



My ultimate guide to getting a good night's sleep—naturally

Ditch those dangerous sleep aids and “specialty” pillows once and for all

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than one-third of U.S. adults routinely get less than a healthy seven hours of sleep a day.¹

And during these troubled times, it's really no surprise that sleeplessness is on the rise. Not to mention, insomnia becomes even more of a problem as we age.

In fact, a new Canadian study of nearly 3,100 men and women with a mean age of 48 years found that 38 percent of the people who had insomnia at the start of the study still suffered with it five years later, when the study ended.² And an additional 14 percent developed insomnia during the same time period.

That's a total of *52 percent* of middle-aged and older people struggling with sleeplessness!

The deadly consequences of sleeplessness

You already know that lack of sleep can make you sluggish and grouchy. But there's plenty of research showing it can do much more than that. After all, sleep is a critical, but often overlooked, factor in good health.

Indeed, insomnia can be a significant contributor to a whole host of infections and serious, chronic diseases—including many associated with aging.

According to the CDC¹:

- 10 percent of people who sleep less than the minimum recommendation of seven hours a night have been diagnosed with cancer;
- 11 percent have diabetes;
- 23 percent have depression;
- 25 percent have asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD); and
- 29 percent have arthritis.

The CDC also reports that 13 percent of people with insomnia have had a heart attack, stroke, or heart disease. In addition, a new study shows that poor sleep may be linked to heart failure.

Researchers tracked more than 400,000 British adults for 10 years and found that the people with the unhealthiest sleep patterns were nearly *twice as likely* to develop heart failure during the course of the study, compared to people with minimal sleep issues.³

Participants were asked questions about their sleep patterns. The researchers gave each person a “healthy sleep score” of 0 to 5, based on the number of healthy sleep habits they reported. (See the sidebar on page 3 for a full list of sleep habits the researchers examined in this study.)

During the following decade, 5,221

study participants were diagnosed with cardiovascular disease. But the people who reported all five healthy sleep habits were *42 percent less likely* to have heart failure compared to people who had reported none or only one.

It appears that poor sleep affects stress hormones, blood pressure, and heart rate—all of which are risk factors for heart failure. It's also possible that early heart problems can cause some sleep-related symptoms.

For instance, daytime sleepiness could be a symptom of worsening heart health. In fact, out of the five healthy sleep habits referenced in the study, lack of daytime sleepiness was linked to the biggest reduction in heart failure risk overall.

Why insomnia is such a perplexing problem

If you're one of the many people who often find yourself tossing and turning before getting to sleep, waking up in the middle of the night, or feeling exhausted during the day,

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then you already know how hard it is to get a good night's sleep.

And studies show that once you start finding it difficult to get good sleep, the problem doesn't just go away on its own—despite the old notion that it will (called “the tincture of time” by old-time doctors).

More specifically, insomnia was once thought to be a situational problem—that is, resulting from acute stress or worry, most of which eventually resolves. But the truth is, insomnia often *doesn't* go away by itself, and its rate of persistence is particularly high.

In fact, doctors often report that by the time people typically come in for insomnia treatment, they've been struggling with sleeplessness for a long period of time. Even the researchers for the Canadian study I mentioned above were surprised to see how persistently insomnia continues for so many people.

Dangerous sleep aids are not the solution

To help “manage” sleeplessness, some people turn to sleeping pills. But research shows these pills don't help you sleep better over the long term. Instead, they lead to a dangerous cycle of drug dependency.

According to the study author, Charles Morin of Laval University in Canada, “in the long run, [sleep medication] is not the answer, because it's just like putting a Band-Aid on the problem and it does not address the underlying issues.”

The good news is, there are safe, effective, drug-free solutions that *do* address the underlying issues that lead to insomnia and other sleep problems.

In fact, after consulting the latest research, I've developed a comprehensive, natural guide for

getting healthy sleep. It consists of a series of dietary and lifestyle changes you can easily adopt to help you get a good night's sleep—now *and* as you get older.

