

**DR. GOTT**



Peter Gott, M.D.

**Femoral hernia can create crisis**

By Peter H. Gott, M.D.

**DEAR DR. GOTT** — Recently I had an emergency operation for a femoral hernia. What causes it, and can it happen again?

**DEAR READER** — Femoral hernia is a condition in which a loop of bowel squeezes into an opening in the groin where the femoral artery passes from the abdominal cavity into the leg. The portion of bowel often becomes compressed or kinked, leading to strangulation, a particularly serious medical emergency.

If the strangulation is not relieved, intestinal obstruction can occur. This can be fatal if the compressed segment of bowel becomes gangrenous and perforates, flooding the abdominal cavity with infected fecal contents.

No one knows the cause of femoral hernia. There probably is a congenital weakness that allows the bowel to slip out of place. If the hernia was successfully repaired, you have no worries about a repeat attack unless you develop a hernia on the other side, which was not repaired.

**DEAR DR. GOTT** — I am female, 38, and have a full dark beard and mustache. My doctor has me on Spirinolactone, but it has not helped in a year. Would electrolysis be a better solution?

**DEAR READER** — Electrolysis might be a better solution, but I think that your best approach would be an examination by an endocrinologist, a specialist in hormone imbalances. Some women note increasing facial hair as they age. However, in your case, the problem could be due to a glandular imbalance, the so-called virilization syndrome in women who have tumors or diseases of the adrenal glands.

You need a thorough examination, as well as blood and urine tests, to discover a treatable and curable cause for your problem.

**DEAR DR. GOTT** — I'm 13 and swallow my gum. Will this hurt me?

**DEAR READER** — The material in gum that makes it chewy is indigestible. Once in your stomach, it has to pass through your entire intestine and come out the other end. Occasional gum swallowing is probably harmless. Nonetheless, repeated swallowing could cause a buildup in the bowel that cannot be expelled. I suggest that you stop swallowing gum and dispose of it more thoughtfully and appropriately (especially where someone will not step on it).

**DEAR DR. GOTT** — Some of my friends have begun an exercise program that includes running in place in a sauna. They claim it is the ultimate aerobic workout. This practice seems rather alarming to me. Could you comment?

**DEAR READER** — People dream up the darndest ways to take up free time. I always thought that saunas were for relaxation after a workout. Many saunas get very hot, and I'd worry that your friends might be overdoing it in the heat, become too dehydrated and suffer cardiovascular collapse. This is called heatstroke among athletes and it can be a serious condition, leading to heart irregularity or standstill.

Jogging in a sauna may be the "ultimate aerobic workout," but I would advise your friends to knock it off, exercise in a temperate environment and then wind down in the sauna.

**DEAR DR. GOTT** — Is clenching your teeth a sign of trouble?

**DEAR READER** — Sometimes, teeth clenching is a sign of tension. We all experience tension, but if we take out stress on our teeth, especially at night when sleeping, bite problems and headaches can result. Teeth clenching may be the earliest manifestation of stress that should be addressed directly, not ignored.

**DEAR DR. GOTT** — My sister has lost the sight in one eye because of

something called toxoplasma gondii. It's a parasite from cats. She's taken all these drugs, but her sight has not returned. I never did like cats, but I didn't realize they were dangerous to humans.

**DEAR READER** — Toxoplasmosis is a common infection that is often carried by cats. The cats contain the parasite and pass the cysts in their stools. These cysts can be directly spread to humans by contact. Once in the body, the cysts hatch and the larvae migrate to the lymph glands and brain. Vision can be affected.

The disease is particularly serious in pregnant women because the parasite can be carried through the placenta and into the fetus, causing severe tissue damage.

Treatment with sulfa drugs usually clears up the infection, but some damage — in the eyes, for example — may be permanent.

Cats contract toxoplasmosis by eating infected birds and rodents. There-

fore, owners of free-ranging cats should have their animals periodically checked by qualified veterinarians.

**DEAR DR. GOTT** — Is a constant navel discharge serious in a 74-year-old person?

**DEAR READER** — In an adult, a navel discharge usually signifies chronic skin infection. The skin of the navel is dark and warm and may remain moist, providing an ideal environment for yeasts and bacteria to grow.

Although a navel infection is usually not serious, it can be extremely annoying and unpleasant because of itching, odor or pain. A culture of the area will enable a doctor to pinpoint the cause and suggest appropriate

treatment.  
**DEAR DR. GOTT** — My husband, 33, has one extra vertebra on his right side only. Arch supports don't help his back pain. Would surgery to remove the vertebra help?

**DEAR READER** — A partially undeveloped vertebra in the back can cause pelvic tilt and back pain, as a person attempts unconsciously to compensate for the abnormality. A lift in the shoe may restore normalcy. Surgery is rarely necessary but may be recommended if pain cannot be relieved by less drastic methods.

**DEAR DR. GOTT** — I'm 51, on my feet eight hours a day and do hard physical labor in a plywood mill. Does this meet the exercise requirements to keep a healthy body? My wife and I walk on weekends.

**DEAR READER** — Without following you around and watching what you do, I can't say whether the amount of physical labor required by your job is healthy. There is no universally accepted "exercise requirement" for adults. In fact, experts are divided about how much physical activity is appropriate for middle-aged adults.

The combination of walking and physical labor is probably giving you

all the strenuous activity you need.

Don't smoke, reduce fats in your diet, stay trim and ask your doctor for specific advice.

**DEAR DR. GOTT** — Six months ago my doctor told me I have cervical stenosis. Last week my urologist said the urethra is turning to stone. What's going on?

**DEAR READER** — Cervical stenosis means that the opening through your cervix into the uterus is becoming narrowed. This is a consequence of aging in women past the childbearing years.

An additional part of the postmenopausal changes taking place in your body is the narrowing and loss of elasticity of the urethra, the tube leading from your bladder. Cervical stenosis is not serious; urethral stenosis can cause difficulty in voiding and repeated urinary infections. It is usually treated by dilation or stretching.

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