

# The three kings

This Christmas, nurture yourself with the healing properties of gold, frankincense and myrrh. By Hannah Ebelthite

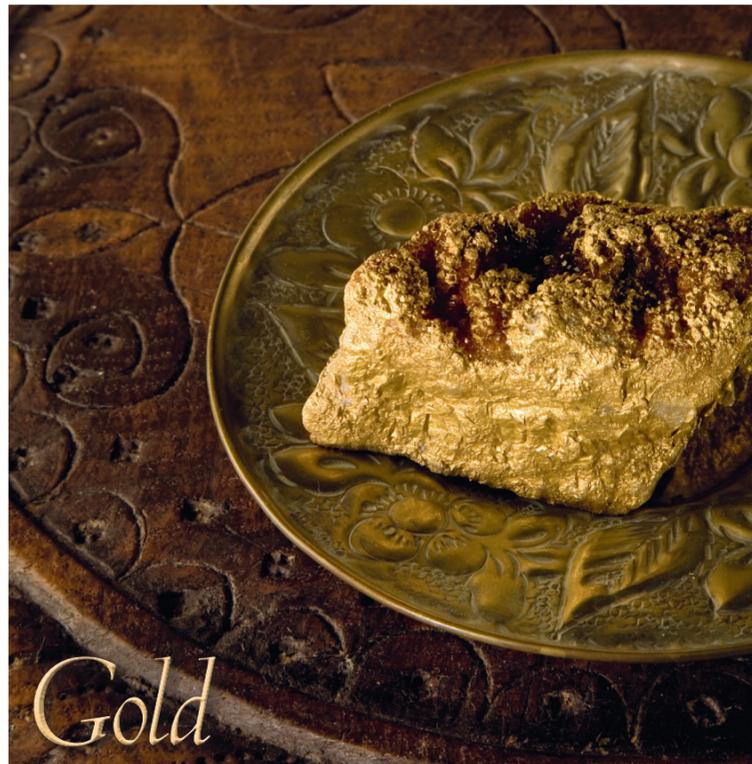
Photographs by Penny Cotter

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH. The gifts the Magi gave the baby Jesus are deeply ingrained in most of our psyches and, with the benefit of modern science, we can see what wise men they were. Their gifts weren't just luxury goods – they had a myriad of therapeutic benefits. In Biblical times, frankincense and myrrh were treasures, literally worth their weight in gold. There have been many theories on what they symbolised – the most common being that gold

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represented material wealth, frankincense was a religious offering and myrrh medicinal – a gift of good health. 'But they're not just historically significant,' says herbalist and naturopath Ed Berger. 'Nowadays, we covet gold, obviously, but for its benefits to our health, not just our wealth. Likewise, frankincense and myrrh are prized for their ability to enrich our wellbeing.' What's more, you don't need to be royalty to afford them. Here's how to harness the healing powers of these Christmas gifts.▷





A remedy derived from gold has long been used in homeopathic medicine to help lift depression and promote a feeling of lightness

**G**OLD HAS BEEN USED medicinally throughout history for psychic, bodily and spiritual purification. In Ayurvedic medicine, gold is used as an effective nerve tonic. Ancient Romans used gold salves for skin disorders; peasants in China still reputedly cook rice with a gold coin to replenish minerals in their bodies.

In 1929, a French doctor isolated the anti-inflammatory properties of gold, and modern chrysotherapy – the use of gold compounds in medicine – was born. Famously, colloidal (liquid) gold injections have been used to treat severe arthritis, and today gold is widely used in mainstream medicine, in rheumatology, to repair damaged tissues and bones in surgery and in dentistry. 'Gold has recently been used in some HIV and cancer treatments,' says Dr Julian Kenyon of The Dove Clinic For Integrated Medicine ([www.doveclinic.com](http://www.doveclinic.com)). Gold's anti-inflammatory properties have also attracted scientists in the beauty world. Studies at Moscow's Vishnevsky Institute showed long-term gold-thread implants trigger the production of collagen and elastin in the skin, making

it appear fuller, firmer and younger; if you have a spare £1,800, Harley Street's Dr Alex Chambers will thread gold filament into your skin to form a net structure, giving you a Gold Thread Lift.