Depending on your particular sleep issues, you can try a few or all of the following steps to help you sleep more soundly ...

Changing your thinking can change your sleep

Insomnia can lead to a vicious cycle of emotional and physiological disturbances. People can develop an obsession about their sleep. They begin to fear not sleeping and the consequences they'll suffer during the day. And that emotional distress feeds into the sleep problem and perpetuates itself, night after night.

The good news is, these problems *can* be treated with counseling that specifically helps people change their behaviors and thinking patterns.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), for example, can focus on changing poor sleep habits, sleep scheduling, and the ways people actually think about and experience poor sleep. CBT for sleep issues typically involves six to eight weekly sessions with a trained specialist.

Research shows that CBT can be highly effective, with 70 to 80 percent of patients experiencing improvements in sleep—including less time falling asleep, more time spent sleeping, and fewer times waking up during the night.⁴ And, unlike with medications, most people tend to sleep better even *after* CBT treatment ends.

CBT can also delve into emotional factors that influence sleep—or that result from sleep issues. Which leads me to my next step for healthy sleep...

Scale back on screen time

As the CDC figures I cited earlier show, insomnia can be a key factor in depression. And now, a new study shows that more sleep—and **less screen time**—are critical for stopping depression and other mood disorders from taking hold.⁴

An international team of researchers analyzed information from nearly 85,000 participants in the U.K. Biobank Study. The researchers found that the people who got seven to nine hours of sleep per night were less likely to become depressed. They also reported that more time spent in front of a TV, computer, phone, or other screen was associated with a higher frequency of depression.

And that certainly makes sense to me. Put simply, time spent sitting in front of a screen late at night is time spent not sleeping. Plus, research shows that the blue light emitted from electronic screens interferes with your body's production of melatonin, a hormone that helps you sleep.

More activity, more sleep

Another drawback of increased screen time is that it takes away valuable opportunities to get outside in Nature and engage in some moderate exercise. Both of which, as I regularly report, have their own mood-boosting and sleep health benefits.

Plus, researchers from the U.K. Biobank Study also noted that engaging in **moderate physical activity** during the day is important for good sleep at night.

They also found that poor dietary patterns are at least partly responsible for exacerbating depression and sleeplessness (which probably includes the unfortunate habit of mindlessly eating in front of a screen).

And that leads me to my next set of sleep steps...

Eating and drinking... and sleeping

There's plenty of research showing that what—and how—you eat can significantly impact your sleep quality. So, I've culled the top recommendations to share with you here...

Think about your meal timing.

Research shows you should wait at least two to three hours after your last meal before going to bed, to allow your digestive system to slow down and prepare for sleep. So the later you eat dinner, the more trouble you may have falling asleep.

Move up "last call." Sure, a drink or two may help relax you in the evening, but the cut-off time should be around 8 p.m. Higher blood alcohol levels can disturb the rapid eye movement (REM) sleep cycle—the most restorative, deepest sleep, during which short-term memory is processed. Plus, if you drink too much alcohol right before bed, you're more likely to be awake for the second half of the night.

Watch your caffeine intake.

Depending on how sensitive you are to caffeine, wait up to six hours after consuming coffee or tea before bedtime—as caffeine can metabolically block biochemicals that are important for inducing sleep. And don't forget about the caffeine found in chocolate. Just a few ounces of dark chocolate (the healthiest kind) can have as much caffeine as half a cup of coffee!

Stay away from sugar. As you know, sugar is the ultimate metabolic disrupter, which is why I recommend avoiding it. But if you do succumb, avoid sugary foods or drinks after 8 p.m. You'll get a quick energy boost, but then that added sugar will delay your sleep. And that sets off a vicious cycle. Lack of sleep also leads to increased production of a hormone called

ghrelin—which stimulates appetite and cravings for sugar and calories.

Avoid acidic foods. Citrus fruits are loaded with B vitamins, vitamin C, and other healthy nutrients. But they're also acidic and can cause difficulty when lying down at night if you're prone to acid reflux. Citrus and other acidic foods are also natural diuretics, which can cause you to wake in the middle of the night for bathroom breaks. (Drinking coffee and tea can have the same effect.)

