

ASK Dr ELLIE



@Dr_Ellie

The Mail on Sunday's brilliant GP... with all the health answers YOU need

My girl's life is wrecked by her acne

Q MY DAUGHTER is 19 years old and spent the past six years on various medicines for her acne. The only thing that worked was one form of the Pill, Dianette, but this made her depressed. Antibiotics made no difference and upset her stomach. She is frightened by the thought of using very strong drugs, which have some worrying side effects.

I'd be interested in anything to help her as sometimes she won't go out. It really affects her life, even though I tell her how lovely she looks.

A ACNE is a hugely debilitating condition that can impact on self-esteem and mood. At a time when teens become so conscious of their appearance and making first impressions, severe acne is a cruel blow. It is not always easy to treat.

The usual first lines of treatment include topical creams, lotions and oral antibiotics.

Both benzoyl peroxide and azelaic acid creams are proven scientifically to work well for acne when it is mild or moderate. Adding in an oral antibiotic tablet is the next usual step.

Antibiotics need at least three to six months to start working; if they are not working, it is always worth trying a different type as we can use at least four or five kinds, including lymecycline.

Dianette is an oral contraceptive Pill licensed for use in acne. Depression can be a side effect of using it due to the specific hormone in it. In that situation, it would be worth trying another contraceptive pill instead.

The Pill is not usually prescribed simply for acne but in a young woman who may want birth control anyway, it is a reasonable approach. One with a different hormone to Dianette may clear up her skin without the side effects.

An empathetic GP should consider that.

The final resort in terms of treatment would be Roaccutane. This is prescribed by a dermatologist with strict monitoring of mood, as it too has been linked to depression.

Given the huge toll that severe acne can have on quality of life, many choose to try Roaccutane and

do so with huge benefits and negligible problems. In a situation where no drugs seem to be helping and acne is so bad that it causes isolation, a consultation with a dermatologist to discuss stronger treatment would be warranted.

Q FOR over a month I've had insomnia, getting just three nights of actual sleep. My GP has given me sleeping tablets for a week but they worked only on the first night. Is there another way to help me get some sleep?

A SLEEPING pills can be of value and can sometimes kick-start a sleep pattern again. For this to work, sufferers are advised to take a sleeping tablet every night for a week to ten days, then wean down. Sleeping tablets beyond that are really not recommended as they are addictive and actually in many cases not very effective.

Treatment for insomnia has to look beyond medication. For insomnia to resolve, good 'sleep hygiene' is essential. This involves creating the best environment and mind for a good night's sleep. It is a way to encourage your body to relax and fall asleep.

The environment of sleeping is crucial: a relaxed dark room, no screens, no lights and as quiet as possible.

Many people use an eye mask or ear plugs to create this.

In the last two to three hours before bed, relaxation should be key, with no screens nor phones, and no stimulation like physical activity or eating. A bath, reading and breathing exercises can all be helpful to allow the mind to relax.

I see many patients sceptical about the benefits of sleep hygiene compared to strong pharmaceuticals but it is a scientifically based approach that can be far more effective.

Sufferers should also try to look beyond the sleep itself as to what has caused the insomnia.

Often this is stress- or anxiety-related. Using daytime exercise, mindfulness or therapy to deal with the stress or anxiety can often help.

Look beyond lumps for breast cancer

UP TO one in six women with breast cancer have symptoms other than a lump, according to a new study of 2,000 women with the disease, published last week.

GPs all know that a lump can

be a classic sign of breast cancer, and encourage women to check for that.

But other symptoms include changes in the skin or shape of the breast, changes in the nipple, discharge from the nipple

or pain. Women need to be clear that any changes warrant a trip to the GP for an examination.

Rather than looking for a lump, just watch for anything new or abnormal.



Carol is my queen... of jungle that is menopause

CAN I just say right now that I'll be backing Carol Vorderman, left, to be the next Queen of the Jungle.

The 55-year-old presenter will be taking part in ITV's I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here! this year (for a rumoured record fee of £200,000) and says that she's doing it because going through the menopause has given her 'a sense of adventure'.

Having made mathematics sexy, the former Countdown host is now taking on society's expectations of how middle-aged women should feel and behave.

Many women I see in clinic who are going through the menopause are affected not so much by physical symptoms such as hot flushes, but by the mental ones, such as insomnia, low mood, irritability and tiredness.

The most common reason I am asked for HRT is actually for low energy levels, which can be very hard for busy, active women to accept. And Carol is living proof that they don't have to.

WOMEN now drink almost as much alcohol as men, according to a global study published last month. It also suggested that among the younger generation, the girls are actually beating men at their own drinking game.

Researchers believe the change is because drinks are cheaper, created for and marketed at us.

So, those clever advertising brains who have managed to persuade women that boozing is part and parcel of emancipation need to step up.

Safe-drinking messages have never really targeted women very effectively, but that will have to change: it is fantastic to have sexual equality, but not the health risks that appear to have come with it.

IT IS about time unhealthy food was banned from hospitals. Given the rising toll of obesity, the medical establishment needs to start setting a better example. NHS chief executive Simon Stevens plans to do just that by banning sugary drinks from hospital vending machines, or adding a levy to the vendor. It is a move not only to protect patients but equally staff who use hospital machines. Healthcare workers are by no means immune to obesity.

DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION FOR DR ELLIE CANNON?

Email DrEllie@mailonsunday.co.uk or write to Health, The Mail on Sunday, 2 Derry Street, London W8 5TT. Dr Ellie can only answer in a general context and cannot respond to individual cases, or give personal replies. If you have a health concern, always consult your own GP.

Why should I take... VINEGAR

Many health nuts swear by daily doses of cider vinegar, claiming it helps them lose weight and promote a healthy digestive system. However, there is much research to

support a range of benefits offered by white wine vinegar. Studies have shown that one teaspoon of it used in, for example, a salad dressing, can help control blood sugar

following a starchy meal. A 2009 study of 175 obese men and women found that a daily intake of 15ml of vinegar – about two teaspoons – aided weight loss.

YES PLEASE!

Dr's Remedy Nail Care Polish
This polish contains garlic bulb extract and tea tree oil to provide natural anti-fungal and anti-bacterial properties, alongside Vitamins C and E and wheat protein to promote strong, healthy nails.
£11.95 foothealthfirst.co.uk



Ask a STUPID QUESTION

IS SLEEP BEFORE MIDNIGHT MORE RESTORATIVE THAN AFTER?
Independent sleep expert Dr Neil Stanley says: 'This idea derives from the

saying "an hour before midnight is worth two hours after midnight", but it is a red herring. 'The deepest slow-wave sleep occurs in the first third of the night, regardless of

what time you go to bed. The latter part of the night sees much lighter or dreaming sleep. Hence it's much harder to wake someone in the first three hours of sleep.'