

## Part 4 Case studies - adult milestones

**Patient:** I don't know where to start.

**Doctor:** *Start at the things that concern you and the way they've evolved, or arisen, and we can work on from there.*

**Patient:** I suppose the thing that's been troubling me for the longest has been the absence of periods which has, well this particular time since June and I suppose my last period was hardly worth bothering with, but just enough to be a minor irritation which was sort of late-ish June but as I left the UK on the 26th or so, so it was still, like, the last six drops or so but it was like six drops for about eight or nine days which is not at all what my usual periods are like because I used to have light to moderate four or five day periods and they'd be very regular. You see it wasn't the first time I'd ever had, like, more than a month of skipping periods because when I was a student, what with exam stress or just travelling around missing a month once in a while wasn't a problem and it was always OK. But September or December last year I didn't have any periods but they came back at Christmas time so I didn't worry about it any more. So those six months were OK - from December to June, and June was hardly worth bothering about and since then there has been absolutely nothing.

**Doctor:** *What happened in June, did you say you were going abroad... or [that] there was some major change in your life?*

**Patient:** I finished off the course I was doing. I was doing a one-year LLM in Belgium and so I had exams in May - June. The exams finished in the middle of June...I came home on about the 21st or so, and then I went away for, well, an indefinite period...for what was supposed to be until January-February (or a few days thereafter) it was...a bit [of an upheaval] but I thought "even so I'm going abroad...jet lagged...changing time zones...you know that your system might get thrown out of balance" but I thought "no way" not for...well it was three months... that was the first time that I went to see someone about it.

My skin has always... for about...probably since I was about 15 / 16 I've had spots of varying degrees of severity. The first antibiotics I got in August 1992... I had had various topical solutions and things before then... but they never made any serious difference. I took my antibiotics for two years following that and stopped taking them within a few days of arriving in Australia... I thought that "this is just getting ridiculous" and they said "well you know, you're starting to run out of diagnostic possibilities here" and "what are you doing about your acne" because it flared up really badly when I went to Japan, it was almost as if going to Japan was licence for my skin to become worse than I have ever known it.

**Doctor:** *Why do you think that was?*

**Patient:** I have absolutely no idea. I really, trully and honestly, don't know.

It is a simple fact that people...that you get fobbed off [by doctors] if it is acne or things like that: "Oh stop worrying about it," "it will get better," "it is just something that everybody goes through" but I thought, "well, it's my periods...my hormones all seem to be out of balance, it's my skin - the whole lot - just taking all these pills is not going to help all that much - I'd much rather try and get to the bottom of it - if there is a bottom of it to be got to."

**[Doctor:** *How much do you perspire?]*

**Patient:** Quite a lot when I am exercising but [otherwise] not particularly.

**Doctor:** *Are you getting any form of flushings?*

Patient shakes her head.

**Doctor:** *OK, have you got a good time or a bad time of the day.*

12

**Patient:** In terms of ... doing exercise I'm far better tea-time-ish... five... five-thirty pm than in the mornings, for example. And in terms of brain activity I'm bad post lunch-time til about 3.30 in the afternoon.

13

[*Doctor:* Can you tell me about your family?]

14

**Patient:** The family have separated about two to three years after I went to Australia... there had been latent marital troubles for a long time and the crunch came when I went to Australia and my brother went on holiday and so Dad moved out but he moved back at the weekend, so he has been back with us since Sunday. So there has been a lot of underlying stress and a lot of overt stress and there's... now there's, kind of, a massive sense of relief, but still a lot of "work" to be done on the parental relationship.

.... I'm close to my mother... I haven't had a particularly "good" relationship with my father... we have been very.... we don't fight or row or anything like that - its the opposite, we just haven't really ever communicated or been involved in the other's life.

15

-----  
*Doctor:* What made you want to travel?

16

**Patient:** Just a curiosity with other places and other cultures and ways of doing things.

17

*Doctor:* Does it make any difference whether you are by the sea or whether you are inland in terms of how you feel, or are physically, and so on...

18

**Patient:** I do like being by the sea - my mothers family are by the sea and so all my childhood holidays were spent by the sea. My University towns have all had rivers, they haven't necessarily been by the sea, but there's always been water... I just have to get out. I'm going to work in London... which I'm really looking forward to. The one thing that fills me with a slight sense of foreboding is how easy I will be able to get out of the city into the countryside and remoteness, and away from it all.

*Doctor:* Are you fond of salt or not?

19

**Patient:** No

20

-----  
**Patient:** People being hypocritical and two-faced and not having the guts to stand up and say to your face what they are saying about you behind your back, really really winds me up... there are a few members of my family like that... two facedness in anybody really gets to me.

