

FIGHT FLU WITH ONIONS?



Sensational health tips have gone viral on social media, but how accurate are they? Shape sets the record straight.

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#3 NATURE'S MOZZIE BUSTER

THE CLAIM Slice a lime in half and stick cloves into the flesh to repel mosquitoes. **WHAT EXPERTS SAY** Don't raid your spice rack just yet. Although cloves are known for their antibacterial properties and are popularly used in dental care products, there is no clinical data to prove that they work as a mozzie repellent, says Ketki Vinayachandra, naturopath at Alternative Natural Medicine.

Similarly, other natural options, such as limes or oils containing citronella, lemon, eucalyptus or peppermint, have also not been proven to be effective in-

sect-busters. Your best bet: Stock up on sprays and roll-ons that contain Deet, a chemical commonly used in mosquito repellent. It keeps pesky blood suckers at bay for up to three hours after application, according to a 2013 study published in Plos One by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Health in the UK.

#4 DRINK AWAY DENGUE

THE CLAIM Papaya leaf juice is a miracle cure for dengue fever because it can dramatically increase the platelet count in people suffering from the condition. **WHAT EXPERTS SAY** The virus responsible for dengue fever and dengue haemorrhagic fever (DHF) can destroy the body's ability to produce platelets

(cells responsible for blood clotting). This can cause the patient's platelet count to plunge to dangerously low levels, which can be fatal.


This is why it's crucial to keep the patient's platelet count up, says Dr Leong Hoe Nam, consultant infectious disease physician at Rophi Clinic. In cases of DHF, capillaries or tiny blood vessels also become excessively "leaky" and can cause fluid to accumulate in the abdominal cavity, leading to failure of the circulatory system, shock and even death, reports the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The question is, could a simple beverage prevent all of these? According to a 2011 Malaysian study, patients with dengue fever and DHF who drank the juice made from papaya leaves had a significant increase in their platelet counts within 48 hours of consumption. This suggests that the juice could potentially be used as a treatment for the deadly disease, although more research needs to be done before a conclusion can be drawn, say the study's authors.

On the other hand, plain water apparently works just as well. Dr Leong says, "Drinking liquids of any kind – whether it's fruit juice, water or soup – to replenish fluid loss will help in the recovery from dengue fever." Now, that's a tip we'll drink to!

#5 BURNING SIGHT

THE CLAIM Do not wear contact lenses when you're cooking or barbecuing food. The open flame can melt the lenses – and blind you permanently. **WHAT EXPERTS SAY** "The only way for lenses to melt is if you actually stuck your face right into the fire and kept your eyes wide open," says Dr Lee Sao Bing, medical director at Shinagawa Lasik & Eye Centre. Of health issues related to wearing contact lenses, the bigger concern is infection of the cornea (outermost layer of the eye), which may occur when bacteria or fungi from a contaminated contact lens enter the cornea. This can cause painful inflammation and an infection called keratitis, which can

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lead to corneal scarring. Eventually, vision may also be impaired, reports the US National Institutes of Health.

Of course, if cooking fumes are causing your eyes to water, switch from contact lenses to spectacles to reduce the discomfort.

#6 GOING BANANAS

THE CLAIM Ripe bananas (especially those with black spots) are better at preventing cancer than unripe green ones because they have Tumour Necrosis Factor (TNF), a protein that's said to have anti-cancer properties.

WHAT EXPERTS SAY There was a Japanese study on the subject, but it was riddled with flaws. So what makes it dubious? Firstly, it was conducted on mice, which means the results may not necessarily apply to humans, says Jaclyn. Secondly, the rodents weren't fed bananas. Instead, banana extract was injected into their bodies. This bypassed the in-

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testinal tract and digestive system entirely, making the results highly inaccurate.

Now read this: Bananas don't – and can't – produce TNF! The anti-cancer protein is produced naturally in the human body and is not found in food, says Jaclyn. About the difference between eating a green banana and one that's fully ripe: "The former is not as sweet or soft. And while neither harmful nor poisonous, unripe bananas are harder to digest and may lead to slight tummy troubles," says Jaclyn.

So opt for a ripe bunch instead. A great energy booster for runners, a medium-sized ripe banana (18-20cm) provides 105 kcal, 0g fat, 27g carbs and 422mg potassium.