

# DOCTOR, DOCTOR

Your real-life health dilemmas and problems, plus all you need to feel fantastic...

## I'm a real-life Sleeping Beauty

Sarah can pass out for weeks and it takes more than a kiss to wake her

**B**leary eyed and confused, I pulled back my duvet. Mum's worried face slowly came into focus, along with the rest of my bedroom.

'What am I doing here?' I said, peering down at my pyjamas.

I was 14 and the last thing I remembered was being at school. A funny feeling had fizzed up my arms as I'd tried to concentrate in computer class.

So why was I at home in bed?

'You've been asleep,' Mum told me. 'For seven weeks.'

I listened, stunned, as she explained I'd collapsed at school, my body slumping and my eyes shutting in front of everyone.

She'd taken me straight home to bed. The emergency doctor had come to see me, but I'd been breathing

normally – I was just in a very deep sleep.

He'd advised Mum to pour Lucozade into my mouth to keep my sugar levels up, and I'd take big glugs of water while in my deep slumber.

'Now you're awake, doctors will be able to run tests to find out what's wrong with you,' Mum explained.

I could tell from her face the terrible strain she'd been under.

A week before my collapse, I'd lost my balance and toppled down the stairs. At the time, I put it down to carelessness, even though I wasn't usually clumsy. But could it be related?

### Nodding off

It took ages to wake up properly, as Mum cooked me dinner and I glugged back water.

My body felt heavy, as if it was weighed down with the need to sleep. But how could I possibly rest any more?

I went with Mum to see my doctor, who examined me and checked my blood pressure.

'It's very high,' he said.

I told him about my fall and the fizzing feeling in my arms.

'You may have had a stroke,' he said. 'But I'm not sure.'

My GP referred me to a paediatrician, who gave me an MRI scan and blood tests. And all the while, I continued to feel very weak and tired. Without warning, I'd get that strange prickly feeling down my arms

and then feel my eyelids droop.

Sometimes, I'd drop off on the bus, or at the cinema. Once, I even fell asleep into my gravy while eating Sunday dinner.

I could then be asleep for a few hours, or up to a week. I was falling behind at school.

Doctors still didn't know what was wrong, but I was prescribed steroids to try to keep me awake.

Yet even they couldn't control my need to sleep. I felt grumpy and depressed, too – as if I had permanent PMT.

Eighteen months later, I was finally diagnosed. 'You have a very rare disorder called Kleine-Levin syndrome (KLS),' the doctor told me. 'It's also called Sleeping Beauty syndrome.'

'It's a neurological disorder where your brain triggers these sleep episodes. The

fizzing feeling is the first sign.'

'Is there a cure?' I asked.

'No,' he said. 'All we can do is manage your symptoms. But you may grow out of it, perhaps by your 40th birthday.'

I started to cry. That felt like a lifetime away.

### Staying positive

I needed to take lithium tablets, but they made me put on weight. Soon, I'd reached 14st. But now my weight fluctuates. If I end up sleeping for a long time, I don't eat and I can drop to 12st.

I can't make plans because I could be asleep for days if an attack strikes. Yet, with Mum's help, I try to stay positive.

Sleeping Beauty syndrome sounds romantic, but it's more like a nightmare than a fairy tale. I pray I'll get my happy ending. ■

Sarah, 17, Penzance, Cornwall



### SLEEPING BEAUTY SYNDROME

■ This neurological disorder, called Kleine-Levin syndrome, triggers an excessive amount of sleep, often up to 18 hours a day, and a change of behaviour – patients may become childlike.

■ Some sufferers may need to spend long periods in bed, even when they're awake.

■ It can occur in anyone at any time, even in healthy people.

■ There's no cure, but lithium and stimulants can help.

More health updates