

**THE MOST**  
**EFFECTIVE REMEDIES**  
**THAT WE LOST TO HISTORY**



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## *Introduction*

Modern medicine is fantastic. Of course things go wrong sometimes, but generally it's safe and very effective. That's the main reason life expectancy is a historic high. Diseases that used to kill millions have been brought under control or even eradicated. Drugs can control many chronic conditions. There's medication to control blood pressure, heart disease, even HIV. We just don't have to fear illness the way our ancestors did.

But, although it's effective, modern medicine is also fragile. It wouldn't take a lot to blow the whole system apart. Even without a crisis, there are growing problems. Antibiotic resistance, for example – overuse of antibiotics, by industrial farmers and people who take a couple of pills when a mug of hot chocolate would do more good, have saturated most of the environment with a low-level dose of antibiotics. That kills a lot of bacteria, but the ones that survive are stronger and more virulent. We might be just a couple of decades away from the point where antibiotics stop working.

Now imagine there's a major crisis. Civil unrest, a natural disaster or an EMP attack has thrown the USA into chaos. That will cause plenty of problems for everyone, but it might be worst for those who need medication. Some modern drugs have a limited shelf life unless they're kept refrigerated. Others will last for years, but might be stolen by looters. Drug stores are going to be attacked and pillaged by addicts, and a lot of their stocks will be stolen or destroyed. Meanwhile the federal government will probably impound the stocks held by manufacturers as a strategic asset.

If you're on regular medication you should keep the largest possible stock of it, and of course every prepper will have a good first aid kit that includes basic medication. There's a limit to how much you can stockpile, though, and sooner or later supplies will run out.

Luckily, that doesn't mean you have to just give up and die. Medicine isn't a new idea. There were doctors in ancient Egypt, and China has a history of herbal medicine stretching back thousands of years. The Greeks and Romans made many advances, and as well as developing surgical techniques they improved on older herbal medicine by making stronger extracts from healing plants.

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Plants were the basis of most medicine from the ancient world, through the Middle Ages and up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, they still are. Drug companies don't invent new chemicals then see what effect they have on sick people; usually they look for existing substances that have a healing effect, then try to fine-tune them. Most of these substances come from plants, and usually it's a plant that's been used for traditional herbal medicine.

Once a medicinal plant has been identified chemists isolate the active chemicals, purify them, then try to develop similar but more powerful versions that can be synthetically produced. Aspirin is based on a chemical found in willow leaves. Quinine, the first effective malaria treatment, was originally extracted from the bark of the cinchona tree. Digitalin, which is used to treat cardiac arrhythmia, is found in foxgloves.

The truth is, many modern drugs have natural equivalents that are almost as effective – and sometimes safer. If you know where to find these it's often possible to switch to the old remedies when modern ones run out. Some care is needed, because bark and leaves don't come with a carefully measured dose of the drug, but if you know what you're doing this can be amazingly effective.

As well as medicinal plants there are a whole host of other old remedies that have faded into history. A lot of folk medicine won't do any good, and some is actively dangerous, but many of these remedies can be very effective. In fact the only reason they've fallen out of use is that we've come to trust modern medicine more than older kinds. This is a lazy way of thinking. People used folk medicine for centuries because, often, it worked. And, when a crisis takes modern medicine away from us, we're going to have a choice between the old remedies or nothing. What would you rather have?

It does have to be said that not all folk medicines work. Some of them are based on complete misunderstandings about how disease works; keep in mind that, two centuries ago, nobody knew what a bacteria was. If you don't know what the problem is, your chances of finding a solution go way down. Some old remedies have gone because they deserved to – they didn't work, and taking a medicine that doesn't work gives you a false sense of security. Instead, it's better to look for an alternative that *does* work – there's usually one available.

In this book we'll look at many old remedies that might still have a useful place in your post-SHTF planning. Some are well proven; they have a known effect that you can rely on. Others are up for debate. They might not work, but there's enough

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supporting evidence that they're worth a try if nothing else is available. Finally there are a few that you shouldn't try; they've either been proven to be ineffective, or they're actually dangerous. This book aims to give you useful information that can save you from discomfort, pain or even death – and there are a few so-called remedies that can lead to all of these.

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# *Chapter 1:*



# *Proven Remedies*



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A lot of folk remedies have been tested by scientists, and proven to work. Other reliable ones involve plants that definitely contain chemicals similar or identical to modern drugs. This section of the book contains the most dependable remedies that were abandoned before they should have been.

## Epsom salts

Let's start off with one that isn't *completely* lost yet. Epsom salts – magnesium sulfate – are still on the World Health Organization's list of essential medicines. It's nowhere near as common as it used to be, though. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries most homes had a big jar of it, and it was used to treat a wide variety of illnesses.

