

Relieving Pain Naturally

Health experts advise that natural alternatives to over-the-counter pain relief options are often the best solution. **Julie Penfold** looks at natural pain relief options for common health complaints.

It is an instant reaction for so many of us when pain first strikes; we simply take something to relieve our symptoms. Popping a pill is frequently our default setting, so it is little wonder that over-the-counter pain relief product sales are booming. Most commonly, our answer is to take paracetamol, ibuprofen or aspirin - the most popular over-the-counter options.

'The main pain-killing ingredient in aspirin is salicylic acid, which is found naturally in willow bark, poplar and meadowsweet', says Natural Medicine Practitioner, Susse Wedel. 'While willow and poplar are only available via a herbalist, meadowsweet is more easily available from natural health stores, such as Neal's Yard, can be drunk as a tea, and is very effective for fast pain relief. For general pain-killing use, ginger, turmeric and cayenne pepper are very good. You can ingest these by adding to a hot water drink or sprinkling on food as and when required.'

Tackling pain head-on

For headaches brought on by stress or tension, Susse recommends rosemary, which is excellent for nervous tension, lavender and chamomile, which are two of the best relaxation herbs and are great for easing headache pain. Stress headaches are caused by a constriction of blood vessels in the head and both rosemary and lavender help to ease pressure. If you have rosemary in your garden, Susse suggests simply picking a bunch and inhaling the scent to instantly ease tension. Alternatively, rosemary essential oil can be rubbed directly onto the temple for pain relief. The alternative remedies are all available as herbal teas and are equally effective when consumed as a drink.

Wood betony is a herb which has an affinity to the head and helps to work on the nervous system. Herbs which have an affinity to the head tend to have a high mineral content of calcium, magnesium and potassium, which are all naturally powerful against headache pain.

Migraine sufferers can opt for feverfew or ginkgo for relief from painful symptoms. Susse also recommends drinking plenty of water and cutting out stimulants in the diet including all caffeinated-drinks, such as coffee, tea and coca-cola, while removing sugar,



tobacco and chocolate, as these foods and drinks often trigger migraines, as well as prolonging them.

Sinus pain can feel like your entire face is aching and fast relief from the symptoms is something we crave. Natural help is at hand via goldenseal, goldenrod or eyebright, as they each work by drying and removing the mucus build-up, reducing inflammation, and soothing and protecting the mucosal lining.

Eating the cure

Nutrition is the key to tackling allergy symptoms. Quercetin is a natural antihistamine found in a number of food sources, including apples, green and black tea, red onion and garlic - the latter two must be eaten raw for maximum effectiveness. Garlic has the added boost of active ingredient allicin, which is effective in easing the symptoms of hayfever, asthma and related allergies. Nettle also has antihistamine properties and helps to clear catarrh and phlegm, while elderflower is great for expelling excess mucus and congestion in the head and lungs. Goldenrod is wonderful for mucus expulsion and upper respiratory congestion.

Susse recommends the following home remedy for external allergy symptoms on the skin: 'Gather a bunch of elderflower and add to a bowl of boiling water. Leave to infuse for one hour and, once it is cool, you can use it directly on the skin, just like a lotion. It is really good for skin rashes and alleviating itching.'

The anti-inflammatory effects of chamomile help reduce allergies and boost the immune system with regular consumption. For quick relief from itchy eyes, place chilled chamomile teabags onto the eyes, to reduce soreness and itching.

Relaxing muscles

An effective alternative to over-the-counter medication for muscle strain is to add several handfuls of fresh thyme to a bath, as the herb eases muscular and rheumatic pain. St John's Wort oil and rosemary oil are also effective at easing muscular aches and pains. In Ayurveda, mahanaryan oil is used to relieve muscular tensions and soreness. Foods containing magnesium, such as wholegrains, wheat, bananas, leafy vegetables, nuts and chocolate, also assist in minimising painful flare-ups.

For fast relief from severe period pain, Susse recommends ginger, as it helps to relax the uterine

muscles and stops painful cramps, spasms and contractions. Susse suggests making your own ginger tea by freshly grating ginger and adding to hot water or buying a ginger herbal tea and drinking several cups throughout the day. Regularly topping up with hot water renews the active pain-killing properties of the ginger, increasing its effectiveness.

Raspberry leaf tea is also great for balancing the hormones, relaxing muscles and relieving menstrual cramps. For quick relief from cramps and spasms, cramp bark tea is specifically recommended, as it helps to relax contracted muscles. To ease bloating and PMT symptoms Susse recommends yarrow tea specifically. Other great period pain relievers are: chamomile, as it is high in calcium and minerals and contains muscle relaxant properties; valerian, which helps to reduce cramping and relaxes stomach muscles; magnesium; calcium; and Vitamin B6, which all help to ease muscle spasms.

'From a dietary point of view, it is wise to avoid cold foods and drinks in the week before your period as they promote constriction and this then causes the cramps and spasms. I would advise switching to warm drinks and herbal teas in the week before, as it is a highly effective preventative tip', Susse says.

And so to bed

Even the best sleepers can suffer from the odd few nights of disrupted disjointed sleep and there are several herbs, foods and drinks which can really help get you back on track. Cherry juice is high in melatonin, and essential to the sleep cycle, while foods rich in tryptophan, an amino acid that helps promote sleep, such as eggs, milk, turkey, sunflower seeds and spirulina are also effective. Key herbal teas include lavender, white oak, chamomile, rose and valerian can really help to relax and unwind mind and body. The teas are most effective when drunk one hour before bed. In Ayurveda, nutmeg is strongly recommended for sleeplessness, for best results Susse recommends adding a teaspoon or pinch of nutmeg into a mug of warm milk one hour before sleeping. Lavender and sandalwood essential oils, whether used on your pillow or massaging a drop or two onto your temples before bed, can also help you to relax into a natural restful sleep. 🙌