

PARENTING WITH LISA SALMON



Answers to those early questions...

HAS your young child ever asked you a question you just can't answer? You're not alone - nearly half of parents admit they often struggle to answer their youngster's tricky questions.

So what's the solution? Around half of parents confess to turning to the internet in the hope of finding an answer, while a third just make it up.

To help parents, child psychologist Dr Sam Wass has come up with some handy replies for some of the toughest queries.

1. Is Father Christmas real?

On this question, you're often playing catch-up to what they've heard in the playground. Ask them what they think, and if they suggest reasons Father Christmas is or isn't real, discuss these with them - and perhaps ask how mummy and daddy could possibly afford all their presents if Father Christmas didn't provide them.

2. Why do people die?

It can be tempting to soften the truth about death with a child. But telling them something like, 'Granny went to sleep', can backfire and cause more confusion later. If someone close dies, perhaps say something like: 'Granny was very old and sick. She doesn't talk or eat or breathe any more, and we won't see her again. But the love we had for her will stay with us forever.'

3. Where did I come from?

For many children, 'from mummy's tummy' is an answer that satisfies them for years. If they ask, 'How did I get into mummy's tummy?', go for something like: 'Daddy has seeds inside him called sperm. Mummy has eggs inside her instead. When grown-ups make a baby, the sperm from daddy needs to get to mummy's womb, so one can join up with the egg and fertilise it. That's the start of a new baby.'

4. What is God?

Don't be afraid to tell your child what you, personally, believe is the answer. It can also help to explain that different people have very different opinions on whether God exists, and, if so, what God is like.

5. What does 'we can't afford it' mean?

The answer depends on the age of the child. For an older child, this can be an opportunity to discuss why some people have more money than others. But for a younger child, it might be better to teach about budgeting, and planning, their resources.

6. Why do I have to go to school?

If your child asks this question a lot, try to find out why. If they just ask once, say school helps them practise using their brain, and make them aware of what they can use their brain for. Remind your child that mummy and/or daddy also have to go to work, to use their brain and earn money.

7. Why is the sky blue?

You need to know a bit of basic science for this one: Light from the sun looks white, but it's made from all the colours of the rainbow. The light travels in waves of different lengths, which are reflected off tiny bits of dust and other very small particles in the earth's atmosphere. Because blue light waves are shorter, they're more likely to hit the dust and other particles, and get reflected down to earth, making the sky look blue.

AN UNCOMFORTABLE THING TO TALK ABOUT

Don't suffer in silence

- Dr Zak urges you to be aware of the signs inflammatory bowel disease

HEALTH

With Dr Zak Uddin



AS a nation famously renowned for keeping their personal issues private, the thought of openly discussing ones bowel habits may be an uncomfortable subject.

Indeed awareness and understanding of Crohn's disease (CD) and ulcerative colitis (UC), collectively labelled inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), has only really increased in the last few years, thanks to high profile sufferers including sportspeople and politicians, brave enough to come forward, share their individual experiences, and highlight the presence of what can be an extremely debilitating condition.

Inflammatory bowel disease, as the name implies, is inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract (GI tract). In Crohn's disease it can affect anywhere from the mouth to anus, and patches of inflammation are said to "skip" through the GI tract, whereas in ulcerative colitis, this inflammation starts in the rectum (the area just above the anus) and processes backwards, although it is usually only confined to the large bowel.

According to the support website Crohnsandcolitis.org.uk, there are 300,000 individuals living with IBD in the UK, with a new case of either CD or UC found every thirty minutes. Most



PAIN THRESHOLD: Stomach pain can be one of the symptoms of inflammatory bowel disease

people are diagnosed between the ages of ten and 40.

There are many suggestions as to the cause of IBD. There is a slight increased risk if you have a first degree relative who is also a sufferer. Another theory is that an abnormal response by the body's immune system to a virus or bacteria in the bowel triggers the start of the disease.

Symptoms include chronic diarrhoea, sometimes with mucus and blood, abdominal pain, weight loss and persistent tiredness. Unlike in gastroenteritis, where you are largely back to normal after a few weeks, a flare up of IBD may last much longer, and individuals can become seriously ill.

The most important task for anyone who feels they may have

IBD is to see their routine doctor as soon as possible. After taking a history of your complaint and performing a physical examination, if your symptoms are suggestive, he or she will refer you to a gastroenterologist. Diagnosis is made with a colonoscopy (camera test of the large bowel). In addition, tissue biopsies will be taken to find out if the bowel has the typical features of IBD, when seen under a microscope.

Although we have no cure at the present time, the goal of treatment is to reduce symptoms to a point where the individual can lead as normal a life as possible. When dealing with an acute attack, drugs including anti-inflammatory medications and steroids are used. Although

steroids are excellent medications, their numerous side effects make them less suitable for long term treatment. In this case, disease modifying drugs similar to those used in other inflammatory conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis will be started under the guidance of a specialist. Bowel surgery is reserved for cases where the condition cannot be brought under control, or the damage is such that a portion of the intestines requires removal. However, with specialist centres UK wide, we are now in the best position ever for managing this disease.

Useful websites

www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk
www.nhs.uk/conditions/crohns-disease

So what is a 'family history' of disease?

Q: I keep hearing the phrase "family history of heart disease" and have had various explanations of what it means. Please could you clarify – Anthony, 31

A: In medical terms, a family history of a disease normally means having one first degree relative, (mother, father, brother or sister) or multiple second degree relatives (grandparents, cousins) with an illness. The condition should have first presented at an age earlier than would be normally expected; meaning heart disease diagnosed in a father or brother

before the age of 55, or a mother or sister before 65. This is sometimes used to predict your risk of a disease and the need for further tests. It is important to know if these individuals had other risk factors for heart disease, including smoking, diet and obesity. It is worth bearing in mind that the majority of illnesses are not inherited.

Q: Is it safe to give my 12 year old daughter a small glass of wine at Christmas dinner this year? I have been told that if I don't make it a big deal and introduce it gently she's less likely to want to get

drunk when she gets older.

A: This is a particularly topical question given the time of year. Sadly the majority of research does not support introducing alcohol at an early age, when your child will be developing both physically and mentally. According to Drinkaware.co.uk children introduced to alcohol early are no less likely to see it as taboo, and it may have detrimental effects on them so young. The UK government advises you allow your children to have alcohol at 15 at the very earliest, and preferably not until they are 16 or older.

If you have a question for Dr Zak, please email: askdoctorzak@gmail.com
W: doctorzak.co.uk
T: @AskDoctorZak

Dr Uddin's advice is provided in good faith and in accordance with currently accepted evidence. However, this content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. You should always seek the advice of a GP, or other qualified health provider, regarding a medical condition.