

## **TAMOXIFEN: A Change for the better**

### Top tips on controlling the side effects

**Described by many as a “miracle drug”, tamoxifen is currently the most widely prescribed hormonal treatment for women following breast surgery. But what are the main side effects and how can they be reduced or eliminated? Readers have reported a range of issues and have sometimes received conflicting advice, so we take a closer look.**

#### **Haywire hormones?**

Hormones are substances that occur naturally in the body where they control the growth and activity of normal cells. Because the growth of some breast cancers are stimulated by the female hormone oestrogen, tamoxifen is prescribed as an anti-oestrogen drug. It works by blocking the stimulating effects of oestrogen on cancer cells which in turn stops the cancer cells from growing. Tamoxifen has also been shown to reduce the risk of breast cancer recurring or of a new tumour developing in the other breast. If you've been prescribed with tamoxifen we take a look at the side effects you may experience and what can be done to help alleviate them.

#### **The good, the bad and the ugly...**

As is the case with many drugs, tamoxifen has its good and bad effects. However, the good news is that many women will not experience any adverse reactions and for those who do, the side effects, whilst sometimes unpleasant, are rarely a serious health risk.

Because tamoxifen affects the supply of oestrogen, the majority of side effects resemble menopausal symptoms. The most common include: hot flushes, night sweats, vaginal dryness, loss of sex drive, insomnia, leg cramps, nausea, headaches and weight gain. More rare side effects include: visual disturbances and voice changes.

Although this list may seem alarming, it is important to remember that you are unlikely to experience all, if any, of the side effects mentioned. You should also bear in mind that tamoxifen may not be to blame for all the symptoms you are experiencing. For example aches and pains could simply be due to over-exertion; and weight gain to a change in your diet or level of exercise. If you do experience any side effects and are concerned the advice is always the same - don't suffer in silence! So always consult your GP if you think you may benefit from medication. It is also worth noting that some women have reported worse side effects from a particular brand of the drug and so simply changing to a different variety can sometimes be beneficial.

*"I was originally prescribed one of the generics, the name of which I cannot remember, but this made my bones ache so much, it was almost unbearable. However on talking to my GP I changed to NOVELDEX and the pains disappeared. I have few side effects now, the odd hot flush, an itchy back, but nothing I can't cope with."*

*Mrs E*

In very rare cases, tamoxifen can cause blood clots or endometrial cancer, although

the chances of either of these conditions developing is extremely rare and for women with a history of breast cancer, the benefits of taking tamoxifen far outweigh any potential risks. However, it is important to be aware of the signs to look for and to see your GP if you are at all concerned. Meanwhile, the basic rule is that your doctor should know your situation best so always keep taking the drug unless you are told otherwise.

However, it's not all bad news! Tamoxifen also has some beneficial side effects; for instance, it is believed to reduce the chance of developing heart disease and has also been shown to reduce the process of bone loss in postmenopausal women, and may therefore help to prevent osteoporosis.

### **The heat is on**

Probably the most commonly reported side effects are the dreaded hot flushes and night sweats. Although many women are not affected and others find the flushes do subside over a period of time, some women will continue to experience hot flushes throughout their treatment. The severity of hot flushes may vary from one a day to four an hour and frequent or severe flushing can be difficult to manage, whilst the onset of night sweats is an added misery, regularly disrupting sleep. So what can you do to control this side effect?

First lets look at the practical steps you can take:

- Take notice of the times your hot flushes occur. Does anything in particular trigger them (for example a particular drink, food or situation). Knowing what is likely to trigger a flush, will make you feel more prepared and therefore more in control.
- You will find it more practical to wear several layers of clothing that can be adjusted throughout the day. Absorbent fabrics such as cotton will feel more comfortable.
- Carry wet wipes or a small spray with you as these will help to cool you down when a flush occurs. Some women choose to use a scented spray, for example lavender which is very calming.
- As stress increases both the number and intensity of hot flushes - try to relax! Learning a relaxation technique is extremely beneficial and studies have shown that women who regularly practice relaxation or meditation can significantly reduce the number of hot flushes they experience.
- Studies have also shown that flushes are less frequent or severe in women who take a regular form of exercise. This doesn't necessarily need to be a work-out at your gym, a brisk walk can be just as beneficial, just choose something you enjoy doing and stick to it!
- Research shows that women who smoke are often more susceptible to hot flushes. So it will be helpful to stop or reduce smoking if at all possible.

