

FEED A COLD, STARVE A FEVER

by

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There is simply too much sickness in the world and getting well just isn't that easy. Doctors and hospitals are often too far away and may be very expensive. It is sometimes even hard to find a good pharmacy. For all of these reasons man has been forced to rely on alternate methods of healing himself.

Believe me. I understand that you are not an alternate methods crowd. When you are a little sick, you go to Walmart like everyone else. There you can find the most wonderful assortment of over the counter medications. Everything is available. From those shelves you can choose medications to calm a cough or clear congestion or reduce fever or moisten the eyes, or relive constipation, or make almost any minor ailment more endurable. When you are very sick, you seek the aid of a physician. He or she can truly perform miracles. After testing to determine the true cause of the problem, the physician might prescribe a medication or procedure that will almost surely make you well. Yes, we are quite comfortable with our form of health care. But millions of people through the world seek health in manners that seem strange to us. Tonight we are going to look at some of those methods and perhaps develop some new perspectives.

I have already mentioned alternate methods and new perspectives so about now you would probably like to have some idea what I am talking about. I am talking about folk medicine--the medicine of the Orient, Biblical times, the Ozarks, Appalachia. But in doing so, we must also talk about the practices of my grandmother and your aunt and our neighbors and perhaps even ourselves. It is the medicine of the common folk where Nature is the only drugstore that you need and your doctor lives just across the creek from you.

To remedy a painful ear, simply instill a few drops of fresh urine in the ear. To remove a wart, massage the wart with a stone gathered in a graveyard in the dark of the moon or by tying knots in a string equal to the number of warts and then leaving the string by a path where someone might pick it up and acquire your warts. Yes,

these methods might seem a bit drastic and unconventional to some of us, but to the real devotees of folk medicine, these are just part of the standard fare. These or similar beliefs go back to prehistoric man and yet have continued to flourish in our country as well as the rest of the world.

The science of pharmacy is still not totally removed from the art of folk medicine. Pharmacognosy is still an interest of most pharmacists and outstanding pharmacognosists are highly desired by all drug manufacturers. Many of today's medications have a history of use by herbalists who gathered them from natural environments and prepared them for use by the sick.

Between the mysteries of birth and death, people find many ways to pursue the dream of perfect health. Mary Hazelton pursues her dream in Crofton and explained her theory on arthritis to me one day. It seems that there are three kinds of arthritis. I wasn't really sure and wouldn't have differed anyway (she was already on a roll). While I tried to come up with three types, Miss Hazelton had already raised three fingers. "The first kind is swelling kind," she said dropping one finger. "Then there is the drawing kind and the stiffening kind." If I had been able to come up with three, I was quite sure that these three would not have been the ones that I would have come up with. I later found out that Miss Hazelton had a touch of all three and that she also had a bad back that was not related to any of the three. No the back pain was the direct result of an injury to the left side of her "vertical brain." Many years ago her doctor had given her Motrin, but this never helped and bothered her stomach. Since that time, she has worn a copper bracelet with good results and hasn't seen a doctor in years. Recently she has added gin and raisins to the regimen and that has proved to be quite successful.

While unusual, Miss Hazelton is certainly not alone in her appreciation of not so standard forms of self-help healing. In eastern Kentucky or certainly in China, she would feel even more a part of the crowd. In many parts of Appalachia, nature's

healing is utilized to a high degree. If Mrs. Hazelton required additional help for her arthritis, she might try carrying buckshot or a buckeye in her pocket, or taking the powdered ashes of a turtle shell internally, chewing a thistly root, carrying a peeled potato in the pocket until it turned black, wearing shoes with copper nails to the ground the pain, rubbing the joints with snake oil, applying heat from hot springs, or taking a tea made from willow bark or leaves.

Now let's get serious and find out how to heal some folks. The first thing you need to know about is the doctrine of Humours. About 450 B.C., a Greek poet by the name of Empedocles introduced the idea that four elements were the root of all things. This was combined with the belief that the earth revolved around a fixed point, known as "the hearth of the Universe" and with the doctrine that the essence of all things was numbers to formulate a complicated scheme. The four elements (earth, air, fire and water) were combined with four abstract qualities (dry, cold, hot, and moist) and four humours (blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile) to explain various disease states. For instance, hot and moist equals blood, which, of course, in most situations would be good unless an individual was too hot and moist which, of course, would be bad. Cold and moist equals phlegm, which I think would almost always be bad unless, of course, the individual was just cold and moist enough.

This theory was still accepted by contemporaries of William Shakespeare. In fact, by that time it had been expanded and perhaps clarified a bit. The combination of the humours within a man's body was referred to as his complexion. This described both his physical nature and his personality. In man's body, earth became black bile and an excess of it caused a man to be melancholy. Water became phlegm, cold and moist; it caused man to be sluggish. Air became blood, hot and moist; it produced a vivacious disposition. Fire, hot and dry, produced yellow bile, making one hot-tempered. This system was so well understood by Shakespeare's audience that it provided the language for virtually all of his references to physical disease, to the

human body, and to personality traits in his plays.

