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COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW ON HERBAL ANTISEPTIC BALM: COMPOSITION, PHARMACOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES, AND FORMULATION ASPECTS

Muskan Agrahari, Muskan Raj, Nashra Afreen, Nakul Jaiswal, *Nalneesh Gupta, Dr. Alok Kumar Shukla

Babu Sunder Singh College of Pharmacy, Nigohan, Lucknow, U.P., India.

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***Corresponding Author**
Nalneesh Gupta
Babu Sunder Singh College of Pharmacy, Nigohan, Lucknow, U.P., India.

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ABSTRACT

Herbal antiseptic balms are widely used topical formulations that combine essential oils and plant extracts to provide antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, analgesic, antioxidant, and wound-healing effects. This review summarises the botanical ingredients, key phytochemicals, pharmacological activities, formulation approaches, and safety considerations associated with herbal antiseptic balms. Essential oils such as tea tree, eucalyptus, clove, peppermint, and camphor contribute potent bioactivities through terpenoids and phenolic compounds, while flavonoids and alkaloids enhance anti-inflammatory and tissue-repair mechanisms. Formulation aspects—including base selection, incorporation of herbal actives, physicochemical evaluation, and stability assessment—are essential to ensure therapeutic efficacy and product consistency. Safety evaluations highlight the importance of concentration limits for essential oils to prevent irritation or toxicity, supported by regulatory guidelines from WHO, EMA, FDA, and IFRA. Overall, herbal antiseptic balms remain valuable therapeutic agents for managing minor wounds, skin infections, inflammation, and related conditions, offering natural, multifunctional, and accessible alternatives to synthetic topical treatments.

KEYWORDS: WHO, EMA, FDA, and IFRA.

1. INTRODUCTION

Herbal antiseptic balms are widely used topical preparations formulated with medicinal plant extracts and essential oils to provide antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, analgesic, and wound-healing effects. Their popularity stems from the long-standing use of botanical remedies in traditional systems such as Ayurveda, Siddha, and Traditional Chinese Medicine, where plant-based balms have historically been applied for cuts, burns, infections, muscle pain, headaches, and skin inflammations.[1] These formulations commonly incorporate essential oils such as eucalyptus, camphor, clove, and tea tree oil, all of which possess well-documented antimicrobial and antiseptic properties supported by modern pharmacological studies.[2,3] In recent years, herbal balms have gained further relevance due to increasing public preference for natural, safe, and cost-effective topical agents, as well as rising concerns about antimicrobial resistance associated with synthetic antiseptics. Scientific investigations have demonstrated that phytochemicals such as terpenoids, phenolics, flavonoids, and alkaloids exert synergistic antimicrobial and wound-healing actions when combined in multicomponent herbal formulations, making balms an effective delivery system for these bioactive molecules.[3,4] Herbal topical preparations have been used for centuries in traditional medicine systems across the world for the management of skin infections, wounds, inflammation, and pain. Systems such as Ayurveda, Siddha, and Traditional Chinese Medicine describe numerous plant-based balms and ointments composed of botanical extracts, essential oils, and natural resins applied externally for healing and antiseptic purposes.[5] These preparations function through the combined actions of their phytochemicals—such as terpenoids, phenolics, alkaloids, and flavonoids—which exert antimicrobial, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and analgesic effects that aid in tissue repair and protection against pathogens.[6] Their longstanding use demonstrates their safety profile and therapeutic relevance, which continues to be recognized in modern integrative healthcare practices. In contemporary pharmaceutical science, herbal topical agents have gained renewed attention due to increasing concerns over the adverse effects of synthetic antiseptics and the global rise of antimicrobial resistance. Essential oils like tea tree oil, eucalyptus oil, clove oil, and thyme oil have shown potent antibacterial and antifungal activity in laboratory and clinical studies, supporting their role as natural alternatives for topical antiseptics.[7,8] Furthermore, modern formulation techniques—such as Nanoemulsions, hydrogels, and enhanced-permeation systems—have improved the stability and bioavailability of herbal constituents, making these preparations more effective and widely accepted in both therapeutic and cosmetic applications.[9]

