

# Letting Go

## Using Poultices to Heal

*By Lucinda Hodges*

Recently, I wounded my finger. Without meaning to I jammed a large splinter under the nail bed. Ouch! The splinter pushed passed the nail deep into the finger. It was a severe enough wound that I considered packing my kids into my van and making an emergency room visit. Not relishing the idea of spending an afternoon in a hospital waiting room knowing that would mean local anesthesia, lancing, stitches and antibiotics. Instead, I choose to use what I had on hand at home to heal the wound.

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My first concern was the pain and swelling. Thankfully, sitting on my dining room table was a lovely chunk of organic [ginger root](#). With my hand temporarily wrapped with gauze I grabbed the ginger and pureed it in my food processor adding just enough unrefined organic olive oil to make a thick paste. As quickly as I could I placed about two to three tablespoons of the ginger paste onto clean gauze and wrapped it around the wound. The rest of the ginger I placed in a glass bowl and put it in the refrigerator for future use. The application of fresh ginger immediately eased the pain in my finger.

Now, that I felt the crisis had passed I poured myself a large glass of water and took two capsules of [quercetin](#). (Quercetin in a plant flavanoid with anti-inflammatory qualities.) I thought it would potentially help reduce the swelling.

**"Healing," Papa would tell me, "is not a science, but the intuitive art of wooing nature."**

-- W.H. Auden

My next step was to see what else I had on hand for poultices. I found a jar of beautiful [French green clay](#), along with bottles of aloe vera gel, borage oil, arnica oil and rosemary oil. With a small whisk I mixed the oils into the clay keeping the mixture very thick. Then I removed the ginger poultice rinsed the finger and applied the clay

poultice directly to the finger wrapping it with gauze to hold it in place. In about twenty minutes the clay felt hot against my finger. I removed the clay, rinsed the wound and reapplied a fresh poultice. For the rest of the day I kept reapplying a fresh clay poultice

every twenty to thirty minutes as the clay quickly pulled the heat and inflammation out of my finger. By evening the finger showed some swelling but all in all not too bad considering the size and depth of the splinter.

That night I slept with my finger unwrapped without any poultice. In hindsight, that was a mistake to leave the wound without a poultice during the first night. I woke up with my finger aching, swelling and purplish. This time I reached deep into my memory to one of my Grandmother's home remedies; salt pork. For those who don't know salt pork is basically bacon fat and the theory is the fats and salts pull the infection and debris from this type of wound. (Though, I seriously doubt it is the same quality of product as in my Grandmother's day.) Nevertheless, I had my husband pick some up at the local butcher shop and wrapped the finger with the fat and went about my day. By noon I removed the salt pork and much to my amazement the finger looked great! The swelling and discoloration very much improved. It had been about 24 hours since I hurt my finger and by now I was confident the poultices were working.

**"Healing may not be so much about getting better, as about letting go of everything that isn't you - all of the expectations, all of the beliefs - and becoming who you are."**

*-- Rachel Naomi Remen*

**"The art of healing comes from nature, not from the physician. Therefore the physician must start from nature, with an open mind."**

*-- Philipus Aureolus Paracelsus*

Over the course of the next ten days I kept rotating the salt pork, ginger and clay poultices, though after the third day I only used the poultices during the day when time and circumstances allowed. The finger didn't get infected but was very bothersome since the splinter was still embedded deep under the nail.

Thankfully, on the morning of the tenth day I noticed the splinter was drawing out from under the nail. With the assistance of my oldest son, who also happens to be a certified wilderness medicine EMT, we slowly pulled the splinter out all in one piece and my finger immediately felt much better. I applied one last poultice of clay to remove any remaining debris or infection and my work was done.

In the end, I am very glad I chose to use natural and readily available substances to heal my finger and extract the splinter. I avoided a medical bill and healed the wound with less stress than if I had headed to the emergency room. It was a learning experience and gave me more confidence in how to use herbs, clays and oils for healing at home.

*\*\*Caution this article is not medical advice. This article is written only for education and entertainment purposes. Please, consult your healthcare provider for medical advice and treatment.*

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