

Hunting Bag Medicine & Methods

14-17 minutes : 12/1/2020

How early American travelers and frontiersmen attended to their medical needs using the basic essentials carried on their person.



Collection of patent medicines and homestead remedies

In his 1859 book, Randolph Marcy, a US Army veteran of 25 years on the frontier remarked that *"A little blue mass, quinine, opium, and some cathartic medicine put up in doses for adults will suffice for a medicine chest."* Although wagon trains would commonly have some form of medicine kit, the individual traveler on foot or horseback needed a more lightweight minimalist approach toward medical care. Since carrying a heavy pannier of medicines for

every occasion is out of the question, here are some period remedies to treat basic ailments that the average frontiersman would likely have on his person. This means that in addition to commonly carried medicines such as mountain mint, cedron nut, or blue indigo, other cures may reside in everyday foods or even the contents of a powder horn.

****Disclaimer – This is not professional advice for handling modern emergencies; it is merely meant as an educational article about primitive cures our ancestors used as well as the modern scientific analysis of how effective certain chemicals in each cure may have had their effect. If you are suffering from any affliction, seek professional treatment, not the methods of this article.***

Treating wounds and bruises:

Apply moistened tobacco shavings to the cut or bruise and bandage it in place. When the bleeding stops and soreness abates, remove the tobacco and treat the affected area with salt, honey or molasses, then wrap in a new, clean, dry bandage. Powdered alum with salt is another effective treatment.