1.1 Importance of Antiseptic Balms in Traditional and Modern Medicine

Antiseptic balms hold significant importance in both traditional and modern medical systems due to their capacity to prevent infections, reduce inflammation, and promote wound healing through natural bioactive compounds. In traditional practices such as Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani, herbal balms containing plant extracts and essential oils were routinely applied to cuts, burns, insect bites, and skin infections, with documented benefits attributed to their antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and soothing properties.[10] These formulations often contained aromatic plants such as *Cinnamomum camphora*, *Melaleuca alternifolia*, *Syzygium aromaticum*, and *Ocimum sanctum*, which were valued for rapid symptomatic relief and broad-spectrum antiseptic activity. In modern medicine, the relevance of herbal antiseptic balms has increased due to consumer preference for natural and safer topical alternatives, as well as concerns about skin irritation and microbial resistance associated with synthetic antiseptics. Scientific studies have demonstrated that essential oils like tea tree oil, eucalyptus oil, and clove oil possess potent antibacterial and antifungal actions comparable to standard topical antimicrobials, supporting their integration into commercial balms and ointments.[11,12]

2. Botanical Ingredients Used in Herbal Antiseptic Balms

Herbal antiseptic balms commonly incorporate a variety of medicinal plants and essential oils known for their broad-spectrum antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and wound-healing properties. These botanical ingredients, such as eucalyptus, tea tree, clove, camphor, and peppermint, contain diverse phytochemicals—primarily terpenoids, phenolics, and flavonoids—that act synergistically to inhibit microbial growth and support tissue repair.[13] Traditional medicine systems have long utilised these plants in topical preparations for treating cuts, burns, skin infections, and inflammatory conditions, and modern pharmacological studies have validated many of these therapeutic actions through in vitro and in vivo evidence.[14] The selection of plant ingredients in commercial balms is typically based on their antimicrobial potency, volatile oil content, dermal penetration ability, and safety profile. Essential oils such as *Melaleuca alternifolia* (tea tree oil), *Eucalyptus globulus* oil, *Cinnamomum camphora* (camphor), and *Syzygium aromaticum* (clove oil) have demonstrated strong antibacterial and antifungal actions against pathogens commonly associated with skin and soft-tissue infections.[11,15]

2.1 Common Medicinal Plants in Antiseptic Balms

Herbal antiseptic balms typically contain a combination of medicinal plants chosen for their strong antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and soothing properties. Among the most frequently used ingredients, tea tree (*Melaleuca alternifolia*), eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*), clove (*Syzygium aromaticum*), camphor (*Cinnamomum camphora*), and peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) are prominent due to their high essential-oil content and proven therapeutic effects.[16] Tea tree oil is widely recognized for its broad-spectrum antibacterial and antifungal activities, particularly against *Staphylococcus aureus* and dermatophytes, making it a key component of many topical antiseptic formulations.[11] Eucalyptus oil contributes both antimicrobial and decongestant effects, while clove oil provides potent antiseptic and analgesic actions due to its high eugenol content.[17] Camphor and peppermint oils are commonly added for their counter-irritant, cooling, and analgesic effects, which enhance balm functionality in relieving pain, itching, and minor skin irritation. These plants work synergistically; studies have shown that combinations of essential oils can produce enhanced antimicrobial activity compared to individual components, due to interactive effects between terpenoids and phenolic constituents.[18]

2.2 Key Phytochemicals with Antimicrobial and Wound-Healing Properties

The therapeutic value of herbal antiseptic balms is primarily attributed to their rich content of bioactive phytochemicals, particularly terpenoids, phenolics, flavonoids, and alkaloids, which exhibit strong antimicrobial and wound-healing activities. Terpenoids—such as 1,8-cineole from eucalyptus, eugenol from clove, menthol from peppermint, and terpinen-4-ol from tea tree oil—are well documented for their ability to disrupt microbial cell membranes, leading to leakage of cellular contents and rapid bactericidal effects.[11,17,19] These compounds also demonstrate antifungal actions by inhibiting germ tube formation, hyphal growth, and ergosterol synthesis, which is essential for fungal membrane integrity.[16,19]

Phenolic compounds, including thymol, carvacrol, and eugenol, possess potent antiseptic and antioxidant properties that support tissue repair by reducing oxidative stress and modulating inflammatory pathways.[17,20] Flavonoids such as quercetin and apigenin contribute additional anti-inflammatory and wound-healing effects through inhibition of pro-inflammatory mediators and enhancement of fibroblast activity.[20]

2.3 Synergistic Interactions Among Herbal Components

Synergistic interactions among herbal ingredients play a crucial role in enhancing the overall antimicrobial and therapeutic efficacy of antiseptic balms. When multiple essential oils or plant extracts are combined, their phytochemicals—such as terpenoids, phenolics, flavonoids, and alkaloids—can interact to produce stronger antimicrobial effects than when used individually. For example, combinations of tea tree, clove, eucalyptus, and peppermint oils have been shown to produce enhanced bacterial cell membrane disruption and increased inhibition zones due to complementary mechanisms of action among terpinen-4-ol, eugenol, 1,8-cineole, and menthol.[18,19] Studies demonstrate that these synergistic effects can reduce the minimum inhibitory concentrations (MICs) required for antimicrobial activity, making multi-ingredient herbal balms more potent and efficient for topical use.[21]

