LET GO OF NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AND FIND YOUR HAPPINESS CREATE A LIFE YOU LOVE UK edition TAKE BACK Walk your way to a CONTROL better How to cope when mood the news makes you feel powerless 16-page DOSSIER Angela Tackle Scanlon Ioneliness on overcoming perfectionism and the eating disorders that for good almost ruined her life 5 ways to feel The easy less lonely right now way to How to bring meditate new people into your life 'I TURNED Discover the friends you **MY GRIEF INTO** really need! PSYCHOLOGIES.CO.UK



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show of strength – be that having the biggest muscles or show it in a different way: by stepping forward, opening up and sharing their own story, warts and all. In my opinion,

that has been shown to us by not one, not two, but three amazing people. By so authentically sharing the challenges they have faced, I hope they help you to realise you're not the only one facing issues in your life (we all have them!) and also inspire you to open your heart to others. Gail Porter, who found herself go in a few short years from having her image projected onto the Houses of Parliament to sleeping on a park bench on Hampstead Heath, says on page 44: 'I've had odd times, but nobody knows what's happening across the road. We don't know what the neighbour or the person downstairs is going through. We're all going through stuff, and I'm quite happy to talk about anything. I hope I've made a difference and made other people think, "We're not on our own in this".'

I also had the honour of speaking to Mark Lemon about his beloved dad, who was tragically killed 30 years ago. And I feel no shame in telling you that his story moved me to tears more than once. But as with each of our stories this month, while Mark's is initially heartbreaking, his is also a tale of inspiration, as he explains how he has worked to turn his life into something beautiful (page 68).

And, finally, our cover star, the brilliant Angela Scanlon, has shared perhaps the most surprising story of all (page 14), revealing that while she projected the perfect happy-go-lucky, girl-next-door image, she battled an eating disorder for 15 years and then became obsessed with work, constantly comparing herself to others. It's quite shocking to see how someone who seemingly 'has it all' can be struggling on the inside, and an insightful look into an inner world we would never have imagined.

I hope that you are moved by their honesty and uplifted by the way they have each fought so hard to overcome their challenges. I certainly have been.

We have lots more inspiration this month, too, from ways to free yourself from negative thinking (page 22) to the Japanese secret to a good life (page 30), plus the easy way to meditate (page 108) and how to walk yourself happy (page 88), not to mention our brilliant dossier (page 51). What an issue. Enjoy!

Dally x Sally Saunders,

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*FOR FULL DETAILS, SEE PAGE 40



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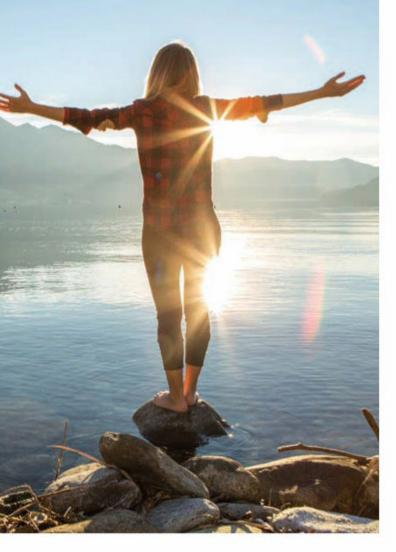
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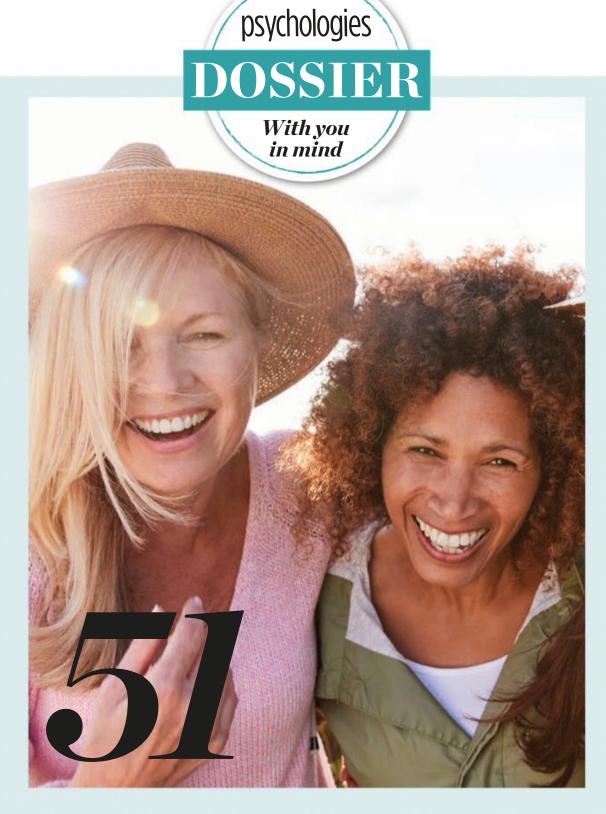
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The advice starts RIGHT HERE!



DR DAVID HAMILTON

Is it possible to ever truly silence negative self-talk? Yes, says Dr David Hamilton, an expert on harnessing emotion to improve physical and mental health. Discover how you too can overcome disempowering beliefs, and reap the benefits for your mind and your body, on page 22.

DR DIANA HILL

It's easy for individual actions to feel futile in the face of worldwide unrest, 'But to turn our backs on suffering is to deny the empathy that makes us compassionate beings,' says clinical psychologist Dr Diana Hill. Discover how we can all play our part in times of turmoil, on page 36.



CHERYL RICKMAN

Loneliness can be a difficult emotion to recognise, and even harder to talk about. 'It's subjective and deeply personal,' says Cheryl Rickman, a Positive Psychology practitioner. Discover how to embrace periods of aloneness, celebrate friendship, and seek out new connections, on page 51.

Our mission

Psychologies' mission is to provide you with inspiration and advice to support you to improve your emotional wellbeing. We aim to help you boost your happiness and resilience and lower your stress and anxiety. We do this by providing simple, achievable steps to make small changes that can add up to a real difference.

Embracing the four pillars of your life, from mind and body to heart and soul, *Psychologies* engages with the world around us as well as the world within to help you discover inspiring ways to make every day better and create a life you love.

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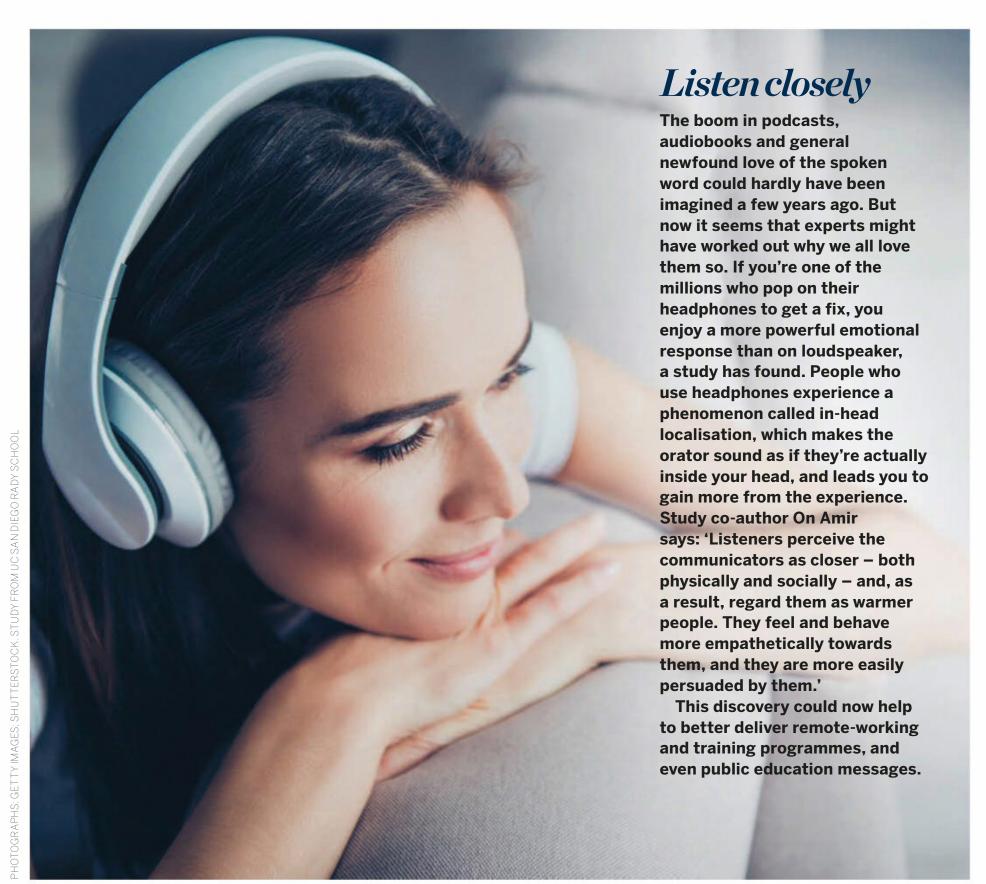
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In the mood

Thought-provoking culture, insightful science and inspirational snippets to bring you up to date on all things uplifting, hopeful and happy-making

COMPILED BY ALEX LLOYD



-



of British people plan to work full-time past state pension age, according to a survey by Rest Less.