The next profound influence was brought about the belief, religious in origin, that nothing grows on this earth in vain, but that everything is meant for the benefit of man through the wisdom of the creator. This meant that there was something that could be done with everything and all man had to do was find it. This led to infinite possibilities, but trying everything that grows on every disease is slow work, so more information was needed.

The "Doctrine of Signatures" filled the bill. It is the belief that the shape, structure or other quality of a plant is a clue or signature telling man what its uses and purposes are. For instance, the lotus root might be used to treat jaundice because of its yellow color. An outgrowth of the doctrine of signatures is the belief that plants and animals indigenous to a give region would always be those which were most useful for the feeding and medication of the inhabitants.

So, this healing people is starting to look like pretty easy stuff. Let's give it a try. For no particular reason, let's look first at baldness. It is easily remedied by grease from a hairy animal or by the fat of the hairless python or by applications of boiled hemlock.

If you wish to treat a patient with kidney disease, kidney beans are regarded as a good bet because of their shape. They may also be used prophylactically. Kidney stones may be dissolved by saxifrage tea because this plant grows among stones and its roots break up the stones.

The influence of the Doctrine of Signatures is evident in both of these examples, but it is much more keenly demonstrated by ginseng. Ginseng is a wonderful plant whose structure is very similar to that of a human. In fact, the Chinese named this root "jen shen," or "man plant." It has been used for years in traditional Chinese medicine. The ancient Chinese believed that the root of the ginseng plant was the crystallization of the essence of the earth in the shape of a man and that ginseng had rejuvenating,

recuperative, revitalizing, and curative actions. The Chinese use ginseng for its tonic and tranquilizing effects. They know that ginseng increases alertness, brilliance, and concentration and improves memory. Ginseng appears to possess antitumor and antiviral effects as well as the ability to lower cholesterol. There are also positive effects on the nervous system and on sexual performance.

Because ginseng is so effective, it is quite expensive. One pound of the dried root sells for about 350 dollars. That means that there is no shortage of ginseng growers and hunters. The typical environment for optimum growth is dark and damp, so the woods of North Carolina yield many pounds of the plant each year. Ginseng hunters of the area attain near legendary status for their ability to find wild ginseng when others have scoured the area and found nothing.

Incidentally, if you would like to join the legions of hunters, the ginseng in our area usually grows about 12 to 18 inches and is mature and ready to be dug when the seeds turn bright red. Remember dark, damp areas with thick foliage serve as a hiding place for many snakes, but don't worry; we can take care of that, too.

Ginseng is not the only plant that offers curative powers. There are many others that have been used for years and are still being used today. In fact, several are listed as active ingredients in medications found in pharmacies today. A partial list of these herbs and plants would include:

Aloe: known in ancient China. It is a component of many laxatives.

Banana: useful in treating certain varieties of digestive and nutritional conditions.

Cabbage: used to prevent scurvy prior to 1754.

Capsicum: red and green peppers used to arrest diarrhea. Used today as a topical for sore joint and muscles-- Doctor's Cream.

Cascara Sagrada: Spanish for the sacred cascara. Comes from the bark of the cascara tree. Used as a laxative and cathartic--CasEvac.

Clove: Toothache. At one time it was believed to “stay” the plague, relieve vomiting, and remedy “wind” in the intestines.

Lettuce: Used for treating burns and to overcome sleeplessness.

Licorice: soothe irritated throat.

Thyme: Induces urination, induces menstruation and brings about abortion.

But what kinds of conditions might respond to folk medicine? The answer is almost anything. Let’s look at a few. Fever and chills respond to chewing turnip roots, or eating watermelon or grapes or drinking a tea of the common chickweed, or putting black pepper in your stockings. In Peru the natives learned the value of Peruvian bark for treating their periodic recurrent fever and chills, which we recognize now as malaria. This bark, derived from the cinchona tree, gave the world quinine.

Many common herbs are effective for treating constipation: sarsaparillas (sweetroot), wild senna, burning ash, buck bean, May apple, swamp milkweed, and queen’s delight (yawroot).

Bleeding can be controlled by applying powdered sumac seeds in honey.

Aches and pains were treated with poultices of cow manure, hot mashed potatoes, or a plaster of onions, rum and wildcat grease.

Snake, bee, and spider bites called for poultices of plantain leaves or of mud, or were charmed away with the “snake ball.”

Burns were treated with a concoction of the inner bark of a pine tree, with lard or other grease.

Boils and carbuncles were treated by “drawing the inflammation to a ‘head’” with hot poultices, which might be of anything which would hold heat, from the split carcass of a chicken to break and milk or a variety of plant seeds.

Cough and colds would respond to a strip of raw pork or one of red flannel, or a dirty scarf around the neck; skin of a dead fish tied to the feet or just greasing the soles;

whiskey internally; kerosene internally with or without sugar; tea of cherry bark; quilted jacket around the chest; or a hot bath, hot drink and bed.

