

Skin Problems

Herbal medicine is a gentle and effective way to treat many skin problems including eczema, psoriasis, acne and rosacea.

The skin is the largest and most visible organ in the body and skin problems can cause a huge amount of emotional stress as well as physical discomfort. Health is undeniably more than skin-deep and most skin conditions are a sign of internal imbalances.

Many people try to self-treat skin problems using a range of different products and often forgetting that many skin conditions can only be treated using internal remedies alongside external creams and lotions.

We strongly advise that you consult a qualified herbal practitioner about your skin problem for an individual treatment plan that involves herbal remedies together with dietary and lifestyle advice.

Diet and Nutrition

The correct balance of nutrients is vital for skin to repair and renew itself. A diet based on refined and processed foods can lead to nutritional shortfalls that also affect the immune system, hormonal balance and bowel function, all factors that reflect in the health of the skin. Foods containing additives and colourings, tea, coffee, fried foods, sugary foods and drinks, dairy products and animal fats can contribute to all skin problems or make them worse. Alcohol can also exacerbate itchy, flaky and inflamed skin conditions and is best kept to a minimum.

The best approach is to eat fresh, unprocessed foods including fruit and vegetables, whole grains, pulses, nuts and seeds with plenty of fluid in the form of plain water, herbal teas, or diluted fruit juices. Aim to eat at least 5-7 portions of a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables daily plus around two litres of fluid.

Food Allergy and Intolerance

Some cases of eczema may be linked to food allergy or intolerance and eliminating the offending foods can greatly improve the condition. Cow's milk and wheat products are common triggers for skin problems, but other foods may be identified using food sensitivity testing as a guide.

Essential Nutrients for Healthy Skin

- Essential fatty acids (EFAs) – Gamma Linolenic Acid (GLA), found in Starflower and Evening Primrose Oil and Eicosapentaenoic Acid (EPA) are sometimes used in the treatment of dry, irritated skin conditions. Food sources include uncooked polyunsaturated vegetable oils, sunflower and pumpkin seeds, nuts, avocados, flax seeds, hemp oil and oily fish (mackerel, salmon, herring, sardines). These should be eaten daily but it may be advisable to take a supplement too.

- Zinc – Important for the immune system, skin healing and reducing inflammation, zinc can be found in almonds, walnuts, brazil nuts, eggs, oats, carrots and beans.
- Antioxidants – Vitamins A, C, E, Selenium and Zinc - Important for immune function, skin healing and to prevent premature ageing of skin, antioxidants are found in orange, red, yellow and purple fruits and vegetables.

Lifestyle

Smoking can play havoc with the skin, robbing the body of vital antioxidant nutrients and adversely affecting the blood supply to the skin. Cigarette smoke also contains a wide range of toxic substances that can trigger allergies in some people.

Stress can play a large part in skin flare-ups and a noticeable improvement can often be seen when stress levels are reduced. See the Stress Management leaflet for information on herbs to help control stress. Exercise can help to reduce stress levels and boost circulation and energy levels.

Get adequate sleep – this is when your body does it's repair work, and lack of sleep can contribute to dull, problematic skin.

Herbs

Herbal medicines can be used both externally and taken internally to overcome skin problems. There is a long list of herbs that can be used – we recommend that you consult with a medical herbalist to make sure that you use herbal medicine safely and effectively.

Internal Use:

- Sarsaparilla – A cleansing and detoxifying herb that is traditionally used for psoriasis, acne and rosacea
- Yellow Dock – has a long history of use in treating chronic acne and psoriasis.
- Burdock – a powerful detoxifier, very useful for longstanding cases of acne and psoriasis.
- Chamomile – gentle nerve relaxant, anti-inflammatory and healing. Combines well with plantain and nettle for the treatment of eczema.
- Plantain – cooling and strengthening herb for the skin.
- Nettle – traditionally used as a gentle blood cleanser and anti-allergy remedy. Particularly useful for itchy, allergic skin conditions.

External Use:

Try a cream or lotion containing:

- Starflower oil – soothing, healing and anti-inflammatory. Useful for inflamed skin such as in eczema, psoriasis or dermatitis.
- Chickweed – a cooling herb for hot, itchy skin.
- Chamomile – used by herbalists to reduce redness and inflammation in itchy skin conditions. Combines well with cooling peppermint for itchy eczema
- Pokerooroot – may help to reduce redness and scaling in psoriasis when used as an ointment

- Marigold – used for it’s healing and antiseptic properties to prevent infection and heal broken skin. Useful in acne, dermatitis, eczema and to heal wounds.
- Tea Tree Essential Oil – with it’s strong antibacterial action, tea tree is extremely useful in treating acne, as a herbal cream, gel or in skincare preparations.

Caution: Stopping use of steroid-based creams suddenly can cause skin to flare-up. Steroid creams should be withdrawn slowly and can be used alongside herbal preparations. If in doubt, consult your doctor or a qualified medical herbalist.

As with all health problems, we strongly recommend that you consult a qualified medical herbalist to create a specific prescription and treatment plan to meet your individual needs.

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