Synergy also extends to anti-inflammatory and wound-healing activities. Phenolic compounds like eugenol and thymol can enhance the anti-inflammatory effects of flavonoids such as quercetin and apigenin, leading to improved modulation of pro-inflammatory cytokines and faster tissue repair.[20,22]

3. Phytochemical Composition of Herbal Antiseptic Balms

Herbal antiseptic balms derive their therapeutic effects from a diverse range of phytochemicals contributed by essential oils and plant extracts. These include major classes such as terpenoids, phenolics, flavonoids, alkaloids, tannins, and glycosides, which collectively provide antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and wound-healing properties. Essential oils commonly used in balms—such as eucalyptus, tea tree, clove, peppermint, and camphor—are rich in monoterpenes and phenylpropanoids, including 1,8-cineole, terpinen-4-ol, menthol, and eugenol, each known to exert strong antibacterial and antifungal actions through cell membrane disruption and metabolic inhibition.[11,17,19]

Phenolic compounds such as thymol and carvacrol enhance oxidative stability and antiseptic activity, while flavonoids like quercetin and apigenin support tissue regeneration by modulating inflammatory pathways and promoting collagen synthesis.[20,22] Additionally, certain balm formulations incorporate resinous materials or herbal extracts containing tannins and alkaloids, which contribute further antimicrobial and astringent effects by precipitating microbial proteins and reinforcing skin barrier function.[23]

3.1 Essential Oils (Eucalyptus, Camphor, Menthol, Clove Oil, Tea Tree Oil)

Essential oils constitute the core active components of most herbal antiseptic balms, owing to their potent antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, analgesic, and counter-irritant properties. Eucalyptus oil, rich in 1,8-cineole, exhibits strong antibacterial and antifungal activity and is widely used for wound cleansing and respiratory relief through its mucolytic properties.[24] Camphor, obtained from *Cinnamomum camphora*, functions as a counter-irritant and mild antiseptic, enhancing local blood circulation and providing relief from pain and skin irritation.[25] Menthol, primarily from *Mentha piperita*, contributes cooling, analgesic, and antipruritic effects through TRPM8 receptor activation, making it a key ingredient in balms for soothing inflamed or itchy skin.[26]

Clove oil, characterised by its high eugenol content, displays potent antiseptic, antioxidant, and analgesic activity, especially effective against *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Candida albicans*, and other wound-associated pathogens.[17] Tea tree oil (*Melaleuca alternifolia* oil), containing terpinen-4-ol as its main bioactive component, has broad-spectrum antimicrobial effects and is particularly effective against antibiotic-resistant strains such as MRSA, making it one of the most widely validated essential oils for topical antiseptic use.[11]

3.2 Phenolics, Terpenoids, Alkaloids, and Flavonoids

Herbal antiseptic balms contain a diverse range of secondary metabolites—particularly phenolics, terpenoids, alkaloids, and flavonoids—which contribute significantly to their antimicrobial, antioxidant, and wound-healing properties. Phenolic compounds, such as thymol, carvacrol, and eugenol, exhibit strong antiseptic activity by disrupting microbial membranes and inhibiting essential enzymes, while their antioxidant capacity helps reduce oxidative damage at wound sites.[17,20] Terpenoids, including monoterpenes (e.g., menthol, 1,8-cineole, terpinen-4-ol) and sesquiterpenes, are known for broad-spectrum antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory effects, acting through membrane permeabilisation and modulation of inflammatory mediators.[19,24] Flavonoids, such as quercetin, apigenin, and luteolin, enhance wound repair by promoting fibroblast proliferation, regulating collagen synthesis, and suppressing pro-inflammatory cytokines, including TNF-α and IL-6.[22,27] Their antioxidant properties also protect skin tissues from free-radical damage, accelerating the healing process. Alkaloids present in some herbal extracts used in balms contribute additional antimicrobial and analgesic effects by interfering with microbial protein synthesis and modulating neuronal pain pathways.[28]

3.3 Analytical Techniques for Phytochemical Profiling

Phytochemical profiling of herbal antiseptic balms requires accurate and sensitive analytical techniques to identify and quantify the diverse bioactive constituents present in essential oils and plant extracts. Gas chromatography–mass spectrometry (GC–MS) is the most widely used method for essential oil analysis, as it effectively separates and identifies volatile compounds such as monoterpenes and phenylpropanoids, including 1,8-cineole, menthol, eugenol, and terpinen-4-ol.[29] High-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) is commonly applied for the detection of non-volatile phytochemicals such as flavonoids, phenolic acids, alkaloids, and glycosides, providing high resolution and quantitative accuracy essential for standardising herbal formulations.[30]

