



HOMEMADE HEALING

Which home and herbal remedies are worth a try?

YOU MIGHT LIKE the idea of treating common health problems with home remedies. In some cases, such as putting cool cucumber slices over your eyes as a beauty treatment, you have nothing to lose and everything to gain. But if you're looking for relief from a serious or painful condition, like an ulcer or urinary tract infection, it's a good idea to know whether that remedy has any evidence behind it.

Read on to learn about herbal and home remedies that could help—and those that more likely won't.

HEALTHY HELPERS

Saltwater gargle for a sore throat. If the flu or frequent throat or mouth infections have left your throat sore, you might try warm salt-water gargles or rinses to feel better and help prevent another bout. Mix 1 teaspoon of salt in a large glass of water, gargle, and spit.

Peppermint oil for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). For people who suffer from IBS, a condition that can cause constipation and diarrhea, peppermint oil may provide some relief. You can find the herb in capsule or liquid form.

Lutein supplements for vision. The nutrient lutein is a powerful antioxidant concentrated in the eye. It's been shown to improve eye health, including reducing the risk for cataracts and age-related macular degeneration—a leading cause of blindness in older adults. You can up your intake of lutein with a daily 10 mg supplement or munch on more green, leafy vegetables such as kale, broccoli, and spinach.

Baking soda for mouth infections. You don't need baking soda to clean teeth. A dry toothbrush and water are just as good as most toothpastes. On the other hand, baking soda mixed with salt has been recommended as a mouth rinse to help reduce mouth infections, especially for people whose immune systems are compromised. For this, mix ¼ teaspoon of baking soda and ½ teaspoon of salt in 1 cup of warm water and rinse several times a day.

Cucumber slices for puffy eyes. One reason this idea works is that most people keep cucumbers in the refrigerator. That means they're cold, and cold reduces swelling. When sliced, they also cover your eyes close to perfectly. Other people swear by cold tea bags as eye compresses, and that works for the same reason.

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WORTH A TRY

Cranberry juice to prevent urinary tract infections. Cranberry juice contains flavonoids and antioxidants, which may make it difficult for "bad" bacteria to grow and thrive in your body. Although some clinical trials have supported the idea that cranberry juice prevents a urinary tract infection, no hard and fast evidence exists. So even though drinking cranberry juice might be refreshing, if you have a urinary tract infection that won't go away, you should see your doctor.

Echinacea for colds. At the first sign of a sniffle or sneeze, you may be tempted to take echinacea. But research results have been mixed as to whether this herb can reduce the severity and duration of the common cold. A recent study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* found that echinacea was as ineffective as a placebo in relieving cold symptoms. Although studies have been inconclusive about echinacea's ability to treat colds, experts agree that it doesn't help prevent them.

Zinc for colds. The mineral zinc may be another potential cold-busting remedy. But like echinacea, studies have not provided a clear answer. A recent review of research to date has

concluded that zinc lozenges or zinc syrup may reduce cold symptoms, but only if taken within 24 hours of when symptoms start.

MORE HARMFUL THAN HELPFUL

Milk for ulcers. That cold glass of milk looks like just the thing to calm your ulcer pain. But though milk might help you feel better briefly, it doesn't actually help heal an ulcer, which is a small sore in the lining of the digestive tract. It's also possible that, in the long run, drinking large amounts of milk could make ulcers worse by increasing the acid in your stomach, irritating those tiny sores.

Aspirin on a tooth for pain. Swallowing an aspirin or other over-the-counter painkiller can ease a toothache, but some people try to make a painful tooth feel better by putting the aspirin directly on the enamel. That's not a good idea. This approach could cause a chemical burn to surrounding tissues, ultimately making pain worse and risking infection. Instead, try swallowing the aspirin and using a cold water rinse to manage the pain. Then, make an appointment with your dentist as soon as you can.

Drinking alcohol for pain. Alcohol can relax you, and some people may drink because they have chronic pain. But regularly drinking alcohol to avoid pain can be bad for your health and can cause unpleasant interactions with other pain-relieving medications you might be taking.

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