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## Health advice

# Sarah's surgery



Dr Sarah Brewer,  
GP and expert in  
complementary  
medicine, answers  
your questions

### Treatment for blurry sight

**Q** I had my eyes lasered to treat short-sightedness 20 years ago. My vision is blurring again in one eye – can I have laser surgery twice, or would contact lenses be better?

**A** According to Bobby Qureshi, consultant ophthalmic surgeon and medical director at the London Eye Hospital, laser is probably not the best option to improve your vision for a second time if you now have presbyopia (age-related long-sightedness). It would only last a few years at most because the lens inside your eye is changing and may eventually form a cataract. He suggests considering a lens extraction and replacing your ageing eye lens with an implant that would potentially last for the rest of your life. The best would be the Light Adjustable Lens (LAL) as, even after implantation, it can be fine-tuned to give the best possible vision without glasses. However, prices start at around £6,000 per eye, so you may wish to try a single contact lens initially as this is far cheaper and less invasive.

### Help me stop sweating!

**Q** Even through the winter, I sweat excessively over my chest and arms. My GP says that it's too widespread to try Botox injections, which are now sometimes prescribed for smaller areas, and has ruled out thyroid problems and menopause. Any ideas?

**A** Excessive sweating (hyperhidrosis) is thought to occur when the body's thermostat is set too high. Have you tried Pro-Banthine tablets? They are licensed to treat hyperhidrosis, work within one hour and are effective for up to six hours. They are only available on prescription, so your GP can advise if they are likely to suit you.



Otherwise, keyhole surgery to cut nerves in the chest or armpit is effective in more than 90 per cent of cases. This may seem like a drastic solution, but it can be life changing. Your doctor can refer you for advice on whether it's an option for you.

### Coping with flushing

**Q** I've just found out my teenage granddaughter, who is half Thai, is taking Pepcid tablets to stop her face going red when she drinks alcohol. Are these dangerous?

**A** The so-called 'Asian glow' that occurs when some people with East Asian genes drink alcohol is due to inheriting enzymes that are less efficient at breaking down alcohol. This leads to a build-up of acetaldehyde (causing hangover-like effects of nausea and headache) and histamine, which produces the flush. Drugs such as Pepcid and Zantac, which switch off acid production in the stomach, are histamine blockers and can prevent the glow. They are available from pharmacies as they are

relatively safe drugs for treating indigestion. However, they slow the metabolism of alcohol further, which increases blood alcohol concentrations. This means you reach your limit more quickly, which could lead to alcohol poisoning. Your granddaughter would do better to dilute her drinks with a non-alcoholic mixer, and use a green-tinted foundation primer to help minimise the glow.

### Advice about gall bladder surgery

**Q** A recent health screen showed I have a cholesterol gallstone, which is about the size of an olive. It's not causing any symptoms, so will I need to have surgery?

**A** It's estimated that one in six people have at least one gallstone, and the annual risk that these so-called 'silent stones' will go on to cause symptoms is around one in 25. You can help avoid gall bladder surgery by changing your diet and lifestyle. Although a low-fat diet is often recommended, going too low in fat intake will, in fact, delay your gall bladder emptying and could make matters worse.

A Mediterranean-style diet that contains healthy fats (such as those found in olive oil, nuts and oily fish) is much more beneficial. A study found those who ate nuts five or more times per week (including peanuts and peanut butter) were 34 per cent less likely to need their gall bladder surgically removed than those who rarely ate nuts. Fruit and vegetables are also protective, as is cutting back on carbohydrates, especially sugar. Supplements that



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can help reduce gallstone formation include vitamin C, magnesium, lecithin, plant sterols, globe artichoke and milk thistle.

### Concerns about fluoride

**Q** My kids love tea, but I read recently that it contains fluoride. Is this safe for them if they are also using fluoridated toothpaste?

**A** Fluoride helps to maintain healthy teeth as it binds to tooth enamel and strengthens it to aid decay prevention. Tea leaves provide 70 per cent of average fluoride intakes, but recent research shows that tea consumption is unlikely to cause either adults or children to exceed safe limits. If you are concerned, though, do ask your dentist next time your children have their regular check-up.

### Early-onset heart disease

**Q** At 37, I've been told that I have heart failure as a result of a viral infection weakening my heart muscle. Aren't I too young for this?

**A** Heart failure is a relatively common problem that affects as many as seven million people in the UK. As in your case, it can occur in younger people following viral inflammation of heart



muscle (cardiomyopathy), but other causes include heart attack (after which some heart muscle is converted into scar tissue), high blood pressure or severe anaemia (which mean the heart has to pump harder to deliver oxygen to the tissues) or an overactive thyroid gland (which causes the pulse to race). Key ways of looking after yourself following diagnosis include limiting salt intake and remaining as active as possible. Avoid alcohol and consider taking coenzyme Q10 supplements – these improve energy production in heart muscle cells and may improve your exercise tolerance. You can find more from the British Heart Foundation which, on 6 February, is holding its Wear It Beat It event. Wear red to help fund heart research. Call 0300 3300 0645 or visit [wearitbeatit.bhf.org.uk](http://wearitbeatit.bhf.org.uk).