

**Q** My nails are misshapen, ugly and break easily.

This can have many causes — ranging from fungal infection, repeated trauma, psoriasis, eczema or dermatitis to deficiencies of iron, zinc or biotin. Thyroid problems can also affect nail growth. All these conditions need to be checked and ruled out. Once the specific cause is identified and treated, improvement will occur.

#### Nail polish stain

**Q** My toenails are yellowish in colour. I try to camouflage them with nail polish but it seems to be getting worse.

If your nails look yellow after removing the nail polish, it is probably due to the chemicals and dyes

in the polish. To reduce yellowing, remove nail polish once a week and allow your nails to “breathe” for a day or two before reapplying it.

#### Cracked feet

**Q** My heels have deep cracks that cause me pain.

Cracked heels become more common as we age because the skin becomes dry and thinner. Although you can treat this at home with warm salt-water soaks and gentle scrubbing with a pumice stone, it is often better to have the thick, dead skin removed professionally in a salon. After that, apply oil before a bath and a mois-

turising cream afterwards. This should be done every day.

#### Cancer gene

**Q** Both my parents died of cancer. I am worried I may have inherited their flawed genes.

Cancer develops due to many factors, not just genetic ones. Even if you have inherited a tendency to develop it, lifestyle and environment also play a significant role. The risk is significantly lower if you eat a healthy diet, avoid processed foods, maintain a healthy weight, refrain from smoking and drinking, and engage in aerobic exercise for 40 minutes a day. You



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should also undergo the recommended cancer screenings.

#### Protein requirement

**Q** I am a vegetarian and am worried about my protein intake. Do I need supplements?

The daily protein requirement is 0.8 g/kg of body weight. After the age of 50, it increases to 1.2 g/kg a day. It is best to obtain protein naturally from food. Animal proteins contain all nine essential amino acids. Most plant foods (except soybeans) lack one or more amino acids. However, if you eat a mixed variety of plant-based foods, you will meet all your protein needs.

#### Salt intake

**Q** I have high blood pressure. I need to restrict salt intake.

All adults should limit their salt consumption to 2.5gm or half a teaspoon per day. Hidden salt is often present in snacks like potato chips, sauces, pickles, processed foods and items with preservatives.

#### Heart attack signs

**Q** Both my parents died of heart attack. I want to know what may have precipitated it.

Men usually develop heart disease about 10 years earlier than

women. Stress and anger can precipitate a heart attack because they raise stress hormones, increase blood pressure and reduce blood flow to the heart. A heart attack is more likely to occur within two hours of an angry outburst.

Men typically experience chest pain, shortness of breath and pain or tingling in the arms, back or neck. Women experience dizziness, nausea, cold sweats, fatigue or heartburn. Because symptoms in women are not typical, a heart attack may be missed.

To reduce risk, control diabetes, blood pressure and cholesterol.

The writer has a family practice at Vellore and is the author of *Staying Healthy in Modern India*. If you have questions on health issues, write to [yourhealthgm@yahoo.co.in](mailto:yourhealthgm@yahoo.co.in)