Like most 19<sup>th</sup> century medicines it was used as a remedy for a lot of illnesses it didn't actually work on, but there are many things it does work for. Here are some uses for Epsom salts:

- **Eclampsia.** If women have seizures during pregnancy, Epsom salts are a very effective treatment. It lowers systolic blood pressure but leaves diastolic pressure unchanged; that eliminates the seizures but keeps up the blood supply to the fetus.
- **Splinters.** If you work with wood, especially with hand tools, you're going to get splinters sometimes. They're painful, and if you don't get them out they can cause serious infections. If you don't have access to antibiotics that can be very bad news. To remove splinters easily dissolve 1/3 cup Epsom salts in a cup of warm water, and soak the splinter in it for ten minutes. That will soften it and make it easier to remove – and it will reduce the pain, too.
- **Constipation.** Its high magnesium content makes Epsom salts an effective laxative. Dissolve two to four teaspoons of salts in a cup of hot water and stir well. You can flavor it with lemon juice to hide the salty taste.
- **Asthma.** A fine spray of Epsom salts dissolved in water can be used to treat an asthma attack. A medical nebulizer is the best way to deliver it, but anything that can create a fine mist will do. It can also be given intravenously to manage serious attacks.
- **Stress.** The evidence isn't quite as strong on this one, but many people believe a bath with Epsom salts dissolved in it can help relieve stress.

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Epsom salts are easy to buy. Just be sure to get pure magnesium sulfate, without any additives like scents – these can be toxic. It's not expensive and it's a very versatile remedy. It also has a lot of household uses, so adding a few pounds of it to your supplies is an excellent idea – and one that our ancestors would definitely have approved of.

## *Baking Soda*

Another all-purpose substance you should stockpile is baking soda. As well as the obvious uses for baking, its chemistry gives it a number of medical uses as well.

If you're suffering from indigestion or heartburn, two tablespoons of baking soda mixed into a glass of water will quickly have an effect. Baking soda reacts with stomach acid to produce salt, water and carbon dioxide; in the process the acid itself is eliminated.

The anti-acidic properties of baking soda also make it useful in cases of acidosis, where the acidity of the body increases. Respiratory acidosis can be dangerous, and baking soda is an effective treatment.

It also has uses for more minor problems. A solution of baking soda can soften splinters and make them easier to remove. The same solution, applied to bee and wasp stings, relieves pain and swelling. It has the same effect on irritating plants, including reactions to poison ivy and poison sumac. It even works on tear gas – if you've been gassed, a weak baking soda solution can be used to rinse your eyes.

## *Honey*

If you're interested in being prepared to survive in the long term, getting yourself a hive and some bees is a great idea. Honey is tasty, a powerful natural sweetener, and unlike refined sugar it's a renewable resource. What many people don't appreciate is that honey also has medicinal uses. A century ago many people still prized it for its healing properties. Now it's been relegated to an ingredient in soothing drinks – but it can do a whole lot more.

- **Wound dressings.** You'd never know from the taste, but honey contains potent natural antibacterials. Under the sweetness are a range of chemicals

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including methylglyoxal, royalisin and even hydrogen peroxide; all of these are very good at killing bacteria. If you're treating a burn or open wound, wash it with honey diluted in warm water then cover it with a clean dressing – the honey will attract insects and, being sticky, also dirt and dust. On the other hand it also kills bacteria and promotes healing.

- **Ringworm.** Despite the name, ringworm is a fungal infection of the skin. It forms circular red, itchy patches that can be very unpleasant. Mix a teaspoon of honey with a teaspoon of powdered cinnamon, spread it on the affected areas and cover with a loose dressing.
- **Coughs.** Yes, honey *does* help suppress coughs. It's not as effective as many people believe, but it's certainly better than nothing. Tea heavily sweetened with honey will help ease a cough, and take some of the discomfort out of a sore throat. You can also make honey-based hot drinks flavored with lemon, ginger, cinnamon or even pepper.

### Foxglove – DANGEROUS

Cardiac arrhythmia is terrifying, and often fatal. If the heart isn't beating in a proper rhythm it isn't transporting oxygen around the body efficiently, and without oxygen your organs – including the heart itself – will start to die. There are excellent modern drugs for arrhythmia, but if you don't have them the arrhythmia can accelerate into a tightening spiral of cardiac failure, ending in total cardiac arrest.

If someone is going into arrhythmia the symptoms will include a fast and irregular heartbeat, loss of consciousness and difficulty breathing. It's a life-threatening situation, and if you don't have access to modern drugs or a defibrillator you might be justified in using a dangerous traditional remedy. The foxglove, or *Digitalis*, plants are a genus of about 30 species, with *Digitalis purpurea* being the most common. Growing to over six feet high and with a spike of purple or pink bell-shaped flowers, it's very distinctive. It's also loaded with digitoxin, a powerful poison that can have lethal effects on the heart.

In the right circumstances, however, it can actually stabilize the heart. If the heart is in arrhythmia then digitoxin and related chemicals in the plant can slow and strengthen its beat, bringing it back to a normal rhythm. Digoxin, also sold as Lanoxin or Digitalin, is a modern medicine made from foxglove extracts.

