What a reaction from the tonic

Health with Doctor Vernon Coleman

I WAS in the middle of a surgery when Mrs S. telephoned, sounding quite distraught.

"It's my husband," she said, clearly distressed. "He's collapsed and looks very ill. Can you come round straight away?"

I tried to get more information from her, but she burst into tears. It was all I could do to get her to confirm her address.

When I arrived, I found that Mrs S. hadn't exaggerated the situation. Her husband was lying on the living-room floor and looked very ill.

He was covered in a red, rather blotchy rash and was obviously having some difficulty in breathing.

"What happened?" I asked Mrs S., kneeling down to feel for her husband's pulse as I spoke.

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"He came in from work about half an hour ago," Mrs S. told me, complaining that he felt tired and rather weak.

"He went straight upstairs to the bathroom and came down with a bottle of tonic medicine that he's had for a while now.

"He got a glass from the kitchen and poured himself some from the bottle. He said he thought that he just needed a good tonic to put some life into him again."

"Had he had anything to eat?" I asked.

"Nothing since he came in from work, and he'll have just had a sandwich for lunch," she told me. "His dinner is still in the oven. It's his favourite — steak-and-kidney pie."

I asked Mrs S. to telephone for an ambulance.

"While you do that, I'm going to give your husband an injection," I explained. "He's had an anaphylactic shock reaction — probably due to something in the tonic that he took."

While Mrs S. rang for an ambulance, I gave her husband two injections. The first was an antihistamine. The second was a drug called adrenalin.

Both drugs work very effectively to help patients suffering from this type of severe allergy reaction by dampening down the body's responses.

"Has your husband ever suffered from allergies of any kind?" I asked when Mrs S. returned.

"Well, he does seem to respond badly if he gets bitten by insects," she said. "He always swells up quite a lot.

"Oh, and he does get hay fever," she said. "Not very badly though."

She paused. "Is this tied up with hay fever?" she asked.

Mr S. was beginning to breathe a little easier, and the skin rash was looking slightly less angry.

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"A sudden anaphylactic shock reaction like this is a very special and dramatic type of response," I told her, "but one of the substances involved, histamine, is exactly the same chemical as is released when an insect stings.

"Hay fever, insect stings and so on are all fairly minor allergy reactions — this is very much a major one."

I explained that with a small sting, the redness and the swelling is confined to one fairly small area — the site of the sting.

"But with a major allergy reaction," I went on, "the swelling literally affects the patient's whole body — it produces swellings inside which close down the airways. That's why your husband had difficulty in breathing."

"And you think that the reaction could have been caused by the tonic medicine that my husband took?" asked Mrs S. "It's likely," I agreed.

"But he's been taking it for ages and it hasn't affected him before," she protested.

I explained to her that allergy reactions can develop quite suddenly and unexpectedly — and that they can sometimes involve substances that an individual has been taking without problems for some time.

"Allergies can develop quite unexpectedly and quite surprisingly," I pointed out.

"So how could we have prevented this happening," Mrs S. wanted to know.

"You couldn't have," I explained. "It's a rare occurence and you did exactly the right thing by calling for help straight away."

Mr S., by ths time, was looking much healthier. "Does he really need to go to hospital?" Mr S. wanted to know.

"I think so," I told her. "I'd like them to keep an eye on him for the next few hours, just to make sure that all goes well.

"Then they can also try to find out whether or not it was something in the bottle of tonic that caused the reaction.

"And how do we make sure that it doesn't happen again?" asked Mrs S.

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"That's why it's important to find out exactly what caused the reaction," I told her. "Once the cause has been identified, then it will be possible to make sure it doesn't happen again."

Just then, we heard the ambulance pulling up outside. "Your husband is going to be fine," I told her. "Let's get him safely into hospital for a while, and then I must get back and finish surgery."

Memo to mums: If you're trying to reduce someone's temperature, use tepid water rather than cold.

If the water you use is too chilly, it will trigger the shutdown of superficial blood vessels — and probably send your patient's temperature up, rather than down.

A dodgy tightrope

WHEN you walk into a room, do heads turn in admiration at your taste and style — or in horror at your outlandish appearance?

