

A Cure for Cramps

Chinese herbs may be your best bet for a less painful period, according to recent research from Australia's University of Western Sydney. Looking at 39 clinical studies, researchers discovered that herbal medicine might better ease menstrual cramps than the usual over-the-counter pain relievers.

In most of the studies, women were given formulas with multiple herbs, typically introduced 5 to 7 days before the start of their period and taken for 10 to 15 days. Among the most frequently tested remedies was *yan hu suo*, which Santa Monica, California-based herbalist Mindy Boxer, Ph.D., calls Traditional Chinese Medicine's "most prominent pain-relieving herb." Boxer suggests taking formulas that blend it with herbs like circulation-stimulating *pu huang* and *dang gui*, muscle-relaxing *chi shao*, and anti-bloating *wu yao*. If cramps pose a problem for you, talk to a TCM practitioner to start trying it for yourself.



Beat the Belly Blues

Aggravated by stress, irritable bowel syndrome may affect 20 percent of Americans, creating symptoms like abdominal pain, constipation, and diarrhea. North Carolina-based naturopathic doctor Michael Smith suggests the following natural remedies.

REMEDY	WHY IT WORKS	HOW TO TAKE IT
Enteric-coated peppermint oil	With its gentle muscle-relaxing action, peppermint oil can relieve the intestinal cramps and gas associated with IBS.	Take one or two enteric-coated capsules three times daily, between meals.
Slippery elm	Derived from the bark of red elm trees, this herbal remedy coats and calms irritated digestive-tract tissues.	Twice a day, drink a cup of water mixed with a teaspoon of slippery elm powder and a dash of cinnamon (or a dollop of maple syrup).
Glutamine	This amino acid helps stimulate intestinal function, lessen inflammation, and nourish the lining of the gut.	Take 3,000 mg in supplement form daily.
Probiotics	By populating your GI tract with plenty of beneficial bacteria, probiotic supplements help stabilize your digestion.	Look for supplements offering 5 to 6 billion <i>Acidophilus</i> and <i>Bifidus</i> bacteria per capsule in your natural-foods store's refrigerated cases. Take two to three times daily with food.

PUTTING THE PAP TO THE TEST

For detecting cervical cancer, the human papillomavirus (HPV) test may be more accurate than the traditional Pap test. For a report published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, researchers discovered that the HPV test's ability to spot precancerous lesions without generating false negatives was 94.6 percent—compared with 55.4 percent for the Pap test.

Most U.S. doctors now use a liquid Pap test, initially shown to be more accurate than the traditional Pap. But more recent research suggests the two Paps have about the same results, says ob-gyn Alan Waxman, M.D. After more research, the HPV test—administered in the same manner as a Pap—could become more commonplace in the near future. "If you get both tests and both come back negative, you won't need to repeat testing for another three years," says Waxman. "But you still need to see your doctor yearly for exams."