FOR great breath freshener, try one drop of peppermint oil on the tongue.

At the end of a heaving, three-course meal, there’s nothing like a refreshing cup of peppermint tea to settle the stomach.

Much more than just a revitalizing, sweet-tasting herb, peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) has long been used as a treatment for general indigestion, colic, flatulence, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), nausea, spasms, and vomiting.

Containing menthol as one of its healing compounds, peppermint also possesses a variety of lesser-known properties and can be used to treat ailments as diverse as the common cold, flu, insect bites, stings, itchy skin, bad breath, herpes, headaches, and muscle pains. Studies have also shown this all-around healer to be a strong natural antibiotic and antiviral, and capable of destroying the disease-causing micro-organisms present in bacteria and fungal infections.

**Internal applications**

Peppermint’s antispasmodic benefits have long been harnessed for the treatment of the discomforting symptoms of IBS. In a 1984 edition of the *British Journal of General Practice*, Dr. M.J. Dew, Dr. B.K. Evans, and Dr. J. Rhodes concluded from a trial into peppermint oil’s effect on IBS that it helps reduce the pain associated with the abdominal disorder by relaxing the low sphincter muscles of the esophagus and easing intestinal spasms and gas burping.

Ingesting peppermint oil can cause acid reflux or heartburn in some people, which is why many herbal practitioners suggest using enteric-coated oil capsules that will not release until they have gone through the stomach.

The recommended enteric-coated oil dosage is one to two capsules 30 minutes to an hour before a meal with no more than six capsules ingested per day.

After dinner, peppermint is mostly taken as a tea in prepackaged teabags or brewed...
"Peppermint's antispasmodic benefits have long been harnessed for the treatment of irritable bowel syndrome."

using one teaspoon of the dried leaves in a cup of boiled water. For a great breath freshener, try one drop of peppermint oil on the tongue.

Topical applications
Just as you feel a tangy freshness when you brush your teeth with peppermint-flavoured toothpaste, when applied to the skin, peppermint oil initially activates the skin's receptors, creating a cool feeling. It then causes the blood vessels to widen and the sudden increase in blood flow to the skin generates a feeling of warmth that makes it ideal for relieving muscle or joint aches. This double cooling and warming effect may make topical peppermint oil useful in treating some types of headaches.

For insect bites, apply one to four drops of the oil straight on the bite. Peppermint's cooling and heating properties not only stop the irritation, but also reduce the possibility of infection. This same quality makes it excellent for applying on herpes sores and can even kill the virus. Alternatively, put several drops of oil in the bath for a soothing, yet invigorating soak.

Terry Willard, CIH, PhD, is director of the Wild Rose College of Natural Healing in Calgary. He is the author of Mind-Body Harmony (Key Porter Books, 2003).