



Today, clever scientists know what pretty well every molecule of any medication they come up with is going to do - this one will help the heart to beat more slowly - that one will help the heart to beat more quickly - while another one will make certain that the pressure of the blood flowing in our veins and arteries remains exactly as it should be.

Other molecules they create, will kill viruses, stop a cough, remove pain from a stomach or even help us to see better, and those scientists know exactly which ones will do what, because with their wonderful modern equipment they can see into the very heart of both the medicine they are developing and the problem that is causing the particular trouble!

Because of this many of the diseases that had been with us since pretty well the beginning of time have now been conquered, not *every* one true, there are still many illnesses we can do little about, like Cancer, Parkinson's, Malaria and many others.

But the scientists are getting closer and closer to success every day, as they learn more and more about the 'enemy'.

But what about the days before modern medicine?

How did the apothecaries, and even the ordinary people of history arrive at their potions; was it all just 'trial and error', or good luck, or did those people have some hidden knowledge to assist them? And how often did their preparations meet with success? How many were just useless and how many were downright dangerous?

Well, here are a few ideas I've found from our historic past that might freeze your blood a little;

How about this, for a useful astringent wash – Dissolve half a drachm of *white vitriol* in five ounces of water. Dissolve two scruples of *acetate of lead* in five ounces of water. Mix the two solutions together, then set aside for a short time, then filter to make ready for use. (*For anyone interested in knowing, a drachm is 3.967 milliliters, a scruple is 1.296 grams!*).

Feeling constipated? Here's a handy little brew, to clear that up, quick time!

Take one ounce of *cream of tartar*, one gram of *jalap* and half a drachm of *powdered ginger*, mix into a thick paste with treacle, take two teaspoonsful. (*I think I'd rather be constipated*).

It's possible you haven't heard of 'jalap', well its listed in my dictionary as **"The dried tuberous root of *Exogonium purga*, ground to a yellowish powder"**. A purgative.



Suffering from a cough? Might I suggest you mix one drachm of compound of *ipecacuanha* with one scruple of *gum ammoniacum* and one of dried *squill-bulb* into a powder. Make into a mass with *mucilage*, and divide into twenty pills – take one, three times a day.

That bit about mucilage concerned me a little, so I looked it up and was told it is a substance extracted as a viscous or gelatinous solution from plant roots, seeds, etc., so I guess that's not too bad really!

To get down to one of the more serious diseases, let's have a look at Cholera.

This is a disease we see very little of now, especially in the richer countries of the world, but until the development of modern medicines, about the only thing doctors of a hundred years or more ago could offer to cure it's dreadful effects, was *medicinal camphor*, which I think would have been of little help.

Where camphor *is* used now, (*fairly infrequently*), is in treating pain, warts, cold sores, haemorrhoids, osteoarthritis and anti-itch, to increase local blood flow, and as a counter-irritant.

Many people, in those far-off days, used to come home from a winter's day working in the fields, with cold hands and feet, and they would sit in front of a nice warm fire, holding their feet and hands to the flames, to warm them up quickly.

The result was called chilblains, a nasty, itchy swelling of the toes and fingers, which could be quite painful at times. Those far-off people I mentioned created their own cures for the complaint.

One was *Arnica Montana*, which is a moderately toxic mountain plant.

Arnica Montana is slightly more effective than a placebo when used for the treatment of several conditions including post-traumatic and postoperative pain, oedema, and ecchymosis.

However, its dosages, and preparations used, have produced substantial differences in the clinical outcome. In the use I am describing, it was recommended for both internal and exterior use, unless the chilblain was broken, when *arsenicum* was advised.

If this didn't work, *Belladonna* and *toxicodendron* were suggested. (*I'll leave you the reader to look the last two up*).

So, our ancestors had some weird and wonderful answers to the more simple ailments that attacked them, though whether their concoctions did any good I am not sure; the one thing I am glad of, is that I live now rather than then, at least our scientists know what they are doing today, and what they are giving us to cure *our* ills, (I HOPE!).