

While these symptoms should definitely be heeded, don't go into meltdown if you have any of them, as in most instances they'll relate to something minor.

## Read<sup>the</sup> signs

### CHEST PAIN

Chest pain is a classic sign of a possible heart attack, particularly in those over 50. However, it's also a common symptom of acid reflux, a condition widely believed to relate to high stomach acid, but which in fact may also be due to low acidity. Acid reflux responds well to naturopathic treatment, which can be as simple as taking lemon juice in water before meals. If the pain is crushing, or if you are breathless or sweating at the same time, seek medical assistance immediately.

### SPOON-SHAPED NAILS

Spoon-shaped nails (a condition known medically as koilonychia), which appear to have an indentation running lengthwise along the centre, can relate to iron-deficiency anaemia; haemochromatosis, where the body retains too much iron; type 1 and type 2 diabetes; Raynaud's disease, which affects blood supply to fingers and toes, causing them to turn white; and lupus erythematosus, an autoimmune disease. More concerning, they are indicated in cardiovascular disease and hypothyroidism; these conditions are all serious, so see your GP if you notice this change in your nails.

### BIZARRE DREAMS

We all dream every night: four to six dreams over the course of our sleep, of which we remember just two to three a week – and only because we wake up before they're finished. No one knows why we dream, and it's also unclear whether dreams have meanings, although some scientists believe they may provide vital clues about our health. During periods of extreme stress, people often have very weird or vivid dreams. Alcohol before bed, infections, and menopause are other triggers.



### EYE TWITCH

Eye twitching usually occurs in the lower lid of one eye, although the upper lid can also be involved. Again, this is a classic symptom of stress or fatigue, although eye strain, dry eyes, tiredness, allergies, excessive caffeine and certain medications are also implicated. So are nutritional deficiencies: a loss of electrolytes such as calcium, potassium and magnesium can trigger the twitching. Unfortunately, many people when stressed excrete more magnesium, which worsens the situation. In rare instances, eye twitching may relate to neurological conditions affecting the eyelid, such as blepharospasm or hemifacial spasm. If the twitching continues after consulting a natural therapist, get a referral to an eye specialist.

### METALLIC TASTE

On the good news side, a metallic taste can mean you're pregnant: this symptom usually occurs in the early stages. Or it may simply be the result of taking a mineral supplement such as zinc on an empty stomach. On the less positive side, it's also a common side effect of numerous prescription and over-the-counter medications, notably antibiotics and antihistamines but also chemotherapy drugs. In most instances, the taste disappears once the medications stop. Other causes are head injury, upper respiratory tract or ear infections, and any conditions that damage the central nervous system. Poor oral hygiene with bleeding gums usually results in a salty taste, but in some people the taste can be metallic. Food poisoning is another cause. ⓘ

“Bizarre dreams are a classic stress symptom, as the brain attempts to sort through the day's activities.”

#### MEET THE EXPERT

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