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FEBRUARY 2012

# health+body

Must-read news and expert advice to help protect the body you love

## Quick! What Color Is Your Tongue?

The answer to that question—and the four other self tests here—can give you surprising clues about your health.

OK, first test! Stick out that tongue....

**WHAT'S HEALTHY:** Reddish-pink.

**WHAT'S NOT:** White, gray or brown muck on the back of your tongue; it may be bacteria that signals acid reflux or a stomach ulcer. A white coating all over can mean you're dehydrated.

**YOUR RX:** Use a tongue scraper to clean off gunk. If bacteria builds up again quickly or is hard to remove, see your doc, who can test you for gastrointestinal issues. For dry mouth, drink more water!

## How white are your eyes?

**WHAT'S HEALTHY:** Bright whites; also, smooth, even-toned eyelids.

**WHAT'S NOT:** Red, irritated eyes. They might be signs of dry eye, which can be brought on by hormonal changes from pregnancy or oral contraceptives, or from staring at a computer screen too long. A yellow tint in the whites of your eyes can be a sign of liver disease, like hepatitis. Redness and crustiness on the edges of lids may be a condition called blepharitis, which can be caused by a staph infection, allergies or rosacea.

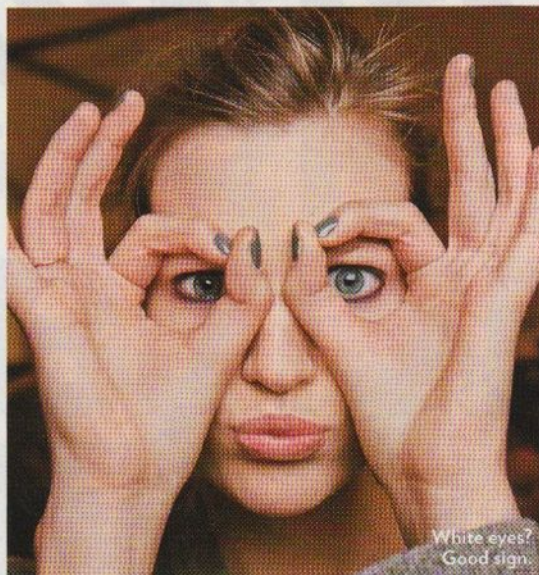
**YOUR RX:** For dry eyes, take fish oil twice daily (the omega-3s help give you healthy tears), try artificial tears and use a humidifier at home in winter. To uncover the source of any lid redness, bumps or crusty stuff, see an eye doc.

## What color are your lips?

**WHAT'S HEALTHY:** A pinker hue than your skin.

**WHAT'S NOT:** An unusually pale pucker could mean you're iron-deficient, while cracks at the corners of the mouth can suggest a lack of vitamin B12. (Both iron and B12 are abundant in meat and dairy, so vegans who are not careful with their diet may not get enough.)

**YOUR RX:** Eat iron-packed beans and dark leafies (spinach, collard greens) and fill up on B12-rich foods (fortified cereals) to bump up your body's stores. For cracks, also ask your doctor if you need an antibiotic.



White eyes? Good sign.

## How full are your eyebrows?

**WHAT'S HEALTHY:** Evenly distributed hair.

**WHAT'S NOT:** Thinning brows. Assuming you haven't gone tweezer crazy, thyroid disease may be the cause. When something's wonky with your thyroid, you may gain or lose weight, and hair loss, even from brows, is also a frequent side effect. "Look for thinning near the ends," says Chicago-area dermatologist Amy Taub, M.D.

**YOUR RX:** See your doctor for blood tests to rule out thyroid problems.

## How strong are your nails?

**WHAT'S HEALTHY:** Firm nails with skin-color plates.

**WHAT'S NOT:** If they're brittle, it may be "a clue that you're dealing with a lot of stress," says Ranella Hirsch, M.D., a dermatologist in Boston. Stress can actually affect how nails grow, she explains. "Sometimes, when I see damaged fingernails, I

ask my patients, 'How's work going? How are things with your boyfriend?'" A green tinge can be caused by an infection; bluish fingertips may indicate an issue with your circulation (it's a sign they're not getting enough oxygen). If whitish spots or lines pop up, you may have nutritional deficiencies.

**YOUR RX:** You *know* the cure for stress: Focus on lightening your load, and don't cheat yourself out of sleep or exercise. If stress makes you pick at your nails, try the beauty editor's trick of keeping them painted: You'll be less likely to want to mess up a mani! For white spots, try a more nutritious diet: Eat turkey and beef for iron (oatmeal and lentils if you're a vegetarian), and a cup of fortified milk daily for calcium and vitamins A and D. And if your nails look green or your fingers blue, get them in front of your dermatologist at your next appointment.

—Jessica Girdwain

# HEALTH ANSWERS, PLEASE!

From JoAnn E. Manson, M.D.



Sleep in rather than nap later.

**Sometimes after taking a nap, I feel more tired. Aren't naps supposed to help?** —J.C., Hayti, Mo.

I rarely recommend them. You may have heard about research suggesting that naps can improve alertness and memory, but these studies are often on stressed, sleep-deprived subjects like astronauts. There's little data showing that naps are helpful for healthy young women, and taking one won't come close to making up for a sleep deficit.

**So what should I do if I'm tired?** Many people find a brisk, 20-minute walk more rejuvenating. If you frequently need a nap, try logging extra hours at night (you may need more than the usual seven to eight) and cut back on caffeine. If that doesn't help, see your doc to rule out other problems. Getting adequate sleep is critical to your health, and catnaps are no answer.



Glamour contributing editor JoAnn E. Manson, M.D., is chief of the division of preventive medicine at Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital, a professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and a lead researcher on several women's health studies.

Keep your resolutions: Sign up for 30 days of healthy menus at [glamour.com/tips](http://glamour.com/tips).

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