

Did my granny have

Before the days of modern medicine, when doctors had fewer drugs at their disposal, a tonic – for instance, cod liver oil and malt or a nice dose of calf’s foot jelly – was the remedy prescribed for a wide range of ills. Many contained herbal extracts, vitamins and minerals and, although your granny might have sworn by a tonic, no one really knows how

effective they were. You won’t find many GPs recommending calf’s foot jelly nowadays, but there are still plenty of 21st-century versions of the traditional tonic. But will they make you feel better? We’ve taken seven bestsellers and, with the help of a team of experts, scrutinised the ingredients and claims to help you find what might work for you.

PRODUCT	FLORADIX, £11.49 FOR 500ml (25 days' supply)	APICOL TOTAL, £12.95 FOR 14 PHIALS (14–28 days' supply)	RIO AMAZON GUARANA JUNGLE ELIXIR, £15.99 FOR 10 PHIALS (one phial taken when needed)
When might you take it?	You have little appetite and your iron levels are low.	You're run down and seem to catch every cold going.	You need an instant energy boost.
What exactly is it?	A mix of ferrous gluconate (a highly absorbable form of iron), fruit juice, rose-hip extract, yeast 'fed' on iron, vitamin B complex, vitamin C, honey, plus herbal extracts. The vitamin C aids iron absorption.	It's made with bee-based products. Royal jelly is mildly antibiotic and contains vitamins, enzymes, hormones and amino acids. Bee pollen is rich in nutrients, and propolis inhibits the growth of bacteria.	Compounds found in guarana seed increase metabolic rate and relax muscles. Guarana acts more slowly than caffeine and benefits last six hours with no withdrawal symptoms. Also contains wheatgerm oil for vitamin E.
Is there any scientific evidence?	German studies suggest Floradix speeds recovery from anaemia, reduces susceptibility to infection, increases stamina and restores appetite.	According to scientists at the Sorbonne in Paris, propolis raises the body's resistance to infections. These claims are backed by research at Louisiana State University, which also found that royal jelly's antibacterial properties are almost 25% as active as penicillin.	Japanese government research on road accidents caused by drowsiness found that guarana maintained alertness. Doctors at Copenhagen State Hospital found that use of guarana by night nurses resulted in lower stress levels and increased energy.
What do the experts say?	<p>Ursula Arens, senior nutrition scientist at the British Nutrition Foundation: 'Excellent for those with low iron levels – increasing iron intake will give more energy.'</p> <p>Harald C Gaier, president of the General Council and Register of Naturopaths: 'Primarily for boosting iron absorption, this supplement will improve energy output. It will also have a beneficial effect on digestion, heart function and metabolism.'</p>	<p>Dr Derek Shrimpton, nutrition and food science consultant: 'Although this would have antibacterial properties, I'm not convinced propolis would raise the body's resistance to infections.'</p> <p>Harald C Gaier: 'This would give some defence against infection, promote cell repair and general healing and improve athletic performance. However, anyone allergic to bee stings should seek advice before taking it.'</p>	<p>Dr Derek Shrimpton: 'This is a stimulant, [and as such is] fine for occasional but not long-term use. It's not a source of energy, nor a substitute for food.'</p> <p>Harald C Gaier: 'This stimulant and revitaliser can help short term, but I have concerns about its long-term beneficial features.'</p>

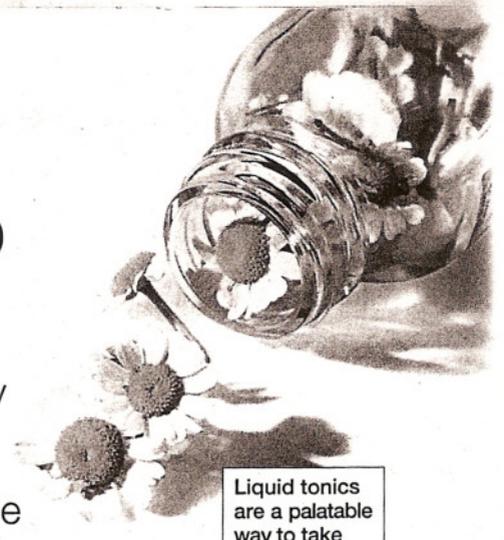


the right idea?