Ditch the late-night pizza. Not only is the tomato sauce highly acidic, but the cheese may contain neurotransmitter-precursor chemicals that have been linked to nightmares. (The same can be true with shellfish.)

Your healthy sleep checklist

Are you wondering if you're getting the kind of sleep that's best for your body and brain? Well, researchers have developed the following checklist.

In fact, your sleep is considered healthy if you often experience these five factors:

- 1) Getting seven to eight hours of sleep per night.
- 2) Not snoring (including sleep apnea).
- 3) Rarely having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.
- 4) Rarely feeling groggy during the day.
- 5) Being described as a "morning" person.

Sleep more soundly with these lifestyle changes

Along with establishing a good-sleep diet, the following simple lifestyle alterations can also signal to your body and brain that it's time to go to bed...and stay asleep throughout the night.

Learn how to relax. Relaxation and stress-reduction approaches like

meditation and yoga during the day can help you fall asleep at night. To find the right mind-body techniques that will work for you, take my free quiz to find your emotional type on my website, www.DrMicozzi.com—and check out the following textbooks under the “books” tab: *Your Emotional Type*, and *Overcoming Acute and Chronic Pain: Keys to Treatment Based on Your Emotional Type*.

Keep a schedule. A regular pattern of sleeping and waking times helps your body adhere to its natural circadian rhythm, which signals when it's time to sleep, eat, and carry out other key body functions. Research shows that the older you become, the less reliable your circadian rhythm is—making it important to establish and stick to a sleep schedule, night after night.

Wind down before bedtime. Stimulation in the evening works against relaxation and the other steps needed for sleep. So stopping activities like exercise and work several hours before bedtime will help prepare your body and mind for sleep. Instead, engage in relaxing activities like listening to pleasant music, reading (*not* on an electronic screen), or any hobby that takes your mind away from the day's toils and troubles.

Learn what to do when you can't sleep. When you find yourself tossing and turning—either before you fall asleep or if you awake in the night—it's best to get out of bed and do something to relax and reset.

Again, do some light reading, try a yoga posture, or engage in a relaxing hobby until you start to feel sleepy again. Do not check your phone or email or turn on the TV. As I mentioned earlier, the blue light emitted from these screens can interfere with your natural production of the sleep hormone melatonin and will only cause you to stay awake for longer (and mentally, you don't need the stimulation from personal or general news—that you can't do anything about until the morning anyway).

Of course, there's one more lifestyle change you can make—and it happens to be my favorite recommendation of all...

My ultimate sleep solution

There are a variety of botanical remedies you can take for relaxation and sleep. But I've found that the most powerful, pleasant, and safe botanical approaches involve plant essences that are *inhaled* and *absorbed* through the skin, rather than ingested.

The ancient practice—and modern science—of **aromatherapy** distills essential oils from plants (the same compounds that give the aromas to perfumes). Those oils can then be applied directly to your skin and inhaled.

A key reason why aromatherapy is so effective at inducing healthful, restful sleep is because the olfactory nerves of the upper nasal passage are wired *directly into* the brain.

And when these olfactory nerves are gently stimulated by the aromas of certain plant essential oils, they send signals to the brain that help you relax, which supports sleep—without the harmful side effects of sleeping pills.


Research shows that the aromas of the following organic plant oils are most effective for supporting sleep:

- Chamomile
- Lavender
- Limonene
- Orange
- Peppermint

I like to use a combination of *all* of these oils, blended with vitamin E in organic coconut and eucalyptus oil.

My daughter swears by it, too. In fact, she used this natural blend of essential oils to help achieve perfect sleep during her pregnancy, labor, and after the birth of our healthy granddaughter last October 2020. So I know personally that aromatherapy is effective and safe, just as the science shows.