The trouble with fashion is that there's a very dodgy tightrope to walk. Balance it and you look great; fall off, and you look stupid and completely wrong, even though the outfit seemed a good idea at the time.

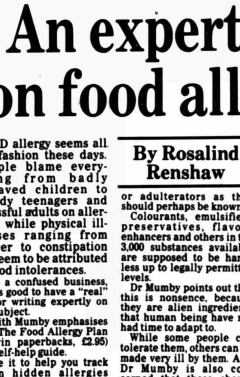
If you'd like advice on how to get it right the whole time, look no further than Colour Right, Dress Right, by Liz London and Anne Adams (Dorling Kindersley, £6.95). This is a practical guide to choosing and wearing the clothes, cosmetics and accessories to make you look and feel your best.

And, since colour dressing is the latest thing, a colour chart is included so that you won't make the silly mistake of wearing peach blusher if you're a pale blonde.

* * *

STILL into improving yourself? Then read the Wholefood Cookbook, by Elizabeth Cornish (Apple Press, £6.95). Beautifully produced and lavishly illustrated, it will give you and your cooking sparkle with ideas for zippy salads, lots of smashing vegetable dishes and healthy, wholewheat bakes.

Tense thriller is a big hit



■ Michael Stewart . . . fascinating to talk to

THERE was only one problem with Far Cry, by Michael Stewart (Corgi paperbacks, £1.95), and that was that I couldn't put it down.

The world went by, supper went uncooked and the television unwatched, as I read this superb psychological thriller.

Be warned, therefore, before you pick it up. Cancel all dates and plan on doing nothing for a couple of days because you too will have the same trouble.

Far Cry is the un-put-downable story of a boy who is apparently being driven crazy. I will say little more, other than to add that if I did, it would give too much away and I'm certainly not going to spoil anyone's enjoyment.

It is tensely written with a superb climax. Some of the tension arises because there are only four main speaking parts — the boy, his mother, the psychiatrist and the book salesman who provides the child's unexpected salvation.

Far Cry is the work of Michael Stewart, whom I met when he came to Reading a few days ago. He is busy hyping the book because his publishers believe, rightly, that he will be the next Jeffrey Archer.

Michael is unmarried, in his late thirties, extremely good looking and fascinating to talk to.

This is his fourth book, and he now writes full-time, having given up a kind of Arthur Daley business two years ago. "We did things like sell unshrunk jeans to Nigeria," he grinned.

When the business looked like coming unstuck over deals to do with oil — obviously, Michael lacked the Dallas touch — he bought himself a word processor and settled into his wing of a historic house just outside Oxford.

"I take six months to do the writing of each book, and a further six months is spent plotting and researching," he says.

He is fascinated by the idea of reality tinged with the para-normal.

Then the events in Far Cry are both believable yet spine chilling.

Do read it. But be warned — you won't be able to put it down once you start!

* * *

I HAD exactly the same trouble with Run For Your Life, by Barbara Abercrombie (Futura, £1.95).

Sarah goes in for a marathon. She's a thriller writer and her new book is also about someone going in for a marathon.

As she writes her book, the plot unfolds in her own life. The trouble is that her book ends in murder . . . and somewhere out there, in her own life, someone is shadowing, stalking, menacing the family, ready to kill.

But who is to be murdered? Because it's quite likely that the ending may be changed.

Marvellous stuff.

ROSALIND RENSHAW

■ Cotton tops are the most fashionable around this summer. They're cool, light to wear and are at their best in natural pastels. This one is by Gloria Vanderbilt (stockist, Debenhams, Broad Street, Reading) and comes in sizes 8-14, and costs around £29.95. Colours: natural and grey.

Needlecraft advice from the experts

Books for Spring

TWO marvellous books with historical emphasis on needlecraft are the work of local authors.

Jan Messent, who lives in Reading, has written Embroidery and Architecture (Batsford, hardback, £7.95), while Nenia Lovesey, of Wokingham, has written an Introduction to Needlepoint Lace (same publishers, same price).

Both books are truly expert in their subjects, beautifully illustrated and absolutely fascinating to read.