Sometimes, the best plan is no plan!

By Katie Piper

A long weekend can be food for the soul if we allow ourselves to truly switch off, and from April through to August this year, the UK has a total of seven bank holidays – giving us plenty of opportunity to do so. However, it's easy to find ourselves caught in a comparison trap of how we're spending our time. With social media showing only the fun parts of holidays and get-togethers, it's easy to lose a sense of what's important. I like to remind myself that comparison is the thief of joy, and the worst thing you can do is compare your reality to everyone else's highlight reels on social media.

As a working mum, I also find myself putting additional pressure on myself to soak up all the bonus extra hours with my children over bank holiday weekends. Of course, time with my kids is precious, but I have to remind myself that a long walk on my own, or a good soak in the bath in the evening, is not me being a bad mum – it's simply my way of allowing myself to be the best version of myself, which in turn benefits all of those around me.

Always remember: You can't look after everyone else, without looking after yourself first.

WATCH, LOOK, LISTEN



WATCH Top Gun: Maverick sees Tom Cruise and Val Kilmer reunite

for the long-awaited follow-up to the 1986 navy pilot drama. In cinemas 27 May.



LOOK Weird Sensation Feels Good at London's Design Museum explores the

phenomenon of ASMR, where sounds produce physical responses. Opens 13 May.



LISTEN Podcast
The Brief History of
Stuff dives into the
origins and science

behind our everyday essentials, from menstrual products to rulers. Narrated by Nihal Arthanayake.



Hit the rails

More travellers are letting the train take the strain when going on holiday, as we rediscover the joy of the journey and look at ways to make our breaks greener.

Eurostar and Trainline chiefs say interest in European breaks by rail is up, with new services such as Nightjet increasing options for sleeper services across the continent.

Lonely Planet recently published its first train tourism guide, with top itineraries including Olso to Bergen in Norway, The Black Forest Railway in Germany, and Locarno in Switzerland to Domodossola in Italy.

Inspired? Also check out *Zero*Altitude (The History Press, £16.99)
by travel editor Helen Coffey,
a reformed frequent flyer who
challenged herself to find cleaner
ways to see the world.

Call for change

Men are being encouraged
to learn the many and varied
symptoms of the menopause in order to
better support the women in their lives.
Widower David Salmon is spearheading a
campaign with GenM – an organisation
working with brands to better support female
employees and clients at this stage of life –
after losing his wife Linda to menopauserelated suicide. 'If we had understood
the symptoms Linda was experiencing,
she might still be here with
us today,' he says.
Find out more at
gen-m.com



Better together

Communities working together to curb crime have been at the heart of Neighbourhood Watch since the first British group was established, in Cheshire in 1982.

Now, to celebrate the charity's 40th anniversary, it's bringing society together to tackle online crime and antisocial behaviour.

Sign up for the 40 Years, 40 Actions challenge to

Sign up for the 40 Years, 40 Actions challenge to improve your neighbourhood, whether that's by teaching the older generation about passwords or organising a litter pick.

Find out more at ourwatch.org.uk

"Honestly, any achievement that T've succeeded in is the result of my mantra: be on time and don't be an ass"

Dame Helen Mirren, speaking at the SAGAwards



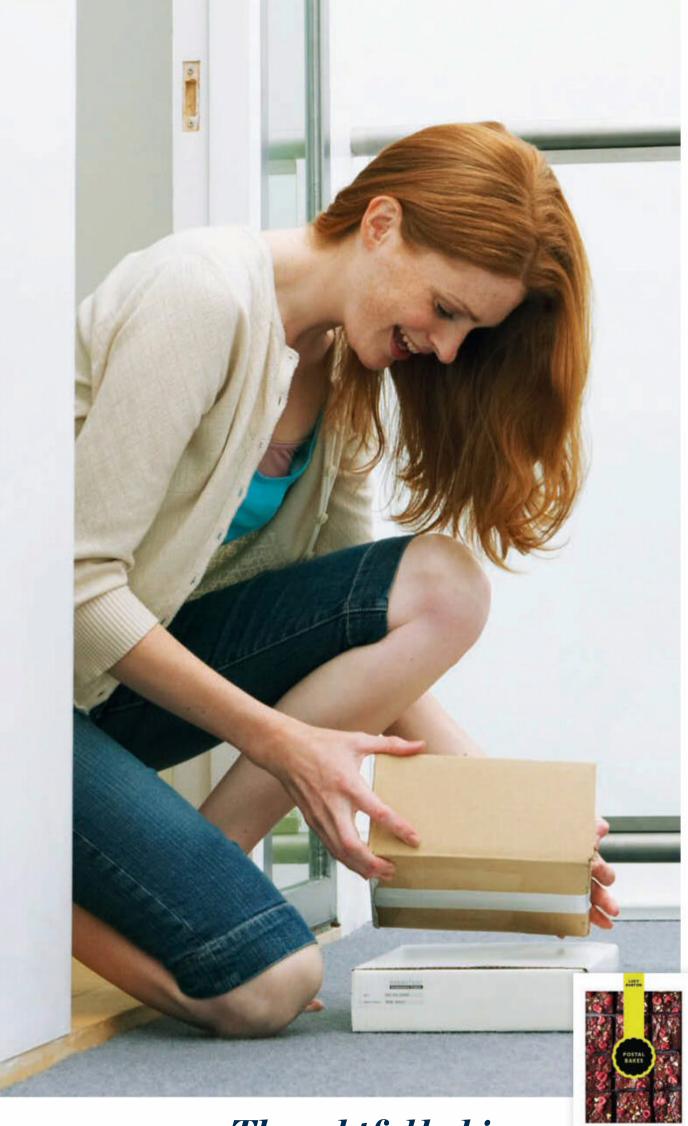


for Britain's birds – here are some thoughtful ways you can give them a helping hand...

Put out water and avoid killing bugs in your garden, as these are needed for hungry chicks.

Nuts in feeders should be chopped to stop choking, and stale bread is a no-no because it can hasten dehydration.

If you see a fledging, don't be tempted to rescue it – babies are rarely abandoned by an adult.



Thoughtful baking

If the way to someone's heart is through their stomach, sending a homemade cake by post could be the ultimate love letter.

New cookbook Postal Bakes by Lucy Burton (£16.99, Welbeck) contains 60 recipes that can all be made to mail – with tips on how to safely send treats such as PBJ brownies or rye and apricot biscotti. Wedding cake creator Lucy came up with the concept after her work was cancelled by lockdowns and she was looking for a way to continue to share her creations with sweet-toothed fans.



LETTERS ARE EDITED FOR STYLE AND LENGTH

Viewpoint

Send your letters of gratitude and tell us what you loved reading in the magazine to letters@psychologies.co.uk



Seize the day!

Here I am, sitting on a cruise ship travelling through the North

Atlantic Ocean, sipping a cocktail and catching up on the past few editions. Don't get me wrong: this is not my usual lifestyle. I work in healthcare and juggle my finances as much as the next person, but when the opportunity came up to get away with a friend, I thought, 'Why not?', and dipped into some hard-earned savings.

While reading, I was drawn to Paul McKenna's article on positivity (March). I've always wanted to write a book and what he said really resonated with me, giving me renewed confidence to give it a go, without pressure.

After having covid early last year (and being admitted to hospital twice), and experiencing mental and physical health complications with long covid, I am now on the road to recovery. So I have started to put pen to paper, writing as little or as much as I want to each day. I am starting to again appreciate the finer things in life: the colour of the sky at sunrise when out with my two dogs, the sound of the owl in the fields nearby, and the hustle and bustle of town life. Carpe diem, as they say! Sharon, Kent

Shared wisdom

I wanted to thank you for all the efforts you put into creating such an engaging and interesting magazine. I imagine it's a real team effort, and I wanted to applaud you for it.

I'm a subscriber, and seeing the magazine arrive each month forces me to take time out to shut myself off, away from any screens, and have some 'me' time. Today, I've been under the blanket, cup of tea to hand, with my Labrador snuggled in with me – the perfect hot-water bottle!

I hate putting *Psychologies* in the recycling bin, and as the content doesn't date, I always pass it on to friends and family, instead, so your words of wisdom can be passed on. Thank you! *Felicity Maxted-Pettman*

Age is just a number

I was so glad I read 'Don't mind the gap' (May). Age should not be a barrier to friendship, and as your article proves, there is often more that unites people born in different decades than divides us.

I am in my early 40s, but I have a few friends in their early 30s, others in their 50s and even a few in their late 60s. I've purposefully put myself into situations where I'm more likely to meet people of all generations. And although the natural tendency may be to seek out similarity, I've developed great

friendships with people of all ages.

