

Folk Medicine/Cultural Health Practices of African Americans FACTSHEET

African Americans commonly use home remedies to manage their health. Remedies are manufactured from herbs, plants, animal, and mineral substances 1.

“Folk home remedies are defined as any health practices (exclusive of over-the-counter pharmaceutical drugs) used at home before seeking professional health care assistance”¹.



Remedies: Drinking water or cider vinegar to reduce blood pressure or cleanse a body from illness. Epsom salts for relief of indigestion.⁴ Spices, herbal medicines, teas, honey, lemons for bronchitis and other items for other chronic illness. Spiritual practices such as prayer or use of a spiritual healer can also be considered a home remedies or complementary alternative medicine.⁵

Beliefs

Some believe illness or disease is a consequence of bad luck, poverty, unemployment or fate ³. Others believe that disease or illness come from natural or unnatural illness causes.

Natural illnesses: Occurs due to **exposure to the environment like cold air and then pneumonia develops.**

Unnatural illnesses: Can be a **punishment from God or from a casted spell and include diseases like cancer.** ².

Many cultural and ethnic groups use folk medicine or practices along with Western medicine. Patients may see a doctor only when home remedies have failed.^{2,4}

Why the use of Folk medicine or practices ?

- Cultural tradition
- Distrust of the medical system
- Discriminatory practices and unfair treatment in American health care facilities

TIPS

- ✚ Assess your patients for use of cultural or folklore practices
- ✚ Ensure they are not engaging in a practice that is harmful or interfering with the care plan
- ✚ Assess whether it is efficacious (beneficial) neutral (no effect but no harm) or dysfunctional (may cause harm)
- ✚ Educate your patient on remedy dangers
- ✚ If home remedies are found to be efficacious or neutral, they may be kept at the patient's bedside

References and Resources

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