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Shelf Help

It was Joey Green, all right. I hadn't seen him in the 20-some years since we graduated from college (at least I think he graduated, sometime between launching *The Lunatic*, a campus humor magazine, and organizing spoof rallies in support of higher tuition), but there he was, sticking tampons in Meredith Vieira's ears on the daytime TV talk show "The View."

He was plugging his newest book, "Joey Green's Amazing Kitchen Cures" (Rodale Press, 2002), by demonstrating how common household products can save you a trip to the drugstore in the middle of the night. (Spouse snoring again? Who needs expensive earplugs when you've got tampons in the house?)

I got to wondering if some of the book's "1,150 Ways to Prevent and Cure Common Ailments With Brand-Name Products" just might be useful in treating the aches and pains that besiege us in middle age. So I asked him.

Time out for true confessions: I didn't go to med school. Did you?

Not that I recall. But all my suggestions are tried-and-true and based on common sense. You don't have to trust me, and you don't have to buy anything. You have all these products in your home, so test them. A little oatmeal on your hands isn't going to hurt you.

Which is what you recommend for arthritis pain?

Smear Quaker Oats, French's Mustard or Tabasco Pepper Sauce on the area. The warmth of the oatmeal (two cups oats, one cup water, cooked in the microwave and allowed to cool to the touch) soothes arthritis pain.

Mustard provides natural warmth to the joints. Hot sauce contains the alkaloid capsaicin, the active ingredient in remedies like Sloan's Liniment and Watkins (Red) Liniment. Is it messy? Sure. But it's inexpensive, in your kitchen right now, and it sure beats arthritis pain.

On to back pain. You recommend a bath filled with hot water and the contents of a large jar of mustard. Sounds disgusting.

I've done it, although personally I prefer filling a sock with rice, tying a knot in the end, heating it in the microwave for two minutes, and then placing it on my back.



MIDLIFE

Stefanie Weiss

The sock conforms to the shape of my back, and the moist warmth from the rice soothes the pain.

If, as you suggest, lemon juice eliminates liver spots, why are so many people getting chemical peels?

Because dermatologists and plastic surgeons don't make money selling lemon juice. Most people don't know this amazing little kitchen cure or, if they do, they dismiss it as some cockamamie old wives' tale that Grandma made up. Well, Grandma was right. Lemon juice bleaches sun spots and freckles over time—safely and inexpensively.

You recommend peanut butter as a moisturizer for dry hands. Why not just stick with hand cream?

You can't exfoliate dry skin with ordinary hand cream. But rub your dry, chapped hands, elbows and knees with Jif Extra Crunchy Peanut Butter, let sit for two minutes, then wipe clean with a paper towel, and—presto!—the peanuts exfoliate the dead skin while the oils in the peanut butter moisturize the skin. It's inexpensive, smells good, and you can make a sandwich at the same time.

I'll buy that. But why put hemorrhoid cream on your face?

Preparation H reduces fine wrinkles around the eyes by acting as a vasoconstrictor. But if the thought of it frightens you, use Crisco All-Vegetable Shortening as a moisturizer on your face before going to bed. A lot of women swear by it. Of course, I'd swear, too, if I had Crisco on my face, but that's another story.

What's your recommendation for the hot flashes that accompany menopause?

Huggies Baby Wipes. Carry a handful of unscented Huggies Baby Wipes in a gallon-size Ziploc bag. This way, you're always prepared to wipe your forehead to ease the intensity of a hot flash when it strikes.

And to prevent snoring?

The best way to prevent snoring is with a tennis ball. Sew a pocket with a Velcro flap to the back of a pajama top, drop the tennis ball in the pocket, seal it shut, and have your loved one wear the garment to bed. The tennis ball inhibits the person from rolling over on his back, and, since most people snore only on their back, you'll get a good night's sleep without having to continually elbow the person next to you.

Are people in midlife more or less ingenious in devising "amazing kitchen cures" than those younger or older?

Well, necessity is the mother of invention, and since older people tend to have more physical problems and tend to have greater respect for things Grandma told them, I'd say they win the prize. Then again, whenever I visit my parents, who live in a retirement community, their friends and neighbors are constantly asking me for tips. Go figure.