

 **Where There Is No Doctor - A Village Health Care Handbook (Hesperian Foundation, 1993, 516 p.)**

  **Chapter 1 - HOME CURES AND POPULAR BELIEFS**

 **(introduction...)**

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Chapter 1 - HOME CURES AND POPULAR BELIEFS

Everywhere on earth people use home remedies. In some places, the older or

***traditional* ways of healing have been passed down from parents to children for hundreds of years.**

Many home remedies have, great value. Others have less. And some may be risky or harmful. Home remedies, like modern medicines, must be used with caution.

Try to *do no harm.*

Only use home remedies if you are sure they are safe and know exactly how to use them.

Home Cures That Help

For many sicknesses, time-tested home remedies work as well as modern medicines - or even better. They are often cheaper. And in some cases they are safer.

For example, many of the herbal teas people use for home treatment of coughs and colds do more good and cause fewer problems than cough syrups and strong medicines some doctors prescribe.

Also, the 'rice water', teas, or sweetened drinks that many mothers give to babies with diarrhea are often safer and do more good than any modern medicine. What matters most is that a baby with diarrhea gets plenty of liquids.



FOR COUGHS, COLDS, AND COMMON DIARRHEA, HERBAL TEAS ARE OFTEN *BETTER, CHEAPER AND SAFER* THAN MODERN MEDICINES.

The Limitations of Home Remedies

Some diseases are helped by home remedies. Others can be treated better with modern medicine. This is true for most serious infections. Sickneses like pneumonia, tetanus, typhoid, tuberculosis, appendicitis, diseases caused by sexual contact, and fever after childbirth should be treated with modern medicines as soon as possible. For these diseases, do not lose time trying to treat them first with home remedies only.

It is sometimes hard to be sure which home remedies work well and which do not. More careful studies are needed. For this reason:

It is often safer to treat very serious illnesses with modern medicines - following the advice of a health worker if possible.

Old Ways and New

Some modern ways of meeting health needs work better than old ones. But at times the older, traditional ways are best. For example, traditional ways of caring for children or old people are often kinder and work better than some newer, less personal ways.

Not many years ago everyone thought that mother's milk was the best food for a young baby. They were right! Then the big companies that make canned and artificial milk began to tell mothers that bottle feeding was better. This is not true, but many mothers believed them and started to bottle feed their babies. As a result, thousands of babies have suffered and died needlessly from infection or hunger. For the reasons breast is best.

Respect your people's traditions and build on them.

For more ideas for building on local traditions, see *Helping Health Workers Learn*, Chapter 7.

Beliefs That Can Make People Well

Some home remedies have a direct effect on the body. Others seem to work only because people believe in them. The healing power of belief can be very strong.

For example, I once saw a man who suffered from a very bad headache. To cure him, a woman gave him a small piece of yam, or sweet potato. She told him it was a strong painkiller. He believed her - and the pain went away quickly.

It was his faith in her treatment, and not the yam itself, that made him feel better.



Figure

Many home remedies work in this I way. They help largely because people have faith in them. For this reason, they are especially useful to cure illnesses that are partly in people's minds, or those caused in part by a person's beliefs, worry, or

fears.

Included in this group of sicknesses are: bewitchment or hexing, unreasonable or hysterical fear, uncertain 'aches and pains' (especially in persons going through stressful times, such as teenage girls or older women), and anxiety or nervous worry. Also included are some cases of asthma, hiccups, indigestion, stomach ulcers, migraine headaches, and even warts.

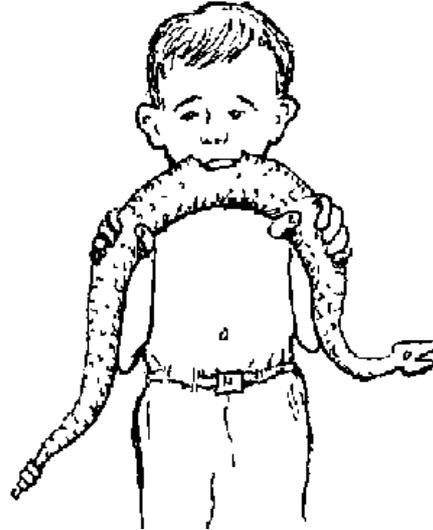
For all of these problems, the manner or 'touch' of the healer can be very important. What it often comes down to is showing you care, helping the sick person believe he will get well, or simply helping him relax.

Sometimes a person's belief in a remedy can help with problems that have completely physical causes.

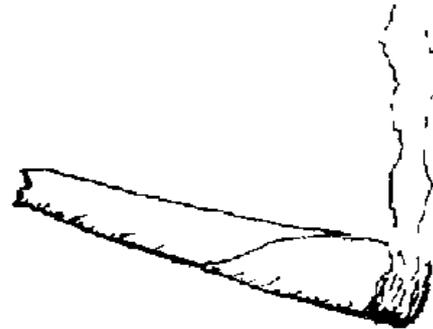
For example, Mexican villagers have the following home cures for poisonous snakebite:



1. to use 'guaco' leaves



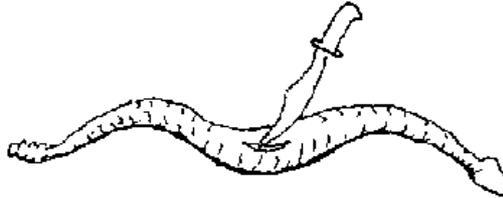
2. to bite the snake



3. to apply tobacco



4. to apply the skin of a poisonous lizard



5. to smear the snake's bile on the bite

In other lands people have their own snakebite remedies - often many different ones. As far as we know, none of these home remedies has any direct effect against snake poison. The person who says that a home remedy kept a snake's poison from harming him at all was probably bitten by a non-poisonous snake!

Yet any of these home remedies may do some good if a person believes in it. If it makes him less afraid, his pulse will slow down, he will move and tremble less, and as a result, the poison will spread through his body more slowly. So there is less danger!

But the benefit of these home remedies for snakebite is limited. In spite of their common use, many people still become very ill or die. As far as we know:

No home cure for poisonous bites (whether from snakes, scorpions, spiders, or other poisonous animals) has much effect beyond that of the healing power of belief.

For snakebite it is usually better to use modern treatment. Be prepared: obtain 'antivenoms' or 'serums' for poisonous bites before you need them. Do not wait until it is too late.

Beliefs That Can Make People Sick

The power of belief can help heal people. But it can also harm them. If a person believes strongly enough that something will hurt him, his own fear can make him sick. For example:

Once I was called to see a woman who had just had a *miscarriage* and was still bleeding a little. There was an orange tree near her house. So I suggested she drink a glass of orange juice. (Oranges have vitamin C which helps strengthen blood vessels.) She drank it - even though she was afraid it would harm her.

Her fear was so great that soon she became very ill. I examined her, but could find nothing physically wrong. I tried to comfort her, telling her she was not in danger. But she said she was going to die. At last I gave her an injection of distilled (completely pure) water. Distilled water has no medical effect. But since she had great faith in injections, she quickly got better.



Figure

Actually, the juice did not harm her. What harmed her was her belief that it would make her sick. And what made her well was her faith in injections!

In this same way, many persons go on believing false ideas about witchcraft, injections, diet, and many other things. Much needless suffering is the result.

Perhaps, in a way, I had helped this woman. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized I had also wronged her; I had led her to believe things that were

not true.

I wanted to set this right. So a few days later, when she was completely well, I went to her home and apologized for what I had done. I tried to help her understand that not the orange juice, but her fear had made her so sick. And that not the injection of water, but her freedom from fear had helped her get well.

By understanding the truth about the orange, the injection, and the tricks of her own mind, perhaps this woman and her family will become freer from fear and better able to care for their health in the future. For health is closely related to understanding and freedom from fear.

Many things do harm only because people believe they are harmful.

Witchcraft - Black Magic - and the Evil Eye

If a person believes strongly enough that someone has the power to harm him, he may actually become ill. Anyone who believes he is bewitched or has been given the *evil eye* is really the victim of his own fears (see Susto).

A 'witch' has no power over other people, except for her ability to make them believe that she has. For this reason:

It is impossible to bewitch a person who does not believe in witchcraft.

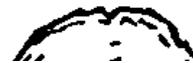
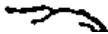
Some people think that they are 'bewitched' when they have strange or frightening illnesses (such as *tumors* of the *genitals* or *cirrhosis* of the liver). Such sicknesses

have nothing to do with witchcraft or black magic. Their causes are natural.



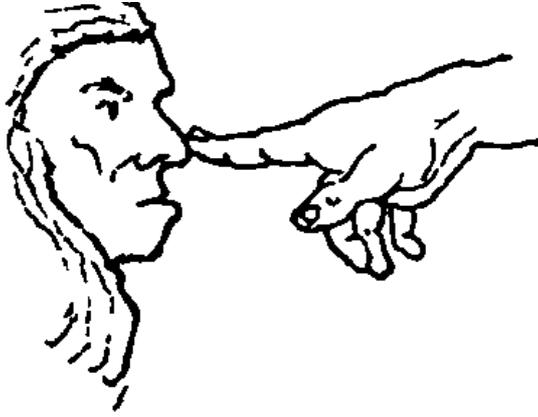
Figure

Do not waste your money at 'magic centers' that claim to cure witchcraft. And do not seek revenge against a witch, because it will not solve anything. If you are seriously ill, go for medical help.





