

Michael van Straten's

Bodytalk

On Classic Gold fm

Alternative Holiday Medicine Chest

If you're off to the sun take care. Too much ultraviolet causes skin cancer which has increased dramatically in recent years, especially amongst the young. If you're holidaying in the sun always use a high factor sunscreen, 20 or above. At the beginning of your holiday start with 10 minutes a day in the sun and never let yourself or children, burn.

Large hats, loose fitting, tightly woven clothing, and regular reapplication of lotions or creams, particularly after swimming, are essential. The Australian campaign of SLIP on a shirt, SLAP on a hat and SLOP on the sunscreen has been a huge success in reducing the amount of skin cancer. Encourage the kids with face-painting competitions using coloured sunblock sticks.

Sitting under the beach umbrella is not enough protection as the sun's rays reflect from water and sand, and bounce back under the umbrella to burn you. So, even in the shade use your sunscreen. Before you go, make sure your skin's in good condition by taking some extra betacarotene, vitamin E and evening primrose oil.

Have you ever had Montezuma's Revenge, the Turkey Trots, Delhi Belly or plain old fashioned food poisoning? 60% of all travellers will suffer. Hygiene in some holiday hotspots is poor and you're safer with sardines cooked over a red hot grill at the beach cafe than the four star cold buffet which is an open invitation to bacteria.

Bugs are spread by flies and flies can't read the price list, so expensive may not be any safer than cheap. Before you eat in a restaurant, look in the loo - if there are swarms of flies where you can see them, imagine what it's like in the kitchens!

Drinking water is suspect in Asia, Africa and South America, the Greek islands, rural parts of Spain and Portugal, Egypt, Turkey and the middle-east, except Israel, so stick to bottled water - even for cleaning your teeth - and avoid ice.

The Med swallows 2 billion tons of sewage every year so look for the EC blue flags, or stick to swimming pools. Don't think you can escape by staying at home - lots of our beaches are just as polluted.

If disaster strikes and you get an attack of food poisoning, it's essential to replace fluid lost through vomiting and diarrhoea. Encourage children by giving them a dessertspoonfull of bottled or boiled water at a time - but not straight out of the fridge. You can buy sachets ready to mix with water that replace lost minerals, or make your own with 4 heaped teaspoons of sugar, half a teaspoon of salt and one litre of water. For the next couple of days stick to bananas, rice, apples and dry toast.

Garlic protects you from stomach bugs as well as vampires, so eat plenty or take the pills - most biting insects don't like the smell of it either, so it can help as a repellent, but it is not a replacement for proper anti-malarial precautions if you're going to an infected area. Whatever your destination, check on any vaccination requirements in plenty of time before you travel.

Do you look forward to travelling with as much enthusiasm as Dracula has for the sunrise? Then one of your family probably has travel sickness, which turns any trip into a nightmare.

Keep youngsters occupied with stories on tape, games and quizzes, don't let them get too anxious or excited. Putting a bucket in the car as soon as you open the door won't give the kids much confidence. Avoid burgers and chips, too many sweets and fizzy drinks. Take some dried fruit, plain biscuits and bottled water with you.

The best remedy of all is ginger. Peel and grate half inch of fresh root into a mug, fill with boiling water and leave to stand covered for ten minutes. Pour through a tea strainer, add a teaspoon of honey and sip. Crystallised ginger is an alternative or buy ginger capsules from your local chemist or health store. Also good for a 'belt and braces' approach are Sea Bands which work on the acupuncture points for nausea. Available at chemists.

The Queen always travels with homoeopathic medicines and so can you. They're safe, effective, have no side effects, they're ideal for children - and they're available at most chemists and health stores. In fact, you'll find them, together with a huge range of herbal remedies, at pharmacies throughout Europe: aconite - for colds, flu and chills; rhus tox, for sprains and strains; arsenicum, for stomach upsets; belladonna, for fevers and headaches; arnica, for bruises and damaged muscles.

Herbs are great holiday healers, so pack some tincture of calendula (marigold) - a few drops in cold water make an ideal compress or lotion for minor burns and scalds. Camomile teabags will soothe sore eyes and the tea helps relieve insomnia and fevers - great for kids - and painful periods. For mild sunburn, put three teabags in a tepid bath

Indigestion is a common holiday problem - all that rich food we're not used to! Chew caraway or fennel seeds, or take a glass of mint tea for indigestion. Don't forget some Slippery Elm powder. A teaspoon in half a cup of hot water relieves heartburn, indigestion and minor stomach upsets.

Take a packet of dried sage and use a teaspoon in a mug of boiling water, cool then use as a gargle for instant relief from sore throats. Use echinacea ointment for grazes and sore skin.

If you're prone to cold sores - and strangely they're more often triggered by the sun - the herb lemon balm (melissa) is both prevention and cure. It's available from health stores as a lipstick (for protection) and an ointment (for treatment).

You're most likely to get stung by a wasp sitting at the beach or pavement café, but the remedy is usually on the table. Mix a teaspoon of salt into a paste with a few drops of vinegar and spread it on the sting for instant relief. For bee stings use bicarbonate of soda.

Do remember that first aid is not a replacement for medical care. If you are in doubt, don't trust to luck, get medical advice.