



An excerpt from
“A Thai Herbal: Traditional Recipes for Health and Harmony”
by C. Pierce Salguero (Forres, UK: Findhorn Press)

For more information see <http://www.taomountain.org/store/thai-herbs-books.html>

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Herbal Compresses

Herbal compresses are frequently used in Thailand in conjunction with traditional massage. Herbal compresses come in two varieties, hot and cold. While cold compresses are first-aid treatments, hot compresses are frequently used in combination with Thai massage to treat chronic disease. According to traditional Thai energetics, hot temperatures increase energy flow, improves circulation, relaxes muscles, and stimulates nerves. Applied to joints and muscles, hot compresses can soothe soreness and increase flexibility. Applied to the abdominal region, they tonify and energize internal organs, and they are used in treatment of many internal diseases.

Herbs commonly used in herbal compresses are listed in the chart below. Any or all of these herbs can be added to the compress, but typically, one from each category would be included. In addition to those listed, other therapeutic plants, such as anti-parasitic or anti-fungal herbs, can be added to treat specific conditions. Most of the herbs listed in this book with topical uses may be added to compresses. The only exceptions would be those ingredients with a noxious odor, or those that have a disagreeable effect when inhaled. Topical herbs with particular healing qualities, such as anti-parasitics or anti-fungals, can be found in the compendium of herbs in Chapter VI, and in the *Index by Application*.

Taste	Therapeutic Benefit	Example Herbs
Hot	Stimulate energy, improve circulation, reduce congestion, and relax muscles	Ginger Root Cayenne Oil
Sour	Cleanse skin, improve skin tone, treat dermatitis or rash, disinfect acne and minor cuts, kill bacteria	Tamarind Kaffir Lime Mandarin Orange Lemon
Aromatic	Stimulate the senses, relax the mind, lessen mental disturbance and stress	Jasmine Eucalyptus Camphor Cinnamon Peppermint

Hot Compress Method

To make a Thai herbal compress, chop or break herbs into 1/2 inch pieces, and mix in a large bowl. Lay out sections of cheese cloth of about one square foot, and scoop a fist-sized amount of the herbal mixture onto each. Bundle herbs into cheesecloth, and secure with a rubber band. (Note: if large quantities of herbs are not available, wadded rags or towels with a few drops of essential oil may be used as a substitute inside the cheesecloth bundles.)

Place bundles in an electric vegetable steamer or rice steamer. If you do not have a steamer, an acceptable substitute can be made by placing a metal colander inside a large saucepan or stock-pot. Fill the pot with water up to, but not touching, the bottom of the colander, so that herb bundles will not become soaked.

Steam bundles for 5 minutes to begin to release the beneficial oils of the herbs. Since you will not be able to stagger the cooking time, you will should begin to apply steam bundles as soon as they are hot, so as not to miss the benefits of the herbs that need less cooking time.

When hot, apply bundles directly to the skin, taking care not to burn the patient. (I typically test a steamed bundle on my forearm before touching it to the patient's skin.) Steam bundles may be dipped lightly in room-temperature olive oil or coconut oil before application in order to not burn. This also imparts the soothing and moisturizing benefits of the oil.

Exchange used bundles with hot ones from the steamer as necessary. Go through the bundles clockwise, so as to keep a rotation, and close the steamer lid in between to keep the bundles hot. (You may have to experiment a bit when not using an electric steamer.) Bundles may be reused several times during the course of a massage, but you should use fresh herbs for each patient. The cheesecloth can be washed and reused.

Cold Compress

Cold compresses are used mainly for sprains, bone breaks, bruises, and other acute injuries, but may also be applied to treat headaches, fevers, and other conditions. Cold compresses are "herbal ice-packs," given immediately after an injury. According to traditional Thai medical theory, cold temperature inhibits energy flow to the injured area, preventing energy pooling and stagnation. Cold temperatures also cause decreased circulation, thus lessening swelling, pain, and bleeding.

Despite their name, it is still necessary for cold compresses to be cooked in order for the therapeutic benefits of the herbs to be released. To make cold compresses, mix the herbs, bundle them, and steam them as explained above. Steam for 10-15 minutes. When bundles have cooked, let them cool, and place them in the freezer overnight. Use as you would an ice-pack. Cold compresses can be re-frozen and reused two or three times, until the herbs have been exhausted.

After applying cold compresses for 24 hours, hot compresses may be used. Exceptions to this rule would be injuries that continue with bruising, swelling, and intense pain.

Hot Compress in Thai Massage

Thai massage is a form of manipulation therapy based on the theory of the flow of energy between specific points on the periphery of the body and the internal organs. Like other Asian massage techniques such as shiatsu and reflexology, and more recent Western developments such as myofascial release therapy, Thai massage practitioners stimulate energy lines and acupressure points on the surface of the skin to affect changes deep within the body.

Even when treating a disease or injury associated with a particular part of the body, a masseur will typically work on acupressure points throughout the body. Linked through

an intricate network of energy meridians, the various acupressure points stimulate and relax the patient's mind and body, and promote the natural healing processes.

Hot compresses provide the same type of stimulation as acupressure, and are often used to stimulate tender or sensitive areas that can not be massaged directly. For example, in therapy of back pain, the back may be too painful for direct acupressure, but hot herbal compress on the same points will provide similar benefits.

While it is beyond the scope of this book to discuss Thai massage or acupressure in detail, a brief note about the use of compresses for a few common ailments will be helpful. (For more information, see my book, *Traditional Thai Massage Therapy: Energy Work and Acupressure*.) Below are a few ways in which you can use herbal compress to treat specific ailments:

- Apply a hot compress to each acupressure point in the charts below for 30 seconds to a minute. (Less time if the patient experiences discomfort.)
- Begin from the center of the body, and work towards the extremities in order to expel stagnant energy, and then work back toward the center to stimulate new energy.
- Perform acupressure on the left side of the body first for women, and on the right side first for men. (Note that even if the symptoms appear only on one side of the body, both sides should always be massaged.)

Headache, Migraine, Tension, Stress, Anxiety, Insomnia, and General Relaxation