Jan is a professional embroiderer and member of the Embroiderers' Guild. Her previous books, Embroidery and Nature, and Embroidery and Animals, were also published by Batsford.

Nenia is a needlepoint lace teacher in her home town, and is also a tutor at the Royal School of Needlework and the English Lace School."

Nenia's book centres on the revival of interest in needlepoint lacemaking, which has led to the rediscovery of old, traditional methods of working, including the stitches and patterns.

The book also encourages beginners to design their own patterns, and there are several photographs of work carried out by Nenia's own students — in their first classes — encouraging stuff!

This is a fascinating introduction to what was, until recently, thought of as a dying, if not lost, English art. And if you get hooked, you can always move on to Nenia's other two books — The Technique of Needlepoint Lace, and Creative Designs in Needlepoint Lace.

Jan's book looks at the influence of architecture through the ages in embroidery.

Previously an art teacher, she is well known as an artist and illustrator as well as an expert in embroidery. Her own embroideries have been exhibited widely, and are prized by collectors in this country and the States.

The book contains many sketches and photographs to inspire the artistically inclined embroiderer, including some of Reading interest — for instance, the figure of Equity and Law, a three-dimensional design on the wall of the Life Assurance Society in the town.

ROSALIND RENSHAW

BOOKSELF

Climbing the career ladder

IT'S odd that two very different books both have similar jacket designs, showing a woman's high-heeled shoe.

But Reach for the Top, by Marilyn Davidson (Piatkus, £2.95) is a woman's guide to success in business, and shows the high heel marching steadily up the ladder of management.

And The Fine Art of Flirting, by Joyce Jillson (Piatkus, £2.95 for paperback, £7.95 for the hardback) shows the high heel flirting with a male trouserleg.

Reach for the Top is sensible, readable, well-researched and thoroughly useful for any woman who wants to swim out of the word processing pool.

The Fine Art of Flirting is probably very funny — American television is doing a show based on the book later this year — but I can't see the joke.

But then I also have a total blind spot for Judith Martin's Miss Manners' Guide to Rearing Perfect Children (Hamish Hamilton, £9.95).

Other reviewers have raved about this and its predecessor, Miss Manners' Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behaviour. This reviewer finds Miss Manners a tedious, unfunny bore. But it may be me.

Patrick Holford has written Vitamin Vitality (Collins, £2.95). He is director of the Institute for Optimum Nutrition, and believes that over 80 per cent of British people don't get enough vitamins and minerals.

He believes that better nutrition makes us live longer, improves intelligence and memory and counters obesity and infertility.

Just room to mention titles from the excellent Sheldon Press series, all of which are aimed at intelligent and practical self-help: Body Language, by Allan Pease (how to read other people's thoughts by their give-away gestures — useful when you want to know when politicians and lovers are lying through their teeth or when the boss is secretly thinking of sacking you); Calm Down, by Dr Paul Hauck — how to cope with frustration and anger; The Complete Public Speaker, by Gyles Brandreth; Making the Most of Yourself, by Gill Cox and Sheila Dainow; and An A-Z of Alternative Medicine, by B. Hafen and K. Pruden.

ROSALIND RENSHAW

An expert view on food allergies

By Rosalind Renshaw

FOOD allergy seems all the fashion these days. People blame everything from badly behaved children to moddy teenagers and stressful adults on allergies, while physical illnesses ranging from cancer to constipation all seem to be attributed to food intolerances.

It's a confused business, so it's good to have a "real" doctor writing expertly on the subject.

Keith Mumby emphasises that The Food Allergy Plan (Unwin paperbacks, £2.95) is a self-help guide.

Use it to help you track down hidden allergies which may be ruining your life, he says. Hidden allergies, he claims, can cause any number of serious illnesses — migraine, colitis, asthma, depression, high blood pressure, obesity and dermatitis, along with mouth ulcers, palpitations, panic attacks and catarrh.

No fixed diet is given, since people with allergies have to arrange their own diets and what is proverbially sauce for one, may be truly poisonous for another. Thus, the current trend for fibre rich foods may be the worst possible thing for someone with an allergy to wheat.

