



# Healing with Topical Applications

## How to use compresses, fomentations, poultices, oils, lotions, salves, bathes, and soaks to heal at the source

When most people decide to heal themselves with herbs, they typically think about taking them internally. However, if there's a problem or pain in a particular part of the body, doesn't it make sense to apply the remedy directly to the afflicted area? In this issue of *Sunshine Sharing*, you're going to learn you how to speed healing for a variety of health problems using topical applications of herbs and essential oils.

### Methods for Using Remedies Topically

There are many different ways to use remedies topically. Here is a brief description of various methods of topical application and how to use them.

#### Compresses and Fomentations

A compress is simply a cotton ball or gauze pad soaked in a liquid and applied to an area of the body. A fomentation is like a compress, but generally uses a piece of cloth like a washcloth or a towel to cover a larger area of the body. Compresses are generally applied to injuries and fomentations are used for rashes, skin eruptions or diseases, poison oak or ivy, or other conditions affecting a large area of the body.



Compresses can be made by making an infusion or decoction (tea) of an herb. You then soak the cotton, gauze, or cloth in the liquid and apply it directly to the affected area. You can also put an herbal tincture or extract directly on a

gauze pad or cotton ball and apply it as a compress. You can also dilute tinctures with water to make fomentations.

Compresses and fomentations can be applied either warm or cold, depending on the need. Cold applications are better for soothing heat and inflammation, warm applications for easing pain and reducing swelling. As soon as the application either cools down or warms up, you can squeeze out the liquid and make another application.

#### Poultices

A poultice is a mixture of crushed herbs applied topically. You can make a poultice from fresh herbs by simply crushing, chopping, or mashing the leaves or other plant parts and applying them to the afflicted area.

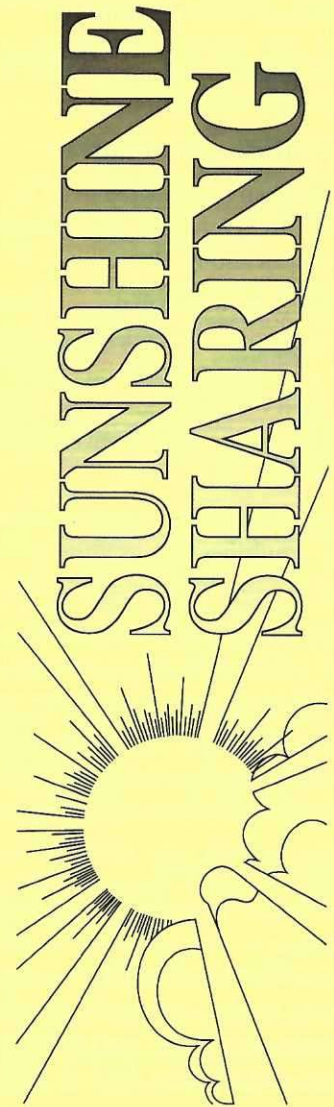


To make a poultice with dried herbs, you need a base of mucilaginous herbs like aloe vera, comfrey root, slippery elm, or marshmallow. You can also use a fine clay as the base. These base materials make the poultice stick together.

Other therapeutic herbs can be added to the base, such as goldenseal or echinacea for infection, astringents like white oak bark or bayberry to tone the skin, or plantain or activated charcoal to draw out toxins. You can also add herbal tinctures or essential oils. To complete the poultice, add enough water to form a thick paste, which is applied topically to the afflicted area.

Poultices are usually covered with a gauze bandage or other dressing to help hold them in place and keep them from staining clothing. You can also cover them with plastic wrap. Change

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the poultice every four to eight hours. For treating bites and stings, change the poultice hourly.

## Oils, Lotions, and Salves

Herbs can be extracted in oil for topical application or turned into lotions or salves. It can be convenient to purchase herbal oils, but you can also make your own if desired.

The easiest way to make an herbal oil is to place the dried herbs to be extracted in a crock pot. Add just enough oil to cover them. Olive oil is generally a good choice, but other oils can be used as well. Turn the crock pot on low and leave the herbs in the oil for 12-24 hours. Let the oil cool before straining out the herb material using some type of cloth.

