

Natural health



Look after your body and wellbeing naturally with **Jan Purser's** essential monthly guide to alternative medicine, health and nutrition.



Should I take ... cramp bark?

Why would I need it? Cramp bark (*Viburnum opulus*) is a muscle relaxant that's traditionally used to treat asthma, muscle cramps, painful periods, ovarian pain and difficulties swallowing. Studies have shown that it also helps to protect the lining of the gastrointestinal tract, which makes it useful for digestive complaints. It's also thought to help lower high blood pressure, improve circulation and act as a mild relaxant.

How much? Take 2g to 4g of dried bark in tablet or capsule form, or 3ml to 5ml of liquid extract, two to four times a day.

Anything I should know? If you're on blood-thinning medication, it's best to check with your naturopath before taking cramp bark.

quick cure

Weak, spotted nails

Take a look at your nails – are they splitting or weak? Do they have white spots? These could be signs of zinc deficiency. It may help to take a zinc supplement that also contains vitamins C and B6 each night. Also, eat zinc-rich foods, such as beef, oysters, mussels, sunflower seeds and lamb shanks, and foods high in B vitamins, such as wholegrains, nuts, dairy foods and soy products.



Not happy?

Ask Jan

Q I recently discovered that I'm allergic to my cat. What can I do to reduce the symptoms? (Giving up my cat is not an option!)
L. Maurice, via email.

A Some people are allergic to feline saliva, others to cat fur and dander, which can all result in hayfever-like symptoms, including sneezing, puffy eyes and an itchy throat. There are a few things you can do to lessen your reaction. Wash your hands after handling the cat and take care not to touch your face or eyes before washing. Don't let the cat sleep on your bed or, at the very least, use a vacuum cleaner or clothes brush to remove fur from the bed cover each day, and wash the bed cover weekly.

A naturopath can prescribe homeopathic allergy desensitising drops, which may help to reduce your reaction. Also consider a visit to an allergy elimination clinic.

Allergies tend to reduce the effectiveness of your immune system, so a naturopath may also prescribe other nutrients or herbs that will help you fight off viruses and other bugs.

Got eczema? Go fish!

Eczema is an inflammatory skin condition with symptoms including cracked skin, itchiness and painful infections. The cause is unknown, but a recent study found that the Western diet doesn't help. It tends to be higher in omega-6 fatty acids (found in nuts, seeds and plant oils) and lower in omega-3 fatty acids (present in oily fish such as salmon, tuna and sardines). The imbalance is thought to increase inflammatory reactions in the body and intensify eczema symptoms. Sufferers who increased their omega-3 intake enjoyed an improvement in their condition. In addition, talk to your naturopath about supplements that may help.

Source: *British Journal of Dermatology*, April 2008

Jan Purser Dip.Nutr., DRT, is a naturopathic nutrition consultant, remedial therapist and public speaker. If you have any questions on diet, natural health or nutrition, write to Natural Solutions, PO Box 3, South Fremantle WA 6162, or email ns@foodbodyandhealth.com.au We regret Jan is unable to personally answer letters.