Allergic

Similarly, a vegetarian diet may not suit everyone because many more people are allergic to grains and dairy produce than they are to meat — a point which Dr Mumby says is hard to get across to enthusiastic vegetarians, who won't accept that more people are made ill by vegetarianism than are suited to it. But where vegetarianism does help is that it puts the emphasis on fresh, whole foods.

Dr Mumby pays tribute to the man who virtually started the allergy ball rolling, Dr Richard Mackarness who was a psychiatrist at Park Prewitt hospital in Basingstoke. He wrote Not All in the Mind, and Chemical Victims, after discovering that some of his mentally ill patients were in fact suffering from allergies.

Taken off the food to which he found they were allergic, they miraculously regained their sanity.

Dr Mumby himself rates the existence of masked or hidden allergies as "the biggest medical discovery since anaesthetics and on a par with antibiotics."

Discoveries along the road have proved conclusive: irritable bowel syndrome, which has puzzled doctors for years, is due to food allergies. When 84 children suffering from migraine were studied, researchers were able to demonstrate a clear relationship with food and food additives in no fewer then 82 of those cases.

Mr Mumby is perhaps at his most interesting on the subject of food additives — or adulterators as they should perhaps be known.

Colourants, emulsifiers, preservatives, flavour enhancers and others in the 3,000 substances available are supposed to be harmless up to legally permitted levels.

Dr Mumby points out that this is nonsence, because they are alien ingredients that human being have not had time to adapt to.

While some people can tolerate them, others can be made very ill by them. And Dr Mumby is also concerned that these chemicals are never used singly but may interact dangerously together.

Then there is the unseen danger — the chemical sprays, fertilisers and pesticides which farmers spray on to their crops, or the antibiotics with which they may treat their cattle, and which creep into the milk which goes on sale to the unsuspecting public.

Food labelling gives cause for concern, too. Manufacturers use words like 'pure' and 'natural' freely, despite the fact that their products may have been pasteurised, bleached with sulphur dioxide or coated with mineral oil.

Some products are labelled "No added sugar", when it often means that corn syrup is an ingredient.

All foods can spark allergies in some people. Some people are allergic to fruit, others to nuts. Pulses and beans are full of toxins and, even after they have been boiled, some people may still be unable to tolerate them.

Meat, wheat, grains, milk and dairy products, eggs and tomatoes are all common trouble-makers.

Where this book is so helpful is that it isn't written by a crank, but by a medical expert. Thus, readers are encouraged to eat fresh wholefoods but warned against dashing out to the nearest health food shop since many so-called health foods could actually make you ill.

Trouble

Dr Mumby doesn't insist, either, that everyone should eat brown bread. White bread is a lot better for people who are allergic to wheat.

Overall, Dr Mumby believes, people are a lot less healthy than they were 50 years ago. Our diets are now loaded with unnatural substances which nature never intended us to eat, and this in turn reduces our ability to deal with other food, such as grains and dairy products.

"Man is very adaptable . . . Yet it takes time to accommodate a new food into our diets. Given a few hundred thousand years, we might easily be able to consume burgers and cola without any ill effects — I only hope that we as a species do not have the folly to persist with such fare".

The Food Allergy Plan is an interesting book, and not too pessimistic a passport to galloping hypochondria.

Russell Grant

The Star with your Stars for Tomorrow

IF IT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY: You have an enigmatic, unworldly charm that adds to your already delightful personality. If you're looking for romance and a deep relationship this is the year that could hold a lot of love for you. Follow all your gut feelings and you won't go wrong.