#### Treat yourself:

- A remedy derived from gold has long been used in homeopathic medicine to help lift depression. Try **Aurum Metallicum pillules**, from £4.50, **Nelson's Pharmacy (020 7495 2404)**.
- The colour gold is prized by colour therapists. 'It has the highest vibration of the spectrum,' says colour therapist **June McLeod (www.coloursofthesoul.com)**. 'Wear gold in the winter months as it has the power to make us feel uplifted.'
- Gold is the material of choice when it comes to non-invasive acupuncture. **Carole Franck's Beauty Center** face and body treatments use gold-plated electrodes rather than needles to transfer a micro-current into acupuncture points on the face and body. As well as anti-ageing, the treatments claim to help slimming and reduce cellulite. From £60 (01823 421521).



**T**HIS SMALL TREE FROM THE MIDDLE East and north-east Africa might not be much to look at, but it makes up for its scrubby appearance with the precious gum it exudes. With a bitter, acrid scent, myrrh has long been renowned for its astonishing antibiotic properties. 'The resin would have been dried and powdered and used on wounds to prevent and treat infection,' says herbalist and naturopath Ed Berger. 'Able to kill any bacteria, it was also taken internally.' Today, it remains one of the most powerful antibacterials used by herbalists. It's available in capsule or tincture form, although, as Berger cautions, these are best used under the guidance of a herbalist. Research is ongoing, but myrrh could show promise as a side-effect-free method of lowering cholesterol, he adds.

While aromatherapists use the resin's dry aroma to boost the respiratory system, researchers at Rutgers University have also made some exciting discoveries. Studies isolated two compounds in myrrh that act as

strong painkillers, and most recently, a potentially interesting anti-cancer agent.

#### Treat yourself:

- To aid relaxation, diffuse myrrh in an oil burner, sit quietly, close your eyes and breathe deeply. Breathe in for a count of five, hold for five, exhale for five, then repeat the cycle three times. 'This will calm anxiety,' says aromatherapist **Rima Shah (www.calmandclear.co.uk)**.
- Use the following compress for cuts and grazes: Add two drops of myrrh and two drops of lavender essential oils to 15ml vodka, says **Shah**. Mix well, then add to a bowl of warm water. Soak a clean muslin cloth or flannel in the water, wring out and apply to the affected area.
- A mouthwash containing myrrh will help keep bacteria at bay. Try **Tom's of Maine Natural Toothpaste with Propolis & Myrrh**, £3.19, from healthfood stores, and **Neal's Yard Remedies Lavender & Myrrh Mouthwash**, £6 ([www.nealsyardremedies.com](http://www.nealsyardremedies.com)).

**T**RADITIONALLY BURNED AS INCENSE and used to drive away bad spirits, frankincense – the resin from the African *Boswellia serrata* tree – is still used as an aid to meditation in the Catholic Church; its sweet, warm aroma is believed to still the mind. But it's also been prized for millennia for its medicinal properties. Frankincense is mentioned in one of the oldest-known medical records, Ebers Papyrus, dating from the sixteenth century BC, and Ancient Egyptians listed the oil on hundreds of prescriptions and recipes. Today, frankincense is a common ingredient in anti-ageing beauty products, says Susan Curtis, director of natural health at Neal's Yard Remedies. 'But what

people may not realise is it's very useful for skin conditions, such as acne, too.' It's antibacterial, anti-inflammatory and can help regenerate skin tissue and heal scarring. Research is revealing ever more interesting facets to frankincense – earlier this year, clinical research at the University of California found that patients with osteoarthritis who took frankincense capsules reported significant relief from stiffness and pain within just a week.

#### Treat yourself:

- Breathe it in: 'Frankincense has a beautiful, deep, sweet but spicy aroma,' says aromatherapist **Rima Shah**. 'It helps to slow down breathing and opens up the airways,

so it's invaluable for respiratory infections and asthma. It also helps soothe, calm and uplift the spirits, and increase concentration.' The resin has a thicker consistency than other oils, but will release its fragrance slowly if burned in an oil burner.

- For a relaxing, joint-soothing bath, add 20 drops of frankincense essential oil to 50ml of a base oil such as almond, and add to a pre-run bath, says **Curtis**. 'This same blend could be applied to scars or used as a night-time facial oil for acne.' Try the **Hydrating Frankincense Gift Box**, £22.50, and **Frankincense Essential Oil**, £12.75 (both available at [www.nealsyardremedies.com](http://www.nealsyardremedies.com)).

#### RESOURCES

To find a qualified medical herbalist near you, visit [www.nimh.org.uk/find\\_herbalist](http://www.nimh.org.uk/find_herbalist). For advice on finding a qualified aromatherapist, visit [www.aroma-therapycouncil.co.uk](http://www.aroma-therapycouncil.co.uk)

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