In addition, Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) and UV–visible spectrophotometry are frequently used as complementary tools for the rapid detection of functional groups and overall chemical fingerprints of herbal ingredients.[31] Nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectroscopy further assists in structural elucidation of isolated compounds, allowing detailed characterization of complex plant constituents in balm formulations.[32]

4. Pharmacological Activities of Herbal Antiseptic Balm Components

Herbal antiseptic balms exhibit a broad range of pharmacological activities due to the presence of potent bioactive constituents derived from essential oils and plant extracts. Their primary therapeutic actions include antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, analgesic, antioxidant, and wound-healing effects, each supported by established pharmacological mechanisms. Essential oils such as tea tree, eucalyptus, clove, and peppermint contain high concentrations of terpenoids and phenolic compounds that exert strong antibacterial and antifungal activities by disrupting microbial membranes, inhibiting enzyme systems, and preventing biofilm formation.[11,19,29] These antimicrobial effects make herbal balms effective for managing minor cuts, burns, insect bites, and localized skin infections.

In addition to their antiseptic properties, herbal balms provide significant anti-inflammatory and analgesic benefits, largely attributed to compounds such as menthol, camphor, eugenol, thymol, and flavonoids. These constituents modulate pro-inflammatory mediators, reduce oxidative stress, and activate sensory receptors, resulting in pain relief and reduced tissue irritation.[20,26,27] Furthermore, many balm components enhance wound healing by stimulating

fibroblast proliferation, collagen synthesis, and re-epithelialization—key processes required for tissue repair.[22]

4.1 Antimicrobial and Antiseptic Activity

Herbal antiseptic balms demonstrate strong antimicrobial activity primarily due to essential oils rich in terpenoids and phenolic compounds that act against a wide spectrum of bacteria, fungi, and certain viruses. Tea tree oil (*Melaleuca alternifolia*), one of the most common components, exhibits potent bactericidal action through membrane disruption and leakage of intracellular contents, showing efficacy against *Staphylococcus aureus*, MRSA, and *Candida albicans*.[11,19] Clove oil, dominated by eugenol, displays strong antiseptic and antifungal activity by inhibiting microbial enzymes and compromising membrane integrity, making it effective against pathogens frequently associated with skin and wound infections.[17]

Eucalyptus oil, rich in 1,8-cineole, has been shown to inhibit both Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria, including *E. coli*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, and *Bacillus subtilis*, contributing to its widespread use in topical antiseptic preparations.[29] Additionally, peppermint and thyme oils contain phenolic monoterpenes such as thymol and carvacrol, which exert synergistic antimicrobial effects when combined with other essential oils due to complementary mechanisms of membrane destabilisation and metabolic inhibition.[20,21]

4.2 Anti-inflammatory and Analgesic Properties

Herbal antiseptic balms exert significant anti-inflammatory and analgesic effects due to the presence of bioactive compounds such as menthol, camphor, eugenol, thymol, and various flavonoids. Menthol, a major constituent of *Mentha piperita*, activates TRPM8 cold receptors in the skin, producing a cooling sensation that reduces pain perception while simultaneously decreasing local inflammation.[26] Camphor, widely used in topical balms, functions as a counter-irritant, enhancing dermal blood flow and modulating sensory neurons to provide relief from muscle aches, joint discomfort, and inflammatory skin conditions.[25] Eugenol from clove oil contributes potent analgesic and anti-inflammatory actions by inhibiting cyclooxygenase (COX) enzymes and reducing the synthesis of prostaglandins, thereby alleviating localized pain and swelling.[17] Flavonoids such as quercetin and apigenin further support anti-inflammatory activity by downregulating pro-inflammatory cytokines, including TNF-α, IL-1β, and IL-6, which accelerates tissue recovery and improve healing outcomes.[22,27]

4.3 Antioxidant Activity

Herbal antiseptic balms possess notable antioxidant activity due to the presence of phenolic compounds, flavonoids, and certain terpenoids that help neutralise reactive oxygen species (ROS) and prevent oxidative damage at wound or inflammation sites. Phenolics such as eugenol, thymol, and carvacrol exhibit strong free-radical-scavenging ability, which contributes to reduced lipid peroxidation and protection of skin cells under oxidative stress.[17,20] Flavonoids, including quercetin, luteolin, and apigenin, further enhance antioxidant defence by stabilising free radicals, chelating metal ions, and upregulating endogenous antioxidant enzymes such as superoxide dismutase (SOD) and catalase.[22,27] Terpenoids such as 1,8-cineole and terpinen-4-ol also demonstrate moderate antioxidant effects, complementing the actions of phenolics and flavonoids to improve overall tissue recovery and reduce inflammation-associated oxidative stress.[29]

