

# Your good health

## 'My skin keeps exploding'

At 22, Tara developed boils. Four years later, they're still spreading...

**W**incing, I grabbed the phone and rang my mum. 'I need your help with the twins,' I said, trying to ignore the throbbing in my groin.

I'd suffered with horrible boils for three years – so the pain and discomfort was all too familiar.

Minutes later, Mum arrived and lifted my six-month-old twins from my arms.

I scrambled to the loo. Three purple boils, each one the size of a 50-pence piece, were clearly visible down below.

'What the...?' I screamed.

I went back into the living room and told Mum.

I'd had a few pimples before, just tiny red spots and the odd boil. Nothing this severe.

'Will you watch the girls while I go to the doctor?' I asked.

She nodded.

### Self-diagnosis

After examining me, the doctor told me I had an infection and prescribed antibiotics.

But the boils began to weep – and I was in constant pain. Every time I cuddled Kourtney and Chloe, or even loaded the washing machine, I winced.

I was only comfy lying on my back, with my feet in the air.

My husband James, 26, and Mum helped with taking care of the girls and the chores.

'I'm going to look up my symptoms on the Internet,' I told James one night.

Scouring endless websites, I stumbled across a page on

a rare skin disease called Hidradenitis Suppurativa (HS).

I had all the symptoms. So I made an appointment with my GP and persuaded him to refer me to a skin specialist.

### Non-stop pain

Four months later, my appointment came through.

'This is the most extreme outbreak of HS I've ever seen,' the dermatologist said.

'What can I do?' I asked.

'It's not curable. All I can do is prescribe you a different antibiotic,' he replied.

The disease isn't contagious. It's a very rare condition, similar to boils, and the best I could hope was to control it.

I was gutted. As if to mock me, more boils sprouted. A few months later, I had nearly 20.

James tried to console me. But I shrugged him off. I didn't want anyone to touch me. And sex was definitely off the menu.

James understood, but I was so depressed. The condition was taking over my life.

Then one day, while I was searching the Net, looking for more information on HS, I stumbled across an online support group.

It was amazing to find people who knew exactly what I was going through.

But my condition worsened. Over the next two years, my sores spread.

They went from the bottom of my stomach, and spread all over my back, bottom, and even the inside of my thighs. They

### REAL-LIFE HEALTH



'I can't even give my kids a big cuddle'



'I refuse to let the boils ruin my life'

developed into thin slits and itched like mad.

It was too painful to sit all day long. So, after months off sick, I had to give up my job as a sales ledger last December.

Being at home wasn't much better. The itching kept me – and James – awake most nights.

We hardly had sex – which was no surprise. So eventually I moved out of the bedroom. I slept on the couch, distracting myself with the TV.

Three months later, I'm still suffering. But worst of all, I feel guilty. I worry I'm not a proper mum to my girls.

I can't run and play with them in the park or even give them a big cuddle. It even hurts to walk.

The only time I ever feel comfortable is in a cold bath,

as it stops the itching.

This May, I'll be doing the Walk For Skin in London. It's about three miles – not too far. There is no time limit, so I'm determined to finish.

### Raising awareness

Hardly anyone knows about this crippling condition, and it's not a research priority.

I'd really like to raise some money for it.

I can't let the boils take over my life. There are some people who have had HS for more than 30 years. A number of sufferers go into remission – and for some, the disease just disappears. I'm living in hope.

I'm still young, and I want my life back. ■

Tara Burton, 26, Chatham, Kent

### HIDRADENITIS SUPPURATIVA (HS): THE FACTS

» HS causes inflammation of the sweat glands, mainly affecting the groin or armpits. It affects both men and women, although more women suffer from the condition.

» HS affects the thighs, upper buttocks, and even below the breasts. The red lumps cause

pain and scarring. They can be itchy and painful.

» For women, the condition is often much worse just before a period.

» There is no known cure yet, but antibiotics and some hormone treatments can help. Visit [www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk](http://www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk) for more information.