

4 weird warning signs your doctor can plainly see

Feel shy in that flimsy paper gown? Don't worry. Your doctor may be paying more attention to your eyebrows than your rear end. It's true! Random body parts can provide important health clues:

1 CREASED EARLOBES

"Decades of research have established that a crease across one of your earlobes is associated with an increased risk of heart disease," says JoAnne Foody, M.D., a cardiologist at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. So if you've got 'em, your doctor may want to check your blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

2 THIN EYEBROWS

Sparse brows (not due to overplucking) are a well-documented sign of thyroid problems. "Thyroid hormone keeps hair healthy all over; without it, hair gets thin and brittle," says Sandra Fryhofer, M.D., a clinical associate professor of medicine at Emory University in Atlanta. A simple blood test can detect your levels.

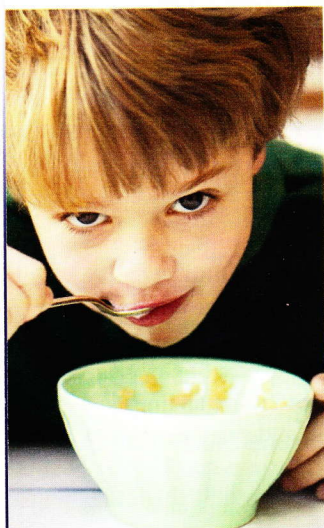
3 BREAST SIZE The bigger your chest, the higher your risk of type 2 diabetes, note findings from part of the Nurses' Health Study, which followed 90,000



women for 20 years. "Women who are a D cup or larger at age 20 are almost five times more likely to develop the disease than A cups," Foody says. "These risks hold true even after adjusting for obesity, diet, smoking, and family history." A type of fat in the breast may produce hormones that encourage diabetes, so if you have a large chest, ask your doctor for a fasting blood-glucose test to assess your risk.

4 SHORT POINTER FINGERS

If your pointer finger is shorter than your ring finger, you may be twice as likely to develop knee osteoarthritis, a new study by the Arthritis Research Institute of America in Clearwater, FL, found. The bigger the difference, the greater the risk, says study author Paul Leaverton, Ph.D. "It's only a concern if the ring finger is *obviously* longer," he says—so if you can't tell just by looking at your hand, you're likely in the clear. The best way to prevent creaky knees? Maintain a healthy weight: Extra pounds strain joints. —MINDY WALKER

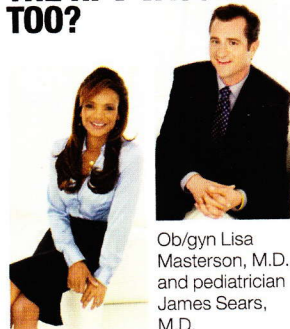


ONE LESS THING TO WORRY ABOUT:

YOUR KIDS' NO-GREEN-FOODS DIET

If your little one is anti-broccoli, spinach, and veggies in general, it's okay to surrender and stop stressing, says New Jersey-based dietitian Erin Palinski, R.D. A recent study at the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom followed more than 13,000 children from infancy to age 7 and found that picky eaters met the same calorie and nutrient quotas as veggie-loving kids. And there were no major differences in weight and height between the two groups. "Instead of fighting with your child over what foods he won't eat, focus on adding in foods he enjoys that are rich in nutrients," Palinski says. Veggies are a terrific source of folic acid, B vitamins, and calcium, but kids can also get those in fortified cereals, bananas, peaches, citrus fruits, peanuts, yogurt, cheese, milk, and fortified orange juice. —SARAH JIO

THE DOCTORS DISCUSS: DO BOYS NEED THE HPV VACCINE TOO?



Ob/gyn Lisa Masterson, M.D., and pediatrician James Sears, M.D.

You've no doubt seen the ads encouraging parents to vaccinate boys ages 9 and older against the human papillomavirus (HPV)—the virus that causes most cases of cervical cancer in women. Should you do it? We asked the cohorts of the medical talk show *The Doctors* (check your local listings for times).

Is there really any benefit of giving boys the HPV vaccine?

Lisa Masterson, M.D.:

Yes! It not only stops boys from catching and spreading HPV to women, but it also prevents genital warts. HPV has also been linked to rectal and mouth cancers in guys.

What about concerns that it may encourage unsafe sex in teens?

James Sears, M.D.:

I'd love to think that my patients won't have sex until their honeymoon, but many teens do it long before their parents know—and often not safely. You may not think your child needs protection right now, but 80 percent of the population will be exposed to HPV at some point in their lives.

Any drawbacks?

Sears: It's expensive, about \$700. So call your insurance company to make sure they'll cover it.

Send your health questions to askthedoctors@redbookmag.com.