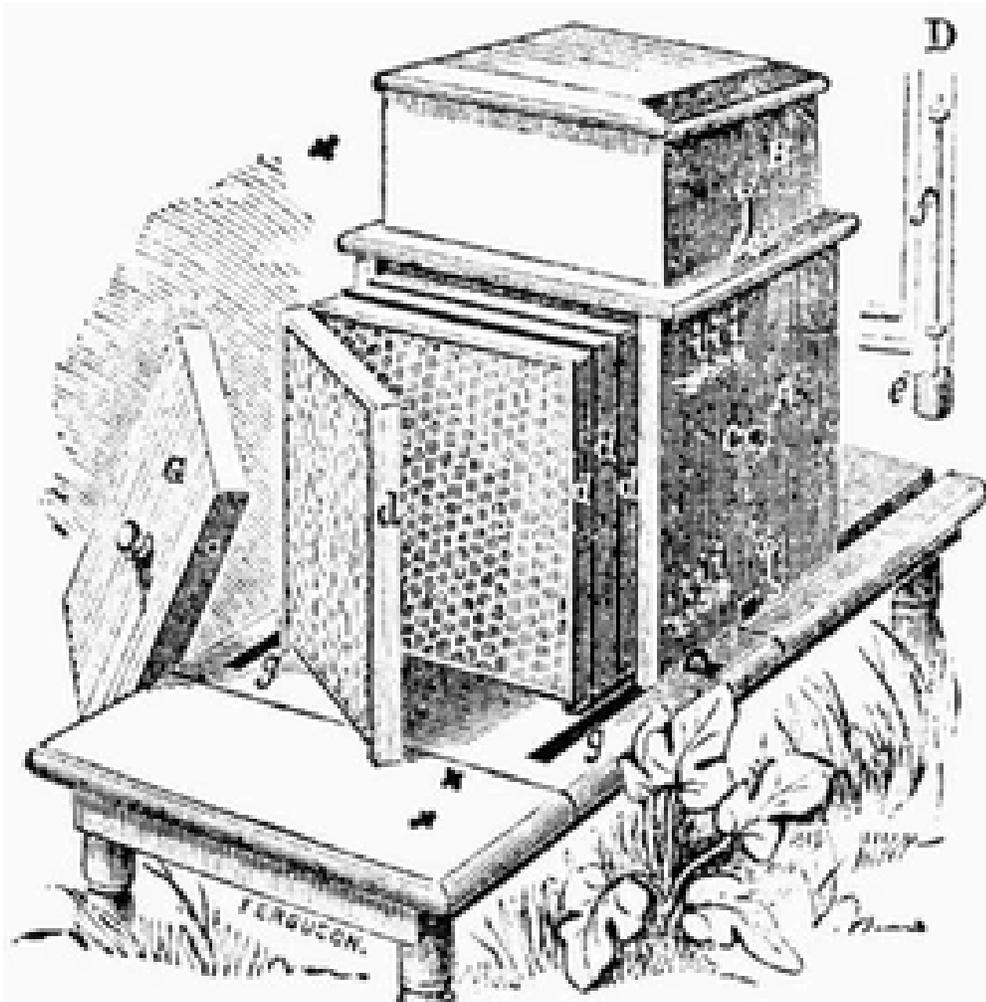


Common pipe tobacco ca.1862

- **Tobacco** (*Nicotina Tobacum*) has been proven to possess antibacterial/antimicrobial qualities in addition to its ability to alleviate pain. Its astringent properties also reduce blood flow in wounds. All this would have made a tobacco poultice an effective form of treatment for said afflictions. As a caveat, Nicotine can also be extremely toxic.

Overdosing can result in sickness and even death. Tobacco also has a variety of chemicals now known to be carcinogenic so by modern medical standards, other options are advised.

- **Molasses** - is often touted as a key ingredient in making salves or poultices for wounds. Many old medical books recommend applying them directly onto bites and wounds (same as honey) to arrest infection. Medical analysis has determined that molasses (aka. blackstrap molasses) to contain two active antibacterial compounds, *dehydrodiconiferylalcohol-9'-O-beta-D-glucoopyranoside* and *isoorientin-7, 3'-O-dimethyl* that are especially effective against cariogenic bacteria including various known and mutated forms of streptococcus. This makes molasses an especially good treatment for animal bites in addition to wounds.



19th Century Beekeeper's Hive

- **Honey** – has been used since ancient times as both a food preservative and for wound treatment, ulcers, etc. Scientifically, honey contains enzyme-produced hydrogen peroxide and phytochemical agents like methylglyoxal which are highly effective against bacteria such as *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, including modern antibiotic resistant strains. It also prevents food spoilage and combats food borne pathogens such as *E. coli* and *salmonella*. It's wet

nature has made it an effective treatment of even deep tissue wounds when no other options are available.



Salt was one of many common household ingredients

- **Salt** – or Sodium Chloride is another compound that dates back to ancient times. Although it was not even added to the periodic table until 1870, it has been identified for its antimicrobial properties. It has been used to treat wounds, head colds and even gastrointestinal discomfort.

Burns (serious):

Treat with scrapings from a raw potato. For lesser burns, make a paste of wheat flour and apply. In either case, keep wrapped with a clean bandage and change the poultice often.

- **Potato** – contains tannins that have drying properties. It also contains high levels of potassium, Vitamin C, and a variety of enzymes that nourish skin tissue as well as relieve burns and inflammation. This has made it a favorite poultice for treating burns and scalds.



Small flour sack being weighed on a steelyard scale

- **Flour** - carries the chemical betaine which is an anti-inflammatory that can help soothe an upset stomach, intestines or irritated skin. This makes it a good quick cure for bakers who have just suffered minor burns, it's not a sterile compound so applying it to 2nd or 3rd degree burns is not at all advised. Added note, flour can also be used to harden the bowels in the case of diarrhea.

