

Glossary of Herbs Therapeutic Actions – Biomedical and Traditional Terminology

Abortifacient: produces abortion
Adaptogenic: decreases the harmful effects of stress
Alterative: promotes healthy changes in the organism
Analgesic: relieves pain
Anaphrodisiac: subdues sexual desire
Anesthetic: produces insensibility to pain
Anodyne: relieves pain
Antacid: counteracts acidity
Antibacterial: kills or prevents growth of bacteria
Antidote: counteracts effect of poison
Antiemetic: prevents vomiting
Anti-fungal: inhibits growth or multiplication of, or destroys fungi
Antigalactic: diminishes secretion of milk
Anthelmintic: destroys parasites
Antihypnotic: prevents sleep
Anti-inflammatory: reduces inflammation
Antimicrobial: helps destroy or resist pathogenic micro-organisms
Anti-rheumatic: eases inflammation and pain in joints and muscles
Antiseptic: a topical antimicrobial
Antispasmodic: relieves cramps, prevents or relaxes muscle spasms
Aperient: very mild laxative
Aphrodisiac: increases sexual arousal and activity
Aromatic: pleasant odour, stimulates digestive systems
Astringent: contracts and firms tissue, reduces secretions & discharges
Bitter: increases tone and activity of gastric mucosa
Calmative: gently calms nerves
Cardiac: heart stimulant or tonic
Carminative: prevents or relieves flatulence
Cathartic: hastens or increases evacuation of the bowels
Cholagogue: stimulates flow of bile
Demulcent: soothing to mucus membranes
Deodorant: removes/corrects foul odours
Depurative: removes impurities from the body, cleansing action
Diaphoretic: increases circulation
Digestant: aids in digestion
Disinfectant: destroys the cause of infection
Diuretic: increases secretion of urine
Emetic: causes vomiting
Emmenagogue: promotes menstruation
Emollient: softening, soothing
Expectorant: promotes mucus discharge from respiratory passages

Febrifuge: reduces fever
Galactagogue: promotes flow of milk in nursing mothers
Hemostatic: arrests blood flow
Hepatic: stimulates function of liver
Hypertensive: causes increase in blood pressure
Hypotensive: causes reduction in blood pressure
Hypnotic: induces sleep
Irritant: excites inflammation
Laxative: produces gentle action of the bowels
Mucilage: contains gelatinous or gummy constituents
Narcotic: induces sleep or unconsciousness
Nervine: calms nerves
Nutritive: nourishes and sustains life
Parturient: hastens labour
Pectoral: relieves diseases of the lungs
Prophylactic: prevents disease
Purgative: strong laxative
Pyrogenic: produces fever
Refrigerant: cooling , reduces heat
Relaxant: relieves tension, relaxes
Restorative: brings back normal function and vitality
Rubefacient: increases superficial circulation, producing irritation
Sedative: diminishes vital functions
Stimulant: excites or increases vital action
Stomachic: induces healthy action of stomach
Styptic: stops bleeding
Sudorific: produces perspiration
Tonic: produces permanent increase in functional tone of the system
Toxic: poisonous
Vermifuge: destroys or expels worms
Vulnerary: stimulates healing of wounds