

Itching to pursue natural remedies

You're due a laugh, a chuckle at least, given the grave turn our lives have taken, so what better way to cheer you up than an update on the soap-versus-gel situation.

If you follow this column you'll recall I made the jump about a year ago, and it was such a big deal I was able to wring several hundred words of comedy out of it.

Now I have to report the switch failed for an unexpected reason, which I'm itching to update you on; in fact, that's what this is about - itching.

After ditching soap and adopting gel in the shower, I found by the end of the day, sitting watching telly usually, I would suddenly have to scratch. One leg, a shoulder, an ankle, back of the neck, and yes, down there in the nethers, too.

The latter sent me off to the pharmacy for a hushed conversation, and soothing cream.

Lin didn't say anything, but she must have noticed. The scratching would be prolonged, attention spans truncated. TV highlights were missed. Questions had to be thrown to 'er-on-the-couch: "What did he say?" "When did she do that?" "What's The Beast on about?"

We settled on the gel as a possible cause. I took to spending twice as long in the shower washing it off. A flannel was used to scrub. That all helped reduce the itches but boosted the hot-water bill.

Other brands were tried. The result was always the same, which suggests they all use at least one common ingredient, unhappily for me a substance that irritates.

Ever-creative, Lin dug out of a smallish bottle of "Dr Bronner's 18-in-1 Hemp Eucalyptus Pure-Castile Soap" and suggested I try it. "It's based on natural oils. Might work."

It does. In fact, it's amazing. After thinking the bottle would last me a week even if I was sparing, I discovered mere drops lather up and transform my skin into a squeaky-clean surface that wouldn't slip on plate glass.

I could play a tune on it, the first bars of Fur Elise. Thinking about that in the shower this morning I was reminded of Grandad Harry Tucker, a Cockney with a Bradley Walsh sense of humour.

When I was six, he assured me he could fart the first bars of God Save the Queen. I remember telling Mum and Dad, who said the old guy was just having me on. As elderliness approaches, I'm starting to think he was serious.

The liquid soap bottle, half the size of a Heinnie, plastic but recyclable (of course) is a story in itself, its labels covered in enough text to carry a short novel.

It reveals the Dr Bronner brand has been going since 1948 and is run out of California by a pair of brothers with that name. Vox news-site wrote of them: "Nothing about Dr. Bronner's has been conventional.

"Its CEO, David Bronner, a ponytailed vegan surfer who wears tie-dyed shirts and drives a rainbow-colored Mercedes-Benz, has planted hemp seeds on the Drug

Enforcement Administration's lawn and was once arrested for locking himself in a cage outside the White House.

"Dr Bronner's calls itself the 'fighting soap company' because so much of its revenue goes toward activism. Most revealingly, perhaps, the brand claims that the first ingredient in all its products, from soap to coconut oil to household cleaner, is 'love!' — exclamation point and all."

According to its website, the soaps come in numerous "flavours", like almond, cherry blossom, green tea, lavender, tea tree, peppermint and citrus.

The one I'm using contains oils of olive, hemp, palm kernel, coconut and something called jojoba, a shrub in south-west US also known as goat nut, deer nut, pig nut, quinine nut, wild hazel, coffee berry and grey box bush.

So there you have it. The migration from soap to gel ended up involving an unexpected second step. And I have to tell you, it's not the only regular application of unnatural substances that has ended the same way.

Take deodorant. I've tried many versions since puberty but in the end they all fail. Lin suggested another natural remedy, something called "Crystal Deodorant Mist", whose label is too small to read. I was sceptical, but it works.

I'm also trying black cumin seed oil, a foul-tasting medicine with solid scientific credentials dating back a thousand years. So far, so good on my chronic bronchitis.