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The problem is that there's a *very* narrow gap between an ineffective dose of natural foxglove and a lethal one – and, to help the patient, you have to land in that gap. Never use foxglove as a medicine unless there's no alternative, and if you have to use it, give the smallest dose you can. The best way to prepare it is to crush a handful of the plant in a pint of hot (not boiling) water, then give the water to the patient half a teaspoon at a time. Wait a few minutes between doses, checking the pulse constantly; as soon as it starts to strengthen and stabilize, stop giving doses.

Even if you're extremely careful, it's not hard to kill someone with foxglove. This remedy works, but it's for dire emergencies only.

## *Comfrey*

This flowering plant has been used in herbal medicine for centuries, but it's become controversial in the last few years. It contains allantoin, which stimulates cell growth and is also an anti-inflammatory. Soak crushed comfrey in vodka or ethanol to create a healing tincture that works well on small cuts – but don't take it internally.

Traditionally comfrey was made into a tea that was drunk to treat a whole range of ailments, from ulcers and menstrual disorders right up to fractures; one of its traditional names is knitbone. It was even given to children to help them grow strong bones and teeth.

Unfortunately, as well as allantoin comfrey contains high levels of dangerous alkaloids; excessive doses can cause liver failure, and the plant has been linked with at least one death. Use it on burns and cuts, but keep it outside your body.

## *Cattails*

This wetland plant is often called “nature's supermarket” because every part of it can be used for food. If it's a supermarket it also has a drugstore counter, because there are medicinal uses for most parts too.

- **Bleeding.** Cattails produce large amounts of pollen. In fact they're one of the few plants whose pollen can be collected in large enough amounts to be

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used as a flour substitute. Don't use it all for baking, though, because the fine powder is also astringent and hemostatic – it slows bleeding. Dust clean, dry pollen on a wound to reduce blood loss and encourage clotting. In traditional medicine it was also believed that it can help with internal bleeding. This belief probably comes from an assumption that if it worked outside it would work inside too, so it was eaten to treat any internal bleeding or circulation problems. Unfortunately that's not true. It is a mild diuretic, though.

- **Burns, blisters and scrapes-** Small burns and other injuries can be treated with a cattail poultice. Collect fresh roots, peel and wash them thoroughly, and pound them into a paste. Then spread it over the wound and cover with a dressing.
- **Cuts and abrasions.** The ash from burned cattails has antiseptic properties. Dry the plants thoroughly, burn them then grind the ash to a powder; use it to dust small cuts and scrapes before covering them. You can mix it with the pollen, too.

### *Activated charcoal*

You probably have a few plans for this already – it's great for making all kinds of filters. It has medicinal uses too, though. Get food grade activated charcoal for your stores – or make it yourself; it's easy. Then make your own charcoal crackers by mixing charcoal into plain dough, rolling it thin, cutting into squares and baking until it's dry. Make some up into capsules, too.

- **Poisoning.** The power of activated charcoal is its ability to absorb other chemicals – including poisons. If you suspect someone has swallowed poison, give them four capsules or a heaped teaspoon of charcoal right away, and repeat the dose every ten minutes until you can get them medical help or the symptoms start to fade.
- **Indigestion and wind.** If you suffer from wind or acid reflux after a meal, eat a charcoal cracker or take a couple of capsules. The charcoal will absorb the chemicals that cause wind, and it's also great at soaking up excess stomach acid. If your dog is prone to passing gas, feed him charcoal crackers too.

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- **Bites and stings.** If you're suffering from insects, mix a little finely ground charcoal into a paste with water and use it to cover the bite or sting. It will draw out some of the poison – not all of it, but usually enough to stop the symptoms getting any worse.

If you're using activated charcoal to deal with any kind of poison – including stings – remember that it can't do anything about chemicals that have already been absorbed into the body. It *can* soak up ones that are still in your stomach or just under the surface of a sting, so the quicker you can take it the better.

## Balsam fir

The balsam fir is a strongly scented tree, and that made it a good candidate for traditional medicine. It was a good choice, too, because some of the remedies involving it really work.

- **Congestion.** If you burn the needles of the balsam fir, and inhale the smoke, the aromatic vapor will help relieve congested nostrils and sinuses. It might be effective against headaches too, although that's not as clear.
- **Wounds and sores.** Blisters on the balsam fir's smooth bark are filled with resin. If you collect this resin, and apply it to small cuts, scrapes, sores or skin diseases, it might help them heal.
- **Vitamin C supplement.** The needles are rich in Vitamin C. Use them to make a vitamin-rich tea that prevents scurvy and may help with cold symptoms and coughs.

## Black locust

The berries of this tree are prized, but the bark and leaves are toxic. In small doses, though, the toxins actually make them medically useful.

- **Constipation.** The flowers of the black locust are an effective laxative. They can be eaten – try one or two petals, and increase the dose in small steps if necessary – or made into a tea.

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- **Purgative.** If you need to induce vomiting – for example, you suspect you’ve eaten something poisonous – then chewing a piece of the root bark will work pretty well.
- **Toothache.** Holding a small piece of the root bark in your mouth might reduce the pain of a toothache – but don’t chew it!

