



Q My son is travelling to Asia as part of his gap year, but does not want to use conventional malaria medication as it makes him feel sick. Can you suggest a herbal alternative?

V Thompson, by e-mail

A As someone remarked to me when I complained that malaria tablets made me feel sick: "Malaria would make you feel a lot sicker." That said, I no longer use conventional medication when I travel to high-risk areas. Instead, I use a Chinese herbal remedy that has proved strikingly effective against malaria: artemisinin, an extract of the plant artemisia. It was used extensively during an epidemic of malaria in Vietnam in the early 1990s and was reported to have cut the death rate by 97%.

The Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria is currently financing the shift to artemisinin-based combination therapies in 26 countries. Other countries are reviewing the situation, and may switch from chloroquine and sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine treatments if the results show it is advisable.

I should point out that most conventional practitioners will stress that your son is taking a huge risk if he refuses to use conventional antimalarial medication, but the remit of this page is to consider alternatives, and artemisinin is well worth investigating if he is determined to go down this route.

Altery Research has been producing a high-quality artemisinin supplement for 12 years (long before the current surge of interest in the plant). So this is the brand I would recommend. It is available from Revital (0800 252875; 90 x 100mg capsules cost £19.95).

Q I am prone to cold sores once the weather starts to get chilly. Although I have tried several of the remedies you have recommended

over the years, I have found nothing that really zaps them. The problem is that they are often on my lips and take a long time to heal.

J Lowther, Plymouth

A After four years clear, without any sign of an outbreak, I had the exact same problem at the end of the summer. I sympathise with you, because although the sore was small, it was on the lip and refused to heal, despite liberal applications of sea-ree oil.

Eventually, I took a leap of faith and tried Theeba, a topical cream that I normally recommend for eczema, psoriasis and burns. It is made from an African plant called *Kigelia africana*; its common name is the sausage tree, because of the shape of its fruits.

I rarely use the word miracle, but in three days, the sore had not only dried, it had also cleared without scarring, which makes this remedy my top-rated recommendation for cold sores this year. I never travel without a pot in my handbag, and I use it for all manner of minor ailments, including my young daughter's cuts, scrapes and grazes.

The cream can be hard to find in health shops, but you can order it from The Little Herbal Company (01484 685100). A 30g pot costs £11.95, plus £1 p&hp, and will last you several months.

Q I recently tried one of the detox diets recommended in one of your early *What Really Works* books. Over two weeks, I lost weight, but I also felt rotten and got a stinking cold. My GP told me I was an idiot, and suggested that detoxing is dangerous. Is he right?

M Danley, London

A It is probably overstating it to suggest that detoxing is downright dangerous, but I would agree that it is not something to embark on casually, not least because

there are always unpleasant side effects, as you experienced.

Feeling rotten and getting a cold was all part of what natural therapists describe as a "healing crisis". What this means is that if you deprive your body of its normal intake of calories and stimulants, it can go into shock.

Anyone who has given up coffee will probably tell you that, after two or three days, they started to experience adverse side effects, including headaches, mood swings and low energy. If you stuck to a serious detox plan for two weeks, it is not surprising you suffered, too.

I think detoxing the body has a role to play in holistic health, but only in the right context. You should make sure that you are being monitored by a qualified health practitioner, and you should embark on a detox only when your lifestyle can accommodate it (for example, when you are not working, or meeting all the normal deadlines of a busy life). While most people talk about detoxing in January, the best time from the body's point of view is spring or autumn, in line with nature's seasonal shift.

If you do detox, it is crucial to gradually build back up to your normal intake of foods and calories, so don't tack into a Sunday roast as soon as the detox ends, as this will place the body under stress and will be counterproductive.

For more information on natural health, visit my website: www.whoreallyworks.co.uk

If you have any questions or tips, write to *What's the Alternative?* Style, The Sunday Times, 1 Pennington Street, London E9B 1ST. We can only provide replies to published letters.

Before following any medical or dietary advice in this column, please consult your GP if you suffer from any health problems or special conditions, or are in doubt as to its suitability.