

WHAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE? SUSAN CLARK



Q I use a tincture of the herb feverfew (50 drops a day) to help prevent migraine headaches, but what can I take when I actually have a migraine? I do not want to take ibuprofen any more, so I am looking for a natural painkiller.

V Smith by e-mail

A A lot of people are asking about alternatives to ibuprofen and other over-the-counter painkillers, following recent reports about potential health risks from these drugs. These came in the wake of the publication in the British Medical Journal of a report by researchers at the University of Nottingham that suggested that the regular use of non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as these can increase the risk of heart attack and stroke.

It is important to note that the researchers advised patients not to stop using these drugs, but said that further investigations were needed.

For anyone, including arthritis sufferers, now looking for a natural anti-inflammatory, I would recommend boswellia, a herbal remedy made from the gummy resin of the *Boswellia serrata* tree, which is native to India but also found in the Middle East and North Africa.

Solgar's Boswellia Resin Extract costs £15.85 for 60 x 100mg vegetarian capsules (from Solgar, 01442 890355). The recommended dose is 10mg three times a day; or, if your migraine is severe, 300mg three times a day. You can use this remedy as you would an over-the-counter painkiller. Alternatively, you can order a 100% organic boswellia tincture from an American website www.herbalremedies.com; take 50 drops a day.

For arthritis sufferers seeking a topical cream to alleviate joint inflammation and stiffness, Boswellia and Comphora Cream is a little-known but excellent natural anti-inflammatory

formulation that, according to users, can help reduce pain and inflammation as successfully as NSAIDs, without the risk of side effects.

The cream costs £24.99 for 100ml, plus £2.99 p&p, from the Skin Shop (0871 871 9975).

Q I suffer badly from allergies, and my eyes itch constantly. I am considering making my own soothing herbal eyewash, but I'm not sure what to use or how to go about this. Can you give me any guidance?

B Jameson, Pennsylvania, USA

A To make your own eyewash, simply dilute five drops of a tincture of goldenseal, an antibacterial herb, in warm water. Use cotton wool or a pad for removing make-up to soak up this mix and gently bathe the eyes. Be careful as you do this, however, because the diluted tincture, which will be bright yellow in colour, can stain any surface or clothing if you spill any.

As you are prone to allergies, you might also want to think about taking steps to support your immune system. I take Simba, a herbal remedy made from the African potato plant, which regulates the immune system, as opposed to simply boosting it.

I was introduced to this supplement by The Little Herbal Company (01484 685100), which specialises in African remedies. Ninety capsules cost £24.50; take one capsule twice a day.

Q I am a practitioner looking to help a client with cystic fibrosis. I have been using Bioforce's Petasus tincture, but this has been discontinued, so I am looking for something else. Do you know where I can get a mistletoe and butterbur tincture?

J Blackburn, by e-mail

A Both butterbur and mistletoe have come under the scrutiny of British and European regulators in recent years. In the UK, mistletoe has been deemed a remedy that can be prescribed only by doctors, herbalists and qualified natural-health practitioners, so you are unlikely to have much success finding an over-the-counter replacement for Petasus. That said, Herbs of Grace (01638 712123) makes a mistletoe tincture, and, as a practitioner, you can contact that company to order and prescribe it.

Butterbur has come under the spotlight because of concerns about the presence in some extracts of chemicals called pyrrolizidine alkaloids (PAs). It has been suggested that these may cause liver problems. Dr Jen Tan, the medical director of Bioforce UK, says that when the Swiss authorities decided that butterbur should no longer be sold over the counter there, Bioforce adopted the same policy for this country.

Butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*) is most commonly used to relieve migraines. For anyone using it for this purpose, the important thing is to take an extract that is free from PAs. Linpharma's Butterbur Petasus does not contain these potentially harmful agents. If it is not on sale in your local health store, you can order it from Revital (0800 252875), which charges £19.95 for 50 x 50mg capsules.

For more information on natural health, visit my website: www.whatareallyworks.co.uk

If you have any questions or tips, write to What's the Alternative? Style, The Sunday Times, 1 Pennington Street, London E9B 1ST. We can only provide replies to published letters.

Before following any medical or dietary advice in this column, please consult your GP if you suffer from any health problems or special conditions, or are in doubt as to its suitability.