### *Indian Gooseberry*

Don’t confuse these with the common gooseberry; they’re not closely related. Indian gooseberries can be eaten, but they’re also used in traditional medicine to treat a variety of diseases. There’s good scientific evidence that they’re powerful antioxidants, and they’ve also been proven to help control both regular and Type 2 diabetes.

Clinical trials have been carried out in India using both extracts and whole fruit, and both are effective on diabetes. Indians usually pickle the fruit with salt, oil and spices, but they can also be eaten raw or soaked in syrup.

Indian gooseberry is also a good source of Vitamin C and other nutrients, so eating it can protect overall health.

### *Chickweed*

This small plant has been used as a salad vegetable and also features in many folk remedies, most of which aren’t supported by any evidence. It does have one proven use, though – treating iron deficiency. The plant is very good at collecting iron from the soil, and you can get the benefits of that if you eat it. Chickweed is a good support treatment for anyone who’s suffering from anemia, and can also be useful for pregnant women. Be careful, though – it contains saponins, which can be toxic in large quantities.

### *Kelp*

This common seaweed used to be a well-known remedy for iodine deficiency. If someone is suffering from hyperthyroidism – with symptoms including fatigue,

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goiter or depression – kelp can be an effective treatment. It can be eaten raw or made into soup; either way the iodine can be absorbed.

After a nuclear attack or radiation accident, eating kelp will help keep the thyroid loaded with safe iodine and prevent it accumulating radioactive iodine-131 from fallout. Be careful though – as time passes, more iodine-131 can build up in the kelp itself. Collect kelp in the first days after the attack, then leave it alone until at least two months have passed and the iodine-131 has decayed.

## *Chicory*

Most famous as a coffee substitute, chicory also has medical uses – and some of them are well proven.

- **Intestinal parasites.** Chicory contains volatile oils that are toxic to intestinal parasites. These oils are found in all parts of the plant, but they're most concentrated in the roots. Many farmers add chicory to their cattle feed to help eliminate worms, and it will work for you, too.
- **Stomach upsets.** The flowers of the chicory plant can help calm an upset stomach.

Chicory has been used as a traditional remedy for chancres. **Don't try this!** A chancre is usually the first symptom of syphilis, and the only treatment that will work is antibiotics. A single dose will stop it at this stage, but chicory won't. The chancre will go away, but the disease will be progressing quietly – and by the time it comes back, you really won't like it.

## *Chufa Sedge*

Although it's not widely known now, this plant is one of the most ancient human food sources – and it's also been widely used in traditional medicine. The tubers of chufa sedge (sometimes sold as “tiger nuts”) are rich in antioxidants, vitamins and nutrients, so they're good for general health. They also help treat diarrhea and upset stomachs, and there's scientific evidence that the compounds they contain can benefit diabetics.



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## *Wild Lettuce*

This plant doesn't look like the familiar vegetable – and it doesn't taste much like it either, thanks to a strong bitter taste – but it's an effective painkiller. In fact one of its other common names is the opium lettuce. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century doctors used it when they couldn't get opium. It isn't as powerful as any opiate, but it's a lot better than nothing.

There are two ways to prepare wild lettuce as a medicine. One is to simmer the chopped plant, along with plenty of sugar, in a pan of water until it's reduced to a thick syrup. It's still pretty bitter even with the sugar, but the natural painkillers are more highly concentrated in this form. The other option is to dry the leaves and stems, then chop them coarsely – a couple of seconds in a blender will do it – and make them into tea.

Finally, by slowly cooking a lot of leaves in just enough water to cover them until the water is dark brown, straining it, then reducing the liquid until it's a paste, you can make a concentrated wild lettuce extract that has a lot of painkilling effect in a small dose.

## *Curled Dock*

The root of curled dock is a rich source of iron and was traditionally used for treating anemia. The leaves and roots also have a laxative effect on some – not all – people. Dock leaves are well known for having a soothing effect on skin irritations and nettle stings. The Zuni people use a poultice of powdered dock root to treat sores, rashes and skin infections.

## *Black Draught*

The ominously named black draught was one of the staples of Victorian medicine, usually used as a laxative (it's a very effective one) but also applied to many other common problems including upset stomachs. It disappeared from pharmacies long ago, but it can be made at home.

Dissolve 3oz of Epsom salts in a pint of water, add three ounces of senna pods, a teaspoon of coriander seeds and half an ounce of crushed fresh ginger, then slowly

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simmer in a covered pan for three or four hours. Strain the liquid and add a large shot of vodka to act as a preservative. Three tablespoons of the draught, given to an adult, will rapidly clear any intestinal blockages.

## *Pine Syrup*

Sore throats and scratchy coughs can make life pretty miserable, so it's no surprise that many traditional remedies are aimed at them. One that really works is pine syrup. First make a basic syrup. Heat a cup of water plus two extra tablespoons to allow for evaporation. Add two tablespoons of corn syrup or sugar, and a pinch of salt. Bring it to the boil; while it's heating up rinse a cup of pine needles and chop them finely.