4.4 Wound-Healing and Tissue-Repair Effects

Herbal antiseptic balms exhibit significant wound-healing and tissue-repair properties due to their rich content of terpenoids, flavonoids, phenolics, and essential oils that act on multiple phases of the healing process. Essential oil components like terpinen-4-ol (tea tree oil) and 1,8-cineole (eucalyptus oil) promote wound repair by enhancing fibroblast proliferation and accelerating re-epithelialization, both of which are essential for restoring damaged skin tissue.[19,29] Phenolic compounds such as eugenol and thymol support wound-healing by reducing microbial load, minimizing inflammation, and protecting tissue from oxidative stress—factors that collectively improve the rate and quality of healing.[17,20] Flavonoids like quercetin, apigenin, and luteolin further contribute to tissue repair through collagen synthesis enhancement, modulation of transforming growth factor-β (TGF-β), and suppression of pro-inflammatory cytokines that delay wound closure.[22,27]

4.5 Additional Therapeutic Actions (Decongestant, Counter-Irritant Effects)

Beyond their antimicrobial and wound-healing properties, herbal antiseptic balms provide several additional therapeutic actions, notably decongestant and counter-irritant effects, which enhance their versatility. Essential oils such as eucalyptus and peppermint exert strong decongestant effects through activation of cold receptors in the nasal mucosa, leading to improved airflow perception and relief from nasal blockage—mechanisms supported by evidence showing that 1,8-cineole and menthol improve respiratory comfort without altering actual airway resistance.[26,33] These properties make many herbal balms beneficial for topical

application on the chest or nose during colds and mild respiratory infections. Counter-irritant effects, produced mainly by camphor and menthol, work by stimulating sensory nerve endings to create sensations of cooling or warmth, thereby diverting attention from deeper muscular or joint discomfort. This mechanism, mediated through activation of TRPM8 and modulation of nociceptive pathways, results in alleviation of musculoskeletal pain and pruritus.[25,26] Additionally, clove oil's eugenol contributes mild anaesthetic effects, further enhancing local pain relief.[17]

5. Formulation Aspects of Herbal Antiseptic Balms

The formulation of herbal antiseptic balms involves careful selection of base materials, essential oils, and plant extracts to ensure optimal therapeutic efficacy, stability, and patient acceptability. Balms typically consist of a semisolid hydrophobic base—such as beeswax, petroleum jelly, paraffin, or herbal oils—that provides occlusion, enhances dermal penetration, and protects the affected area from environmental contaminants.[34] Into this base, essential oils like eucalyptus, tea tree, peppermint, clove, and camphor are incorporated due to their well-established antimicrobial, analgesic, and anti-inflammatory properties. The choice and concentration of these oils must be optimised to achieve therapeutic potency while minimizing dermal irritation, as excessive levels of certain essential oils (e.g., eugenol, menthol, camphor) may cause sensitisation or redness in sensitive individuals.[25,35]

Stability is a critical consideration, as essential oils are prone to oxidation, volatilisation, and degradation when exposed to heat, light, or air. Antioxidants such as tocopherols or rosemary extract are often added to maintain formulation integrity and prolong shelf life.[36] Furthermore, modern techniques, including nanoemulsion and microemulsion incorporation, have been used to enhance solubility, dispersion, and skin permeability of herbal actives, improving therapeutic outcomes compared to conventional semisolid systems.[37]

5.1 Selection of Base Materials (Ointment Base, Wax, Oils)

The base material used in herbal antiseptic balms serves as the structural foundation of the formulation, influencing texture, spreadability, dermal absorption, and stability of the incorporated active ingredients. Commonly used bases include beeswax, white soft paraffin, petroleum jelly, lanolin, and plant-derived oils, each offering distinct advantages. Beeswax is widely selected due to its natural origin, emulsifying ability, and capacity to form a protective barrier that prevents moisture loss while supporting controlled release of essential oils.[34] Petroleum jelly and paraffin provide excellent occlusivity, enhancing the retention of active

components on the skin surface and improving their penetration into deeper layers.[38] Plant oils such as coconut oil, olive oil, and almond oil are frequently incorporated not only as emollients but also as bioactive carriers rich in fatty acids and antioxidants that support skin repair and barrier restoration.[35] The choice of base must also consider the compatibility of essential oils and extracts, as some volatile compounds may degrade or interact unfavorably with certain waxes or hydrocarbons. Additionally, the melting point and consistency of the base influence user acceptability and product stability, with higher wax content producing firmer balms suitable for warmer climates.

