

HERBAL TINCTURES:

Dosage guide and administering tips

What are herbal tinctures?

These are herbs that have been extracted in strong alcohol. The alcohol is an excellent solvent. It extracts and preserves many of the chemical compounds and properties of herbs. Professionally made tinctures are made with ethanol and water and keep for years and years. Examples of herbal tinctures that you might already know are the Bioforce products, widely sold in shops. Those bottles of murky brown liquid are herbal tinctures. You can also buy tinctures from suppliers such as Neal's Yard or Baldwins. Both those stores carry a much wider range of herbs.

Home-made tinctures can easily be made using a clean, dry jam jar, the correct herb (in fresh or dried form) and either vodka or brandy.

I recommend that you make life easy for yourself and have a store of these tinctures in your cupboard that you can turn to when needed (usually 2 am with kids!). It is very easy and inexpensive to buy these and you don't need to worry about them going off because they usually have a best before date of at least 4 years.

Why use herbs in tincture form?

People usually find them more convenient than herbal teas or other forms of herbal medicines that take time and effort to make.

They are very concentrated so only small doses are required e.g. drops. This is much easier to get into a child who is resistant to taking any medicine. So much simpler than pleading with them to drink a beaker of tea every day!

They are especially convenient if you are travelling or away from home. You only need to bring the small bottle/s. You don't need to pack bulky bags of dried herbs.

Diluting herbal tinctures

Herbal tinctures are usually best given to children diluted rather than neat, to reduce the impact of the alcohol content. The amount of alcohol in a dose of tincture is not harmful or poisonous but I think it's better to give children herbs in a form that tastes a little more gentle. I might be going over-board here but I've always preferred not to start an association between taking alcohol and feeling better...!

Concerns about the alcohol content

Here are options if you are concerned about the alcohol content.

- Reduce it by pouring the dose of tincture into a little boiled water. When it has cooled down, then give this to your child (don't burn her/him!). Alcohol has a low evaporation point so adding it to boiled water reduces the alcohol content a little, but it does not remove it entirely.
- Completely avoid this by using teas, vinegars, infused honey or syrups.

Tips for administering herbal tinctures (yucky!)

Try giving your child their herbal tincture (already diluted in water).

Add the dose to:

- Disguise the taste by mixing with water, milk, tea, juice etc. in your child's normal cup. Dosages of tinctures are so small, it is quite easy to hide them this way.
- Oral dosage syringe (if child resistant to taking medicine this is usually the easiest way to do it).
- A dosage beaker: if child happy to take herbal medicine.

Our Key Child-Friendly Herbs

The following herbs will cover the most common conditions that your child is likely to encounter.

I have divided them in to two categories. Herbs to give in ‘Normal Dosages’ or ‘Small Dosages’

Herbs to give in normal dosages:

Common name

- Calendula/marigold
- Chamomile
- Cleavers
- Elder berry
- Elder flower
- Lemon balm
- Lime flower
- Marshmallow
- Meadowsweet
- Nettle
- Oatstraw
- Plantain
- Red Clover
- Rose
- Thyme

Latin name

Calendula officinalis
Chamomilla recutita/Matricaria recutita
Galium aparine
Sambucus nigra fruct.
Sambucus nigra flos.
Melissa officinalis
Tilia europa
Althea officinalis
Filipendula ulmaria
Urtica dioica
Avena sativa
Plantago lanceolata or Plantago major
Trifolium pratense
Rosa spp. (so many varieties!)
Thymus vulgaris

Herbs to give in small dosages:

These herbs are given in a smaller amount because they have a strong flavour and action so only a smaller amount is required to have an effect.

- Mints: peppermint, spearmint etc. [Use ¼ normal herbal tincture dose for age]
- Rosemary [Use ½ normal herbal tincture dose for age]
- Cinnamon [Use 1/10 normal herbal tincture dose for age]
- Sedative herbs e.g. wild lettuce. [Use ¼ normal herbal tincture dose for age]

Dosage Guide by Age of child:

For the safe herbs I have listed above, the dosages are usually worked out this way:

- Put the tinctures into a dropper bottle.
- The dosage usually used is 1 drop per month old the child is.
- Give this dose 3 times per day (diluted in water etc.).

See these examples to help you with your maths!

1. For a 6 month old baby, give 6 drops diluted in the milk the child is feeding on, 3 times daily. Or, if breast fed, dilute the tincture in some water, put on a spoon and let the baby take it from the spoon. Or put the diluted tincture into a plastic dosage syringe and gently squirt it into your baby's mouth.
2. A 3 year old child, with asthma: 36 drops, given 3 times daily. If you don't want to count out 36 drops each time (!) then you can measure it out in mls instead. 20 drops are approx 1 ml. So this is a smidgen under 2 mls given 3 times daily.
3. A 7 year old child with hay fever: this is 84 drops given 3 times daily. So this is more easily counted as 4 ml given 3 times daily.
4. At age 12 children can take adult levels of safe herbs. So for the tinctures listed here this is usually 5 ml given 3 times daily.

Please note, for other herbs not on my 'safe for kids' list, the dosages may vary.

So if you want to use herbs other than the ones I've recommended during this course, please check the safety by asking a qualified herbalist.