Lotions are made by mixing the oil with other liquid ingredients and an emulsifier (like lecithin) to make the oil and water mix. It's sort of like making homemade mayonnaise.

You can also make an instant lotion by adding essential oils to a fixed oil like olive oil or coconut oil. You can also mix essential oils with an unscented lotion for topical use.

Salves are made by adding melted beeswax to a warm herbal oil and stirring the mixture until it begins to harden. Essential oils can also be added just before the mixture starts to thicken.

## Baths and Soaks

An herbal decoction can be used to soak part or all of the body for various healing purposes. To make a decoction add herbs to a large pot of water, bring the water to a boil, reduce the heat and allow the herbs to simmer for 30-60 minutes. When the decoction cools enough you can soak feet, hands, or other body parts in it. You can also add it to the bath water for an herbal bath.

Essential oils can also be used in baths or soaks. Mix the oils with a small amount of a natural, unscented soap, such as a Castile soap, before adding them to the water. You can also mix them with Epsom salts.

# Topical Remedies for the Healing the Skin

The most common use for topical remedies is to help heal injuries and other problems with the skin. Here are some examples of skin problems and how to help them.

## Insect Bites and Stings

Insect bites and stings can be very painful, but fortunately there are many herbs that will help neutralize the venom, reduce the swelling, and take away the pain. For starters, just about any astringent herb can be crushed and applied topically as a fresh plant poultice for bites and stings. These include the leaves of oak trees, raspberry or blackberry bushes, rose bushes, gumweed leaves and flower buds, willow or poplar leaves, and yarrow. One of the best



herbs for bites and stings is a common lawn weed, plantain. Use the crushed fresh leaves or apply a tincture made from the fresh plant as a compress.

You can also moisten a black or green tea bag and use it as an instant compress. You can also make a compress using a liquid extract of lobelia, echinacea, black cohosh, or the astringents mentioned above. You can also apply essential oils like cajeput, lavender, lemon, lemon grass, tea tree, and ylang ylang.

Seek medical attention for poisonous spider bites, like black widow or brown recluse. However, you can apply a poultice of activated charcoal as a first aid treatment while seeking medical attention. You can make a paste from the charcoal using just water, but it holds together better if you can use aloe vera gel. Apply the black paste to the bite and change it every hour.

## Burns

One of the best burn remedies is aloe vera which can be applied topically in the form of a gel or using pieces of the inside of fresh leaves. It is a great remedy for first or second degree burns, but medical treatment should be sought for third degree burns.

Another good topical remedy for burns is a compress using real vanilla extract. There are also essential oils that can be helpful for burns, including lavender, bergamot, rose, and tea tree. These can be applied directly to the burn, but work better if mixed with a little aloe vera gel or honey first.

## Bruises, Abrasions, and Other Minor Injuries

Bruises, abrasions, scratches, sprains, and other similar injuries where the skin isn't broken can be treated topically in a variety of ways. A lotion or salve made from arnica and calendula is one of the best remedies to apply to these types of injuries. It takes down swelling and speeds healing.



You can also make a salve or ointment for healing injuries using herbs like plantain, comfrey, goldenseal, yarrow, white oak, and calendula. These salves can speed tissue healing and cause the injury to heal more quickly. They may also ease pain.

You can also use poultices with plantain, burdock leaves, St. John's wort or compresses with essential oils like tea tree, lavender, eucalyptus, myrrh, or frankincense. Adding these oils to some aloe vera gel is especially helpful to soothe irritation and speed healing.

## Cuts and Bleeding

The best technique to stop bleeding of any kind is to apply pressure to the wound. That's something you'll learn in any first aid class or book. There are herbs with a styptic action that can help stop bleeding, but it's not wise to put herbs into open wounds as you don't want the plant material inside the wound, under the skin.

Once the bleeding has stopped and the wound is closed, you can apply styptics to help keep the wound closed and speed healing. Some of the best styptics are calendula, capsicum, yarrow, or any astringent, such as white oak, bayberry, or uva ursi.