21

-----  
**Patient:** I have very little patience with pure emotional logic. I think I can be overly rational... or at least try and impose rationality on everything instead of realising that it isn't always going to work. Emotions are just as important and can be just as valid but if I have somebody who is just being completely emotional or completely hysterical then I will lose patience with them far more than with somebody who is being sort of calm and rational about the whole thing.

22

There is something else I should have mentioned but really forgot about it. The summer I was sixteen.. The summer of eighty-eight, I was working... I wasn't working in Glasgow, I was away from home... working for and staying with a colleague of my parents and... I don't know whether you would call it abuse or whether you wouldn't... I got fundamentally messed up with that whole thing. He was married, had a son and was trying to... wanted to sort of "educate" me into being a woman or being a "sexual being" type of thing as well. "You know I'm not going to go so far as to rape you" or all the rest of it, but he did virtually everything else in terms of touching me up, sort of kissing, playing with my vagina and that kind of thing. And I thought about leaving and "I am going to have to explain to them why I am leaving." "I am going to have to tell my parents why I have come back six weeks, five weeks before I had originally planned to." I tried every kind of tactic that I thought I knew at the time, sort of: "this was wrong" "this is not what I wanted" this was... all the rest of it. His wife went away

at one point with the kids to visit her family and said was I happy to stay in the house... if I wanted, they would put me up in an hotel. "If you promise you will leave me alone, like not come into my room - then I'll stay, otherwise I'm not staying" So he promised and I believed him, but I did not have a lock on my bedroom door and within a few days he came in and so I said "you promised" he said "well you didn't really expect me to hold to them" "well, actually, yes I did - that's the way I've been brought up" sort of thing... just all sorts of things... so that was when I was sixteen and I didn't talk about it... my father still doesn't know about it, I talked to my mother about it about two years later and talked to some sort of older friends through church things when I was a student. A few of my friends know about it.. but not a lot... This is one of the things I fight the tendency to be retrospective about. I've gone out and I've had one serious relationship and I've dated a few guys, but nothing else serious. And its one of those things if I'm feeling low or down about the whole thing "well its small wonder... I was so messed up in terms of..."

23

*Doctor: Has it affected your own sense of self esteem? What, in terms of the way you work now - emotionally or in terms of your relationships, what kind of hangover has it produced, this episode...*

24

**Patient:** I think its left a kind of paradoxical response because its left me extremely unwilling to trust anybody else and get involved on any kind of sexual level. I sort of quite often, or not often but sometimes just find myself feeling completely detached from an embrace or all the rest of it. You know I think "Well, I'm here, I should be enjoying this... I should be involved in this... I should be sort of deeply committed" and I find myself feeling as if I'm kind of standing back watching a film or something. But yet on the other hand my father for me, throughout my teenage years, wasn't there... a person to talk to and learn about being a young woman with and that kind of thing, which is part of, well was part of this maybe this whole relationship because this guy was about my fathers age and he was somebody that I could talk to quite easily, I respected his views, we had quite a lot of intelligent conversations about things so it was good for me. But I suppose in some ways he was a bit of a father substitute type figure, so in some ways... other people have sometimes said to me - older men and that sort of thing - I'm kind of, I would describe it as a peculiar mixture of quite sort of confident in knowing what I want and where I going, but yet there is still an element of... not quite looking for a father figure but slight sort of "little girl lost" element, which is just another kind of paradox, and that's a bit what I feel like, you know.

25

*Doctor: The fact that your periods have gone, has that wiped out your desire for sex? I mean is your libido at rock bottom, or is it normal, or where are you in that scale of things?*

26

**Patient:** I would say its OK now for the last... maybe for the last three or four months it was pretty low, but then I have had a whole sort of negativity complex masturbation was a whole sort of concept that I had never sort of come across before and then this guy was sort of talking about it "you know you should, like its good, everybody does it, its kind of normal" type thing. And then, just general curiosity, not there and then... we are talking about afterwards, I sort of tried it... this is really quite pleasurable, then I kind of got... I almost felt I was hooked or addicted and all the rest of it, and then I really hated myself because I associated the whole thing with that episode "this is really unhealthy, this is something I can't control" - and I am a wee bit of a control freak...it kicked the habit... if you would put it like that. But now, even though I am not having periods I feel far more like a sexual being.

27

*Doctor: So you have actually denied yourself sexual pleasure.... because of its associations...*

28

**Patient:** I suppose so, yes. Certainly in terms of feeling very guilty about it, sort of unclean ...

### Review appointment:

29

**Patient:** It was just bizarre. The same night I took the first of your powders... at 1.30am, I went to the bathroom... [my] period [had started]. That was very odd. That was in early January.... I would say that my skin is now as good as it has ever been since I first started having spots... which is about seven years ago... no longer than that, eight even...