

DIYsastrous

From coins on bad eyes to WD-40 for arthritis (yes, really!), a TV series starring our own Dr Ellie examines the bizarre home remedies that can ruin your health...and some that actually work!

PERSONALLY, I blame 'Doctor Google'. As empowering as the internet has been in helping us take charge of our health – from online pharmacy services to sites such as WebMD where we can research any illnesses we may have and their potential treatments – it has also led to something more worrying. More than ever, people are trying to diagnose and treat themselves rather than consulting a doctor. While I was aware of it from my own practice, the true extent is quite astounding.

For it's one thing treating your cold with hot drinks and honey, but the DIY 'cures' some people try are far beyond anything I had imagined. I have seen countless patients who tried home remedies before finally making it to my surgery and I'm used to garlic for sore throats and bananas for diarrhoea. So when the opportunity came up to be involved with new Channel 4 series Health Freaks, which will put some of people's home cures to the test, I wasn't expecting to be surprised. How wrong I was.

TESTING THE TREATMENTS

THE series, which starts on October 21, will give those who truly believe in their DIY cures, no matter how strange or unbelievable they are, the chance to put them to a panel of medical professionals and find out what we doctors think.

Across the series, the panel of doctors, including myself, Dr Pixie McKenna and Dr Ayan Panja, are pitched to by more than 40 people, who all genuinely believe in their home remedy. From oat baths for psoriasis and duct tape for verrucas to gargling with coconut oil for gingivitis and – bizarrely – breast milk for skin infections, we have heard a number of compelling cases for cures that could really work and should be explored further.

Some we even put to the test in a small trial, too. But surprisingly, we also heard from people who've been using treatments that are downright dangerous.

JUST GIVE IT A SQUIRT OF WD-40

TWO of the first people to pitch were builders Andy and Simon. They told us how they use WD-40, the industrial lubricant spray used to repel water and prevent corrosion, as a cure for arthritis and chest pain.

They have been spraying this product on their skin. Apparently it is a common builders' remedy, and many across the country use it, genuinely believing it will treat their ailments.

As a doctor who's never used WD-40 anywhere other than my bike, I couldn't quite believe it. But our contributors really believed in their remedy, so we had to warn them to stop and try something more appropriate for their condition AND designed for human use.

WHY HOME REMEDIES WORK

HOWEVER, as we questioned Andy and Simon on how they believed it



By Dr Ellie Cannon

worked, it became clear why they could be seeing some improvement in their ailments; with something like this there is almost certainly a placebo effect, particularly in the case of Simon's tight chest. He genuinely felt an instant improvement, as if he'd used an inhaler.

The belief that something is doing you good can be powerful and in some cases is not to be dismissed.

However, rubbing a product like WD-40 directly into the skin is definitely not a good idea, as it has not been tested on humans. And of course when I listened to Simon's chest before and after he'd applied the WD-40 there was no clinical improvement.

In the case of the arthritis, it's more likely that the improvement was due to the physical act of massaging, which we know reduces pain, rather than any chemical effect from the WD-40 spray.

MORE HARM THAN GOOD?

SAFER massaging with ibuprofen gels, for example, would do just as good, if not a better, job – and at least we know they are harmless.

We advised Andy and Simon to stop using this potentially dangerous cure; it could be a skin irritant and we have no idea of the potential long-term harmful effects. But I'm pretty sure they believe in it so much that they ignored us, and the science.

Yet even people using remedies handed down through generations could be doing more harm than good: one person we met was placing copper coins on her eye to treat a stye. While styes may not even need treatment, using money covered in bacteria could spread and worsen what starts out as a minor infection.

STICKING WITH THE DUCT TAPE

ONE of the first cases we put to a trial was that of Carl, who came to us with a cure for verrucas. Something simple, cheap and in his opinion effective: duct tape. Carl simply covered his painful and long-standing verrucas with a piece of duct tape for seven days, then repeated this process for about a month and his once-stubborn verrucas disappeared. This was pretty compelling because he had already tried the plethora of conventional treatments that doctors like me offer for verrucas.

I was sceptical but fascinated to see if it worked, as many patients suffer with recurring verrucas and warts. Collectively as medical practitioners, we thought there could be something in this because of the oxygen starvation, so we conducted a small trial.

NOT AS DAFT AS IT SOUNDS HALF of our volunteers used duct tape



REX FEATURES / ALAMY

Order up a curry cure

IT SOUNDS like another home remedy, but a Madras curry really is a great way to tackle a sore throat, says research.

