



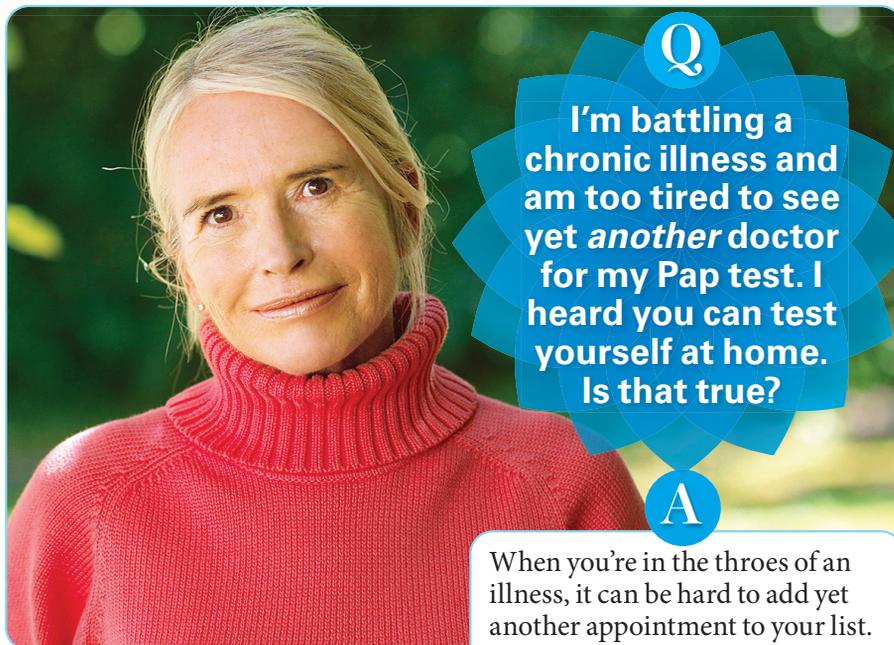
## Is PCOS the cause of my fatigue?

**Q:** I'm 45 and manage my PCOS with a low-carb diet and lifestyle changes. But I've battled daytime drowsiness ever since my diagnosis last year, and my husband says I've started to snore. Help!

**A:** Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is the most common endocrine disorder affecting premenopausal women. The condition occurs when progesterone levels get too low, triggering the growth of fluid-filled cysts on the ovaries, irregular periods, excess body and facial hair, weight gain, insulin resistance and acne.

As far as your daytime drowsiness, it's likely caused by *obstructive sleep apnea* (OSA). With OSA, the upper airway collapses during sleep, causing repeated episodes of paused breathing lasting several seconds. These episodes rob the brain of oxygen and the body of sleep. OSA is marked by snoring (as your husband reports), gasping for breath while sleeping, morning headaches and daytime sleepiness. And a recent study published in the *European Journal of Endocrinology* revealed that women with PCOS are twice as likely to develop sleep apnea. The researchers suspect that metabolic abnormalities linked to PCOS are to blame.

Your doctor can confirm an OSA diagnosis with a sleep study, and may recommend a *continuous positive airway pressure* (CPAP) machine to help keep your upper airway open during sleep. In the meantime, try sleeping on your side, which helps keep airways open and may ease snoring. In addition, the National Sleep Foundation reports that losing just 10% of your body weight slashes OSA symptoms by 50%. But if sleep apnea persists, talk to your doctor about other options. You can also ask your dentist, who can prescribe a mouth guard worn during sleep that reduces snoring.



Q

I'm battling a chronic illness and am too tired to see yet *another* doctor for my Pap test. I heard you can test yourself at home. Is that true?

A

When you're in the throes of an illness, it can be hard to add yet another appointment to your list. But you may not need a Pap test this year. If you're under 65 and your last test was normal, the National Cancer Institute says you only need a Pap test every three to five years. And if you're over 65, you may not need one at all—your doctor can give you guidance.

As far as DIY Pap tests, which use a self-swabbed sample taken from vaginal walls or a urine sample, one study found they're 98% accurate when compared to doctor-performed tests. Designed for women with limited healthcare access, they may provide a viable option, but I believe in-person testing is best. Your doctor uses your checkup to examine your breasts, vulva, pelvic floor, uterus and ovaries—key aspects of your health.

## Could Viagra really work for me?

**Q:** I'm 47 and confided in a friend that my orgasms have become weak. I was surprised when she told me she takes Viagra. Isn't that only for men?

**A:** Viagra works for men with erectile dysfunction by increasing blood flow to the penis—and since weak orgasms, a common concern for perimenopausal women, are due in part to lack of blood flow to the genitals, researchers suspected Viagra could help. But studies on its effectiveness for women are mixed, so the FDA hasn't approved its use. However, some of my patients find that low doses prescribed off-label do help. If you're interested in trying it, talk to your doctor, as Viagra can interact with other medications and may not be right for women with certain health conditions.

You may also want to start doing Kegel exercises, which strengthen the pelvic floor muscles for longer-lasting and more intense orgasms. To do: Squeeze pelvic muscles as if holding in urine for 5 seconds and release slowly. Repeat 10 times, three times daily.



### Put FIRST to work for you!

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