Folk medicine is a hot item at the news stand. Recently I noticed the cover of an August **Weekly World News** extolling the the value of the Apple Cider and Honey cure. Apparently this natural miracle concoction can cure arthritis, bladder infections, cancer, canker sores, colds, hearing loss, heart disease, high blood pressure, impotence, indigestion, influenza, skin problems, sore muscles, excess flab and much, much more. I assumed that this was all true since the paper appeared to be reputable enough. (It cost 99 cents, \$1.09 in Canada), so I turned to the article and investigated more thoroughly. It was all really true! I found that exciting new research demonstrated that drinking daily doses of apple cider and honey, mixed one-to-one, help repair damage to the inner ear and boost hearing levels. I also learned that last year German scientists discovered that in combination with honey, apply cider actually stimulates the production of sex hormones in men and women. A tablespoonful of apple cider and a teaspoonful of honey taken just before sex have been shown to double stamina in men. Both products are also good for the feet. A coating of warm honey on the bottoms of your feet will make them feel better after a long day at work or too much exercise. For a real treat, soak you feet in chilled apple juice before putting your shoes back on. You can also take off pound after pound of ugly flab in a matter of weeks by sipping a fabulous "diet cocktail" made of five parts apple cider to one part honey. Drink one cup of this miracle brew before meals to speed up metabolism and suppress your appetite.

All of these facts are brought to us by Dr. Louis Ducarre of Geneva, Switzerland, who has spent years researching these and other amazing cures. Dr. Ducarre must have started his research when he was about five because judging from his picture, which appeared in the article, he is about twenty now. Of course, if he has been taking the apple cider and honey combination, he might be much older and merely appear

young.

Each and every one of these life saving hints is authenticated for us by the picture of the swim suit clad model which dominates one page of the paper. She is holding a five pound dumbbell in each hand and is the most healthy looking woman that I have ever seen. If it were not for this miracle cure, she would undoubtedly be fat, bald, toothless, and on welfare. This is truly Mother Nature's most powerful healing combination.

If you could possibly require more proof of the worldwide appeal of folk medications, please note the sign on the building just south of Cat West in Oak Grove. It says "Ginseng." This stretch of highway which has never been known as a mecca of health care may now be viewed in an entirely new light.

Speaking of universal appeal, people come from miles away to be cured by Charlie Grider. Charlie runs the Crofton Health Care Institute and barbecue shack and must have at one time had dozens of brothers and sisters because everyone calls her "Aunt Charlie." I have never actually seen her, but have sold items to her through nephews and nieces on dozens of occasions. Most purchases have been either sulfur or senna powder. By asking more about Aunt Charlie each time someone comes in for her, I have been able to find out the following. She is somewhere in her hundreds. She had no children and was never married. No one ever spent time trying to teach her to brew medicine, but she watched as her mother made medicine for her and her brothers and sisters. Her mother would use mostly spring water, honey, wild peppermint, ginseng, sassafras, corn liquor, and the bark of some trees. Charlie has used each of these items along with liberal amounts of coal oil, but now finds some ingredients hard to obtain because the woods behind her house have been cleared and she has to go too far to find what she needs. She also tells her nieces and nephews that they are lazy and "no account" because they won't go to the woods and get what she needs. Several, fearing her wrath or simply wanting to be cured, have

tried to find what she required but were usually unsuccessful. So Charlie simply makes do with what is available. She substitutes this for that and makes several different teas. She prefers to brew them outside when possible, but will use her wood stove in the house when the weather is bad. Last summer, I got to know a nephew who was visiting from Chicago. He and I talked about Charlie several times during his five day visit back to his roots. When he got ready to drive back to his home, he stopped by the store to show me a present that Charlie had given him. It was a fruit jar full of a clear liquid with a couple different types of root and some bark still in the jar. The over-riding scent was that of alcohol. "I don't even want to know where she gets that," said the nephew, probably wondering about the penalty for rum running in Chicago. Charlie had told him that it was fine to start right away taking a teaspoonful every day, but that it would be much more effective if he let it sit for a couple of months before starting to take it. He wasn't sure what it was effective for, but he was sure that the letting it sit part would not be a problem. He planned to put it on the shelf with the last five jars that Charlie had given him.

Apparently one of Charlie's main complaints in life is that none of her nieces and nephews will take the time to learn any of the things that she has to teach them. Almost without exception, they all say that she has given them medicine that has helped when they were sick or applied ointments or liquids that relieved the itch of chiggers or poison ivy or given them potions that help with pain or sleep, but they all have other things that they are interested in doing. No one wants to take a lot of time gathering roots and brewing teas, let alone learning what does what and how to mix each and every ingredient. So too bad for the people of the area years from now who would like to avail themselves of some of Charlie's miracle cures and too bad for the nostalgic residents who hate to see yet another way of life fade away. In another hundred years or so, Charlie's will die and those left behind will wonder where all the great cures of the past have gone.