



Mum-of-two Dr Ellie Cannon works in a busy inner city NHS practice and in private practice

# Ask Dr Ellie...

Woman's GP Dr Ellie Cannon answers the burning questions in her surgery this week...

## I can't get my hayfever under control this year

**Q** My hayfever is usually controlled with an antihistamine from the chemist, but this season my nose is constantly blocked – and it's only May.

**A** This does happen sometimes. It may be due to different pollens or levels of pollution, but you may need to change your medication. Steroid nasal sprays, such as Beconase, are useful when a blocked nose is your main symptom. It can cause a dry nose or mouth, so don't overuse it. If

this isn't helping, ask your pharmacist about combining a steroid spray and an antihistamine. Non-drug saltwater treatments, such as Aqua Maris natural nasal drops (50ml for £6.40, amazon.co.uk), are also useful to clean the nose to remove pollen. They can be used safely together with conventional treatments.

**\* Woman loves Beconase Hayfever Relief Nasal Spray for Adults (100 sprays, £5.49, boots.com)**

## Am I depriving my family of vitamin D?

**Q** We always use sunblock in our family, but I've read that we shouldn't deprive ourselves of sun because of vitamin D levels. Is this correct? How much is too much?

**A** When I became a GP, no one was talking about vitamin D, but now I speak about it with patients almost daily. To make enough vitamin D in the UK, you need to be outside three times a week, between April and September, for 15 minutes, with your hands, arms and face uncovered. If you're going to be out in the sun for longer, make sure you put sunblock on. Using sunblock prevents our skin making vitamin D, as it blocks out UV light. But sunblock is so important as it prevents serious problems like skin cancer. As you say, it's a balancing act.

## Are painkillers OK long-term?

**Q** Is it safe to use ibuprofen for my migraines? I take it once a week as it helps me get on with my day, but my GP has worried me by saying it could affect my heart in the longer term.

**A** There's been lots of coverage about ibuprofen increasing the risk of heart attacks, as some research has shown long-term users being at slightly increased risk. These risks were mainly seen in elderly long-term users of ibuprofen and its counterpart, Voltarol. These patients were taking full doses daily for many years for chronic pain, mostly for arthritis. The benefits of improved quality of life must be weighed against the risks of long-term use and, in your case, the risks may be small. The job of a GP is to warn you of possible side-effects – as she has done – and make sure you're taking the smallest dose necessary to achieve the benefits.

## How will Parkinson's disease affect Dad?

**Q** My dad has been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, which has come as a terrible blow to the family. Could you please explain how this is going to affect him in the years ahead?

**A** This is a difficult diagnosis for you all to deal with. Parkinson's is a disease of the brain that affects the muscles of the body. It's often confused with dementia, which only affects the mental function. Parkinson's causes a classic trio of body stiffness, shaking and a slowness, which gradually worsens over time. We know this is due to a change in a specific part of the brain that controls the normally smooth operation of the muscles.

These three symptoms may be accompanied by other developments, such as changes in speech, a blank face, smaller handwriting and difficulty in dressing. People with Parkinson's do develop dementia as part of the disease and, in the later stages, it completely halts a person's ability to function. A huge amount of research is being undertaken into drug treatment for Parkinson's, which should always be managed by a specialist team. Your dad should be under a geriatrician to help manage his medication – and as a family, you now need to start talking about his long-term care.

WORDS: DR ELLIE CANNON, LEONIE RODERICK. PHOTOS: ISTOCK. DR ELLIE REGRETS SHE CANNOT ANSWER LETTERS PERSONALLY.

**3** WAYS TO BOOST YOUR HEALTH THIS WEEK

The scientists have spoken! Try these tips for a healthier life...

### Boost your energy

In need of a helping hand to get you through the day? New **Energise Me (£15 for one month's supply, innerme.co.uk)** contains a blend of vitamins B6 and B12 with co-enzyme Q10, to help convert food into a fast energy boost.

### Sing in the shower

Even if you're not pitch perfect a sing-song in the shower could boost health. A new study shows being in a choir increases life expectancy, promotes heart health and wards off depression.



### Time to smile!

It's National Smile Month so make sure yours is one to be proud of – and invest in a **DenTek Tongue Cleaner (£4.09, amazon.co.uk)**. Scrape away bad breath-causing bacteria... and get grinning!

