

An Herbalist's View

Herbal First Aid-Soft Tissue Injury

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Overview

1. Soft tissue injuries are very common first aid events
2. These injuries encompass sprains, strains and other similar injuries, as with falling on a wrist or twisting an ankle
3. They are not open wounds or broken bones (at least as discussed here)
4. Infection is not usually a concern
5. Main considerations are trauma, pain, swelling, immobility and possible long-term damage
6. With just a little skill and training one can learn to do basic treatment for most of these types of injuries
7. Internal medicines are not always necessary, so less concern with treatment this way
8. A few basic supplies can help with many types of soft tissue injuries

Skills to learn and practice

1. Evaluating seriousness of injuries
2. Bandaging techniques

Considerations

1. In general the risks are lower than some other types of first aid situations due to lower probability of infection.
2. When physically assessing the injured site, be careful not to palpate (press) too hard and hurt the patient
3. Wear gloves if there is any blood
4. Discuss with the patient some of the problems of not caring for the injury. That if they continually strain the area with use it will likely heal slower. This means that it will take longer to regain full function and there might be possible long-term damage. Also, if they do not rest the body part, pain might become more persistent.

Assessment

Visual and Tactile

1. Evaluate the injury, spend a moment looking over the injured area, and seeing if it is local or more extensive.
2. Palpate the injury
 - Avoid applying too much pressure to the injured area
 - Start by palpating *around* the injury

- Go gently, pay attention to see how much pain you are causing. Occasionally look at their face to see if they are grimacing. Ask questions while you are assessing, you can also hear the tone of their voice to know if you are hurting them inadvertently.

Questions

1. Ask patient how the injury happened. If possible, ask them to pantomime the accident, this can give clues to the type and extent of the injury.
2. Ask if this area is prone to injury, as it might be a chronic weakness that needs to be addressed.
3. Ask how badly it hurts. Try to assess the patient's usual pain tolerance

Treatment

Non-herbal

1. Stay off or limit use of affected part
2. Bandaging
 - Finding the right balance of just-right tightness
 - Learn how to make a successful wrap using points along the body to keep the bandage in place
 - Understand that with time the injured area will likely become swollen, so instructing the patient how to loosen and re-wrap the bandage if this becomes a problem
3. Applying cold and/or hot to affected area
 - Cold is usually applied initially as it slows down inflammation.
 - If using cold packs or ice, wrap them in a towel or cloth to avoid excess cold.
 - Heat is often applied later, as it feels good and can speed healing
 - Hot water bottles, hot packs and compresses are useful ways to apply heat.
4. Crutches and staffs
 - Crutches and staffs can be very useful initially for ankle and knee injuries
 - The goal of any of these walking devices is to keep weight off the affected area
 - Fit the crutches properly for the patient. The top of the crutches should be a few inches lower than the armpits. The area where the hand grips should be even with the wrist when the arms are hanging down.
 - Help your patient learn to walk with them and remember that uneven terrain can complicate this.
 - Staffs should be shoulder height, and made of a solid, non-flexible, non-breakable material.
 - PRICE-Protect, Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation

Herbal treatments (see categories below)

1. Trauma herbs-to help relax and ground after an accident
2. Pain herbs, including skeletal muscle relaxants, sedatives and sleep aids if needed

3. Antiinflammatories
4. Compresses applied externally
5. Circulatory stimulants, rubefacients and vulneraries to speed up healing

When to seek additional help

1. If pain is extensive and/or persists for too long
2. If there is extensive bruising
3. Patient feels the need for further diagnosis

Preparations

Internal

- Capsules
- Powders
- Teas
- Tinctures

External

- Compresses
- Essential oils
- Liniments
- Oils
- Poultices
- Salves
- Soaks

Oils

- Arnica
- Calendula
- Capsicum
- Castor
- Hypericum
- Lobelia
- Symphytum
- Valeriana

Essential Oils (these are antiinflammatory)

- Wintergreen
- Black birch
- Chamomile

Treatment Categories

- Antiinflammatory
- Circulatory stimulant
- Pain relieving
- Rubefacient
- Sedative
- Skeletal muscle relaxant
- Sleep aid
- Trauma aid
- Vulnerary

Antiinflammatory (internal and external)

- Aloe
- Arnica
- Calendula
- Curcuma
- Filipendula
- Glycyrrhiza
- Hypericum
- Matricaria
- Populus
- Salix
- Stellaria
- Zingiber

Circulatory Stimulant

- Anemopsis
- Capsicum
- Rosmarinus
- Zanthoxylum
- Zingiber

Pain Relief (includes sedatives, sleep aids and skeletal muscle relaxants)

- Actaea
- Cannabis
- Eschscholtzia
- Humulus
- Lactuca
- Pedicularis
- Piscidia
- Scutellaria
- Valeriana

Rubefacient (brings blood to the surface)

- Capsicum
- Friction
- Mustard seed
- Tiger balm
- Topical heat
- Warming liniments

Trauma Aid

- Anemone
- Eschscholtzia
- Hypericum
- Lavender ess. oil
- Lobelia

Vulnerary (wound healing)

- Aloe
- Althaea
- Arnica
- Calendula
- Ginkgo
- Hypericum
- Malva
- Symphytum
- Ulmus

Non-Herbal Items

- Ace (elastic) bandage
- Antiseptic wipes
- Bandages
- Basin-soak
- Cloth-compress
- Cold pack
- Duct tape
- Gauze pads
- Gloves-disposable
- Heat packs
- Hot water bottle
- Scissors
- Salonpas patch
- Tape-various
- Vet wrap (self-adhesive bandage)

Plant List (spp. indicates that a number of species are used)

Actaea racemosa-Black cohosh	Lobelia inflata-Lobelia
Aloe spp.-Aloe	Malva spp.-Mallow
Althaea officinalis-Marshmallow	Matricaria recutita-Chamomile
Anemone spp.-Anemone	Pedicularis spp.-Lousewort
Arnica spp.-Arnica	Piscidia piscipula-Jamaican dogwood
Calendula officinalis-Calendula	Populus spp.-Poplar
Cannabis spp.-Marijuana	Rosmarinus spp.-Rosemary
Capsicum spp.-Cayenne	Salix spp.-Willow
Curcuma spp.-Turmeric	Scutellaria lateriflora-Skullcap
Eschscholtzia californica-California poppy	Stellaria media-Chickweed
Filipendula ulmaria-Meadowsweet	Symphytum spp.-Comfrey
Ginkgo biloba-Ginkgo	Ulmus rubra-Slippery elm
Glycyrrhiza spp.-Licorice	Valeriana officinalis-Valerian
Humulus lupulus-Hops	Zanthoxylum spp.-Prickly ash
Hypericum perforatum-St. Johnswort	Zingiber officinale-Ginger
Lactuca spp.-Wild lettuce	