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Closer

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ISSUE 156
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dear dr mark



DR MARK PORTER'S
HERE TO ANSWER YOUR
HEALTH WORRIES

IS COFFEE REALLY THAT BAD FOR YOU?

Why is it that diets always suggest cutting out coffee? I drink between four and six cups of strong coffee a day. Am I doing myself any harm?

Erika, by email

There is very little actual science behind most detox regimes, so I wouldn't worry about the amount of coffee you drink. Most doctors would agree that drinking between four and six cups a day is unlikely to cause any problems, and may even have a few health benefits. Caffeine helps both mental and physical performance, and coffee, like tea, is a rich source of antioxidants - chemicals that protect our bodies against the ravages of day-to-day life.

WILL MY SCARS EVER DISAPPEAR?

I got very badly sunburnt last summer on my shoulders and it has left unsightly scars. Will they ever go away?

Carrie, by email

In extreme cases, sunburn can cause the same sort of scarring as a conventional burn - pale, pinkish scars, which become more noticeable during the summer because they don't tan like healthy skin. These may become less noticeable with time but they will never go away completely. The only way to cover them up effectively is to use camouflage make-up. Make sure you use plenty of sunscreen in the future as the scarred areas will be more sensitive to the sun than the rest of your skin.

MY BOYFRIEND'S GOING BALD

My boyfriend is in his mid-20s but is already starting to lose his hair. His dad went bald at an early age and it looks like my boyfriend is going the same way. It shouldn't bother me, but it does. Is there anything he can do to stop it?

Sam, Beaconsfield

There are two licensed treatments for male pattern baldness - Regaine and Propecia - and both will slow, halt or even reverse hair loss in around half of all men. You can buy Regaine over the counter at chemists, but you need a prescription for Propecia. Both drugs have to be used indefinitely to maintain any benefits. Personally, I think your boyfriend faces an uphill struggle to keep his hair - a battle he will eventually lose. I suggest you come to terms with that.

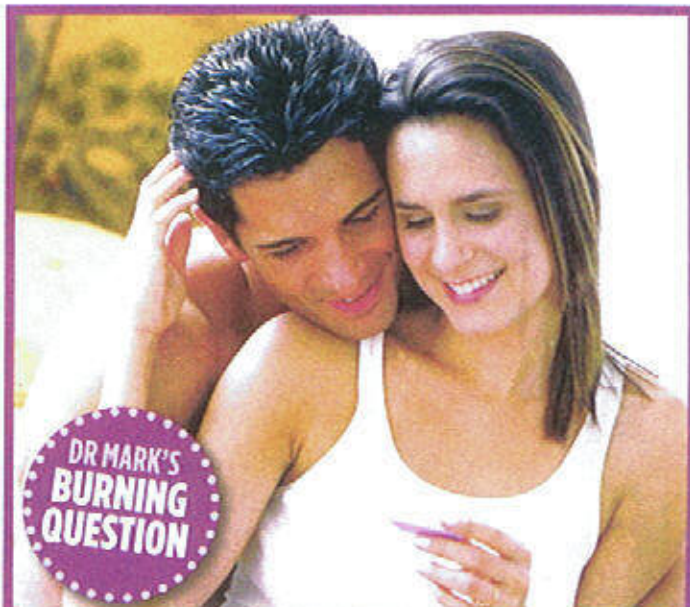
what's the alternative?

SLEEP TROUBLE

I broke up with my boyfriend recently and since then have had trouble sleeping. Can you suggest any natural remedies?

Debs, by email

Avoid eating after 8pm and cut out caffeine in the afternoon. Make a list of your feelings to clear your mind before bed. Finally, you could try the natural relaxant Valerian (£5.99, Holland & Barrett).
Penny Topham, www.organicnutrition.co.uk



Is folic acid dangerous?

My partner and I have just found out we're having a baby. My doctor suggested I take folic acid, but I'm concerned by recent newspaper reports saying it can cause heart attacks. What's the truth?

Eva, Manchester

You should take daily folic acid supplements while trying to conceive, and up until the 12th week of your pregnancy. This will help protect your baby against spina bifida and will have no effect whatsoever on your risk of having a heart attack. Up until now, however, many doctors had thought folic acid supplements actually reduced the likelihood of heart disease, but a recent trial suggests they have no such preventative effect. It also found that when taken alongside vitamin B6 supplements, folic acid may make matters worse. It's unclear why this combination should cause problems, but volunteers who took the two together were about 20 per cent more likely to have a heart attack or stroke than those who didn't. So although folic acid is a must, you should avoid vitamin B6 supplements.

TRIED & TESTED

The Closer panel's verdict on **Botox alternatives**

Natralox

£49.95 (Harvey Nichols and www.planetblueshop.com)

"This cream is well worth the money. It smells really nice and sinks in very quickly when applied to the face. Loads of my friends have commented on how fresh-faced I look."

RATING: 5/5

Bioque Serum

£75 (08700 117503)

"I love the bottle - it looks so pretty. I don't have that many wrinkles, but this serum definitely smoothed out my complexion."

RATING: 4/5

Pretox

£65 (0845 121 6868)

"This is amazing! It rubs in really easily and my lines were less noticeable after just a couple of weeks. My skin looked instantly smoother, too."

RATING: 5/5