Young friends may not have the wisdom of older ones, and older friends may not have the devilmay-care attitude of younger ones, but there is nothing better than a friend of any age!

Kendra, Birkenhead





PHOTO COMPETITION

My favourite moment of spring so far was this inviting burst of colour at the foot of a woodland tree, at Williamson Park in Lancaster – a reminder that the little things are often the most important. I find so much peace, joy and an abundance of gratitude on my meditative morning walks.

Nicky Sharkey

Would you like to showcase your photographic talent in Psychologies? What moment has made you feel inspired, grateful or moved this month? Capture it and tell us why, and we'll print the winner. Share your photograph with us and explain its inspiration on Instagram @psychologiesmagazine with the hashtag #PsychologiesPhoto, or email it to letters@psychologies.co.uk

I have a subscription to **Psychologies** and look forward to receiving my copy every month. The changes you have made have improved, enhanced and expanded on everything that was already excellent! I read with joy about the success of 'Give it a grow' (April) although, a note of caution for readers embarking on 'The Good Life': I recently read about some homeowners who had taken their 'home production' too far and received a fine! **Julie Seager**

LETTER OF GRATITUDE

I'd like to thank...

My hairdresser,

When I bought my first house from you, after my marriage ended, I also found a new hairdresser. We were both about to embark on life as single parents and did not know then that we would be around to support each other through each one of life's ups and downs – albeit with me in a chair and you wielding a pair of scissors! When life has been hard, when I needed a lift, or when I just wanted to feel beautiful again, you covered up those greys, brought my sparkle back and reminded me that I matter. I have been blessed to have a hairdresser who quickly became a friend.

Those few hours I spend with you each month are so much more than a hair cut. I walk out with a spring in my step. During lockdowns, so many of us came to realise how important our personal care is. The magic you weave is not to be underestimated.

Born in the same year, far too long ago, we've seen the years pass together, watched our children grow up, and moved into new and exciting seasons in our lives. As you prepare to step into your new career as a psychologist, I like to think I have been a little bit of practice for you. I'll be knocking on your door, though, when these roots need attention! You are irreplaceable.

anna

New beginnings

This is my third edition of *Psychologies* since my father bought myself and my sister a subscription each for Christmas last year (so Sally may too be reading this letter!)

Andrea McLean's article, 'Tame your fear' (May), struck a chord with me. I imagined the tiger outside my cell and identified this as my anxiety for change; I have recently re-married and moved to Cornwall, and my three beautiful boys are now independent young men and have flown the nest.

Part of me still grieves for my first marriage, and I feel somewhat redundant as a mother and need to adapt, and settle into a new area and career. But after reading the article, I realise how lucky I am, to have three sons, a loving husband and to live in such a beautiful part of the world.

As I embark on a degree in social work, and look for inspiration to help me learn, my father's gift of a subscription is certainly helping! *Heidi Kirby*



On paper, I had everything... but I didn't feel anything at all

After years spent battling an eating disorder and searching for a cure for her deep-seated insecurities, TV presenter Angela Scanlon reveals all about her journey towards self-acceptance, gratitude and joy

WORDS: BETH NEIL

n the surface, everything appeared to have fallen into place for Angela Scanlon. Her TV career was flourishing, there were glamorous magazine shoots, a lucrative contract with a big-name hair brand, and no shortage of invites to prestigious events.

But behind the high-functioning façade, Scanlon was barely holding it together, tortured by self-doubt and a fixation on comparison, which was fuelling it even further.

Here was a woman with everything she had ever dreamed of and, yet, at the time, Scanlon says she felt nothing but an overwhelming sense of emptiness.

'It was alarming to get to this place where you think: "This is it. This is the dream gig," and to feel worse than you have in a really long time,' she says, recalling being given the plum job of covering Alex Jones' maternity leave on *The One Show*, in 2016.

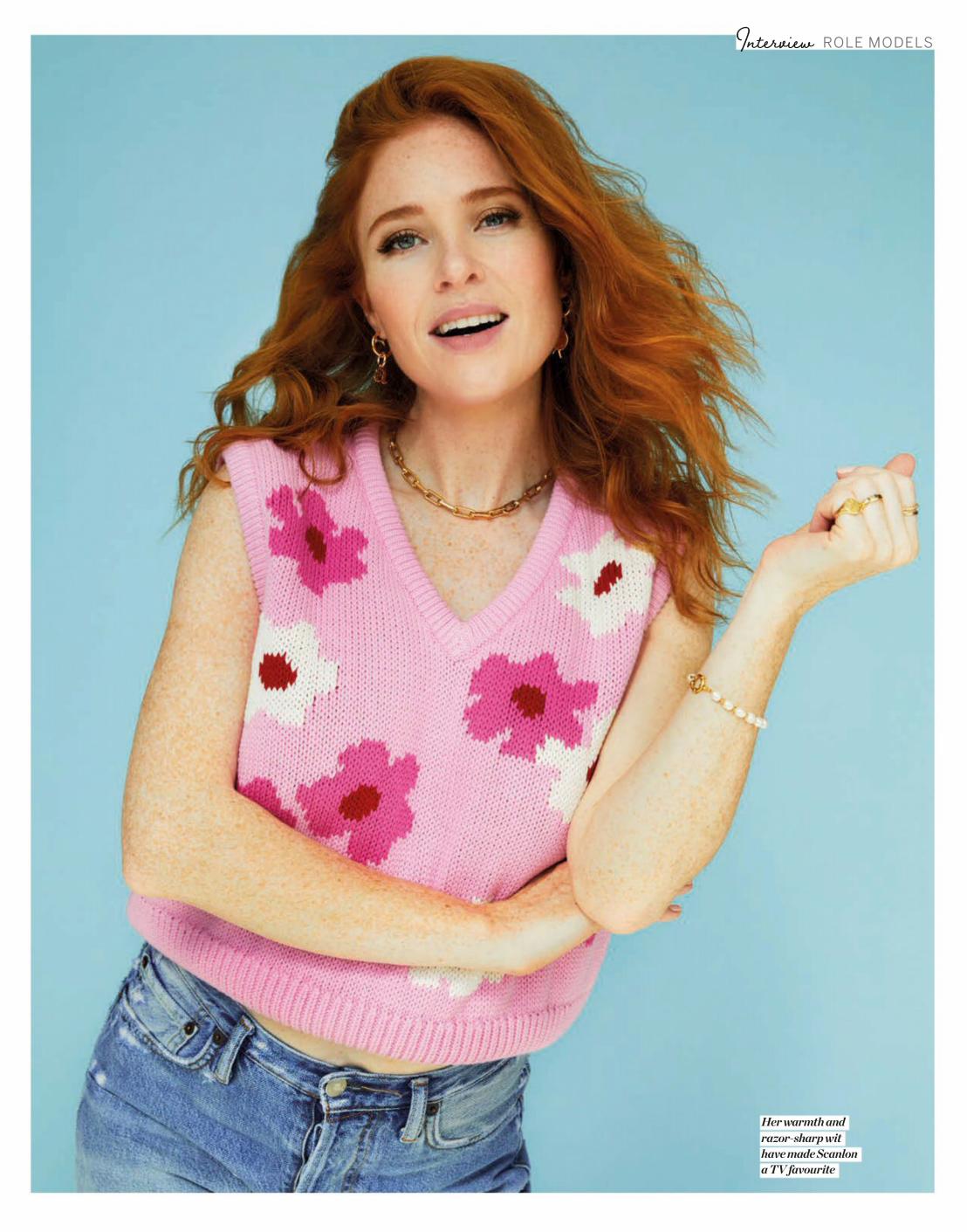
'On paper, I had all that I had ever wanted, but there was just a complete disconnect, and I felt huge discomfort in my own skin. People would see me on telly having a fun time, because I knew how to present the version of me I was happy to put out there. But I found it impossible to enjoy it, because I didn't know who the hell I really was.

'And it was incredibly distressing because there was suddenly this stark realisation that the work stuff I'd been putting everything into, wasn't going to "fix" me after all.'

Scanlon's torment and subsequent healing journey are laid bare in her new book, *Joyrider* (Vermilion, £16.99), an inspirational and beautifully written collection of deeply personal life experiences and the lessons she's taken from them.

She describes having had 'foundations built on quicksand', detailing how perfectionism and a desire





to people-please have been embedded since childhood, as well as opening up for the first time about a 15-year eating disorder that began in her teens as a rejection of puberty, and evolved into a desperate need for control.

To regular viewers of *The One Show* and BBC Two's interiors hit, *Your Home Made Perfect*, who know County Meath-born Scanlon, 38, as a confident, whip-smart and hugely likeable host, learning of her inner turmoil will no doubt come as quite a surprise. And she admits to feeling nervous about showing so much vulnerability.

'I'm not going to lie; it's been quite a trip writing it!' she says. 'But it's also been cathartic, and getting it out there feels like a relief. The whole process was about digging around, figuring out who I am and learning to accept all the sh*tty, ugly, unreasonable parts of me as well.

