



The Embarrassing Truth

Not eager to ask your doctor about hot flashes, hiccups and other awkward issues? We did the honors.

By Arricca Elin SanSone

Occasionally, my face gets really flushed. Could it be hot flashes?

Maybe. “A hot flash is a very individual experience,” says Jacqueline Thielen, MD, women’s health specialist and assistant professor of medicine at Mayo Clinic. “Typically, you feel yourself getting warm, sweating and

having facial flushing that lasts a few minutes.”

While hot flashes aren’t dangerous, they’re uncomfortable and bothersome. “Fortunately, we have hormonal and non-hormonal meds to manage symptoms,” says Thielen. “You don’t have to suffer in silence.”

See your doc for new flushing or increases in frequency or intensity. It could indicate a thyroid problem, Cushing’s syndrome or rosacea.

Are my stretch marks permanent?

Sadly, yes. Those pink, black, red or purple streaks occur when the skin stretches during pregnancy or from rapid weight gain or loss. In time, they typically fade and become less noticeable. Although nothing can erase them, you may be able to minimize their appearance with prescription retinoid creams or laser therapy.

See your doc right away. “You have the best chance of improving the appearance of ‘new’ marks that are red or purple, not those that have faded to white,” says Lauren Ploch, MD, with Georgia Dermatology and Skin Cancer Center in Augusta, GA.

Why do I get hiccups after a glass or two of wine?

A hiccup is an involuntary spasm of the diaphragm quickly followed by the closing of your vocal cords. “A combination of factors cause hiccups,” says Evelyne Kalyoussef, MD, associate professor in the department of otolaryngology at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. “When you drink alcohol, your stomach may become distended, which irritates the diaphragm.” Fizzy

beverages, overeating, eating or drinking too fast, or even getting upset or excited may trigger an episode. People with reflux may be more prone to developing hiccups. “Everybody’s grandma swears by a different remedy, though none are proven,” says Kalyoussef. Most hiccups subside in a few minutes. If they don’t, try this trick (not guaranteed but worth a shot!): Pinch your nose and hold your breath. The increase of carbon dioxide in the body relaxes the diaphragm. **See your doc** if hiccups persist, especially for more than a day, so they can rule out more serious issues, such as infection or stroke.

Is there a way to hide my psoriasis?

Short of wearing long pants and turtlenecks, there’s no effective way to camouflage those scaly red patches. Besides, you shouldn’t feel like you need to. “We have treatments we didn’t have 20 years ago,” says Ploch. “Let’s fix it instead of hiding it.” The first line of defense is a prescription cream, which may contain steroids or vitamin A or D derivatives to slow down cell growth and reduce inflammation. There are also systemic meds called biologics, which target specific parts of the immune

system to block the action of cells or proteins that trigger symptoms. UVB light therapy helps some people too. “It takes a few months to see results from a new treatment, but there are many combinations of therapies, so don’t give up,” says Ploch.

See your doc because people with psoriasis are at higher risk for conditions such as cardiovascular disease and arthritis.

■ **I can’t get rid of my muffin top. What gives?** Even though it may seem like your belly snuck up on you, it’s been a work in progress. As we get older, we lose lean muscle mass. There’s also a loss of estrogen and a newfound predisposition for your body to redistribute weight into your midsection, says Thielen. The threat isn’t just to your skinny jeans; those extra pounds around your midsection may increase your risk for diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. “Your muffin top is a red flag for you to take care of yourself,” says Thielen. “Dropping some pounds will help, but you have to add weight or resistance training to build muscle.” As for liposuction or other cosmetic procedures,

your doctor will probably encourage weight loss by less invasive means.

See your doc if your weight-loss efforts aren’t working. It could be menopause or an underlying hormonal issue such as polycystic ovary syndrome.

■ **My feet stink!** Super-smelly feet aren’t pleasant, but they’re common. “If the odor is really noticeable, you may sweat more than other people,” says Lindsay Strowd, MD, assistant professor of dermatology at Wake Forest Baptist Health. “People worry that it’s a cleanliness issue, but it’s not. It’s caused by naturally occurring bacteria we all have on our skin that multiply with sweat.” The key to smell-free feet is keeping them dry. Wear socks that wick moisture away from skin (not 100% cotton). Sprinkle foot powder in shoes as a moisture barrier, or apply antiperspirant to the bottoms of feet. Give smelly shoes a daily dose of disinfectant spray (we like Lysol). If you have mild itchiness and scaling or redness on the bottom of feet or between toes, try an OTC antifungal medication that contains clotrimazole. Powders and sprays are better than creams, which may make feet too moist.

See your doc if your feet are always wet. The cause



may be hyperhidrosis, which can be treated with topical and oral meds.

■ **Sometimes I feel constipated; sometimes I go constantly. Do I have IBS?** Probably not. Lots of things affect your bathroom routine, including diet and exercise. “Infrequent constipation or diarrhea is normal,” says Darren Brenner, MD, director of the neurogastro motility and functional bowel programs at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. “To diagnose IBS, there must also be some sort of abdominal pain, a feeling of fullness or bloating, or cramping.”

See your doc if you have recurrent diarrhea or constipation (or alternating episodes!) and GI discomfort, because IBS is more common in

women. There are new medications, dietary modifications, behavioral interventions and other therapies to help manage it, says Brenner.

■ **How can I prevent my groin from sweating during my workout?** You have sweat glands down there, so—sorry!—you can’t stop them from doing their job. To feel more comfortable, wear cotton underwear and moisture-wicking fabrics. If you experience a not-so-fresh odor, try dusting an OTC antifungal powder containing miconazole into skin creases before working out (steering clear of the most intimate parts of your anatomy). “These powders help absorb excess wetness and minimize smell,” says Sonya Kenkare, MD, dermatologist at Little Company of Mary Hospital in Evergreen Park, IL.

See your doc if you’ve suddenly started sweating profusely. They’ll check for an underlying condition such as hyperthyroidism.