

NATURAL REMEDIES

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For 25 years Mim Beim has been practising as a naturopath. Her experience has made her a firm believer in making changes to lifestyle and diet before any kind of medicine is used. She also thinks treatment should be enjoyable, not torturous. Mim has written eight books, is a lecturer at the Australasian College of Natural Therapies in Sydney and is recent past Head of Naturopathy at the Australian Traditional Medicine Society. She currently writes a naturopathy column for the *Sunday Telegraph's* Body + Soul and also their website bodyandsoul.com.au.

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This book is dedicated to my friend and esteemed colleague, Jennifer Price

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Contents

Dedicaton	iv
Imprint	iv
Disclaimer	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	xi
How to use this book	xiii
A general guide to using remedies	xv
Acne	1
Anaemia	7
Anorexia nervosa	12
Anxiety	17
Arthritis, osteoarthritis (OA)	24
Arthritis, rheumatoid (RA)	30
Asthma	37
Atherosclerosis	44
Bad breath (halitosis)	49
Baldness (alopecia)	54
Body odour	58
Boils	62
Bronchitis	66
Bruise	70
Bulimia	74
Cancer, strategies to reduce your risk	80
Cancer treatments	91

Natural Remedies

Candida overgrowth	99
Cataracts	104
Cellulite	108
Chickenpox	112
Chilblains, poor circulation	116
Cholesterol, high	120
Chronic fatigue syndrome	126
Colds and flu	132
Cold sores, herpes and shingles	139
Conjunctivitis	144
Constipation	147
Cough	154
Cystitis	159
Dandruff	164
Depression	168
Diabetes (type 2)	174
Diarrhoea	180
Diverticulitis	185
Ear infection	189
Eczema and dermatitis	194
Endometriosis	200
Erectile dysfunction (impotence)	204
Fatigue	209
Flatulence and bloating	212
Food sensitivity, allergy and intolerance	218
Fungal infections	229
Gallstones	234
Glandular fever	238
Gluten intolerance (coeliac disease and gluten sensitivity)	242
Gout	248
Gum disease	252
Haemochromatosis	256
Haemorrhoids	259
Hayfever	263
Headaches and migraines	269
High blood pressure	277
Infertility	284
Inflammatory bowel disease	292
Insomnia	298
Irritable bowel syndrome	305

Jet lag	310
Kidney stones	315
Memory and concentration	319
Menopause	326
Mouth ulcer	332
Multiple sclerosis	335
Nausea and vomiting	339
Osteoporosis	347
Overweight	352
Peptic ulcer, gastritis	363
Pregnancy	368
Premenstrual syndrome (PMS)	373
Prostate, enlarged	379
Psoriasis	382
Reflux	386
Rosacea	390
Sinusitis	394
Sore throat	398
Stress	402
Thyroid	413
Varicose veins	419
Warts	423
Appendices	427
<i>Appendix 1</i>	
Essential oil therapeutic properties	428
<i>Appendix 2</i>	
Bach flowers	432
<i>Appendix 3</i>	
Making remedies	441
<i>Appendix 4</i>	
Food sources	449
<i>Appendix 5</i>	
Acid-forming foods	457

Natural Remedies

<i>Appendix 6</i>	
Buteyko breathing	462
<i>Appendix 7</i>	
Carrier oils	467
Resources	470

Introduction

Natural Remedies was initially meant to be a *simple* re-write of my section of the popular book, *Help Yourself: the A-Z of natural cures for common complaints*, I co-authored with Jan Castorina way back in the last century. However, *simple* didn't happen, as I had not accounted for three factors. First has been the appearance of Doctor Google, who was not born when I wrote the first book, but whose presence is now ubiquitous. Doctor Google has a Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde persona. The positive Doctor Google allows a wealth of access to medical information for the average bear that was previously the closely guarded possession of medical professionals. The negative Doctor Google allows a wealth of access to misguided and possibly dangerous health information that the average untrained bear may not realise is incorrect.

Secondly, evidence-based medicine has arisen as the practice *du jour* for both mainstream and naturopathic medicine. Basically it means 'show me the research', with large randomised control trials being the preferred research tool. Trouble is, these trials are expensive to undertake, and few have been done on herbal remedies, (with a couple of notable exceptions including St John's Wort which came up very nicely when compared to prescription antidepressants) and it's extremely difficult to 'placebo' lifestyle changes such as increasing exercise, avoiding sugar or practising belly breathing. The cynic would say that the larger trials are mostly funded by wealthy pharmaceutical companies that are looking to patent and sell medicines, as you can't patent a herb or a vitamin or a breathing technique. But that would be cynical. The remedies and suggestions in this book include some evidence-based natural remedies, remedies that have been used by herbalists and natural therapists for centuries, in addition to the things I have found work well for my patients, evidence-based or not.

