

Hot water short-circuits itchy bites

QUESTION: I am a mosquito magnet. The only thing that eases the itch is to put my poor bitten legs under hot running water. Tap water is hot enough.

After I have been out feeding the mosquitoes, I just come in and take a hot shower or an appendage bath and don't have to suffer more.

ANSWER: We first discovered this home remedy for itchy bug bites and mild poison ivy in a dermatology textbook from 1961 ("Dermatology: Diagnosis and Treatment"). The hot water (hot enough to be uncomfortable but not hot enough to burn) needs to be applied for just a few seconds to short-circuit the nerves that cause itching. The effects can last for a few hours.

Red yeast rice lowers cholesterol

Q: What can you tell me about red yeast rice? Is it really good for lowering cholesterol levels, and are there any side effects?

A: Red yeast rice can help in lowering cholesterol. In one study, researchers recruited people who had high cholesterol but had discontinued statin-type drugs because of muscle pain or weakness. They were randomized to red yeast rice or



People's Herbal Pharmacy
Joe and Teresa Graedon

a placebo. Those taking red yeast rice lowered bad LDL and total cholesterol significantly and did not suffer serious side effects (*Annals of Internal Medicine*, June 16, 2009).

There are natural statins in red yeast rice, so it is not surprising some readers have reported muscle problems while taking this supplement. Anyone who takes red yeast rice should be under medical supervision.

Cinnamon drops blood sugar level

Q: I am a nurse, and one of my patients has a success story that may interest you. His pre-surgical tests showed an HbA1c above 8, indicating his blood sugar had been above normal for months. He decided to start taking a cinnamon supplement.

When I saw him two months later, his HbA1c was 6. Wow. He's also been taking a teaspoon of yellow mustard, which contains vinegar and turmeric, after every meal. It muddies the

research, but it has been good for him.

A: Thanks so much for sharing this story. HbA1c is a blood test that reveals long-term blood-sugar control. Keeping the level below 7 is considered desirable.

Not everyone benefits from cinnamon, but we have heard from readers that a supplement can be helpful. There is even some research to support this approach (*Journal of Diabetes Science and Technology*, May 2010). Vinegar and turmeric can help reduce the rise in blood sugar after eating, so we're not surprised mustard might be beneficial, too.

Sliced garlic killed pinworms

Q: I read your article on pinworms. As a child I had several episodes with this parasite. Because I vomited up the meds that were prescribed, my mother called the doctor, and he said to put sliced garlic on buttered bread and have me eat the garlic sandwich.

That was the end of pinworms. Never had another attack, and I still love garlic to this day.

A: Garlic is an old-fashioned remedy for pinworms. We could find no scientific validation for this approach, but others have shared simi-

lar stories of success. The medicines (albendazole, mebendazole or pyrantel pamoate) also work quite well.

Don't overdose on vitamin D

Q: I started taking 10,000 IU of vitamin D a day. Six months later, I suddenly developed severe constipation. Was the constipation caused by the large dose of vitamin D?

A: Vitamin D is a superstar among vitamins these days. It has become clear that low vitamin D levels are common and the consequences can be serious. Too little vitamin D has been linked to a higher risk for conditions such as arthritis, cancer, osteoporosis, diabetes and even heart disease and stroke (*American Journal of Epidemiology*, Oct. 15, 2009).

It's no wonder many people have decided to take more vitamin D. Many experts agree the RDA of 400 IU daily is too low. But excess vitamin D, a fat-soluble vitamin, can be toxic. Constipation is one possible symptom of too much vitamin D. Other side effects may include digestive upset and weakness. ■

E-mail questions@peoplespharmacy.com.

HEALTH NEWSMAKERS

Director attends neuro-radiology course. Alan Marumoto, medical director at University Center Imaging, recently attended a Continuing Medical Education course on technology to



Marumoto

identify and treat brain tumors as well as diagnose other neurologic diseases. The course was sponsored by the American Society of Neuroradiology.

Advancements in neuro-radiology sub-specialties were addressed by representatives of the American Society of Head and Neck Radiology, the American Society of Spine Radiology, the American Society of Functional Neuroradiology and the American Society of Pediatric Neuroradiology.

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tion in breast ultrasound and CT scans from the American College of Radiology.