If you
have a
strange
sickness:



do not blame a witch,



do not go to a magic center,

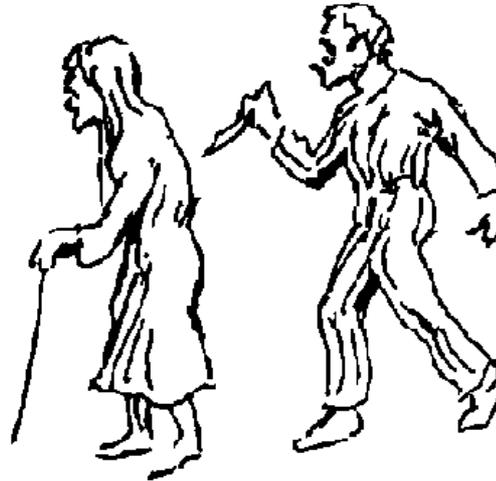


but ask for medical
advice.

Questions and Answers on Some Folk Beliefs and Home Remedies

These examples are from the mountains of Mexico, the area that I know best. Perhaps some of the beliefs of your people are similar. Think about ways to learn which beliefs in your area lead to better health and which do not.

When people think someone is bewitched, is it true that he will get well if his relatives harm or kill the witch?



Figure

FALSE! No one is ever helped by harming someone else.

Is it true that when the 'soft spot' on top of a baby's head sinks inward this means the baby will die of diarrhea unless he gets special

This is often true. The 'soft spot' sinks because

treatment?



the baby has lost too much liquid. Unless he gets more liquid soon, he may die.

Is it true that if the light of the eclipsing moon falls on a pregnant mother, her child will be born deformed or retarded?



Figure

This is not true! But children may be born retarded, deaf, or deformed if the mother does not use iodized salt, if she takes certain medicines, or for other

Is it true that mothers should give birth in a darkened room?



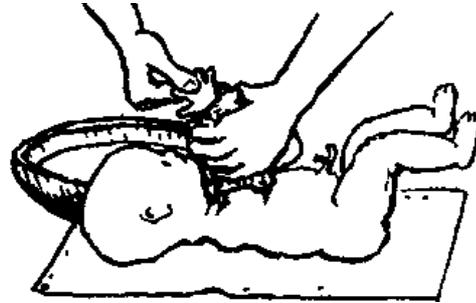
Figure

reasons.

It is true that soft light is easier on the eyes of both the mother and the newborn child. But there should be enough light for the midwife to see what she is doing.

Is it true that a newborn baby should not be bathed until the cord falls off?

True! The stump of the cord should be kept dry



Figure

until it falls off. But the baby can be gently cleaned with a clean, soft, damp cloth.

How many days after giving birth should a mother wait before she bathes?



Figure

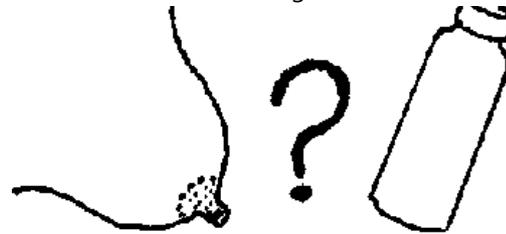
A mother should wash with warm water the **day after giving birth**. The custom of not bathing for weeks following childbirth can lead to infections.

Is it true that traditional



TRUE!

breast feeding is better than 'modern' bottle feeding?



Figure

Breast milk is better food and also helps protect the baby against infection.

What foods should women avoid in the first few weeks after childbirth?



Figure

In the weeks following childbirth, women should not avoid any nutritious foods. Instead, they

		<p>should eat plenty of fruit, vegetables, meat, milk, eggs, whole grains, and beans.</p>
<p>Is it a good idea to bathe a sick person, or will it do him harm?</p>	 <p>Figure</p>	<p>It is a good idea. Sick people should be bathed in warm water every day.</p>
<p>Is it true that oranges, guavas, and other fruits are harmful when one has a cold or a fever?</p>		<p>NO! All fruits and juices are helpful</p>



Figure

when one has a cold or fever. They do not cause congestion or harm of any kind.

Is it true that when a person has a high fever, he should be wrapped up so that the air will not harm him?



Figure

NO! When a person has a high fever, take off all covers and clothing. Let the air reach his body. This will help

Is it true that tea made from willow bark will help bring fever down and stop pain?



Figure

the fever go down.

True. It helps. Willow bark has a natural medicine in it very much like aspirin.

Sunken Fontanel or Soft Spot

The *fontanel* is the soft spot on the top of a newborn baby's head. It is where the bones of his skull have not formed completely. Normally it takes a year to a year and a half for the soft spot to close completely.

Mothers in different lands realize that when the soft spot sinks inward their babies are in danger. They have many beliefs to explain this. In Latin America mothers think the baby's brains have slipped downward. They try to correct this by sucking

on the soft spot, by pushing up on the roof of the mouth, or by holding the baby upside down and slapping his feet. This does not help because... A sunken soft spot is really caused by dehydration.



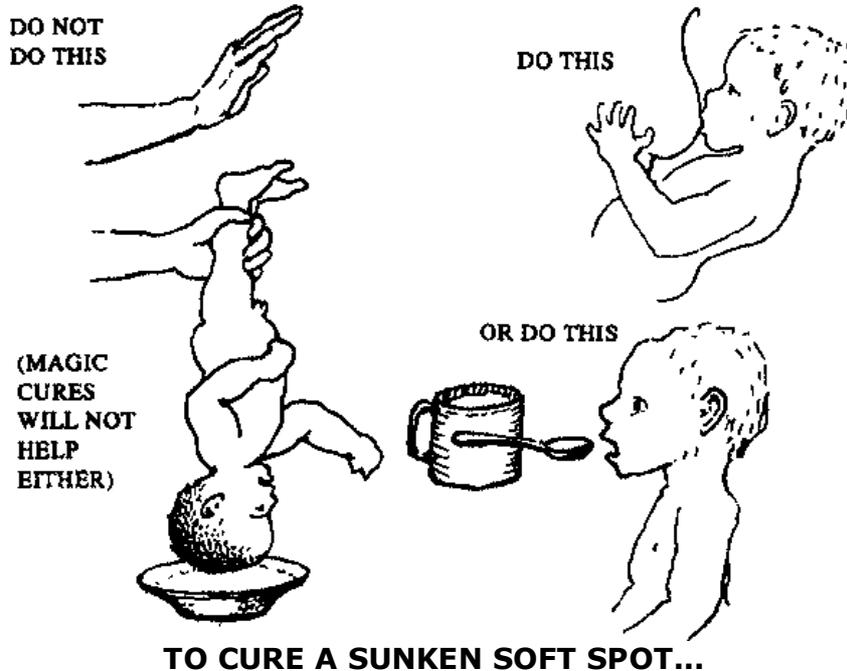
Figure

This means the child is losing more liquid than he is drinking. He is too dry - usually because he has diarrhea, or diarrhea with vomiting.

Treatment:

- 1. Give the child plenty of liquid: breast milk, Rehydration Drink made with water, sugar/and salt only or boiled water...**

2. If necessary, treat the causes of the diarrhea and vomiting. For most diarrheas, medicine is not needed, and may do more harm than good.



Note: If the soft spot is swollen or bulges upward, this may be a sign of meningitis. Begin treatment at once, and get medical help.

Ways to Tell Whether a Home Remedy Works or Not

Because a lot of people use a home cure does not necessarily mean it works well or is safe. It is often hard to know which remedies are helpful and which may be harmful. Careful study is needed to be sure. Here are four rules to help tell which remedies are least likely to work, or are dangerous. (Examples are from Mexican villages.)

