

HERBAL TREATMENT OF COLD SORES

Q. I get frequent, unsightly **cold sores** on my lips and usually at the worst possible time, for example if I am going out to a party. Are there any herbs for this?

A.

The Herpes Simplex virus which results in painful blisters on your lips or other parts of your face can recur within weeks or only every few years, after the initial infection. After the first outbreak the virus lies dormant in your nervous system until it is triggered by different causes. When the immune system is depressed by an infection such as a cold, the virus can be activated. Emotional stress, menstruation, fatigue or are all known causes. Exposure to the sun may be a trigger so apply a sunscreen.

I would recommend that you pay careful attention to your diet and lifestyle to help keep your immune system strong. There is so much help and advice available now on how to eat healthily and on the benefits of regular exercise, adequate sleep, reduction of alcohol and stopping smoking, so there is no excuse!

More specifically on the subject of your diet, it may be that you need to adjust the levels of two amino acids (amino acids are necessary for each cell to function in your body and are simply proteins that have been broken down by your digestive system). Lysine is supposed to suppress viral replication while Arginine is necessary for that to happen. The theory is that you should eat foods high in Lysine and low in Arginine to minimise your risk of a cold sore. Certain fish – halibut, tuna and salmon, meats – chicken and turkey, and fruits – papaya, pears, apples and grapefruit all come into this category. Nuts and chocolate are high in Arginine and best avoided.

Herbs in the **mint family** are effective, including Rosemary, Sage, Thyme, Oregano, Self-Heal, to name but a few, and **Lemon Balm** (*Melissa officinalis*) has been shown by research to be particularly good. These herbs contain many useful plant chemicals which help boost the immune system, reduce inflammation, heal wounds and kill viruses and bacteria. A mixture of mint and Lemon Balm makes a very pleasant tasting tea. You can also apply this with cotton wool directly to the sore. For this, make a stronger tea by steeping 3 teaspoons of herb in a cup of very hot water, covered, for 15 minutes and allow to cool before use. A touch of diluted essential oil of Lemon Balm onto the lips at the first sign of tingling is also very effective but expensive for good quality oil. Two more good anti-viral herbs are **St. John's Wort** (*Hypericum perforatum*) which, like Melissa, kills viruses and heals wounds, and **Echinacea**. You

can buy St. John's Wort as a cream or use a strong tea. Adding powdered **Liquorice** root would increase the effectiveness. **Aloe vera** is a plant that helps break down dead tissue and regenerate new tissue. Applying its juice helps reduce pain and inflammation.

All of the herbs mentioned can be taken internally but it is advisable to consult a qualified practitioner first before using herbs.

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