Natural Remedies

And finally, the third factor was that I had not realised how much, in the 16 years since writing the previous book, I had changed as a naturopath and a person. I have had 16 extra years of treating patients, learning more about the rapidly expanding world of nutrition and natural medicine, and gaining more life experience, the greatest teacher of all.

However, even with these massive changes in the medical landscape, many of the dietary recommendations and remedies I suggested long ago remain the same, which is comforting, as are the basic rules of good health which also remain the same, namely: eat well, exercise, be happy and take time to rest and relax.

How to use this book

Natural Remedies is not meant to be read from cover to cover; rather it is intended as a reference guide to help you know what to do if you, or a family member, has a particular ailment. In each entry, 'What is it?' gives an overview of how this condition affects the body. 'Symptoms' outlines some of the more common signs you can expect to see with this complaint and 'What causes it?' talks about the possible causes. Sometimes a complaint relates to the food you eat or environmental factors – or it may come down to a poor choice of parents, namely, the condition is inherited.

'What to do' is divided into three parts – 'Diet', 'Remedies' and 'Other' – and gives practical advice on natural treatment. It is recommended that, rather than attempting every suggestion, you choose just two or three from each part of 'What to do'.

If you wish to treat yourself with any natural remedies it is important that you do not self-diagnose, but rather consult a good practitioner, orthodox or alternative, for a professional diagnosis, and then keep them informed of any therapies you undertake, or wish to undertake.

A general guide to using remedies

Remedy availability

With a widened acceptance of natural remedies, herbs and supplements available in many shops in cities and towns together with the internet means you have access to obtaining most remedies, wherever you live. Always choose the highest quality and most trustworthy brand you can afford. There are many health food shops and reputable companies that also sell online and that employ naturopaths to advise people. Use them! Ask what herbal or supplement combination is best for you.

If you are keen to make your own remedies, see Appendix 3.

Which remedy to choose?

With many of the ailments, there will be many remedies and lifestyle changes recommended, too many for you to consider taking or doing. Ideally, according to naturopathic principles, go with the basics first. That is diet and exercise. If your diet is not supporting your health and there are foods that you are eating that should be eliminated, this would be the best first step, before considering supplements.

Very often several vitamins, minerals and herbs are suggested. Rather than buying each one separately, very often you will be able to buy a formula in tablet or other

Natural Remedies

form that already contains a combination of some of the remedies. Don't worry if it doesn't contain all of the remedies. Wherever possible choose a tablet or remedy that is recommended by naturopaths as this will usually be of higher quality and have the most efficacious combination of remedies.

Dosages

You will find that I given few specific dosages. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, some people are incredibly sensitive to medication, natural or pharmaceutical. For example, vitamin C or ascorbic acid: in the very sensitive individual as little as 500 mg will cause diarrhoea, whereas another person could take 10 g (10,000 mg) without any ill effect.

Be guided by the label – however, be aware label dosages are often on the low side as a safety precaution. If, after a reasonable amount of time, you are not noticing any benefits from the remedy, it might be the wrong dosage. The best course of action is to ask a trained practitioner who is aware of the safety and dosage range of the remedy.

A word on dosage

Any medicine, natural or not, can have side effects. It is always wise to err on too little than too much, and even wiser to consult a health practitioner who is trained in this area.

How much of a medicinal plant to give varies. Small doses over a long period of time may suit a chronic condition like arthritis or eczema, whereas larger doses given frequently may be more appropriate for an acute condition like a cold.

Herbal medicine has refined the art of dosage, and can be as important as the very herbs that are chosen. Understanding dosage is part of the training of any herbalist. Western herbalists rely on sources including the *British Herbal Pharmacopoeia* and German Commission E for guidance

Generally, herbal teas are to be taken 3 cups a day, and tinctures from 12 drops to 5 ml 1-3 times daily, diluted in some water. Apply cream, compresses, poultices and baths as required.

Remedies and children

Many of the remedies are safe for children to take, but always check with your practitioner. All of the dietary recommendations are appropriate for children. However, if the diet is too restrictive this may have implications for obtaining the correct nutrients necessary for growth. Check with your practitioner.

