

Bella

The **SEXIES**
summer skirt
to suit your
shape

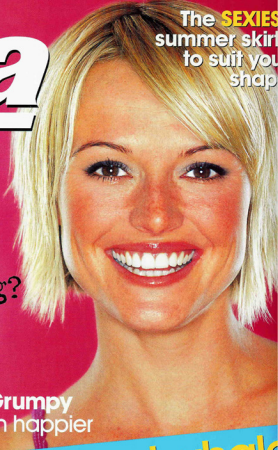
The piece
of paper
that tore
my family apart

Murdered or missing?
The mystery of the
vanishing housewife

I dumped Prince
Charming for Mr Grumpy
and I've never been happier

From beached whale
to dancing queen
HOW I LOST 11ST

A MUM AT LAST
Menopause at 40 –
beautiful baby at 46!



Health file

All you need to know for your health and vitality

I'm allergic to my JEANS

Alison Besaies is one of millions of women brought out in a painful rash by jewellery or clothes made with nickel. And experts say the craze for body piercing is partly to blame



Alison can't handle any nickel products

Alison Besaies put on her new snug-fitting jeans and admired the fit. But within a few hours she found herself scratching underneath the waistband. And as the day went on the itching grew worse. When she took her jeans off she found a red, egg-sized bump over each hip.

"It was really painful," she says. Alison already knew that she suffered from an allergy to nickel, so she quickly realised that her skin had reacted to the shiny metal rivets in her jeans.

Alison, 39, from Thames Ditton, Surrey, was first diagnosed with the problem after her earlobes had swollen to twice their normal size when she wore dangly home-made earrings. She'd even developed

a rash where the earrings had brushed against her neck.

Alison found that her body reacted dramatically to any alloys containing nickel. Belts, shoe buckles, sunglasses frames, zips and even bra hooks and underwiring brought her out in a rash.

Up to one in 10 women and one in 50 men in the UK are now allergic to nickel. "The number appears to be increasing, particularly among the young, as body piercing and multiple piercing have become fashionable," says consultant dermatologist Professor David Gawkrödger.

A few people can develop such a severe allergy that just handling coins can trigger a reaction, he says. Nickel allergy often develops months or even years after a piercing, or as the result of wearing cheap metal jewellery,

which tends to have a high nickel content. Alison confesses to having secretly had her ears pierced when she was 12. Later on, during her punk phase, she wore safety pins through her ears.

What sufferers can do
The best way to deal with a nickel allergy is to avoid contact with the metal altogether. Steroid creams can lessen severe reactions. For the most sensitive people, gold, silver and stainless steel can also cause problems as they usually contain some nickel. Unfortunately, even jewellery sold as

"hypoallergenic" or "nickel safe" can bring on a reaction.

Alison has now set up a company called Allergymatters, which promotes products specifically for people with allergies. They include jewellery made from nickel-free titanium, stainless steel and even surgical plastic. Prices start at £5 (call 0800 062 8228 or visit www.allergymatters.com for details).

A useful trick if you are allergic to nickel is to coat your jewellery with clear nail varnish. It will need to be reapplied from time to time.

Dianna Austin



Even bra hooks can cause a rash



The website www.thejewelleryshop.net carries a range called Pigrim that's guaranteed 100 per cent nickel free. For your nearest salon offering nickel-free titanium ear piercing contact Biomdahl on 01933 410022 or visit their website at www.biomdahl.com.