Secondly, take a look at your diet. As hot flushes tend to be more severe in women who are overweight, try to ensure you eat a healthy, well balanced diet. You will also find it beneficial to cut out stimulants, like caffeine found in tea, coffee and cola. Many women also choose to avoid spicy foods or alcohol as these can trigger a hot flush.

Recently there has been much debate as to whether diet and appropriate nutritional supplements can help protect women from hot flushes, as well as other negative menopausal effects and many women are now choosing to take a natural approach,

rather than rely on HRT. However, opinions vary on the suitability of these diets and supplements for ladies who have had breast surgery. The key here is to seek the advice of your doctor before trying any remedies that may affect the success of your treatment.

*"I have found the problems with tamoxifen to be weight gain and hot sweats. The hot sweats have been eased by applying Wild Yam Cream of an evening and drinking Soya Milk for my breakfast."*

Mrs P

### **The Eastern Approach - why diet is thought to help**

It has been well reported that Japanese women rarely experience hot flushes or other menopausal symptoms, particularly compared with women in western societies. Many experts think the key to this could be the difference in their diet, which is high in foods containing phyto-oestrogens.

Phyto-oestrogens are chemicals found in certain plant foods for example in legumes, green vegetables and cereals. The most common type are called isoflavones which are found in soya based products, for example in tofu or soya milk. Phyto-oestrogens are structurally similar to the hormone oestrogen but have a far weaker action in the body. They are thought to work by raising or lowering hormone levels as required, thereby allowing the body to re-adjust its own hormonal balance naturally. This would seem to explain why soya can reduce hot flushes, (which are thought to be due to lack of oestrogen) but can also reduce the incidence of breast cancer (which is thought to be linked to an excess of the hormone).

However, there is currently insufficient evidence to support the potential of soya and/or isoflavone supplements in either the prevention of breast cancer or the alleviation of hot flushes. In fact studies have been extremely contradictory and some experts feel that women with, or at a high risk of developing, breast cancer should avoid substances which affect the balance of hormones in the body. Certainly further evidence is required before a definite conclusion can be drawn.

Phyto-oestrogen foods:

- Foods which naturally contain bioflavonoids include: Green beans, chick peas, barley, rye, wheat, celery, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, linseed and garlic.
- Foods containing isoflavones include: soy products, for example soya milk and tofu.
- Citrus fruits are also high in flavonoids and will help to boost your immune system as well.

### **Herbal remedies and supplements**

Many of our readers report that herbal remedies and supplements have been successful in reducing hot flushes. Here again opinions vary about the safety of taking supplements that can alter the balance of hormones in the body. Therefore before taking any of these remedies we would recommend you seek the opinion of your GP or cancer specialist. It is also worth bearing in mind that you may need to take some herbal remedies for several weeks before any real benefits are noticed.

*Herbal remedies*

Red Clover, Dong Quai (Chinese Angelica), Licorice, Black Cohosh, Wild Yam,

Motherwort, Chastetree (agnus castus), False Unicorn Root, Star Flower and Evening Primrose Oil may all be beneficial in reducing the severity of hot flushes and are widely available from health food shops and chemists. Yarrow, known mainly as a remedy for fever, may also be beneficial as it can help to reduce body temperature.

### *Supplements*

Vitamin E, vitamin B6 (Pyridoxine) and vitamin C with bioflavonoids may also be beneficial and can be purchased from most chemists or health food stores.

### **Complementary therapies**

Some women have found complementary therapies very helpful, for example acupuncture, reflexology or homeopathy. If you want to try a complimentary therapy it is important to go to a recognised, qualified practitioner. Your doctor may be able to advise you about obtaining treatment through the NHS or alternatively if you are seeking a therapist privately it is important to ensure they have the correct qualifications. See the list of addresses on page 9 for people to contact.

### **Medicines your doctor may prescribe**

If your hot flushes are very severe, it should be possible for your doctor to prescribe you with drugs that will help reduce their intensity. Low dose progesterone for example Megestrol (Megace) or drugs which act on the blood vessels, such as Clonidine (Dixarit) have been used to good effect. More recently, Venlafaxine an anti-depressant has been used for relieving tamoxifen induced menopausal symptoms. In extreme cases, if side effects are very severe, some doctors will consider prescribing a low dose of HRT. This can help to improve quality of life and in some cases the benefits will outweigh any potential risks.