The bottom line is that even if you find your sleep quality decreasing with age, that doesn't mean you're relegated to a future of tossing and turning—and making yourself more susceptible to chronic disease. Nor do you have to turn to sleeping pills with a whole host of dangerous side effects (or “specialty” pillows).

Instead, follow my simple steps for sound sleep. Eventually, you'll find that bedtime doesn't have to be a nightmare after all. 

Laughter really is the best medicine

Research links humor to lower stress, a healthier heart, improved memory, and more...

Laughter is an outward sign of a positive mental state.

It shows you're experiencing

pleasure, joy, satisfaction, and enthusiasm—all of which can help lower your risk of chronic diseases and increase longevity.

And after this past year, we could *all* use a good laugh. Not only for our mental health, but for our physical health, too.

Laugh often, lower your stress

Studies show wide-ranging health benefits of laughter—from improving weight loss to relieving depression. And a study by cardiologists with the University of Maryland Medical Center found that people with heart disease tend to laugh 40 percent less than people of the same age without heart disease.¹

Of course, that's not surprising when you consider how laughter reduces stress (the No. 1 hidden factor of heart disease). In fact, a new, well-designed study found that the more you laugh, the lower your stress levels.²

Researchers installed apps on the phones of 41 college psychology students. The apps prompted the students to answer questions about their stress levels eight times a day for 14 days. (Having to answer that many questions daily sounds stressful in itself...but, I digress.) The students were also asked how often they laughed during the course of a day.

The researchers discovered that the students who laughed near the time of stressful events had fewer stress symptoms. Interestingly, the researchers also found that the stress reduction wasn't dependent on how hard the students laughed, but rather how *often* they laughed.

Laugh your way to better memory

Meanwhile, an earlier study on men and women in their 60s and 70s found that having a good laugh not only lowered levels of their stress hormones, but even helped improve their memory.³

Researchers divided the 20 subjects into two groups. They asked one group to sit silently. Participants were not allowed to talk, read, or use

their cellphones for 20 minutes. The other group watched funny videos during the same time frame. Then, each group took a memory test.

Both groups performed better on the memory test than they did at the start of the study. But the "humor group" had 44 percent better memory recall, while the "silent group" only had 20 percent improvement.

Plus, the humor group showed considerably lower levels of cortisol, the "stress hormone"—while the non-humor group's cortisol levels decreased only slightly.

How laughter works in your body and brain

Of course, the concept of laughter as medicine is hardly new. Dr. Annette Goodheart invented laughter therapy in the 1960s. She was also the first to create a scientific framework for the therapeutic use of "voluntary stimulated laughter."

Dr. Goodheart taught that tones of voice, chanting, and laughter provide "inner music and harmony" that can help trigger the most basic healing responses in the body.

She also showed that different

sounds of laughter have different frequencies and vibrations that resonate directly with the heartbeat. It turns out, laughter can speed up the heartbeat in a state of excitement, or slow it down in a state of relaxation.

Dr. Hunter "Patch" Adams is another pioneer in the science of humor and healing.

I knew him way back when—before he became famous from the movie "Patch Adams," where his character was played by the late Robin Williams (who I also had met while we were both in college in California, and who tragically had his own "tears of a clown" story).

"Patching" things up

In 1995, years before the movie came out, I wanted to include a chapter on "Humor Therapy" by Dr. Adams in the first edition of my textbook, *Fundamentals of Complementary and Alternative Medicine* (now in its sixth edition), which was the first U.S. textbook on natural approaches to health and healing. (You can order yourself a copy from the "books" tab on my website, www.DrMicozzi.com).

