4-1-2023

Debunking Medical Myths: Black Salve

Rubi Walker  
*Wayne State University School of Medicine, fw5498@wayne.edu*

David Allen  
*Wayne State University School of Medicine, gb2291@wayne.edu*

Elena Busuito  
*Wayne State University School of Medicine, gi0689@wayne.edu*

Emma Burke  
*Wayne State University School of Medicine, hk8152@wayne.edu*

Zachary Chen  
*Wayne State University School of Medicine, hk8153@wayne.edu*

*See next page for additional authors*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/pat_edu_proj](https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/pat_edu_proj)

Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/curriculumandinstruction), [Medical Education Commons](https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/medicaleducation), and the [Public Health Commons](https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/publichealth)

**Recommended Citation**

Walker, Rubi; Allen, David; Busuito, Elena; Burke, Emma; Chen, Zachary; and Pitpitan, Rebekah, "Debunking Medical Myths: Black Salve" (2023). *Patient Education Projects*. 610.  
[https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/pat_edu_proj/610](https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/pat_edu_proj/610)

This Infographic is brought to you for free and open access by the Patient Education at DigitalCommons@WayneState. It has been accepted for inclusion in Patient Education Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@WayneState.
Authors
Rubi Walker, David Allen, Elena Busuito, Emma Burke, Zachary Chen, and Rebekah Pitpitan

This infographic is available at DigitalCommons@WayneState: https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/pat_edu_proj/610
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 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)

REFERENCES

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)

1850s: surgeon Jesse Fell adopted bloodroot for the treatment of cancer from Native Americans (2)

1920s: Illinois salesman Henry 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)