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Men's Health

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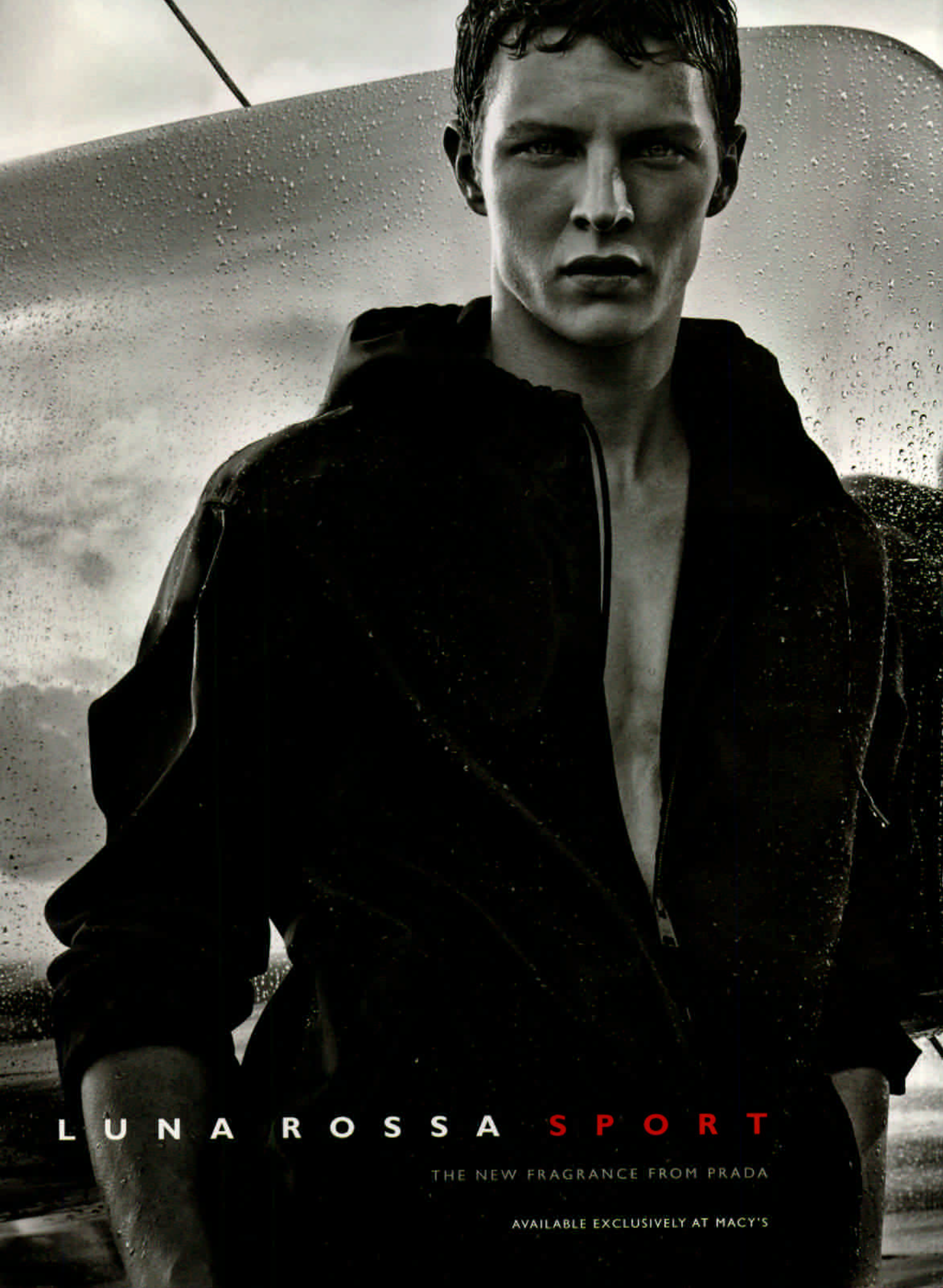
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LIFE'S QUESTIONS, ANSWERED



Should I let my son play football? I'm freaked out about concussions.

DAN, PHILADELPHIA, PA

Use his age as a gauge of whether he should get his head in the game. A 2015 study in the journal *Neurology* found that former NFLers who played tackle football before age 12 had worse cognitive and memory impairment than those who started playing later in life. Trauma sustained during this critical period of brain development may have lasting effects, says Kim Gorgens, Ph.D., a neuropsychologist at the University of Denver. So if your kid is younger than 12, tell him he needs to sit it out for a few years. Once he's ready, go to usafootball.com/headsup to find a local league certified in Heads Up, a program aimed at preventing head injuries in youth players. The team that makes your cut should have updated equipment. But check the helmets and pads: Make sure the straps haven't lost elasticity and the pads aren't compressed.

Why do I yawn when I exercise?

JOHN, TUCSON, AZ

Because you're Hulk-huge, and working out is mere child's play? Probably not. It's more likely that your brain is trying to cool down midworkout, says Andrew Newberg, M.D., a neuroscientist at Thomas Jefferson University. When you exercise, your head heats up, causing your brain to

operate less efficiently. Every time you yawn, though, you suck in extra O₂, which boosts bloodflow to your brain and helps reduce the temperature. The result: You're able to exercise longer and more effectively, Dr. Newberg says. Now, if you find yourself yawning almost every other rep, you could be sleep-deprived. If that's the case, take a rest day—and literally rest.

Ear pimples hurt! What's the best and fastest way to get rid of them?