'I used to want to take a shiny pill, and would have paid any amount of money for a switch to be flicked and for me to have it all worked out.'

Although mum-of-two Scanlon recognises some of her issues began at a young age, it was the anorexia and bulimia that took hold as a teen that caused her to start spiralling. By 20, she was spending periods surviving on black coffee and tinned pineapple, which would leave her on the verge of collapse.

Speaking publicly about her illness for the first time, she says: 'When it felt like my body was changing and I was becoming a woman, I didn't feel equipped for that in any way, shape or form. That was the start of it, and then it just escalated and became my coping mechanism.

'I was committed, but I did it silently. Keeping it secret meant it was less messy in many respects, or at least the mess was private. And I kept it hidden for a really long time; this shameful little secret I couldn't open up to anybody about. It was so isolating.

'People around me were kind of aware, but it's an impossible thing to help somebody with if they're not open to being helped. Which I wasn't.'

She recalls excruciating family meals where she should have been enjoying herself but was instead working out an escape route.

'I had just gone completely in on myself. Those family social occasions are often the most difficult for somebody struggling with an eating disorder, because you're supposed to be having a good time and yet you know people's eyes are on your fork, and in your mind you're plotting your exit.

'I think the lies you tell people are also where the shame comes from. The constant: "Oh, yeah, I had lunch earlier on". You're lying to everybody, trying to cover your tracks, and it's just a very lonely place to live.'

Although the anorexia and bulimia are behind her now, replaced in her late 20s and 'seemingly overnight' with an addiction to work (the obsession over food, she explains, switched to her career), it wasn't until she became a mum that Scanlon's recovery truly began. Although she struggled to adapt to motherhood, having daughter Ruby, now four, gave her a completely new perspective on her body.

'I think the experience of birthing and feeding a baby, and then of watching this little girl revel in her own gorgeous rolls, made me realise how detached I'd become from my body. The one I had punished, overfed, underfed, and didn't love at all. The one I had been abusing for years.

'I was also acutely aware of how judgmental I was of other people's bodies, too, and I didn't ever want Ruby to feel like she was under scrutiny from anyone around her. So that became a big motivation for me to really start to look at how I related to my own body.

'I'm in awe of what it's done. I also have massive regret for the torture I put it through.'

The soul-searching Scanlon has done over the past few years, aided by therapy, has allowed her to settle into motherhood with much more ease second time round. Today, 12-week-old Marnie is snuggled peacefully on her chest in the sling as Scanlon chats, and she says it feels entirely different to the fraught and bewildering early months she remembers with Ruby.

'Marnie's a pretty chilled little baby and breastfeeding has worked for me this time, which has helped massively. Feeding was so horrendous the last time and, although I ploughed through, it had real implications for everybody, I think. But everything feels easier and more relaxed now.'

That in itself is bittersweet, though. 'On one hand, I'm managing to have these lovely, slow, intimate little moments where I feel absolutely present. And then I feel pangs of guilt, because that wasn't my experience with Ruby. So I'm trying to manage that and just hope that what I did was enough for her.

'But that's part of being a mother, isn't it?

"The experience of birthing made me realise how detached I'd become from my body. The one I had punished, overfed, underfed and didn't love at all"



acknowledges now that she needed more time off, but her hunger to get back came from the aforementioned addiction to work, which meant her personal life 'was always up for grabs'.

She says: 'Maternity leave can be a challenge because there's a sense that you're stopping while everybody else flies ahead, and you're never going to catch up again. There's this mad urgency to get back



because otherwise you're going to be forgotten about. It's pervasive, it's everywhere, and while it can keep you moving, it's also suffocating.'

Being forced to take her foot off the gas during the 2020 lockdown, when her TV projects were suspended, turned out to be a blessing in disguise. With time and space to reflect, Scanlon was 'able to breathe for a second' and it began to dawn on her the extent to which comparison had been ruling her life.

'I felt okay with lockdown because I knew everyone else had stopped too. But I was only all right because this person and that person weren't doing anything either.

'I hadn't realised just how much my own sense of satisfaction was tied to the success of others. I was measuring everything I did against multiple other people and, so, on any given day, I either triumphed or I fell short. It was never a pure reaction to where I was myself – it was always in relation to others.'

These days, Scanlon makes a conscious decision to focus her attention elsewhere and to be grateful for all the positives in her life, however small. This is the 'joyriding' the title of the book refers to – the deliberate swerve into a 'sweeter lane' – and the practice has taken a long time to master. But it has been life-changing for Scanlon.

'I just feel more comfortable. I don't have it together all the time – sometimes I get my knickers in a twist about the most inane, trivial things, and I'm definitely not "fixed". But that's not the goal now. I have a little toolbox that makes things less daunting when I feel like I've veered off course. I'm like: "Okay, I know this."

'Sometimes, I fail miserably, and that's been the big growth for me. It's not about getting to a place where I've got it all figured out. But realising that when things are thrown at us, we get to choose how we react to them, and even if we faceplant, we can get up and try again tomorrow.'

She says her new mindset has strengthened her

"When things are thrown at us, we get to choose how we react to them, and even if we faceplant, we can get up and try again tomorrow"



relationship with her entrepreneur husband of eight years Roy Horgan, 43, who she describes as 'the yin to my yang'.

She says: 'Our relationship has changed massively in terms of communication. I think I was completely incapable of that before. I'm easier on myself, which means I can be a little bit easier on him, too.'

As well as the forthcoming series of *Your Home Made Perfect*, Scanlon's gratitude-focused podcast, *Thanks a Million*, is now into its fifth season. Last summer, she launched her jewellery brand, FRKL; her chat show, *Ask Me Anything*, returns for a second series on Irish network RTÉ in the autumn; and she recently became the face of Olay, which she describes as a real 'pinch me' moment.

'My granny used it when it was still Oil of Ulay, and I remember that iconic little square bottle on her dressing table,' she says. 'When they approached me about working together, I had just written about that memory of my granny in the book, which was really weird. I was like: "Oh my God, yes!". It's such a nostalgic brand for me, as well as being a truly amazing science-led product.'

The joy Scanlon feels from all these projects is real and tangible now, and it's this emotion that she keeps on coming back to.

'I'd lost the ability to access any sort of joy, happiness or lightness, because I was completely denying all of the other emotions,' she says. 'But in trying to squash the bad ones, I'd also turned off my connection to the good ones, to the point where I was numb and everything felt flat.'

What does she hope people will take away from the book? Scanlon smiles at the question.

'Oh, that it's all a f***ing rollercoaster, isn't it? Life is an absolute big bag of tricks and that's part of the joy and also part of the terror.

'Some days we'll deal with it and, on other days, it'll all fall to sh*t – and that's okay too! All of it is okay.

'We should welcome all the emotions. That's the melting pot of being human.'

Joyrider: How Gratitude Can Help You Get The Life You Really Want by Angela Scanlon is out 12 May (Vermilion, £16.99)





LIFE AS I KNOW IT

Child's play

Harriet Minter is embracing her inner child, and discovering that 'older' doesn't always mean 'wiser'

l've always had an interest in how we understand our own motivations, so when someone

invited me to be one of the first people in the UK to experience a new form of self-analysis, I jumped at it. In retrospect, this level of enthusiasm was strange – after all, as anyone who has done therapy knows, it can often be the opposite of fun. But having forgotten this, I turned up full of enthusiasm.

The therapy, Compassionate Inquiry, was developed by the doctor and author Gabor Maté, in the US. My practitioner, Lauren Burton, believes it can be useful for people who tend to take on too much or hold themselves to very high standards, because it takes you back to early points in your life and helps you understand how your childhood self is still showing up in your adult life. It turns out that, when you realise that annoying habit you have (in my

case, an inability to commit to anything) is actually just your inner child trying to take control, you have far more self-compassion.

This experience turned up at exactly the right time. I've been feeling burnt out and directionless for a few months, and felt frustrated with myself for it. I thought that at 40 I was a fully formed adult with not a trace of my child-self left, but it turns out that trying to be an adult all the time was actually working against me; I needed to play.

A few days after my first session, I was off to Venice for a weekend.

'Can you take six-year-old Harriet with you?' Burton suggested. 'See what she would like to do.'

My inner cynic rolled her eyes.
Venice was clearly for adult-me;
there would be great food and
beautiful buildings and maybe
some shopping, but there would be
no play. But from the second
I landed, it felt as though I had a
new approach. I was so excited to
take a boat from the airport to the

city that I did a jig of joy in the queue, much to the consternation of the chic French couple behind me. In St Mark's Square, I ordered gelato at 8am, just because I wanted it. And in the glass factories of Murano, I allowed adult-me to buy a pricey vase – but only if she also bought child-me a cute glass cat that I saw being blown.

