

## **Medical old wives' tales that harm, not help** by Kate Eller

Thankfully, modern medicine has moved past medieval treatments like lobotomies to “help” those with mental health issues and bloodletting for “curing” the common cold, but there are still plenty of health myths out there.

Grandparents, or even parents, don't always know best.

Let's separate fact from fiction.

**Misconception:** Fresh air helps cuts heal faster.

**Modern:** Keeping a wound moist by covering it reduces infection risk, lessens the chance of re-injury and allows the cells to repair faster. Keeping the wound dry will lead to a scab, which increases the likelihood of scarring.

**Misconception:** Sterilize a cut with hydrogen peroxide.

**Modern:** Yes, hydrogen peroxide may help kill bacteria, but it's also killing the surrounding healthy skin cells, impeding the body's ability to heal the wound and increasing the likelihood of a noticeable scar. Instead, wash the cut with soap and water and cover it with a bandage. If the cut is large, or exceptionally deep, seek medical attention right away, as you may need stitches.

**Misconception:** Butter and toothpaste soothe burns.

**Modern:** Burns need to cool – naturally. Putting butter, toothpaste or other non-burn-specific ointments on a burn may temporarily feel cool, but will ultimately clog the pores and stifle the body's ability to cool itself. Instead, run cool – not cold – water over the burn for about 20 minutes. If you do choose to put something on it, use an ointment made for burns, triple antibiotic or bacitracin ointment or aloe vera gel.

If the burn is severe – is blistered, covers a large part of the body, is oozing, and/or you notice increased pain, redness and swelling – it's best to seek medical attention.

**Misconception:** Treat frostbite with hot water.

**Modern:** Skin exposed for too long to below-freezing weather does not necessarily cause full-blown frostbite. The first stage of frostbite is frostnip (your skin turns red, feels very cold and you experience prickling and numbness), which does not cause permanent damage and should be treated by rewarming the area with warm, not hot, water.

For true frostbite (pain, burning, numbness, muscle stiffness, further color changes, blisters and loss of sensation), it's a must to seek medical help, as it can damage skin, tissue, muscle and bone. This can lead to permanent damage, especially if the skin is thawed and then refreezes.

**Misconception:** Stop a nosebleed by tilting your head back or applying ice.

**Modern:** Leaning forward will prevent blood from running down the back of your throat, which can irritate the stomach and lead to vomiting. Instead, pinch the soft part of your nostrils together right underneath the bony bridge, lean forward and breath through your mouth. Ice does not help stop the bleeding.

**Misconception:** Feed a cold, starve a fever.

**Modern:** If you are not feeling well, regardless of the type of illness, proper nutrition is needed to help your immune system recover.

**Misconception:** Coughing up green mucus means you need antibiotics.

**Modern:** The color of your mucus is no longer used to determine antibiotic use. Viruses are often accompanied by lots of phlegm, and antibiotics are only effective for bacterial infections.

**Misconception:** Treat a sprained ankle with heat.

**Modern:** Don't use heat for this injury. I.C.E. is best; Ice on and off every hour or two when you are awake for 20 minutes at a time, Compress the ankle with an elastic wrap and Elevate the ankle above your heart. Finally, stay off the ankle to help heal the sprain and keep the swelling down.

If the pain is excruciating, there is immediate bruising and you cannot put any weight on your foot, it's likely more serious than a sprain, and a visit to the ER is in order.

**Misconception:** If you swallow poison, make yourself vomit.

**Modern:** There are certain poisons that can cause more damage on the way back up. Call 911 immediately, and then call the Poison Control Center 24/7 at 1-800-222-1222 to see if there is anything that should be done before help arrives.

Wishing you joy and good health,  
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