

Dosing Guidelines

Liquid herbal medicines are integral to modern western herbal medicine and naturopathy. They provide advantages which simply cannot be achieved with any other form of natural medicine. You are not forced into using a specific combination of herbs, and you have enormous flexibility for individualising your treatment to create a bespoke herbal medicine for your patient.

The key though is *dosage*.

Posology – The Art & Science of Dosing

There are a number of different philosophies of dosage in herbal medicine. Some emphasise using higher dosages (pharmacological or heroic dosing), some lower (drop dosing), some incorporate many herbs into a formula, some only use a few.

The important thing to remember is that there is no single philosophy which is “better” or more “correct” than another. The individual is the ultimate determinant of dosage. All philosophies have their place; however it is good to have some guidelines to work from.

The Herbal Extract Company of Australia Dosages

How are our dosages derived?

They are based on a number of sources, including founder Lyndsay Shume’s more than 50 years of clinical experience. Most specifically they are based on standard reference texts such as the British Herbal Pharmacopoeia (1983), British Pharmaceutical Codex (1923) and the British Herbal Compendium.

They are expressed in daily, as well as weekly dosages to accommodate different formulating methods.

The Herbal Extract Company dosage recommendations will differ from that of other manufacturers because they are based on the manufacturers’ opinions. Remember they are just what they are called – recommendations. They are not maximum toxic doses but an effective dosage range. Recommendations are to be used as a guide only, so don’t be restricted by them.

The following are tried and tested guidelines from Ian Breakspear*. They should give you the confidence and framework to individualise your prescriptions as required.

Prescribing for Results

1. Therapeutic Objectives

A list of objectives allows you to more easily choose your herbs and give you something against which to measure your patient outcomes (results). Some pointers:

- Make your objectives clear and focused. “Fix arthritis” is too broad. Perhaps start with “reduce joint inflammation” and “improve joint mobility”.
- Don’t try to do everything at once. Often the road to health and healing can be a long one, especially in chronic diseases. Focus on a smaller set of objectives first, then work your way towards longer term objectives as the patient improves.
- Balance your objectives. Make sure they address not just symptoms, but also address any known causes and tonify and support the affected body systems.

2. Choosing your Herbs

The question is how many herbs to choose? This in part depends upon your philosophy. However, in the folk traditions of herbal medicine from which some of our most effective treatments are derived, formulations were often quite simple. A good guide is 3-6 herbs. Often the more well matched your herb choices are to your objectives, the fewer you need.

For instance, whilst Liquorice is a good anti-inflammatory, if your patient has osteoarthritis you may be better off choosing Guaiacum or Devil’s Claw which are more specific.

3. Prioritising your Herbs

In the list of herbs you are going to use, some will be more immediately important than others. Take for example, a patient who is fatigued constantly after living a very fast work and social life for many years. He is always tired, and has been getting lots of colds and flu lately. You’ve chosen the following herbs:

- Siberian Ginseng
- Echinacea
- Liquorice
- Oats

A great formula! In this formula there are two key herbs which will get quick results. They are Siberian Ginseng and Echinacea. These will become your *Primary Medicines*, the medicines which reliably and quickly achieve your main objectives.

The Liquorice and Oats are great additions. They deal with the long term objectives of restoring his adrenal function and tonifying his nervous system. They also nicely complement the Siberian Ginseng and Echinacea. These will become your *Assistant Medicines* or adjuvants.

Choosing Dosage

Liquid prescribing allows flexibility, it is important to use this to its fullest. This means not placing artificial restrictions on your choice of dosage. The key is to remember a simple mantra:

“Use what you need to use for the patient.”

Don’t restrict how much herb you put in a bottle simply because it won’t fit. Your choice of dosage should be based on what the patient needs, not on how much will fit in a bottle. So how do you do this?

1. Using Weekly and Daily Dosages

Weekly dosages are just one way to look at dosage ranges for herbs. It is how much the patient should consume in a week. You could break this down to a daily dose (by dividing by 7) or even a twice or three times a day dose (divide weekly by 14 or 21), but weekly dosages are often easier to work with.

However dosage ranges can vary quite a lot. Take Globe Artichoke for instance – its weekly dose ranges from around 20-80mL.

How much should you use? This depends upon whether you’ve chosen it as a Primary Medicine or an Assistant Medicine.

- Primary Medicines generally need higher doses. They will usually be prescribed at the upper end of their dosage range.
- Assistant Medicines often only require smaller dosages. So they will usually be prescribed at the lower end of their dosage range.