Back home, I've continued to indulge my child-self, listening to what she wants and bringing it into my middle-aged life. It's definitely brought more fun with it (although, it turns out, my 40-year-old bum really doesn't fit on a slide). But it's also had an interesting knock-on effect: my feelings of burnout are slowly lifting and I'm starting to allow myself to jump into things wholeheartedly. It turns out that, to cure my commitment problem, I needed to stop taking an adult approach and ask, 'What does my six-year-old self want here?' As is often the case, children are so much wiser than adults.



PHOTOGRAPH: MARK HARRISON. HAIR AND MAKE-UP: CAROLINE PIASECKI. STYLIST: KATE ANYA BARBOUR



Inspiration to boost your happiness and confidence, plus simple steps to overcome anxiety and stress

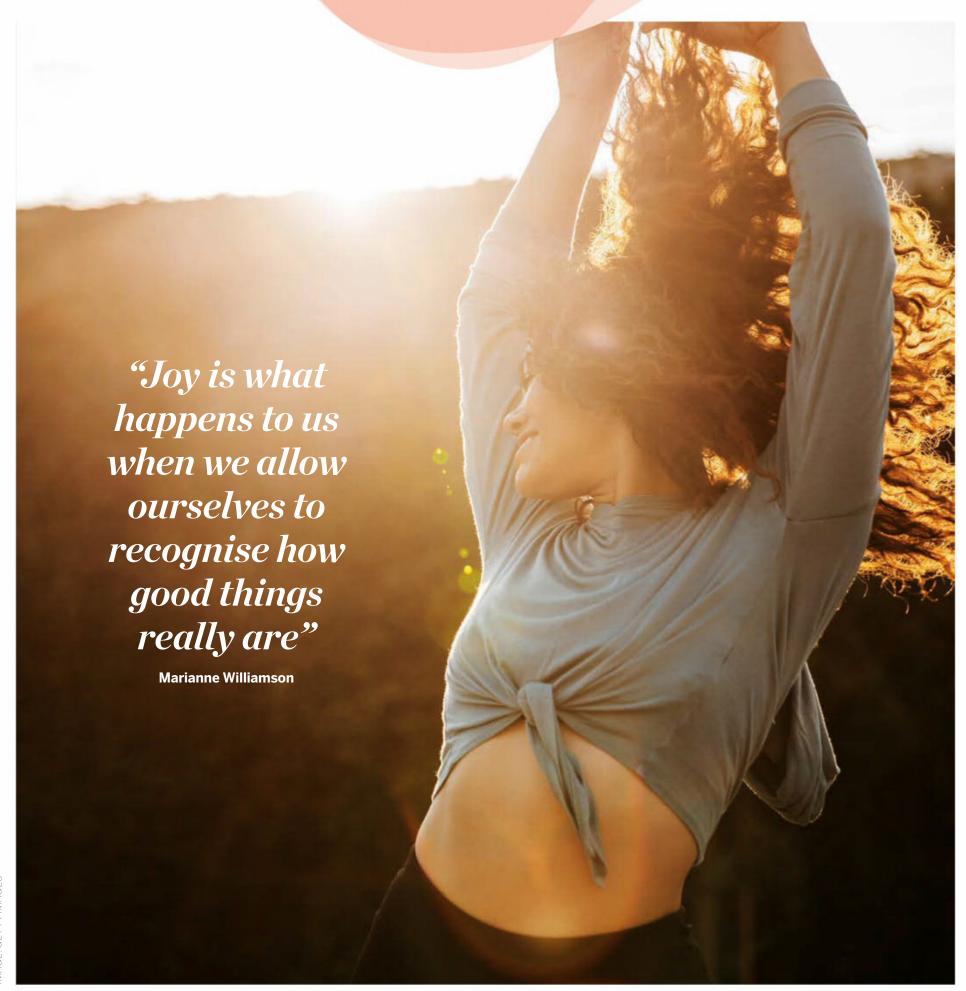


IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES





ave you ever wondered how it would feel to be completely free of all your negative thoughts? No more self-criticism, no limits to what actions you can take towards your desires and goals in life, no feelings of not being good enough, of unworthiness, of failure. None of it. Gone with the wave of a magic wand.

Just create that version of yourself for a moment and notice what happens to your confidence and energy levels. You suddenly feel possibility brimming up, and your energy rising to meet it.

But is it really possible to get rid of all too st the negative self-talk and disempowering beliefs?

Isn't it just a part of your identity?

As a healing mentor, it's

you react

negatively to

stressful

situations,

you are

reacting

to beliefs

created from

past events"

As a healing mentor, it's something I help creative souls deal with all the time. After all, your thoughts and beliefs are really just energy zooming about in your head. But how do they get in there in the first place, and how do they continue to live inside you?

Well, research shows that you live just 5 per cent of your life from your conscious mind, which are all the thoughts and desires that you are aware of. The other 95 per cent of thoughts that you are

unaware of live in the subconscious, so it is pretty much running the show. I'm going to use an analogy that I first heard from Bruce Lipton, a cell biologist and pioneer in how your beliefs affect your genetic coding. Lipton says the subconscious is like a cassette tape that is constantly playing in the background. Its job is to record every experience you encounter, as a survival mechanism that can keep you alive.

It logs your memories, ideas, emotions, thoughts and all the sensory information you've ever experienced, including all interactions you had in your earlier years with everyone around you: for example, parents, siblings, family, teachers, religion, society, and television.

The interactions between the age of birth to six formed your core beliefs.

A belief that 'I'm not lovable' may come from having a hard-working parent who's rarely at home, or 'I'm not good enough' may come from being told off by a teacher. 'I'm stupid' could come from a tormenting sibling. All these messages were recorded onto your tape player in your early years.

From there on, you live your life by playing out your recordings and building on your patterns of stress and beliefs based on those early messages. You make decisions and take actions based on the limits of feeling like you're never good enough in your relationships, feeling too stupid to apply for your dream job, or

not very lovable within your group of friends.

When you react to stressful situations with irritation, anger, sadness, resentment or offence, you are reacting to beliefs created from past events that are recorded on your cassette tape. Even the word reaction ('re-action') gives you the clue. You are literally 're-acting' how a past event made you feel, triggered by the belief that lays beneath it.

The subconscious not only records these beliefs on a psychological level, but also a physiological one, too.

'If a child is always rejected when reaching

out for love, then their body will tighten muscles in their shoulders, in their neck, in their heart, or in their stomach, and that becomes a chronic tension pattern, subconsciously, that gets held in the body,' says psychotherapist Dr Dori Gatter. 'And then there's a belief that "if I reach out for love, I'll be rejected", so that tension pattern holds the belief physically in the body.

'When you are getting triggered by something, that is the body's memory of when something happened in the past that you are responding to. When we're talking about pain in the body, this comes from the chronic tension pattern, and what's happening, actually, is that people end up being annoyed with the pain and upset with the pain, which is really just being annoyed at themselves,' she adds.



The way you respond to pain or any other symptoms that your body presents you with can be key to learning what beliefs you are holding in your body. Another way to discover the beliefs is to observe how you interpret stressful situations, as your stress response can always be traced back to traumatic events and those early core beliefs.

I speak from experience. The debilitating symptoms of chronic fatigue syndrome are what put me onto this path of turning to my inner world. Triggered by the stress of a high-pressure job in advertising, I eventually found myself bed-bound for a few months. Intense body pain and fatigue, tinnitus, brain fog, anxiety, depression, insomnia, and hypothyroid were the party of symptoms that were screaming at me.

I found that some treatments helped to manage the symptoms, but for years it felt like I was dragging my body around with me, trying to live a 'normal' life and believing that I was weak, my body was broken, and that for some reason life was punishing me.

Eventually, I came to the realisation that my body was simply playing out my cassette tape recordings in a physical form, and I needed to accept myself. I certified in EFT and Matrix Reimprinting, and discovered that all I had to do was start listening and use it as a tool for discovering what beliefs were limiting me, and record some new, empowering ones, instead.

The brilliant Dr David Hamilton supports this idea of using kindness, and of cleaning up our self-talk to have a positive effect on your body and health. 'When we are unkind to ourselves,' says Dr Hamilton, 'we are causing ourselves a certain amount of psychological stress - and you can't have psychological stress without a physical component to it,' he says. 'When we are criticising and being hard on ourselves, it is like we are psychologically inflaming ourselves. Life is giving us these opportunities, but these limiting beliefs are stopping us. We are putting our nervous system into almost continual background stress and that can have repercussions in a number of different ways – if the body is naturally on stress alert, that will have a suppressing effect on the immune system. It also suppresses the body's

natural regenerative system, so we don't recover as fast from things such as illness or exercise.'

The power of belief, and how it affects the body, has been acknowledged by science with the research that has been done on the placebo and nocebo effects.

'In a scientific study completed years ago, where people who had asthma were given an inhaler that contained saline (salt water) but were told it contained an allergy, 19 out of the 40 people taking part developed a constriction of the airways, and 12 had an actual asthma attack. That's the effect of the power of a negative belief,' says Dr Hamilton.