#### *Low dose progesterone drugs include:*

- Megestrol (Megace)
- Medroxyprogesterone (Provera)
- Norethisterone (Primolut N, Utovlan)

#### *Other drugs:*

- Clonidine (Dixarit)
- Venlafaxine, an anti-depressant

### **You've lost that lovin' feeling**

Lack of oestrogen can also cause changes to the vagina, as the walls become thinner, dryer and less acidic. As the level of natural secretions lessens, intercourse can also become uncomfortable. Here again you can take some practical steps to reduce irritation. Take warm, rather than hot baths and avoid using perfumed soaps or bubble bath as these can aggravate irritation. Wear cotton underwear for added comfort and avoid wearing nylon tights and tight fitting jeans or trousers.

Vaginal dryness can usually be eased with the use of appropriate creams, lubricants and suppositories, some of which contain a mild form of oestrogen. Most specialists believe that very little of the oestrogen is absorbed so it is unlikely to affect the balance of hormones in your body. But again, studies are very contradictory and so you may prefer to choose a product which is not oestrogen-based. When in doubt, seek advice from your GP or cancer specialist.

Treatments available include:

- KY Jelly or Astroglide which are non-hormonal, water-based lubricants and are particularly beneficial if you experience discomfort during intercourse.
- Vaginal moisturisers including Replens and Senselle can be used several times a week and are non-hormonal.
- Oestrogen pessaries including Ortho-Gynest cream and Estring, a vaginal ring, are used locally on the vagina to relieve dryness. However, long term use may not be recommended as it is not clear how much oestrogen is absorbed into the rest of the body.
- Herbal remedies include: Motherwort, Wild Yam, Dong Quai and Chastetree (agnus castus), which helps to keep the vagina moist, and improve circulation, stimulating libido. Vitamin E has also been shown to produce positive changes in the blood vessels of the vaginal wall.
- If relief from vaginal discomfort does not increase your sex drive, your doctor may prescribe testosterone (the hormone responsible for controlling the sex drive) which can be effective in restoring libido. This is generally given every six months as an implant under the skin.

### **Off the scales**

Weight gain is quite common following treatment for breast cancer and some specialists have been reluctant to attribute increased weight to tamoxifen. However, more recently opinion is changing and it is thought that weight gain is often more exaggerated in women taking tamoxifen, particularly due to water retention.

To minimise water retention you should reduce the amount of salt you eat. Avoid salty foods such as crisps, anchovies and smoked or cured meats. Many processed or ready-to-eat convenience meals also contain high levels of salt and are best avoided if at all possible. It is also important to drink plenty of water (at least 8 glasses a day). Although this may sound surprising, drinking the correct amount of water helps to dilute the sodium in your body, thereby relieving fluid retention.

Although water is the healthiest option, if you find this too bland you may prefer to drink herbal teas or fruit and vegetable juices. Just remember to steer clear of tea and coffee as these actually encourage fluid retention.

If you would like to try a herbal remedy, Fennel, Black Cohosh and Motherwort are all effective in counteracting the effects of water retention.

### **Nuisance Nausea**

It is quite common to experience nausea after taking tamoxifen, however this will generally subside after a few weeks of taking the drug. Other women have found taking the tablet with food or taking it at a different time of day (usually before bedtime) has helped to alleviate the feeling of sickness. You may also be able to split the dose and take half in the morning and half in the evening, but always consult your GP or cancer specialist first.

### **Bed time Blues**

Leg cramps and insomnia can be particularly troublesome, especially if sleep patterns are already disrupted by night sweats. Leg cramps are usually caused by insufficient water consumption or a lack of calcium in the diet. If you are not getting the recommended daily calcium intake of 150mg from your diet, you may need to

consider taking a calcium supplement. Quinine, a key ingredient in tonic water can also help, as will drinking at least 8 glasses of water a day. Foods that contain flavonoids (such as citrus fruit) are also important for good circulation and Wild Yam can be used to ease joint and muscle pains.

If insomnia is not caused by leg cramps or night sweats, but by anxiety, there are many remedies available, both over-the-counter preparations and those prescribed by your GP. However, for those of you who would prefer to try a more natural approach, check out our [guide to getting a good night's sleep](#).