Once the syrup boils, leave it to boil for one minute without stirring. Then take it off the heat and stir in the chopped needles. Let it steep for two or three hours, then strain it. The syrup will keep in the refrigerator for up to a month, and one or two tablespoons of it will take the worst edge off a cough or sore throat.

## *Clove Oil*

Modern dentistry has made a huge difference to our quality of life. You might not enjoy a session in the chair, but it's a lot better than what people had to live with just a few generations ago. Unfortunately it will be one of the first things to collapse in a major crisis. Luckily, there are some traditional remedies that do work. One of the best is clove oil. This used to be the first choice for relieving the pain of a cavity. Just apply some to the cavity with a cotton bud or fingertip, and it will quickly soothe the pain. Repeat whenever it starts hurting again; this will make things much more pleasant until you can get some more permanent treatment.

## *Garlic*

People have been using garlic as a remedy for thousands of years – it was valued for its medical properties at least as long ago as ancient Rome, and probably much longer. Today it's believed to help prevent heart disease, some cancers and many

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other conditions. The evidence for this is variable; for example, garlic probably doesn't do anything to prevent cancers or even the common cold (although a sandwich filled with sliced garlic is a traditional preventative). It probably *does* have some benefits for heart disease, because it looks like it prevents platelets clumping into clots.

One thing garlic can definitely do is act as a natural painkiller. A slice of raw garlic held against a cut or sting can take away much of the pain. Some people can react badly to it, but for most it works well. Garlic, like clove oil, is also good at relieving toothache; just hold a slice of garlic against the cavity until the pain subsides.

Garlic also has antiseptic effects. In both world wars medics used it to protect wounds from infection when their regular antiseptics ran out. It isn't as effective as a modern antiseptic, but it still gives reasonably good protection and you're a lot better using garlic than not using anything. Poultices of crushed garlic can be applied to wounds or sores to fight infection and take down inflammation.

## *Onions*

If you can't get garlic, onion contains the same active ingredients but at lower concentrations. It can be used as a substitute for garlic, but it might have a less powerful effect or need more to get the job done.

## *Dandelion*

The common weed is edible, and makes a good salad vegetable or green. It's also been used as medicine for centuries. Herbalists use it to "detoxify", but there's no scientific support for detoxification. However dandelions do make a good potassium supplement, and they're also a laxative and diuretic. If you're suffering from constipation or difficult urination dandelion tea can help.

## *Castor Oil*

These days castor oil is mostly used in industry, but it used to be one of the favorite cures of every doctor and medically inclined housewife. It's classed as safe by the FDA but not many people use it as a medicine anymore. A lot of that is down to

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its reputation – a spoonful of castor oil was a common punishment for Victorian children, because it tastes pretty bad.

However, behind the scenes, castor oil extracts turn up in a lot of modern medicines – and the oil itself is still a good thing to have in your emergency supplies. It's a very effective laxative, and it probably helps to induce labor in pregnant women. For that reason it shouldn't be used to treat constipation in pregnant women who aren't at full term, because it can bring on premature labor.

In alternative medicine castor oil is also used to treat skin conditions, cysts and even cancer. There's no good evidence that it works on any of these, although it might be worth trying on skin problems if you don't have any other remedies.

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## *Chapter 2:*



## *Possible Remedies*

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As well as the proven remedies we've already looked at there are many others that *might* work. Usually there's been some scientific study of them, but not enough to be sure. In other cases there's so much evidence from people who've used them, and say they helped, that it's hard to ignore. Just be aware that there are no guarantees with any of these remedies. It would be a very bad idea to switch from modern medicine to anything in this section – but, if you can't get a hold of modern medicine anymore, these lost remedies are worth trying. If they don't work you're no worse off than you were before; if they *do* work it could be a life saver.

## Fenugreek

This distinctive sweet-smelling herb is used in Indian, Persian and Turkish cooking – but it could also help diabetes sufferers. The evidence isn't clear, but some scientific studies suggest that it could reduce hypoglycemia and TC; it might also lower cholesterol levels. This isn't completely reliable, but if you're out of medicine and have access to fenugreek it's certainly worth a shot.

## Thyme

Another herb, and a more common one – most people have some in the kitchen. It isn't just great for seasoning chicken and fish, though. Thyme has also been used as a remedy for thousands of years, both as a herb and as an essential oil.

- **Wound dressings.** Before antibiotics were invented, bandages were often treated with oil of thyme – it can help prevent infections thanks to its natural antibacterial properties. It's not as effective as a proper antiseptic, though.
- **Toenail fungus.** Studies suggest that oil of thyme might be effective against several common fungi that can infect toenails. Rub the affected areas with oil every day for a week; it might clear up.
- **Coughs.** A tea made with thyme leaves (dried or fresh) is a traditional herbal remedy for coughs – and there's some evidence that it actually works. Allowed to cool, it can also be used as a gargle for sore throats.

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## Potato

Potatoes are a lot less exotic than herbs, but they might also have some medicinal uses.

