



The Wellness Family

Dr. Heather Keeps You Informed

Poultices, Compresses and Wraps

Before reaching for an anti-inflammatory medication, a decongestant or many of the other over-the-counter drugs available, consider first the chemicals used in these treatments and remember your wish for wellness.

External Healing Applications

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 the body. It is possible to apply certain substances to the skin through poultices and compresses that will actually promote healing as they soak into the body. However, before reaching for this healing option, it's important to know what options are recommended for each situation.

While it is best, in most instances, to use cheese cloth, organic cotton fabric, or other natural fiber, what to put in the cloth, how to apply it, and for how long is going to be dependent upon the purpose of the treatment.

Preparing the Applications

There are several ways to prepare external applications called poultices, compresses or wraps.

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, 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.

Finally, a wrap is similar to a compress but generally covers more area. Where a compress is going to be 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 and, where warmth is important, considering using wool for the cloth and wrap 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. This can include using wash cloths or pieces of a towel or even t-shirt for a poultice or compress as well as a wool scarf when needed for a wrap.

Recommended Ingredients

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



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Choosing the Ingredients

Lemon is one of the first ingredients to consider due to 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, bladder infections, swollen glands, boils and abscesses.

Potatoes are able to draw out toxins and break up congestion which makes them useful as a poultice for the following: sore throat, cough, headache, neck pain, boils and abscesses, chilliness and muscle pain.

The Onion Poultice

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

To create an onion poultice, chop the 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 5 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 works wonders when applied to corns or calluses overnight but has also been shown to be 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 then be wrapped all the way up to the knees.

Chamomile Preparation

To prepare Chamomile place 2 to 3 tablespoons of organic flowers in a bowl and add hot water. Steep for 3 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 2 or 3 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. Be aware, 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; using chamomile applications with a child that is running a high fever is also highly discouraged.

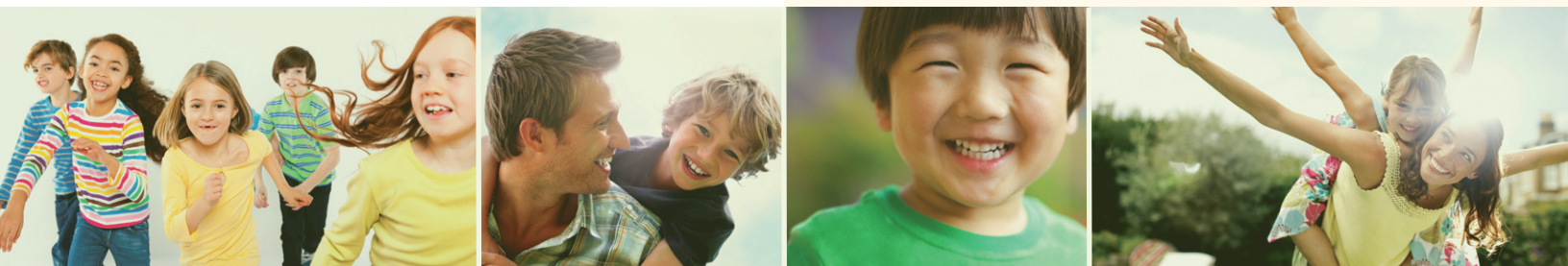
Potato Poultices

To prepare a potato poultice, boil 4 to 6 potatoes with the skin on. Allow them to cool for a few minutes and then place them in a sock or sleeve. After smashing the potatoes allow them to cool for another 6 to 8 minutes as 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.

In Summary

One of the highest priorities when seeking wellness for your family is to know what to do in the rare instances when illness strikes. The local pharmacy or corner drugstore is not a refuge. Holistic options are always best for your family.



*Dear Patient,
Dr. Heather is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. So take a moment today to discuss with your Family Wellness Chiropractor any concerns you may have regarding your family's overall health and wellness.*

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