

# ask our EXPERTS

Got a problem you can't bear to share with your GP? Don't worry – you can always ask Zest's experts!

## Q WHY HAVE MY PERIODS SUDDENLY BECOME LIGHTER?

**My periods have always been regular, but while they used to be quite heavy and would last up to seven days, they have recently become much lighter and shorter, lasting no more than four or five days. I'm 30 years old, not on the pill and not pregnant. Could this be a sign of a change in my fertility?**

**A** As long as your periods are still regular, it doesn't sound like you have anything to worry about. A regular period means you are still ovulating and heaviness and lightness can vary and often change with age.

Some women experience premature ovarian failure, which brings on early menopause, but, in this case, periods start to become irregular, first getting closer

together and then further and further apart. If your cycle does start to change in this way, you should contact your GP straight away. **JR**

## Q HELP! MY TEETH ARE GREY AND SPOTTY!

**I've noticed some uneven grey spots and lighter-coloured spots developing on my teeth, even though I look after them by brushing at least twice a day and visiting a dentist about once a year. What could be causing this and what can I do to get rid of the discoloration?**

**A** In young children, spots occurring on teeth when they first come through is usually an issue of fluoridation caused by swallowing fluoride toothpaste and this can often be avoided simply by using careful

brushing techniques. But, in adults, such discoloration of teeth is often an early sign of tooth decay.

Consuming sugary food and drinks leads to acid attacks on the enamel that protects your teeth, causing this spotting of colour. Dentists can treat early discoloration relatively easily, and might polish the tooth's surface to remove the marks, but in more severe cases veneers may be recommended.

In advanced cases of decay, fillings, crowns or even root-canal treatment is sometimes required. The best advice is to avoid further decay by cutting out sugary snacks and drinks between meals. Continue to brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, and also clean once a day in between your teeth, using either dental floss or an interdental brush. **NC**

## Q WHY DO MY HANDS AND FEET ITCH?

**The palms of my hands and the soles of my feet have started to itch a lot but there is no redness and the skin is not broken. I haven't been using any different skincare products, so I have no idea what's causing it.**

**A** The most probable cause is atopic eczema, which is the most common form of the condition and flares up from time to time. Even if there's no redness on your palms and soles, itching can occur before or during an outbreak of eczema elsewhere on your body. Less commonly, the itching could also be a sign of an overactive thyroid, a nutritional deficiency or, in very rare cases, an illness of the nervous system.

The best advice is to get checked out by a dermatologist, because fortunately, these conditions are easily treatable. **NL**



## Q IS MY TOE INFECTED?

**While out running recently, I bent back part of the toenail on my big toe. It's not swollen or red but it's started to smell a little. Could it be infected?**

**A** If your toe has started to smell, it's likely to be infected. Bending back the toenail separates it from the nail bed and this can allow germs to get in and develop an infection. As there's no redness or swelling, the infection is probably in the very early stages, so if you act now, you may be able to heal it quickly and easily. Try soaking your toe in warm salt water – which has an antiseptic effect – for 15 minutes, two or three times a day, and see if this helps. If there's no improvement after a few days and your toe continues to smell or any redness or swelling develops, see your GP or a podiatrist. Be warned that, because the growing part of the nail is traumatised, it may remain damaged as it grows, leaving you with a permanently thickened nail. **ES**

## ...AND WHAT ABOUT HIM? WHY DOES MY BOYFRIEND HAVE UNDER-EYE BAGS?

**My boyfriend has puffy bags under his eyes, yet he gets about seven hours' sleep each night and is fit and healthy. What's causing them and is there anything he can do to get rid of them?**

**A** It's a very common misconception that eye bags are a reflection of how much water we drink or how much sleep we've had. The problem usually has more to do with age and genetics than anything else. As we get older, our eyeballs start to sink into their sockets and the fat behind the eyeball is squeezed forward into the area below our eyes, which, combined with a loss in skin

firmness and elasticity as we age, gives the appearance of bags. The excess skin and fat can be removed surgically, but the procedure is quite expensive.

Sun exposure and smoking will only make the problem worse, so if your partner smokes, this is just another reason for him to stop now. Make sure he protects himself from the sun by avoiding exposure between 11am and 3pm, and encourage him to wear a cap and sunglasses with good UV protection when out in the sun. Also, tell him to moisturise daily with a cream that contains SPF. **DH**

Photographs: Scope Beauty, Photolibary

Send your questions to our experts at [zest.mail@natmags.co.uk](mailto:zest.mail@natmags.co.uk)

## MEET OUR PANEL



**THE GP**  
Dr Dawn Harper is a Gloucestershire-based GP and has an interest in women's health. She also runs a private clinic at the Cheltenham And Gloucester Nuffield Hospital (01242 246543).



**THE COSMETIC SURGEON**  
Simon Withey is a consultant plastic surgeon with London Plastic Surgery Associates ([www.LPSA.co.uk](http://www.LPSA.co.uk)). He specialises in all areas of aesthetic surgery.



**THE GASTROENTEROLOGIST**  
Dr Richard Marley is the lead consultant for gastroenterology and hepatology at Barts And The London NHS Trust. He also practises at The Princess Grace Hospital, London.



**THE PODIATRIST**  
Emma Supple is a podiatrist and spokesperson for the Society Of Chiropodists And Podiatrists ([www.feetforlife.org](http://www.feetforlife.org)). She's also the founder of London's SuppleFoot Podiatry Clinic ([www.supplefeet.com](http://www.supplefeet.com)).



**THE GYNAECOLOGIST**  
Dr Janice Rymer is a consultant gynaecologist at Guy's And St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust ([www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk)), and a Royal College Of Obstetricians And Gynaecologists council member.



**THE DENTIST**  
Dr Nigel Carter is a qualified dentist with over 20 years' experience. He's also the chief executive of the British Dental Health Foundation ([www.dentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.dentalhealth.org.uk)), a dental-health charity.



**THE DERMATOLOGIST**  
Dr Nick Lowe is a consultant dermatologist at The Cranley Clinic in Marylebone, London (020 7499 3223). He is a member of the British Association Of Dermatologists.



**THE PSYCHOSEXUAL EXPERT**  
Paula Hall is a sexual/relationship therapist for Relate and her own private practice ([www.therelationshipspecialists.com](http://www.therelationshipspecialists.com)). She's BASRT and BACP accredited. For advice on sex, visit [www.relate.org](http://www.relate.org).



**THE COGNITIVE THERAPIST**  
Dr Jennifer Wild is a cognitive behavioural therapist who specialises in anxiety disorders. She also works as a research clinical psychologist at the Institute Of Psychiatry, King's College London.



**THE TRICHOLOGIST**  
Philip Kingsley founded the Philip Kingsley Trichological Clinic ([www.philipkingsley.co.uk](http://www.philipkingsley.co.uk)) and is a fellow of The Institute Of Trichologists. He has many celeb clients and is the UK's leading expert in his field.



**THE SEXUAL-HEALTH EXPERT**  
Dr Nneka Nwokolo is a sexual health consultant at Chelsea And Westminster Healthcare NHS Trust and lead clinician at Dr Thom ([www.drthom.com](http://www.drthom.com)), which provides STI testing and treatment.



**THE UROLOGIST**  
Julian Shah is a consultant urologist and senior lecturer at the Institute Of Urology And Nephrology at University College London. He has a special interest in the treatment of incontinence.