

THIS IS A BIT embarrassing BUT...



GP Ellie Cannon gives her advice on the most common awkward problems she hears about in her surgery

You can talk to your best friends about anything – your terrifying overdraft, that weird thing your new man asked you to do in bed, the rash that's developed under your boobs... Okay, so maybe you can't tell them *everything*, which is why GPs like me hear so many health 'confessions'.

Your doctor should never make you feel uncomfortable for mentioning something that's important to you, especially if it's affecting your health. And that awkward boob check or vaginal exam could be a lifesaver, so never hesitate to make an appointment. But if you're unsure, here are some of the more common embarrassing health issues I deal with day to day.



"Erm... hello? Anyone?"

longer bleeding in the first year, but you should eventually settle into a regular pattern. Some lucky women end up with lighter periods, or none at all.

● **See your GP if...** Your periods are still irregular after a year, or you're not comfortable with the side effects.

... my sex drive has disappeared since I started taking the Pill?

It's not common, but it's certainly an issue that a number of women notice – and must be extremely frustrating when it happens. It's usually down to the type of progesterone in the Pill.

● **See your GP if...** Your lacklustre libido is getting you down. There are at least 20 types of Pill, and with the right one the problem should go away.

... my pharmacist referred me to my GP for the emergency contraceptive pill after I'd had sex four days previously?

The standard morning-after pill that you can buy from the chemist is effective for up to three days after sex – although the later you take it, the less effective it is. But EllaOne – available on prescription – is effective up to *five* days after sex.

● **See your GP if...** You need urgent contraception past the three-day point.

Sex

IS IT NORMAL THAT...

... I always get cystitis when I sleep with someone new?

Doctors used to call this 'honeymoon

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cystitis.' During sex, bacteria can be pushed up the urethra, and the jiggling around doesn't help. It's more common if your vagina is dry, so foreplay is essential, and always pee after sex. Daily high-dose (over 200mg) cranberry capsules can also help prevent it.

● **See your GP if...** You have symptoms of infection that aren't clearing with over-the-counter treatments, and *immediately* if there is also blood in your urine.

... I bleed in certain positions?

Never treat bleeding during sex as normal. A one-off can be put down to

'trauma'; if it happens a second time, seek help. Certain positions allow deeper penetration – if that causes bleeding, it could be an issue with your cervix. It's likely to be a benign problem called an erosion, but you need to rule out more serious causes.

● **See your GP if...** It happens more than once.

... I've got thrush but I used a condom?

Sadly, yes. Thrush can be transmitted sexually but can also be picked up from skin-to-skin contact, especially when everything's warm and moist. Even with a condom, there's other skin exposed, like on his scrotum, allowing thrush to transfer. The good news? It's pretty easy to sort with a cream or tablet from the chemist. And get him some too.

● **See your GP if...** Over-the-counter treatments don't help, or you're planning on ditching condoms, as you'll both need full STI checks.

Periods

IS IT NORMAL THAT...

... my periods are getting heavier as I get older?

Your periods evolve, and can get heavier through your 20s and 30s in response to weight changes, stress, diet and having children. You might not notice if you're on the Pill, so don't be surprised if you come off it and they're now heavier.

● **See your GP if...** You need to change your tampon every two to three hours or you have regular flooding nightmares. Any pain other than normal period pains should also be checked out.

... I need to wear a panty liner every day?

It's certainly common – and not much fun – to have so much discharge you feel like you've wet your knickers every day. The commonest cause is thrush, which is easily treated with a tablet or cream from the chemist, so try that first.

● **See your GP if...** Thrush medication doesn't work. Chances are it's a simple infection or bacterial imbalance that can be treated with antibiotics.

... my periods have changed since I had an abortion?

Everything's a bit up in the air for a couple of months after an abortion: mood, body *and* periods. Cycles can get longer or shorter, while periods can be heavier or less painful.

● **See your GP if...** You're bleeding heavily or between periods, and if there's pain (as periods are commonly less painful after an abortion).

Body parts

IS IT NORMAL THAT...

... I can feel a lump down there?

No, this isn't normal. There are loads of lumps and bumps women can get on their vulvas – cysts, infections, abscesses and herpes – but a doctor needs to tell you what's going on. Unless you have a recurrence of the same lump, which you've previously been told is fine, I'd get any lump down below checked out.

● **See your GP if...** You find *any* lump, anywhere – don't even think twice about getting it checked out.

... I have small bumps on my nipple?

These are Montgomery glands, and appear as bumps on the areola and the nipple. They make oil to protect the nipple and can get larger during sex. Having between two and 20 is normal, but some people never notice them.

● **See your GP if...** You notice changes, such as lumps or discharge, in your breasts. Check them every month (download the iCoppaFeel! app for regular reminders).

... I sweat all the time?

Sweating a lot can be normal. Say you have a hot date: you overheat with nerves, so you sweat. Just take deep breaths and keep calm to cool down.

● **See your GP if...** You're not stressed, you haven't just done a spinning class, and you've *still* got your own personal sprinkler system going on. Your GP can work out what's going on, and might prescribe a deodorant such as Driclor (also available over the counter) or recommend another treatment. ♦

Contraception

IS IT NORMAL THAT...

... I haven't stopped bleeding since I got the contraceptive implant?

This is a side effect of the implant, which is inserted under the skin on your upper arm, and something you *should* have been warned about. It's normal to have irregular, heavier or

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