



BACKACHE

Red pepper (Capsicum, various species). Red pepper contains a marvelous pain-relieving chemical called capsaicin. Capsaicin is so potent that a tiny amount provides the active ingredient in many powerful pharmaceutical topical analgesics. You can mash a red pepper and rub it directly on the painful area. You can also take any white skin cream that you have on hand and mix in enough red pepper to turn it pink. Whether you use a cream or a hot pepper, be sure to wash your hands thoroughly afterward: You don't want to get it in your eyes. Always test a small area first when applying any topical to the skin.

Willow (Salix, various species) and other forms of natural aspirin. It originally came from compounds known as salicylates that occur naturally in willow bark, meadowsweet and wintergreen. Any of these herbs can be made into pain-relieving teas. Many salicylate-rich plants also contain methyl-salicylate, an aspirin-like compound with a particularly pleasing smell. One is wintergreen. Another is birch bark, once used by American Indians to make a tea that they drank or applied externally to treat lower back pain. Oil of wintergreen, which is high in methyl-salicylate, also serves as a good pain reliever for external use. (Please make sure you keep oil of wintergreen – all essential oils for that matter - out of children's reach. Ingesting even the tiniest amount can be fatal)

Peppermint (Mentha piperita) and other mints. You will find the compounds menthol and camphor in many over-the-counter backache medications. Menthol is a natural constituent of plants in the mint family, particularly peppermint and spearmint. Camphor occurs in spike lavender, hyssop and coriander.