

## Homeopathic Healthcare

George Guess, M.D.

Homeopathic medicine has a broad range of applicability — from careful constitutional prescribing by trained professionals for deep-seated chronic disease to self-care for everyday minor ailments and simple acute illnesses (colds, flus, etc.). The timely administration of a gentle yet effective homeopathic remedy at home to oneself or one's family member can both ease suffering and reduce the need for more costly medical care.

Summer is upon us and with it the inevitable annoyances of insect stings and bites, sunburn, poison ivy, gardening and sports injuries, etc. All of these conditions, if not too severe, can readily be managed at home with suitable homeopathic remedies. In my last column treatment for insect stings was considered. In this column we will consider Poison Ivy Dermatitis. Next month's column will cover sunburn.

As in all applications of homeopathic medicines, the best results are obtained if one takes the time to observe the main symptoms, their characteristics and what influences them (e.g., heat, cold, time of day, pressure, motion, posture, etc.), and uses that information to select the single most appropriate homeopathic medicine based upon the similarity of its symptoms to those of the patient. The kinds of symptom specifics to look for will be reflected in the descriptions of the homeopathic medicines which follow.

### Treatment of Poison Ivy Dermatitis

#### General Concerns

Avoid contact through recognition of the plant. If poison ivy rashes are recurrent, suspect contact to the plant via domestic pets or contaminated clothing. Wear protective clothing when outdoors.

If severely allergic to poison oak/ivy, one may also be allergic to some foods which contain the poison oak antigen; eg, mangos and cashews.

After exposure: wash all clothing thoroughly. Wash skin with soap and tepid water; very hot water may cause the sap to spread on the skin. Apply Jewel Weed — fresh or tincture to exposed areas. Jewel weed frequently grows close to poison ivy.

#### Topical treatments

Once the poison ivy eruption has developed, there are a number of topical (externally applied) treatments available, among them: zinc oxide, unflavored yogurt, cold milk compresses for itching, rinses of the affected area with a mixture of apple cider vinegar and goldenseal. My preferred topical treatment is the undiluted application of Plantago (plantain) tincture, available through homeopathic pharmacies. It alone is often sufficient to relieve itching and prevent the spread of the rash. Also sometimes useful is Grindelia (Rosin-wood) tincture.

#### **Homeopathic Treatment**

**Anacardium** (marking nut): this remedy corresponds to eruptions of large blisters filled with yellow fluid; the face is often affected. The sufferer may be irritable and curse with the itching. Itching can be better from eating and a very hot bath; it is worse from scratching.

**Croton tiglium** (croton oil seed): this rash often affects the eyes, scalp and genitalia. If the condition is less severe, the itching is better from gentle rubbing; if more severe, the rash becomes painful and sore to touch or scratch. Often there is a "hidebound" feeling, wherein the skin feels thickened and immovable as old leather.

**Ledum palustre** (marsh tea): the itching and burning sensations are better from very cold applications and worse from heat. I frequently use this remedy successfully.

**Rhus toxicodendron** (poison ivy): this remedy corresponds to burning, itching eruptions made worse by scratching and rubbing, cold air, night, and the warmth of the bed. Symptoms are relieved by very hot applications; e.g., an almost scalding shower. The sufferer may be restless, anxious, and irritable. The rash may be linear due to scratching, blisters forming on the irritated skin.

Some persons who are very sensitive to poison ivy have been able to "immunize" themselves to the effects of the plant by taking one dose of very high potency (paradoxically, an extremely high dilution, usually a 10M potency) of Rhus toxicodendron each spring.

**Rhus venenata** (poison elder): the picture of this remedy is similar to that of Rhus toxicodendron; itching is better from hot water, worse from touch and pressure; however, it may also be better from gentle rubbing and scratching, unlike Rhus toxicodendron.

**Sulphur** (sulphur): the itching is worse from warmth, from bathing or contact with water, and at night. Scratching aggravates the itching, and often causes burning afterwards.

**Graphites** (graphite): these eruptions are characterized by much oozing of a sticky, honey-colored fluid from the eruption. The itching is worse at night and in warmth.

**Sepia** (ink of the cuttlefish): the eruption is usually a dry and composed of tiny blisters. The itching is better in a warm room and from warm applications, though worse in a hot bed. The rash may look brownish. Itching may be better from exertion.

**Bryonia** (wild hops): the rash consists of fine, dry bumps, especially on the face. Symptoms are worse from motion. The sufferer may be irritable and often desires to be left alone.

*Dr. Guess is a family physician and has practiced classical homeopathic medicine since 1978. He maintains a private family practice in Crozet, Virginia, near Charlottesville. He is the past editor of the American Journal of Homeopathic Medicine (a professional homeopathic medical journal) and Vice-President of the American Board of Homeotherapeutics (a national homeopathic specialty board). [www.drgeorgeguess.com](http://www.drgeorgeguess.com)*