## Skin Rashes and Itching

Rashes are inflammatory reactions on the skin, also known as dermatitis. Dermatitis involves redness, swelling, and itching. Herbs that help to soothe irritation can be applied topically to small areas as compresses or to larger areas as fomentations. They may also be used in baths or made into an oil or lotion.



Herbs that reduce the irritation topically include aloe vera, burdock, chamomile, Oregon grape, and pau d'arco. Chickweed is particularly good for easing itching. Seaweeds in baths, poultices, or lotions may help soothe and moisten the skin.

Essential oils diluted in olive oil or coconut oil can also help soothe rashes and itching. Good oils to consider include chamomile, geranium, jasmine, helichrysum, lemon, and rose.

## Topical Applications for Deeper Health Problems

Topical applications don't just affect the skin, they can help to heal problems underneath the skin in muscles, joints, lymphatics, and even internal organs. Here are some conditions you can help to heal using topical applications.

### Reducing Inflammation and Pain



Herbs can be applied topically to relieve inflammation and speed healing of injured tissues and damaged organs. For example, they help to heal sprains, tears, pulls, arthritic joints, traumatic head injuries, and even broken bones.

They can also stimulate circulation and lymphatic drainage in organs like the liver, intestines, and lungs, which can help to heal problems in these organs.

Poultices can be helpful for healing damaged tissues. A good poultice base for healing injured tissues is powdered marshmallow root and/or comfrey leaf mixed with plantain. Then add other tissue healing herbs like alfalfa, horsetail, and white oak bark. Mix with water and apply the paste over the injured area. Cover it with gauze and change it every 4-8 hours. If you do this for several days you might be amazed at how much faster the injury heals.

You can also make a soak for sprained ankles and other similar injuries by making a decoction of comfrey leaf, plantain leaf, and white oak bark, or similar herbs. Allow it to cool enough so you can soak the afflicted area in the warm decoction for 15-30 minutes.

Essential oils can also be applied topically to ease muscle and joint pain, draw circulation to the damaged area, and speed healing. Good essential oils to use for this purpose are camphor, wintergreen, clove, eucalyptus, menthol, lavender, nutmeg, and copaiba. You can find blends of these oils used in *Topical Analgesic Essential Oil Blends* or lotions. Massaging arthritic joints with these several times a day consistently for three to four weeks can help damaged joints to heal.

## Easing Respiratory and Lymphatic Congestion

Congested lymphatics and respiratory passages can also be eased by topical applications of essential oils diluted in a fixed oil or unscented lotion. Some of the best oils to use here are wintergreen, eucalyptus, pine, thyme, and rosemary. Massage the diluted oils into the skin anywhere there are swollen lymph nodes, swelling, or mucus congestion. This can even be helpful for earaches and sore throats when massaged into the neck and throat.

When there is congestion in the chest you can also massage garlic oil into the chest and back to clear the congestion. You can purchase the oil or make it yourself by pressing some fresh garlic into olive oil. Let it sit for about five to ten minutes, then strain out the garlic. Use immediately or refrigerate the oil and use within a few days. Garlic applied topically can clear congestion from the lungs or other tissues in just a few hours.

Another traditional remedy for clearing the lungs is mustard applied topically. Like garlic oil, a mustard plaster can be used for severe bronchitis, mucus stuck deep in the lungs, and even pneumonia. You can buy commercially made mustard plasters, or you can make your own. Here's a recipe for a mustard plaster.

Mix one-quarter cup of ground mustard seeds with one cup of flour and add enough water to make a paste. Put the paste inside a thin cloth. Coat the skin with olive oil, then place the cloth containing the mustard paste over the skin. Put a warm, wet towel over the mustard plaster. Cover this with a dry cloth or a piece of plastic. Leave it on for about 15-30 minutes. Check it frequently to make sure it isn't irritating (burning) the skin.

### Dissolving Cysts, Lumps, and Hardened Tissues

Cysts, non-cancerous lumps, and other hardened tissues can often be relieved by topical applications as well. One option is a castor oil pack. Castor oil packs have been used to help endometriosis, fibrosis, cirrhosis of the liver, breast lumps, Peyronie's disease, and adenomyosis.