1. THE MORE REMEDIES THERE ARE FOR ANY ONE ILLNESS, THE LESS LIKELY IT IS THAT ANY OF THEM WORKS.

For example: In rural Mexico there are many home remedies for goiter, none of which does any real good. Here are some of them:



DON'T

1. to tie a crab on the goiter



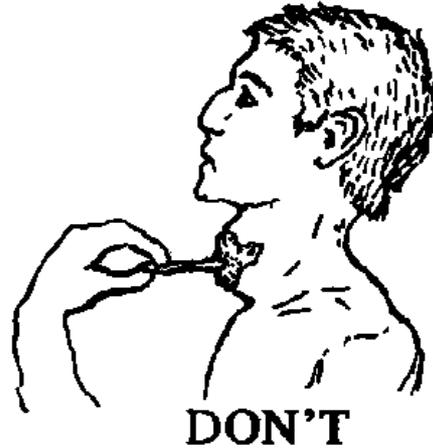
DON'T

2. to rub the goiter with the hand of a dead child



DON'T

3. to smear the brains of a vulture on the goiter

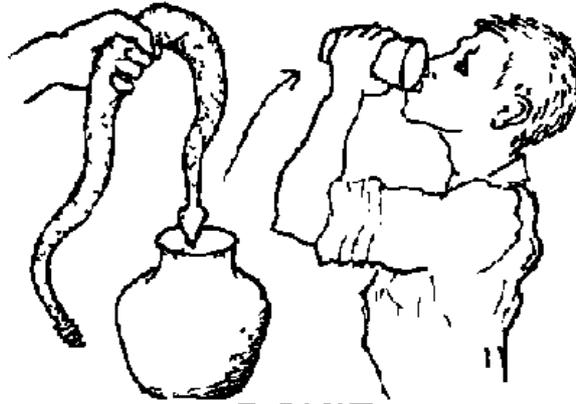


4. to smear human feces on the goiter

Not one of these many remedies works. If it did, the others would not be needed. When a sickness has just one popular cure, it is more likely to be - a good one. For prevention and treatment of goiter use iodized salt.

2. FOUL OR DISGUSTING REMEDIES ARE NOT LIKELY TO HELP - AND ARE OFTEN HARMFUL.

For example:



DON'T

1. the idea that leprosy can be cured by a drink made of rotting snakes



DON'T

2. the idea that syphilis can be cured by eating a vulture

These two remedies do not help at all. The first one can cause dangerous infections. Belief in remedies like these sometimes causes delay in getting proper medical care.

3. REMEDIES THAT USE ANIMAL OR HUMAN WASTE DO NO GOOD AND CAN CAUSE DANGEROUS INFECTIONS. NEVER USE THEM.

Examples:



DON'T

1. Putting human feces around the eye does not cure blurred vision and can cause infections.

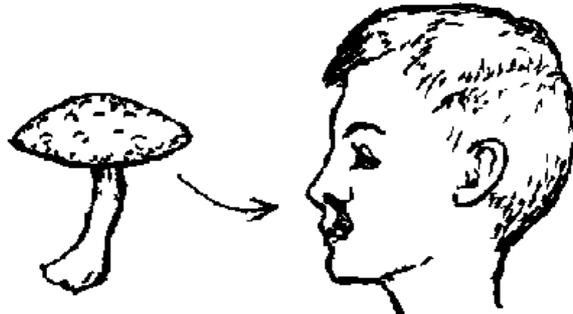


2. Smearing cow dung on the head to fight ringworm can cause tetanus and other dangerous infections.

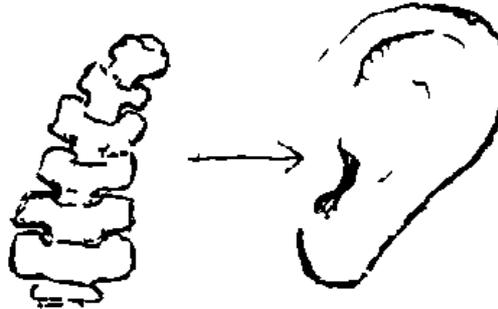
Also, the droppings of rabbits or other animals do not help heal burns. To use them is very dangerous. Cow dung, held in the hand, cannot help control fits. Teas made from human, pig, or any other animal feces do not cure anything. They can make people sicker. Never put feces on the navel of a newborn baby. This can cause tetanus.

4. THE MORE A REMEDY RESEMBLES THE SICKNESS IT IS SAID TO CURE, THE MORE LIKELY ITS BENEFITS COME ONLY FROM THE POWER OF BELIEF.

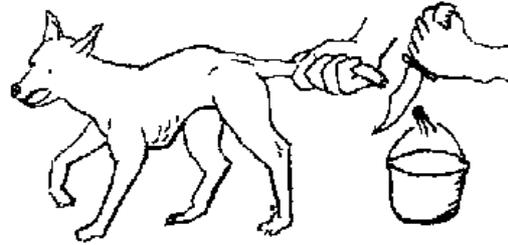
The association between each of the following illnesses and its remedy is clear in these examples from Mexico:



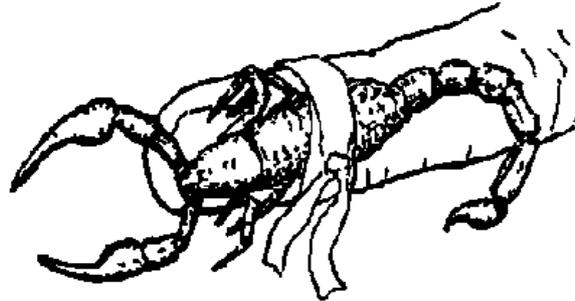
1. for a nosebleed, using yesca (a bright red mushroom)



2. for deafness, putting powdered rattlesnake's rattle in the ear



3. for dog bite, drink tea made from the dog's tail



4. for scorpion sting, tying a scorpion against the stung finger



5. to prevent diarrhea when a child is teething, putting a necklace of snake's fangs around the baby's neck



6. to 'bring out' the rash of measles, making tea from kapok bark

These remedies, and many other similar ones, have no curative value in themselves.

They may be of some benefit if people believe in them. But for serious problems, be sure their use does not delay more effective treatment.

Medicinal Plants

Many plants have curative powers. Some of the best modern medicines are made from wild herbs.

Nevertheless, not all 'curative herbs' people use have medical value... and those that have are sometimes used the wrong way. Try to learn about the herbs in your area and find out which ones are worthwhile.



CAUTION! Some medicinal herbs are very poisonous if taken in more than the recommended dose. For this reason it is often safer to use modern medicine, since the dosage is easier to control.

Here are a few examples of plants that can be useful if used correctly:

ANGEL'S TRUMPET (*Datura arborea*)

The leaves of this and certain other members of the nightshade family contain a drug that helps to calm intestinal cramps, stomach-aches, and even gallbladder pain.



Figure

Grind up 1 or 2 leaves of Angel's Trumpet and soak them for a day in 7 tablespoons (100 ml.) of water.

Dosage: Between 10 and 15 drops every 4 hours (adults only).

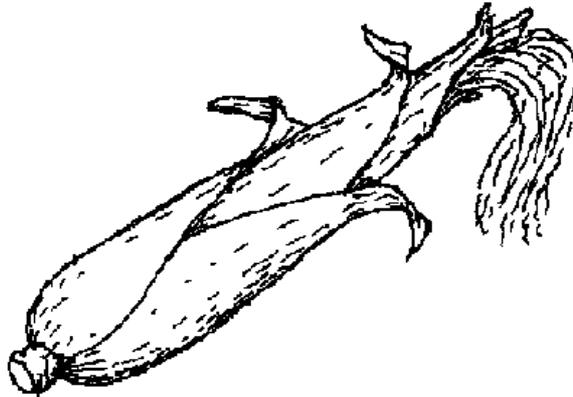


WARNING: Angel's Trumpet is very poisonous if you take more than the recommended dose.

CORN SILK (the tassels or 'silk' from an ear of maize)

A tea made from corn silk makes a person pass more urine. This can help reduce swelling of the feet - especially in pregnant women.

Boil a large handful of corn silk in water and drink 1 or 2 glasses. It is not dangerous.



Figure

GARLIC

A drink made from garlic can often get rid of pinworms.

Chop finely, or crush, 4 cloves of garlic and mix with 1 glass of liquid (water, juice, or milk).

Dosage: Drink 1 glass daily for 3 weeks.

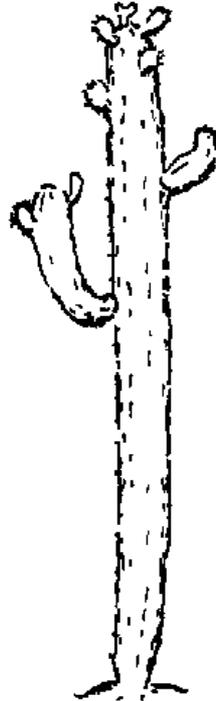
To treat vaginal infections with garlic.



Figure

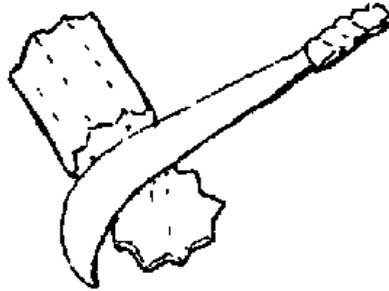
CARDON CACTUS (*Pachycerius pectin-aboriginum*)

Cactus juice can be used to clean wounds when there is no boiled water and no way to get any. Cardon cactus also helps stop a wound from bleeding, because the juice makes the cut blood vessels squeeze shut.



Figure

Cut a piece of the cactus with a clean knife and press it firmly against the wound.



Figure

When the bleeding is under control, tie a piece of the cactus to the wound with a strip of cloth.