'The only way that they reversed the effects was that they were then given another inhaler and told that it contained something that would relieve their symptoms – after which they all returned to normal. So a negative belief actually made salt water constrict their airways, and it was a positive belief that reversed it. The placebo and nocebo effects are the clearest demonstrations of the power of positive and negative beliefs on the body.'

In my own case, some beliefs that I uncovered were: 'I'm not important', 'It's not safe to let my guard down', 'I'm a failure', 'It's not safe to sleep', 'I'm responsible for everyone's feelings', 'My best efforts are not good enough', and 'I'm too slow', to name just a few. It's no wonder my body put me to bed for a few months – carrying around such beliefs is exhausting! Re-recording these beliefs not only resulted in a relief of my symptoms, but my relationships both with other people and with myself have improved, as well. My inner bully has quietened down, I feel liberated knowing I'm in charge, and life seems to present me with exciting opportunities.

So, the next time your body tugs on your sleeve by presenting a symptom to you, or you hear yourself using limiting language, such as 'I can't...' or 'I should, but...', or blaming age on why your body is failing you with it's aches and pains, know that you have a choice. You can continue listening to the same cassette tape, or connect into what beliefs your wonderful body is communicating and record some new empowering music with which to dance into your best life.

Go for a walk in nature and record yourself asking the following questions: How does this symptom make me feel? What is it holding me back from achieving? When have I felt this way before? When was the first time I felt this way? If any memories come up for you, then express how you felt and what you made it mean about yourself or your outlook on life. Send some love and support to that version of yourself.



Communicating with your body

It is important to have extra love for yourself and show self-compassion with this work. It's not always easy, and sometimes some deeper work is required than just repeating affirmations. If you feel too afraid or find yourself sabotaging your best efforts, then remember this is all coming from what is recorded in your subconscious; it's not your fault. Find yourself a practitioner who will help to guide you on your journey.

Dr Gatter adds: 'Your body
holds all the messages. You can
ask the tension pattern directly:
What are you here for? What's your
purpose? What is the message you
have for me? What do I need to learn
by you being here? And start to get to
know it and befriend it, rather than
treating it like a problem – because,
then, you're just treating yourself
like a problem.'

NEXT STEPS

Read The Biology Of Belief by Bruce Lipton (Hay House, £14.99)

Read *Transform Your Beliefs, Transform Your Life* by Karl Dawson and Kate Marillat (Hay House, £14.99)

Read The Five Side Effects Of Kindness by David Hamilton (Hay House, £12.99)

Read Your Body Speaks Your Mind by Deb Shapiro (Little, Brown, £14.99)

Coaching in action

Present tense

The award-winning coach Kim Morgan meets Martha*, a client struggling with feelings of anxiety, despite her confident façade

Session one...

artha struck me as a quietly confident person. She was a newly qualified lawyer who had secured a job in a top law firm, where I had run some coaching workshops - which is where we'd first met. At the end of the final workshop, she stayed behind and asked if she could book some coaching sessions with me. We arranged an initial 'chemistry' session to decide if coaching was right for her, during which Martha interrogated me about how coaching worked and about my experience, references, qualifications and code of ethics. When she eventually agreed to work with me, I found myself feeling rather honoured, and slightly intimidated!

When we next met, however, it was as if I was meeting a different person. Martha had dropped her professional persona, and threw herself straight into her reason for being there, without pausing for breath: 'I'm overwhelmed with worry about everything, almost all of the time. I worry about things I've said and done, and whether I should have said or done them. I replay situations and conversations in my



mind, and worry if I have upset people. I worry about things which haven't yet happened, and imagine the worst possible outcome for every situation. And when I'm not worrying about past and future events, I am worrying about current world events and the state of our planet; I can't stop reading the news on my phone and feeling anxious about the terrible things that are happening. And, at work, I am in a permanent state of anticipatory anxiety about making a giant mistake.'

I asked Martha: 'Have you always felt like this, or has something changed?'

Martha stopped and thought for a few minutes. 'That's a good question. I think it started when I stopped being a child and became an adult. I don't think I had realised that there was such pain and suffering in the world before then. In my first year at university, someone on my course died

in a car accident, and it shocked me so much. It was like my whole world view changed overnight.'

'What did it change from and to?' I probed further.

Martha gave a wry smile: 'I went from seeing the world as unicorns, rainbows, sunshine and fairy dust to fear, danger, unkindness and unfairness. I'm not blaming my parents, because I had a wonderful childhood, but they shielded

me from reality and now I just worry about everything, every day.'

'Do you accept that the world is full of kindness and happiness *and* unkindness and sadness, at the same time?' I asked gently, with a smile.

Martha screwed up her face like a toddler: 'I don't like the horrible things in the world!' She was close to tears.

I felt an overwhelming need to offer Martha some reassurance. (I understood her child-like behaviour was triggering a parental, rescuing response in me, and made a mental note to discuss this with my own supervisor.)

'The good news is, there are strategies that can boost your mood and your emotional resilience. They involve accepting that there are both good and bad things in the world, and encourage you to switch your focus to noticing the positives as well as the negatives.'

At the end of the session, we agreed to meet again in a month's time. I gave Martha a simple, effective journalling exercise: Each night before going to bed, write down three good things that happened that day. It would only take minutes to do, but could have a powerful impact on her feelings of wellbeing and emotional resilience.

Martha looked
thoughtful and subdued.
She thanked me and said
she wanted to enjoy life
again, the way she had as
a child. She had recently
seen a quote that she was
going to write in her journal:
'The past is history. The future
is a mystery. This moment is a gift.
That's why it's called the present.'

Find out what Kim discovered about Martha's struggles with anxious thoughts in the next issue.

Does this sound like you? Turn the page for Kim's coaching exercises

"Do you accept that the world is full of kindness and happiness and unkindness and sadness, all at the same time?"

Work it out

Mood mapping is a helpful exercise to do when you are feeling overwhelmed by anxiety or worried by issues, real or imagined.

Take a pen and some paper, and draw yourself in the middle of the page – a stick person will do, or you might just write the word 'Me'.

Then, around it, write down all the things that are affecting your mood, either positively or negatively. You might have words such as: 'The weather', 'World events', 'My birthday', 'Work', 'Social media', 'My family'.

If they are things that make you feel positive, draw a sunshine around them. If they are things that are troubling you, draw a cloud around them.

Take each word in turn and focus on what aspects of the situation you can control. Could you change your thoughts, behaviours or beliefs about some of the negative factors? Could you do more of the positive things that improve your mood? Make a list of strategies for yourself for each different situation.

8 ways to manage rumination

Rumination is thinking a lot, endlessly analysing, and obsessing about possible consequences, without taking any action. Rumination often stimulates a host of linked negative thoughts. Here are eight ways to manage it:

- **1.** Create a 'self-esteem box' photos and lists of good things which have happened to you during the course of your life.
- **2.** Recall examples of where you overcame a difficult problem what skills did you use?
- **3.** Ask yourself, what would someone you admire do in this situation?
- **4.** Instead of imagining dire consequences, imagine three positive outcomes.
- **5.** Schedule a fixed amount of time each day for ruminating no more than five minutes.
- **6.** Reward yourself with a treat when you take positive action to solve a problem.
- **7.** Imagine yourself five years from now, looking back on this situation how important does it seem?
- **8.** Imagine explaining this situation to someone who is really experiencing a crisis how would they, and you, then view it?



THREE GOOD THINGS

Three good things' is a wonderful exercise from the practice of Positive Psychology, and has been shown to increase feelings of happiness and wellbeing.

Every night for six weeks, keep a written journal of three good things that have happened in your day, and reflect on why they happened. You don't need to write a lot, and the good things can be small; the purpose of the exercise

the purpose of the exercise is to notice good things – however seemingly insignificant.

Lightbulb moments Balancing act

 $A\, safety\, net\, of\, cynicism\, is\, the\, perfect\, counterbalance\, to\, positivity,\, says\, the\, eternally\, optimistic$ Kimberley Wilson, psychologist and author of How To Build A Healthy Brain

here are two kinds of people in the world: those who talk to strangers at bus stops, and those who would rather walk. I have a number of semi-professional cynical women in my life. Let me be clear, they are not at all unfriendly, and once you are inside the circle of trust, they are warm and fiercely loyal. But they do, for example, eye newcomers with discernible suspicion.

'I don't like new people', says Nicolla, without a qualm, 'It's like, why are you here? What do you want from me?'

'I don't need any more friends,' says Jo, as matter-of-fact as if she were reading the ingredients on a can of beans. (I'm incredibly grateful that I got in before she hit quota!)

I love them dearly. And I need them. Not only does their general state of peaceful antipathy lend itself to a dry sense of humour that is absolutely hilarious, but I am also certain that more than once they have saved me from trading the family cow for some magic beans.

You see, I am inclined towards optimism. Through luck or design, I tend to see the best in people, and always try to extend the benefit of the doubt. In general, this has worked out well for me, and the consensus in optimism research suggests that it is linked to better health and lower risk of depression.

