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Debunking Medical Myths: Black Salve

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BLACK SALVE

WHAT IS

BLACK SALVE?

Black salve is a **topical escharotic** containing zinc chloride and **sanguinarine**, which is derived from a plant called bloodroot, or **Sanguinaria canadensis**. (3)

What is a topical escharotic?

A topical escharotic is a substance that can cause **death of tissue**, such as the skin. When applied to the skin, it forms an "eschar," a **thick dark scab** made of **dead skin**. (5)

CAN BLACK SALVE CURE SKIN CANCER?

NO

- **No** scientific studies have indicated that black salve can cure skin cancer. (1)
- A number of case reports note **incomplete removal** of cancer cells after black salve usage. As such, black salve **cannot guarantee** complete removal of all skin cancer cells. (1,3)
- Many of the examples stating it cured skin cancer are purely anecdotal, **lack** scientific support, and **cannot prove causation**. (4)
- Further testing on black salve as a treatment needs to be done and **people should avoid using it** in the meantime. (1)

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FACTS

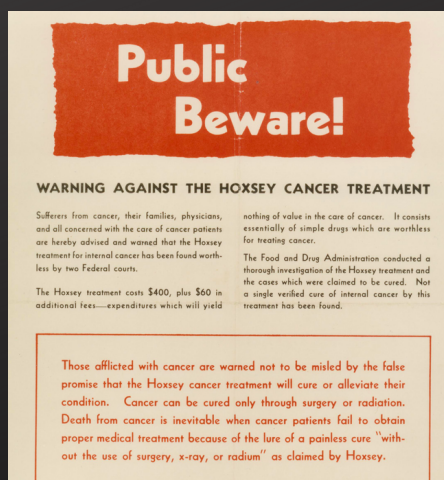
ABOUT BLACK SALVE

- In the 1950s, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) **prohibited** selling of black salve. (3)
- Black salve destroys skin cells **indiscriminately**, which means it does **not** specifically target skin cancer cells over normal, healthy skin cells. (1,3)
- Case reports of black salve usage note complications such as **painful skin irritation, pus production, infection, swelling, and poor cosmetic outcomes**. (1,3)
- Case reports of black salve usage note requiring additional **scar revision and reconstructive surgery** to repair the resulting **skin deformations and destruction**. (1,3)



HISTORY

- 1850s: surgeon Jesse Fell adopted **bloodroot** for the treatment of cancer from Native Americans (2)
- 1920s: Illinois salesman **Harry Hoxsey** begins selling bloodroot black salve creams after supposedly observing that horses cured themselves of cancerous growths after consumption of a certain plant. (2)
 - The American Medical Association branded Hoxsey a **charlatan** (2)
 - The FDA posts **warnings** about Hoxsey's formula in 46,000 US post offices (2)
- 1950s: FDA **prohibits** the sale of black salve (3)



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