

HEDGDEROW HERBALS

The quarterly newsletter from your local herbalist - Julie Dore
Articles, news, recipes and tips for a healthier you

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FREE

Welcome to the autumn edition which includes information on healthy seasonal fruit, advice on dealing with migraines and easing for joint pains

Migraine Attack



Passion Flower (*Passiflora incarnata*) can help with stress induced migraines

Excruciating pain, often accompanied by flashing lights, vomiting and nausea signal a migraine attack. These are nothing like ordinary headaches and can ruin the lives of sufferers. Women are 4 times more likely to suffer than men and most people get their first attack before their forties. Migraines can also run in families.

Whilst the mechanisms that cause the symptoms are beginning to be understood (and in 50 % of sufferers specific triggers can be identified) the reason why attacks occur has still not been determined. Before any attack there are changes in brain chemistry, electrical activity and blood flow and blood vessels in the head rapidly widen and narrow. These spasms induce clotting of blood platelets which in turn releases

serotonin; it is this substance that is closely linked to the nausea centre in the brain. Whilst the pain may seem like it's inside your head, in actual fact it is the spasms in the blood vessels of the scalp that are the cause of the violent pain.

There are many triggers which vary between individuals - keeping a diary or check list may help pin-point yours. Record what you ate and drank, amount of sleep, the weather, exercise taken, general mood, medications, social activities (e.g. a smoky party) and stage of menstrual cycle. Often it is food additives that are the cause so check ingredient labels on processed meals carefully. If you can identify a trigger you can take steps to avoid it, easy if it equates to diet (only 3 in 10 attacks are) but not so if it is caused by events outside your control like changes in the weather, stress, tiredness and hormones. Herbs may be able to help. As it is a complex condition, it is often best treated under the guidance of a medical herbalist but there are things you can try for yourself.

Feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*) contains anti-inflammatory chemicals that reduce spasms of the blood vessels in the head. Take it daily, 20 drops of fresh tincture or leaves, for several months. The frequency of attacks should decrease and eventually stop. You can then stop taking the herb until the first sign of another attack when a single dose should stop it because the body is sensitised to feverfew.

Herbs that improve circulation in the head, such as ginkgo or rosemary, taken regularly as prophylactics, can help but **must not** be used if you suffer from high blood pressure. For hormonal triggers, herbs that improve liver efficiency are useful, e.g. dandelion root, milk thistle, artichoke or schisandra. Pre-menstrual migraines (occurring within 2 days of your period) may respond to diuretics - dandelion leaf is a gentle safe herbal diuretic. Many herbs can reduce the effects of stress e.g. lime flower, passionflower or valerian. Finally, ensure your diet contains good sources of calcium, magnesium, fish oils and vitamin B complex as deficiencies in these cause migraines in some people.



If you do have an attack, rub lavender and peppermint essential oil on painful areas and take ginger for the nausea. And check out the amazing claim for apples below. At the first signs of an attack, drink water and try to eat something as low

blood sugar can often be a culprit. Try something bland like toast. My mother-in-law always has porridge if she suspects an attack. Fresh air, relaxation techniques or gentle exercise such as a walk can be beneficial. Or ask your herbalist for an emergency mix of anti-spasmodic and analgesic herbs to take.

Other complementary techniques that can help migraine sufferers are acupuncture, shiatsu, chiropractics (especially if linked to spinal nerve stress), and techniques that improve posture, breathing and relaxation such as yoga and Alexander Technique.

Contact the Migraine Association
info@migraine.org.uk

Autumn Fruits

Apple and blackberry are a wonderful combination and family favourite, but these two amazing fruit are also packed with healthy goodness.

An apple a day really is a recipe for health. Apples are high in soluble fibre which aids digestion and encourages natural beneficial bacteria to thrive in the gut. A diet high in soluble fibre reduces blood cholesterol levels and helps balance blood sugar levels in diabetics. Apples are a good source of quercetin and chlorogenic acid, both of which help protect against cancer. Quercetin inhibits the growth of malignant cells and is known to improve lung function, while chlorogenic acid blocks formation of the disease. The pectin in apples may protect us from pollution by binding to heavy metals in the gut and carrying them out of the system. Pectin is also a very good remedy for mild diarrhoea, soaking up the toxins in the intestine; eat nothing but grated apple six times daily until symptoms subside. The natural apple juice also has powerful antibacterial properties so take this for any stomach upsets, colds and other infections.

Blackberries are a rich source of Vitamin C (vital for a healthy immune system) and, like other dark skinned fruits and berries, contain anthocyanins, powerful antioxidants that protect the body from disease-causing free radicals. They protect against cancer and heart disease as well as preserving the health of blood vessels.

Both are good sources of potassium and research has shown that a diet low in this mineral can lead to an imbalance with sodium in the body leading to high blood pressure. The smell of fresh apples is said to have a calming effect and helps lower blood pressure, even dilating blood vessels in the head to reduce the pain of headaches and migraines.

So go easy on the crumble and you have a health packed pudding. Alternatively, try the recipe below.

Blackberry Stuffed Apples

Per person: 1 large cooking apple, 50g blackberries, 1 tablespoon of cane sugar, 1 tablespoon of water and 1 teaspoon of chopped mint.

Wash and core the apple, making a shallow cut through the skin around the middle to prevent it bursting. Place on a baking tray. Mix the blackberries, sugar and mint together and stuff into the apple, pressing firmly. Finally spoon the water over the apples. Bake in a preheated oven at 180°C (350°F), Gas mark 4, for 45 minutes or until the apples are tender. Serve hot.

Oh My Aching Bones!