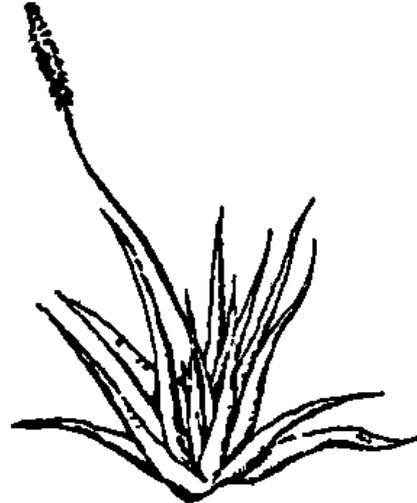


Figure

After 2 or 3 hours, take off the cactus and clean the wound with boiled water and soap. There are more instructions on how to care for wounds and control bleeding on pages 82 to 87.

ALOE VERA (*Sabila*)

Aloe vera can be used to treat minor burns and wounds. The thick, slimy juice inside the plant calms pain and itching, aids healing, and helps prevent infection. Cut off a piece of the plant, peel back the outer layer, and apply the fleshy leaf or juice directly to the burn or wound.

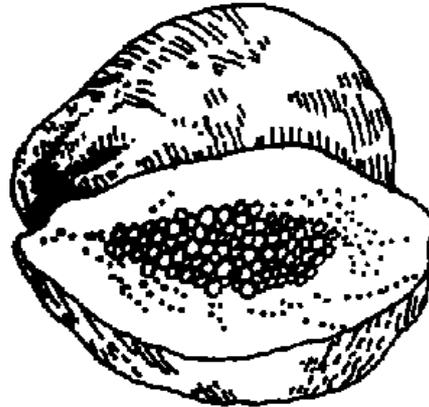


Figure

Aloe can also help treat stomach ulcers and gastritis. Chop the spongy leaves into small pieces, soak them in water overnight, and then drink one glass of the slimy, bitter liquid every 2 hours.

PAPAYA

Ripe papayas are rich in vitamins and also aid digestion, Eating them is especially helpful for weak or old people who complain of upset stomach when they eat meat, chicken, or eggs. Papaya makes these foods easier to digest.



Figure

Papaya can also help get rid of intestinal worms, although modern medicines often work better. Collect 3 or 4 teaspoons (15-20 ml.) of the 'milk' that comes out when the green fruit or trunk of the tree is cut. Mix this with an equal amount of sugar or honey and stir it into a cup of hot water. If possible, drink along with a laxative.

Or, dry and crush to a powder the papaya seeds. Take 3 teaspoons mixed with 1 glass water or some honey 3 times a day for 7 days.

Papayas can also be used for treating pressure sores. The fruit contains chemicals that help soften and make dead flesh easier to remove. First clean and wash out a

pressure sore that has dead flesh in it. Then soak a sterile cloth or gauze with 'milk' from the trunk or green fruit of a papaya plant and pack this into the sore. Repeat cleaning and repacking 3 times a day.

Homemade Casts-for Keeping Broken Bones in Place

In Mexico several different plants such as *tepeguaje* (a tree of the bean family) and *solda con solda* (a huge, tree-climbing arum lily) are used to make casts. However, any plant will do if a syrup can be made from it that will dry hard and firm and will not irritate the skin. In India, traditional bone-setters make casts using a mixture of egg whites and herbs instead of a syrup made from plant juices. But the method is similar. Try out different plants in your area.

For a cast using *tepeguaje*: Put 1 kilogram of the bark into 5 liters of water and boil it until only 2 liters is left. Strain and boil it until a thick syrup is formed. Dip strips of flannel or clean sheet in the syrup and carefully use as follows.



Figure

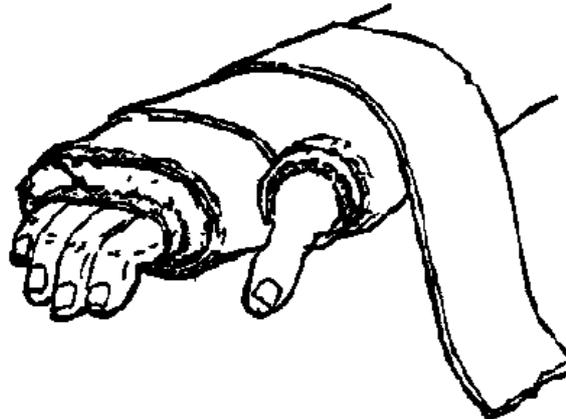
Make sure the bones are in a good position.

Do not put the cast directly against the skin.

Wrap the arm or leg in a soft cloth.

Then follow with a layer of cotton or wild kapok.

Finally, put on the wet cloth strips so that, they form a cast that is firm but not too tight.

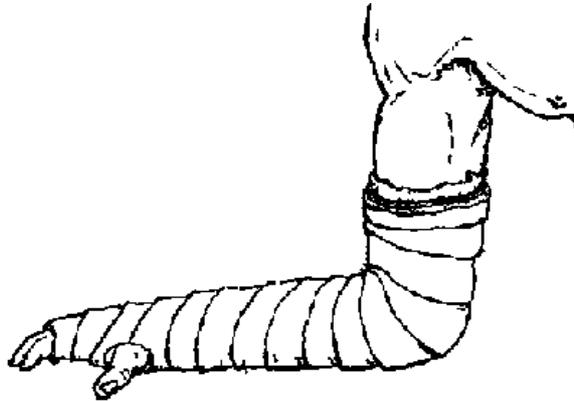


Figure

Most doctors recommend that the cast cover the joint above and the joint below the

break, to keep the broken bones from moving.

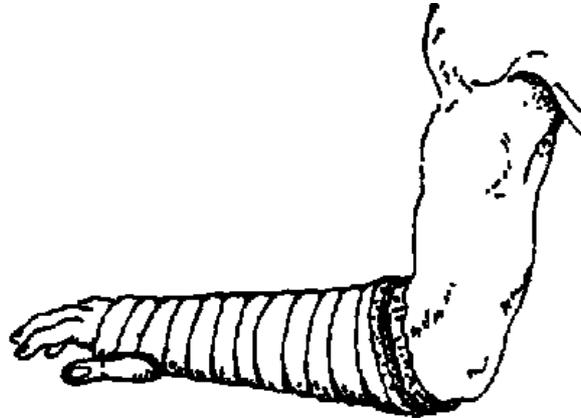
This would mean that, for a broken wrist, the cast should cover almost the whole arm, like this:



Figure

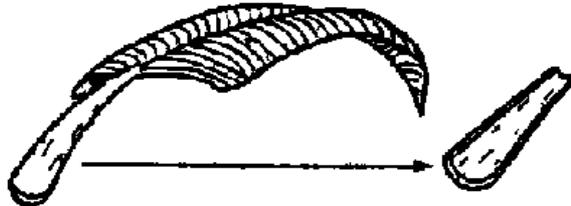
Leave the finger tips uncovered so that you can see if they keep a good color.

However, traditional bone-setters in China and Latin America use a short cast on a *simple* break of the arm saying that a little movement of the bone-ends speeds healing. Recent scientific studies have proven this to be true.



Figure

A temporary leg or arm splint can be made of cardboard, folded paper, or the thick curved stem of dried banana leaf, or palm leaf.



Figure

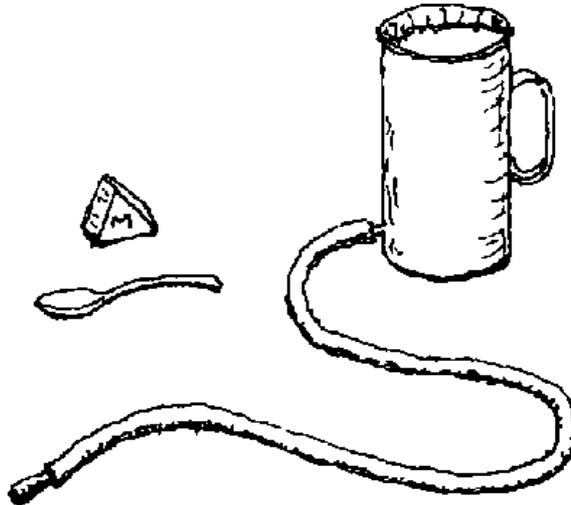
CAUTION: Even if the cast is not very tight when you put it on, the broken limb may swell up later. If the person complains that the cast is too tight, or if his fingers or toes become cold, white, or blue, take the cast off and put on a new, looser one.

Never put on a cast over a cut or a wound.

Enemas, Laxatives, and Purges: When to Use Them and When Not To

Many people give enemas and take laxatives far too often. The 'urge to purge' is world wide.

Enemas and purges are very popular home cures. And they are often very harmful. Many people believe fever and diarrhea can be 'washed out' by giving an enema (running water into the gut through the anus) or by using a *purge*, or strong laxative. Unfortunately, such efforts to clean or purge the sick body often cause more injury to the already damaged gut.



Figure

Rarely do enemas or laxatives do any good at all. Often they are dangerous - especially strong laxatives.

CASES IN WHICH IT IS DANGEROUS TO USE ENEMAS OR LAXATIVES

Never use an enema or laxative if a person has a severe stomach-ache or any other sign of appendicitis or 'acute abdomen', even if he passes days without a bowel movement.