- **Warts.** An old gypsy remedy for warts is to cut a potato, rub the exposed flesh on the wart, then bury the potato. If you dig it up a week or two later, the wart will have grown on the potato – and it'll be gone from you. Obviously this story is nonsense, but there might be a core of truth in it. Many people say they've got rid of warts by rubbing them with a slice of raw potato. Try applying fresh potato to the wart at least once a day for a week, then see if it's having any effect. If it seems to be working, keep going until the wart is gone. Don't bother burying the potato, though – just throw it in the trash.
- **Scurvy.** The evidence behind this one is a *lot* stronger. Mashed potatoes is a traditional remedy for scurvy – Vitamin C deficiency – especially in infants. That isn't a surprise. When we think about foods rich in Vitamin C most of us think of oranges, lemons and blackcurrants. Potatoes won't be high on the list, but they should be. Wash and slice them, boil them lightly with the skins still on, and they're a very good source of the essential vitamin. You'll lose a lot of it if you peel or bake them, though.
- **Digestive problems.** Water that potatoes have been boiled in is a traditional remedy for stomach upsets. It's starchy, and may also have anti-inflammatory properties. Some people advise drinking juice squeezed from raw potatoes, but uncooked potato contains toxic alkaloids, to be very wary of drinking too much of it – not more than half a cup, twice a day.
- **Constipation.** Steamed potatoes might be effective at clearing up constipation. You can also make them into a soup – boil the potatoes in broth, then either mash them in the broth or run the whole lot through a blender.

## Oak

Oak trees have provided wood for fuel, charcoal, construction, weapons and tools. The acorns can be used as food. You can even make ink from oak gall. It's a very useful tree – and some of those uses are medical.

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- **Bleeding.** Dried, powdered oak root is astringent and helps to control bleeding. It might also be able to prevent infections.
- **Wound healing.** Make a poultice from oak leaves and apply to a wound – there's some evidence it can promote healing.
- **Swollen joints.** A cold compress made from oak leaves can take the heat out of a sore joint and bring down the swelling. To be fair, though, a cold compress made from just about any leaves will do that.

## *Beech*

The beech is another useful tree. In medical terms it doesn't do anything spectacular, but various parts of it are still believed to be handy remedies:

- **Inflammation.** A tea made from beech leaves and bark is a mild anti-inflammatory.
- **Stomach upsets.** An infusion of beech leaves can calm an upset stomach.
- **Burns.** A poultice made from boiled beech leaves may help burns heal more quickly. Some people believe it also works on skin damaged by frostbite.

## *Fiddleheads*

The fiddlehead, or ostrich fern, is a good source of antioxidants and omega-3 and -6 fatty acids, so adding it to a survival diet is good for general health. Its leaves have also been used as a poultice to treat wounds, infection and boils; just place the fresh leaves against the injury and hold them in place with a cloth or bandage.

## *Blackberry*

Collecting the sweet, dark fruit of the blackberry is an old tradition that still survives in many areas, but a few generations ago the plant was also valued for medicinal reasons. None of the health claims made for it have been scientifically verified, but a lot of people swear by them – and as blackberry is easy to find in most rural areas, it's definitely worth a try. What scientists do know is that the



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leaves and root bark are strongly astringent and can act as a diuretic, so while blackberry remedies aren't proven to work they're certainly credible.

- **Diarrhea.** A tea made from the root bark and leaves is a traditional remedy for diarrhea. Some people even claim it can treat dysentery, but that might be over-optimistic.
- **Mouth ulcers.** Mouth ulcers can be painful. Make a mouthwash from boiled blackberry roots; that might help them heal. It can also be used as a gargle for sore throats, and to treat thrush.

## *Blueberry*

As well as being tasty, blueberries have gained a reputation as a healthy “superfood”. There's probably no such thing as a superfood, but blueberries do feature in some traditional remedies. They're also high in natural antioxidants, so eating them regularly could protect your DNA and reduce the risk of cancer.

Traditionally, blueberry juice has been drunk to treat urinary problems. It's believed (but not proven) to be effective against cystitis, and it's possible that it can prevent or even reduce kidney stones. Drinking it certainly won't do any harm, and it probably will help your overall health at least slightly.

## *Burdock*

This is another plant that used to play a big part in folk medicine. Most parts of it, but specially the roots, were believed to have healing properties. Dried burdock was used as a diuretic, a diaphoretic – to make people sweat – and a blood purifier. Oil pressed from burdock root was used to treat acne, eczema and other skin problems – and a lot of people believe it's effective.

## *Red clover*

Tea made from red clover flowers and leaves has been used to treat everything from sore throats to cancer, but there's no evidence it works on most of them. One exception is hot flashes in menopausal women; there's good evidence that extracts

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of red clover help relieve those. Tea made from the plant is likely to have some effect, too.

White clover leaves were also made into tea, which was a traditional remedy for coughs, colds and fevers. There isn't strong evidence to support this, but it could work.

### *Port*

It's usually not a good idea to try using alcohol as a medicine, because its effects on the body can make a lot of symptoms worse. Alcohol depresses breathing, and if someone already has trouble breathing that can be dangerous. It also affects blood pressure and can make bleeding worse.