How to bring more healthy laughter into your life

If the research on the health-boosting benefits of laughter sounds good to you, try these well-studied sounds of laughter at home:

- **HA.** This most frequent sound of laughter opens your mouth and stretches and expands your chest. The vowel "A" produces vibration in your kidneys, abdomen, and hips. It also stimulates your adrenal glands, giving waves of energy to your body.
- **HE.** This more subtle form of laughter produces vibration under your ribs, stimulating your liver, gallbladder and muscles. It also facilitates digestion.
- **HI.** This "frolicking" laughter sound produces vibrations in your neck and heart areas. It can also stimulate your thyroid gland.
- **HO.** This vibration literally goes to your head. It affects your pineal gland, pituitary glands, and brainstem. Some experts say it also helps with digestion—which was probably appreciated by the jolly old elf (Santa Claus) whose belly shook like a bowl full of jelly when he laughed, "Ho-ho-ho." And of course, there are the Seven Dwarfs, with their cheerful "HI HO, HI HO, it's off to work we go."
- **HU.** This "dark laughter," which occurs at the lowest frequency and vibration, is very powerful. It affects your large intestines and gets more air into your nostrils to help stimulate your sense of smell.

My publisher was Churchill Livingstone, a venerable old medical publishing house in London and Edinburgh. They also publish the classic *Gray's Anatomy* textbook (not the TV show).

My editors had expressed some reservations about including a chapter on humor in a medical textbook. They weren't quick to take any extra chances...not with the first textbook on the science of natural medicine. So, they left out Dr. Adams' original chapter in my first edition. And there it sat for years, yellowing on my top shelf.

Then, when it came time to issue a new, second edition of my textbook, the movie "Patch Adams" had come out to great popular acclaim. And Dr.

Adams' all-but-forgotten, generous contribution to the first edition of my book quickly became quite valuable.

In fact, it's almost laughable (literally) how abruptly my publishers changed their tune. Suddenly, they became very interested in publishing that old chapter by Patch Adams. So, they rushed it into print for the second edition. And it was a great, groundbreaking contribution.

Laugh and live out loud

I still stay in touch with Dr. Adams, and he still updates his chapter for new editions of my textbook. He remains quite busy traveling the world, bringing humor to medicine, literally.

Recently, as Patch and I updated his chapter for the latest, sixth edition of my textbook, I was reminded just how important the topic of humor in medicine is, and how it connects to most of the other chapters in my textbook.

So your personal take-away for this month comes straight from my textbook...

Make it a point to laugh out loud—today, and often. Also, work your way through the laughter sounds I list in the sidebar on page 5. The full range of frequencies and vibrations will benefit your entire body and mind.

Besides, it will be fun! 

Spring cleaning for your mind, body, soul—and medicine cabinet

The Spring Equinox occurs this month, on March 20. For both humans and Nature, it marks the beginning of the season of birth, change, and renewal.

Spring's extended daylight and warmth awaken physiologic processes in our bodies and minds, and we begin to feel more jubilant, energetic, and inspired. In addition to how we react subconsciously, these processes provide the perfect opportunity to think about new beginnings.

For many people, that means "spring cleaning." The practical aspect is to open up, air out, and clean the soot, dirt, and grime accumulated during the winter. But there's also a symbolic and psychological aspect to clearing things out and organizing your life.

Spring cleaning often contributes

to feeling healthier and more productive. In fact, studies show that being in a clean and organized setting can lower your stress levels. (Not to mention, living and working in disorganized spaces is associated with poorer diets and less physical activity.)

That's why this year, I suggest you "spring clean" not only your home, but also your health.

I'll start with my top four steps to cleanse your mind and body. And don't worry: I won't be recommending any fad diets or dangerous "detoxes"...just simple, scientific solutions you can *easily* incorporate into your daily life.

And in the era of pandemic shutdowns and telehealth (as I discussed in last month's issue), it's more important than ever to keep yourself as healthy as possible.

That's why I'm also including my spring cleaning guide for a well-stocked medicine cabinet.

So, without further ado, let's "spring" forward...

Your internal spring cleaning guide

In recent years, Spring has become associated with complicated dietary "cleanses." But some of these trendy recipes and regimens can actually be unhealthy...and the only thing they cleanse is your wallet.

That's why I recommend you ditch the detox potions. Instead, cleanse your body and brain with these four simple steps that *really* work.

