

DECEMBER 2007 £3.30

Good Housekeeping

134 great recipes
and tips for
your best-ever
Christmas

96 brilliant
last
minute gifts
to save time
and money

30 easy
party
make-up tips

GET THAT FESTIVE FEELING...

★ Wrap the presents ★ Decorate
the tree ★ Dress the table

THE PERFECT
LITTLE BLACK DRESS
whatever your age!



Win a £25,000 transformation
5011646



TRIED AND TESTED ★ Champagne ★ Smoked salmon ★ Mince pies
★ Christmas cake and pudding ★ Pâté ★ Brandy butter
★ Digital cameras, camcorders and radios ★ MP3 players



Your alternative medicine cabinet

It's a gentler way to self-medicate and you probably have most of these natural remedies at home. Jo Adnitt reports on how they can soothe many everyday health problems



Cabbage

for food poisoning

Well-cooked cabbage and the water it's been boiled in are effective at clearing up minor diarrhoea and sickness caused by food poisoning. 'White cabbage, in particular, is very high in sulphur, which helps destroy harmful bacteria in your stomach,' says Susie Perry from nutrition therapy clinic Smart Nutrition. Try to eat at least three large tablespoons of thoroughly boiled leaves, or sip a cup of the cooking water.

Walnuts

for winter blues

'Walnuts are a fantastic source of zinc, amino acids and omega 3 and 6, which help prevent depression,' says pharmacist Margo Marrone of The Organic Pharmacy, which is dedicated to organic health and beauty treatments. 'Walnuts influence the levels of serotonin in the brain and help to nourish the nervous system. You should aim to eat a small handful every day.' Other feelgood foods include flax seed, almonds and sunflower seeds, which are high in tryptophan, an essential amino acid that increases the production of serotonin.

Cinnamon

for bloating and indigestion

Research has shown that this aromatic spice helps inhibit the growth of E coli when added to food. It encourages the digestive system to work efficiently and can be used to treat indigestion and flatulence. 'And because it improves appetite, it's also an effective herb to use when recovering from a cold or flu,' says medical herbalist Dr Ann Walker. Stir a half-teaspoon of powder into a warm drink or porridge every morning. Use only small amounts and do not take if you're pregnant.

Horse chestnut

for aching joints and muscles

Horse chestnut strengthens the walls of small blood vessels and helps treat aching muscles, varicose veins and swollen ankles caused by weakened veins. A study involving 240 patients showed that horse chestnut extract is just as effective as elastic stockings in providing relief from swelling and leg pain. As an anti-inflammatory, it can also be beneficial in the treatment of arthritis and aching joints. Available as a topical cream, tincture or supplement.

Lavender

for stress and insomnia

A 2005 American study involving 31 adults found that lavender essential oil acts as a mild sedative and promotes deep sleep. 'Lavender essential oil also helps aid relaxation and emotional stress,' says aromatherapist Carol Jordan. 'Use four drops in a carrier oil on your pillow or up to six drops in the bath before bed.' A recent study of 50 breast biopsy patients also found that lavender oil helped ease post-operative pain when mixed with oxygen. For more information and advice on finding an aromatherapist near you, visit aromatherapy.council.co.uk.



Sage

for sore throats

'Sage is one of the strongest medicines used by herbalists,' says Dr Walker. 'Try infusing a small handful of leaves in warm water and use to gargle. The phenolic acid in the leaves helps target streptococcal bacteria and soothes the pain.' It's also effective for treating ulcers and as a general mouthwash, but don't use it when pregnant.

Rosemary

for circulation

In Germany, rosemary oil is an approved treatment for joint pain and poor circulation. 'Use a generous pinch of fresh or dried leaves in teas and food, but don't overdo it,' warns Dr Walker. 'Too much rosemary can raise blood pressure, causing a throbbing head.'

Melissa/ lemon balm

for cold sores

If you feel the tingle of a cold sore coming on, apply lemon balm oil directly on the spot. 'Aim to use five drops a day or buy a specially formulated stick, which is particularly handy for skiing holidays where UV rays increase susceptibility,' says Margo Marrone.

Basil

for migraines

Basil can help calm nervous irritability, one American study found. Its analgesic effect helps relieve tension headaches and migraines and should be taken as soon as the pain starts. 'Infuse a handful of freshly chopped basil in a pint of water for 20 minutes. Strain and divide into two or three doses to be drunk throughout the day,' advises Dr Walker.

Cranberries

for cystitis

Drinking one to two glasses of cranberry juice a day can help prevent and treat urinary infections. A study published in the British Medical Journal found that women were half as likely to have a recurrence of cystitis if they drank a glass of cranberry juice a day. The chemicals in the berries stop bacteria sticking to the lining of the bladder and bowel, and help flush out the system. Look for unsweetened brands, as bacteria in the bloodstream can feed off sugar. Adding live yogurt to your diet can also help prevent bacteria moving from the bowel to the bladder, one of the main causes of cystitis.

Lemon

for colds

Vitamins A and C in lemon work well to protect the mucus membranes of the nose, mouth, throat and lungs – all more vulnerable to infections in winter. If you're susceptible to colds, aim to take 500–1,000mg of vitamin C per day throughout the winter. 'Infuse fresh lemon and ginger in warm water and drink every morning. Vitamin C supports liver function and is a natural immunity booster and vitality builder,' says nutritionist Susie Perry. Lemon juice is also an antiseptic – apply to cuts or grazes to cleanse the area and stop bleeding.


Cayenne

for blocked nose and sinuses

This spicy pepper has been used for centuries to clear airways. Cayenne contains capsaicin, which has been shown in clinical studies to have powerful antibacterial and decongestant properties to prevent and fight sinusitis. A double-blind placebo-controlled trial of 154 individuals also showed that cayenne can help relieve headache and migraine pain. Add a dash to hot food or soups – the pungency will help to clear congested nasal passages.

Thyme

for chesty coughs and phlegm

The essential oils in thyme act as a powerful decongestant when swallowed. 'Thyme helps liquefy phlegm on the chest and enables it to break away so the cells underneath can start to heal,' says medical herbalist Dr Walker. Cooking will destroy the oils, so use fresh thyme in food or buy a soothing thyme syrup (often combined with liquorice) from health-food shops. According to a report commissioned by the German government, drinking a cup of tea made from warm water and half a teaspoon of thyme two or three times a day can also help to cure coughs. 

Remember, if problems persist or you have any concerns using these remedies, you should consult your GP. Photographs: Leo Acker. Props: glass shelf, Ikea. Glass jar, Gardan Trading. Large jar, John Lewis