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Eyebright

Scientific Name(s): Euphrasia officinale L.

Common Name(s): Eyebright

[Medically reviewed](#) by Drugs.com. Last updated on Apr 22, 2024.

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Clinical Overview

Use

Eyebright preparations have been used to treat a variety of conditions, specifically inflammatory eye disease; however, clinical trial data are lacking to recommend use for any indication.

Dosing

Clinical studies are lacking to provide dosing guidance. Tinctures and extracts of the herb have been used; an orally administered homeopathic product was used in 1 study evaluating effects in preventing conjunctivitis. Various homeopathic eye drops and oral formulations are available commercially.

Contraindications

Contraindications have not been identified.

Pregnancy/Lactation

Avoid use. Information regarding safety and efficacy in pregnancy and lactation is lacking.

Interactions

None well documented.

Adverse Reactions

Multiple adverse effects, including nausea and constipation, confusion, weakness, sneezing, rhinitis, cough, dyspnea, insomnia, polyuria, and diaphoresis, may occur with 10 to 60 drops of eyebright tincture. Homeopathic doses are unlikely to cause adverse reactions because of the minimal amounts ingested. Only sterile ophthalmic preparations should be used.

Toxicology

Information regarding toxicology is limited.

Scientific Family

- Orobanchaceae (formerly Scrophulariaceae) (figwort)

Botany

E. officinalis is an annual, herbaceous, semiparasitic plant found throughout Europe, Asia, and North America.[Liu 2018](#) The plant is believed to have originated from European wild plants; however, many species are attributed to the genus *Euphrasia*, with *E. officinalis* considered a *nomen ambiguum* (Latin for "ambiguous name") in botany.[Duke 2002](#), [Khan 2010](#), [USDA 2020](#)

Synonyms include *Euphrasia rostkoviana* Hane and *Euphrasia stricta* J.P. Wolff ex J.F. Lehm[Duke 2002](#); however, the chemical constituents of these plants might differ.

History

Eyebright is thought to have been used for eye infections by the Greek philosopher Theophrastus (371-287 BC), sometimes known as the "father of botany," and by the Greek physician Dioscorides (AD 40-90).[Bartram 1998](#) The plant was used in traditional African American herbal medicine and has been used in homeopathy to treat conjunctivitis and other ocular inflammations.[Boyd 1984](#), [Lans 2007](#), [Leffler 2014](#)

Euphrasia was used as a 14th-century cure for "all evils of the eye," and an eyebright ale was described in the Elizabethan era. It was a component of British "herbal tobacco," which was smoked for chronic bronchial conditions and colds. Other early uses include treatments for allergies, cancer, cough, conjunctivitis, earache, epilepsy, headache, hoarseness, inflammation, jaundice, ophthalmia, rhinitis, skin ailments, and sore throat.[Leffler 2014](#)

Chemistry

Eyebright primarily contains tannins (approximately 12%) and gallotannins.[Barnes 2007](#), [Duke 1992](#) In addition, the plant contains minerals, vitamins, fats, and volatile oils (approximately 0.2%). Gas chromatography-mass spectrometry analysis of the volatile compounds revealed more than 70 constituents, including n-hexadecanoic acid as the main constituent, followed by thymol, myristic acid, linalool, and anethole.[Novy 2015](#)

Iridoid glycosides (eg, aucubin [0.05%], catalpol, euphroside, ixoroside) and phenylethanoid glycosides (eg, dehydrodiconiferyl alcohol 4-beta-D-glucoside, acteoside, eukovoside) are also prominent in eyebright extracts. Various phenolic compounds and flavonoids (eg, apigenin) have also been identified.[Barnes 2007](#), [Blazics 2011](#), [Duke 1992](#), [Petrichenko 2005](#), [Shuya 2004](#), [Tóth 2014](#)

Uses and Pharmacology

Antihyperglycemic activity

Animal data

In a study of rats, an aqueous extract of *Euphrasia* leaves demonstrated hypoglycemic effects.[Porchezian 2000](#)

Antimicrobial activity

In vitro data

Antimicrobial activity of eyebright essential oil (*E. rostkoviana*) against organisms associated with eye infections was tested using 96-well microtiter plates. The essential oil showed antimicrobial effects against *Enterococcus faecalis*, *Escherichia coli*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Staphylococcus epidermidis*, and *Candida albicans*. The best activity was observed against gram-positive bacteria, for which the extract had a minimum inhibitory concentration of 512 mcg/mL. [Novy 2015](#)