Children from as young as 6 months can take herbs. Children under eight or nine generally will not swallow capsules or tablets, so crushed tablets, powders or tinctures can be used. Australian herbalist Rob Santich (and father of five

children) has a nifty idea for delivery for less palatable remedies. In an old-fashioned ice cube tray, pour some natural jelly into each cube, leaving enough room for the appropriate dose of herb, then set in fridge. Each jelly cube is a dose. Another way would be to put the crushed tablet or powder into a small amount of juice.

What dosage?

Usually the appropriate dosage for children is mentioned on the label. However, below are the calculations herbalists use when prescribing for children. When in doubt, consult with your practitioner.

Suggested dosages for children

Under 2 years of age - Fried's rule

Age in months divided by 150 equals the fraction of adult's dose to use.

For example, for a 20-month-old child:

20 divided by 150 = 0.006th of adult dose

If an adult dose is 5 ml, the child's dose equals .03 ml per dose

Over 2 years of age - Ausberger's rule

1.5 times weight in kg (plus 10) is percentage of adult's dose to use.

For example, for a 24 kg child:

1.5 multiplied by 24 equals 36

46 per cent of an adult's dose for the child dosage equals 2.3 ml per dose.

Natural remedies during pregnancy

Although herbs have been used by pregnant women for hundreds, if not thousands, of years, it is usually recommended to err on the side of caution. However, most common herbal teas and a wide variety of vitamin and mineral supplements are safe. Always seek advice before you take the herbs.

Interactions with other medications

If you are taking prescription medication there is the potential that herbs and nutritional supplements may interact with your pharmaceutical medicine. Although this is comparatively rare, it can happen. There is more and more research into this area, and most naturopathic practitioners have access to regularly updated databases that determine what goes with what and what does not. Drugs like warfarin, with narrow dosage parameters, tend to be the more difficult drugs to team with natural remedies.

Reactions

Just because a remedy is natural, doesn't mean it is necessarily safe. If you develop a reaction to, or simply do not feel good on, any food, herb, supplement or therapy suggested, stop it immediately. The best thing would be for you to consult your trusted practitioner to check out whether it might be the remedy or something totally unrelated. Sometimes the problem may be that you have done too much too soon. If this is the case, slow down and start with small amounts of one thing before moving on. As with any medicine, there is a chance that it simply does not suit your body. Fortunately there are many roads to Rome – another remedy or therapy may better suit your needs.

How long before I feel better?

A general rule of thumb for natural therapies is that it takes up to one month of treatment for every year of an ailment. Usually you will notice improvement within days of starting a remedy or change in diet, but it helps to be patient. My guiding principle in treatment is that natural therapies should not be a hardship. Hopefully the road to healing will be a pleasurable and enlightening experience.

Acne

What is it?

Pimples en masse are called acne or officially *acne vulgaris* – vulgar(is) meaning common rather than vulgar meaning uncouth. Common or uncouth, acne is better absent than present. Acne occurs when the sebaceous glands, which provide the skin's naturally protective skin oil known as sebum, become blocked. Sebum hardens and oxidises forming a blackhead. The familiar pustule associated with acne occurs when debris collects in the sebaceous gland and a small infection occurs creating a pus-filled pimple. Most commonly found on the face, acne can also occur on the shoulders, neck, throat, back and buttocks.

Fifty per cent of teenage girls and 75 per cent of teenage boys suffer from acne; however, many people suffer this ignominious condition well into their twenties and thirties. Any condition, like acne, that appears on the face can have an impact on your sense of self-esteem and, for the very sensitive, may create secondary psychological problems including social phobia, anxiety and depression.

Symptoms

- Blackheads.
- Whiteheads.
- Papules (small red bumps).
- Pustules (pus-filled bumps).
- Redness around the bumps.
- Scarring.
- Cysts.

What causes it?

- **Hormones** – acne often occurs at the time of puberty when hormones surge through young bodies. Hormonal pimples are often blind or cyst-like, lying under the surface, causing the skin to look red and painful. In women, hormonal acne is often located along the jawline and may extend to shoulders, neck and back. An outbreak prior to the menstrual period is another giveaway of hormonal hijinks. For young men, hormonal acne can be especially bad, covering the entire face, as well as chest, shoulders and back.
- **Sugar** – bacteria are involved in the pimple process, and bacteria (like the rest of us) just love sugar. Avoid sugar in your diet and your pimples will disappear. Interestingly, acne has been called skin diabetes and may herald a problem with metabolising sugar, and possible future diabetes. Avoiding sugar is a great start to avoiding a diagnosis of diabetes down the track.
- **Dairy sensitivity** – although chocolate may sometimes cause an outbreak of pimples, by far the most common food culprit, apart from sugar, is dairy.
- **Stress** – an outbreak that occurs at or after exams or times of high emotions is most likely stress related.
- **Constipation** or a slow bowel transit time allows toxins from the bowel to circulate in the bloodstream and and trigger an outbreak on the surface of the skin.