### Readers Experiences:

**VISUAL DISTURBANCES:** Tamoxifen has been associated with the development of eye problems and it may therefore be a good idea to have regular eyes tests whilst taking this medication.

*“Following my mastectomy I was put on tamoxifen and began to notice a change in my eyesight. From being long-sighted, I was quite rapidly becoming short-sighted. I was taken off tamoxifen and put on anatazole and the short-sighted progression stopped. No consultant or eye specialist will admit that it could be the drugs which caused this sight problem, but I am concerned other people may be having the same eye problem and will become extremely short-sighted.”*

Mrs M

**VOICE CHANGES:** Again, some women have reported changes in their voices whilst taking tamoxifen, although generally this will only be noticeable in professional singers. If this becomes a problem your GP may recommend speech therapy. Alternatively learning yoga breathing can also be helpful.

*“I took tamoxifen until 1996. Although my hot flushes have ceased since I stopped taking the drug, I have put on a lot of weight. I have also had problems with my voice. Over the last 4/5 years it has been husky. I have seen an ENT doctor who thinks it may be a side effect of the tamoxifen and is suggesting speech therapy.”*

Mrs M

*“Following my mastectomy and during my chemo, I lost my singing voice and when it started coming back it was cracked and limited in range. I was advised by a retired cancer nurse to learn yoga breathing, so I enrolled for singing lessons with a teacher who could show me how to do it. It has worked and the voice is back. I was able to thank God by singing a solo at a local sing-a-long “Messiah” on New Years Eve and have joined a choir again. My speaking voice has improved as well.”*

Mrs T

### Healing Herbs

*“My consultant says I must stay on tamoxifen for life. My life was ruined with the hot sweats, even spoiling my love of holidays abroad. But help is at hand! I found the solution - a herbal remedy called Dong Quai which is Chinese Angelica - it cools you down so counteracting the tamoxifen effect.”*

Mrs C

*“Coping with the side effects of tamoxifen was hard, but I’m into my fourth year and*

*I'm not having the hot flushes anymore. I don't know if this is relevant or coincidence, but I started taking Star Flower Oil supplements after reading an information leaflet from the Cancer Research Society. About three weeks after I started taking these my hot flushes subsided. I am still taking it and am happy to say I lead a much more normal life."*

Mrs D

*"I was recommended Black Cohosh both by fellow patients and by my breast care nurse. Everyone is different obviously, for them it had reduced the flushes successfully during the day, for me it is taking the edge off them."*

Mrs C

#### *Conventional Cures...*

*"Prior to my mastectomy I was on HRT, but as soon as my doctor took me off the HRT and put me on tamoxifen the hot sweats returned every two hours and left me exhausted. I mentioned this to my breast care nurse and she contacted my consultant who prescribed Megestrol Acetate along side the tamoxifen. In my case it solved the problem and I now take both drugs."*

Mona Y

*"I had a lengthy factsheet from BACUP which advised ladies suffering unduly with hot flushes to see their GP as a drug called Clonidine (Dixarit) can be prescribed. Recent research also suggests that progesterone may be helpful."*

Sandra C

*"Following my mastectomy I was put on tamoxifen. I was quite well except for hot flushes throughout the day and night, along with violent cramps in places I didn't realise existed! My hot flushes attacked every half hour, which was exhausting, humiliating and drained me of my self confidence and energy. After trying every possible antidote in the health shop, homeopathy and hypnotherapy, my doctor prescribed a low dose of HRT which has finally done the trick. I now only have the occasional flush which I can cope with and my life style has improved 100%."*

Mrs N

## In Contact

**Do you have a story you'd like to share or some words of encouragement for other readers? Send your letters and photographs for inclusion in Amoena Life to: Rhoda White, Editor, Amoena (UK) Ltd, FREEPOST, Eastleigh, Hampshire, SO53 4BJ or e-mail [agrwhw@amoena.com](mailto:agrwhw@amoena.com)**

### Starting a brand new life

I have just received my first copy of Amoena Inform and both my partner and myself thought what a great magazine. I found it so reassuring to know there are so many other people out there that have gone through the same, you feel you are the only one sometimes.

