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Doctor-Recommended

Natural Remedies

Medical experts share their most trusted nondrug treatments for everyday ailments.

BY BETHANY KANDEL

The latest surveys show that about a third of Americans now use natural or complementary medicine, and the number is growing. Fish oil is the most common natural product used for health—nearly 8% of adults take it preventively for heart health. Next in popularity are glucosamine/chondroitin, probiotics, and melatonin. The popularity of these remedies hasn't been lost on physicians, who are increasingly acknowledging the usefulness of many alternative therapies. We asked doctors about the natural remedies they swear by—the ones they use themselves and recommend to patients instead of writing a prescription. Here are 20 you may have never heard of but could come to trust.

STEVE GIRALT/OFFSET



1 **Problem** Acne **Try** Coconut oil

Doctor Says

“People with acne tend to overdry their skin, which triggers more oil production. I recommend applying a very thin coat of coconut oil to bumps after first cleansing with a salicylic wash. Coconut oil has antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties and contains lauric and capric acids and vitamin E. It repairs the skin barrier, is easy to use, prevents overdrying of skin (and subsequent rebound oil production), and helps the marks heal faster.”

—Diane Madfes, assistant clinical professor of dermatology, Mount Sinai Hospital



GABRIEL BUCATARU/STOCKSY

2 **Problem** Hay fever and other seasonal allergies **Try** Pycnogenol, the trademarked name for a natural plant extract derived from French maritime pine bark

Doctor Says “Most people suffering from seasonal allergies reach for OTC antihistamines, but these can often cause side effects like drowsiness and dizziness. Pycnogenol works by reducing the inflammation that can lead to the typical symptoms of sneezing, itchy eyes, and irritated throat. It can be found in vitamins, supplements, lotions, and serums and can also be taken by itself in tablets or capsules. I recommend 100 mg a day in the weeks leading up to allergy season.”

—Fred Pescatore, internist and author of *The Allergy and Asthma Cure*



3 **Problem** Anxiety **Try** Green tea and dark chocolate

Doctor Says “Green tea and dark chocolate can each help take the edge off worries and tension; use them along with—not instead of—prescribed anti-anxiety medications. Green tea contains L-theanine, an amino acid that’s been shown to help induce quiet and calm. Dark chocolate is one of my favorite food-as-medicine prescriptions, as it’s rich in compounds that gently lift mood. Have a piece of dark chocolate with your cup of tea to get the benefits of both.”

—Tieraona Low Dog, fellowship director, Academy of Integrative Health and Medicine

4 **Problem** Bacterial infections between the toes **Try** White vinegar

Doctor Says “Vinegar can eliminate the bacteria that tend to grow between toes. When heat and humidity make the area red, cracked, or oozy, vinegar soaks can help dry skin and treat any infection that may have developed. In the early stages of infection, the vinegar can be used alone: Soak the foot in a bath of one part vinegar to three parts water. If the infection is more advanced, add topical or oral antibiotics.”

—Diane S. Berson, associate clinical professor of dermatology, Weill Medical College of Cornell University, NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital



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Problem Bloating and nausea
Try **Ginger**

Doctor Says “Ginger regulates the flow of digestive juices to make sure food is properly absorbed, improving the function of bile and pancreatic enzymes to help digestion. It can soothe the stomach and reduce discomfort from bloating, nausea, and abdominal distension after meals. Peel, slice, and dice ginger to make a smoothie, or steep it to make a relaxing herbal tea.”
—Jonathan Cohen, gastroenterologist, NYU Langone Medical Center and Concorde Medical Group

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Problem Bronchitis and sinusitis
Try **Humming**

Doctor Says “Most sinus infections occur due to poor movement of the nasal cilia that are designed to expel bacteria and dust from the nose and sinuses. Humming stimulates the nasal and bronchial cilia and breaks up the mucus in your nose, sinuses, throat, and chest.”
—Murray Grossan, ENT-otolaryngologist, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center

7 **Problem** Constipation
Try **Unsulphured blackstrap molasses**

Doctor Says “This type of molasses is a wonderful stool softener. Take 1 Tbsp daily on its own or stir it into water or any beverage. It’s especially useful for pregnant women because it’s a more natural alternative than chemical laxatives, plus it contains iron and many other essential vitamins and minerals, such as vitamin B6, magnesium, copper, calcium, potassium, manganese, and selenium.” (Patients with diabetes should avoid molasses.)
—Ashita Gupta, internal medicine specialist, Mount Sinai Hospital



8 **Problem** Cuts and abrasions
Try **Raw manuka honey**

Doctor Says “Honey helps speed the healing of cuts, burns, and other wounds because of its antibacterial and anti-fungal properties. It’s rich in gallic acid and the antioxidant quercetin, which both help with healing. I recommend washing the area and massaging a small amount of honey directly onto a cut. Then cover with an adhesive bandage.”
—Diane Madfes, assistant clinical professor of dermatology, Mount Sinai Hospital

9 **Problem** Dry scalp
Try **Extra virgin olive oil**

Doctor Says “Dry scalp can be caused by a loss of moisture or a buildup of styling products. The flakes from dry scalp are finer than those from dandruff. To use EVOO for dry scalp, warm about 5 Tbsp, cool slightly, then massage into the scalp. Comb through, then cover with a towel or shower cap and leave on for 20 to 40 minutes or overnight. Rinse. Repeat as needed.”
—Angela Lamb, assistant professor of dermatology, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital

10 **Problem** Headaches
Try **Peppermint oil**

Doctor Says “Peppermint essential oil can be applied to the temples to relieve tension headaches. You can make your own by putting five drops of peppermint essential oil in 1 oz of a carrier oil, such as almond or grapeseed. Shake well and store in a small glass jar. When you feel a headache coming on, massage a few drops of the oil into your temples. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Repeat in 20 to 30 minutes if needed. Keep the oil away from the eye area, and don’t use it on children under 6.”
—Tieraona Low Dog, fellowship director, Academy of Integrative Health and Medicine

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Problem Gout Try Cherries

Doctor Says “Eating as few as six cherries a day can prevent a recurrence of gout. No one knows why or how it works, but I’ve seen success often enough to be a believer and to recommend it for people who get gout attacks with any frequency, particularly if they’re wary of daily prescription medicine.”

—Steven Fisher, internist, Fairfield County Medical Group

12 Problem Hot flashes Try Cumin, coriander, and fennel tea

Doctor Says “Steep ½ tsp each of cumin, coriander, and fennel seeds in a quart of boiling water; strain into a Thermos and sip all day until sunset. This is an Ayurvedic remedy that helps improve digestion and sleep and decrease palpitations, hot flashes, worry, and anxiety.”

—Kavitha Chinnaiyan, cardiologist, Beaumont Hospital



13 Problem Indigestion Try Oregano

Doctor Says “Oregano is a concentrated source of antioxidants, which help to reduce inflammation and soothe the stomach. To use it, [buy ready-made oregano tea or] steep 1 to 2 tsp of fresh or dried oregano in 8 oz hot water for approximately 10 minutes. The recommended dosage is up to three times daily.”

—David Borenstein, founder, Manhattan Integrative Medicine

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Problem Inflammation that may lead to heart disease and cancer Try Grapes

Doctor Says “Resveratrol, found in the skin of red grapes, is Mother Nature’s miracle drug that seems to have an anti-inflammatory effect and can help protect you from cancer, heart disease, and more. Have one or two servings of grapes—which have the phytonutrient-rich skin—or one serving of red wine every day to prevent chronic disease.”

—John Pezzuto, dean, Arnold and Marie Schwartz College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Long Island University



STEPHANIE SALVATORE/OFFSET

15 Problem Irritable bowel syndrome Try Sauerkraut

Doctor Says “Sauerkraut is a rich source of probiotics, which can help heal many gut woes. While cabbage can aggravate IBS in some people, sauerkraut, because it’s fermented, can actually improve gas, bloating, and irregular bowel movements. Look for packages that say ‘raw’ with ‘live cultures.’ Eat a little bit with a meal each day.”

—Tieraona Low Dog, fellowship director, Academy of Integrative Health and Medicine

16 Problem Itching Try Epsom salts

Doctor Says “Epsom salts can soothe basically anything that itches or burns the skin, such as mosquito bites, bee stings, and poison ivy, oak, and sumac. Soak for at least 12 minutes in a bath made by dissolving 2 cups of salts in running water. Or make a compress by soaking a cotton washcloth in a cup of cold water mixed with 2 Tbsp of Epsom salts, and apply it to the itchy area.”

—Joe Matusic, assistant clinical professor of pediatrics, West Virginia University School of Medicine



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Problem PMS Try Saffron

Doctor Says “Studies show the equivalent of 15 mg—or about one-tenth of a teaspoon of threads—of saffron twice daily can decrease PMS symptoms, including anxiety, irritability, depression, mood swings, and insomnia. Add saffron to your food, take it in capsule form, or brew a cup of tea.” (Patients with bipolar disorder shouldn’t use saffron without a doctor’s supervision.)

—Skye McKennon, clinical assistant professor, University of Utah College of Pharmacy

JOHNER/OFFSET

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Problem Toenail fungus Try Tea tree oil

Doctor Says “Toenail fungus is an infection inside the nail. The compounds in tea tree oil are a safe, effective way to treat the problem. Use 100% tea tree oil applied like nail polish twice a day for 4 to 6 months.”

—Steven Fisher, internist, Fairfield County Medical Group



19 Problem Tooth decay Try Nuts

Doctor Says “Nuts contain protein and minerals important for tooth health. Some, like almonds, contain calcium, which can help strengthen and protect teeth. Chewing nuts stimulates saliva production, which can reduce the risk of tooth decay.”

—Kim Harms, spokesperson for the American Dental Association

20 Problem Warts Try Apple cider vinegar

Doctor Says “Soak a cotton swab or cotton ball in the vinegar and apply directly to the wart several times a day. Dilute the vinegar with water if it stings too much. Warts are caused by a viral infection in the top layer of the skin. The vinegar probably works because its acidity is toxic to the replicating viral cells.”

—Tanya Kormeli, dermatologist, clinical professor at the University of California, Los Angeles



PREVENTION PICKS



Cocovit Organic Raw Fair Trade Coconut Oil
(\$38, shop .prevention.com)



Wedderspoon Raw Manuka Honey
(\$38, shop .prevention.com)