

Strange symptoms: What your skin, eyes and hair may be telling you

Brittle nails, inflamed gums or sparse eyebrows are all signs of health problems

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By Amy Beal
Women'sHealth

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Today's warp-speed doctors' office visits rarely address all of your Q's, which is why it's more critical than ever to be in tune with your body—it can help yield some important insight. Here's what to look for:

Mouth

White Tongue Coating

Could mean: You have a yeast infection—the oral type, that is, says Bruce Robinson, M.D., of the American Academy of Dermatology. Your mouth maintains a fine yeast-bacteria balance, but when foreign stuff (think: antibiotics) throws that out of whack, the yeast portion grows unchecked and coats your tongue. A prescription antifungal rinse should clear things up. If it doesn't, revisit your doc.



Featurepics

Brittle nails are a clue that you might be low in vitamin D and other nutrients. Lay off the polish for awhile and shoot for a more balanced diet to get your talons in tip-top shape.

Inflamed Gums

Could mean: You're knocked up. "Your dentist is often the first to know," says Sassan Rastegar, D. D. S., a dentist in New York City. "Swollen gums are one of the early side effects of the hormonal changes that come with pregnancy."

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If your gums are puffy or bleed when you floss—and your period is late—it may be time to take a pregnancy test.

Cracked Mouth Corners

Could mean: You're vitamin deficient, says Wilma Bergfeld, M. D., a dermatologist at the

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Cleveland Clinic. ("Otherwise," she says, "you're a big lip licker. Stop that!") A lack of B vitamins—specifically, B2, B6, and folic acid—can dry out the sensitive skin on the outer corners of your mouth, causing unseemly cracks on your kisser. Adding nutrient-rich eats such as leafy greens and watermelon to your regular diet should smooth out any rough patches, says Vandana Y. Bhide, M. D., a board-certified internist in St. Augustine, Florida.

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Eyes

Sparse Outer Eyebrows

Could mean: Your thyroid isn't pumping out enough hormones, says internist Jacob Teitelbaum, M.D., author of "From Fatigued to Fantastic!" More than 27 million Americans have thyroid disorders, and eight out of 10 of those are women. The right prescription meds should get your hormones— and brows—back on track.

Dark Under-Eye Circles

Could mean: You may have allergies, says Jennifer Wider, M. D., of the Society for Women's Health Research. Nasal congestion from allergies can dilate and darken the veins around your eyes and nose. Once you pinpoint and treat your allergen culprits—often with OTC meds—your under-eye shadows should fade.

Hair

Thinning Hair

Could mean: You have a thyroid issue. If you've been noticing more breakage when you blow-dry, head to your G.P. for a thyroid test, says Kent Holtorf, M.D., founder of the Holtorf Medical Group in Los Angeles. Brittle hair can also be a sign of malnourishment—specifically, deficiencies in omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin A. So for the love of your hair (and your health), steer clear of any low-nutrient crash diets.

Could You Have a Thyroid Disorder?

Skin

Brown Splotches

Could mean: You've had a self-tanner mishap...or you have a benign condition called melasma that's often associated with oral contraceptives, says Dina D. Strachan, M. D., a dermatologist in New York City. Doctors aren't sure why some birth-control pills cause these dark patches on the

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forehead, cheeks, or upper lip, but they do know UV exposure makes them worse. Your M.D. might recommend a hydroquinone cream.

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Small Yellow Bumps

Could mean: You're looking at fat deposits caused by high cholesterol, says Svetlana Kogan, M. D., an internist in New York City. The yellowish bulges can appear anywhere (yes, on thin people too) but are most common on the knees, elbows, hands, and feet. Make an appointment with your doc for a simple blood cholesterol test.

A Rash on Your Rump


Could mean: Celiac disease, which is triggered by eating gluten, can manifest itself as an itchy red rash or blisters on your derriere. Ten to 15 percent of people with gluten intolerance get this inflammation, which can also appear on your elbows and knees, says Howard Sobel, M. D., a cosmetic dermatologist in New York City. Fortunately, once you cut pasta, wheat bread, and other gluten sources from your diet, you'll kick the butt blisters too.


[Here's what to do for sensitive skin—and how to ease tingling skin, rashes, and more](#)

Nails

Brittle Nails

Could mean: Your frail nails might indicate nutritional deficiencies like low calcium, vitamin D, or zinc, says Andrea Cambio, M.D., a dermatologist in Cape Coral, Florida. Sporting nude nails more often and maintaining a balanced diet may help. Or you can try soaking your nails in water for five minutes at night before moisturizing them with an alpha hydroxy cream.

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