Poison Oak / Poison Ivy:

Apply a paste of gunpowder (what we now call black powder) and water to the affected area. *(Sulfur and milk works well enough back at the homestead too.)*



Original 19th century gunpowder can & flasks

- “**Gunpowder**” (aka. *black powder*) Is a combination of **Saltpeter** (*sodium nitrate*), **Sulfur**, and **Charcoal**. This is important since two of the ingredients have strong medicinal applications.
- **Sulfur** is known as an effective topical to treat inflammation. It is ideal for skin eruptions from poison ivy to acne. In diluted quantities, it may compliment other ingredients found in eyewash. Sulfur is a common mineral found in the human body, especially in hair and nails which adds to the “brimstone” stench when hair and nails are burnt.
- **Saltpeter** has antibacterial qualities and was a favored meat preservative in previous centuries. It is also an ingredient in eye wash.
- **Activated Charcoal** was used to treat a variety of ailments during the previous centuries. Period books on oral hygiene recommend charcoal as a tooth whitener as well as a treatment for chemical or food poisoning. It cannot be absorbed by the human body which means it can be consumed orally and will pass straight through your digestive tract. Nowadays, we know that charcoal molecules have a negative electrical charge that will bond with toxins due to them being positively charged. Since the main toxin in poison oak/ivy is Urushiol, activated charcoal serves as an effective treatment. This makes charcoal effective both internally and externally being very effective in wound care to combat infection. A friend of mine who is a physician

released a research paper citing the effectiveness of activated charcoal and its continued use in modern medicine today.

Eye wash:

Mix a pinch of gunpowder into a dram of warm water. Add more water till it has the subtle saltiness of a tear. Tilt the head, lift the eyelid, and flush from the corner toward the nose. (See notations on “gunpowder” in the bullets above as all three ingredients in small-diluted doses will serve their purpose.)

Insects in the ear or nose:

Introduce a few drops of warm “sweet oil” (olive oil). Either the bug will vacate or drown and the oil soothes the irritation. Either way, a syringe of warm water will flush everything out. If you don't have a syringe, an assistant with a mouth full of warm water and a pipe stem can do the same.

- **Sweet Oil (Olive Oil)** – Has been used in medicine since ancient times. Phytonutrients such as oleocanthal along with various amino acids and antioxidants are highly effective in reducing pain, inflammation, and infection. It is also rich in vitamins A and E to promote healthy tissue regeneration.

Earache:

Treat similar as insects in ear or nose but use a poultice of roasted onion and flush out with a syringe using a solution of castile soap and water.



Daily produce from the heirloom garden

- **Onion** contains phytochemicals that boost the immune system and inhibits the harmful effects of substances such as insect venom upon human cell structures. It also makes an effective solution in treating wounds or even earache.

Treatment of insect bites: Apply a fresh slice of onion or a paste of salt. Another easy treatment is a compress of common clay.

Mosquito and black fly repellent:

Crush sage leaves in your hand and wipe it onto the exposed skin that insects may attack. More effectively a couple drops of pennyroyal or mountain mint (Oregano oil) in with olive oil will ward of these venomous creatures. One common Native remedy is to also use wild sweet grass. I pulverize a handful and apply it all over the exposed parts (hands, ears, face & neck) and have gotten a lot of relief from flying insects especially. There is not too much science here. Sage, mints and the sweet grass all contain essential oils that parasitic insects such as mosquitoes, really hate.

- **“Mountain Mint” (Oregano Oil)** – is another ancient treatment that is a seemingly amazing panacea. Its high levels of Omega 3 acids and other amino acids give it a strong antibacterial, antiviral, antiseptic, antifungal, and even anti-parasitic

capabilities. It can be consumed orally for head colds or used in treating a variety of infections in addition to being an insect repellent.

Poisonous Snake Bite:

