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News Article

Excuse me, doc...

Thursday, 01 | 04 | 2010 ; Source: Mind Your Body; The StraitsTimes

By Poon Chian Hui

Do you snore like a freight train? Do you have unwanted hair on some parts of your body? Are you worried about your flailing libido? This week, POON CHIAN HUI looks into more blush-worthy conditions that you may find embarrassing

SNORING

What causes it?

Snoring stems from the vibration of soft tissue in the mouth. This includes the soft palate, tonsils and tongue base, said Dr Kenny Pang, a sleep specialist at Paragon Medical.

"At some point, the soft tissue obstructs the upper airway, causing snoring and, in some people, breathing difficulties," he said.

It is not surprising then that overweight people may have more trouble breathing, as their airways tend to be congested with more soft tissue.

However, greater congestion may not necessarily cause louder snores. With complete obstruction, there will be no sound and so no snoring, he said. "That is why many people get worried when their spouse is suddenly quiet. It's when the partner is noisy that they know he's still alive."

What you can do

As being overweight contributes to snoring, losing weight may help, said Dr Pang.

In addition, sleeping on the side prevents the tongue and palate from falling backwards, reducing snoring.

Should you see a doctor?

Most people dismiss snoring as a nuisance rather than a medical problem. However, it may be a symptom of sleep apnoea, which has long-term health implications, said Dr Pang.

Sleep apnoea is a disorder where one stops breathing momentarily several times during sleep. Sufferers will experience dips in oxygen levels during sleep, which can stress the heart and brain, he said. This, in turn, leads to high blood pressure, strokes, heart attacks and even sudden death, he added.

If you feel unusually sleepy in the day, have trouble focusing on tasks and find yourself choking or gasping for air in the middle of the night, see a doctor, he advised.

FREQUENT URINATION

What causes it?

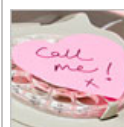
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For younger men, common causes include urinary tract infections and overactive bladders, said Dr Ng Kok Kit, a consultant urologist at [Changi General Hospital's](#) Andropause and Men's Health Clinic.

The former involves a bacterial infection of the urine, causing painful and frequent urination and may be accompanied by fever.

The latter stems from a bladder that is unduly sensitive. Even a small amount of urine in the bladder will make the person want to go to the toilet, said Dr Ng.

In older men, frequent urination may be linked to an enlarged prostate, otherwise known as benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH). Sufferers may find it difficult to start urinating and may experience a weak urine stream, a sense of incomplete relief and dribbling of urine at the end, he added.

What you can do

Preventing urinary tract infections start with good hygiene and staying well-hydrated.

Basic bladder training exercises can help you deal with an overactive bladder. It is best to learn these exercises from a trained nurse or therapist, said Dr Ng.

Should you see a doctor?

Yes. Antibiotics can treat urinary tract infections. If left untreated, the condition may lead to kidney infections, said the urologist.

People with an overactive bladder can see a doctor to get help with bladder training and to obtain medicine to control the condition.

BPH can be treated with medication; severe cases may need prostate surgery.

EXCESSIVE HAIR

What causes it?

Up to 10 per cent of women are affected by hirsutism or the presence of hair resembling male-pattern hair growth.

It is usually caused by a spike in male sex hormones or androgens, said Dr Wee Horng Yen, a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at [KK Women's and Children's Hospital](#).

Androgen over-production is commonly due to hormonal imbalance like polycystic ovary disease, which also causes irregular periods, obesity and infertility. Sufferers may also get acne and greasy skin in addition to excessive hair growth, he said.

A more unusual cause is congenital adrenal hyperplasia, where the lack of a particular enzyme triggers the release of male sex hormones in women, he added.

Androgen-secreting tumours may also be found in the woman's ovaries or adrenal glands, but these are rare occurrences.

Dr Wee added that some types of medication are androgenic, so hair growth may be a side effect.

What you can do

Waxing may help, but the effect is temporary. Other options include laser and electrolysis treatments as well as cosmetics. However, these are not permanent solutions.

Should you see a doctor?

Finding out the exact cause early may help stop the condition from worsening and get rid of the diseases that may be behind the problem, said Dr Wee.

Signs to look out for are increased hair growth on the face, chest, arms and legs.

Dr Pang Shiu Ming, a dermatologist at [Singapore General Hospital](#), added that other changes such as weight gain, acne growth, irregular periods, deepening of the voice and increased libido in addition to rapid hair growth may indicate a more serious problem such as polycystic ovarian disease or male hormone secreting tumours.

IMPOTENCE

What causes it?

Also known as erectile dysfunction, impotence can be caused by poor blood supply to the penis, nerve damage, hormonal imbalance and even psychological barriers, said Dr Ng Kok Kit, a consultant urologist at [Changi General Hospital's](#) Andropause and Men's Health Clinic.

Smokers, diabetics and those with high cholesterol and hypertension have a higher risk of erectile dysfunction, he added.

What you can do

Keeping one's blood vessels healthy with regular exercise and a balanced diet may prove useful, said Dr Ng.

He advised giving up smoking and keeping blood sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure levels well under control.

Should you see a doctor?

Yes, if the condition severely affects one's quality of life, said Dr Ng. Solutions include oral medication, injection therapy and surgery.

