

# How to Prepare an Herbal Compress

Ithaca Free Clinic

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Compresses are a type of external herbal preparation used for sore muscles and bruises. They are prepared by soaking a cloth in an herbal tea and then placing the cloth on the outside of the body.

Compresses are often prepared individually so each compress may have a different tea blend and directions for use.

## Reasons for Using a Compress

Compresses are helpful for painful, tired, sore and inflamed muscles and joints such as the lower back or knees. They are also useful to help mend wounds and bruises.

## Supplies

1. Stove
2. Pot
3. Water
4. Tea
5. Cloth
6. Rubber gloves
7. Hot water bottle
8. Towel

## General Directions

1. These are directions for a generic compress.
  - Ask about specific instructions for any compress you may be using.
2. If the compress is going to be placed on your back, or any place else that is difficult to reach, it is helpful to have someone assist you.
3. After the tea is prepared (see below), put a clean cloth in the water
4. Remove the cloth and wring it out so that it is not too wet
  - The cloth will be hot so it will be easier to wring it out wearing rubber gloves
  - If there are no rubber gloves available, lift the cloth from the hot tea with a utensil and allow it to cool a little before wringing it out
5. It may be helpful to have a towel under your body so that the water dripping from the cloth does not dampen the bed or furniture
6. Place the moistened cloth on your body
7. The cloth should be very warm *but not burn the skin*
8. It can be helpful to put a hot water bottle on top of the compress to keep it warm so that you can keep the compress on longer without having to change it as often

9. Leave the compress on until it is cooled off
10. Place the cloth back in the tea (which may need to be reheated) and put it back on your body
11. Each session should last about 10-20 minutes
12. Leftover tea can be kept in the refrigerator until it is used up
  - The tea should be heated up again before using it

**Infused Tea for Compress** (the most common preparation for tea)

1. Pour boiling water over the tea in a jar or French press
2. Let sit for 15 minutes
3. Strain the tea into a pot
  - The pot makes it easier to put the cloth into the tea and to reheat it later if necessary
4. The tea is now ready
5. See General Directions

**Decoction Tea for Compress** (this is when the tea is boiled in water)

1. Put tea in a pot with water
2. Bring to a boil
3. Let simmer on a low boil for 15 minutes
4. Turn off the heat and strain the tea
  - Return strained tea to the pot
5. The tea is now ready
6. This tea can be kept in a jar and refrigerated to be reused later
7. See General Directions

**Compresses at the Ithaca Free Clinic**

At the Ithaca Free Clinic, you will be given two separate bags of tea to prepare your compress. The larger bag contains the majority of the tea and a smaller bag for the amount needed per preparation. Use the smaller bag as a way to measure how much to take from the larger bag. Save the smaller bag for last.

*For example:*

1. You are given 5 oz of tea for your compress
2. The directions are to pour 1 quart of hot water over 1 oz of tea
3. You will be given two bags
  - One bag with 4 oz of tea
  - One bag with 1 oz of tea
4. You take the amount from the larger bag using the smaller 1 oz bag to approximate how much you need
5. This avoids having to weigh the amount of tea each time