

It's a dirty world. Harmful bacteria teem everywhere and people are constantly exposed to toxins in the way of pesticides and chemicals. How can a body protect itself and be rid of accumulated ick? The answer is dirt simple: Dirt. But not just any dirt—medicinal clays and earths.

Eating Dirt

Long before celebrities were endorsing pricey detox regiments, and long before modern medicine gave us penicillin, prehistoric man was using a variety of clays for cuts, infections, constipation, diarrhea and much more.

Medicinal clays are any type of edible clay, such as kaolin and the bentonite-types, which are rich in minerals and safe to consume. Many clays have enormous absorptive and adsorptive properties, as well as being rich in nutrients. Prehistoric man was believed to use ochre, which is iron hydroxide and clay, to disinfect cuts. Ancient Egyptians used clays much the same way and used it to treat inflammation. It was even used through medieval times.

All through pre-history and up to the present clay has been widely recognized and used around the world for its healing properties. Many modern over-the-counter medicines have clay as an ingredient. Beauty salons use clay in masks and mud baths to detoxify skin and impart a radiant glow.

Each clay ranges widely in composition and benefits. In this modern age, more and more edible clays and earths are being marketed and sold in health food stores and beauty shops everywhere, making them accessible to everyone.

Kaolin

Kaolin is a whitish clay predominantly found in tropical or humid locales. It's used extensively for industrial purposes in making ceramics, glass, paper and more. But it's also widely used in toothpaste and in many over the counter medicines for soothing upset stomachs and diarrhea.

The Naval Medical Research Center has developed a lifesaving gauze impregnated with kaolin clay. The clay is heavy with aluminosilicate nanoparticles that promote blood clotting in order to seal wounds.

Kaolin isn't as absorptive as other clays, so it's not the best choice for internal uses.

Bentonite

Bentonite is a type of clay predominately composed of volcanic ash and montmorillonite, a silicate clay named after the area in France it was discovered. Bentonite clays are named according to composition: sodium, calcium or potassium.

Calcium bentonite is an excellent source of calcium. NASA utilized it as a calcium supplement for astronauts so that they didn't lose bone mass due to weightlessness.

The calcium version of bentonite is also very *adsorbent*, meaning ions and toxins, such as heavy metals, adhere well to its surface.

Sodium bentonite, on the other hand, is very *absorbent*. It expands a lot and can absorb many, many times its own weight in water and toxins.

Zeolite

Zeolite is another group of volcanic ash-type earths. The clinoptilolite-based variety is used in filter systems because of its high adsorption. It's also used much the same as calcium bentonite is used, but with the added benefit of imparting an antioxidant effect according to one immunology study.

Attapulgit

Similar to bentonite, attapulgit is a bluish clay that binds to toxins and poisons. It's also widely used as a stomach aid and diarrhea reliever. The main composition of attapulgit is magnesium.

Diatomaceous Earth

Best known for its use in kitty litter, diatomaceous earth is a fine powder composed of the fossilized remains of ancient algae known as diatoms. It has a slightly gritty feel similar to pumice, and as such has been used in facial scrubs and toothpastes.

Food grade diatomaceous earth is safe to consume but is highly absorbent. It's used in cleaning industrial spills as well as in litter boxes. The powder is high in silica, a necessary nutrient for healthy nails and hair.

Precaution must be used when handling diatomaceous earth as it presents a breathing hazard due to its fineness and silica content. Also, gloves should be worn when handling diatomaceous earth since the powder will dehydrate and dry hands.

Dirt is a Beautiful Thing

All types of clay and earths can be used externally as well as internally. Diatomaceous earth makes an excellent face scrub and mask, and the clays are beneficial in facial masks and as bath soaks for absorbing excess skin oils and drawing out toxins.

A Word of Caution

Don't consume clay in excess of the recommended dosage on the packaging unless told so by a doctor. Drink plenty of water and take well away from food or medicines. Make sure all clays and earths are "Food Grade".

Get Dirty

Eating clays and earths is a time-honored practice with science backing it up. So go ahead, clean yourself inside and out with a bit of dirt.