1.) Balance your diet. There are two easy ways to instantly make your diet healthier: Eat more organic fresh fruits and vegetables from the rainbow spectrum of colors. And

cut sugars, and processed foods and ingredients.

Of course, there are other steps you can take to improve your diet—which I discuss regularly. But for your “spring cleaning,” start with these two. You’ll feel better physically *and* mentally before the dawn of the Summer Solstice.

2.) Make a splash. Water is the staff of life, but the *quality* of the water you drink is paramount. As chemicals increasingly flow into our rivers, lakes, and reservoirs, it’s more important than ever to purify your drinking water.

That’s why I recommend only drinking filtered water (there are good-quality commercial filters you can attach to your faucet or pitcher nowadays). Another option is to opt for natural spring waters, bottled at the source in glass (which is recyclable).

Also, because chemicals and pollutants in the water supply can easily be absorbed through the skin, it’s important to bathe in clean, pure water. To remove chlorine from bathwater, simply toss a teaspoon of powdered vitamin C into the tub and wait five minutes before starting your soak.

You can also add half a cup of Epsom salts to your bath. The magnesium in Epsom salts naturally helps your body flush out toxins, reduce inflammation, boost circulation, and improve muscle and nerve function. In addition, I also suggest installing water filters on your showerheads.

3.) Be in Nature. To boost your health in a myriad of ways, get outside and take a walk in Nature—or play with your children or grandchildren in the Spring sunshine.

For most people in the northern hemisphere, March is the first month

of the year in which the sun’s rays start penetrating the atmosphere at levels that allow your body to naturally make vitamin D. Just 15 minutes of daily exposure to sunlight on your bare skin (without toxic sunscreen) will help your skin produce optimum levels of D.

Plus, your ramble in Nature will contribute to your sensible goal of moderate exercise totaling 140 to 150 minutes *per week*. And enjoying the Spring light and air naturally lowers stress—the No. 1 hidden factor behind chronic disease.

4.) Take a mental break. Spring is all about activity, but don’t forget to slow down every once in a while. One of the best ways to do this is to devote a few minutes each day to reflection and meditation.

(Note that I said “a few.” You don’t need to enter a monastery to get the mental, emotional, and physical benefits of meditation.)

My book with Don McCown, *New World Mindfulness*, shows you exactly how to incorporate daily meditation into your busy life—right here, right now. (Order yourself a copy from the “books” tab on my website, www.DrMicozzi.com.)

Not only can you boost your mood and lower your stress levels, but research shows that meditation can also improve your sleep (as I discuss on page 4), help control pain, and lower your blood pressure.

“Spring cleaning” for your medicine cabinet

Of course, another place that needs some “spring cleaning” is your medicine cabinet. In fact, Spring is a good opportunity to rethink your entire approach to at-home healthcare.

Keeping a well-stocked medicine cabinet can help you treat many

common ailments—and keep you away from doctor’s offices and hospitals during the pandemic. It also gives you the chance to reassess your use of prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs.

I often warn about the dangers of prescription drugs, but the OTC drugs you keep in your home can also have serious side effects. In fact, adverse events from these medications are a leading cause of emergency room visits and hospital admissions.

Plus, any foreign chemicals (like those found in drugs) tax the liver and kidneys, because the body must metabolize and excrete them. So do your body a favor by ridding your home of them *before* they get into you and, ultimately, burden your health.

Fortunately, there are many safe, natural alternatives to effectively manage common ailments for the whole family. I recommend adding the following natural remedies to your medicine cabinet...

Colds and flus. OTC drugs only manage symptoms like congestion and runny nose. They also have side effects like anxiety, drowsiness, high blood pressure, insomnia, racing heart, and upset stomach. And they do nothing to actually help support your immune system to eliminate the virus.

To more effectively fight colds and flus, I recommend stocking your medicine cabinet with immune-supporting herbs like astragalus, elderberry, and echinacea, along with zinc lozenges.

I also like to include eucalyptus oil, which can be used in a vaporizer to help reduce congestion and improve breathing (and sleep, as I discuss on page 4).