Never give an enema or laxative to a person with a bullet wound or other injury to the gut.

Never give a strong laxative to a weak or sick person. It will weaken him more.

Never give an enema or purge to a baby less than 2 years old.

Never give a laxative or purge to a child with high fever, vomiting, diarrhea or signs of dehydration. It can increase dehydration and kill the child.

Do not make a habit of using laxatives often (see Constipation)

THE CORRECT USES OF ENEMAS

1. Simple enemas can help relieve constipation (dry, hard, difficult stools). Use warm water only, or water with a little soap in it.

2. When a person with severe vomiting is dehydrated, you can try replacing water by giving an enema of Rehydration Drink made with water, sugar, and salt only, very slowly.

PURGES AND LAXATIVES THAT ARE OFTEN USED

CASTOR OIL SENNA LEAF CASCARA (cascara sagrada)	These are irritating purges that often do more harm than good it is better not to use them
MAGNESIUM CARBONATE MILK OF MAGNESIA EPSOM SALTS (magnesium sulfate)	These are salt purges. Use them only in low doses, as laxatives for constipation. Do not use them often and never when there is pain in the belly.
MINERAL OIL	This is sometimes used for constipation in persons with piles but it is like passing greased rocks. Not recommended

CORRECT USES OF LAXATIVES AND PURGES

Laxatives are like purges but weaker. All the products listed above are laxatives when taken in small doses and purges when taken in large doses. Laxatives soften and hurry the bowel movement; purges cause diarrhea.

Purges: The only time a person should use a strong dose of a purge is when he has taken a poison and must clean it out quickly. At any other time a purge is harmful.

Laxatives: One can use milk of magnesia or other magnesium salts in small doses, as laxatives, in some cases of constipation. People with *hemorrhoids* (piles) who have constipation can take mineral oil but this only makes their stools slippery, pot soft. The dose for mineral oil is 3 to 6 teaspoons at bedtime (never with a meal because the oil will rob the body of important vitamins in the food). This is not the best way.

Suppositories, or bullet-shaped pills that can be pushed up the rectum, can also be used to relieve constipation or piles.

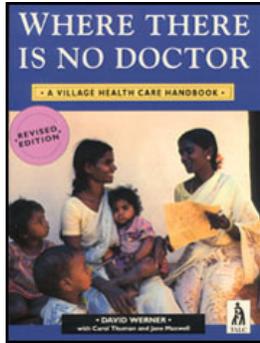
A BETTER WAY

Foods with fiber. The healthiest and most gentle way to have softer, more frequent stools is to *drink a lot of water* and to *eat more foods with lots of natural fiber*, or 'roughage' like *cassava, yam, or bran* (wheat husks) and other whole grain cereals. Eating plenty of fruits and vegetables also helps.

People who traditionally eat lots of food with natural fiber suffer much less from piles, constipation, and cancer of the gut than do people who eat a lot of refined 'modern' foods. For better bowel habits, avoid refined foods and eat foods prepared from unpolished or unrefined grains.



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 **Where There Is No Doctor - A Village Health Care Handbook (Hesperian Foundation, 1993, 516 p.)**

  **Chapter 2 - SICKNESSES THAT ARE OFTEN CONFUSED**

-  **What Causes Sickness?**
-  **Different Kinds of Sicknesses and Their Causes**
-  **Non-Infectious Diseases**
-  **Infectious Diseases**
-  **Sicknesses That Are Hard to Tell Apart**
-  **Examples of Local Names for Sicknesses**
-  **Misunderstandings Due to Confusion of Names**
-  **Confusion between Different Illnesses That Cause Fever**

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Chapter 2 - SICKNESSES THAT ARE OFTEN CONFUSED

What Causes Sickness?

Persons from different countries or backgrounds have different ways to explain what causes sickness.

A baby gets diarrhea. But why?

People in small villages may say it is because the parents did something wrong, or

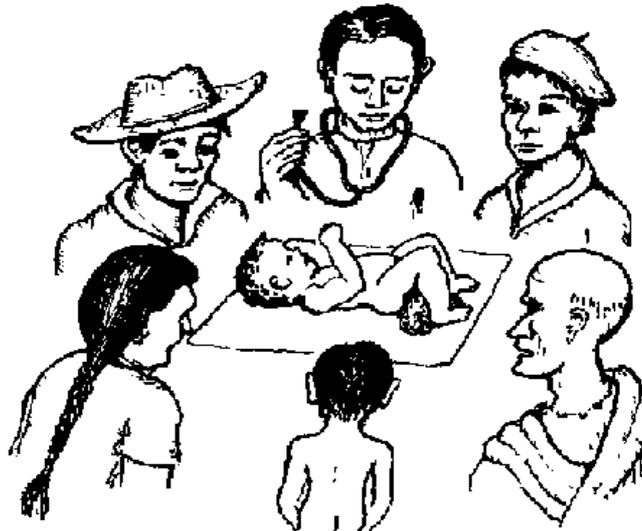
perhaps because they made a god or spirit angry.

A doctor may say it is because the child has an infection.

A public health officer may say it is because the villagers do not have a good water system or use latrines.

A social reformer may say the unhealthy conditions that lead to frequent childhood diarrhea are caused by an unfair distribution of land and wealth.

A teacher may place the blame on lack of education.



Figure

People see the cause of sickness in terms of their own experience and point of view. Who then is right about the cause? Possibly everyone is right, or partly right. This is because...

Sickness usually results from a combination of causes.

Each of the causes suggested above may be a part of the reason why a baby gets diarrhea.

To prevent and treat sickness successfully, it helps to have as full an understanding as possible about the common sicknesses in your area and the combination of things that causes them.

In this book, different sicknesses are discussed mostly according to the systems and terms of modern or scientific medicine.

To make good use of this book, and safe use of the medicines it recommends, you will need some understanding of sicknesses and their causes according to medical science. Reading this chapter may help.



"Why my child?"

Different Kinds of Sickesses and Their Causes

When considering how to prevent or treat different sicknesses, it helps to think of them in two groups: infectious and non-infectious.

Infectious diseases are those that spread from one person to another, Healthy persons must be protected from people with these sicknesses.

Non-infectious diseases do not spread from person to person. They have other

causes. Therefore, it is important to know which sicknesses are infectious and which are not.

Non-Infectious Diseases

Non-infectious diseases have many different causes. But they are never caused by germs, bacteria, or other living organisms that attack the body. They never spread from one person to another. It is important to realize that *antibiotics*, or medicines that fight germs, do not help cure non-infectious diseases.

Remember: Antibiotics are of no use for non-infectious diseases.

EXAMPLES OF NON-INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Problems caused by something that wears out or goes wrong within the body:

rheumatism

heart attack

epileptic fits

stroke

migraine headaches

Problems caused by something from outside that harms or troubles the body:

allergies

asthma

poisons

snakebite

cough from smoking

Problems caused by a lack of something the body needs:

malnutrition

anemia

pellagra

night blindness
and
xerophthalmia

cataract	stomach ulcer	goiter and cretinism
cancer	alcoholism	cirrhosis of the liver (part of the cause)
Problems people are born with:		Problems that begin in the mind (mental 'illnesses'):
harelip	epilepsy (some kinds)	fear that something is harmful when it is not (paranoia)
crossed or wall-eyes (squint)	retarded (backward) children	nervous worry (anxiety)
other deformities	birthmarks	belief in hexes (witchcraft)
		uncontrolled fear (hysteria)

Infectious Diseases

Infectious diseases are caused by bacteria and other *organisms* (living things) that harm the body. They are spread in many ways. Here are some of the most important kinds of organisms that cause infections and examples of sicknesses they cause:

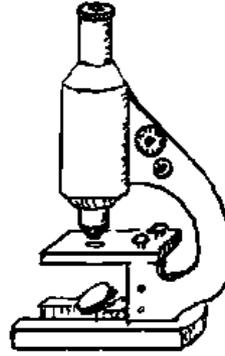
EXAMPLES OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Organism that causes	Name of the sickness	How it is spread or	Principal medicine
-----------------------------	-----------------------------	----------------------------	---------------------------

the sickness		enters the body	
	tuberculosis	through the air (coughing)	
	tetanus	dirty wounds	
	some diarrhea	dirty fingers, water, flies	
bacteria	pneumonia (some kinds)	through the air (coughing)	different antibiotics for
(microbes or germs)	gonorrhea, chlamydia, and syphilis	sexual contact	different bacterial infections
	earache	with a cold	
	infected wounds	contact with dirty things	
	sores with pus	direct contact (by touch)	
virus (germs smaller than bacteria)	colds, flu, measles, mumps, chickenpox, infantile paralysis, virus diarrhea	from someone who is sick, through the air, by coughing, flies, etc.	aspirin and other painkillers (There are no medicines that fight viruses effectively. Antibiotics do not help.) Vaccinations help prevent some virus infections.
	rabies	animal bites	
	warts	touch	

fungus	ringworm athlete's foot jock itch	by touch or from clothing	sulfur and vinegar ointments: undecylenic, benzoic, salicylic acid griseofulvin
internal parasites (harmful animals living in the body)	In the gut: worms amebas (dysentery)	feces-to-mouth lack of cleanliness	different specific medicines
	In the blood: malaria	mosquito bite	chloroquine (or other malaria medicine)
external parasites (harmful animals living on the body)	lice fleas bedbugs scabies	by contact with infected persons or their clothes	insecticides, lindane

Bacteria, like many of the organisms that cause infections, are so small you cannot see them without a microscope - an instrument that makes tiny things look bigger. Viruses are even smaller than bacteria.