I am 38 and was diagnosed with grade 3 cancer two years ago (May 1998) in my right breast. It was only discovered by accident after having gone to my doctor about something else. My consultant didn't think it was anything, but while I was there he suggested a mammogram. We were all quite shocked and after a biopsy three weeks later, the breast was removed. They also removed 22 lymph glands and discovered that I had cancer. Twelve months of chemotherapy followed with 12 weeks radiotherapy.

I kept going with two girls aged 10 and 12 and everyone was marvellous, I even returned back to work after the sickness had passed with each chemotherapy. But I must say the strangest help I had was going through a divorce at the same time! I had only been separated from my husband of 14 years for 3 months when I was first diagnosed. It kept my mind otherwise occupied during the time of thinking that I was dying.

I met my new partner a year ago this March on a blind date wearing my wig and he is the best thing that has come out of it. I think that the hardest thing is now, living with the fear that one day it will come back and I will have to go through it again, but at least I know that he will be there to help me. He isn't worried about the way I feel I look and what the future holds.

There seems to be so much support while it is happening to you, but when it's over and the appointments are three monthly and you look so well, people think you are fine. I know I'm not, I like to show them I am but deep down inside I am scared stiff. So thank you for your magazine, it has truly helped me.

**Lee B**

### "For I am fearfully and wonderfully made"

#### Psalm 139: verse 14

As I write this, I am facing a mastectomy on July 21st. I am one of the very fortunate ones. I have benefited from medical technology and my disease has been detected before it has become cancer. But I am sure you will not be surprised to learn that I am fearful. Will my husband still love me? Will I still love myself?

I have been for a walk on the beach this morning. I became aware of the blueness of the sky and the softness of the air and so took myself down to South Bay for a walk on the sand. I looked at the gulls standing by the waters edge, the early morning

jogger and the tyre tracks left by the boy racers. A yacht floated on the blue stillness of the sea, doing nothing, going nowhere. I sang a few choruses, as I always do when I'm alone on the beach, with no one to hear me except God.

I love to collect shells and began to search for a special one to put somewhere safe, to remember this glorious morning by, on the days when I am feeling down, as I think I am bound to at some points in the next few months.

A lovely shell caught my eye, golden striped, half buried in the sand. I bent to pick it up, but realising it was just a broken piece, I left it and walked on, disappointed. I had only gone a few paces when God spoke to me loud and clear. "Yes, it is only a piece, but you stopped to pick it up because you thought it was beautiful. Is what you saw any less beautiful, because it is not whole?"

I went back and picked it up. It had been in the sand a long time. Its edges were smooth. Its colours glowed. As a fragment of creation it was beautiful in its own right, as I will continue to be after July 21st.

**Written on Saturday 1st July by Stephanie K, aged 45**

Steph died on Monday 31st July - not from breast cancer - but of acute pancreatitis and multiple organ failure following a cardiac arrest a week later. Of course I still love her and always will for she is now truly beautiful and amongst the heavenly hosts, no doubt still singing praise choruses. Indeed she is more than beautiful, she is radiant.

**Postscript written by her husband, Trevor K on August 1st**

## Comment

**Do you have a comment to make about any of the items featured in our magazine? Send your letters to Rhoda White, Editor, Amoena (UK) Ltd, FREEPOST, Eastleigh, Hampshire, SO53 4BJ or e-mail: [agrhow@amoena.com](mailto:agrhow@amoena.com)**

### Help at hand

I had a complete mastectomy in Jan '99, the hospital, nurses, surgeon etc were wonderful and I felt very confident for the future. However, three months ago Lymphoedema reared its head and without your magazine, I would be almost in the dark about it. No mention of the possibility of this occurring was mentioned to me and on a visit to the hospital about it, all I was offered was a pressure sleeve – no other information was given.

Because of your magazine and after a struggle, I now have an appointment to see a therapist for simple lymphatic drainage, which she is prepared to teach me. I am very confident that this will be very advantageous to me. This is all due to your timely magazine for which I sincerely thank you.

**Doris S**

**Following breast surgery, every woman should be aware of the threat of Lymphoedema and the precautions they can take to prevent this condition. For further information see our report in issue 11 - Lymphoedema - Top tips for prevention and treatment.**

### Timely advice

I am writing to say how much I appreciated your report on Lymphoedema. Four years ago my mother had a mastectomy. Approximately twelve months later her arm began to swell and she was diagnosed as having Lymphoedema. Her arm has been so large that she has had to unpick the seams of sleeves to be able to get her arm into clothing.