5.2 Incorporation of Herbal Extracts and Essential Oils

The incorporation of herbal extracts and essential oils is a critical step in the formulation of herbal antiseptic balms, as it directly influences their therapeutic efficacy, stability, and sensory characteristics. Essential oils such as tea tree, eucalyptus, peppermint, clove, and camphor oils are typically integrated into the semisolid base during the cooling phase to prevent volatilisation and preserve their bioactive components, including terpenoids and phenolic compounds responsible for antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory actions.[11,17,29] Careful control of temperature is essential, as excessive heat can degrade volatile constituents such as 1,8-cineole, eugenol, and terpinen-4-ol, leading to reduced therapeutic activity.

Herbal extracts—whether alcoholic, hydroalcoholic, or oil-based—are incorporated based on their solubility profile to ensure uniform distribution throughout the balm. Lipophilic extracts blend effectively into oil and wax bases, whereas hydrophilic extracts may require emulsifiers or penetration enhancers to maintain stability and bioavailability.[34,37] The concentration of extracts and essential oils must be optimised to balance potency and dermal tolerability, as higher levels may lead to skin irritation or sensitisation, particularly with strong actives like clove or camphor.[35]

5.3 Stability Considerations in Balm Formulations

Stability is a crucial aspect of herbal antiseptic balm formulation, as the volatile and thermolabile nature of essential oils and plant extracts makes them susceptible to oxidation, evaporation, and degradation during storage. Essential oils rich in monoterpenes—such as 1,8-cineole, terpinen-4-ol, and menthol—can undergo oxidative breakdown when exposed to heat, light, or oxygen, leading to loss of antimicrobial potency and potential formation of irritant by-products.[29,36] To minimise these effects, formulations often include antioxidants

such as tocopherols, ascorbyl palmitate, or rosemary extract, which help maintain chemical stability by neutralising free radicals and slowing oxidative reactions.[36]

Physical stability is also essential, as phase separation, crystallisation of waxes, or changes in viscosity can alter the efficacy and usability of the balm. Selecting compatible base materials and maintaining appropriate ratios of wax to oil ensures homogeneity and prevents graininess or syneresis during storage.[34,38]

5.4 Physicochemical Evaluation of Herbal Balm

Physicochemical evaluation plays a crucial role in ensuring the quality, safety, stability, and therapeutic efficiency of herbal antiseptic balms. These evaluations help determine whether the formulation maintains its structural integrity, spreads appropriately on the skin, releases active ingredients effectively, and remains stable under environmental stress. Key parameters include spreadability, viscosity, pH and stability assessment. Additional characteristics such as homogeneity, melting point, appearance, odour, and resistance to phase separation also contribute to overall product quality. Due to the presence of volatile essential oils, herbal balms are particularly sensitive to oxidation, temperature variations, and light exposure, making stability testing indispensable.[36] A well-formulated balm should exhibit smooth texture, uniform consistency, adequate firmness, and retention of aroma throughout its shelf life. Ensuring proper physicochemical characteristics not only enhances patient acceptability but also preserves the antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory actions of essential oils and plant extracts. The following subsections describe each evaluation parameter in detail.

5.4.1 Spreadability

Spreadability determines how easily a balm can be applied onto the skin surface and how uniformly the active ingredients distribute across the application area. Optimal spreadability ensures effective delivery of bioactive compounds and minimizes patient discomfort. It is influenced by the wax-to-oil ratio, viscosity, melting point, and presence of solid particles in the formulation. Higher oil content generally enhances spreadability, while excessive wax can make the formulation stiff and difficult to apply.[34]

A standard spreadability test measures the time required for two glass slides to slip apart under a specific weight, indicating how smoothly the balm spreads. Good spreadability promotes better coverage of the affected area, improving antimicrobial action and treatment outcomes.

5.4.2 Viscosity

Viscosity is critical in determining the semisolid nature, structural stability, and handling properties of herbal balms. An ideal viscosity ensures that the balm remains firm at room temperature yet softens upon skin contact, facilitating application without running or liquefying excessively. Viscosity is influenced by factors such as.

- Type and concentration of waxes (e.g., beeswax, paraffin)
- Quantity of oils and extracts
- Storage temperature
- Interaction between essential oils and base materials.[38]

Stable viscosity ensures uniform distribution of herbal actives, prevents sedimentation of plant particles, and maintains consistent therapeutic performance throughout the product's shelf life.

