

Remedies We'd Rather Forget

These remedies are shared for fun and are not recommended for use.

Hot Wax Treatment

MY MOTHER had a surefire way to remove wax from our ears, in the 1940s. She would first cut a piece of muslin, about 6 by 8 inches, then dip it in melted paraffin wax until it was thoroughly coated and carefully roll it into a cone shape.

The unlucky victim rested his or her head, one ear up, on the table. When the paraffin had hardened, Mother would insert the pointed end of the cone into the ear and ignite—yes, ignite—the other end!

The patient would soon hear a loud hissing and crackling in the ear while keeping one wary eye on the flame so close to the head. When the cone burned down somewhat, Mother extinguished the flame. When she unrolled the cone, a huge amount of disgusting, brown earwax would be on the cloth, somehow pulled from the ear by the process.

—Marietta Paris, Rochester, New York

It Did Some Thinning, All Right

AS A YOUNG LAD, I'd spend summers with my grandma in the hills of northwest Arkansas.

Within a day or two of my arrival, Grandma would put about 4 tablespoons of "sweetwater," as she called it, into a pint fruit jar. I later discovered it was moonshine.

To this, Grandma would add about a cup of sassafras tea, a couple spoonfuls of honey and three or four drops of coal oil. She then heated it and had me drink it.

Grandma said the solution would thin out my blood for the summer. I don't mean to call her a liar, but when the drink did its thinning, you'd better have been in the outhouse.

—Bill Leistner, Maryville, Tennessee

Simmering a “7-Year Itch”

IN 1940, all 26 pupils at my country school caught the “7-year itch,” or scabies, caused by mites. We tried several remedies bought at the drugstore, but nothing worked.

My grandmother said sulfur and lard would do the trick. Mother mixed the two and covered us completely with the concoction. We then put on long underwear and stood over the register above the wood furnace for an hour.

It cured the itch, but you can imagine how we smelled at school the next day.

—Loren Lindsay, North Mankato, Minnesota