

Embarrassing bodies

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From the slightly awkward to what feels like the downright mortifying, these health conundrums are more common – and much more solvable – than you might think.



Whether it's snoring loud enough to wake the neighbours or hair that has started to crop up in places it wasn't before, some ailments are more awkward than others to address. Sure, we've made significant strides when it comes to destigmatising mental health and chronic illnesses, but certain issues remain steeped in embarrassment.

For many of us, our first port of call is Dr Google. If you have ever gone down the rabbit hole of searching for the meaning of symptoms online, you'll know how confusing (not to mention alarming) it can be. Ironically, while you might find it embarrassing, for your GP or pharmacist it's more than likely something they've heard before.

"I can't remember a time when I have been shocked or heard something for the first time," says women's

health expert and integrative medical doctor, Dr Lucy Caratti. "If you are dealing with something, someone else has already experienced it and asked us about it."

The same goes for pharmacists, who are a good port of call thanks to their expertise in medications and preventative health services (like vaccinations or blood pressure checks). They're also able to provide guidance and treatment for minor ailments (such as colds, coughs and allergies), as well as offering health advice including lifestyle recommendations.

"In addition, we can refer you to a doctor or other allied health practitioner where needed, to ensure you receive the most appropriate treatment for your concern," says Priceline pharmacist Melissa Gannon.

However, if just the thought of saying it out loud is enough to send you into a shame spiral, we've pulled back the covers on seven common health issues.

1. Inconvenient leaks

Affecting an estimated 38 per cent of Australian women, urinary incontinence can severely impact your quality of life.

"Generally, it can be classified as either stress incontinence [caused by an increase in abdominal pressure such as when sneezing] or urge incontinence [where the urge to urinate comes on suddenly without the ability to control it]," explains Dr Caratti. "Some people have a mix of both and some have what is called overflow incontinence [where you can't completely empty your bladder, leading to leaking]."

Leaks can be caused by a variety of factors including weak pelvic floor muscles, urinary tract infections, an overactive bladder and some medical conditions. Treatment ranges from lifestyle changes (like reducing your caffeine and alcohol intake, and smoking less) and physical therapy (including pelvic floor exercises), to more serious interventions such as medications and surgery.

2. Loud snoring

Snoring is often joked about but it can indicate sleep apnoea, a condition where breathing repeatedly stops and starts during sleep. It has been linked to several health problems, including cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

"Snoring is more likely when you have a cold or a blocked nose, and can be worsened by alcohol or sleeping on your back," says Melissa. "Ongoing snoring should be investigated to rule out any underlying medical conditions or sleep disorders."

3. Unwanted hair

Hirsutism or excessive hair growth, particularly on the face, chest and back, can be embarrassing and is often caused by hormonal imbalances, such as polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

"While hair growth has been labelled 'normal' for perimenopausal and menopausal women, hair thinning on the top of the head while growing a beard is definitely not one of the joys of ageing," says Dr Caratti. "If you are in this age group, it's

"If you are dealing with something, someone else has already experienced it and asked us about it." – *Dr Lucy Caratti*

worth seeing a doctor to look for contributing factors like insulin resistance or high testosterone."

Once the cause is addressed, hair growth can only be slowed, not reversed, so hair removal treatments like waxing or shaving will still be needed.

4. Heavy discharge

Discharge is a normal part of vaginal health, but significant changes in volume, colour or odour can indicate infections or other issues.

"Hormonal changes can affect the vaginal discharge so you may want to look out to see if there is a cyclical pattern to the changes. Heavier than normal discharge can also be due to a disruption to the vaginal microbiome

and infections, so if you notice any change, it's best to see your GP," says Dr Caratti.

A simple swab can determine whether there is any infection (like thrush or an STI) and help dictate which treatment may be necessary.

6. Bad breath

Halitosis, or chronic bad breath, is often attributed to poor oral hygiene. But it can also be a sign of underlying health issues such as gum disease, sinus infections or digestive problems.

"To maintain good oral hygiene, it's important to brush twice daily and floss or use an interdental brush to clean between teeth where a toothbrush can't reach," says Melissa. "Drinking plenty of water and limiting sweet foods are also important."

Book in to see your dentist every six months so they can rule out any dental or medical conditions that could be contributing factors.

7. Excessive sweating

Hyperhidrosis, or excessive sweating, affects about 3 per cent of the population and can feel like a daily battle for sufferers.

Lifestyle changes like showering with an antibacterial soap to reduce the odour associated with sweating, choosing different clothing fabrics that allow your skin to breathe, and staying hydrated are all supportive measures you can adopt.

"In addition to antiperspirants, there are oral medications and medical procedures. However, these need to be discussed in consultation with a GP," says Melissa.

Dr Caratti adds that if underlying causes are ruled out, "we need to remember that sweating is a normal bodily function that serves a purpose, so we don't necessarily want to shut it down!" **AWW**

5. Low libido

Reduced sexual desire is often steeped in shame. Factors contributing to low libido include stress, hormonal imbalances or changes, mental health issues and relationship problems.

"Causes of low libido in women can be so varied and depend on age," explains Dr Caratti.

She says in younger women the likely culprits are hormonal imbalances, side effects from medications like antidepressants and mental health issues.

"In older women, on the other hand, a larger proportion of cases are due to hormonal changes such as low testosterone, low oestradiol causing dry vagina and painful sex. Body changes and low confidence related to perimenopause and menopause can also be factors."

If your sex drive is consistently low, book a visit to your doctor.