On the other hand, there are exceptions to every rule. If you have a dry, painful throat, try a small glass of port. The heavy, sweet wine can have a soothing effect. It's a favorite trick of singers who want to polish their voice before a performance.

Some people believe port can also help reduce fevers. In Argentina, a traditional remedy is an egg yolk mixed into a glass of port. It doesn't sound very appetizing, but many believe it works.

### *Loquat*

The loquat, or Japanese plum, is a small tree that produces oval yellow fruits. Several parts of the plant have medicinal uses, and it's been used in Chinese medicine for thousands of years. Sweet syrup made from the fruit is used to soothe sore throats, and is still a popular ingredient in Chinese cough drops. A tea made from the leaves can also help sore throats, and the Japanese believe it can heal skin conditions like eczema (although there's no solid evidence for this). If you're stressed or can't sleep you can eat a large helping of loquat fruit – it's a mild, but effective, sedative.

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## Crab Apple

The small, sour fruit of the crab apple is used to make apple sauce, jelly and pies; most parts of the tree also have medicinal uses. The fruit is an effective laxative, and its juice is astringent. A poultice made from crushed crab apples is a traditional remedy for inflammation, and may help wounds to heal. The root bark is a mild sedative and believed to help eliminate worms and intestinal parasites. The leaves also contain antibacterial agents. *Don't* eat the seeds – they're toxic.

## Heal – All

*Prunella vulgaris* is commonly known as heal-all, self-heal or woundwort, which is probably a clue that it's been used in medicine. It's edible and very rich in vitamins, so adding the leaves to salads is one way to promote general health. It also has some more specific uses in traditional medicine. The dried leaves can be made into a tea which was believed to cure diarrhea, kidney problems and goiter. It was also thought to bring down fevers.

Not all the medical claims made for Heal-All have strong evidence to back them up, but they're certainly plausible. The plant has antibacterial and antiseptic properties, and it's also astringent. Using fresh leaves to cover a wound is likely to help prevent infection.

## Vinegar Socks

Many people say vinegar has medicinal powers, and through the years it's been used in some very odd remedies. One of the oddest is soaking your socks in it and wearing them to bring down a high fever. The technique is simple – just put your socks on and soak them in vinegar. Every half hour add some more vinegar to keep them nice and wet, and repeat until the temperature starts to come down.

Unsurprisingly there's no solid evidence that this works, and no convincing scientific reason why it should. On the other hand a lot of people swear that it *does*, so if you have a stubborn fever (and spare socks) it's worth a try. The worst that can happen is your feet smell of vinegar for a couple of days, and if you're

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sweating with a fever that's probably going to be an improvement anyway. You can use either regular or apple cider vinegar.

### *Nut Shell Tea*

Nut shells are an old Southern remedy for a bad cough. Take five ounces of shells – walnut or pecan are good – and boil them in a pint of water for at least half an hour. Then strain out the shells and drink. Many people swear that this will soothe your throat and help relieve the cough.

### *Rose Flips*

The most prized traditional garden plant is the rose, and it's also worth looking for when the SHTF – the petals are edible, and make a good salad. The rose has medicinal properties too, though. Forget the flower – what you want is the rose hip, the small fruit that forms after the flower has died.

Rose hips have a high Vitamin C content, so they're good for general health. Tea made from them has also been used to treat colds, fevers and upset stomachs.

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## *Chapter 3:*



## *Remedies To Avoid*

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For a variety of reasons, the remedies in this section should be avoided. Some are ineffective. Not *possibly* ineffective – *definitely* ineffective. Trying them might give you a false sense of security, when you’d be better off looking for something that might actually work. Others are capable of hurting or killing you on their own. It doesn’t matter who tells you to try them; don’t listen.

## *Hair of the dog*

The expression “Hair of the dog” now applies to a simple, traditional hangover cure; have another drink when you wake up. That’s not a good idea for many reasons, including alcohol dependency, poor nutrition and the risk of a DUI charge, and it also doesn’t work. You might not notice the hangover as much, but it’s still there under the alcohol buzz – and soon enough it’ll resurface, worse than ever.

Hangovers weren’t the original target of this myth, though. In its older and more literal form, it was prescribed as a treatment for one of the most terrifying diseases in the world – rabies. From ancient times until as late as the 19<sup>th</sup> century people believed that if you were bitten by a rabid dog, placing hairs from the animal in the wound would protect you from the lethal madness.

It won’t. The only thing you should do with a rabid dog is shoot it and incinerate the body where it lies. Trying to catch it just invites more bites; even plucking hairs from its corpse carries a risk, because all its fluids will be loaded with the virus. If you can, find a doctor and get rabies prophylaxis as soon as you can; if that isn’t an option wash the wound thoroughly with soap and hot water – and antiseptic, if you have it.

## *Black cohosh*

Traditionally this plant was used to treat arthritis and muscle pains. Extracts from it can be processed into medicines, but the plant itself is bad news. In pregnant women it can cause miscarriages; in everyone else it’s been linked to liver disease and can cause existing cancers to spread and metastasize. There’s evidence it can have beneficial effects, but the dangers of consuming it outweigh these.

