

Home Health Remedies
and
Final Analysis

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Home Health Remedies

In all societies, folk medicine exists. For some groups, folk medicine is the only way to cure illnesses and yet for other folk groups, folk medicine is primarily an alternative form of medicine. I interviewed Lamille and Roberta Houchens, who live in Homer, Kentucky. Both are seventy-one years of age and have lived in Logan County all of their lives. Mr. Houchens is engaged in farming and Roberta is his wife, a mother, grand-mother, as well as great-grand-mother. It is evident that both stay very busy. Neither one has any serious health problems other than arthritis. Both have maintained their health by eating proper foods and exercise.

Although both practice forms of folk medicine, Mr. Houchens depends more on health remedies than his wife does. At the time of the interview, they stated that they have a family physician. They only use the care of a physician as a last resort to maintain proper health needs. Mrs. Houchens spoke more about the care from a physician than Mr. Houchens. Mr. Houchens commented more about health care methods and remedies pertaining to colds, stings and other conditions as well as illnesses. Mr. Houchens also stated that he only goes to a physician unless it is absolutely necessary. Some years ago, he, his wife and their seven sons all had severe colds. Mrs. Houchens and her sons went to a physician, while Mr. Houchens stayed at home and administered his own remedies. He also stated that his medicine worked faster than the medicine the physician prescribed to his wife and children and that her recovered before they did. He found that incident amusing.

Mr. Houchens has practised home remedies since he was a boy. Once, as a boy, he set his dogs broken leg. At sixteen, he set his little sisters broken arm. He stated that now, his sister cannot acknowledge which arm was broken. Over the years, he has practiced and experimented with many remedies. During the interview, he shared these remedies with me, as well as a few stories about

remedies concerning his friends. The following are illnesses and discomforts he and his wife have had and the remedy to cure them:

1. Arthritis

- a. Mixture of turpentine, coal oil and lard, applied to arthritic area, leaving it on for one day. On the second day, immerse area in very hot water. This method releases pain.

2. Blood Clot

- a. Apply omega oil and a hot wet towel to the clot. Mr. Houchens stated that the clot he had, started in his thigh. He also said the clot was as large as a silver dollar and that it went away in a weeks time.

3. Cold and Congestion

- a. Mix soda, water and vinegar to gargle. Also a mixture of turpentine, coal oil and lard, to rub on chest and back. The lard aids against blistering.
- b. As a child, Mr. Houchens also wore a bag of asafetida around his neck. This would prevent a cold.

4. Diarrhea

- a. Dig the root of a goldenrod plant and chew the root. Swallow only the juice from the root. Mr. Houchens said, "This is real medicine."
- b. He also stated that eating popcorn helps during this condition.

5. Earache

- a. Soak a towel in warm turpentine, until steam is coming up from the towel. Allow the steam to enter the ear. This will cure the earache.

6. Nosebleed

- a. Apply a dime under the upper lip. This method will stop bleeding.
- b. Apply a piece of brown paper under the upper lip.
Mrs. Houchens remarked that brown paper is not made like it use to be and that it even smells different. Both agreed, that the difference in odor may have some effect on this remedy.

7. Poison Ivy

- a. In order to releave itching and cure the rash, scratch the area very hard, enough to break the skin, and pour pure bleach on it.

8. Stomach Ache

- a. Spread a wet tobacco leaf on the stomach area. This will releave pain.

9. Stings and Small Abrasions

- a. Dip cut or stung area in turpintine.
- b. Apply chewed tobacco on the area .
- c. Spray lysol on the wound.

All of these remedies kill germs.

10. Blood Stopping

- a. Mix sugar and soot (from a wood stove) together and apply on wound. He stated never to use coal soot, only wood soot, for healing purposes. His method heals the wound. Mr.Houchens stated that he once stuck a knife through his leg by accident. He applied sugar and soot to the wound. Although it left a darkened scar, he never went to a doctor due to the wound.

11. Tonsillitis

- a. Gargle turpentine. A friend of Mr. Houchens learned this remedy from an old indian doctor. This cured Mr. Houchens from severe tonsillitis.

12. Ringworm

- a. Apply the juice (stain) from a walnut hull on the infected area. Do not wash off the stain. Let it wear off until the ringworm is gone.

Through conversation, I learned that Mr. Houchens has mostly taken care of himself, while Mrs. Houchens has taken care of herself and their children. In few instances, Mrs. Houchens has been of some help to her husband. It is evident that they have taken health care responsibilities for themselves. There is not a major caretaker for the ill person in their family.

