

## *Virtual Mentor*

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### VIEWPOINT

#### Folk Remedies

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Sickness was so common in frontier life that many diseases were not even regarded as such. Many a frontiersman suffering from malaria was so used to it that he did not consider himself sick.

An 1837 cookbook, which contained many remedy recipes, advised *against* calling a doctor except for smallpox, "inflammation of the bowels," nosebleed and "gravel" (kidney stone). The recipe for kidney stone: Juice of horse-radish made into thin syrup, mixed with sugar; a spoonful every four hours.<sup>1</sup>

Other remedies and their recipes included:

- *To cure a toothache*, pick the tooth with a coffin nail, the middle toe of an owl, a needle used to make a shroud, or a splinter from a tree struck by lightning; apply the juice of the "toothache plant" (prickly ash), pack the tooth with cotton soaked in oil of cloves, rub it with sumac (poison oak) gum; then chew the root of a thistle.
- For arthritis, more popularly—or unpopularly—known as "rheumatiz, carry buckshot or a buckeye in your pocket; take the powdered ashes of a turtle shell, internally; chew a thistle root; carry a peeled potato in your pocket until it turns black; wear shoes with copper nails to ground the pain; wear copper bracelets; or rub the joints with snake oil.
- Teas and other "decoctions" were common remedies for fever and chills: make a tea of the ground bark of the wild snowball (red root), the bark of the wafer (stinking) ash, the leaves of the sourwood (lily-of-the-valley) tree, the common chickweed, the leaves of sheep sorrel, the scarlet sumac bark (ole poison oak, again) or red pepper. One could also treat chills and fever by chewing turnip root, eating watermelon or grapes; or putting black pepper in one's stockings.
- Coughs and colds naturally called for a multitude of "cures": passing the sick child three times under a horse's belly; administering kerosene, internally, with or without sugar, putting a strip of raw pork or one of red flannel or a dirty scarf around the neck.

## References

1. The above information was excerpted from Bauer WW. *Potions, Remedies, & Old Wives' Tales*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc; 1969.

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