

18th Century Cures

A Pamphlet of Cures Commemorating the
200th Anniversary of the Founding of the
Loughborough Dispensary



Researched and Produced by
The Charnwood Practitioners
Volunteers and Loughborough Library
Local Studies Volunteers

Cures

An introduction to 18th century illness and healing

When illness was in the general population (people did not know disease was spread by germs), apothecaries were consulted and they prescribed traditional remedies.

Doctors were not easily available to the poor. In some towns charitable hospitals offered help and care. There were, however, many tricksters who sold useless potions.

The main serious diseases which had to be dealt with in the 1700s were smallpox, typhus, measles, scarletina, diphtheria, tuberculosis (known as consumption), rickets and whooping cough.

People also suffered from bad teeth, infections and arthritis.

Hygiene was bad, as washing and bathing were not commonplace and germs and bacteria thrived.

Doctors, when paid, would use powders with strange ingredients, such as worms, horns, spiders' webs, birds' nests and medicinal plants. Items such as tobacco, coffee, tea and chocolate were all used as medicine.

Women healers who treated the sick with herbal cures were treated the same as women claiming to have magical powers selling witches' brews and spells. All were accused of being witches and were often put to death.

Among other strange beliefs and superstitions it was believed that the touch of the King could cure scrofula (a type of tuberculosis).

Please don't try these recipes at home!

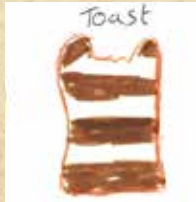
[Recipes can be found in the *17th Century Recipes book* (author unknown) and *A Book of phisick*, published 1710]



Some common and some more unusual cures from the 18th century:

1. Very Good Salves for a Burn or Scald

Take 2 pennyworth of oyle, a pennyworth of beeswax and almost a pound of fresh butter, 2 good handfuls of yellow mos from an Ash tree and boil it together a little and strain out the mos.



2. To Cure the Quinsy

(A fever with difficulty in swallowing.

Today it is known as peritonsilla abscess, a complication of tonsillitis)

Apply a large piece of white-bread toast half an inch thick, dipped in brandy, to the crown of the head, till it dries.



3. To cure a Tooth-ach

Toothache was believed to be worms burying in the hollow part of your tooth. Put three drops of mercury (very poisonous) in the tooth to kill the worm. Rub the cheek for a quarter of an hour and put a clove of garlic in your ear.



4. To Cure a Head Cold

Pare the yellow rind of an orange; roll it up inside out and thrust inside each nostril.



5. To Cure Jaundice

(Skin and eyes turn yellow)

Wet leaves of celandine (yellow spring plant) upon and under the feet.



6. To Cure Asthma

Sea water, nettle juice and quicksilver will all cure it but the best remedy is to live for a fortnight on boiled carrots only.

7. To Cure a Head Ache

Drink strong tea. Comb hair upwards and stroke with nutmeg and vinegar.



8. To Kill Black Worms in the Face (Blackheads)

In the 1700s they thought blackheads were small black worms buried in the face. Use red wine vinegar, prunella (a small blue-flowered plant) and nightshade water (deadly nightshade when soaked in water is very poisonous).



9. For Convulsion Fits and Snake Bites in Children

This might be the strangest cure ever.

Take a live pigeon and tie its rump to the rear end of the child. The bird will struggle and draw away the fits. This also works for a snake bite to draw venom away.



10. Alka Seltzer of 1700s for Gripes

Add mature poppy leaves to 1 gallon of brandy. Steep for a few days. Strain and mix with sweet syrups for taste. Dosage three to four spoonfuls. This was deemed to be effective as it knocked the patient out and unconscious people seldom complain of a stomach upset!



11. For Consumption or General Sickness

Take cow dung fresh in May, dry it in heat and grind to make a fine powder. Dosage as much as you can put on a sixpence, in beer, three times a day.



12. To Cure Palsey (A paralysis)

Take a dead fox and mince the flesh. Then gut a dead goose, put all the fox mince inside the goose and sew it up. Roast them, take the dripping when cooked and add lavender, sage, rosemary, aniseed, fennel seeds, nutmeg, mace, cloves, pepper, ginger and frankincense. Boil on a soft fire, strain and cool into a pot. Anoint it on the place of the palsey and rub in well.