But too much optimism can become a problem. For one thing, my daily cardio, without fail, is running for my train, which I put down to being too optimistic about the number of things I can plausibly achieve before I have to leave the house (this has been dubbed 'the

planning fallacy'). I always make it but, seriously, it's no way to live.

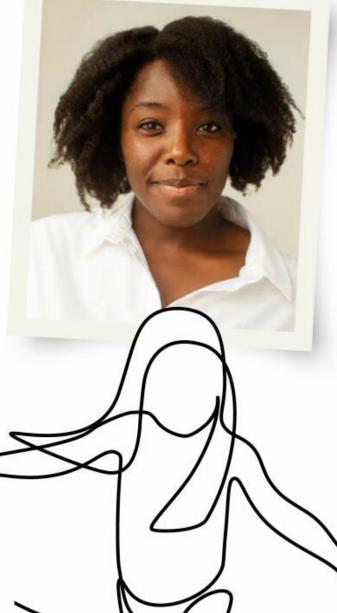
And, sometimes, optimism can teeter, totter and stumble into the realms of naivety. That is, you can mistake red flags for bunting. I realised this when watching the charming conman portrayed in The Tindle Swindler on Netflix. I remembered an encounter with a similar character years ago. Looking me dead in the eye, my friend Cat said at the time, 'He seems very unreal, Kimberley'. And she was right. He was. And this is why I need that healthy dose of cynicism in my life, as a counterbalance.

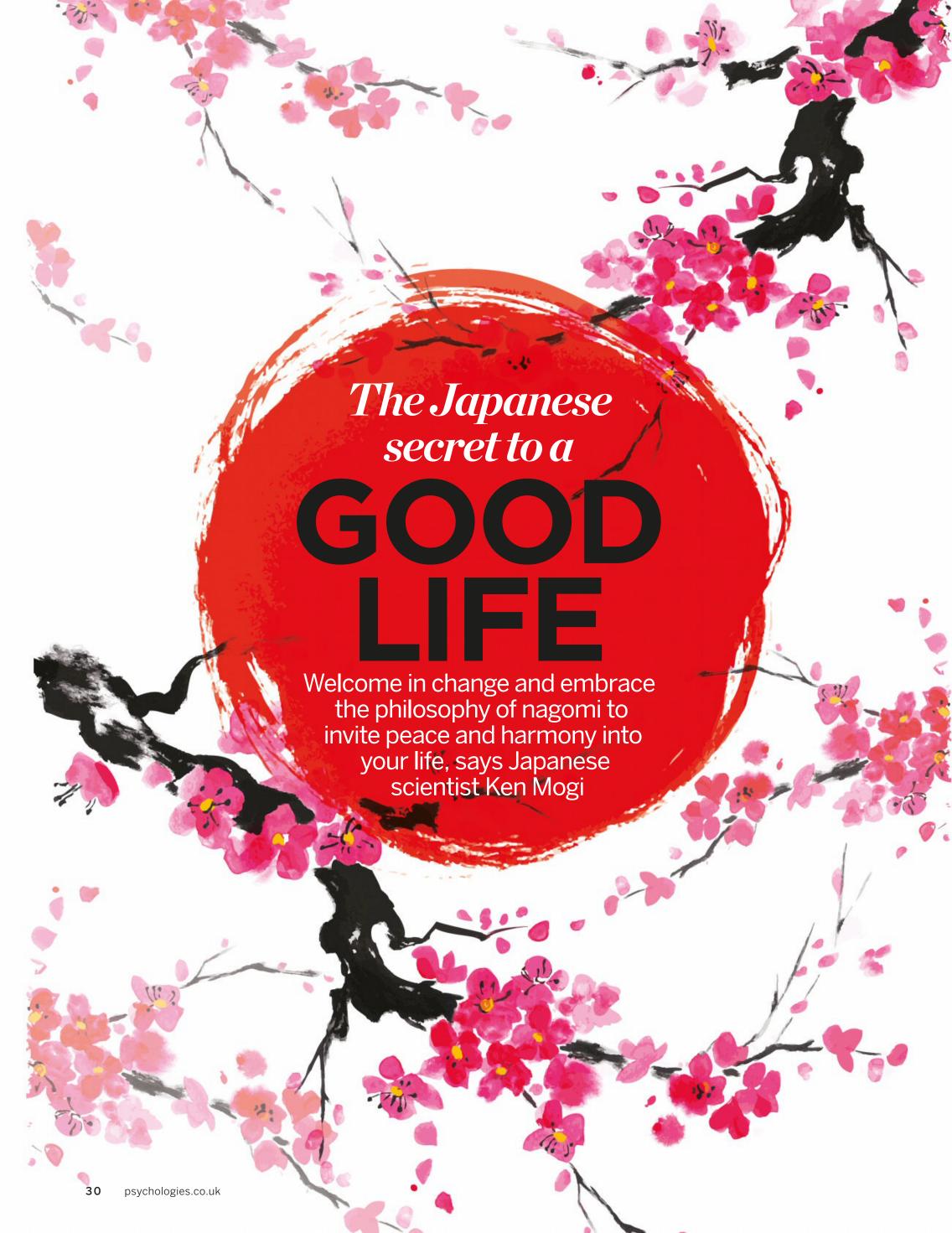
When thinking about relationship dynamics, whether platonic or romantic, I often invoke the analogy of a kite. The delight of a kite is how it allows itself to be taken, lifted by the winds. But a kite needs an anchor. Without a tether, a kite is liable to come crashing to the ground or find itself tangled in the branches of a nearby tree. Likewise, an anchor, the person holding the tether, needs the

kite. How else will they be persuaded to look up? I like to think that, in return for saving me from myself, my gift to these women is that I nudge (and sometimes drag) them into positive experiences they might otherwise discount.

There is no such thing as a self-made woman. The reality is that our emotional worlds are porous, our personalities co-created with the person or people we are relating to in the moment. We balance and ballast each other. And it is a beautiful thing. God bless the cynics.

kimberleywilson.co; @foodandpsych; How To Build A Healthy Brain (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99)







Jive pluars in your tije:

Maintaining happy
relationships with
your loved ones, even if
you disagree with them.

Learning new things, while always staying true to yourself.

Finding a sense of peace in whatever you are doing.

Mixing and blending unlikely components to strike a harmonious balance.

Having a greater understanding of the Japanese philosophy of life.

ife is a journey, a one-way transition from youth to old age. Many of us struggle to accept this inevitability and perceive ageing as something to guard against, as though it is a shameful defeat. But that is a misguided understanding of the essence of life. It is no exaggeration to say that applying the philosophy of nagomi to our lives will change the way we approach our own existence.

Nagomi is the recognition of the fact that life depends on many elements for robustness, stability and dependability. Without nagomi, life in this unpredictable world cannot go on. Nagomi is an important puzzle piece in the philosophy of life, not only in the Japanese context but in the wider world. Indeed, you may even say that nagomi is life itself.

The greatest tragedy of life often comes from resisting the changes that living our organic lives inevitably brings. Many cultures around the world are obsessed with youth, with people going to great lengths to stay young-looking, trying this supplement or the other, taking this exercise, eating that special food, and undergoing cosmetic surgery. These are all down to personal choice, but to endlessly pursue youth is to overlook the beauty that can come with age.

The Japanese approach to staying forever young is not in rejecting change, but embracing it as a natural occurrence in this floating world. In Japan, there is the concept of tokowaka, which literally translates as 'forever young' ('toko' means eternity and 'waka'

means 'young'). Tokowaka occupies an important position in the philosophy of life in Japan. Most significantly, tokowaka is a process; nothing stays the same and everything is renewed. In order to stay forever young, according to the philosophy of tokowaka, you need to let go, and embrace – even welcome – changes. Indeed, tokowaka is a process in which you establish a nagomi with ageing.

One example of tokowaka in the natural world is the cherry blossom we see in the spring. The beautiful pink flowers of the cherry tree are indelibly associated with Japan, and they are celebrated for their ephemeral bloom. Everything about cherry blossoms is unpredictable. The time at which they bloom and the length of time they bloom for is determined by the fickle spring weather; a number of warm days will bring the buds to bloom, subsequent cooler weather will preserve the blossoms for longer, but rain and wind can bring them prematurely to the ground. Even in the best conditions, the blossoms only last a week or so. For many Japanese people, cherry blossoms are a metaphor for life. Like our lives, their bloom is unpredictable and short, and at the whim of the elements beyond their control. Hanami, 'flower viewing', the Japanese tradition of appreciation of flowers, is about enjoying life to the full while we can, because one day it will end.

By repeating the natural process each year, the cherry blossom collectively achieves something akin to tokowaka, or the flower of the truth. It is a celebration of the ephemeral, or the flower of the time.

