

Ask the Experts

Have a health-related question?

Send it to us at *Bottom Line Health*, Box 10702, Stamford, CT 06904-0702... or via e-mail to BLHealth@BottomLineInc.com.

Is an algae shake healthy?

The lunch spot near me serves green shakes made with algae. They claim it's really healthy—is it?

It could be. Algae are marine-based plant proteins—the category includes seaweed, kelp and spirulina—that are often used for food or made into powder. Two tablespoons of spirulina powder (the form often used for shakes) contain 8 g of protein, plus iron, magnesium, potassium and several B vitamins.

Algae have long been touted as helping with weight loss, controlling diabetes and boosting immunity. While more research is needed to prove these claims, a Korean study showed cholesterol reductions when adults added a heaping tablespoon of spirulina to their daily diets. *Caution:* Avoid spirulina if you take medication for an autoimmune disease (such as lupus)...the blood thinner *warfarin* (Coumadin)...or a *nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug* (NSAID)—it may weaken the effectiveness of these drugs. Avoid algae if you are pregnant or nursing.

Lisa R. Young, PhD, RD, adjunct professor of nutrition at New York University, New York City, and author of *The Portion Teller Plan*. PortionTeller.com

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the teeth to loosen from the bone, which could change your bite. And if you're missing a tooth, the ones nearby are likely to gradually shift into the empty space. *Bottom line:* Have a thorough dental exam, including an oral cancer screening, bite exam, necessary X-rays and periodontal pocket measurements (a measure of the space between the gum tissue and tooth) to determine the cause of shifting.

Marvin A. Fier, DDS, FASDA, ABAD, executive vice president, American Society for Dental Aesthetics, and dentist in private practice, Pomona, New York. SmileRockland.com

Mysterious toenail problem

I have a split toenail on my left pinky toe. It's tender to the touch and hurts when I walk. What's going on?

Split toenails, often called "sixth toenails," are common, frequently occurring on the pinky toe. Heredity, wearing pointy shoes and foot trauma (such as a sports injury) can all cause the nail to split or to develop callous-like keratin cells—the stuff that nails are made of—at the outer corner of the toe.

When the area is painful, you

falls off. A podiatrist also can shave it off. With these treatments, however, the nail can grow back. *Permanent solution for a painful split nail:* An in-office surgery to remove the excess nail and its root.

Johanna S. Youner, DPM, a podiatric surgeon in private practice and attending physician at New York Downtown Hospital, New York City.

Are online meds safe?

My prescription meds are so much cheaper online, but are they safe?

To play it safe, stick with online pharmacies in the US that are licensed by the state where the pharmacy is located and also by your state (check your state's board of pharmacy). The site should also have a ".pharmacy" domain name in the URL. (For example, "SmithDrugStore.pharmacy.") These pharmacies have been reviewed by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy. The website should list a physical address in the US and have a pharmacist available to answer questions. Steer clear of pharmacies that don't



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BottomLine Health

VOLUME 32 | NUMBER 7 | JULY 2018 | \$6

Relief from heartburn without risky drugs!

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are hard to beat."

—Laura Ingalls Wilder, American writer (1867–1957)