Figure

Antibiotics (penicillin, tetracycline, etc.) are medicines that help cure certain illnesses caused by bacteria. Antibiotics have no effect on illnesses caused by most viruses, such as colds, flu, mumps, chickenpox, etc. Do not treat virus infections with antibiotics. They will not help and may be harmful (see Antibiotics).

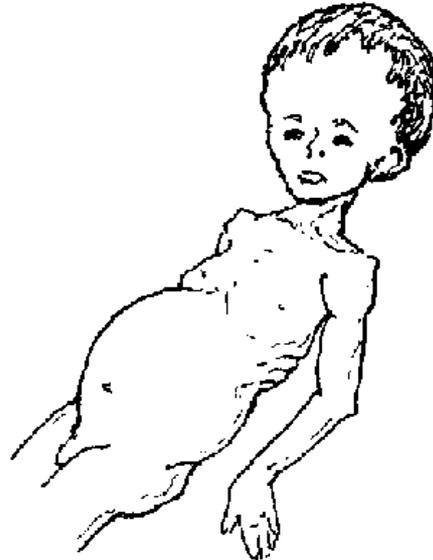
Sicknesses That Are Hard to Tell Apart

Sometimes diseases that have different causes and require different treatment result in problems that look very much alike. For example:

1. A child who slowly becomes thin and wasted, while his belly gets more and more swollen, could have any (or several) of the following problems:

- **malnutrition**
- **a lot of roundworms, (usually together with malnutrition)**
- **advanced tuberculosis**

- **a long-term severe urinary infection**
- **any of several problems of the liver or spleen**
- **leukemia (cancer of the blood)**



Figure

2. An older person with a big, open, slowly growing sore on the ankle could have:

- **bad circulation that results from varicose veins or other causes**
- **diabetes**
- **infection of the bone (osteomyelitis)**

- **leprosy**
- **tuberculosis of the skin**
- **advanced syphilis**



Figure

The medical treatment for each of these diseases is different, so to treat them correctly it is important to tell them apart.

Many illnesses at first seem very similar. But if you ask the right questions and know what to look for, you can often learn information and see certain signs that will help tell you what illness a person has.

This book describes the typical history and signs for many illnesses. But be careful!

Diseases do not always show the signs described for them - or the signs may be confusing. For difficult cases, the help of a skilled health worker or doctor is often needed. Sometimes special tests or analyses are necessary.

Work within your limits!

In using this book, remember it is easy to make mistakes.

Never pretend you know something you do not.

If you are not fairly sure what an illness is and how to treat it, or if the illness is very serious - get medical help.

SICKNESSES THAT ARE OFTEN CONFUSED OR GIVEN THE SAME NAME

Many of the common names people use for their sicknesses were first used long before anyone knew about germs or bacteria or the medicines that fight them. Different diseases that caused more or less similar problems - such as 'high fever' or 'pain in the side' - were often given a single name. In many parts of the world, these common names are still used. City-trained doctors often neither know nor use these names. For this reason, people sometimes think they apply to 'sicknesses doctors do not treat'. So they treat these home sicknesses with herbs or home remedies.

Actually, most of these home sicknesses or 'folk diseases' are the same ones known to medical science. Only the names are different.

For many sicknesses, home remedies work well. But for some sicknesses, treatment

with modern medicine works much better and may be life-saving. This is especially true for dangerous infections like pneumonia, typhoid, tuberculosis, or infections after giving birth.

To know which sicknesses definitely require modern medicines and to decide what medicine to use, it is important that you try to find out what the disease is in the terms used by trained health workers and in this book.

If you cannot find the sickness you are looking for in this book, look for it under a different name or in the chapter that covers the same sort of problem. Use the list of CONTENTS and the INDEX.

If you are unsure what the sickness is - especially if it seems serious - try to get medical help.

The rest of this chapter gives examples of common or *traditional* names people use for various sicknesses. Often a single name is given to diseases that are different according to medical science.

Examples cannot be given for each country or area where this book may be used. Therefore, I have kept those from the Spanish edition, with names used by villagers in western Mexico. They will not be the same names you use. However, people in many parts of the world see and speak of their illnesses in a similar way. So the examples may help you think about how people name diseases in your area.

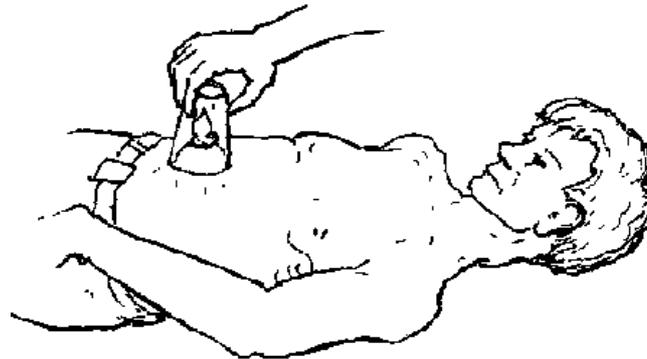
Can you think of a name your people use for the following 'folk diseases'? If you can, write it in after the Spanish name, where it says.

Name in Your Area: _____

Examples of Local Names for Sicknesses

Spanish Name: *EMPACHO* (STOPPED-UP GUT) Name in Your Area:

In medical terms *empacho* (impaction) means that the gut is stopped up or *obstructed*. But in Mexican villages any illness causing stomach-ache or diarrhea may be called *empacho*. It is said that a ball of hair or something else blocks a part of the gut. People put the blame on witches or evil spirits, and treat with magic cures and *cupping* (see picture). Sometimes folk healers pretend to take a ball of hair and thorns out of the gut by sucking on the belly.



Figure

Different illnesses that cause stomach pain or discomfort and are sometimes called

***empacho* are:**

- **diarrhea or dysentery with cramps**
- **worms**
- **swollen stomach due to malnutrition**
- **indigestion or stomach ulcer**
- **and rarely, true gut obstruction or appendicitis**

Most of these problems are not helped much by magic cures or cupping. To treat *empacho*, try to identify and treat the sickness that causes it.

Spanish Name: *DOLOR DE IJAR* (SIDE PAINS) Name in Your Area:

This name is used for any pain women get in one side of their belly. Often the pain goes around to the mid or lower back. Possible causes of this kind of pain include:

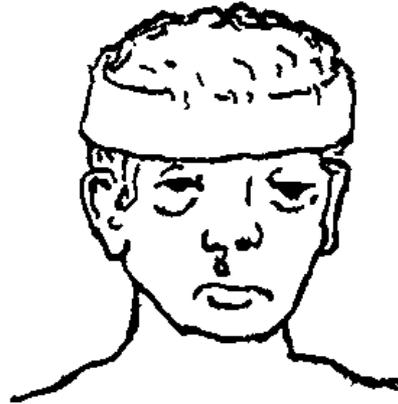
- **an infection of the urinary system (the kidneys, the bladder, or the tubes that join them)**
- **cramps or gas pains (see diarrhea)**
- **menstrual pains**
- **appendicitis**
- **an infection, cyst, or tumor in the womb or ovaries or an out-of-place pregnancy**



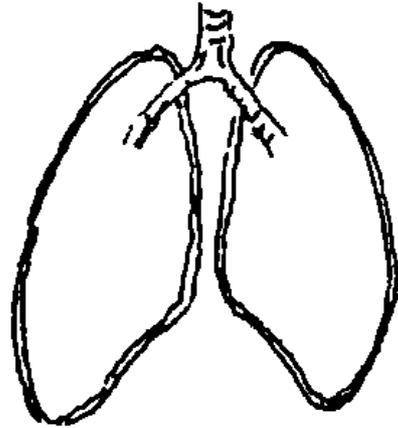
Figure

Spanish Name: *LA CONGESTION* (CONGESTION) Name in Your Area:

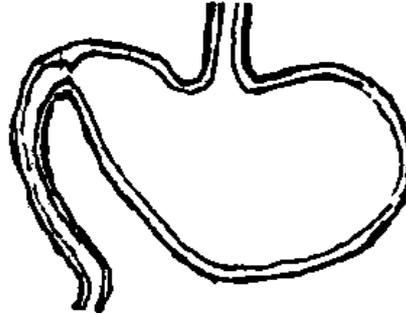
Any sudden upset or illness that causes great distress is called *la congestin* by Mexican villagers. People speak of *congestin* of:



the head,



the chest,



the stomach,



or the whole body.

