

OUR HEALTH SOS

Too tired to put on my socks

Just getting dressed, left me out of breath – and I was only 27

From Jenna Churchley-Burton, 31, of Bedminster, Bristol

I lay in bed exhausted. My lips had turned blue and another bout of coughing had left me struggling for breath.

I'd come down with a bad chest infection and it was getting worse by the day.

I went to see my GP and he wasted no time in checking the levels of oxygen in my blood.

He said: 'This really is not good, Jenna. Your levels are dangerously low. I think the best thing to do would be to get you into hospital where you can be closely monitored to find out what's causing this.'

But I protested. I'd spent too much time in hospitals.

I'd been born prematurely with a very rare lung disease and had stayed in intensive care until just before my third birthday.

I begged: 'If I take antibiotics and rest up completely, can I stay at home?'

Eventually we compromised – I wouldn't be admitted but I would be referred to a consultant respiratory specialist.

I had a CT scan



Me now

and then the specialist showed me an image of my lungs.

Pointing to some big black spaces on the scan, he said: 'Here we can see areas of extensive emphysema...'

I burst into tears. Being told I had emphysema – a serious long-term lung disease – was news to me.

The consultant explained that it had been caused by

me being intubated as a baby.

I was only 27, but I felt as if a death sentence had been passed.

I had to take medication and use inhalers frequently. On top of that, I needed regular appointments with the consultant.

Just simple tasks like getting up, dressing or climbing stairs left me breathless.

In time, I met a man called Guillaume, and he became my boyfriend.

However, I was worried that I was a burden to him.

I said: 'I don't want to hold you back.'

But he said: 'Don't be silly – you're not, I



Guillaume and me

love you no matter what.' Sadly my condition grew worse.

By the following year, I was getting so little oxygen that even small tasks like putting my socks on left me struggling for breath.

A respiratory nurse prescribed oxygen therapy.

She gave me small cylinders of oxygen I could carry around with me.

She said: 'You need to keep your levels topped up or you will be at risk of a stroke and a heart attack.'

I hated the idea of walking around with a tube in my nose and being so obviously different to everyone else.

When I started using the oxygen in public, people would stare at me and I hated it. It was so embarrassing.

But gradually I got used to their stares and they bothered me less.

I hope that in telling my story, I can help other young emphysema sufferers come to terms with oxygen therapy and reassure them that you

don't need to feel embarrassed in public.

Last year I saw a new consultant who told me I would need a lung transplant within the next five years.

I asked: 'Without a transplant, how long do I have left?'

He replied: 'If I had to guess – 10 years.'

Now I'm waiting to see if I can have an operation to reduce my lung capacity before being

assessed to go on a transplant list.

It's going to be a tough ride, but I fought for my life once, and I will again. I'm determined to be here for many years to come.

EMPHYSEMA

What is it? Emphysema is one of a number of conditions, including chronic bronchitis, where people have difficulty breathing because of long-term damage to their lungs. These conditions are often now called chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Who gets it? Although non-smokers can develop COPD, smoking causes more than 80 per cent of cases.

What's the treatment? Treatments usually involve relieving the symptoms with medication, by using an inhaler to make breathing easier for example. Surgery is only an option for a small number of people with COPD.

Where can I find out more? On the British Lung Foundation website blf.org.uk/COPD



I was kept in intensive care

Relationships

ARE YOU THE PERFECT COUPLE?

Does your relationship feel like a stroll in the park or more like you're dragging a piano up a hill? Take our quiz and see how in tune you are

- 1 You both want to go out for a meal. How do you decide where to go?**
 - a We take it in turns to choose.
 - b We like the same restaurants and pubs so it's easy.
 - c We usually can't agree so we just order a takeaway — if we can agree on that!
- 2 Do you share similar interests or hobbies?**
 - a One or two, but we also have a couple of separate interests too.
 - b Yes. We spend most of our spare time together.
 - c No. We do very different things.
- 3 Whose family do you visit?**
 - a We tend to see more of one family than the other because we both want to, or because the other one lives far away.
 - b We visit each other's families equally.
 - c My partner does what he can to get out of seeing my family.



- 4 When you plan a break or holiday, you...**
 - a Take it in turns to choose.
 - b Always return to a place we both really enjoy.
 - c Argue because we like very different types of holidays.
- 5 When you're unwell, your partner usually...**
 - a Treats me the way he likes to be

- treated. He mostly leaves me alone, but checks in on me to see if I want anything.
- b Makes me tea, buys me treats and sends me texts asking how I am.
 - c Steers well clear until I'm back on my feet.
- 6 Faced with a crisis like losing your job, a serious illness or bereavement, you...**
- a Tend to muddle on, trying to hold it together.
 - b Pull together. When one feels overwhelmed, the other takes over.
 - c Have lots of rows because the strain gets too much.



