Editor’s Note: For first-degree tear treatment and methods of preparation, see The Birthkit, Number 46, Summer 2005.

**Second-Degree Tears**

Many of the second-degree remedies are good choices for first-degree tears also.

Gotu kola (*Centella asiatica*) has been documented in several scientific studies to aid wound healing. One of the primary mechanisms of *Centella* appears to be the stimulation of type-1 collagen production.

Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*) has anti-inflammatory properties that may decrease bruising when the herb is applied topically. Comfrey may be used externally to speed wound healing and protect against incorrect development of scar tissue. Care should be taken with very deep wounds, however, as the external application of comfrey can lead to tissue formation over the wound before it is healed deeper down, possibly leading to abscesses. It may be used as a compress or poultice for external ulcers, wounds and fractures.

Marshmallow (*Althea officinalis*) has demulcent, emollient, anti-inflammatory properties—a good choice for wound healing. Mucilage, made up of large carbohydrate (sugar) molecules, is one of the active constituents in marshmallow. This smooth, slippery substance soothes and protects irritated mucous membranes.

St. John’s wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) contains anti-inflammatory, astringent, vulnerary, nervine and anti-microbial properties, all of which are wonderful for topical application. St. John’s wort, although famous for depression in modern times, was first used as a topical herb for wound healing and was written about during the age of early Greek civilization as well as in the 1500s.

St. John’s wort infused oil is used for bruises, is anti-inflammatory and is often used by herbalists to speed healing of wounds and sores. Externally it is applied to bruises, sprains, burns, skin irritations or any laceration accompanied by severed nerve tissue. The German government allows such external St. John’s wort preparations to be labeled for the treatment of wounds, myalgias (muscular pain) and first-degree burns. Its soothing, anti-inflammatory action eases burning and swelling and speeds the healing of perineal tears.

A number of studies of St. John’s wort extracts have demonstrated antibacterial and wound-healing activity. For instance, two widely prescribed Russian preparations of *Hypericum*, novoimanine and imanine, have been tested for treatment of *Staphylococcus aureus* infection in vivo and in vitro and have been found to be more effective than sulfanilamide.

Witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) has astringent, anti-inflammatory properties. It is soothing and cooling and has a mild anti-inflammatory effect on the skin. You can apply it directly to the perineum or try soaking a cloth in cold water, wringing it out thoroughly and putting witch hazel on it before applying to the perineum. Witch hazel is also great for treating varicosities and vulvar bruising and for slowing bleeding. Witch hazel can be used as a compress or sitz bath.

White oak bark (*Quercus robur*) has astringent, anti-inflammatory and antiseptic properties. It reduces irritation on the surface of tissues due to a form of numbing. A reduction in surface inflammation is one of the possible effects. A barrier against infection is created which is of great help in wounds and burns. Only a small amount of oak bark is needed in a sitz bath formula; too much can be irritating.

Horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) contains a compound called aescin that acts as an anti-inflammatory and reduces edema (swelling with fluid) following trauma. Horse chestnut also has astringent properties. Because of the resin content, I would use an alcohol-based tincture. Add 2 teaspoons of tincture to 2–3 cups of warm water. The alcohol in the tincture would be
I was in active labor for six hours. During this time, the nurses and midwives made us feel like we were the most important people in their hospital. Nicole and the nurses helped me have as much range of motion as possible. They found a boombox for me and didn't mind when I played hip hop. They didn't object to the way I liked to dance and sway when a contraction came on. They found a rocking chair for me and a soft chair for my husband. Their soothing words helped me feel peaceful.

I could write 20 pages about the kind and gentle care I was graced with during the birth of my second daughter. The nurses respected my desire to birth without painkillers. I wanted to participate. I wanted to dance this baby out into the world. No one even mentioned epidural or morphine to me. They told me that they knew I could do it, that they believed in my strength.

When I sat down, Nicole was right there rubbing my feet, which felt wonderful. When I stood up, she supported me. When I was ready to push, everyone believed me. Without thinking, I climbed onto the bed on all fours. No one made me go on my back. I pushed my baby out in 20 minutes.

My daughter Margaret is now a year old. She has brought so much joy into the lives of her father, sister and me. For the rest of my life, I will think about Nicole and the nurse-midwives at the hospital with gratitude and joy. I didn't get the homebirth I wanted, but because of women who believed in the power of natural birth, I had the best possible hospital experience. They blessed me with their hard work and generous spirits. In a way, they helped me back my first child's birth. After my first birth experience, I felt defeated, wondering if I could have done it without an epidural or narcotic, even if allowed to be mobile or given the right support. Now I know the answer is yes, and it is a confirmation of my own strength and power and interconnectedness with the life force that I will carry with me forever.


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sufficiently diluted so it shouldn’t be felt by the woman. Horse chestnut can also be used in a sitz bath or compress.

Horsetail (Equisetum arvense) can be used both internally and topically to decrease inflammation and promote wound healing. (8) It has astringent, diuretic and vulnerary properties. Horsetail also has high silica content, which is helpful in the production and repair of connective tissues and accelerates the healing of broken bones. It can be used as a compress and sitz bath.

Chaparral (Larrea tridentata) has been used topically to decrease inflammation and pain and to promote healing of minor wounds. For topical use, cloths can be soaked in oil preparations or tea of chaparral and applied several times a day (with heat if helpful) over the affected area. Chaparral is a well-known herbal antibiotic. Powdered chaparral can be applied directly to minor wounds after they have been properly cleansed. (9) It can be used as a compress, sitz bath and infused oil. Chaparral should not be used internally.

Using herbs in perineal repair not only promotes healing but gives the mother options and control over her healing process, further empowering her.

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References:


More on Herbs

Marshmallow, related to the hollyhock, is traditionally used by Native Americans to increase postpartum milk production. Mother Food: Food and herbs that promote milk production and a mother’s health. 2004. Hilary Jacobson.
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