To make a castor oil pack, you will need the following:

- 1/4 cup castor oil
- 8 drops essential oil, such as lavender, frankincense, myrrh, tea tree, cajeput, or helichrysum
- A soft cloth

Combine the castor oil and the essential oils. Soak the cloth in the oil so the cloth is saturated but not dripping. Fold the cloth and place it in a baking dish and put the dish in the oven at 350 degrees for about 20 minutes. It should be warm, but not hot. As an alternative, you can heat the oil and the cloth in a crock pot. This is slower, but produces a more gentle heat.

Place folded cloth directly over painful area. Cover with a towel to keep it warm. You can also put a hot water bottle over the pack. Use the pack once a day for 30 to 60 minutes. Rinse off the oil after each use.

Poultices are another option for dealing with cysts and lumps. In this case you would use a basic poultice base of plantain and seaweeds like kelp or dulse. Don't use comfrey. To this base you add alteratives like burdock, dandelion, Oregon grape, and red clover and a smaller amount of lobelia. Seaweeds are helpful in soften-

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ing hardened masses and the alteratives are helpful in cleaning up morbid conditions in the tissues. Change the poultice every four hours and reapply several times a day. It may take several days for the cyst or other tissue to dissolve. If it isn't better after a few days seek medical attention.

## Topically Clearing Morbid Tissue

Herbs can also be applied topically to remove things from the body. They can help pull slivers and pus from wounds. Some herbs can even be used as escharotic remedies to remove warts, and moles. Here are some examples.

### Slivers

There are several herbs that can help to pull slivers out of the skin without having to dig them out. The most effective of these is the crushed fresh leaves from lily of the valley. The second most effective remedy is the crushed leaves of fresh plantain.



Drawing salves have also been used to aid this process. Drawing salves, typically contain ingredients like plantain, red clover, chaparral, and pine gum. They can be applied over the affected area and covered with a bandage.

### Abscesses and Infected Wounds

An abscess is an open sore exuding pus, usually surrounded by inflamed tissue; or a covered cavity containing pus. While these are typically treated with antibiotics, they can also be treated with drawing salves or poultices containing ingredients found in drawing salves. Another good remedy for pulling out infection is activated charcoal. It can be sprinkled directly onto pus-filled wounds. It will pull out pus and infection and help the wound to heal faster.

You can also make a poultice with plantain, marshmallow root, echinacea, and goldenseal to fight the infection and draw out the pus. Nano-particle silver and essential oils can also be used in the

poultice. Good essential oils to use for this include tea tree, cajeput, myrrh, eucalyptus, and thyme. You can also add these essential oils to a nano-particle silver gel and apply that topically.

### Removing Warts and Growths on the Skin

Escharotic salves contain similar herbs to drawing salves but include stronger herbs like poke root or bloodroot or certain mineral salts. You can also make a quick escharotic salve by mixing a standardized extract of paw paw with a drawing salve or with coconut oil.

Escharotics are potent remedies that can help remove warts, growths and clear morbid tissue. But, they can also cause scarring, long-term damage or other problems and as such should only be used with great care. So, before using escharotic remedies consult with a professional herbalist who has experience using them.

Be careful to only apply escharotic remedies to the tissue you wish to remove because they can harm the surrounding living tissue. Discontinue using them as soon as redness or a white ring appears around the morbid tissue. After this the body typically ejects the morbid tissue a few days later. Once the morbid tissue is gone, follow up with a healing salve or ointment containing healing herbs like calendula, yarrow, comfrey, and/or plantain.

A wart is a horny projection on the skin usually caused by a virus. Raw garlic has been applied topically to warts to help remove them. One can also use herbs like bloodroot or celandine as a compress, or a drawing or escharotic salve.

### Additional Help and Information

For more information about using herbs and essential oils topically, contact the person who gave you this newsletter. You can also consult the following resources:

*Modern Herbal Dispensatory* by Steven Horne and Thomas Easley

*Home Remedies: Hydrotherapy, Massage, Charcoal, and Other Simple Treatments* by Agatha Thrash and Calvin Thrash

*Cancer Salves* by Ingrid Naiman

*Strategies for Health* by Steven Horne