

# Compound Tincture of Benzoin - what it is and what it does

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Red 'tears' in grey matrix

Compound Tincture of Benzoin (Tinc Benz Co.) is derived from the resin that is exuded from the bark of trees of the species *Styrax benzoin* when the bark is deliberately damaged. The cultivated trees are first incised when seven years old and yield about 3lbs of resin per annum for ten or twelve years. A 'V'-shaped cut is made with an axe deep in to the cambium of the bark and the resin flows out, hardening into reddish 'tears' set in a grey matrix. The hardened balsamic resin is harvested, crushed and ground, and dissolved in alcohol to produce Tincture of Benzoin (a tincture is a solution in alcohol).

The trees are cultivated in Sumatra and Siam, the resins differing in composition according to where grown. Sumatran resin contains 18% or more of benzoic acid and about 20% of cinnamic acid. It also contains 1% of vanillin, styrol, styracin, phenol-prophyl cinnamate and benzaldehyde. These constituents account for its distinctive aroma. Siam grown trees yield a resin that has the composition of up to 38% of benzoic acid, partly combined with benzoeresinol and siaresinotannol, vanillin and an oily aromatic fluid.

The compound tincture (T Benz Co.) consists of 10% benzoin and 90% alcohol with aloes, storax and Tolu balsam. It is antiseptic. It is sometimes mixed with lards and fats to prevent them turning rancid. T Benz Co is used to disinfect and protect skin. It is used as a wound dressing and is said to promote the growth of granulation tissue.



It is technically a 'medical varnish', forming a sealing 'film' over raw tissue to protect wounds from ingress of bacteria. Because of this sealing property it should not be applied to areas that are infected or have been infected since it might seal residual infection in. (It should not be used, for instance where an infected heloma durum has just been enucleated).

*Styrax benzoin*

The compound physically prevents drying out of the skin after paring, retaining suppleness and flexibility. It protects skin against maceration and chemical breakdown. When applied to a skin surface before application of tapes and dressings, the bond strength of the adhesive is increased several-fold. This is useful when we wish to apply a dressing and want it to be retained for a lengthy period to protect feet that cannot be reached. T Benz Co suppresses skin reactions beneath dressings. And T Benz Co will retain a cotton wool nail pack in the nail sulcus, creating a non-hardening pack with the consistency of chamois leather.

When applied to a break or abrasion in the skin, there may be a little smarting (due to the alcohol solvent), but this is mild and quickly passes. Applied to itching and inflamed areas of skin, it reduces inflammation and calms and cools. Applied to deep heel fissures it cleanses and keeps supple, promoting rapid healing. Applied to broken blisters it protects from infection and promotes healing. Chilblains benefit from its application.

Benzoin is a main constituent of Friar's Balsam, which is used in steam as an inhalent for respiratory conditions and is taken by mouth as an expectorant. Friar's Balsam is readily purchased at almost any chemist and has all of the beneficial properties of T Benz Co., although being rather slower in drying. It makes an excellent alternative or substitute for T Benz Co. and both preparations are effectively interchangeable.

The use of these compounds is regarded as 'old fashioned' by some. In truth, it has stood the test of time and simply never been bettered. It remains reliable, versatile, efficacious, inexpensive and very effective.

## COMPOUND TINCTURE OF BENZOIN

*Answers should be submitted on A4 paper and should be of sufficient length to demonstrate full understanding of the topic. Single word answers are not permissible. Try to answer in one or two short paragraphs, not more than 1/4 page per answer.*

Q1. What is a tincture?

Q2. Define two essential properties of a medical varnish.

Q3. Detail five distinctly different uses of Tinc Benz Co.

Q4. Say why Tinc Benz Co is useful in nail sulcus work.

Q5. How is T Benz Co employed in potential cautery?

Q6. Why is Tinc Benz Co useful in the treatment of heel fissures?

Q7. Give three reasons why T Benz Co is useful in sport.

Q8. What is *Styrax benzoin*?

Q9. Is there any instance where application of Tinc Benz Co is contraindicated?

Q10. What may be used as an alternative to T Benz Co?

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Alliance CPD Dept, Gateway, Forest Moor Road, Knaresborough HG5 8JY  
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