With few exceptions, the extent to which traditional practices are used is almost complete. Their children have had to force them to see a doctor. Once, Mrs. Houchens became very ill and had not seen a doctor. Her grandson literally picked her up and took her to a hospital. They both use their remedies with faithful practice. They believe that each remedy will work but only if given a proper amount of time. If the remedy seems to fail, they don't exclude it and continue to wait for a result. It is then a physician is considered. Even though their main method of health care is folk remedies, they also find faith in their family physician. They use these remedies due to the results they have had in the past.

Mrs. Houchens told me of a time when her six year old sister became ill. Local doctors diagnosed her as having "white swell" or tuberculosis of the bone. Sores appeared on her arms and legs. Local doctors gave up hope. It was then her parents took her to Louisville, where she was met with equal disappointment. The trip to Louisville is significant to the severity of her

sisters illness. A doctor in Russellville told her family that the only resort for the child was for her to drink cod liver oil. He also gave them a form of black salve for the sores. This recommendation cured her little sister. She is still living at the age of sixty-one.

The most impressive remedy concerned a seventeen year old boy who had cancer. Doctors gave the boy only three months to live. A older man in the community told the boy to drink a shot of one-hundred proof whiskey every night before bed. The boy never had any form of alcohol to drink in his life. He was instructed to get up very early the next morning, go out to the garden, sit down on the ground and dig into the earth. He was to continue to use this method until he was completely well. He is still living today. Mr. Houchens believes that the whiskey opened up the boys lungs. It is believed that digging the earth and inhaling the fresh earth cured the boy of his disease.

Mr. and Mrs. Houchens are strong believers in folk medicine. They have faith in their health care remedies due to the experience they have had in the past. Their restored health is proof that the remedies they practice work. Family traditions and personal logic are two main issues that underlie their folk medical beliefs. All of these characteristics point toward their values of belief which highlights just one of many characteristics pertaining to their personal folklore.

Final Analysis

Folk medicine has become one of today's most talked about methods of medicine. Some old wives tales are no longer believed to be superstitious but a "new" way to practice "old" medicine. People are not letting their medical traditions die and others are becoming more interested in how folk medicine works. "All functioning individuals may be said to possess health systems. These consist of beliefs concerning definitions of health and illness, the cause of health and illness and resources for producing the one or preventing the other." 1

One of today's top magazines, Better Homes and Gardens, published an article pertaining to folk medicine and asked, "Does folk medicine truly work?" Doctors were asked questions concerning home remedies, sent in by the readers. "Old wives tales do indeed have some basis in fact, however obscure." 2 People are asking questions and want to learn more from our "old folk practitioners." Although folk remedies are being passed down through generation, they have been given a new birth and modern society is catching on. "There is a contemporary fashion for 'medical chic'. Running counter to the development of medical science and 'orthodox' practice, 'unorthodox' theories of illness and methods of treatment are currently enjoying popular attention." 3

There are many reasons why people continue to practice and seek methods of folk medicine. First of all minor illnesses can be treated at home or over the counter. This means people will not have as many expensive doctor bills. Another reason is convenience. For those who have always practiced folk medicine as a personal way of health care, they have a sound belief system and seeking a physician sometimes is not feasible or logical. "The optimism of scientific medicine is under attack." 4 People are seeking new methods and their beliefs are stronger than ever. More people tend to believe that the good earth and all of its natural surroundings will take care of its people.

Health food stores and organic food are on the rise.

Due to new folk practices problems are coming into view because of lack of communication. It is difficult for a physician to help those who have no faith in the medicine he or she practices. "Traditional beliefs and customs have not usually been analyzed in terms of their effect on mental health. All of this and much more is certainly possible, especially in the context of modern medicine in which family medicine, community medicine, psychosomatic medicine and medical behavioral science are seeking to understand disease and health in connection with the whole person and his environment." ⁵ It is very important for both groups to communicate. Both groups, folk and medical, can enhance their ability to learn and form new ideas to communicate. This system will promote better health care.

In conclusion, folk medicine and home health traditions have had a new outlook for a new generation and a rebirth for those who have been out of touch with the medical folk world. People are willing to try new ideas that derive from old methods. Folk medicine no longer holds the superstitions it once held. In its own way it has proved to be a way of life for people in all societies.

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