

Alternative Health Susan Clark



How do you treat persistent cold sores? Can supplements boost a flagging sex drive? Each month our top expert answers your questions

Susan Clark is a journalist reporting on natural health. She is the author of the *What Really Works* series of books and a weekly columnist with *Grazia* magazine.

My five-year-old son has persistent cold sores which never seem to dry out because he is always licking his lips. Can you recommend a cream that would work overnight?

Recommending a cream is one thing, getting him to let you apply it is another, so I am going to suggest the least abrasive (but still most effective) topical remedy I know, which I use with my young daughter who occasionally has the same problem.

Themba is a cream made from the African 'sage' tree (*Kigelia Africana*). Originally marketed to help alleviate a range of chronic skin conditions, including eczema and psoriasis, it is also brilliant for cold sores. It won't work overnight – nothing does – but it will help dry out the sores which is the most important step in getting them to heal. To order, call The Little Herbal Company (01484 685100; www.littleherbal.co.uk), where a 30g pot costs £11.95 plus £1.50 p.p.

I am 28 years old and for the past five years have suffered from very heavy periods. I have heard that Chinese herbs can help but I don't know where to start.

The simple answer, when it comes to DIY Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is, quite simply, don't. I am not saying don't consider this route which, in the right hands, can be hugely effective but I wouldn't advise it if you are going to take pot-luck: Chinese herbal medicine is highly sophisticated. It is not unusual, for example, for a single remedy to comprise a dozen or more differ-

ent herbs acting synergistically in the body.

For the very best results, you will need to work with a skilled TCM practitioner, who will not only recommend the correct herbs (which you usually brew into a tea) but who will also offer acupuncture and advice on nutritional changes to your diet. The Register of Chinese Herbal Medicine (01603 623994; www.rchm.co.uk) keeps a referral list of such specialists. Ask for someone with experience of your particular problem. If you don't have the time or the budget to take this route, then the over-the-counter Western herbal remedy to use is *Agnus castus*, also known as Chasteberry. On sale in all good health stores, the daily therapeutic dose is 150mg of the standardised extract (ie, the active chemicals in the herb).

My 40-year-old husband's sex drive seems to get lower and lower. I have heard you can take supplements which might make him prefer me to a book at bedtime. Do any of them actually work?

There are lots of libido-boosting remedies on the market but if you really want your husband to recapture his enthusiasm for sex, then you need to start with a remedy that helps lower stress hormones and then get him on one of the sex-boosting ones. Stress, whatever the cause, triggers an increase in the production of the hormone cortisol. High cortisol levels tell the body to reduce production of those compounds that serve as precursors to the manufacture of the male sex hormone, testosterone, which in turn adversely affects libido. Persuade your husband to take a supplement made from *Magnolia Phellodendron* extract which has been shown to lower cortisol levels by almost 40 per cent.

Simultaneously, introduce the coyly named

Libido, a supplement made from two herbs, *Tribulus terrestris* which has a long history of traditional use to help boost testosterone levels, and *Ginkgo biloba* which can improve circulation.

You can order both remedies from Victoria Health (0800 3898195; www.victoriahealth.com). Doctors AZ Relora, £19.95 for 90 capsules. Take two a day. Nutrica's Libido, £17.95 for 30 capsules. Your husband should take one a day.

I sweat heavily (and smell dreadful). I have tried strong deodorants and Bach's Rescue Remedy but to no avail. Is there anything more potent?

Ironically, not more potent – since the greater the dilution of homeopathic remedies, the stronger they are considered to be – but since what is underpinning your symptoms is an emotional reaction to more stressful situations, then I think homeopathy would be well worth investigating.

There will always be a debate about whether homeopathy works, because if you apply Western allopathic medicine's logic it shouldn't, but according to plenty of anecdotal evidence, it does. A qualified homeopath will make what is called a constitutional diagnosis as to why your body has this extreme reaction and prescribe accordingly. The joy of homeopathic medicine is that it will not interfere with any existing medication and, usually, you only take the pills for a few days.

To find a doctor who is also a qualified homeopath, call the British Homeopathic Association (020 7935 2163). For other qualified homeopaths, call the Society of Homeopaths (01604 817890).

Before following any medical or dietary advice in this column, please consult your GP if you suffer from any health problems. Susan Clark's website is www.whatreallyworks.co.uk

Doctor or lawyer? We asked 100 women who they prefer



63% said they prefer a date with a good bedside manner