It is said that *la congestin* strikes persons who break 'the diet', by eating foods that are forbidden or *taboo* after childbirth, while taking a medicine, or when they have a cold or cough. Although these foods usually cause no harm and are sometimes just what their bodies need, many people will not touch them because they are so afraid of getting *la congestin*.

Different illnesses that are sometimes called *la congestin* are:

- **Food poisoning, from eating spoiled food: causes sudden vomiting followed by diarrhea, cramps, and weakness.**
- **A severe allergic reaction, in allergic persons after they eat certain foods (shellfish, chocolate, etc.), take certain medicines, or are injected with penicillin. May cause vomiting, diarrhea, cold sweat, breathing trouble, itchy rash, and severe distress.**
- **Any sudden upset of the stomach or gut: see diarrhea, vomiting, and acute abdomen.**
- **Sudden or severe difficulty breathing: caused by asthma, pneumonia, or something stuck in the throat.**
- **Illnesses that cause fits or paralysis: see fits, tetanus, meningitis, polio, and stroke.**
- **Heart attacks: mostly in older persons.**

Spanish Name: *LATIDO* (PULSING) Name in Your Area: _____

***Latido* is a name used in Latin America for a pulsing or 'jumping' in the pit of the stomach. It is really the pulse of the *aorta* or big blood vessel coming from the heart. This pulse can be seen and felt on a person who is very thin and hungry. *Latido* is often a sign of malnutrition - or hunger! Eating enough good food is the only real treatment.**

Spanish Name: *SUSTO* (HYSTERIA, FRIGHT) Name in Your Area:

According to Mexican villagers, *susto* is caused by a sudden fright a person has had, or by witchcraft, black magic, or evil spirits. A person with *susto* is very nervous and afraid. He may shake, behave strangely, not be able to sleep, lose weight, or even die.

Possible medical explanations for *susto*:

1. In many people, *susto* is a state of fear or *hysteria*, perhaps caused by the 'power of belief. For example, a woman who is afraid someone will hex her becomes nervous and does not eat or sleep well. She begins to grow weak and lose weight. She takes this as a sign she has been hexed, so she becomes still more nervous and frightened. Her *susto* gets worse and worse.

2. In babies or small children, *susto* is usually very different. Bad dreams may cause a child to cry out in his sleep or wake up frightened. High fevers from any illness can cause very strange speech and behavior (*delirium*). A child that often looks and acts worried may be malnourished. Sometimes early signs of tetanus or meningitis are also called *susto*.

Treatment:

When the *susto* is caused by a specific illness, treat the illness. Help the person understand its cause. Ask for medical advice, if needed.

When the *susto* is caused by fright, try to comfort the person and help him

understand that his fear itself is the cause of his problem. Magic cures and home remedies sometimes help.

If the frightened person is breathing very hard and fast, his body may be getting too much air - which may be part of the problem:

**EXTREME FRIGHT OR HYSTERIA WITH FAST HEAVY BREATHING
(HYPERVENTILATION)**

Signs:

- **person very frightened**
- **breathing fast and deep**
- **fast, pounding heartbeat**
- **numbness or tingling of face, hands, or feet**
- **muscle cramps**

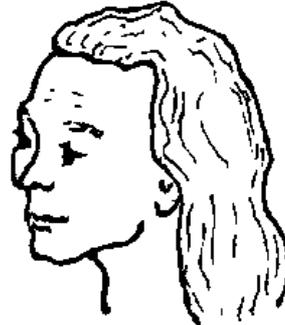


BEFORE
Figure



Figure

AFTER



Figure

Treatment:

- **Keep the person as quiet as possible.**
- **Have her put her face in a paper bag and breathe slowly. She should continue breathing the same air for 2 or 3 minutes. This will usually calm her down.**
- **Explain to her that the problem is not dangerous, and she will soon be all right.**

Misunderstandings Due to Confusion of Names

This page shows 2 examples of misunderstandings that can result when certain names like 'cancer' and 'leprosy' mean one thing to medical workers and something

else to villagers. In talking with health workers - and in using this book:

Avoid misunderstanding - go by the signs and history of a person's sickness, not the name people give it!

Spanish Name: *CANCER* (*CANCER*) Name in Your Area: _____

Mexican villagers use the word cancer for any severe infection of the skin, especially badly infected wounds or gangrene.

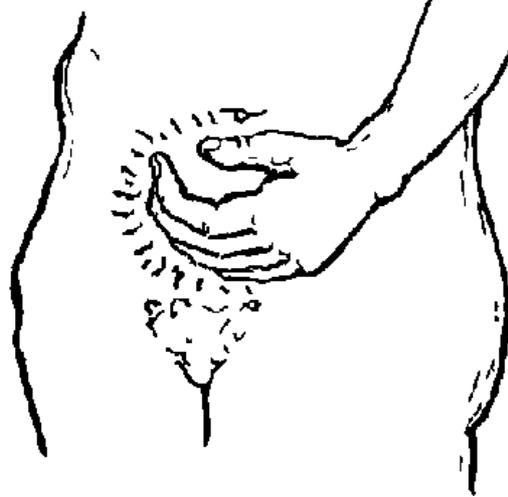
In modern medical language, cancer is not an infection, but an abnormal growth or lump in any part of the body. Common types of cancer that you should watch out for are:



cancer of the skin



breast cancer



cancer of the womb or ovaries

Any hard, painless, slowly growing lump in any part of your body may be cancer. Cancer is often dangerous and may need surgery.

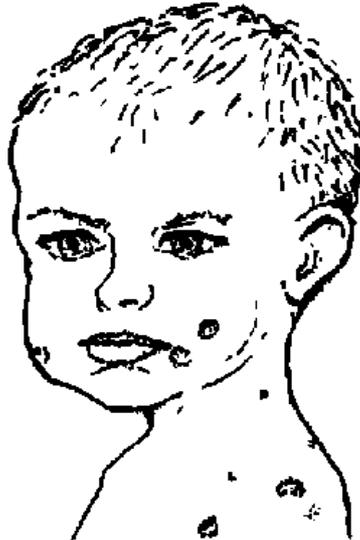
At the first suspicion of cancer seek medical help.

Spanish Name: *LEPRA* (LEPROSY) Name in Your Area: _____

Mexican villagers call any open spreading sore *lepra*. This leads to confusion, because medical workers use this term only for true leprosy (Hansen's disease). Sores commonly called *lepra* are:

- **impetigo and other skin infections**

- sores that come from insect bites or scabies
- chronic sores or skin ulcers such as those caused by poor circulation
- skin cancer
- less commonly, leprosy or tuberculosis of the skin



This child has impetigo, not leprosy.

Confusion between Different Illnesses That Cause Fever

Spanish Name: **LA FIEBRE** (THE FEVER) Name in Your Area: _____

Correctly speaking, a *fever* is a body temperature higher than normal. But in Latin

American, a number of serious illnesses that cause high temperatures are all called *la fiebre* - or 'the fever'.

To prevent or treat these diseases successfully, it is important to know how to tell one from another.



Figure

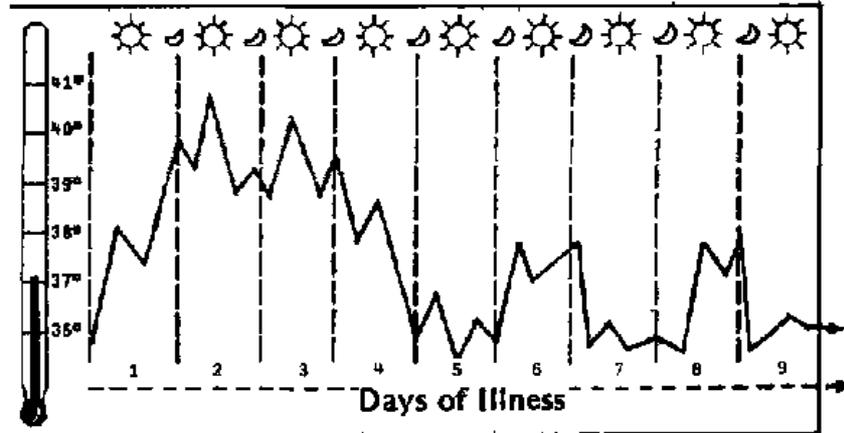
Here are some of the important acute illnesses in which fever is an outstanding sign. The drawings show the fever pattern (rise and fall of temperature) that is typical for each disease.

Malaria:

Begins with weakness, chills and fever. Fever may come and go for a few days, with shivering (chills) as the temperature rises, and sweating as it falls. Then, fever may

come for a few hours every second or third day. On other days, the person may feel more or less well.

The solid line shows the rise and fall of temperature.

