

## HERBAL TREATMENT OF POOR CIRCULATION

**Q.** I have bad circulation especially in my hands and feet and always feel very cold in the winter. What herbal remedies can I take to warm me up?

**A.** I would suggest you talk to a health practitioner first such as your G.P. or a qualified medical herbalist to reassure yourself that there is no serious underlying health problem.

Blood flows down the arteries at great speed and returns under pressure through the capillaries (small blood vessels) and veins to the heart. The vessel walls must be in good condition to allow the free flow of blood. To keep this 'plumbing' in good working order, eating the right foods and herbs will prevent damage to the artery walls and keep them flexible.

When they are weakened 'bad circulation' may result. The heart pumps blood round the body and must have the correct supply of vitamins, minerals and nutrients to do its job properly.

If you smoke that will obviously have an effect on your heart and circulation, so get help to stop smoking.

Controlling the fats in your blood through exercise and diet is necessary.

**Garlic** protects by helping dissolve cholesterol and dilating the blood vessels. It is best eaten raw. Crush a clove of garlic and sprinkle on food with some fresh parsley to avoid the smell on your breath.

Eat less saturated fat found in meat and dairy foods and more **nonsaturated** fats such as those found in oily fish, nuts and seeds. Include plenty of fresh vegetables and fruits, especially black and red berry fruits in your diet. These strengthen blood vessels and contain vitamin C, which helps you absorb iron to make healthy blood cells. A substance called rutin also strengthens blood vessels and is found in **Buckwheat**. Reduce salt, which can increase the risk of high blood pressure and add herbs as flavouring instead. Add the herbs **Cinnamon, Ginger, Horseradish** (avoid if you have an under active thyroid), **Mustard and Black or Cayenne pepper** to your food. These bring blood to the surface of the skin and are very warming.

Exercise of any kind is beneficial but if this is impossible try massaging your hands and feet. Add a teaspoon of mustard powder to a small cup of almond or olive oil as a massage oil. You can also add mustard to hand and foot baths (1 tablespoon to 2 pints/1litre of hot water).

A pleasant tasting and warming herbal tea can be made from equal parts of **Lime flower, Hawthorn berries and Yarrow** with Ginger or Cayenne pepper to taste. Some other herbs that also improve the circulation are **Rosemary, Ginkgo, Prickly Ash and Horse Chestnut**.

For convenience, most of these herbs can be taken as a tincture - a concentrated liquid medicine.

Herbs and tinctures can be bought from a qualified medical herbalist. It is advisable to consult a qualified medical herbalist *before* taking herbs to make sure they are the right ones for you. This is especially important if you are taking prescribed medication, are pregnant or breastfeeding.

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