Location, location, location

Just where your pimples are located may point to their cause. For instance, pimples on the cheeks are often the sign of a food intolerance such as dairy, whereas cyst-like pimples along the jaw line are most likely to be hormonally triggered. Hormonal outbreaks also appear on the chest, back and shoulders. Small pimples with red surrounds grouped closely together signify a localised infection just under the skin. Removing sugar from your diet will help in addition to taking blood-purifying herbs that are mentioned on page 4. Congested looking pimples on the forehead may be a sign of 'fatty liver'. Have this checked. Pimples on the chin reflect poor digestion or constipation. Pimples on the cheeks point to food allergies.

What to do

Identifying the cause of the problem will lead to the appropriate treatment. Regardless of the cause, the general rules of skin care still apply – that is, regular cleansing and moisturising, drinking plenty of water and eating a healthy diet.

Diet

- If dairy products are the cause, it is most likely due to a sensitivity to casein, the protein component of milk, rather than lactose (milk sugar) which usually results in tummy problems. The best way to tell if your acne is due to a dairy sensitivity is to avoid all dairy foods for one month, including milk (skim or full cream), cheese, yoghurt, cream, butter, chocolate and any processed food with added milk protein. One month is enough time to witness significant improvement. If this does not occur – happy days – reintroduce dairy into your diet. If dairy has proved to be the problem, either continue to avoid dairy foods completely, or if you are a dairy food fan, reintroduce dairy products gradually, as it may be a question of quantity. First dairy product to reintroduce is a good unsweetened probiotic yoghurt, half a cup daily. If this seems to be OK, then keep adding dairy foods until the first pimple appears – a sign you’ve reached your daily limit. The nutritional impact of eliminating or reducing dairy foods is not dire; after all, the majority of people on the planet have not traditionally eaten dairy products. However, if dairy is off the menu, you do need to ensure you are consuming sufficient protein and calcium from dairy-free sources.
- Avoid cakes, biscuits, soft drinks and all processed foods with added sugar.
- Water. Skin needs to be hydrated, and water helps to flush toxins away. Drink at least 1.2 litres and preferably 2 litres of water daily in addition to other fluids such as the herbal teas mentioned below.
- Fibre. If your acne coincides with a sluggish bowel, make sure you eat plenty of fibre. Fibre hastens transit time, taking toxins more quickly out of the body, with less time to be reabsorbed. High-fibre foods include nuts, seeds (particularly chia seeds), wholegrains, legumes, vegetables and fruit. If, after adjusting your diet to include plenty of fibre and drinking at least 2 litres of water, you still suffer from constipation, see page 147.
- Unless you eat prodigious amounts of chicken nuggets or other fried food, acne is unlikely to be caused by fat. In fact, the good fats found in nuts, seeds, avocados and olive oil are important for healthy skin and are encouraged.

Remedies

- Hormonal imbalances take time to resolve. Be patient. You should notice some improvement in 4 to 6 weeks. The herb chaste tree (*Vitex agnus castus*) is a lovely hormonal normaliser, perfect for boys, girls, men and women. Chaste tree alone is excellent; however, in a particularly nasty case, two other herbs to help are nettles and saw palmetto. Two micronutrients that assist in hormone balance are zinc and vitamin B6. Evening primrose oil contains substances that are anti-inflammatory for the skin and act to regulate hormones. Take at least 4 g daily.

- Blood-purifying herbs. In the tradition of natural medicine, skin is seen as one of the major organs of detoxification alongside the liver, bowels, lungs and kidneys. Any affliction of the skin, including acne, is a signal that the body needs help with detoxifying. A group of herbs with special affinity for the skin is known as blood purifiers, alteratives, depuratives and have been used for centuries. These herbs include clivers, yellow dock, calendula, burdock, sarsaparilla, dandelion and echinacea. Usually taken in a combination of two and more, these herbs can be taken in extract, tincture, tablet or tea form; however, for skin conditions, a water-based tea is preferred. Drink at least 3 cups daily. When cooled this tisane makes a fine toner or spray to apply after cleansing, and before applying moisturiser.
- Vitamin A and zinc. This vitamin and mineral combination is excellent for the skin. Vitamin A has an important role in the maintenance of healthy epithelial cells, the cells that line the body inside and out. Zinc is used by hundreds of enzymes, including those that regulate hormones and sugar metabolism. Zinc is also important for healing. The two micronutrients are often found together in skin-focused supplements.
- If sugar is the culprit, and you have eliminated sugar from your diet (as you must) and you still experience sweet cravings, then take a tablet that contains a combination of zinc, gymnema and chromium with each meal.

