



ASK THE EXPERTS

Don't suffer in silence – our wellbeing wonder-team of experts is on hand to answer your health questions

I went grey at an early age and have been colouring my hair for a number of years. How can I keep it in good condition?

Karine Jackson, a hair expert (karinejackson.co.uk), says:

There's nothing wrong with dyeing your locks as long as you use a good colour and care products. Look for a gentle dye that doesn't contain ammonia and opt for a translucent finish rather than a heavy block colour which isn't as flattering. You need permanent colour to cover grey, but choose one that contains the lowest level of PPD (the ingredient that is most often responsible for reactions) possible.

The contents of your hair care products are essential to check too – some brands use salt for viscosity but this is drying and fades colour. Letting your mane dry naturally and working with its texture when styling avoids heat damage (if your hair is naturally wavy, for example, you can encourage this by twisting it round your fingers as it dries), and it's wise to swap your conditioner for a treatment every couple of weeks. I would also recommend using a silk pillow case as this will protect the hair shaft while you sleep, plus your locks will be in better condition in the morning and consequently need less styling.

What are the best essential oils to use during the winter?

Christine Fisk, consultant aromatherapist (baseformula.com), says:

Lots of essential oils are great for this time of year, with popular choices including lavender, tea tree, eucalyptus, lemon, peppermint and myrtle. My favourite blend, however, uses four drops of black pepper essential oil, eight of ravenara and two of sandalwood. Black pepper has antitarrhal, antibacterial, antiseptic and expectorant properties and is ideal for respiratory problems such as colds, coughs, bronchitis and laryngitis. Ravensara also has antiseptic, antimicrobial, antiviral, expectorant and immunomodulant qualities and is an excellent choice for flu, chronic fatigue and protecting against colds and viral infections. Sandalwood is a decongestant and is also useful for respiratory problems.

This powerful blend can be used in a number of ways. Put a few drops into a diffuser or up to five on a tissue and inhale throughout the day. For sore throats, mix five drops with 10ml of fragrance-free lotion and massage onto your throat. This can also be used as a back and chest rub for bronchial issues. You can use 10 drops for steam inhalation or five drops mixed in 10ml of arnica oil to massage aching joints and muscles.

If you don't want to mix oils yourself, you could try Base Formula's Bug Buster and Breathe Easy essential oil blends which are great for winter wellbeing.

What can I do to boost my immunity during the festive period?

Maya Daghighi, herbalist, naturopath and lecturer at the College of Naturopathic Medicine (naturopathy-uk.com), says:

Herbs and spices have antiviral properties that can boost your immune system and help you to stay healthy. Echinacea is a key one and you can spice up your warm drinks and meals with cinnamon, ginger, cardamom, cumin, nutmeg, black pepper and cayenne. All of these will heat your body from its core and support your circulation and digestion, and you can also try adding manuka honey to herbal teas. Use apple cider vinegar mixed with garlic and rosemary on salads, and make it extra tasty with tahini and pumpkin seed oil.

Burning essential oils such as lavender, sage and frankincense can help to prevent the spread of infections in your home. Aim for six to eight hours of sleep a night, take brisk walks outside and remember that sugar, caffeine and alcohol can suppress the immune system. You should also aim to eat seasonal foods for their specific phytonutrients and colourful fruit and veg for their health-promoting antioxidant content.