Alternative Snakebite Treatment in 2018 [Chewing Mimosa Roots]

Here’s a note from a reader, that I thought I’d share and respond to since maybe some other people have also thought about some of the ideas here. I’m not a doctor, but I’ll relay here what I’ve learned over the years reading a lot about snake bites in Thailand from various venomous and sometimes potentially deadly snakes.

Reader’s Note:

I have one concern about snakebites.

On your site, you write that one should not try to suck out the venom as it may cause more damage...

In my youth I was quite fascinated with certain cartoons, in particular Tarzan, and in several of these, the Cobra was biting a person.

The “treatment” as quickly as possible was to add a tourniquet on leg or arm above the bite, and then cut open the skin where the two fang-penetrations occurred with a sharp knife. And then “suck the venom out”.

I suppose it is quite an experience in pain, but the logic as in staying alive seem good to me.

It, to me, also make sense to open up the tourniquet a little bit every 15 minutes or half hour for two reasons, resupply the limb with oxygen-rich blood, and also to distribute the remaining venom slowly into the rest of the body.

On my travels around Thailand I have also seen Mimosa grow many places. The small plant with leaves which fold together
By chance or pure luck, I noticed that extract from the root of this plant (*Mimosa pudica*) will act against cobra venom.

I suppose chewing this plants root after a cobra bite could also do some good (inhibit the effect of the venom)

Feedback on my thoughts and ideas is greatly appreciated.

Maybe you have experience with some of this?

I just think of what to do if being a long way away from hospital. Thailand is a big country :)

Best regards,

M

My Response:

There is no one best way to treat all venomous snake bites, unfortunately. Tourniquets are not used here, or, at least not recommended. A pressure bandage is used in its place. But more on that in a minute.

There are many kinds of venom. Meaning, they have different effects on the body. Malayan pit viper venom is not one you would want to apply a tourniquet or a pressure bandage to because you’ll be stopping the venom in one place and it will wreak havoc on the tissue it is in contact with. It literally melts bone, it is so strong. Better to let that circulate through the body as it will and get the antivenin ASAP. Many people die of Malayan pit viper bites because they don’t go the hospital quickly. Some apply their own holistic treatment or superstitious treatment, whatever you want to call it, and they end up losing toes, fingers, hands, feet, legs, or their lives. So, with the vipers, in general, you wouldn’t want any sort of pressure bandage at all.

Kraits have an almost entirely neurotoxic venom. It won’t hurt
to apply a pressure bandage directly on top of the bite-site, and then another one a couple inches further up (between bite and the heart).

Monocled cobras have a combination of neurotoxic and cytotoxic venom which does cause some significant necrosis at the bite site. I think the consensus is that a pressure bandage should not be used with cobra bites, unless you are far from a hospital, and then you will definitely want to slow the spread of the venom to your muscles and brain as much as possible. The pressure-bandage sort of traps the venom in one spot for a while, and buys you some time to get to a proper hospital. I have seen some of the after-effects of monocled cobra (Naja kaouthia) bites, and it isn’t pretty. The skin and some underlying tissue is inevitably severely affected with envenomation.

As far as chewing roots, or some other herbal remedy for snake bites, I don’t know anything about it. I have seen Thais use a ground leaf and water mixture on cobra bites, and then get themselves to the hospital after it was far past the time they should have gone. They believed in the magic of the potion.

Thing is, they insist that sometimes it works. But, it doesn’t work in most, or maybe not any cases at all. It’s simply that they were never envenomated. They were bitten, but the bite was dry. Not enough venom transferred into the bite site to cause damage. They apply some remedy. No bad effects occur, and they say it was due to the home remedy they applied.

One of the main problems about initial treatment of snake bites is that of identification. If you don’t know whether it was a krait that bit you, or a Malayan pit viper, or something else, you wouldn’t know what to do to treat the wound properly.

This is why some blanket general recommendations are used when referring to the way to treat a snake bite. I posted them here
a few years ago. They are mostly from the Queen Saovabha Memorial Institute in Bangkok. (The Red Cross Snake Farm)

I don’t think anywhere in the world anyone is recommending to make incisions near or over a snake-bite and to suck the venom out with your mouth, or other suction devices. I think the possibility of introducing germs from the mouth compounds the envenomation and it is not suggested. I have read a study or two about this practice actually not removing any significant amount of venom at all.

But, again, I’m not a doctor and not completely up on the latest. I’ll read some more and get back to update this article in a future edit.

As far as root extracts from the plant *Mimosa pudica* having an effect in mitigating the effects of *Naja kaouthia* venom, it sounds interesting. I won’t be paying $36 for the article, but if someone did and wants to share it with me, I’d like to see it. The whole practice of charging money for research articles that may help save lives, rubs me the wrong way. (Article page [here](#) for anyone that wants to pay the fee.)

One problem I could see potentially popping up is that someone ingesting or injecting such an extract might have more serious problems if the substance interacts negatively with the treatments at the hospital which we know CAN help.

So, I wouldn’t advise it. If anyone knows an expert who IS advising it, do let me know so I can read more about it.

I hope that answers some of your questions. I think these are good questions, and my answers may not be right on – but this is what I’ve learned over the last few years (8) while interacting with and reading about venomous snakes.

Here is the [Snake Bite page](#) for anyone interested.