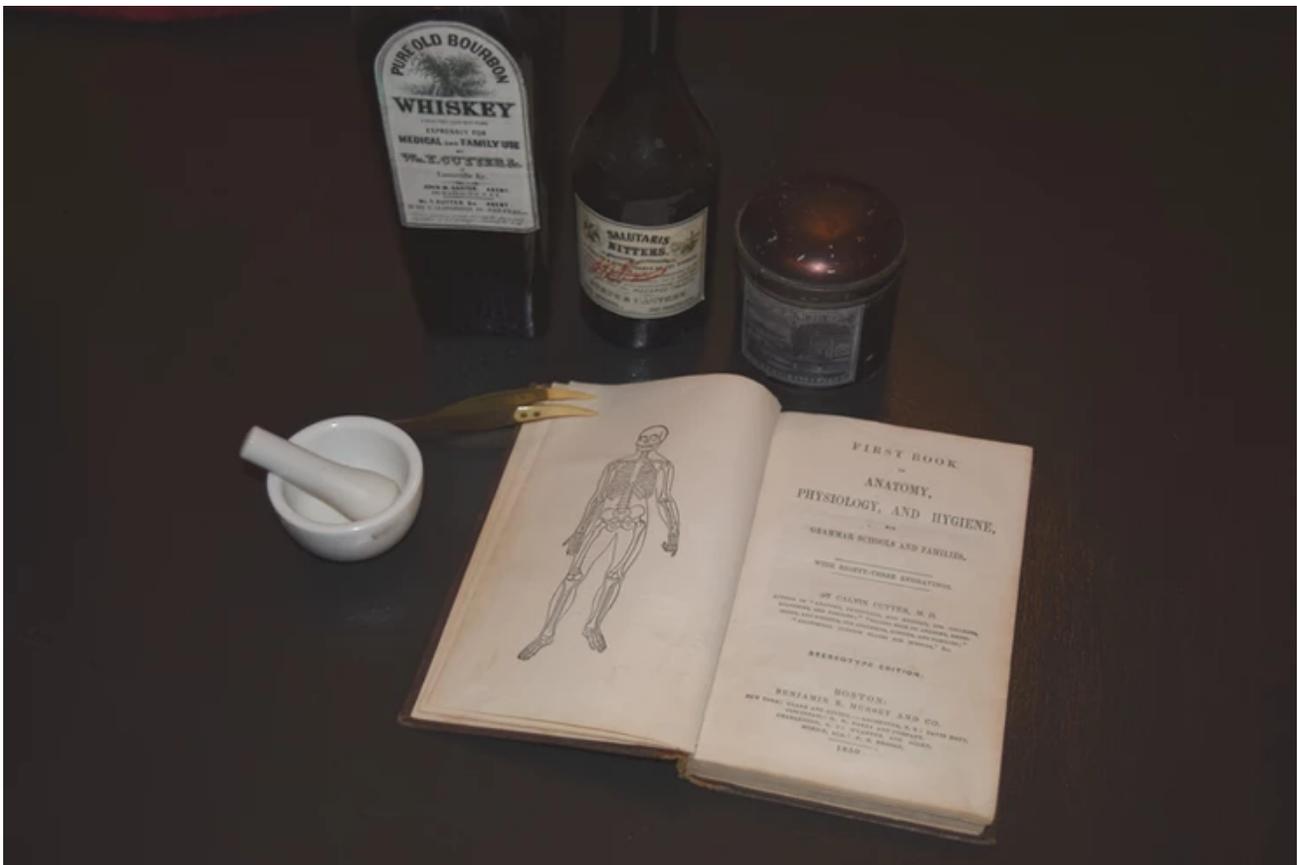
Bite off and chew a portion of Cedron Nut or scrape into a poultice and apply to the wounds. Make a strong tea of the bean shavings and drink ½ pint of it every 30 minutes for about 6-hours or until the effects are greatly diminished. Another treatment is to pulverize blue indigo and mix with water to make a paste to be used as a poultice. Apply to the wound till the blue color fades, then apply a fresh poultice repeatedly until the effects subside and the indigo stops fading in color.

- **Cedron Bean or Cedron Nut** – I was unable to find modern medical research as to which active properties in this nut served as an effective antivenom. That said, it was a well known treatment in the 19th century and the preceding centuries as well. Despite its documented usage to much earlier dates, the Central American nut was featured in numerous experiments especially in the late 19th century demonstrating the efficacy of the bean's ability to negate the toxic effects of venomous snake bites.
- **Blue Indigo** – is not water soluble but could be powdered and mixed with water to form a paste that is used as a poultice for venomous snake bites. It appears that blue indigo is especially potent with high levels of potassium permanganate that greatly diminish the toxic effects of snake venom. Although modern antivenoms are a more effective treatment, indigo has verified chemical properties and a long history of serving as a functional treatment when others are not at hand.