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20) Your future direction and ambitions look a bit hazy. You cannot define your career role and somehow dodge in and out of different departments unsure of what you're meant to be doing. You shouldn't make any major moves or decisions now about your occupation as you could put your foot in it. A confusing day.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21) Your daydreams take over and you wistfully wonder the hours away. A bewitching week for those on their holidays or taking a break from the daily grind. You are prone to thoughts of romance so you could find yourself hooked on a book dedicated to love, marriage and slushy tales.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21) A very tender day when you want to be with your own amour. Physical relationships take on an enticing tone so, whether you're attached or not, there is a glimmer of something special in your life. Because the day has some psychic emanations you may feel extra-sensitive or bump into a person who has a very mystical gift.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23) A day of love. Close relationships have something very gentle to impart so if you've been having harsh words or not been getting on now is the time to forgive and forget. A reconciliation is on the cards, as is a desirable offer.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23) Glamorise the area you work in. Because your office or factory is where you toil and labour there's no reason why you shouldn't make it a more pleasant place. A visit to a hospital or playing the good Samaritan in some way will make you realise how lucky you are.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sept 23) For a realistic sign you are wearing the biggest pair of rose coloured glasses I've seen in a long time! Your vision is clouded to all matters that require a rational approach or logical summing up. An adventure could take place in a pub, club or centre or leisure which could lead to protestations of love.

LIBRA (Sept 24 - Oct 23) Refurbishing your home is something you should give time to now. You have an eye for beauty and fashion. You can't afford to buy the plushest materials but if you shop around you could bring refinements into your abode for next-to-nothing.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 22) You have a commanding air and are able to approach the most important folk in a relaxed, but unfamiliar manner. As you are adept in communicating now you shouldn't avoid taking people to task or telling them a few home truths as you will not come across as too oppressive — simply concerned. Good day to catch up on your post.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 23 - Dec 21) Investment in the arts, antiques or anything that could be described as elegant will allow you to make some extra boodle. You may own an heirloom or old artefact you assume is worthless but is actually worth a few bob. It's a profitable day for a rummage so rifle through your drawers, the attic or other potential treasure troves.

CAPRICORN (Dec 22 - Jan 20) You're on good form so there's no excuse to hold back or make excuses why you shouldn't do something. Your attractiveness will bring a few admirers, so keep that air of mystery you have cultivated since last year. The less you say the more you'll be wanted.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19) Do you believe in magic? Well, we're off to a good start because Wednesday has magical qualities and will have some amazing consequences. Most Aquarians are very curious over the supernatural or paranormal, and events that take place now will cause many a sceptic to waiver on the brink.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20) Detvote yourself to a good cause. Charity or voluntary work will refresh your spiritual fount; a helping hand given now will brush up your halo. You may be seconded on to a committee or be asked to organise an event for the summer. A fete, or show could do with your imaginative advice.

Easing the pain

Pets with Con Gordon

"A DEAR old shaggy dog I know called Dede has rheumatism in her hindquarters," writes a woman reader.

"I know rheumatism can't be cured, but what can we do to ease her pain?

"I suggested aspirin but am told it is not good for dogs."

Rheumatism, and arthritis affecting the joints, are common in older dogs.

Treatment is warmth and rest, and — at one time — aspirin, but aspirin is liable to upset the stomach of dog or man, and my vet doesn't use it any more.

He says there are better drugs for his purposes — which are to alleviate pain and to check the progress of the ailment.

A warm bed is important.

I think a lot of pets don't sleep warm enough. A house can be a cold place in the middle of the night, and the floor is the coldest place of all, even with the benefit of one or two blankets.

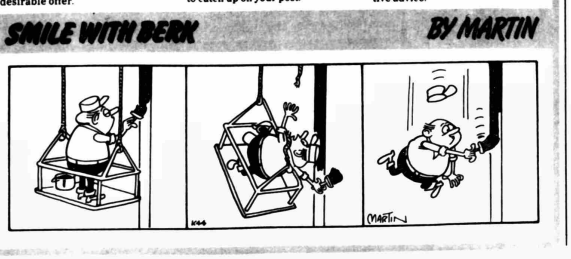
A lot of vets who make use of homeopathic methods is obtainable from the Homeopathic Development Foundation Ltd., of Harcourt House, 19a Cavendish Square, London W1M 9AD, and the Foundation publishes a number of books on the homeopathic treatment of animals.

One of them is Homeopathy for Pets (75p) by George MacLeod, MRCVS, which gives a list of household remedies — to be administered in strictly homeopathic potencies.

The author says the booklet will be found to be of real help in the treatment of simple complaints but it should not be regarded as a substitute for expert advice.

"For more serious conditions," he writes, "it is strongly recommended that a qualified veterinary surgeon be consulted."

SMILE WITH BERK — BY MARTIN



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