

dear dr mark



DR MARK PORTER'S
HERE TO ANSWER YOUR
HEALTH WORRIES

DOES NIGHT WORK CAUSE CANCER?

I'm about to start a new job that involves shift work, so I was alarmed by recent reports that working nights increases a woman's chances of developing breast cancer. What's the link?

Jayne, by email

Studies have shown that women who work nights are up to one and a half times more likely to develop breast cancer than those who don't. The link is poorly understood, but thought to be caused by hormone changes that happen when you're exposed to more light. Over the years, breast cancer has been linked to a range of causes. In truth, one of the most important determinants of a woman's chances of developing breast cancer is her family history. If you have no family history of the disease, you are still at a pretty low risk of developing breast cancer, whatever else you do with your life.

HE WON'T GIVE ME A PRESCRIPTION

I've had a persistent cough for the last two weeks, but my GP still says I don't need antibiotics. Is he trying to save the NHS money?

Lydia, Ipswich

The vast majority of coughs are caused by viruses - antibiotics don't help and they can even make matters worse. Coughs generally clear up without any treatment, but you do need to be patient. Research shows that the average cough lasts for 20 days from start to finish, so you probably still have

another week to go. Signs of more serious trouble that may require antibiotics include a high temperature, shortness of breath and coughing up blood.

MY PROBLEM LUMP

I have an embarrassing problem. When I make love, I develop a tender swelling close to my vagina that can grow to the size of a cherry. What could it be?

Melanie, by email

You need to see your GP to confirm the diagnosis, but it sounds very much like a Bartholin's cyst - a swelling of the gland that produces lubrication when you are sexually excited. Infection, inflammation or any other type of blockage in the outlet of the gland will lead to swelling when you're aroused. Treatment depends on the cause, but sometimes involves a small operation.

what's the alternative?

SEX? NO THANKS!

My diet's OK and I sleep well, but lately I'm not interested in sex. Can you help?

Sacha, York

Wild oats are known for their restorative qualities to the reproductive organs. Try the wild grass *avena sativa*, which you can buy as a tincture or eat as porridge. *Agnus castus* is another herb that helps switch your body back on.

Nutritional therapist Christina Barton (www.chrisbar.com)



DR MARK'S
BURNING
QUESTION

Can I prevent cot death?

Every time I put my baby down to sleep, I worry about cot death. What do doctors advise these days? And is it true that giving her a dummy at night could help prevent it?

Ali, Hertfordshire

The advice to put babies to sleep on their backs has resulted in a dramatic drop in the number of cot deaths in the UK, but sadly six babies still die every week. The latest research now suggests that babies who use dummies are much less likely to fall victim to cot death. Why this is so remains unclear, but research has found that using a dummy cuts cot death by 90 per cent. There is no downside to giving your child a dummy at night, as long as you wean her off it by her first birthday (regular dummy use can cause ear infections as germs travel via saliva into the ear). Don't forget the other major risk factor for cot death - smoking. Never let anyone smoke in your house if you have a young baby.

TRIED & TESTED

The Closer panel's verdict on **head lice treatments**

Full Marks Mousse £5.99 (0800 074 2040)

• This is very effective. You apply the mousse, allow it to dry for about 30 minutes, then rinse it out. It didn't have a nasty smell, so my kids didn't complain.

RATING:
4/5

Electronic Head Comb £21.99 (Boots)

• This was effective, but time consuming. Your children have to stay sitting down while you painstakingly comb through their hair, which mine found boring.

RATING:
3/5

Nice'nClear Head Lice removal kit

£9.99 (www.nicenclear.co.uk)

• This is brilliant! It comes with a DVD to show you how to spot and treat head lice. You comb through the lotion, then use the shampoo. It has a fruity smell, so my kids thought they were using a regular brand.

RATING:
5/5



Something on your mind? Send your health questions to Dr Mark Porter at closerdoc@emap.com