

Pimple — Pupik

PUPIKA PUKSUWAQA. – I PINCHED MY PIMPLE.



Photo: Mary Haakanson gathering angelica, Old Harbor, June 1990. Kodiak Area Native Association Collection, AM4:128.

From pimples and boils to burns, sores, and rashes, skin irritations are a common problem. The Alutiiq word *pupik* can be used to describe all of these conditions. Early accounts of Alutiiq communities report that skin ulcers were widespread, often caused by insect bites. Alutiiq healers lanced boils and used plant medicines to soothe skin ailments, treatments that continue today.

One of the most useful plants for alleviating irritated, cut, or dry skin is angelica. This large, leafy herb contains an oil with healing properties. People rub angelica leaves or the inner part of angelica stems on the skin to both treat and prevent ailments. In the steam bath, people heat the leaves in warm water and pat them on the skin to promote healing.

To treat a stubborn skin infection, one that does not heal well, people apply the powdered contents of mature puffball mushrooms. Alder bark and birch bark will also draw the infection out of a sore. Both barks can be soaked in water, placed on the sore, and bandaged. Alder bark is particularly helpful in treating boils. People leave the bark in place until the core of a boil is light green and can be removed with tweezers. This allows the boil to heal from the inside.

The Alutiiq word for goosebumps, *pupiguaq*, comes from the word for *pupik*. It means “like a pimple,” or “kind of a pimple.”