5.4.3 pH and Stability

Although herbal balms are predominantly anhydrous, pH analysis becomes important when hydrophilic extracts or emulsifiers are present. Maintaining a skin-compatible pH prevents irritation, enhances product safety, and improves patient compliance.[39]

Stability testing is essential to evaluate the balm's resistance to.

- Oxidation of essential oils
- Volatilisation of aroma compounds
- Colour or odour changes
- Phase separation or graininess
- Microbial contamination in moisture-containing variants

Accelerated stability studies at varying temperatures and humidity conditions help predict long-term shelf life. Antioxidants such as tocopherol (vitamin E) or rosemary extract are commonly incorporated to reduce oxidation and prolong product integrity.[36] Packaging in airtight, opaque containers further protects volatile oils and ensures sustained therapeutic performance.

5.5 Additional Evaluation Parameters.

In addition to physicochemical characteristics, herbal antiseptic balms must undergo several supplementary evaluation parameters to ensure safety, usability, patient acceptability, and

therapeutic reliability. These include washability, skin irritation testing, homogeneity, melting point determination, odour assessment, and microbial load analysis, all of which provide a comprehensive understanding of product quality.

Washability determines how easily the balm can be removed from the skin with water or mild soap. Formulations containing high wax concentrations may adhere strongly, making washability an important parameter for user convenience. Good washability prevents residue buildup and reduces the risk of pore blockage or irritation.[40]

Skin irritation testing is essential for confirming dermatological safety, especially since essential oils like clove oil, camphor, and peppermint may irritate at high concentrations. Patch testing on human volunteers or validated animal models assesses redness, itching, burning sensation, or inflammation. A well-formulated balm should exhibit minimal or no irritation, ensuring suitability for regular topical use.[41]

Homogeneity ensures uniform dispersion of essential oils, extracts, and excipients throughout the formulation. Visual and microscopic examination helps confirm the absence of lumps, separation, or aggregated particles. Uniform texture and colour indicate proper blending, which directly influences dosing consistency and therapeutic reliability.[34]

Melting point determination is performed to assess the thermal stability of the balm. It ensures that the formulation remains semisolid at room temperature and does not soften excessively in warmer climates. An optimised melting point enhances portability, storage stability, and user acceptability.[38] Finally, microbial load testing becomes important when herbal balms contain hydrophilic ingredients, as the presence of water can encourage microbial growth. Even in anhydrous balms, testing ensures the absence of contamination during manufacturing. Acceptable microbial limits are essential for ensuring product safety and preventing secondary infections.[42] Collectively, these evaluation parameters complement physicochemical assessments and ensure that herbal antiseptic balms meet quality standards required for safe and effective topical application.

6. Safety, Toxicity, and Regulatory Considerations

Ensuring the safety and regulatory compliance of herbal antiseptic balms is essential, as these formulations contain potent essential oils and plant extracts that may cause adverse reactions if improperly used. Safety assessments typically include acute dermal toxicity, irritation and

sensitisation tests, and evaluation of potential interactions among essential oils, many of which—such as clove oil (eugenol) and camphor—may cause irritation or sensitisation at high concentrations.[41] Regulatory authorities such as the World Health Organization (WHO), European Medicines Agency (EMA), and national pharmacopoeias emphasise the importance of standardisation, contaminant testing, microbial quality control, and adherence to Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) for herbal topical products.[42] Essential oils must be used within established dermal safety limits defined by organisations such as the International Fragrance Association (IFRA) to minimise risks of dermatitis or toxicity. Additionally, compliance with labelling regulations—such as listing all ingredients, concentrations, directions for use, and warnings—ensures consumer safety and legal acceptance. Collectively, these safety and regulatory considerations ensure that herbal antiseptic balms are both effective and safe for public use while meeting international quality standards.

6.1 Dermal Safety and Irritation Potential

Dermal safety evaluation is essential for herbal antiseptic balms, as the presence of concentrated essential oils may pose a risk of skin irritation or sensitisation in sensitive individuals. Compounds such as eugenol (clove oil), menthol (peppermint oil), and camphor are effective therapeutic agents but can cause redness, burning, or allergic contact dermatitis when present above recommended topical limits.[17,25,41] Standardised patch testing, typically conducted on human volunteers or validated animal models, helps determine irritation potential by assessing erythema, oedema, or other inflammatory responses following topical application. Moreover, cumulative irritation tests and repeated-insult patch tests (RIPTs) are commonly used to evaluate sensitisation risks and ensure long-term safety for consumers. The dermal compatibility of the base materials—such as beeswax, petroleum jelly, and plant oils—also contributes to overall skin tolerance, as occlusive or comedogenic substances may predispose some users to irritation or follicular occlusion.[35] Following guidelines established by the WHO, EMA, and IFRA ensures that essential oils are incorporated within safe dermal exposure limits to minimise adverse reactions and promote product safety.[42]

