin: By alleviating oxidative stress, eyebright can be used topically, particularly to support cellular health following prolonged exposure to ultraviolet light (4).

Evidence

In an in vitro study an extract of eyebright displayed cellular protection against UVB-induced photoaging by suppressing oxidative stress, cell apoptosis and inflammation. This preliminary study demonstrates the protective effects of *E. officinalis* against UVB-induced photoaging (4).



An in-vitro study analysing the activity of extracts of eyebright on cultured human corneal epithelial cells concluded promising effects in its application as treatment for eye disorders (5, 6).

A number of compounds found in high concentration in eyebright, namely aucubin have been subject to extensive research, findings show anti-microbial, hepatoprotective, antitumor and neuroprotective activity. Aucubin is found also in Ribwort Plantain (1).

It must be noted that despite longstanding traditional use, clinical trials on eyebright are limited and more research needs to be conducted. In vitro studies are not always a good reflection of the medical efficacy of a plant as results do not always translate into people. Nonetheless traditional use is a valid form of evidence too.



Safety

Eyebright is safe to use long term, there are no reported interactions or contraindications (1).

Dosage

Internal use: infuse 2-4g of dried herb in hot water, strain and drink. Up to three times daily. Take 2-6ml of 1:5 tincture three times daily.

External use: Infusion. Using sterile equipment, infuse 1 heaped teaspoon of dried herb in half a cup of hot water for 10 minutes. Strain using a paper coffee filter (or similar, to remove all herb particles), cool, and drop into eyes. For inflammation or infection use bath eye for 10 seconds. Twice daily

Internal use: infuse 2-4g of dried herb in hot water, strain and drink. Up to three times daily. Take 2-6ml of 1:5 tincture three times daily.

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