2. Constructing the Formula

Using our previous example, let’s build up a formula based on weekly dosages.

| Herb | Dosage Range | Priority | Amount per Week |
|----------------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Siberian Ginseng | 21-42mL/week | Primary Medicine | 40mL |
| Echinacea Blend | 21-42mL/week | Primary Medicine | 40mL |
| Liquorice | 42-105mL/week | Assistant Medicine | 40mL |
| Oats | 12.6-42mL/week | Assistant Medicine | 20mL |
| Total amount: | | | 140mL |

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The total is 140mL. This is how much the patient needs to take in one week to achieve the results we want. From this you can work out the patient's daily dose by dividing by 7. In this case it will be 20mL per day.

If you want to give this twice or three times daily, all you need to do is divide the daily dose by 2 or 3 respectively. In our case we want to give it twice a day, so the patient's final dose is 10mL twice daily. The key is that whatever formula you come up with, the patient needs to take that in the designated time frame (in this case 1 week).

3. Building the Bottle

Of course you are not going to give the patient 140mL to take away with them. Most of the time we dispense in 100mL, 200mL or 500mL bottles. So the final step is to scale up to your dispensing bottle.

Say we want to see this patient in three weeks. That means he will need 420mL to last three weeks. Therefore we will choose a 500mL bottle to make sure he has enough to last the three weeks. To work out how much of each herb to put in the bottle, you can do the following:

Size of bottle / amount per week = factor

$$500\text{mL} / 140\text{mL} = 3.57$$

To make it easier, just round it to 3.5. Now multiply each herb by the factor (in this case 3.5) and you have your bottle!

| Herb | Amount per Week | Factor | Amount per Bottle |
|----------------------|-----------------|---------|-------------------|
| Siberian Ginseng | 40mL | x 3.5 = | 140mL |
| Echinacea Blend | 40mL | x 3.5 = | 140mL |
| Liquorice | 40mL | x 3.5 = | 140mL |
| Oats | 20mL | x 3.5 = | 70mL |
| Total amount: | | | 490mL |

Advantages of Herbal Fluid Extracts

- Flexibility of formulation and dosage
- Individualised prescribing of unique formulation
- Point of Difference: They are premium products available exclusively to practitioners.
- Excellent Outcomes
- Minimal processing and no additives so the medicine is more likely to mirror the original plant chemistry
- Greater absorption Convenient and easily blended Economical
- Long shelf life

Conclusion

Effective dosage strategies are essential to good patient outcomes.

Whatever dosage system you use, remember this: The key differentiating factor between a herbalist or naturopath, and an orthodox medical practitioner, is our focus on individualised care. The individual is first and foremost. If the majority of our prescribing is pre-formulated tablets, capsules and powders, we risk losing touch with the very core of what it means to be a herbalist or naturopath. Herbal liquids give us the ability to prescribe specifically for the individual. When combined with a good dosage system, it will give your patients the results they deserve and keep them coming back to you for care they cannot get elsewhere.

*Ian Breakspear has been a herbalist and naturopath for 18 years, including 17 years of clinical experience and 14 years of teaching experience. In addition to his clinical qualifications he holds a Masters in Herbal Medicines from the University of Sydney, and is a Fellow of the NHAA. Ian was involved in the Naturopathy Program at the University of Western Sydney for 6 years, before moving to his current position as Program Director - Natural Therapies at Australasian College of Natural Therapies (ACNT).

For eight years Ian was an elected representative on the Board of Directors of the National Herbalists Association of Australia, culminating in the position of Vice-President from 2005 to 2009. In this time he managed a number of major projects including the creation of the modern Course Accreditation System in 2002/3. He currently sits on the peer-review panel of the Australian Journal of Medical Herbalism and is published in journals in Australia and the US.

Compliance

If your patient finds the taste of liquid herbs a hurdle try getting them to:

- Use the old adage "A spoonful of sugar (or honey) helps the medicine go down" and put their dose into a glass of sweet juice, preferably freshly squeezed. Blackcurrant and pineapple are popular. This method is not appropriate if you require a bitter action.
- Ask them to water down their dose (e.g. add 10mL of water to a 5mL dose) and follow up with a chaser of water.
- Take the medicine with food to help correct the taste.
- Suck on some ice before taking the dose.
- For children try to make it fun by using a curly straw or putting the dose into jelly set in an ice tray.