Other

- Cleanse and moisturise. A common misconception among acne sufferers is that skin should be squeaky clean, the squeakier the better. In fact, the skin actually likes to have a slightly oily protective covering and produces sebum for this purpose. If the outer layers of the skin become dry, more sebum is produced to compensate for this, adding to the pimply problem. Wash the skin with a mild cleanser. If you wish, this cleansing can be followed with a toning wash of a cold tea of the blood-purifying herbs mentioned above. Then use a light, low-allergen moisturiser, perhaps containing aloe vera, calendula or tea tree. The best anti-pimple program will not work unless you follow a regular routine of cleansing and moisturising the skin.
- Tea tree oil or gel applied directly on to the pimple helps to reduce reddening and further infection. Tea tree oil helps skin regenerate and has antibacterial properties, making it an excellent ingredient in any cleanser, gel or moisturiser in your acne treatment program.
- A little sunshine and sea water can work miracles.
- Don't pick! Beauty therapists suggest you leave squeezing to them rather than attempt this potentially disfiguring procedure yourself. Try a course of facials as a start for clearing the skin and while you're there ask about basic skin

care. This is particularly pertinent to boys and men who may lack skin care knowledge. Generally, maintaining good personal hygiene is also a great way to prevent break-outs. Picking, scratching and touching spreads infection and will contribute to scarring. Desist.

- From an emotional perspective, acne may represent inner conflicts and disharmony. If you feel this applies to you, speak to a friend or try counselling to help understand and resolve these internal difficulties.

Aromatherapy

The following blend will have a calming, soothing, cleansing and purifying effect on the skin.

It can be used in a blend of 20 ml calendula and 10 ml rosehip base oils – pressed onto a cleansed face of an evening. Can also be mixed into 30 g of an unscented cream base and used each morning on a cleansed face.

- 4 drops of lemon-scented tea tree – analgesic, anti-inflammatory, antiseptic and bactericidal.
- 5 drops of lavender – has regenerative and soothing effects on irritated or damaged skin, along with being antibacterial.
- 2 drops of cypress – astringent and an antiseptic.
- 4 drops of sandalwood – antiseptic, astringent, anti-inflammatory, antibacterial.

For a deep cleansing face mask, reduce the number of drops of essential oils by half and add to a paste of green clay. For spot treatment, use 2 drops lavender and 1 drop lemon-scented tea tree and use cotton bud to apply directly to the spot/s in question. Lymphatic drainage facial massage will greatly assist in cleansing/purifying and decongesting the skin.

At a glance

Diet

- Dairy foods may be the cause of your pimples so avoid things like milk, cheese, yoghurt, cream, butter, chocolate and processed foods that contain milk protein. Try this for a month to see if there is any improvement.
- Sugar can be a culprit and cutting out cakes, biscuits, soft drinks will help to clear up your skin.
- Water, lots of it to flush away toxins. Aim to drink 2 litres a day.
- Include lots of high-fibre foods such as nuts, seeds, wholegrains, legumes and fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Minimise the bad fat in your diet such as deep-fried and fatty foods but make sure you have the good fats found in nuts, seeds, avocados and olive oil. The good fats are beneficial for your skin.

Remedies

- The herb chaste tree works well for hormonal acne. In more severe cases of acne adding nettles and saw palmetto can help.
- Take zinc, vitamin B6 and evening primrose oil supplements to strengthen your skin. Combining Vitamin A with zinc is an excellent vitamin and mineral combination for the skin.
- Acne can be a sign that your body is not detoxifying. Traditional blood-purifying herbs such as clivers, calendula, yellow dock burdock, sarsaparilla, dandelion and echinacea come to the rescue – choose three or more to be taken in tablet, extract or tea.

Other

- Adopt a daily practice of cleansing and moisturising. Choose gentle low-allergy skin products.
- Dab a drop of tea tree gel or neat oil onto any spots as they appear.
- Live near the beach? Splash some sea water onto your face and body, and soak up (a few) rays.
- Don't pick! Treat yourself to a monthly facial.