The ACR awards accreditation for the achievement of high practice standards after a peer-review evaluation of a facility's practices. Image quality and procedure evaluations are conducted by certified radiologists and medical physicists who are experts in the field.

Volunteer clinic changes its name. The clinic formerly known as Indian River Volunteers in Medicine is now called Space Coast Volunteers in Medicine.

The clinic is designed to provide free medical and dental care to the working poor and uninsured of Brevard County.

Though other clinics serve the indigent population such as Federally Qualified Health Centers, the Volunteers in Medicine Clinics differ in that they are designed to serve the working population who earn too much for government assistance but not enough to have health care.

For information, e-mail info@spacecoastvolunteersinmedicine.org. ■

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Peanut ban on planes not nutty to sufferers

BYRUSS BYNUM ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAVANNAH, Ga. — Federal regulators are considering a snack attack on the nation's airlines that would restrict or even ban serving peanuts on commercial flights.

Advocates say the move would ease fears and potential harm to about 1.8 million Americans who suffer from peanut allergies. Peanut farmers and food packagers, however, see it as overreaching and unfair to their legume.

"The peanut is such a great snack and such an American snack," says Martin Kanan, CEO of King Nut Companies, an Ohio company that packages peanuts served by most U.S. airlines. "What's next? Is it banning peanuts in ballparks?"

Twelve years after Congress ordered it to back off peanuts, the U.S. Transportation Department gave notice last month that it's gathering feedback from allergy sufferers, medical experts, the food industry and the public on whether to ban or restrict in-flight peanuts.

The peanut proposals were listed in an 84-page document including several other proposed consumer

In a nutshell

Several airlines such as Continental, United, US Airways and JetBlue have voluntarily stopped serving packaged peanuts as mile-high grub. Delta and Southwest still hand out goobers as in-flight snacks. American Airlines doesn't serve packaged peanuts, but it offers trail mix and other snacks that can contain peanut ingredients.



minor ones — such as itching, sneezing and coughing.

A few limited studies on airline passengers with peanut allergies found a number of people reporting symptoms while flying, but few were severe or life-threatening, said Dr. Scott Sicherer, who studies food allergies at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York.

"But there's discomfort," he said. "It's sort of like if you were allergic to dogs and all of a sudden they brought 50 dogs onto the plane."

Why worry about peanuts on airplanes, as opposed to other public spaces?

Advocates with the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network say the answer's simple: Planes are confined spaces where the air and dust particles get re-circulated. And there's no way to stop and get off during a severe reaction during flight.

"It's a different environment when you're basically 30,000 feet in the air," said Chris Weiss, the group's vice president of advocacy and government relations. "If you're sitting around a bunch of people and all of a sudden they're all handed packages of peanuts, that could release enough peanut dust into the air to trigger a reaction." ■

More online

U.S. Department of Transportation rule proposal: dot.gov/affairs/2010/dot11010.html
Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network: foodallergy.org
Georgia Peanut Commission: gapeanuts.com

protections for air travelers. Three options were given: banning serving of peanuts on all planes; prohibiting peanuts only when an allergic passenger requests it in advance; or requiring an undefined "peanut-free zone"

flight when a passenger asks for one.

While those options only pertain to peanuts served by flight crews, the document also states "we are particularly interested in hearing views on how peanuts and peanut products brought on board aircraft by passengers should be handled."

Spokesman Bill Mosely said the department is responding to concerns from travelers who suffer from peanut allergies or have allergic children, "some of whom do not fly" because they're afraid of exposure.

Peanut allergy can cause life-threatening reactions in people ingesting even trace amounts. Just breathing peanut dust in the air can cause problems — though usually



Marissa Rocourt, MD
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If you have symptoms of heat exhaustion

Heat exhaustion may affect people who spend hours in the sun or very hot weather without drinking enough fluids. Symptoms of heat exhaustion may include heavy sweating, pale skin, muscle cramps, fatigue and weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea or fainting.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

suggests how to cool down when you have symptoms of heat exhaustion:

- Drink plenty cool, nonalcoholic beverages.
- Get enough rest.
- In cool water, take a sponge bath or shower.
- Stay inside in an air-conditioned building.
- Wear lightweight clothing.

— Gannett

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