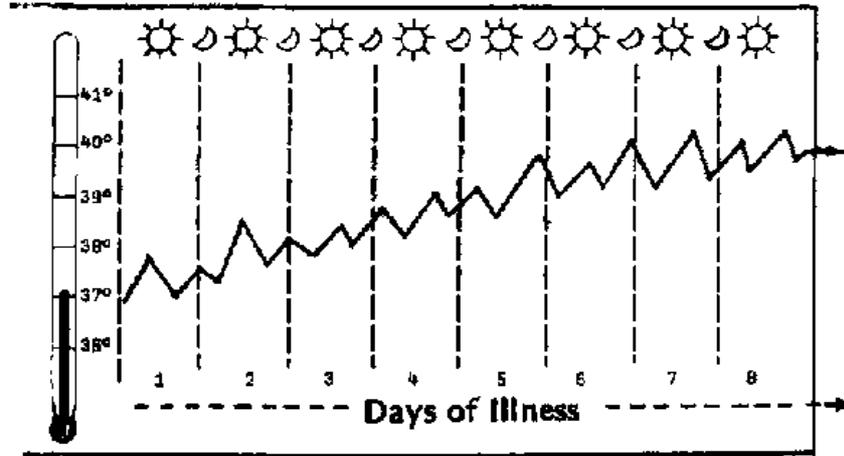


MALARIA - TYPICAL FEVER PATTERN

Typhoid:

Begins like a cold. Temperature goes up a little more each day. Pulse relatively slow. Sometimes diarrhea and dehydration. Trembling or delirium (mind wanders). Person very ill.

**The fever goes up
a little each day.**



TYPHOID - TYPICAL FEVER PATTERN

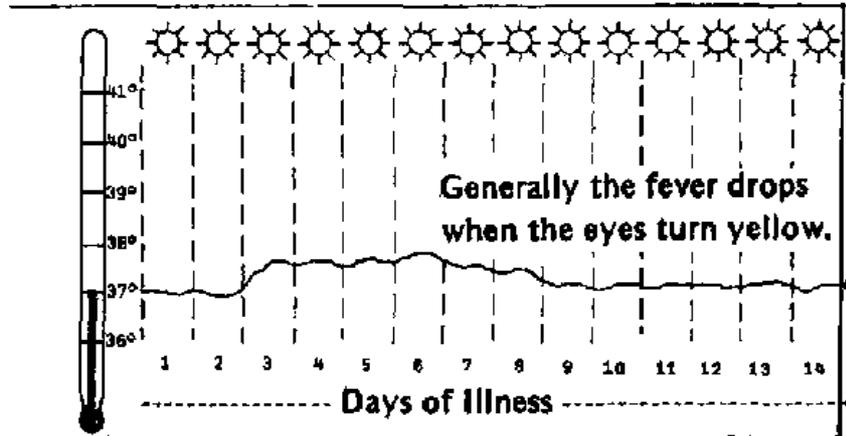
Typhus:

Similar to typhoid. Rash similar to that of measles, with tiny bruises.

Hepatitis:

Person loses appetite. Does not wish to eat or smoke. Wants to vomit (nausea). Eyes and skin turn yellow; urine orange or brown; stools whitish. Sometimes liver becomes large, tender. Mild fever. Person very weak.

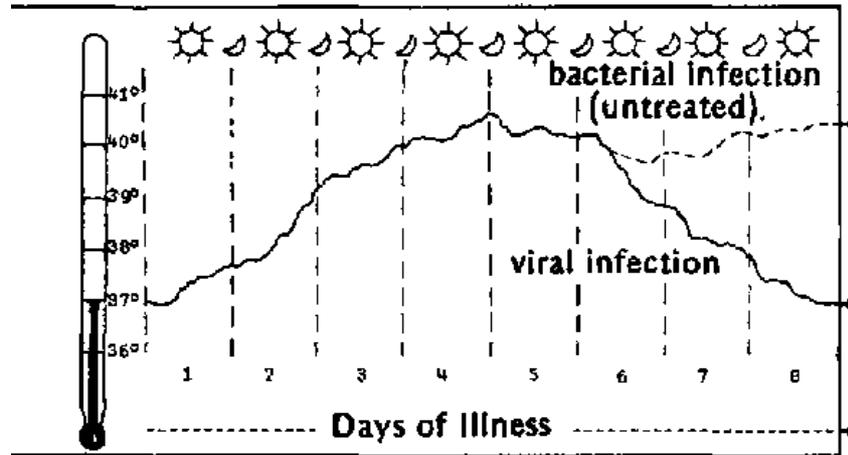
**Usually the fever
is mild.**



HEPATITIS-TYPICAL FEVER PATTERN

Pneumonia:

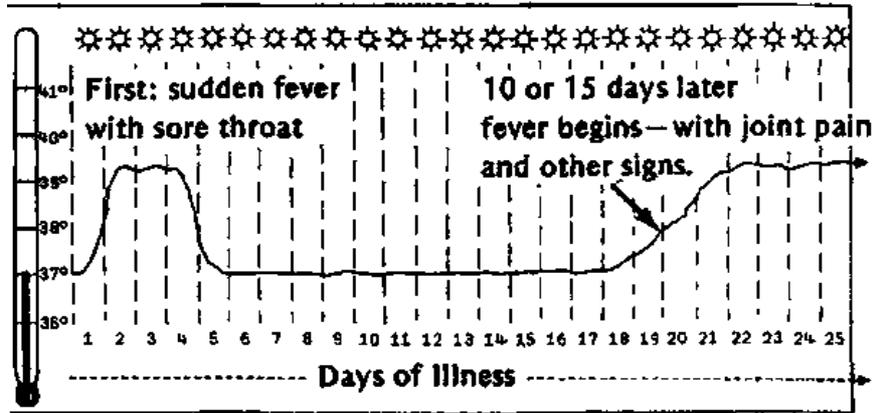
Fast, shallow breathing. Temperature rises quickly. Cough with green, yellow, or bloody mucus. May be pain in chest. Person very ill.



PNEUMONIA - TYPICAL FEVER PATTERN

Rheumatic fever:

Most common in children and teenagers. Pain in joints. High fever. Often comes after a sore throat. May be pain in the chest with shortness of breath. Or uncontrolled movements of arms and legs.

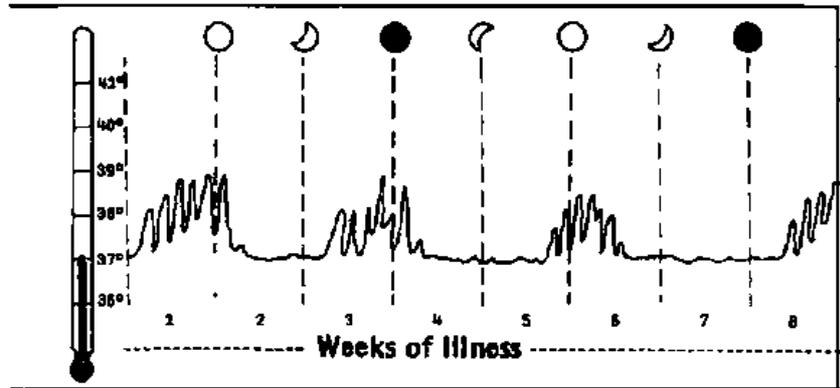


RHEUMATIC FEVER - TYPICAL FEVER PATTERN

Brucellosis (undulant fever, Malta fever):

Begins slowly with tiredness, headache, and pains in the bones. Fever and sweating most common at night. Fever disappears for a few days only to come back again. This may go on for months or years.

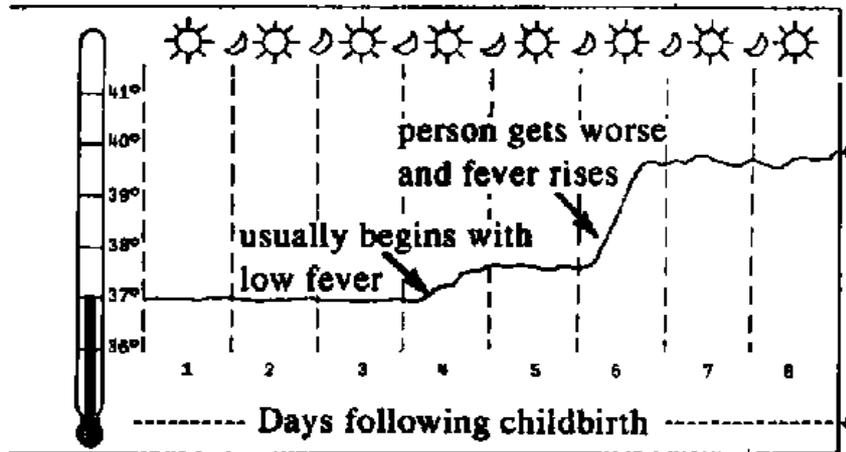
Fever comes in waves. Rises in the afternoon and falls at night.



BRUCELLOSIS - TYPICAL FEVER PATTERN

Childbirth fever:

Begins a day or more after giving birth. Starts with a slight fever, which often rises later. Foul-smelling vaginal *discharge*. Pain and sometimes bleeding.



CHILDBIRTH FEVER - TYPICAL FEVER PATTERN

All of these illnesses can be dangerous. In addition to those shown here, there are many other diseases (especially in *tropical* countries) that may cause similar signs and fevers. These illnesses are not always easy to tell apart. Most are serious or dangerous. When possible - seek medical help.