Cuts and scrapes. You can skip the

topical “antibacterials” and chemical antiseptics. These OTC ointments wipe out your immune response and delay and interfere with healing. They also disrupt the natural, probiotic microbiome of your skin.

Instead, stock your medicine cabinet with tea tree oil. It's an effective, natural antiseptic with antimicrobial properties. Simply apply a few drops to a wound before bandaging.

Digestion problems. There are many OTC drugs for bloating, constipation, diarrhea, and gas. But I've written before about studies showing that these drugs can cause nutrient deficiencies, along with other serious side effects.

The good news is, there are plenty of natural and effective digestive aids. Licorice supplements have been shown in numerous studies to help improve heartburn. Peppermint oil or slippery elm capsules can lessen gas, bloating, and abdominal pain. Chamomile can soothe upset stomachs and reduce nausea. And ginger can do everything from reducing constipation to alleviating indigestion.

There are two digestion supplements, however, that I *don't* recommend adding to your medicine cabinet: probiotics and fiber.

As I often report, probiotic supplements don't work and are potentially dangerous. Instead, support your microbiome with foods that encourage your natural probiotics, like organic, full-fat cheese and yogurt, and fermented vegetables like sauerkraut.

Plus, while natural fibers are important to good health, fiber supplements can actually *cause* digestion problems. That's why it's best to let nature take its course by including plenty of fresh, organic

fruits and vegetables, and some whole grains (in moderation), as part of a healthy, balanced diet.

Dry skin and eczema. Changes in weather can be tough on the skin. So, your medicine cabinet should include natural skin moisturizers like organic aloe, lavender-based lotions, and topical vitamin E in oil.

Skin problems can also be helped with a poultice of ground colloidal oatmeal (not breakfast oatmeal). You can make your own by grinding whole oats in a coffee grinder, and mixing it with warm (not hot) water until it forms a thick, paste-like consistency. Then, you simply apply it to the affected area.

Pain, aches, and sprains. For centuries, medical traditions around the world have relied on natural pain relievers. And it's only been in recent years that the drug industry got into the act—leaving death and destruction in its wake.

The dangers of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and the disaster of acetaminophen (Tylenol®) are, sadly, well-known. And now, opioid addiction is an epidemic.

But you can avoid this public health disaster by stocking your medicine cabinet with well-documented, botanical pain remedies such as my ABCs for joint pain—ashwaganda (winter cherry), boswellia (frankincense), and curcumin (turmeric).

For topical relief for aching joints or muscle sprains and swellings, use arnica (botanical or homeopathic preparations), calendula, or capsaicin ointments and creams.

For headaches, try butterbur root, feverfew, ginger, or magnesium. You can also apply lavender or

peppermint essential oil to your temples or forehead.


Sleep and insomnia. Many OTC sleep aids contain antihistamines, which can make you drowsy well into the next day. They can also cause dry eyes and mouth, blurred vision, dizziness, nausea, and serious cardiovascular issues like low blood pressure and rapid heart rate.

Instead, I recommend stocking your medicine cabinet with plant-based essential oils that have been shown in studies to safely and effectively promote healthy sleep: chamomile, lavender, limonene, orange, and peppermint.

You can apply these essential oils directly to your skin, which has been shown in studies to induce calm, relaxation, stress reduction...and sleep. Or try breathing them through an aromatherapy oil diffuser. (For more about sleep solutions, see page 1).

Of course, just as seasons change, so do patterns in our lives. The Spring Equinox not only allows us to cleanse our homes and our health, but also gives us a chance to revisit our goals and obstacles.

It teaches us that our lives are not a line or a circle. They're more like a spiral—taking in a little more, and slowly going on, with each passing rotation through the years.

So...embrace the Spring Equinox this year, and its opportunity for birth and rebirth. After all, life doesn't always afford us the opportunity for a fresh start—so I encourage you to make the most of it. And be sure to check out next month's newsletter as well—as I'll be issuing yet another important spring cleaning guide as we welcome warm weather. 

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