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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