- 7 When you have an argument, what happens?**
- a We both get upset but we usually manage to work it out.
 - b We discuss the issue and talk about how we can resolve things.
 - c It takes days for us to start talking again and we never seem to move on from the problem.
- 8 Do you talk and listen to each other equally?**
- a More or less. We listen to each other when there's something interesting or important to talk about.
 - b Yes, we give each other
- our full attention always, whatever the subject.
- c I end up doing most of the listening or talking.
- 9 How do you manage your finances?**
- a We each have our own money to buy what we want and we share the bills.
 - b We have a joint bank account and check with each other before spending any money.
 - c We can't talk to each other about money without getting angry.

HOW DID YOU SCORE?

Mostly a's
Your relationship has its ups and downs but it appears that you mostly complement each other well. You know that neither of you are perfect, but you accept and love each other despite your flaws. You recognize that a good relationship needs compromise and negotiation and have managed to find that balance of respect and consideration.

Mostly b's
You're a perfect pairing. Be careful though — there's more to a good, healthy relationship than having exactly the same outlook and interests. If you spend all your spare time together, you might be in danger of suffocating each other! Don't overlook your individual need to have your own time, interests and to just be yourself.

Mostly c's
Your relationship is rather one-sided. You need to put in equal effort and commitment or resentments will build up and arguments follow. Discuss your differences and agree to negotiate and compromise over some issues. Start by identifying just one or two things to change — that will help you share your lives in a more balanced way.

TRUE or false

- An apple a day keeps the doctor away**
A recent study by University of Oxford researchers led them to say that if everyone over the age of 50 ate an apple a day, 8500 deaths from heart attacks and strokes could be avoided every year in the UK. This is because eating apples would give a similar boost to cardiovascular health as taking medicines such as statins, yet would carry none of the side effects.
- You'll catch a cold if you go out with wet hair**
The only thing that can cause a cold or flu is a virus. However, if you are already carrying the virus in your nose, being chilled by having wet hair might allow symptoms to develop. A study at Cardiff's Common Cold Centre found that people who chilled their feet in cold water for 20 minutes were twice as likely to develop a cold as those who didn't chill their feet. This may be because being chilled makes blood vessels constrict, affecting nasal defences and making it easier for the virus to replicate.
- Eat up your carrots — they'll help you see in the dark**
Carrots are rich in beta-carotene, which the body converts to vitamin A. If you had a vitamin A deficiency, you would develop night blindness. Eating carrots would correct this and improve your night vision, but carrots won't improve your eyesight if it is already good.
- Sitting too close to the TV will ruin your eyes**
Optometrists say the only eye problems that televisions cause are strain and fatigue, both of which can be cured by simply resting your eyes.



Dr KNOTT direct



HE HAS MAN BOOBS. My husband is 63 and appears to be developing breasts. He isn't overweight so could something be wrong?

The medical term for this is gynecomastia. It is a normal finding in half of men over the age of 70. It is also a common side effect of medicines such as digoxin, finasteride, and metronidazole. Occasionally it can be caused by underlying illnesses such as thyroid gland disease, liver

problems and adrenal gland disorders, so your husband should get a check-up to rule out these more uncommon conditions.

DOES SHE FEED THEM ENOUGH? My daughter gives her children aged five and seven healthy food, but how many calories should they have a day?

Various guidelines quote differing amounts, but a child aged five needs about 1200 calories per day and a

child aged seven needs about 1600 calories per day. These are average figures, which need to be adjusted according to how active the child is. Also, boys need slightly more than girls.

WHO KNEW? Women in love stop worrying about their weight, a study has found

a period, as ovulation normally occurs two weeks before the bleeding starts. Breastfeeding is not a reliable form of contraception, so you need to take other precautions to avoid pregnancy.

WHEN WILL MY PERIODS RETURN? I've just had a baby. Also, could I get pregnant before I start ovulating?

The average time is five to six weeks after delivery but this varies from woman to woman. You can get pregnant before having

MY NAILS LOOK AWFUL. They are ridged and flaky and break off before they get to any length. Please help.

Ridging of the nail can be a natural result of ageing, although flaking

suggests something else is going on. Repeated injury to the nails or contact with chemicals can be a cause. Fungal infection, iron deficiency and psoriasis can also produce this condition. Rarely, it can be due to an inherited problem. It would be worth trying a rehydrating oil on your nails, which can be obtained from a chemist or beautician. If that doesn't work, your GP could do blood tests and send off part of the nail to test for these other causes.

Dr Knott cannot answer your questions personally. If your symptoms are urgent or painful, please see a doctor.

SHOPspy

If you're looking to bring some excitement to your kids' bath times you'll like the new products in the Kids Stuff Crazy soap range. Shake & Sparkle Foam Bath should please any mini princess, and the Colour Changing Bubble Bath will fascinate boys and girls. Each comes with a crocodile finger puppet and costs £2.49 (RRP).



CLICK on it...

GP and family planning specialist Dr David Delvin and psychotherapist Christine Webber are carrying out a survey into the female orgasm. The results will be published later this year. If you're interested in filling out the online questionnaire simply click on smartsurvey.co.uk/s/medical. Dr Delvin — author of bestselling books about sex — says anyone taking part can be reassured that the survey is totally anonymous.

