

YOUR GPs CAN TREAT THESE CONDITIONS

The GPFIRST Programme was launched in 2014 to encourage patients in eastern Singapore to see their general practitioners (GPs) for mild to moderate medical conditions, rather than head straight to the emergency department. In this regular series, our eastern community GPs offer advice on common ailments *Caring* readers might face.

In this issue, we focus on hypertension and adult acne. Do visit www.gpfirst.sg or see your GP for more information on other common conditions such as nausea, headaches, sprains, fevers, cuts and bruises and mild scalds.



HYPERTENSION

I am a 45-year-old female. I love to indulge in good food. Recently my colleagues commented that I had put on some weight. A recent health screening revealed that my blood pressure was 141/90 and I have a 28.3 Body Mass Index (BMI). Lately, I have also been having headaches, especially in the morning when I rush for work. Am I suffering from hypertension? Can my GP help me?

Blood pressure (BP) changes from minute to minute, and can vary a lot in a day. Thus, your diagnosis of high blood pressure should be based on multiple BP measurements taken on several separate occasions and over four to seven consecutive days, before diagnosis of

hypertension can be confirmed.

You can also buy a home blood pressure monitor (HBPM), which is widely available and can be used repeatedly to show day-to-day blood pressure variation. If your HBPM average blood pressure is equal or more than 135/85 mmHg when measured repeatedly, you may be regarded as hypertensive. You should, however, consult your doctor to confirm and, more importantly, address the diagnosis.

Hypertension is associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, including heart attack and stroke. Besides raised blood pressure, other risk factors for cardiovascular disease include a body mass index (BMI) of over 27.5, a lack of physical



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activity, smoking, high stress levels, high cholesterol and diabetes.

In your case, losing weight can minimise your risk for cardiovascular disease. Aim to keep your BMI to less than 23kg/m². Talk to your GP, who can assist you in your weight loss plan. Reducing stress, such giving yourself adequate time in the morning to get ready instead of rushing, helps too. Other small lifestyle changes can make a difference in cardiovascular health: eat a healthier diet high in fibre, veggies and whole grains, and low in fat and cholesterol, exercise regularly, limit alcohol and avoid smoking.

Hypertension is often called the silent killer because, even when severe, it may not manifest any symptoms. You may have headaches or giddiness when the hypertension is severe, but these symptoms are not specific to hypertension, they are also present in other diseases. It is best to talk to your GP who can evaluate the cause of your headache and suggest the right treatment.

ADULT ACNE

I am a 20-something female suffering from acne breakouts. Is this unusual? What causes adult acne and how do I manage it?

You are not alone, about 50 per cent of women aged 20 to 29 have acne!

Acne is caused by the inflammation of the skin's sebaceous glands. These glands become blocked, producing whiteheads and blackheads. Bacteria on the skin multiply in the blocked glands and causes inflammation, which can lead to nodules or pustules with or without heads, and sometimes, cysts, which are deep under the skin and can be tender and last for quite a while.

With teenage acne, pimples are found on the T-zone (forehead, nose and chin); these are usually caused by the increase in the levels of male hormones during puberty in both sexes. In adult hormonal acne, pimples usually form on the lower half of the face

(jawline, lower cheeks and chin). Hormonal fluctuations, emotional stress, change in weather/environment and unsuitable skincare products are possible causes. As a rule of thumb, wash your face no more than twice a day, as over-cleansing may encourage sebum production, potentially resulting in more clogged pores. After cleansing, use non-comedogenic moisturiser and sunblock. Avoid foods that may aggravate your acne, like chocolate or milk, refined carbs and sugar, and red meat. Maintain a healthy diet, drink plenty of water, and exercise regularly. Don't pick at your acne no matter how tempting or it may scar!

Mild adult acne may be managed by topical treatments. Tea tree oil is a natural antiseptic which is effective in some cases. Your GP may recommend products containing alpha-hydroxy acids (fruit acids), glycolic acid or retinoids, as these help to slough off dead skin cells and prevent further blockage of sebaceous glands, even help lighten scars. In moderate to severe cases, oral therapy may include antibiotics, retinoids, or hormone pills. It usually takes at least two months for a new skin routine to take full effect, so be patient. If it persists, see a GP with a special interest in dermatology, or a dermatologist. ©



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