As the nights draw in and the mornings get foggy, all those aches and pains we forgot about over the summer come back with a vengeance. Unfortunately some people suffer joint pain, stiffness and immobility all year round. Diet and herbal medicine can help alleviate some of these distressing symptoms.

The two most common types of arthritis are osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.

Osteoarthritis (OA) results from wear and tear or injury to a joint and tends to be more common in people over 60 or follow on from injury. The hands and weight-bearing joints, knees, hips and spine, are most commonly affected as protective and lubricating collagen at these is eroded away. Bone rubs on bone giving rise to the symptoms of pain, stiffness and deformation. Usually the pain is worse after exercise.

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease; your own body is attacking itself causing the joints become swollen, inflamed and painful, the pain often relieved by movement. In addition you may suffer from weight loss and fever. It commonly strikes between the ages of 20-40 and is more common in women. The symptoms are felt symmetrically with morning stiffness common.

The pain and stiffness of both types is caused by inflammation and there are a number of herbs that act as anti-

inflammatories; including willow bark, devil's claw & turmeric. Black Cohosh and wild yam are good for rheumatic pains. Herbs that improve circulation and enhance elimination of toxic substances are important as they improve tissue health in the inflamed areas thereby providing relief and healing,



examples include dandelion leaf, hawthorn, and ginger. Massaging the painful areas with herbal creams is very soothing. A cream of comfrey leaf with pain relieving herbs such as yellow jasmine and lobelia with essential oils of

lavender, rosemary or juniper is very soothing and beneficial. If warmth relieves your symptoms then add extract of cayenne pepper for a very warming cream; with continued use cayenne numbs the pain receptors, acting as an analgesic.

In both conditions **diet** can play an important role in helping to alleviate the symptoms, in particular the inflammation and therefore the pain. Certain vitamins and minerals act as natural anti-inflammatory agents. So ensure an adequate daily supply by eating

- yellow or orange fruits and vegetables,
- dark leafy greens, cabbage, broccoli,
- berries, kiwi fruits, pineapples, bananas
- garlic or onions,
- nuts, , beans and peas
- yeast, whole wheat products
- tuna, salmon and liver.

Together these provide you with Vitamin A, C (one serving per day is said to slow the progression of OA and it has a role in the repair of cartilage), B₃, B₅, B₆, D, E & K.

Vitamin D is also found in fortified products and it is made in our skin in response to sunlight. Important minerals are zinc, boron (it helps the body to absorb calcium) and copper (often low in RA sufferers). These are found in shellfish, salmon, whole grains, dark leafy greens, beans, peas and lentils, apples and nuts. In other words, eat lots of cabbage!! (dark leafy greens)

The essential fatty acid **omega 3** also reduces inflammation. Eat one serving per day of oily fish, e.g. salmon, fresh tuna, mackerel, sardines, herring, swordfish, anchovies. If you don't like fish, take one tablespoon of flax or hemp oil daily, as a salad dressing, added to soups, soya yoghurt, and porridge or taken neat. You can take cod liver oil but as cod is becoming endangered I would recommend you use plant oils instead. Reduce or avoid products high in omega 6, which increases inflammation. This is found in polyunsaturated oils such as sunflower, sesame, and corn oil. Use olive oil products instead.

Turmeric contains an effective anti-inflammatory, curcumin, so relieving pain. Add to food, take as a supplement or apply as a poultice to the affected areas.

Ginger improves circulation to the hands and feet so relieving symptoms, and encouraging healing plus it stops production of inflammatory chemicals. Make a tea with fresh (1 cm root) or powdered ($\frac{1}{3}$ tsp.) ginger. Add ginger essential oil to a carrier oil for a warming massage blend.

REDUCE foods that make your blood acidic. These include:

- ◆ Animal protein which contains phosphorus and nitrogen both of which make the symptoms worse (e.g. meat, poultry, dairy, game, eggs etc)
- ◆ Dairy products
- ◆ Citrus fruits
- ◆ Refined sugar (incl. cakes, biscuits, processed food. Note that low fat/fat free foods are often high in sugar)
- ◆ Coffee
- ◆ Smoked and preserved foods

For **osteoarthritis** take a supplement of 400mg of chondritin sulphate combined with 500mg glucosamine sulphate daily. It reduces pain as effectively as ibuprofen without the side effects, but does work more slowly.

With **rheumatoid arthritis** there is often a link between flare-ups and certain foods. The common offenders are listed below. Try to give up all of these for three months and then reintroduce one food each week to determine which, if any, aggravated your symptoms. Any foods that do cause a flare-up can then be avoided in the future.

- ◆ Dairy products (i.e. anything made with cow's milk)
- ◆ Wheat and/or corn. Use rice, oats, rye, barley or quinoa instead
- ◆ Sugar; sweeten with honey instead
- ◆ Members of the nightshade family-tomatoes, potatoes (use sweet potatoes instead), peppers and aubergines

If you are taking steroids for RA you should ensure sufficient intake of calcium, magnesium and Vitamin D to help prevent the associated bone loss found with these drugs.

With osteoarthritis **exercise** to keep the joints mobile but avoid stressing them. Swimming, aqua aerobics, walking, yoga or Pilates are ideal. Acupuncture has been shown to be very effective at relieving the pain of arthritic joints. For rheumatoid arthritis, perform ten repetitions of a range of motion exercises daily. In the mornings take a hot shower or bath to relieve stiffness. Apply moist heat, e.g. heat packs or baths, for twenty minutes three times daily, or for acute pain, use cold packs.

Visit the Hedgerow Herbals website www.hedgerow-herbals.co.uk.
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