'Once, when I was feeling run down, my granny told me to ask the doctor for a tonic. He said there was no such thing! So where has the name come from and what does it mean?'

READER EDITOR **BETH VANCE**



Liquid tonics are a palatable way to take your vitamins

BIO-STRATH ELIXIR, £10.75 FOR 250ml. (16 days' supply)	DR GILLIAN McKEITH'S LIVING FOOD ENERGY, £19.95 FOR 165g POWDER (one month's supply)	SEVEN SEAS VITAMIN & MINERAL TONIC, £4.39 FOR 300ml (10 days' supply)	EFFICO TONIC, £3.59 FOR 300ml (10 days' supply)
<p>You feel you could 'sleep for a week'.</p>	<p>You work odd hours and eat on the run.</p>	<p>You feel lethargic and off your food.</p>	<p>You've been ill and now feel better, but still lack energy.</p>
<p>This contains a yeast 'fed' on herbs, plus honey, malt and orange. The medicinal value of the herbs themselves isn't important, but the yeast is said to increase the response of infection-fighting white blood cells.</p>	<p>It's made with living sprouted grains (millet and quinoa), natural essential fatty acids and other 'living' ingredients like parsley. It's claimed that grains/seeds have the highest enzyme and vitamin content when they're sprouting.</p>	<p>Vitamins A and D increase resistance to infections and glycerophosphates supply phosphorus, calcium and magnesium and stimulate the appetite. It also contains iron, copper sulphate and other minerals.</p>	<p>It contains vitamins B1 and B3, which are needed for energy release in the body, and the stimulant caffeine.</p>
<p>A study of 60 patients at Hamburg University showed a 64% improvement in fatigue symptoms.</p>	<p>Based on observation of patients at her London clinic, Dr McKeith found 'living foods' – packed with antioxidants, amino acids, over 90 minerals, vitamins and enzymes – corrected nutritional deficiencies and fought fatigue better than traditional supplements.</p>	<p>Seven Seas claims the tonic will 'overcome that listless feeling', but says research is confidential. They say the tonic is licensed as a medicine and that the research behind it is extensive.</p>	<p>Based on the benefits of B vitamins, rather than trials of Effico, this is recommended for convalescence or if you're feeling run down.</p>
<p>Dr Derek Shrimpton: 'Yeast is a good source of B vitamins and is easily absorbed. But although it should boost the immune system, this would be hard to prove.' Harald C Gaier: 'The yeast absorbs useful aspects of the herbs and synthesises its own vitamins. The combined effect lowers fatigue levels.'</p>	<p>Dr Derek Shrimpton: 'Grain sprouts are a rich source of micronutrients, but it's hard to see how consuming enzymes would have nutritional value. Amino acids (proteins) are usually not deficient in a western diet, and only about 11 minerals have any nutritional importance.' Harald C Gaier: 'These sprouted grains trigger the synthesis in the body of vitamins from other sources, while providing protein, trace elements and enzymes.'</p>	<p>Ursula Arens: 'This is a good product and a useful way to make sure you get iron and vitamins A and D.' Harald C Gaier: 'To "overcome that listless feeling", this would have to be taken continuously, but the cumulative effect of the copper might not be a good thing.'</p>	<p>Ursula Arens: 'Vitamins B1 and B3 are effective for people suffering from tiredness so, although this might have little effect on the average healthy person, it would be good for anyone with a busy lifestyle.' Harald C Gaier: 'Thiamin (vitamin B1) enhances cell oxidation and should strengthen the nervous system. However, niacin (B3) can cause hot flushes in some people and caffeine can induce sleeplessness, anxiety and palpitations.'</p>

Text: Jane Yelltram Photographs: Tony Hutchings All products should be available from high-street chemists and healthfood stores