

## Colds comfort – and a clarification

You know it's winter when butter no longer spreads easily on your toast in the morning, the power bill goes through the roof...and you get the first cold of the year.

It seems ridiculous that after centuries of medical progress against a raft of terrible diseases, we still can't cure the simplest affliction. That doesn't stop the medicine industry though. "Relief" is the byword, and pharmacies line their shelves this time of year with products offering respite from the symptoms that follow that first dreaded sign, the sore throat.

Our household has just recovered from the worst cold bug in memory, two weeks of misery during which tissue boxes were abandoned for toilet rolls to deal with outputs that beggared belief. We grimly watched seasonal TV ads promising relief, knowing after decades of experience that none of them do much more than gouge your wallet and provide an illusion of symptom-reduction.

You've just got to ride it out, cursing the Northern Hemisphere for gifting us its latest mutation and air travel for hastening its arrival, and hoping this time the change in weather won't lead to what mother used to say: "It's gone to his chest."

The bug moving down to my chest was always the result when I got a cold in times past, despite the pharmaceutical industry's seductive attempts to head it off with generations of syrups, pills and potions that began with generous alcohol content levels and morphed into concoctions whose sole appeal lies in the maker's imaginative use of scientific terms.

It was so bad on one occasion I ended up with pneumonia. That left an oddly useful legacy: when its less deadly cousin, bronchitis, threatens now, I get a warning jab from the scar left in one of my lungs. That's a signal to take the only useful cold-related remedy I have ever found.

I got help with the discovery of horse radish and garlic from an unexpected quarter. Late last century as I left a GP's surgery (he is no longer practising) with the inevitable prescription for antibiotics, his nurse whispered advice that has proved far more effective: "Don't tell the doctor I said this, but try horse radish and garlic pills."

I've found they work if I take them early enough. I've since suffered bronchitis only if I ignored the warning signs. Now I pop them as soon as the cold hits. There's a particularly powerful garlic version with vitamin C (which may or may not make a difference).

Here's the irony: they seem to be harder and harder to find. Only one Taranaki chemist shop I visited recently stocks them. Which means that perhaps the nurse's secret has yet to spread. Or – lucky for me, but not others – the only effective counter-measure I know short of dangerously overused antibiotics may be selective in its usefulness.

Garlic and horse radish have long attracted attention as natural remedies with medicinal benefits. The internet is chokka with optimistic references. We still await a cure for the cold.

FOOTNOTE: My columns usually cover a single topic, but it's important I add something this week, an addendum to last week's criticism of New Plymouth District Council over what I took to be its vacillating position on an initiative the former council voted to investigate – the age-friendly city.

The reference to "people-friendly" in the current council's top 10 focus points list has nothing to do with that, Mayor Holdom has advised. He attended the Positive Ageing Trust's forum on "age-friendly" cities last Saturday, played a full part in the discussions, and explained that the "people-friendly" item on the list refers to a strategy to ensure the council's various customer services, especially digital ones, meet the public's expectations.

So, I rarked him up for the wrong reason, but the end result was good. Along with two councillor colleagues – Stacey Hitchcock and Alan Melody – Holdom got to hear and discuss wide-ranging findings from the Positive Ageing Trust's initial investigation into whether Taranaki should embrace the age-friendly philosophy.

The 40-odd people who braved last weekend's freezing showers spent a couple of hours coming up with suggestions on how to meet community problems, and how those can be signalled to the powers-that-be – not just councils, but government agencies, NGOs and community groups, as well.

It became obvious that people of all ages face challenges over transport (inadequate bus services, for instance), housing, community support, health services, building access, civic participation, social inclusion, communication, and other issues. Expect to hear more.