[IMAGE]

Natural Healing With External Applications

By Claudia Anrig, DC

Since the skin is the body's largest organ, and is able to respond to both internal and external stimulations, communicate sensations to the brain, protect the body, breathe and even excrete toxins, it can be an excellent source of healing. For centuries, poultices and compresses (with certain specific substances) have been used to enhance the healing via the skin.

Before reaching for an anti-inflammatory medication, a decongestant or many of the other over-the-counter drugs available, parents need to know there might be a more natural way of offering their child relief. Here are some great tips to consider.

Preparing the Applications

A *poultice*, also called a *cataplasm*, is typically a cloth pouch that contains herbs or similar prepared ingredients with the ends folded and secured with string. It is then applied topically to the skin. It can be heated or left cold depending upon the ingredients and the purpose.

A *compress* is slightly different in that it isn't a pouch containing ingredients. To use a compress, start with a bowl of hot, cold, warm or room-temperature water depending upon the purpose. Add the applicable herbs or other ingredients and then soak the cloth in the water, wring it out and apply it to the affected area. In some cases, especially when heat is important, you'll want to replace the cloth often, but in other instances it can be left alone or held in place with a wrap.

natural healing - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Finally, a *wrap* is similar to a compress, but generally covers more area. Whereas a compress is used in a localized area, a wrap (depending upon the purpose) can be used similar to an ACE bandage. The typical wrap will be about 2 yards long; if warmth is important, considering using wool for the cloth and wrapping the entire area.

In all of these instances, it's best to use natural and organic cloth, but any cloth will work in a pinch, including washcloths, pieces of a towel or even a T-shirt for a poultice or compress; or a wool scarf when needed for a wrap.

Selecting the Ingredients

Natural, organic ingredients are always recommended. Common poultice ingredients include onion, lemon, potato and ginger. The typical ingredients in a compress include chamomile, lavender, lemon, *Arnica* or *Calendula*, depending upon the need. With regards to wraps, they can be prepared using all of the above, again determined by need.

- *Lemon* is one of the first ingredients to consider due its variety of uses including fever, stress, watery runny nose or eyes, sore throat or tickle in the throat, allergies, bronchitis and more.
- *Chamomile* has been known for its soothing properties, but in a poultice, compress or wrap, its uses can also include chest congestion, eye inflammation, cramps (including menstrual), soothing for ear, nose and throat, upset stomach or colic.
- *Onion*, applied in a poultice, is most useful for colds, earaches, teething and swollen glands.
- *Potatoes* are able to draw out toxins and break up congestion, which makes them useful as a poultice for sore throat, cough, headache, and muscle pain.

The Onion Poultice

When chopping an onion, the eyes can water and the nose run; this is precisely why the onion is useful as a healing poultice. Onion can improve circulation and helps break up congestion. The high sulfur content in onions causes thick mucus to move outward toward the skin.

To create an onion poultice, chop white or yellow onions finely. To really get the juice to come out, place a cloth over the chopped onion and smash it under a cup; then puree it in a blender for five to 10 seconds. While this can be used at room temperature, it has also been suggested that the onion can be lightly sautéed with a little water or olive oil until warm.

The Lemon Poultice or Compress

The lemon can be prepared for a poultice by slicing; however, when preparing the lemon for a compress, it’s best to cut the lemon in a bowl of warm water. This makes it possible to capture the aromatic oils from the skin of the lemon.

A lemon poultice may work well as a powerful stress reliever. Apply the poultice to the wrist; the cooling effect of the lemon is calming and can even help when feeling fatigued. As a wrap or compress, lemon is

especially useful in lowering body temperature and soothing high fevers. A lemon foot wrap, soaked in warm water infused with lemon, can often relieve and sooth a fever by keeping the limbs cooler and drawing the heat from the head. To be most effective, a foot wrap should start at the toes and be wrapped all the way up to the knees.

Chamomile Preparation

To prepare chamomile, place 2-3 tablespoons of organic flowers in a bowl and add hot water. Steep for three minutes. Remove the flowers from the water to use as a poultice; for a compress, strain the water before using. If organic flowers are not available, substitute two to three teabags. For the poultice, place the teabags directly into the cloth.

Chamomile tea is well-known to quickly sooth an upset stomach; however, what many may not know is that as a poultice or a compress, it can be placed directly on the stomach to aid in comfort. *Note*: Due to its similarity to ragweed, some children have been known to have adverse reactions to chamomile. If this is the case, discontinue use immediately. Chamomile applications are also contraindicated in a child running a high fever.

Potato Poultices

To prepare a potato poultice, boil four to six potatoes with the skin on. Allow them to cool for a few minutes and then place in a sock or sleeve. After smashing the potatoes, allow them to cool for another six to eight minutes – the poultice should not be too hot and potatoes will retain their heat well.

Once the poultice is the right temperature, it can be placed directly on the area of concern. For a sore throat or cough, it can be placed around the neck; the same is true for muscle aches or pains. It is most beneficial when the poultice is warm; if it begins to cool too quickly, a hot-water bottle can be placed directly on the poultice to keep it warm. The warm, moist heat is what is most soothing with this application.

Tofu and Ginger Compresses

A cold, firm tofu compress may be a helpful remedy for inflammation (bruising or a black eye). Additionally, it may work as a fever-reducer. Simply place on the child’s forehead for 15-20 minutes.

Ginger is consider to have a "warming" effect on the body and has been known to help with circulation. It also may be useful for stiffness, pain and inflammation. Adding a hot-water bottle to increase the warmth of the compress also may be beneficial.

Arnica and Calendula

Available in a cream, ointment or salve, these ingredients can be extremely helpful to treat pain, swelling, bug bites, bruises and sprains. When applied to the skin, *Calendula* may be helpful for diaper rash, eczema and abrasions. Make sure to carefully follow instructions on the product label.

"Wrapping" Up

The average time of application may vary, but placing a compress or poultice directly on the region for 10-20 minutes is a great rule of thumb. A cold compress or poultice can be reused, but it is recommended that it be refrigerated between uses. With warm application, it is usually suggested to create new ingredients for the next compress or poultice.

Sometimes the simple home remedy that has been around for hundreds of years can teach young parents that not everything has to come from the pharmacy or drugstore aisle. A final word of common sense: If the condition hasn't improved at least slightly within 24 to 72 hours, seek medical attention. Talk to your doctor to learn more.

Resources

- Feder L. *Natural Baby and Childcare: Practical Medical Advice and Holistic Wisdom for Raising Healthy Children*. Hatherleigh Press, 2006.
- Cannon B. Grow Healthy. *Grow Happy. The Whole Baby Guide*. Genki Press, 2014.

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