Antioxidant activity

Experimental data

Antioxidant activity of the glycoside acteoside has been demonstrated in laboratory experiments of *E. rostkoviana*. [Blazics 2011](#)

Ophthalmic anti-inflammatory/Antioxidant effects

Animal and in vitro data

Anti-inflammatory effects have been demonstrated in rodents. [Petrichenko 2005](#) The leaves of the plant have been traditionally used to treat eye conditions in chickens in Trinidad and Tobago. [Lans 2007](#)

Anti-inflammatory activity of *E. officinalis* L. preparations has been shown using human corneal cells, with decreased cytokine expression observed. [Paduch 2014](#)) Protective effects of *E. officinalis* (95% ethanol extract) against ultraviolet B (UVB)–irradiated photoaging in normal human dermal fibroblasts were demonstrated, possibly due to reduced oxidative stress, proinflammatory activity, and cell apoptosis. [Liu 2018](#)

Clinical data

The use of homeopathic-strength eye drops has been evaluated in an open-label study of patients with noninfective conjunctivitis (N=65). More than 95% of patients experienced complete or clear improvement of symptoms within 3 to 17 days of starting Euphrasia drops, with optimal results occurring with administration of 1 drop 3 times per day. No serious adverse events were observed. [Bielory 2003](#), [Stoss 2000](#) Another large, double-blind study in students during a viral conjunctivitis epidemic (N=994) examined use of orally administered homeopathic Euphrasia 30C (C=centesimal dilution [1 part in 100]) and found no effect in preventing conjunctivitis compared with placebo. [Mokkapatti 1992](#)

In a double-blind, randomized, controlled trial, use of Euphrasia eye drops was evaluated in preterm and term neonates with neonatal obliterated nasolacrimal duct/dacryocystitis (N=84). Patients randomized to the Euphrasia group (n=42) received Euphrasia eye drops in single doses of 0.4 mL instilled 4 times a day, while the control group (n=42) received single 0.4 mL doses of sodium chloride 0.9% instilled 4 times a day, for a duration of 96 hours. Results showed no difference regarding treatment success, which was achieved in 34 (81%) patients in the Euphrasia group versus 30 (71.4%) in the control group ($P=0.31$). [Gerstenberg 2019](#)

Dosing

Clinical studies are lacking to provide dosing guidance. Tinctures and extracts of the herb have been used [Duke 2002](#); an orally administered homeopathic product was used in 1 study evaluating effects in preventing conjunctivitis. [Mokkapatti 1992](#) Various homeopathic eye drops and oral formulations are available commercially.

Standard herbal references list 2 to 4 g of the herb as an infusion, 2 to 4 mL as a liquid herb extract (1:1 in 25% alcohol solution), and 2 to 6 mL as an herb tincture (1:5 in 45% alcohol), all for use 3 times a day.[Barnes 2007](#), [Duke 2002](#)

Pregnancy / Lactation

Avoid use. Information regarding safety and efficacy in pregnancy and lactation is lacking.

Interactions

None well documented.

Adverse Reactions

Multiple adverse effects, including nausea and constipation, confusion, weakness, sneezing, rhinitis, cough, dyspnea, insomnia, polyuria, and diaphoresis, may occur with 10 to 60 drops of eyebright tincture.[Duke 2002](#) Homeopathic doses are unlikely to cause adverse reactions because of the minimal amounts ingested, and none were reported in a large study evaluating use of Euphrasia "pills" for prevention of conjunctivitis in students (N=994).[Mokkapatti 1992](#) Only sterile ophthalmic preparations should be used.[Duke 2002](#)

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Toxicology

Information regarding toxicology is limited. In acute toxicity tests in mice, toxicity was observed at eyebright doses of

approximately 4,500 mg/kg,[Petrichenko 2005](#) whereas in rats, no toxicity was observed with eyebright aqueous extract dosages of up to 6 g/kg.[Porchezian 2000](#)

Index Terms

- *Euphrasia rostkoviana* Hane
- *Euphrasia stricta* J.P. Wolff ex J.F. Lehm

References

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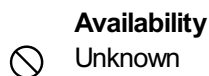
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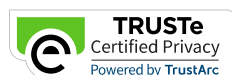
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