Sore, blistered feet:

Treat them with a mixture of pig lard and flour or chalk. Change to dry socks and rub the soles of the socks with soap for greater relief on the march.

- **Lard / Tallow**- contains myristic acid and high levels of unsaturated fats that can both sooth and nourish inflamed skin and muscle tissue. The antiseptic qualities of soap in addition to the lard provide further relief.



Common household medical textbook

Treatment of cough:

1-to-1 mixture of molasses and white wine vinegar. A stronger version of this concoction involved 40 drops of laudanum to 6 ounces with the afore mentioned cough syrup. Other cures involve a solution of strong honey with warm water or tea.

- **Vinegar** – dates back to ancient times as a form of wound treatment and as an antiseptic cleansing ingredient. Although modern medical analysis has downgraded its effectiveness at wound treatment or cleaning human pathogens from surfaces, its antibacterial qualities have been affirmed. Regardless, It remained a highly effective solution for proper oral hygiene in addition to treating head colds from ancient times to the last century. Oregano oil in tea or soup is another treatment. (**Note: also see bullets describing molasses.*)

Headache:

Was believed to be related to poor blood circulation or gastric discomfort. 'Sick headache' was what we now call a migraine. Most important is to find shade with some quiet and rest. A cold compress should be made to the forehead and the patient be served a tea made of sage. Suitable substitutes are ginger, feverfew, or peppermint. These will also bring comfort to the stomach. Burdock was introduced from Europe and if any is available, bind its leaves to the soles of the patient's feet as they rest.

Eliminate Gastrointestinal parasites:

Sift in a little hardwood (white) ash into your corn meal or flour. It has been an ancient practice with many American Indian tribes and was first documented by English anthropologists among the Cherokee in the late 1700s. When asked why they added ash to their cornmeal, the Cherokee reply was *"It is to kill worms that get into the belly"*.



Applewood produces an excellent ash for medicine

- **Hardwood Ash** – is a source of lye when distilled. It can be used in the manufacture of soaps or stronger cleaning solutions. When the hardwood (white) ash is mixed with meal, it works as an effective vermifuge that poisons parasites living in your gastrointestinal tract. Adding ash to cornmeal was also known to combat bone loss which can occur on a highly corn-based diet.

**Note: Coniferous trees and other softwoods do not have an adequate degree of lye in their ash.*



The Short List of Simple Cures

(West & Johnston, 1863)

Dysentery - Dissolve as much table salt in pure vinegar as will ferment and work clear. When the foam is discharged, cork it up in bottles and put away for use. (Dose. *one large spoonful in a gill of boiling water.*)

Sick Headache - One teaspoon of pulverized charcoal and 1/3 teaspoonful of soda (saleratus) mixed in very warm water.

Toothache - Powdered alum by itself or mixed equal parts with salt applied all over the sore area and enamel. This will alleviate pain and arrest decay.

Gastrointestinal worms - Mix 2-dracms of common salts with 2-scruples of conchneal (scaled insect parasitic to nopal cactus) Dose: 1/2 drachm every morning..

Chapped Lips - Wash with barley water and apply a mixture of Tully (*Sanguisorba officinalis*, aka. great burnet) and olive oil.

Chapped Hands - Dust the hands with finely powdered oatmeal.

Frontiersmen and pioneer travelers are often underestimated by modern historians for their ability to provide suitable medical care for life's emergencies. The reason for this is that research is tedious and the narrative has become inundated by the inaccurate depictions of

modern writers who simply lack the desire to do the research. Although modern medical technology now offers more effective methods, it's nice to know you aren't completely out of luck should the day come again when the gas no longer flows and electricity is replaced by firelight.

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