



Q Like lots of my friends, I am feeling the aftereffects of a hectic start to the year and look tired, especially around the eyes. Could you recommend a quick-fix boost for my looks and energy levels?

Name and address supplied

A My best new year discovery is Sudden Change Under-Eye Lift, by HealthAid, a brilliant cream that does exactly what the name suggests. The main active agent it contains is hyaluronic acid, which is increasingly used in eye products to help promote skin elasticity. At just £2.99 for 10 applications, plus p&hp, from Victoria Health (0800 413996), this serum is great value. Use as directed on the packet.

For even better results, you can use it alongside Occlus Acupoint Eye Patches. These contain extracts of chrysanthemum and sage root and are applied around the socket to relax and rejuvenate the face. They cost £19.95 for 10 applications, also from Victoria Health. Use as directed on the box.

In truth, there are no quick-fix energy boosters, and you need to take a long-term approach to build up your immune system and get you through the rest of winter. The supplement I rely on to do this job is Siriba, an immune modulator and, thus, energy-enhancing supplement made from the African potato tuber. It costs £24.50 for 90 capsules, plus p&hp, from The Little Herbal Company (01484 685100, www.littleherbal.co.uk). The maintenance dose is two capsules a day.

Q A friend has told me there is some suggestion that children who suffer from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may be deficient in iron. Can you tell me any more about this theory?

G Wilkins, via email

A The research your friend may be referring to is a recent study by French

scientists. They have linked iron deficiency to ADHD after discovering that 84% of those children studied who had been diagnosed with the condition had low iron levels, compared with just 18% of those children who were not diagnosed with the disorder.

The crucial thing to be aware of when supplementing a child's diet with iron is that doses need to be specific to avoid any risk of toxicity. So, unless you know what you are doing, you may end up causing more harm than good.

You can, of course, try to increase a child's dietary intake of iron by introducing more iron-rich foods, such as spinach and liver, to their diet. However, I can't imagine many children would enjoy these, so supplementation is probably a more workable answer.

One solution is a tonic called Spasone, which is safe for children over the age of two. Each sachet contains iron that occurs naturally in spa water from Snowdonia. It costs £5.85 for 14 sachets, plus p&hp, from The Nutri Centre (0800 587 2290, www.nutricentre.com). Dissolve a sachet in half a glass of fruit juice each day.

Alternatively, you could try Kirkman's Liquid Iron, formulated for children aged between one and six. It costs £17.95 for 236ml, also from The Nutri Centre. Simply add 8-10 drops to your child's favourite juice each day, but do not exceed this dosage.

Q I would appreciate your comments on raspberry-leaf tea. I am 32, and 36 weeks pregnant with my third child. I underwent an emergency caesarean with my first baby and narrowly avoided it with my second. This time, I am anxious to ensure labour goes as smoothly as possible.

J Abrahams, via email

A Raspberry-leaf tea is commonly used by midwives who have an interest

in natural health to help facilitate both labour and delivery. There is some evidence that it can be used safely (with, it must be stressed, appropriate medical supervision), but only to help induce labour and get everything moving quickly.

For the purpose you are suggesting, there is no evidence that it actually works because nobody has undertaken a clinical trial investigating this particular use of the plant leaves. Therefore, the best advice would be for you to seek expert help.

One reason for confusion about the effectiveness of raspberry-leaf tea is that different chemical agents found in the plant have opposing effects on the smooth muscle of the uterus. For example, it is suggested that lower doses cause more contraction of the womb, and higher doses have a more spasmodic effect and decrease the rate of contraction. Research is needed to determine the precise effects of certain doses.

There are lots of excellent practitioners who specialise in fertility and pregnancy. Contact either the National Institute of Medical Herbalists (01392 426022), or the British Naturopathic Association (01458 840072), to find a qualified herbalist or naturopath, or, even better, a trained midwife who works with natural remedies, including raspberry-leaf tea, and who can oversee your labour and delivery.

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

If you have any questions or tips, write to *What's the Alternative?* Style, The Sunday Times, 1 Pennington Street, London E9 8 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.