



# hidden health *hazards*

A foot rash could mean diabetes, back pain could be depression. **JOANN CHIA** looks at some seemingly innocuous symptoms that could point to a more serious ailment.

Think that unrelenting bout of rash is caused by sensitivity to weather changes, or that an acne outbreak is nothing more than a case of work stress? Don't be surprised if a simple visit to the GP leads to a slew of specialist consultations. Equipping yourself with knowledge about some of the common signs and symptoms of women-related health conditions – and seeking early treatment – may be what saves you from worsening health and a hefty medical bill.

## 1 acne outbreak

### YOU'RE ALSO SUFFERING

**FROM** Irregular or missed periods, excessive hair growth, dandruff and skin discoloration.

**YOU COULD HAVE** Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS), where the ovaries produce excessive androgen (male hormones), which increases sebum production and predisposes you to acne. You have a higher chance of developing ovarian cysts, which may result in lower fertility or infertility. Sufferers are also more susceptible to diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.

**DON'T PANIC YET BECAUSE** Acne is common and affects a quarter of adult women, with flare-ups before your period, during periods of increased stress or if you've started on a new skincare product, says Dr Wong Su-Ni, consultant dermatologist at Pacific Specialist Practice. A proper skincare regimen and antibiotics should clear it up. If you suspect PCOS, see your ob-gynae, who will review your medical history and perform the necessary blood tests.

## 2 hair loss

### YOU'RE ALSO SUFFERING FROM

A face rash, anaemia, seizures or psychosis, mouth ulcers, dry eyes, easy bruising, bleeding gums and aching or swollen joints.

**YOU COULD HAVE** Lupus. This chronic autoimmune disease causes the immune system to produce antibodies that attack tissues, leading to inflammation and damage in any part of the body. According to the Lupus Foundation of America, nine out of 10 sufferers are females and eight out of 10 new cases develop among women of childbearing age.

**DON'T PANIC YET BECAUSE** Stress, fungal infections, hormonal changes during pregnancy or medication can cause temporary hair loss. Hair is likely to resume its normal growth cycle once your body gets used to the changes. A trichologist from the Philip Kingsley Trichological Centre says that if the significant hair loss (a widening parting, a receding hairline or a thinner ponytail) persists for more than a week, see a specialist immediately.

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