6.2 Toxicity Concerns with Essential Oils

Although essential oils provide potent antimicrobial and therapeutic benefits, several of them carry toxicity risks when used at inappropriate concentrations, making safety evaluation essential in herbal antiseptic balm formulation. Compounds such as camphor, eucalyptus oil (1,8-cineole), and clove oil (eugenol) can cause systemic toxicity if absorbed in large

amounts, especially in children, where accidental ingestion or excessive topical use may lead to symptoms such as nausea, CNS depression, convulsions, or hepatotoxicity.[25,33,43] Clove oil's eugenol, while pharmacologically beneficial, is known to exhibit dose-dependent cytotoxicity and can cause skin burns or allergic dermatitis when used above recommended dermal limits.[17,41] Similarly, camphor has been associated with neurotoxicity at high doses, particularly when applied repeatedly or extensively on damaged skin.[25]

Eucalyptus oil toxicity is also documented, with ingestion or over-application leading to CNS symptoms and respiratory distress due to rapid mucosal absorption of 1,8-cineole [33]. The risk increases when essential oils are used in undiluted form or combined in incompatible mixtures. Therefore, regulatory bodies such as IFRA and WHO emphasise the importance of adhering to maximum safe concentration limits, appropriate dilution, and age-specific precautions to prevent toxicity.[42,44]

6.3 Regulatory Guidelines for Herbal Topical Products

Regulatory guidelines for herbal topical products, including antiseptic balms, are established to ensure safety, quality, efficacy, and proper consumer protection. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), manufacturers must comply with Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), standardised documentation, raw material authentication, and stringent quality control measures to prevent contamination and adulteration.[42] In many regions, herbal balms fall under cosmetic, traditional medicine, or over-the-counter (OTC) topical product categories, depending on their intended use and therapeutic claims.

In the European Union, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) requires proof of traditional use, safety assessment reports, microbial testing, and stability data before herbal topical formulations can be marketed. The Cosmetic Regulation (EC) No. 1223/2009 mandates a Product Information File (PIF) containing toxicological profiles, ingredient safety data, product labelling, and evidence of Good Manufacturing Practices.[45] In the United States, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires compliance with cosmetic GMP guidelines, proper ingredient declaration, and prohibition of unverified therapeutic claims unless the product is registered as an OTC drug.[46]

Essential oils present in balms must follow dermal safety limits set by the International Fragrance Association (IFRA), including maximum allowable concentrations for compounds such as eugenol, menthol, camphor, and 1,8-cineole to prevent irritation or toxicity.[44]

7. Applications of Herbal Antiseptic Balm in Healthcare

Herbal antiseptic balms are widely used in healthcare for managing minor wounds, cuts, burns, insect bites, fungal infections, muscle pain, and skin inflammation, owing to their broad-spectrum antimicrobial, analgesic, and wound-healing properties derived from essential oils and plant extracts. Their natural origin and multifunctional actions make them suitable alternatives to synthetic topical agents, especially for individuals seeking plant-based remedies with fewer side effects. Ingredients such as tea tree oil, eucalyptus oil, clove oil, and menthol provide rapid symptom relief and protection against common skin pathogens, including *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Candida albicans*.[11,17,29] Additionally, counter-irritant effects from camphor and menthol support their application in relieving muscular tension, headaches, and nasal congestion.[25,26,33]

8. CONCLUSION

Herbal antiseptic balms represent a valuable class of topical preparations that combine the therapeutic benefits of essential oils and plant extracts to deliver broad-spectrum antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, analgesic, antioxidant, and wound-healing effects. Their efficacy is supported by well-established phytochemicals such as eugenol, 1,8-cineole, menthol, and terpinen-4-ol, which act individually and synergistically to provide effective relief for minor skin injuries, infections, and inflammatory symptoms. Proper formulation, including optimised base selection, appropriate concentrations of essential oils, and stringent physicochemical and safety evaluations, ensures product stability, dermal compatibility, and regulatory compliance. As the demand for natural and multifunctional topical remedies continues to rise, herbal antiseptic balms remain a promising and widely accepted option in traditional and modern healthcare settings. Their diverse pharmacological actions and favourable safety profile underscore their continued relevance in therapeutic and commercial applications.

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