

The History of the Herbal Compress

Originally created in Thailand during the middle ages, the Thai herbal compress has been used for treatments all over the world for centuries. Typically they were used on soldiers returning from battle to get immediate responses to inflammation from wounds and injuries. They were also used for treating soreness and pain from tired, achy muscles and joints.



Now, they are used in many forms around the world. In north America we typically see them being used for personal use as home remedies for treatment of small wounds, inflamed joints or even menstrual cramps. For years spas in Europe and more recently in North America, have been using the power of the herbal compress to lure clients into an ancient world of the past, surrounding them with rich enticing aromas and deep moist heat that alleviate stress from everyday living. Massage clinics have also stepped into the world of the compress, using them in Thai massage treatments for removal of toxins during inflammation, improving muscle tone tension, and easing aches and pains from many conditions such as arthritis, fibromyalgia and soft tissue injuries.

In Thailand the typical compress houses traditional herbs from the gardens of Thailand. These herbs have both medicinal and aesthetic uses. The herbs are taken into the body either topically or by being inhaled. The unique drawing properties of each hand picked herb allow for removal of toxins causing an immediate decrease of inflammation and pain. All three methods allow the medicinal properties of the herbs to have profound effects in body.

There are many ways to create a compress for home remedies within the home. These are typically called poultices because they are applied directly to the skin for deep absorption and effectiveness or they can be wrapped in cloth, heated then applied to the skin. A simple way to make a poultice for home would be to choose the herb or substance of choice, say oatmeal, place it on a square of material, wrap it up, heat it, and place it on the area for relief. Some poultices can be used for extended periods, for example the Castor oil wrap. These types of wraps can be left on over night. See article on 'how to make a home made poultice' for step by step instructions.

Spas and clinics would usually purchase a prepackaged compress to use in their treatments. Spas would use them in full body massages, special body treatments, pedicures as well as facials. The facial balls come in a variety of choices with each designed for a specific skin type. The body ball is usually a general recipe but can treat a variety of soft tissue conditions as well as areas of the body. They could use them in many different ways within their practice but most often they are steamed and applied to the client either on the skin directly or through the clothes.

Clinics are an excellent place to find the Thai herbal compress as it works hand in hand with the treatment of almost any condition or injury. The therapist would press the heated compress along the muscles and joints allowing the heat and affect of the herbs to be absorbed deeply into the tissue. These specially selected herbs have drawing properties that reduce inflammation by removing built up toxins. Clients also benefit from inhaling the intoxicating aroma of the herbs while breathing deeply during the treatment.

This ancient treatment tool has come a long way. The compress is becoming a staple in homes and professional settings around the world. It's uses are abounding and the affects can be astounding.

Uses for the Herbal Compress

In Thailand during the middle ages, the herbal compress was commonly used on soldiers with wounds and injuries inflicted by war. Special Thai herbs were selected, wrapped and compressed to wounds to reduce inflammation, soothe abrasions, ease muscle aches and speed healing. Today, this superior treatment is still practiced around the world in various forms and uses.



The most common way to use a compress is to steam it and apply to the body. This allows the pores to open and the herbs to be easily taken in through the skin. The heat from the pouch also relaxes and eases the muscle and soft tissue. This prepares the body for a deep massage treatment, stretching or similar activities.

During a treatment the herbs, once heated, create a strong aroma that is inhaled through the nose. Another effective way to use the healing properties of the herbs is to compress the heated herbal ball on the skin to allow the herbs themselves to draw the toxins out. A vegetable steamer is the most common and convenient way to warm the compress. Other devices such as rice cookers, boiling water, or roasters, will thoroughly steam the pouch and allow the aromas into the air.

Steam from a hot shower also encourages inhalation through the nose or absorption through the skin. Another convenient way to use the compress is to add it under running water for a bath or a foot soak. In this case, the poultice would be limited in use as the herbs can not dry effectively and mold and bacteria may build up in the pouch. If it is a home made poultice or compress, you may be able to remove the herbs, dry them and repack the compress for future use.

Therapeutically, the heated herbal compress is commonly used to combat the following ailments:

- muscle aches
- joint pain and inflammation
- edema
- sluggish circulation
- stiffness
- cramps
- tension & muscle tone
- fatigue
- insomnia
- stress
- toxin build-up
- digestive conditions
- acne
- skin abrasions
- decreased energy levels
- and many more!

Special compress balls are also available that do not require heat and some are even used at room temperature. Cold compresses can be used for example, to prevent and treat headaches or reduce pain caused by inflammation throughout the body. Cool temperatures have a stimulating effect on the body while heat usually provides a relaxing effect. When used in conjunction, they can create a push-pull effect on the circulation that stimulates the immune system that can prevent sickness, improve blood mobility and the flow of energy. Compresses at room temperature are commonly used when hot or cold is not indicated.

A herbal compress can also be applied esthetically to soothe and rejuvenate skin and the signs of aging. The facial compress balls may help reduce dark circles, reduce deep lines and wrinkles, soften, firm, and improve PH balance to face and neck. It can also improve circulation and elasticity to neck and facial muscles creating a more relaxed

How To Make A Home-Made Poultice

This article explains how to make a home made poultice...

Materials Needed:

clean cotton cloth, gauze, or cheesecloth

spare wool or flannel fabric

dried herbs of choice (see Top 10 list for suggestions)

cellophane

gauze wrap/tape

heating unit (stove or microwave)

freezer bag

heat source (microwave rice bag, electric heat pad, hot water bottle)

Step 1: Clean effected area

Step 2: Cut piece of gauze or cheesecloth that will cover the area to be treated

Step 3: Heat *dried herbs in water either on the stove in saucepan or in microwave in bowl of water

Step 4: Squeeze moisture out of herbs and place on material

Step 5: If herbs can be applied directly to skin, apply poultice on area, herb side down and proceed to step 7. If you can not apply herbs directly to skin (see contraindications), wrap material up using gauze tape into a pouch, creating a flat surface to place over the area.

Step 6: Apply to affected area

Step 7: Wrap poultice in cellophane

Step 8: Cover with flannel or wool material (this keeps in the warmth)

Step 9: Cover wrap with heat source (optional)

Step 10: Leave on for up to 1- 24 hours (see contraindications)

After use, dispose of poultice if used on infectious injuries. If used for muscle soreness or inflammation without infection, dry herbs thoroughly and store in plastic bag for future use.

*If using powdered herbs, place herbs in gauze or cheesecloth before heating. Wrap into ball and tie ends together with rubber band. Place whole pouch into hot water until warm then squeeze the ball until most of the water is out. Continue at step 6.

*If making cold poultice (see cool poultice recipes), allow herbs to cool in pouch before applying to skin. Proceed to step 6. After use, wrap poultice in freezer bag and keep in freezer.