

COMPRESS OR POULTICE

GENERAL INFORMATION

Sometimes, especially with severe injuries or deep infections such as mastitis, a compress is the best and most effective method to use. A compress keeps the herbs up against the problem area. The moisture and the heat of a compress act as drawing agents, increasing the effectiveness of the herbs by exponential degrees.

Herbal liniments and poultices were very important with my family of boys (and with my daughters, also) until we discovered essential oils. There has been very little need for liniments since, and we use herbal compresses and poultices much less than we used to. Essential oils are more convenient, and a whole lot less messy than a compress. Unless serious drawing properties are needed, an essential oil is often more than sufficient.

BASIC INSTRUCTIONS

Place the herbs in the water. Distilled or spring water is an absolute necessity. Bring the mixture barely to a boil and then remove it from the heat. Let the mixture steep for a few minutes. Take a square of cloth— cotton is best (although I have often used an old bed sheet) and place the herbs in the center of the cloth (for a poultice) or use just the liquid to soak the cloth (compress). Fold it so that the herbs will stay inside during use. Place this poultice on the body and keep it warm in some manner. Leave the poultice on as long as you possibly can. When the herbs have dried out, it is time to steep another batch.

Occasionally, a poultice will include a carrier-type oil. The addition of an oil keeps the herbs moist for a longer period of time. Soaked oils, such as arnica, add their own anti-inflammatory properties.

A compress is made using only the liquid in which the herbs were steeped to soak the cloth. For a poultice, the herbs are folded into the cloth.

The chemicals, such as chlorine, found in ordinary tap water will interfere with the medicinal properties of the herbs. Many years ago I tried desperately to fight repeated mastitis infections with herb poultices. (Since I was allergic to anti-biotics, winning with the herb was important!) Time after time the poultices didn't work, and I became very ill before the herbal tinctures I was taking by mouth were able to take effect. Eventually, my husband learned about not using chlorinated tap water. The difference with the next poultice was astonishing! The previous poultices, made with tap water, had not been effective at all. But this time, even though the infection was already far advanced, the swelling, pain, and redness began to recede immediately.