

DR. CHRISTOPHER'S  
*Herbal Legacy Newsletter*

## Snake Bites

Contributed by School of Natural Healing Community Member Ivygreen



Recently on the forum, there was discussion about what to do for snake bites, and I thought I might add what we have used over the years when we have experienced these "nature" emergencies.

First, I would like to point out that, according to statistics from a year ago, there was reported to be a national shortage of the supply of anti-venom, considering the expected demand. I have not stayed abreast with the updates to see if that still applies. However, I am firmly convinced that we

need to be equipped to deal with these kinds of emergencies on our own.

It is also possible to be bitten by a poisonous snake which does not inject any venom into its victim. However, in cases of both poisonous and non-poisonous snake bites, there is always the possibility of infection developing.

Below is what we have used successfully in treating snake bites.

(DISCLAIMER: What I have written is based on my own knowledge and first-hand experience. It is not meant to be taken as an authority on what to do in the event of snakebite, diagnostics or treatment of disease. I list it merely as my contribution in preservation of future antiquity.)

### A. Herbal Poultices

1. For immediate first aid, we mixed dry mustard powder with finely grated, raw potato (white), and bound over the site where the fangs penetrated. In this case, the patient was a dog which had been bitten in three places by a water moccasin (cotton mouth). Never under-estimate the speed with which these guys can strike!!!
2. After this poultice was in place, we heated water to stew down Shepherd's Purse, Sage, and Plantain, until they were soft. With this, we made a fomentation which was applied comfortably warm (we did not wait for the herbs to steep 30 minutes, we used them as soon as they were soft from heating, and cooled enough for comfort. It is important not to

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delay!!!). You can speed the cooling process by placing the pot in a sink filled with icy water; just be sure the pot doesn't tip over. If we had Plantain Tincture, or fresh Plantain, we would have added it to the Potato poultice. Crush or blend up the fresh plantain\* with the potato.

3. Liberally apply poultices all over swell site, and replace with fresh poultices every 10-15 minutes. Use your own judgment as to alternate between the poultices, or to stick with just the herbs. I cannot recall whether or not we would actually apply the herb fomentation (leaves, liquid and all) over the potato poultice, or if we removed the first poultice.

**Case Study:** We used this procedure on more than 3 separate occasions with our dogs. Most often they were bitten in the leg, with 2-3 different sets of fang punctures. This means the snake struck them more than once! The leg would triple or quadruple in size from the swellings. The dog would scarcely make it to the house; would be extremely lethargic, and gums would be whitening, an indication that they were going into shock.\*\*

(Incidentally, if you do take a snake-bitten dog to the vet, they wouldn't treat him with anti-venom: typical veterinary procedure is to give steroids.)

We would bring him into the house and lay him on the floor, beginning treatment with the raw potato. His eyes would be glazing over; he would be very feverish, and not very responsive. For the next hour and a half, we would be applying and reapplying the poultices. We would watch the swelling begin to gradually come down, and slowly he would gain responsiveness as the fever reduced.

We also used this treatment when a bite was received in the head.

## **B. Activated Charcoal Powder**

At risk of sounding like a broken record on the benefits of charcoal, I have to acknowledge, it does work!

1. Neighbor; bitten in the hand by unseen snake - very likely from a young copperhead, judging from the distance between the fang marks, and the fact that numerous copperheads had been found in the immediate area. And, the next day, a snake "skin" was discovered in the shed where she had been.

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All she did was soak her hand in a bowl of water with lots of charcoal added to it; and maybe later apply plantain tincture with a band-aid. Had no other negative side effects: we can't be sure whether or not she was injected with venom.

2. Dog; bitten in the corner of the mouth by a copperhead (again, very likely - it was in a brush pile). We used Lavender essential oil and Activated Charcoal.

I had read in my aromatherapy book that lavender oil was indicated for snakebites, so I decided to give it a try. She took off running like she had been shot and hid under the house. It took a long time to coax her out; and even then she wouldn't let me get near her with the oil.

But she did allow us to use the charcoal water. Due to its location in the proximity of her mouth, we couldn't directly soak it, but had to dip cotton cloths in the charcoal water and place them over the swelling area. These we reapplied often with fresh charcoal water. After a day, the swelling had gone down, and she'd returned to normal.

\* Plantain is best used fresh, as opposed to the dried herb. What works very well for us, is to take the plantain, right after being picked, place it in a blender with *only* enough water as needed to blend it until smooth. Fill individual dividers in ice trays with this blended plantain, and freeze. When frozen completely, remove to plastic freezer-safe bags, label, and store in freezer. When bitten by a snake, spider, or in the case of an insect sting, simply remove one of those frozen cubes, thaw, and apply to the affected area, holding in place with a cotton gauze, or some other bandage.

\*\*Please be aware that, while a dog might survive the 1/2-mile limp home after being bit by a snake, a human may not. A dog's composition differs from humans in that they react differently to snakebites. My understanding is that when a human is the victim, you don't have much time. Also, be aware that after the immediate recovery, humans can begin to have problems in the circulatory or nervous systems. Heart attacks have even been associated to being a reaction to the venom in victims who had prior been recently bitten by a snake.

The following is from notes my mom had taken out of a book she once borrowed. Sorry, I couldn't trace it for reference: Use according to your own risk and discretion:

Immediately, apply a very large charcoal compress covering almost an entire extremity, centering over the bite, using large quantities of activated charcoal, wet with water and kept moist with plastic

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wrap. A new compress should be placed over the immediate vicinity of the snake bite every 10-15 minutes.

Activated Charcoal should also be taken by mouth, in the quantity of approx. 2 Tbsp. every 2 hours, for 3 doses, and 1 tsp. every hour for 24 hours. Each dose should be followed by 2 glasses of water.

Swelling & pain are evidences of the envenomation in a snake bite. The swelling should be evident within 10 minutes of being bitten, or one should question whether there has been envenomation. It is recommended to carry a container of charcoal for first-aid when hiking in snake infested woods. Once the swelling begins, the venom may not be able to transfer to the charcoal as easily as at first. As long as pain and swelling are being controlled by the compresses, we would continue with this treatment and expect the venom was being attracted to the charcoal. If pain & swelling should progress, add ice packs to the extremity, if available.

One case of a venomous snake bite: the lady (bitten by a Water Moccasin) treated herself with 6 hours of continuous charcoal soaks to the affected foot. She took Charcoal by mouth. After that, she made a poultice of crushed cabbage leaves for overnight use, and slept fairly comfortably. The next day, it was still swollen but not very painful. She continued daily soaks. The swelling was not completely gone until after 5 weeks, but eventually she completely recovered.

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