

Remedies

Have you ever had a stomach ache? Felt sad? Skipped breakfast or stayed up too late? Had a cold or broken your arm? If so, you were unhealthy. A **remedy** is anything that helps restore the body to a healthy state. Rest, specific foods or drinks, exercise, and wise lifestyle choices can all help your body feel better and work properly again. Casts for broken bones and prescribed pills or syrups can also help to treat or cure problems. Other remedies include talking to an Elder, finding a way to deal with a stressful situation, or changing a bad lifestyle habit.

Doctors, or physicians, can recommend remedies when you are not feeling well. They use equipment to listen to, and look into, different parts of your body. They ask you to describe how you feel. Regular checkups with your doctor can help prevent disease and injury. Your doctor may remind you about safe practices and healthy habits, such as washing your hands, wearing a bike helmet, and wearing sunscreen. Your doctor may also talk with you about factors that influence your health, such as your family history, eating habits, and exercise routine.

First Nations and Métis medicine involves everything that affects the body, mind, spirit, and emotions. A medicine can be part of a plant or an animal. Plants are sometimes boiled in water to make a tea. A medicine can also be a special ceremony led by an Elder. Ceremonies help to balance and cleanse the four aspects of a human being.

Plants as Healers

Plants have been used as remedies in different cultures for hundreds of years. Plants are still being studied for the ways they can help to keep you healthy.

First Nations and Métis people have traditionally used parts of herbs, shrubs, and trees to help treat and cure many illnesses. Elders stress that you must learn about the plants, and how to harvest and prepare them, before using them as healers. An Elder or Traditional Knowledge Keeper can share this knowledge and show you how to thank Mother Earth for her gift.



Regular checkups with a doctor are part of a healthy lifestyle.



Games, hobbies, and exercise are also part of a healthy lifestyle.

Below are three Saskatchewan plants that have been used as remedies by First Nations and Métis people.



Echinacea is used to treat colds and prevent infections.



Rat Root (also called Wiki, Acorus, or Sweet Flag) is used to treat colds and fatigue. People can eat bites of the root or boil it to make a tea.



Tea made from the leaves of Labrador Tea (also called "muskeg tea") is used to treat stomach and kidney problems.



Some First Nations and Métis people chewed on the leaves of willow trees, or made tea from willow bark, to relieve aches and pains. Scientists have found salicylic acid in willows, the same pain-relieving ingredient used in Aspirin™. The ancient Greeks, Egyptians, and Chinese also used willow leaves and bark to relieve pain and lower fevers.

Plants Helped People to Survive

European explorers who came to North America learned about and relied on traditional remedies that First Nations people generously provided. Explorer Jacques Cartier and his crew spent the winter of 1535 near Quebec City. Many of the men developed scurvy, a disease caused when the body does not get enough vitamin C. Vitamin C is found in fresh fruits and vegetables, which do not grow in winter. The Iroquois had a remedy: they boiled the needles and bark of pine or hemlock trees, which contain vitamin C.

In the Prairies, explorers such as Henry Kelsey and Anthony Henday survived the harsh winters due to the teachings of the First Nations and Métis. Englishman Grey Owl learned from the Ojibwe people how to survive in harsh Canadian forests. These men learned how to use different plants to make medicine, sunscreen, insect repellent, and even snowshoes.



Pine trees contain vitamin C.