

Health & wellbeing

Great advice to keep you happy and healthy

Q. I'm finding it difficult to hear properly. How do I know if I have a serious hearing problem or just excess ear wax?



Hidden Hearing Audiologist Farah Kiani is here to help.

This is a question I get asked a lot – wax blockage may give you mild, temporary hearing loss, and for this to happen the wax must completely block the canal or press on the eardrum.

Excess ear wax may also lead to discomfort, earache, the feeling of blocked ears and, in some cases,

tinnitus. It's very important not to try to remove the wax yourself if you think there is a blockage, as you may unintentionally push the wax further into the ear and possibly cause inflammation or damage to the wall of the ear canal.

Instead, ask your GP or audiologist to check for you.

If you have difficulty hearing, you may have hearing loss caused by a condition in the middle or inner ear. I recommend getting your ears assessed by your GP or audiologist.

To book a free hearing test visit www.HiddenHearing.co.uk/Friend or call free on 0800 037 2080.



In The News

Help For Chronic Coughs

Doctors from the University of Manchester have discovered a new drug which could help people with a stubborn and unexplained chronic cough.

The twice-daily pill cuts coughing by two thirds in people who have been coughing for more than eight weeks.

The drug, called gefapixant, works by blocking the throat nerve which triggers the cough reflex, and the scientists hope it will soon be made widely available for those who need it.



Handy Tips



Physiotherapists recommend regular exercises to ease the pain and stiffness that many people feel in their hands:

- Try washing up by hand once a day – the warm water can help ease pain
- When you've finished washing up, spend a few extra minutes with your hands in the bowl, gently squeezing a cloth or sponge and pushing the water from side to side
- Get your hands on a lump of Plasticine or Play-Doh and bring it out when you are watching TV, then spend five minutes squeezing, pinching and moulding it in your hands



Health Bite

Kombucha is a form of fermented tea which has now reached mainstream supermarkets thanks to its abilities to boost helpful bacteria levels in the gut.

The drink is slightly sweet with an apple-like flavour and a slight fizz. You can make your own by adding a special form of bacteria called a SCOBY to black or green tea, or buy it bottled and ready to drink.

Not only can kombucha help ease gut problems, but studies show it helps repopulate your gut microbiome, which in turn helps to boost your mental and physical health.



Hygiene To Safeguard Health



Our Health Writer, Louise Atkinson, gives advice on what you can do.

WITH everyone worried about the spread of coronavirus, the best advice for keeping safe is wash your hands, cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze and avoid touching your face.

This advice has stood the test of time, and the good news is experts predict it is so effective it could even herald a reduction in all forms of infectious diseases.

Handwashing works by breaking the reinfection cycle of a virus like COVID-19 which is spread through respiratory droplets that emerge when someone coughs.

These microscopic particles can travel as far as six feet and settle on surfaces, where they can live for anything from a few hours up to several days.

Although there is a risk of catching the disease by inhaling those particles, the biggest chance of getting coronavirus is by touching a surface where a droplet might have settled, then touching your face, potentially transferring the virus to your mouth, nose or eyes.

That's why frequent handwashing is so important. It allows you to wash away any invisible droplets before you touch your face or transfer the virus to another surface.

A recent study found that

handwashing cuts the chances of contracting a respiratory illness by 54% – the best odds of any deterrent.

So routinely wash your hands for at least 20 seconds before eating, after touching used tissues, after coming in from a crowded area, before bedtime, before applying make-up, before and after handling contact lenses, after being to the loo and after contact with someone you suspect might be unwell.

Although hand sanitisers are helpful, they only provide a barrier against virus if they contain 60% alcohol, and if your hands are dirty or greasy the sanitiser won't work.

The next best step is to frequently clean areas in the house where germs are more likely to spread.

The NHS recommends cleaning germ hotspots on a regular basis after use. Use either soap and hot water to rinse the germs away, or a bleach-based disinfectant to kill them.

That includes TV remote controllers, light switches and mobile phones – also taps, toilet seats, door handles, handrails, and the steering wheel, gear stick, dashboard controls and door handle of your car.

You can wash reusable cloths on a 60-degree wash, or 40 degrees with a bleach-based detergent, with towels and bed linen used by anyone who has the virus, then wash your own hands thoroughly after handling.

A tumble dryer will kill harmful micro-organisms in 28 minutes, but hanging washing outdoors is good, too, because direct sunlight has disinfecting properties.

As spring finally emerges from one of the wettest winters on record, heed another bit of old-fashioned advice – throw open your windows and doors to let the fresh air in. ■

Sleep – A Hot Topic

If you have trouble sleeping, try ditching your hot-water bottle.

Although many people find a hot-water bottle comforting at night, sleep experts warn that getting into a warm bed sends contradictory signals to the brain. The body needs to cool down in order to initiate good sleep and then maintain deep sleep.

This cooling process slows your metabolism and coincides with the release of melatonin, a hormone that makes you feel drowsy, sending a signal to your brain that it's time to fall asleep. However, a hot-water bottle could cause you to overheat, so interrupting this important process.



Vital Vitamins

The B vitamins are vitally important for supporting heart health, mental performance, psychological function and immunity, as well as ensuring the body efficiently converts food into energy. But they can be rapidly depleted if you are under stress or suffer from anxiety.

Healthspan's high strength B complex tablet combines eight essential B vitamins including B1, B2, B3, B5, B6, B12, biotin and folic acid, which studies show could improve your mental health and enhance cognitive performance.

Healthspan High Strength Vitamin B Complex is £8.95 for 120 tablets from www.healthspan.co.uk.

