

# Using herbal remedies

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## Read this first...

The Pontious Farm does not employ professional herbalists.

The Pontious Farm offers herbal remedy information, compiled from various herbal references, as a courtesy to our customers.

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## Play the safety card

For now, herb experts say the best advice for dealing with herbs is this: Whatever herb you're taking, learn as much as you can about what to expect from it. If anything unexpected happens, stop taking it and check with an expert you trust. In addition, here's some further advice for anyone using herbal medicine.

## Precautions

Use all herbal remedies cautiously and follow these guidelines:

- Always consult a physician if you have painful or chronic symptoms.
- Don't mix herbal medicines with medical prescriptions.
- Avoid large doses of any herb.
- Stop using any herbal medicine if you notice any side effects, such as headache, dizziness, or an upset stomach.
- Avoid using herbal medicines if you are pregnant or nursing, unless you have the consent and are under the supervision of an obstetrician.
- Do not give herbal medicines to children less than two years old without the consent of your pediatrician.

## Treatment & dosage

Unless otherwise noted, all recipes and dosages are for adults. Reduce the adult doses for children in the following manner:

- For children under two years, use a fifth of the adult dose (and get an OK from your pediatrician). Increase gradually to reach a quarter of the adult dose at age three or four (depending on the size of the child), a third at age six or seven, a half at age eight or nine, and to a full adult dose at puberty.
- If you're over 65 or sensitive to other drugs, start with low-strength preparations.

Unless otherwise stated, take remedies for four to six weeks. If there is no improvement, seek professional help.

## Fresh vs. dried

If a recipe does not specify dried or fresh herbs, use the following quantity information to guide your measurements:

- If a recipe calls for teaspoons, it probably refers to dried herbs. To translate into fresh herbs, double or triple the quantity.
- A standard herbal infusion recipe for 2 cups of water calls for 2 tbs of dried herbs or 1- ½ cups of fresh herbs.

## Make sure of the diagnosis

Herbal devotees sometimes feel they can diagnose illness as well as come up with herbs to treat it. But diagnosing is an art that's best left to physicians—so resist the temptation to diagnose yourself.

Once you're confident of a diagnosis, you can then discuss with your physician how best to treat it: drugs, herbs, or a combination of the two—plus any diet, exercise, and lifestyle changes.

## Watch out for side effects

It's hard to imagine an active plant chemical—much less an herbal mixture containing thousands of them—having just one targeted chemical reaction in our bodies. Naturally, we have other reactions, unrelated to the illness, that could appropriately be termed *side effects*. That's why you have to watch it when taking any new herb for the first time.

If you have an unpleasant reaction to an herb—say, dizziness, nausea, or headache—cut back on your dosage or stop taking it altogether. Listen to your body: If the herb doesn't feel right, don't take it.

## Be alert for allergic reactions

Even if you have no known allergies, you might react to a new herb that you try. Again, listen to your body. If you develop unusual symptoms, stop taking the herb and consult an allergist or physician.

If you have difficulty breathing within 30 minutes of trying a new herb, call 911 immediately. You may be having an anaphylactic reaction—the most severe form of allergic reaction—which can prove fatal unless treated promptly. An anaphylactic reaction to an herb is rare, but possible.

## Beware of interactions

Pharmaceutical medicines sometimes interact badly with each other and with certain foods. Same goes for herbal medicines, although many herbal reference books neglect to mention this. Always be particularly careful when taking more than one drug or herb, or a combination of a drug and an herb. If you suspect a bad interaction, consult your physician or pharmacist.

## Use one herb at a time

By starting out with one herb, you'll learn how it affects your body and your symptoms. If you start with herbal combinations, you won't know which herb works best.

## Do ask, do tell

If you're seeing both a physician and an herbalist, you may be tempted simply to do what both advise. Usually that's OK, such as when a physician gives you sleeping pills for insomnia and an herbalist recommends a hot bedtime bath with a blend of sedative aromatherapy oils.

But just as too many cooks can spoil the broth, too many health practitioners can be too much of a good thing. If your doc prescribes Prozac and your herbalist recommends St. John's wort, and you take both, you're doubling up on antidepressants. Or if your physician prescribes half an aspirin a day to prevent heart attack, and your herbalist tells you to drink a daily cup of willow bark tea, which contains the herbal equivalent of aspirin—that's probably more anticlotting action than you need.

To avoid the too-many-cooks problem, be sure to tell them both about all the medicines you're taking, as well as any unusual foods you're eating.

## Don't expect instant results

Using herbs can be as easy and familiar as going to the local drugstore and buying some capsules. But don't expect herbs to be as instantly effective as over-the-counter drugs. That's not the way they work.

## Herbal infusion (tea)

- 2 tbsp Dried herbs or 1-½ cups packed, fresh herb leaves or flowers, washed and dried well
- 2 cups Boiling, fresh spring, well, or distilled water

Pour the boiling water over the herb. Brew for 15 minutes to several hours in a glass or ceramic pot. Drink ½ to 1 cup three to four times a day.

## Herbal decoction

- 2 tbsp Dried herbs or 1-½ cups fresh bark, roots, or stems, washed and dried well
- 2 cups Boiling water

Add the herbs to boiling water in an enamel saucepan. Simmer gently, without boiling, for 30 minutes. Strain, and drink ½ to 1 cup three to four times a day.

## Herbal compress

Follow the instructions for preparing an infusion or decoction, then soak a towel in the warm liquid. Wring out the towel and lay it upon the affected area, covering it with a dry towel. As the compress cools, replace it with a warm one. Continue treatment for 30 minutes or until the skin is flushed or tingly.

## Herbal maceration

Maceration is good for herbs likely to lose some of their therapeutic value if heated.

Cover herbs with vegetable oil, cider vinegar, or pure alcohol. Seal and leave for two weeks, shaking jar each day. Strain and top with fresh herbs. Repeat until liquid smells strongly herbal. Strain, seal, and bottle. Keeps well.

## Herbal ointment

- 1-1½ oz Melted beeswax or rendered lard
- Herbal oil

Mix together beeswax/lard and herbal oil. Store in a cool place for one week.

## Herbal plaster

Place dried or fresh herbs, or a paste (see poultice recipe) in the folds of a light towel or cheesecloth, then lay the plaster on the injured area.

## Herbal poultice

- ¼ cup Dried herbs or 3 cups fresh herbs, washed, dried, and minced
- 4 cups Oatmeal

Mix the herbs and oatmeal with enough hot water to form a paste. Place the paste directly on the skin and cover with towel. As it cools, replace it with a warm one. Continue treatment for 30 minutes.

## Herbal syrup

- ¼ cup Dried herbs or 3 cups packed, fresh herbs, washed and dried well
- 1 qt Water
- 1-2 tbsp Honey

Add the ingredients in an enamel saucepan. Bring to a boil and continue at a slow boil until the liquid is reduced by half. Add the honey. Store refrigerated for up to one month.

## Herbal tincture

- ¾ cup Powdered, dried herb
- 2 cups Brandy, vodka, or gin

Mix together ingredients in a glass bottle. Allow to steep, shaking occasionally, for several weeks. Strain and store.