

An Herbalist's View

Herbal First Aid-Soft Tissue Injury

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Soft tissue injuries are common and affect muscles, ligaments, and tendons. These injuries include sprains (a partial tear to a ligament) and strains (injury to muscle or tendon). They occur from overuse, repetitive motion, twisting, or tearing of these structures.

Symptoms include pain, inflammation, bruising, immobility, trauma, and possible long-term damage. They do not usually become infected.

These injuries can often be treated at home, but it is important to assess whether they need medical attention.

PRICE is the general protocol that stands for protection, rest, ice, compression, and elevation. This is generally done for the first few days. 'Walking it off' is not a good idea, as the body needs time to recover. It is helpful to learn basic bandaging techniques.

Herbal treatments are administered externally and internally and can help with pain, inflammation, and tissue recovery.

Overview

1. Soft tissue injuries are very common first aid events.
2. These injuries encompass sprains, strains, and similar injuries, such as falling on a wrist or twisting an ankle.
3. They are not open wounds or broken bones (as discussed here).
4. Main considerations are trauma, pain, swelling, immobility, and possible long-term damage.
5. With some training, one can learn to do basic treatment for these types of injuries.
6. Internal medicines are not always necessary, so there can be less concern about herb/drug interaction or an individual's sensitivity to herbal medicines.
7. A few basic supplies can help with many types of soft tissue injuries.

Skills to learn and practice

1. Evaluating the seriousness of soft tissue injuries
2. Bandaging techniques

Considerations

1. In general, the risks are lower than other types of first aid situations due to the lesser probability of infection.
2. When physically assessing the injured site, be careful not to palpate (press) too hard, which can hurt the patient.
3. Wear gloves when there is blood.

4. Discuss with the patient the problems of not caring for an injury.
 - If they continually strain the area with use, it will likely heal slower.
 - This means it will take longer to regain full function, and there might be possible long-term damage.
 - Also, if they do not rest their body, pain might become more persistent.

Assessment

Visual and Tactile

1. Evaluate the injury. Spend a moment looking over the injured area to see 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 may be 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 inadvertently hurting them.

Questions

1. Ask how the injury happened.
 - They can pantomime the accident, which 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.
 - Assess their usual pain tolerance.

Treatment

Non-herbal

1. Stay off or limit the use of the 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 instruct them on how to loosen and re-wrap the bandage if this becomes necessary.
3. Applying cold and/or hot to the 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 directly contacting their skin.
 - 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 helpful for ankle and knee injuries
- The goal 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.
- Uneven terrain can complicate walking with crutches.
- Staffs should be shoulder height and made of a solid, non-flexible, non-breakable material.

When to seek additional help

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

Treatment

Treatment Categories

1. Analgesic/Pain
2. Antiinflammatory
3. Bioavailability
4. Circulatory stimulant
5. Connective tissue tonic
6. Rubefacient/Counter irritant
7. Sedative
8. Skeletal muscle relaxant
9. Sleep aid
10. Trauma aid
11. Vulnerary

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

Types of Preparations

Internal

- Capsules
- Powders
- Teas
- Tinctures

External

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

Antiinflammatory

- Arnica
- Black birch
- Chamomile
- Chickweed
- Devil's claw
- Ginger
- Licorice
- Meadowsweet
- St. Johnswort
- Turmeric
- Willow
- Yucca

Essential Oils (for external use)

- Black birch
- Chamomile
- Rosemary
- Wintergreen

Oils (for external use)

- Arnica
- Calendula
- Castor
- Cayenne
- Comfrey
- Lobelia
- St. Johnswort
- Valerian

Pain Relief

- Black cohosh
- California poppy
- Cannabis
- Hops
- Jamaican dogwood
- Pedicularis
- Skullcap
- Valerian
- Wild lettuce

Rubefacient (brings blood to the injured area)

- Cayenne
- Prickly ash
- Topical heat
- Warming liniments

Trauma Aid

- Anemone
- California poppy
- St. Johnswort
- Lobelia

Vulnerary (wound healing)

- Arnica
- Calendula
- St. Johnswort
- Chickweed
- Comfrey
- Slippery elm

Non-Herbal Items

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

Plant List

1. Anemone-Anemone species
2. Arnica-Arnica species
3. Black birch-Betula lenta
4. Black cohosh-Actaea racemosa
5. Calendula-Calendula officinalis
6. California poppy-Eschscholzia californica
7. Cannabis-Cannabis species/CBD
8. Castor-Ricinus communis
9. Cayenne-Capsicum species
10. Chamomile-Matricaria chamomilla
11. Chickweed-Stellaria media
12. Comfrey-Symphytum species
13. Devil's claw-Harpagophytum procumbens
14. Feverfew-Tanacetum parthenium
15. Ginger-Zingiber officinale
16. Gotu kola-Centella asiatica
17. Hops-Humulus lupulus
18. Horse chestnut-Aesculus hippocastanum
19. Horsetail-Equisetum species
20. Jamaican dogwood-Piscidia piscipula
21. Licorice-Glycyrrhiza species
22. Meadowsweet-Filipendula ulmaria
23. Pedicularis-Pedicularis species
24. Prickly ash-Zanthoxylum clavaherculis
25. Rosemary-Salvia rosmarinus
26. Skullcap-Scutellaria lateriflora
27. Solomon's seal-Polygonatum species
28. St. Johnswort-Hypericum perforatum
29. Turmeric-Curcuma longa
30. Valerian-Valeriana officinalis
31. Wild lettuce-Lactuca species
32. Willow-Salix species
33. Wintergreen-Gaultheria procumbens
34. Yucca-Yucca species