

Excerpt from
Natural Medicine First Aid Remedies
by Stephanie Marohn

Abscess

An abscess is a collection or pocket of pus in a cavity formed by disintegrating tissue and surrounded by inflamed tissue. Pus itself is a product of inflammation, accumulating where infection is present. Abscesses can arise in any part of the body, but occur most often in the skin. Bacteria are frequently the source of the infection, but other microorganisms or an injury can also cause abscesses. Recurrent abscesses can be an indication of weakened immunity or toxicity in the system.

Symptoms include swelling, heat, redness, and throbbing of the affected area. The abscess increases in size as it fills with pus, and decreases when the pus is drained. If untreated, the abscess can spread, resulting in the formation of other abscesses, or the tissue can become fibrous, leaving a lump. A red line extending from the abscess is a sign of blood poisoning; seek medical care immediately.

Essential Oils

Chamomile, Lavender, and Tea Tree (*Melaleuca alternifolia*) are “the most effective oils for treating an abscess,” says Patricia Davis, founder of the London School of Aromatherapy. They can be used singly or in combination. Put a few drops on a hot compress and place it over the abscess to draw out the infection and reduce the pain and inflammation. Leave the compress on until it cools. Repeat as needed.¹

Flower Essences

Patricia Kaminski, an herbalist and flower essence therapist from Nevada City, California, recommends Self-Heal, used both topically and internally. For topical treatment, apply the flower essence and/or flower essence cream directly on the abscess 2–4 times daily. To speed healing, take 4 drops of the flower essence under the tongue 2–4 times daily. Continue treatment until the abscess is resolved.

Food Therapy

Eat:

Garlic, kelp, yogurt/kefir, pineapple (eat it by itself), foods high in vitamin A and beta-carotene. (For a list of foods containing these nutrients, see part 3, “Food Therapy,” p. 374.)

Avoid:

Sugar (including fruit and fruit juice), simple carbohydrates such as white flour and white rice, and fried foods.

Herbal Medicine

Antibacterial herbs can be effective in resolving bacterial abscesses, including those caused by staph (*Staphylococcus* bacteria), says David Winston, A.H.G., a clinical herbalist and consultant from Washington, New Jersey. He suggests the following applications, which can also be used for boils.

Poultices: To open and drain an abscess that is red, hot, and inflamed, use one of the following poultices.

- Flaxseed: Put 2 tablespoons of flaxseed in a piece of cheesecloth and pour boiled water over/through it. The flaxseed will become gelatinous. When it is cool enough to apply to the skin without burning, spread it on the abscess and leave it on until it is cold. Do this twice daily for as long as necessary.
- Burdock (*Arctium lappa*) leaf: Put fresh burdock leaves in a blender with enough water to make a paste. Apply to the abscess and reapply when it dries out. Do this twice daily for as long as needed.

Topical antibacterial: You can use one or a combination of the following for as long as needed.

- Oregon grape (*Berberis aquifolium*) root: Make a decoction by putting 2 teaspoons of the herb in 1 cup of boiling water. Cover, simmer for 15–20 minutes, and steep for another 20 minutes. Soak a cloth with the decoction and lay it on the abscess. Wrap gauze around it and leave it on all day. Alternatively, you can use a tincture of Oregon grape root, but it can be painful to put that on an open abscess because of the alcohol in tinctures. Note: Oregon grape root will stain clothing yellow.
- Echinacea (*E. spp.*): Crush up the fresh root and add water to make a paste that resembles applesauce in consistency. Put it on the abscess, with a bandage on top of that so you can leave it on all day.
- St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) infused oil: This is known as hypericum oil, but the product label may read St. John's wort olive oil extract. Note that an infused oil is distinct from an essential oil or herbal tincture. It is the herb in a carrier oil such as olive oil, rather than an extract or an essential oil preserved in alcohol or glycerin. Dab the infused oil on the abscess 2–4 times daily, and cover with an adhesive bandage.

Homeopathy

Homeopathic physician Michael G. Carlston, M.D., of Santa Rosa, California, recommends the following remedies:

If the skin abscess is lingering, feels better with warmth, but does not produce much pain, use Silica (*Silicea*) 6c, 12c, or 30c. During the acute stage, take 2 or 3 pellets, or a couple of drops if taking in drop form, 2 to 3 times per day. You may need to take it for a week, but let your symptoms guide you. As they lessen, reduce the frequency of dosage. Don't keep taking the remedy when the abscess is gone.

If the abscess feels better with warmth but is painful, take Hepar sulphuris calcareum 6c, 12c, or 30c. It is likely that you'll need to take it 4 times a day. Again, let your symptoms be your guide. Reduce the frequency as your symptoms abate, and stop taking the remedy when the condition is resolved.

Nutritional Supplements

In addition to taking a multivitamin/mineral as a general practice, taking zinc, vitamin C, and vitamin A can help prevent the abscess from becoming a systemic infection, says Kathi Head, N.D., a naturopathic physician from Sandpoint, Idaho. Take 30 mg of zinc twice daily and 1,000 mg of vitamin C 3 times daily for a week or so. The dosage for vitamin A is 25,000 IU twice daily, but take it only for a week, and do not take it if you have any liver problems.

Reflexology

Treat the area of the foot corresponding to the part of the body where the abscess is located.

Stone/Crystal Therapy

For an abscess, use petrified palm, states Melody, author of the crystal reference series *Love Is in the Earth*. With hypoallergenic tape, secure the stone on or near the abscess, and leave it on for 2–3 days, until the condition is resolved.

Other Remedies

Applying warm compresses can ease the pain and swelling of a skin abscess, and speed drainage.

Putting a charcoal poultice on the abscess to draw out the infection works really well, says Dr. Head. Use activated charcoal powder or crush tablets and mix with hot water to make a paste. Put it on the abscess and cover with gauze. Alternate the charcoal poultice with a poultice made from the powder of Oregon grape or other berberine-containing herb (barberry, *Berberis vulgaris*, or goldenseal, *Hydrastis canadensis*) mixed with hot water. Berberine has antibiotic effects. By alternating the charcoal and the herb poultice, you both draw out and fight infection. Apply a new poultice 2–3 times daily. Continue the applications for a few days.

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