

IT'S NOT THAT YOUR DOCTOR IS HIDING THE GOOD STUFF, IT'S JUST THAT A REGULAR CONSULTATION MAY NOT GIVE THEM ENOUGH TIME TO TELL YOU EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW. ALEXANDRA CARLTON ASKS SOME OF AUSTRALIA'S TOP SPECIALISTS TO OPEN UP

## Lumps aren't always bad

The body is covered in perfectly normal lumps and bumps, but that doesn't stop us freaking out when we find them. "Certain parts of the body can cause alarm when [a lump is] discovered," says Dr Gillian Deakin, author of *101 Things Your GP Would Tell You if Only There Were Time*. "There is a line of large taste buds on the back of your tongue, for example, which you only see if you really look: they go unnoticed until you have a sore throat or are seeking a cause. [Likewise] there is a small hard lump above the voice box [which] also goes unnoticed unless you prod it and it gets sore – then you get a hard, tender lump in your neck."

## Return to the GP who got it wrong

"Unfortunately, many conditions have no reliable test to prove them. That's why it's important to go back to the doctor who first made the obvious diagnosis [even if it turned out to be wrong]," advises Deakin. We've all known someone who has drifted endlessly between various doctors in search of a correct diagnosis, but, says Deakin, stick with one doctor and work closely with him or her. "If the patient goes to another practitioner and the process is disrupted, the next practitioner will have to start all over again," she warns.

## Question our authority

Few people have the chutzpah to challenge their doctor, but sometimes you should, says anti-ageing specialist and author of *Eternal Health*, Dr Michael Elstein. One in four women in Australia will suffer from depression at some point in their lives, according to national depression initiative Beyond Blue. But studies show that more than 10 per cent of people will be misdiagnosed with it. Why? "Because doctors can sometimes overlook simple lifestyle anomalies that could be causing a patient's symptoms," Elstein says. "What one doctor may think is depression may in fact be that the patient simply has low levels of a vital nutrient because of a deficiency in their diet." Elstein says doctors should be asking questions about diet and digestion before any formal diagnosis. "And if they don't, you should insist that they do," he says.

## Google is not your doctor

It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking the internet contains the same information as a medical degree if you search hard enough, meaning self-diagnosis becomes a habit for many people. "Any crackpot can set up a website and it can look very convincing but have no scientific basis to it at all," says Dr Gino Pecoraro, honorary secretary of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. "Even if you do go to a site that's reputable, you're likely to give too much significance to facts that may not be relevant for you." If you must research on the web, he says, "Direct your doctor to the website so they can interpret it for you."

## Resist anti-inflammatories

Got an injury? Don't reach for the anti-inflammatories straight away. "You need the cells in the inflammation to start the healing process," says physiotherapist Emily Boulton-Smith from Sports Lab Integrated Spine and Sports Therapies. "Instead, start taking them three days after the injury has occurred. Until then, use the RICE principles: rest, ice, compression and elevation."

## Dentists aren't always baddies

Good news! Even if you already have tooth decay, you can skip a filling. "Certain medicines and topical creams can repair damage to tooth enamel caused by decay," says Dr Derek Lewis from the Australian Dental Association, who recommends a dentist-only product called Tooth Mousse. "But [decay] has to be detected while the enamel is soft though hasn't yet actually caused a cavity." That means regular check-ups are crucial; waiting until you have a toothache means you're in for the drill.

## You won't age overnight if you choose to stop using Botox

"Botulinum injections [like Botox] make you look younger by reducing movement-related lines and wrinkles through relaxation of the facial muscles," says Sydney cosmetic dermatologist Dr Adrian Lim, from skin and laser clinic uRepublic. Take a break from the needles and you'll see a gradual return of lines – but you won't turn up to work the next day looking twice your age.

## Pills don't cure every vitamin deficiency

The sun can help too. There's been a lot of press recently about vitamin D deficiencies – apparently our rigorous use of sunblock has left some of us with low levels. But, and here's the important bit, that's no excuse to put away the zinc cream, says Dr Lim. "You only need exposure to summer sun for a few minutes, several times a week to produce adequate levels of vitamin D," he says.

## Your facelift won't last forever

According to Dr Michael Zacharia, president of the AustralAsian Academy of Anti-Ageing Medicine, while procedures like rhinoplasty will last forever, other surgery, particularly that which is linked to ageing, may not. "The problem with stretching [skin] which has lost its elasticity is it's like used Glad Wrap; once it's lost its bounce, it doesn't hold quite as well." Zacharia says a facelift can last anywhere from two years to 20 years, depending on how your skin reacts to the procedure. "The more Anglo-Saxon your skin type, the less time the results usually last." As for getting the best from your surgery, "There are things you can do to maintain your skin quality so your surgery lasts longer," he says. "Ideally, surgeons should give patients a full anti-ageing assessment, looking at their hormone levels, nutrition and lifestyle. If they don't do this, you should get it done independently so you know how to maintain your skin once the procedure has been done."