

Let's hear it for natural remedies

Herbs, needles, massage help many symptoms

By Danielle Braff

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Medicine cabinets need a break. They are overflowing with tiny bottles that promise to fix everything from headaches to poor sleep -- but they also can cause pesky side effects. Maybe it's time to try some time-tested natural remedies.

Problem: Neck and back pain

Craniosacral massage was developed by William Sutherland, who studied osteopathy in the late 1800s in Missouri. When Sutherland discovered that skull bones could be adjusted, he came up with this method of gentle massage to ease aches and pains -- focusing specifically on the tiny muscles connecting the head and neck. The therapy is meant to correct imbalances around the brain and spinal cord. Get it at NOW Studio, 2141 W. Webster St., 773-276-5278. \$90 for 60 minutes; at least two visits are recommended.

Problem: Lack of energy

Try Chi Nei Tsang, a holistic healing method from China, where monks used this technique thousands of years ago to detoxify their bodies and build stamina and energy. Practitioners press on points on and around the abdomen -- almost like a deep belly massage. The palpations are supposed to make internal organs work more efficiently, giving you instant energy. Get it at The Healing Vessel, 3322 N. Ashland Ave., 2nd floor, 773-931-1216. \$150 per treatment; five treatments recommended.

Problem: Muscle aches and flulike symptoms

Try an herbal poultice body treatment, which has been around since 14th Century Siam, now Thailand. It was originally used to help soldiers when they returned from battles with post-traumatic stress, disease and general pain. Aestheticians rub the body with heated bundles filled with turmeric, prai and lemongrass, each of which plays a part in relieving sore muscles, boosting immunity, cleaning the body's infections and toning the top layer of skin, according to practitioners. The rubbing action also helps muscles and promotes relaxation. Get it at Silken Tent, 2300 Chestnut Ave., Glenview, 847-510-1240. \$150 per treatment; at least one recommended.

Problem: Migraines, infertility, sore muscles

One of the oldest Chinese treatments is acupuncture, which has been around since at least 3000 B.C. While its specific roots are unclear, legend has it that soldiers wounded by arrows noticed pain relief in other areas of their body. Experimentation led to needles, which are still used today. The acupuncturist inserts the needles all over the body on different pressure points, depending on the ailment. Though it sounds painful, the needles are so tiny that they don't hurt when inserted. The needles are left in for about 25 minutes while you relax. When they're removed, you're likely to feel very calm. Get it at Alternative Health Group, 1834 W. North Ave., 773-227-9150. \$150 for first visit, \$100 for follow-ups. Recommended at least once a week until pain subsides.

Problem: Stress and depression

The Chinese have long regarded rosebuds as a cure-all for depression, PMS, stress and an overall unhealthy outlook on life. The rosebuds, which are made into a tea, are literally tiny roses containing natural chemicals that are supposedly good for circulation, which helps everything in the body begin to work correctly. Get it at Nam Bac Hang, 243 W. Cermak Rd., 312-225-0024. \$5 per ounce. Drink daily or whenever needed.

Problem: Too many toxins

If you drank too much alcohol or downed too much junk food over the weekend, it may be time for the Gua Sha treatment, an ancient Chinese folk remedy that is so easy to do that some people do it at home. The practitioner will apply herbal oils or even olive oil to your skin, and then use a round-edged tool to scrape across the oil from your neck to your lower back. No skin is peeled off, and there is no bleeding; the movement is believed to stimulate blood circulation. Get it at Jin Ngan's private practice, 3322 N. Ashland Ave., 773-592-4559. \$35 per session, as needed.

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