

healthy clinic

rub it on your body and leave it to dry naturally. Body oil and body wash can help take the sting and the itch out of bites too. Herbal creams can also help soothe sore skin. Calendula and arnica creams may help reduce inflammation.

Q I've had a dodgy knee for years after doing loads of sport as a teenager, which has led to me losing cartilage and having eight operations. The damage to the joint, resulting in extensive osteoarthritis, is now so bad I need an artificial knee. Working out in the gym, cycling and swimming are out. What exercise regimes should I do before the operation?

Jean Hayes, by email

A Dax Moy, personal trainer, says Problems like this are common, with increasing numbers of people suffering pain around the knee joint and arthritis within the knee. Once the knee has undergone this kind of damage, the passive structures, such as cartilage, ligaments and other tissues, are under too much stress to cope. The only way to correct this is to have the active systems, the muscles, adapt by getting stronger and taking on more of the load – essentially holding the body together more efficiently.

The type of exercise you do is critical. Integrated Movement Training can be very effective in rehabilitating people after joint damage or surgery. This system is based on processes used by physiotherapists, and involves moving every muscle and joint in the body over every possible direction and range of motion. It mimics the way the body integrates movement patterns, re-educating the muscles and nervous system to work together more effectively.

The key with any activity undertaken while recovering is to work within your comfort range, avoiding pain at all costs. This way, you'll eventually gain muscle that will increase your mobility and allow you to exercise more effectively.

Q I often experience cramp in my feet and toes. It tends to happen when the weather is cold or when I'm swimming. It's really painful and can get so bad that it sometimes wakes me up at night. I eat well and lead quite an

active lifestyle. I thought only elderly people had cramp, but I'm only 19! What's causing it?
Andy Taylor, Worcester

A Emma Supple, podiatrist, says Despite being fairly common, the causes of cramp are not fully understood. It often happens when a muscle gets tired, if you're dehydrated or as a result of bad circulation. A visit to your GP would confirm if yours is a circulation problem and a blood test could rule out low iron levels, which can also contribute to this painful phenomenon.

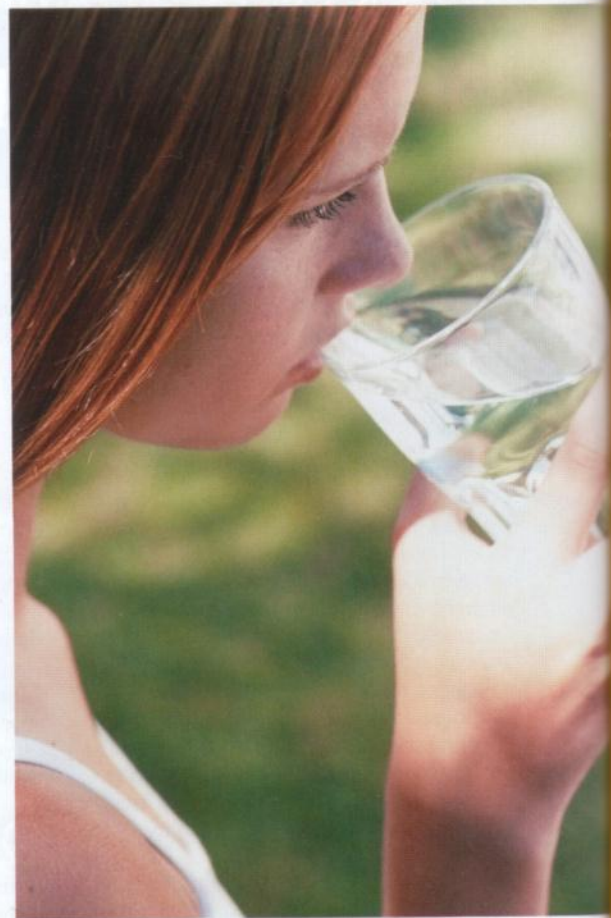
You say you often get cramp when swimming, and it could be that your technique is faulty and you're exhausting your muscles. 'Tight' muscles cramp more easily, so make sure you warm up properly before exercising.

Cramp can also be caused by poor foot function. If your feet are overly arched, the steeper angle of the bones in the feet can put strain on the muscles and ligaments. Structural problems, such as arched feet, tend to be inherited, but using specialist insoles can help correct it. It's a good idea to visit a podiatrist, who can give you a full assessment.

Q My husband sometimes gets seborrheic dermatitis on his face. Are there any complementary therapies that could help alleviate it?
Suzette Muentz, by email

A Johanna Robertson, nutritionist, says Seborrheic dermatitis is a dandruff-like condition. In babies, it's known as cradle cap. People usually get it on their scalp, but it can spread to other areas of the face and neck, causing inflamed, reddened skin and scaling. It's linked to a yeast called *Malassezia*, which we normally carry on our skin with no problem. Seborrheic dermatitis occurs when we become overly sensitive to it. Changes in climate and emotional stress can also play a part in bringing on an outbreak.

A yeast-starvation diet, which cuts out sugar and yeast-containing foods, could help reduce this organism and improve the condition. Consider taking a supplement of



'good' acidophilus bacteria because this may help displace yeast over-growth.

Seborrheic dermatitis has also been linked to an over-consumption of alcohol and a high-fat diet, so reduce your intake of these. Those with oily skin are also more prone to this condition, so following general nutritional guidelines for healthy skin could help. Eat oily fish and seeds for their essential fatty acids, along with plenty of organic fruit and vegetables, and avoid refined, sugary and fried foods. Reduce your intake of red meat and dairy and make sure you drink the recommended 1.2 litres of water daily.

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