Marshmallow, liquorice root, and a hot blackcurrant drink served at 70C are also rivals to the most widely used over-the-counter remedies.

The Common Cold Centre at the University of Cardiff tested therapies.

The centre's head, Professor Ron Eccles, said: 'I recommend a hot spicy curry – it ensures you salivate and reduces your coughing and sore throat symptoms. Many spices have antiviral effects, which could also be beneficial, it's also my personal favourite treatment for colds and flu. We have also found that a hot fruit cordial drink had immediate effects on sore throats and other symptoms of colds and flu.'

'The big advantage of this kind of treatment is that it is cheap as well as being safe and effective.'

Almost every GP sees 120 patients a year with an acute throat infection.

But for each person seen, another 18 do not seek help from a medic.



Legal Notices

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE

Claim No 4829/2013 of 2013
(CHANCERY DIVISION)
COMPANIES COURT

IN THE MATTER OF GROUPAMA
INSURANCE COMPANY LIMITED

and

IN THE MATTER OF
THE NATIONAL MOTOR AND
ACCIDENT INSURANCE UNION LIMITED

and

IN THE MATTER OF
AGEAS INSURANCE LIMITED

and

IN THE MATTER OF THE FINANCIAL
SERVICES AND MARKETS ACT 2000

Notice is hereby given that an application (the **Application**) for an order sanctioning an insurance business transfer scheme (the **Scheme**) under Part VII of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (the **Act**) was made to the High Court (the **Court**) by Groupama Insurance Company Limited (**Groupama**), The National Motor and Accident Insurance Union Limited (**National Motor**) and Ageas Insurance Limited (**Ageas**) on 10 July 2013. The Scheme provides for the intra-group transfer by each of Groupama and National Motor to Ageas of the entirety of its general insurance business (the **Business**).

The proposed transfer will, once effective, result in the Business which is currently carried on by Groupama and National Motor being carried on by Ageas. If the Scheme is sanctioned by the Court, it will result in the transfer to Ageas of all the contracts, property, assets and liabilities of Groupama and National Motor; irrespective of whether a person would otherwise be entitled to terminate, modify, acquire or claim an interest or right or to treat an interest or right as terminated or modified in respect thereof. Any such right will only be enforceable to the extent the order of the Court makes provision to that effect. All claims in respect of the policies comprised within the Business shall, upon the transfer becoming effective, be dealt with by Ageas.

A scheme report (the **Scheme Report**) has been prepared by an independent expert in accordance with the provisions of the Act. A copy of the Scheme Report, a summary of the Scheme Report and a statement setting out the terms of the Scheme can be obtained free of charge from the website of Groupama at www.groupama.co.uk and Ageas at www.ageas.co.uk. Copies can also be obtained free of charge from the Groupama Company Secretary at Groupama Insurance Company Limited at 6th Floor, One America Square, 17 Crosswall, London, EC3N 2LB, by email to: transfer@groupama.co.uk or by phone on 0800 408 1788.

The Application is directed to be heard before a Judge of the Chancery Division at the Rolls Building, Fetter Lane, London EC4A 1NL on 22 October 2013. Any person who believes that he or she would be adversely affected by the carrying out of the Scheme has the right to be heard (in person or by legal representative) by the High Court at the hearing of the Application. Any person who intends to exercise this right, and any person who objects to the Scheme but does not intend to appear at the hearing, is requested to notify the Groupama Company Secretary at Groupama Insurance Company Limited at 6th Floor, One America Square, 17 Crosswall, London EC3N 2LB, by email at transfer@groupama.co.uk or by phone on 0800 408 1788 setting out the reasons why he or she may be adversely affected.

on their verrucas and half used normal surgical tape, and they all kept video diaries for the month over which the trial took place. Some experiences were good and some not so much.

However, when Carl came back for the results we were able to reveal that every participant who had used duct tape had seen a reduction in the size of their verrucas of at least 1mm, which is impressive. It certainly merits further investigation.

We found promising results with other home-made remedies, too – for example when one psoriasis sufferer showed that her skin had almost completely healed simply by bathing with oats. Oats are used already in certain skin creams, so this could also warrant further trials to assess their use for serious skin conditions.

The series has raised some interesting questions. Some contributors we met identified potential options for further investigation. But not every suggestion was feasible: frankly some were hazardous and bizarre, so I would always recommend people seek medical advice rather than trying to heal themselves with unproven treatments.

● Health Freaks starts on Channel 4 on Monday, October 21, at 8.30pm.

