

ASK Dr ELLIE

@Dr_Ellie

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

Q EARLIER this year, aged 65, I was diagnosed with high blood pressure after tests by my GP, and I was put on medication. Over the following months I underwent more checks at hospital which included wearing a 24-hour monitor, but doctors couldn't tell me what had caused my problem. Given this, I went back to my GP expecting to be told that as my blood pressure had remained stable, I could come off medication. But the doctor said I would have to remain on tablets for the rest of my life. Is he right?

A THIS is an excellent question, as I really believe patients don't ask the question 'Why?' often enough.

You have been diagnosed with a lifelong problem and it is pertinent to seek answers and understand what is a very common condition. High blood pressure increases risk of heart disease and stroke. It is often defined as 'essential hypertension', which means no cause has been found. In a way, that's positive, as worrying triggers such as kidney disease and hormonal disruption are not to blame. It could be your situation is due to the hardening of the arteries as you age, but other factors may contribute.

Your situation is typical – no further reason is sought as there is rarely one to find. Your high blood pressure has been confirmed through a 24-hour tape as it should be, and your GP correctly suggests you need lifelong treatment.

Whether or not we know the cause of high blood pressure, we are certainly aware of the consequences. It is a significant risk factor for strokes and heart attacks, and multiple scientific trials have proven that control of blood pressure reduces this risk.

The drug you are on – which you mention by name in your letter – works by relaxing the blood vessel walls, thereby reducing the pressure within the circulation. It keeps the blood pressure down but only while you take it daily. By staying on this drug, you are preventing much more serious

Will I need heart pills for the rest of my life?

problems. It is difficult to accept you need pills for a condition you cannot feel, so I empathise. But the answer remains the same: treatment for high blood pressure is lifelong.

Q I AM aged 82 and all my life I have had a horrible coated tongue. I have never smoked, I rarely drink alcohol and I eat a healthy diet, yet my mouth is very dry when I wake up. However, I cannot afford to drink too much before I go to bed as I suffer from slight incontinence.

A THE most common cause of a coated tongue would be oral thrush, but it would be unusual to suffer this all your life. It would usually

have been resolved if you have tried an anti-fungal treatment from the GP. I wonder if you have a condition called oral lichen planus. This is an autoimmune disease that causes white raised patches on the tongue, cheeks, palate and gums.

These patches can be painful when they are on the tongue. People with oral lichen planus can also have red, painful sores in the mouth as well as the hands and feet. If this is the case, the diagnosis needs to be confirmed by your GP or specialist, and treatment with steroids can be used.

Oral hygiene is obviously crucial to helping your problem, and it is worth considering using a soft tongue brush if you haven't already to try to relieve some of the coating.



TEXTBOOK CASE: Cheryl opened up about her mental health issues

Courageous Cheryl helps lift the gloom

GORGEOUS Cheryl Fernandez-Versini has opened up about her mental health following the breakdown of her marriage to footballer Ashley Cole. I applaud her honesty in speaking about the subject which still carries an unjustifiable stigma.

Cheryl's was a textbook description of depression: 'I didn't feel passionate, just a bit dead. Getting out of bed was difficult. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat properly. Trying to go to sleep, and suddenly when you're sleeping, the world gets loud,' she said.

The illness – relationship problems, work stress or grief. But it can also be spontaneous. Last week, there was an exciting scientific

breakthrough as researchers in Cardiff identified genes that may be responsible for the development of another mental illness, schizophrenia. In the same way, it's highly likely that our susceptibility to depression is written in our DNA.

The most important step is to seek help, as Cheryl did. Frustratingly, NHS mental health teams are under-resourced and waiting lists for a psychotherapy can be lengthy.

Private sessions can also be expensive but there are lower-cost options. One would involve seeing a trainee for as little as £5 per session. They are usually nearing qualification when they start seeing patients and would be intensively supervised.

Health

CARNATION FOOTCARE

PEDIROLLER

SOOTHING FOOT EXERCISER

"Has helped relieve my tired, aching feet"

Cheryl Phillips

- Ridged design massages tired feet, reducing tension and stimulating circulation.
- Chiroprapist designed for immediate relief for heel and arch pain.
- Foot exercise guide included.



carnationfootcare.co.uk

Available from selected and independent pharmacies

PRINCE George turned one last week to the delight of his family and Royal-watchers. The Duchess of Cambridge has already disclosed that her son is fairly fussy when it comes to eating vegetables, so I'm sure she and her husband are paying close attention to George's eating habits. Research has shown that a love of vegetables can be honed even before the age of two. Even fussy eaters can be encouraged to eat more greens if they are offered them five to ten times. So Kate, you've got a year to turn Prince George into a gourmand!



DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION FOR DR ELLIE?

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.

Don't get rid of our rural GPs

THE news about vanishing rural GP services is a huge worry to those communities affected. We don't need 'a doctor' – we need 'our doctor'.

Every community needs GPs who understand the environment and the idiosyncrasies of their particular neighbourhood.

In the area I work in, the local housing estate has centralised

heating that the residents can't control; this makes children's eczema worse through winter, and causes dry, congested noses in babies.

The local GPs know that. Staff at a remote call-centre wouldn't, and that directly affects patient care.

It will be a tragedy if rural GP services go the way of the rural post office.

● *Keep Calm: The New Mum's Manual: Trust Yourself And Enjoy Your Baby*, by Dr Ellie Cannon, is published by Vermilion, price £10.99. To order your copy at the special price of £8.99 with free p&p, call the Mail Book Shop on 0844 472 4157 or go to mailbookshop.co.uk.

HAVING been an expert panellist on Channel 4's *Health Freaks*, a series about the bizarre DIY treatments people concoct, it didn't surprise me to read that organic enthusiasts are using beeswax as an alternative to sun creams. According to Cancer Research UK, some websites claim carrot seed oil has a sun protection factor of up to 50, which would be funny if it wasn't so dangerous. The best way to stay safe is to keep out of the sun! Sorry, but having seen how disfiguring skin cancer can be, it's just not worth the risk.