In February 1999, I myself was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent a mastectomy, following by a course of radiotherapy and chemo. During the months of treatment, my main worry was that I too would develop lymphoedema and be unable to carry on working.

Having read your article, I am now more aware of how to either control or prevent lymphoedema and intend to follow your tips.

I am also taking Tamoxifen and, like many others, suffer from hot flushes. My oncologist prescribed Nolvodex, in his opinion this drug was the best and least like to cause too many problems. The hot flushes seem to be the only side effect and I am currently trying star flower oil tablets to see if these help. If not, I will try some of the other remedies suggested by your readers.

Thanks for sending me INFORM. I have enjoyed reading it and find the information provided and letters from others who have undergone breast surgery very helpful.

**Susan B**

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Thanks for sending me INFORM. I have enjoyed reading it and find the information provided and letters from others who have undergone breast surgery very helpful.

**Susan B**

**Relieved to know I'm not alone**

Last week I went for my 6 month check up at the hospital and while I was in the waiting room I noticed your Amoena Inform magazine. I started reading the magazine and I couldn't put it down. I would like to say I wish I had read it before as it answered so many questions for me.

I have been suffering with a build up of fluids under my arm and always thought I would put up with it because it must be after effects from my treatment and surgery. After seeing the doctor and reading your magazine, I finally realised something could be done.

I am taking Tamoxifen at the moment and it was a relief to read that other readers also experience side effects. I've had aching bones which, after a bone scan, I was told were a side effect from Tamoxifen. Also, I develop bruises from nowhere.

The side effect which really got me down was the weight gain while having chemotherapy I put 2 stone on and although I have managed to lose 1 stone, I can't seem to move anymore.

After reading your magazine I am more at ease knowing there are other readers like me.

Thank you so much.

**S W**

**Concerned by negative comments**

As an ex-GP who has undergone a mastectomy and is currently taking Tamoxifen, I

am concerned by the very negative comments about the drug in your magazine. I am only too well aware of its effective role in reducing recurrence of breast cancer, something hardly mentioned by your correspondents, and I am not entirely convinced that it is always solely responsible for the dreaded hot flushes, as so many of your readers imply. Many women starting the drug are around the age when the menopause begins and I fear that some women are being misled into thinking that Tamoxifen is the main cause of their discomfort when “natural causes” may be the culprit.

I had started to get occasional hot flushes 6 months before I was diagnosed, at the age of 47. They became a little worse after I started Tamoxifen in 1995, but have really only become a problem in the past 18 months since I had a hysterectomy and oophorectomy. Although my surgeon has suggested I try stopping Tamoxifen, I am reluctant to do so, I'm not convinced it would help and I feel more confident whilst taking it, despite the very unpleasant and exhausting effects of the flushes. I'm experimenting with some of the alternative remedies whilst waiting for Time, the great healer, to show its effects. I hope that other readers will not be encouraged to stop Tamoxifen without very careful consideration of the possible adverse consequences.

**Kathryn H**

Thank you for your letter Mrs H. In printing letters from ladies concerning the side effects of tamoxifen, it was certainly not our intention to discourage women from taking this treatment. In fact, it's because we realise how vital tamoxifen is for our reader's future well-being that we published details of remedies to help counteract the unpleasant symptoms they are experiencing. We hope our report **Tamoxifen - A Change for the better**, addresses these issues more clearly.

### **No support from GP**

I would like to say a heart felt thanks for your wonderful magazine. I have been taking Tamoxifen for 2 years and since I started this treatment I have suffered from an unbearable range of ailments – hot flushes, awful night sweats, sickness, dizziness, depression, the list goes on and on. I have visited my GP on several occasions but haven't had much support, in fact I was given the impression that the drug had no side effects and that these so called symptoms were all in my head. I was feeling so down, not knowing which way to turn, when your magazine dropped through my letter box. What a relief! Reading your letter's page, I realised many other women are also experiencing exactly the same as me – so we can't all be imagining things can we? I shall be trying some of the remedies recommended, but even if they don't work, just to know I'm not imagining these things has made me feel so much better. Thank you.