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## *Rum and gunpowder*

In the era of sailing ships, a traditional Royal Navy cure for a fever was a large shot of rum with a dash of gunpowder mixed in. It may have originated with the buccaneers in the Caribbean, and it was spread round the world by sailors.

The reason this fearsome remedy spread so far is that there's a big grain of truth in it. The effect comes from the alcohol in the rum; if someone has a fever alcohol *can* bring their temperature down. Drinking alcohol tends to dilate blood vessels close to the skin, and more blood flowing in shallow body layers means more heat radiated out of the body – that's why drinking alcohol is so dangerous in cold weather. So a heavy dose of rum can very easily bring a fever down by a few degrees.

Unfortunately, any benefits from bringing down the fever will be outweighed by the other harm the remedy causes. A large enough dose of alcohol to have much impact on temperature will also risk causing nausea, vomiting and respiratory depression. In general, alcohol is not a medicine and shouldn't be used as one – it's more likely to kill than cure.

## *Crab Apple Seeds*

Many parts of the crab apple tree have medicinal uses, but one should be avoided – the seeds. Some people claim that a chemical they contain can help treat cancer. Unfortunately the chemical is hydrogen cyanide. There's no good evidence that it can treat cancer, but it can definitely kill people and crab apple seeds contain quite a lot of it. In large quantities the seeds can shut down your respiratory system very quickly.

## *Pennycress*

Various parts of this small plant have been used in traditional medicine. It has antibacterial properties, which means it can be effective at fighting infections, but it also has dangers. In large quantities it reduces the white blood cell count – so while it can fight infections, it makes you more likely to get one in the first place. Unless you know exactly what you're doing it's safer to avoid using this plant on

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sick people, although if you're healthy it's fine to eat moderate amounts in salad or greens.

## *Kudzu*

In Asian traditional medicine, kudzu is used as a treatment for cancer. However, there's no evidence it slows or stops the growth of any kind of cancer – and in some cases it can actually make a tumor grow and spread faster. Any cancer that's influenced by hormones can be made more aggressive by kudzu.

## *Mercury*

We all know that mercury is poisonous. If you're interested in history you might also know that it used to be taken as a cure for several deadly diseases, especially syphilis. Mercury *does* fight syphilis, but it's still toxic. Regularly ingesting mercury will seriously damage your health and can easily kill you; there's no point at all in risking that when syphilis can be wiped out as soon as the first symptoms appear by a single dose of antibiotics. It's never worth taking mercury as a medicine.

## *Any "natural cancer cure"*

There are no traditional remedies or diets that will treat cancer. Some plants contain antioxidants that can help *prevent* cancer, but once a tumor has actually appeared you should rely on medicine if you can. Eating onions, or rubbing castor oil on your skin, isn't going to help.



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## Conclusion

Modern medicine isn't perfect. Some drugs have unwelcome side effects, some – like thalidomide – go horribly wrong, and others cause harm because they're prescribed indiscriminately. These are exceptions, though. In general modern remedies are pretty good, which is why life expectancy is longer than it's ever been.

The downside is that modern medicine is delivered by the sort of huge, complex and technology-heavy system that's going to collapse quickly in any real crisis. We've all seen how hospitals get overwhelmed when there's a bad storm; imagine how bad it's going to get if whole states – maybe the whole country – have collapsed into chaos. Our modern healthcare system won't last a week. That's when we'll have to reach for remedies that had been abandoned as we made progress.

Luckily, many of these remedies weren't abandoned because they didn't work; they were abandoned because they don't work *quite* as well as the modern drugs that replaced them. If you're suffering from poison ivy then baking soda might not be as good as the latest anti-inflammatory skin cream, but it's a whole lot better than nothing.

Many traditional remedies – baking soda, for example – have other uses in everyday life or an emergency. Activated charcoal is used in water filters and is a component of gunpowder. Castor oil is a good low-temperature lubricant that doesn't degrade rubber seals. Vinegar has so many uses that anyone who wants to be prepared should have gallons of it stockpiled. The fact these substances have medicinal uses too is just a bonus.

Knowing what medicinal plants to look for is also a good idea. Many of our best drugs are based on plant extracts, and when the drugs are gone the plants will still be there. They might not be as potent, but they'll still help.

Don't reject remedies because they're in the "possible" section of the book; lots of people are convinced that these treatments work, and in general they aren't going to do any harm even if they're ineffective. If you don't have any other medicines available they're definitely worth trying.

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Finally, some remedies have been lost to history for a reason. They're either totally ineffective or actively dangerous. People have killed themselves trying to treat cancer with crab apple seeds; it doesn't take much cyanide to turn your lights out for good. Sometimes it really is best to stick with the devil you know.

A well-stocked first aid kit and medicine cabinet will be your first resources when illness or injury strikes, but if they don't have what you need try reaching into history instead. Some of the remedies in this book have kept millions of people alive; the next life they save could be yours.