MIKE, ANN ARBOR, MI

We know they're annoying, but don't give 'em the finger. While your hands may be clean, your fingernails are probably teeming with germs. That means pinching a pimple can spread bacteria from your hands to the zit, which may

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▶ AM I NORMAL?


I constantly replay bad or embarrassing memories in my head.

TIM, HARTFORD, CT

At the risk of adding "that time I wrote to *Men's Health*" to your lousy-experience loop, this isn't exactly typical behavior. "Most of the time you should be able to reflect on the event and move on," says Elizabeth Kensinger, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Boston College. "It shouldn't be the case that nearly everything reminds you of bad moments from the past."

The next time you find yourself running on the rumination wheel, grab a good friend's ear and talk about how the memory makes you feel. Are you angry? Frustrated? Humiliated that you bared your soul to a national men's magazine? "Verbalizing what we're experiencing can sometimes help us control our emotions, minimizing the impact a past bad event has on us in the present," says Kensinger. If that doesn't work, it's possible that your obsessive thinking is a symptom of an underlying anxiety issue. Time to see a professional psychologist. Find one at locator.apa.org.

○ NORMAL ● WEIRD

worsen the existing infection, says Joel Cohen, M.D., a dermatologist based in Colorado. Instead, use a cotton swab to apply a daily dab of 10 percent benzoyl peroxide gel directly onto the pimple until it fades away. The benzoyl peroxide has both anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial properties, which means it'll keep zits from swelling while killing off the pus-causing bugs. To prevent future ear acne, you'll need to step up your aural hygiene, says Amy Derick, M.D., a clinical instructor of dermatology at Northwestern University. "Make a habit of gently washing your ears when you wash your face," Dr. Derick says. Then, after you towel off, wipe on an astringent that contains salicylic acid, such as Neutrogena's Rapid Clear Treatment Pads (\$8, neutrogena.com). This acid bath will open up any pores still clogged with excess oil. And while you're in cleaning mode, dampen a cotton ball with rubbing alcohol and use it to degrease those disgusting workout earbuds. Do that at least once a week or when you begin to see an oily sheen on the buds' surface.

Why does kale give me the runs? Are there any alternatives?

ANTHONY, SACRAMENTO, CA

There's a simple reason for this superfood's supergross side effect: carbohydrates. Kale is loaded with insoluble fiber and a carb called raffinose, neither of which can be broken down

during digestion, explains Linda Ann Lee, M.D., director of the Johns Hopkins Integrative Medicine and Digestive Center. Instead, they both pass straight through your GI tract to your colon, where bacteria begin converting them to acids, gases, and alcohols. The end result of this fermentation process: You're perched on the porcelain throne. To avoid a blowout, switch over to Tuscan kale, which has blue-green leaves and is less fibrous than red and curly Russian kale, suggests Colleen Gerg, R.D., a dietitian based in Philadelphia. You may also need to cut back to about half an ounce a few times a week. On your kale-free days, Gerg suggests swapping in other good-for-you greens, such as spinach or Swiss chard. They contain the same prized vitamins and minerals as kale—vitamins K, A, and C and manganese—but less fiber.

I've heard conflicting advice: Should I take aspirin for heart health or not?

DAVID, GREEN BAY, WI

That depends on whether your blood pump is actually in peril or you're just being cautious. If you have coronary heart disease or already suffered a heart attack or stroke, low-dose aspirin can serve as cheap artery insurance, says Ravi Hira, M.D., a cardiology fellow at Baylor College of Medicine. A 2009 meta-analysis in *The Lancet* concluded that patients who popped a low dose of aspirin every day had a nearly 20

percent lower chance of having a second stroke or heart attack than those who didn't follow an aspirin regimen. Credit the little white pill's ability to reduce the body's production of prostaglandins, lipids that promote blood clotting. But for everyone else, the need for a daily dose depends on one's risk of a future infarction. Go to cvdrisk.nhlbi.nih.gov and enter your age, total and HDL cholesterol numbers, and systolic blood pressure into the Framingham Risk Calculator, a tool that predicts your chance of having a heart attack in the next decade. If your 10-year risk is higher than 6 percent, ask your doctor about making aspirin your ally, says Dr. Hira. But if your risk is 6 percent or lower, keep the cap on the bottle—the benefits of daily aspirin don't outweigh the dangers. A study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that aspirin's blood-thinning properties can increase the risk of stomach or brain bleeding.

I think it's time to take my dad's car keys away. What's the safest way to approach the subject?

BILL, CHARLOTTE, NC

Start with three words: "I am worried." This puts the focus on you, making it less likely that your pop will feel ambushed, says David Solie, M.S., P.A., author of *How to Say It to Seniors: Closing the Communication Gap with Our Elders*. Mention that the fear he had when you first started driv-

Why are mosquitoes more attracted to me than to other people?

MIKE, COLUMBIA, MD

If the mosquitoes could talk, they'd probably say "Smells like food to us!" followed by "Our dinner is named Mike?" The indictable aromas: carbon dioxide, which some people naturally produce and exhale more of, and lactic acid, which builds up after a tough workout, says Jonathan Day, Ph.D., a professor of medical entomology at the University of Florida. In addition to being supersniffers—skeeters can smell humans from about 60 feet away—these pests also possess highly evolved heat sensors. That means if your body temperature runs in the above-normal range, they'll be mothlike in their attraction to you. Then there's your wardrobe: Sporting dark colors by day or bright colors at night will make you stand out. So try moving into the shade (to lower your body temp) and talking less (to reduce the CO₂ you're spewing). When you're tired of chilling out, bust out the bug spray, says Day. Repel Lemon Eucalyptus Insect Repellent (\$5, amazon.com) can keep mosquitoes at bay for up to two hours.



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