**Mrs J K**

## Sweet Dreams

Follow our guide for a better night's sleep

**A good night's sleep is essential for our health and well-being. It is a time for renewing both mind and body. When sleep patterns are interrupted we become tired, irritable and unable to concentrate.**

**Many influences contribute to insomnia, the inability to sleep. Nervous tension, anxiety and illness are just some of the factors that may keep us awake at night, often disrupting sleep just when our body needs it most. It is estimated that during middle-age, one in four women will take either prescribed or over-the-counter sleep remedies in the hope of improving sleep. Although there are a wide range of products available to treat insomnia, sleeping pills can be addictive if taken regularly and can also leave you feeling drowsy in the morning. If you're looking for a more natural approach, our guide will help you to achieve a good night's sleep, leaving you feeling more refreshed and revitalised throughout the day.**

**Establish a regular sleeping schedule.** You will get a better quality of sleep and feel more energetic during the day if you keep to a regular routine. So try to go to bed and get up at the same time each day and don't be tempted to sleep in at the weekends. Remember the time you get up in the morning, governs the time you will be tired at night, so if you want to fall asleep more readily at night - you need to get up earlier in the morning!

- **Stay active.** For a better night's sleep, take plenty of regular exercise throughout the day, but don't exercise too late into the evening, as this will disrupt your sleep.
- **Wind down and relax.** Start to wind down during the evening by directing your attention away from the pressures of the day. This is the time to avoid mental stimulants, as the more alert you are the longer it will take you to fall asleep. Don't watch TV late into the evening as this can over excite the imagination. Instead try listening to some relaxing music or do some light reading. However, avoid napping in the evening as it will be harder for you to fall asleep at night.
- **Steer clear of stimulants.** Avoid stimulants such as tea, coffee, alcohol and cigarettes, particularly late at night as these will disrupt your sleep and leave you feeling tired and irritable.
- **Pour yourself a calming drink.** Try calming herbal teas like camomile, lemon balm or mint. Sip the herbal teas slowly half an hour before going to bed, and they will work as a natural sedative. Alternatively, try Valerian, which is an age-old remedy for sleeplessness that helps to reduce tension and anxiety, promoting natural sleep. But remember not to drink large quantities late into the evening otherwise night-time trips to the toilet will be inevitable!
- **Have a relaxing bath.** A bath can be a relaxing way to end the evening. Keep the water warm, but not hot and try adding a few drops of aromatherapy oils for added relaxation. Use essential oils such as camomile, lavender and meadowsweet which will all help to calm you. Alternatively try a ready-to-use herbal bath oil, available from many chemists.
- **Breathe deeply.** Before getting into bed, try a simple deep breathing exercise. Sit quietly with your eyes closed and consciously relax your muscles. Choose a word to focus on, pick something relaxing like "peace" or "calm". Take a

deep breath, breathing in and out to slow counts of five. Silently say your focus word to yourself every time you breathe out. Dismiss other thoughts as they come into your mind and keep concentrating on your breathing and on your focus word. As you start to relax, feel the tension leaving you. Continue for about 10-15 minutes and then gradually let your thoughts return, stretch and get up slowly.

- **Get comfortable.** Once in bed you will succumb to sleep more easily if your bed is comfortable and your bedroom is quiet, well ventilated and away from obtrusive lights.
- **Be positive.** Once in bed try to deliberately direct your mind away from troubling, stressful or unhappy thoughts. Don't attempt to solve problems that have been worrying you throughout the day, put them out of your mind until the morning. One way to make this easier is to write down your worries or concerns as this will often make them seem more manageable.
- **Relax.** If worries keep you awake at night, using a relaxation or visualisation technique will help to shift the focus of your mind away from your anxieties. This can also help to calm you during the day, if you feel anxious or panic overtakes you. See our list of recommended reading, for further information.

### **Lemon Balm Tea**

**Try this refreshing bed time drink for a calming effect.**

Place 1/2 oz of fresh lemon balm leaves into a tea pot and pour over 1/2 pint of boiling water. Leave to infuse for approximately 10 minutes - then drink, sit back and relax...

### **Overnight beauty treatment...**

Sleep is important for healthy skin. During the night damaged skin cells are repaired and new cells generated. As less moisture is lost through the skin during the night, it is more receptive to treatments and creams which are more easily absorbed.

The skin balance gel-cream has been especially developed for women who have had breast surgery. It's light formula and high concentration of nutritive components are ideal for the neck and chest areas. The gel-cream effectively restores reddened, tired and irritated skin.