

# WHAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE? SUSAN CLARK



**Q** Earlier this year, I had a bad cold and, on the advice of a pharmacist, used an over-the-counter nasal spray. Since then, I have had no sense of taste or smell, which, as I am a food stylist and writer, has serious implications. Basic neurology tests are negative, and as I now have a long wait for an appointment with a consultant, I am looking for something that might help.

P. Betz, by e-mail

**A** These two senses are so intertwined that the loss of one will affect the other. There is a clear link between your recent viral infection and your loss of taste and smell, as a viral infection can cause damage and inflammation of the olfactory nerve.

You could try taking the Chinese remedy ginkgo biloba to restore nerve function. Ginkgolide B, one of the active agents of this plant, reduces levels of a substance called platelet activating factor, high levels of which are associated with nerve damage.

The therapeutic dose of ginkgo in all good-quality supplements is 120mg of the standardized extract. Lambert's Ginkgo Biloba time-release capsules (£11.95 for 90 tablets, from The Nutri Centre, 0800 587 2290, [www.nutricentre.com](http://www.nutricentre.com)) release the active agents over 2 to 3 hours. Take one per day.

If the loss of these senses appears to happen for no reason, supplementing your diet with a high dose of zinc (30mg a day) might help, but this could take up to three months to work. If tests show that there has been nerve damage, a vitamin B complex might help, as, in some cases, might ginger tea.

**Q** I was wondering if you have heard of an ointment called Tetrasil? It is supposed to be a new treatment for fungal infections.

**I am desperately trying to clear athlete's foot and fungal nails.**

M. Willsons, by e-mail

**A** Tetrasil is a patented topical cream made from a silver compound called tetrasilver tetroxide (TST), suspended in organic wax and jojoba oil. It is said to be much more potent than colloidal silver, which has a history of use in helping to clear skin infections, including athlete's foot. However, Tetrasil has not been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration, so, unlike licensed over-the-counter creams, it can't be sold with any medical claims.

The theory behind the cream is that TST is attracted to the surface of pathogens (organisms that are bad for you, including bacteria, fungi and viruses). Once attracted, it kills off the pathogen by releasing a short, sharp electrical charge.

Tetrasil may clear your infections in the short term. However, most natural healers would reject the notion of treating only the symptoms of skin infections and not the root causes. They would argue that the only natural remedies likely to do this are those that can support what must be a weakened immune system, because, in perfect health, our body's own defences should be able to fight off everyday infections.

Whenever I am extremely stressed, I suffer from an infection on the side of my left foot. Instead of using a topical cream, I simply increase my dosage of Simba, a supplement that regulates the immune system, to a therapeutic level of one capsule twice per day until the infection disappears. Simba costs £24.50 for 90 capsules from The Little Herbal Company (01484 685100, [www.littleherbal.co.uk](http://www.littleherbal.co.uk)).

**Q** My wife is suffering from postnatal depression, but is breast-feeding, and so is reluctant to use prescribed drugs to treat her condition. As well as exercising,

she is also seeking a more natural remedy to help with the depression. Your website suggests St John's wort, but is it suitable to take while breast-feeding?

P. Malby, by e-mail

**A** The use of most natural remedies, including St John's wort, during breast-feeding is possibly unsafe, and therefore best avoided. According to my reference sources, the babies of breast-feeding mothers who take a therapeutic dose of this herb may be at risk of drowsiness, lethargy and colic. It is always best, with regard to pregnancy and breast-feeding, to play it safe.

Instead, I would suggest trying plant and flower essences. However, the use of all essences requires a leap of faith, as there is no clinical evidence that they work. As is the case in homeopathy, they contain no material (ie, identifiable) dose of the active agents. For this reason, they are safe to use, and are usually taken as adjuncts to other remedies.

The brand-new Happiness Essence contains a blend of tree and plant essences, including St John's wort, but is safe to use for the reasons outlined above. Happiness Essence, made by T3 Therapy to Take Away, costs £7.95 for 30ml from Victoria Health (0800 413596, [www.victoriahealth.com](http://www.victoriahealth.com)).

For more information on natural health, visit my website: [www.whateallyworks.co.uk](http://www.whateallyworks.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.