If you were to summarise the Japanese philosophy of life in one phrase, it would be that 'the only permanence in this world is change'. The sense of the ephemeral nature of the world, the realisation that everything passes, is behind the Japanese embrace of nagomi. Everything passes, no matter how powerful and permanent it might appear to be. If you build something out of brick and stone, you cannot make it permanent. Even the rebuilding of Japan's most sacred Shinto shrine, the Ise

Shrine, every 20 years is just a best attempt at permanence in the face of the impermanence of nature.

Every 20 years, the shrine buildings are carefully dismantled and new buildings of exactly the same structure are erected on a new site, using newly obtained wood. The current buildings date from the year 2013. The next rebuilding will take place in the year 2033. Records suggest that this rebuilding process has been going on for the past 1,200 years, with occasional irregularities due to battles and social turmoils.

In order to sustain the exact rebuilding of the shrines every 20 years, a number of careful considerations and preparations must be put in place. For example, the hinoki (Japanese cypress) trees that are used as logs in the shrine buildings must be planted many decades in advance. For this purpose, the Ise Shrine has reserves of hinoki trees all over the nation.

Thus, the Ise Shrine buildings are forever young, or tokowaka, even though materially speaking they are always changing. Indeed, the venerable shrine can stay young, new and shining precisely because it is letting its older self go.

The Japanese approach to staying forever young, then, is not about rejecting change, but embracing it. Superficially, the Ise Shrine might appear to be about keeping up an appearance of being forever young by replacing the old with the new, thus valuing only the latter. But it does not reject the notion that the new eventually becomes old; when the shrine is rebuilt, the carefully dismantled wood from the old building, quite robust and strong still, is meticulously polished and processed, to be used for smaller shrines distributed around the Ise area. The wood is always respected and treated with great care, fitting for its venerable history of having been once used to build the Ise Shrine.

Even if the Ise Shrine stays forever young in a superficial sense, then we still accept that, in this floating world, changes are natural.



Edited extract taken from The Way of Nagomi by Ken Mogi (Quercus, £12.99)

"The sense of the ephemeral nature of the world, the realisation that everything passes, is behind the Japanese embrace of nagomi. Everything passes, no matter how permanent it might appear to be"

Flights of fancy

Fusing a passion for photography and an interest in wellness, Breanne Cook, owner of The Pied Wagtail, has curated a treasure trove of inspiration and encouragement



The Pied Wagtail



After 12 years in a
variety of social work
roles, including time
spent in hospitals,
children's palliative

care and mental health education, I chose to walk away from my career and start The Pied Wagtail. But I couldn't leave the beating heart of my work behind: my passion for championing people's strengths, resilience and wellbeing.

The Pied Wagtail is a gift shop, where you can treat yourself or buy gifts for others to let them know you're thinking of them; a mini gallery of my photography, with prints (like the one shown above) and stationery available to buy (photography is something I turn to to support my own mental health); and a wellbeing and resilience hub – somewhere you can go to boost your own or a loved one's wellbeing.

At The Pied Wagtail, you'll find products that offer encouragement, motivation and inspiration, with wellbeing gifts that have been carefully selected to enhance wellness – such as The Catalyst Gift Box, a mystery box filled with gifts to motivate you to take action on that thing you've been holding back on, to inspire you to think differently, and to remind you that – despite the challenges you're experiencing – you're surviving; you've got this.

You'll discover online courses, too: The Pied Wagtail Values for Wellbeing course is available now and focuses on why knowing what your values are can benefit your wellbeing. The course will guide you through the theory and teach you how to discover your own values.

And there's a book club, too: The Pied Wagtail Book Club is for anyone interested in personal development and keen to discuss ideas with like-minded people. Running four times a year, if you sign up you'll receive the book and some extra goodies, perfectly packaged. thepiedwagtail.co.uk

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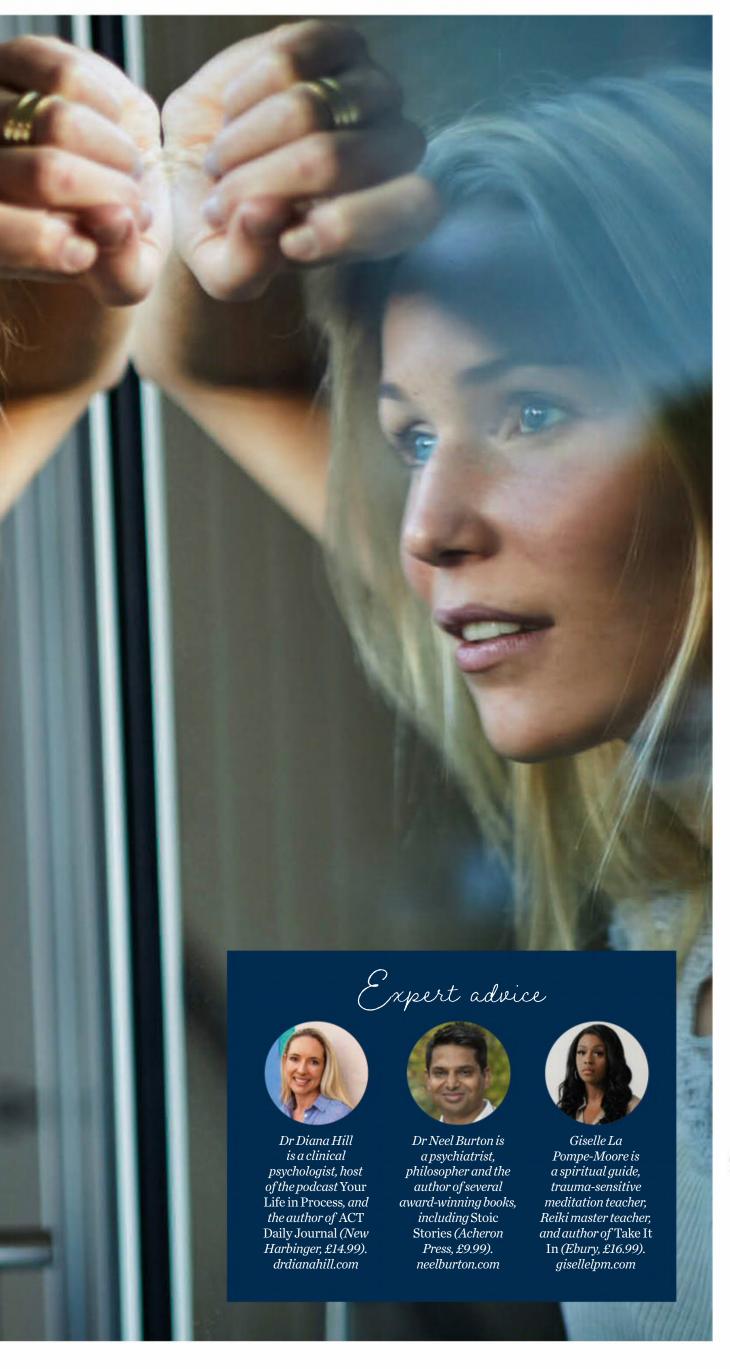


off the Values for Wellbeing course, with code TPWVALUES

IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES







ne minute you're laughing so hard with your friends you're worried you might pee, the next, a news update flashes up on your phone and a cloud of guilt and anxiety engulfs you.

It is a hard balance to strike – as global citizens, we want to be aware, but as compassionate beings, we are vulnerable to being derailed by the misery of others.

We cannot turn a blind eye to conflict and disaster overseas, but repeated exposure to upsetting news can leave us with emotions that are hard to manage. Pushing images from the news to the back of our mind feels like burying our heads in the sand, and our own opportunities for happiness can be tainted by a feeling of guilt that others are facing turmoil while we 'carry on as normal'.

We can limit our exposure to current affairs by turning off updates and resisting endless doom scrolling, but we cannot shy away from the news forever. Before long, a front-page headline catches our eye, or a colleague brings the latest conflict up in conversation. And, as clinical psychologist Dr Diana Hill points out, to turn our backs on suffering is to deny the empathy that makes us compassionate beings. It is not realistic – or sustainable.

'Expecting yourself to be calm during times of uncertainty invalidates a core principle of humanity: you hurt because you have a heart. Many of us may seek calm by turning down the volume of our hurt – we grab an extra glass of wine, check out on our phones, avoid the news, or crawl back into bed. But turning down your hurt also means you have to turn down the caring in your heart. Experientially avoiding the pain of life, turns you away from the very meaning in life.'



"Expecting to be calm during times of uncertainty invalidates a core principle of humanity"

Feel the heart behind your hurt

So how can we find balance? Dr Hill suggests a practice called Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) to help you stay engaged with caring, without burning out. She advises:

AVOID AVOIDING It is normal to want to avoid pain, but Dr Hill believes complete avoidance often makes things worse. 'Avoidance can lead to feelings of loneliness, guilt, or secondary problems, such as having to deal with that hangover you created, or the work you missed while you were avoiding life. The first step out of feeling terrible is to stop trying to avoid feeling terrible.'

Dr Hill suggests we face up to situations, however distressing, and then take action towards what we care about, no matter how small or how relevant to the source of our distress. We cannot control how humans in other places and situations behave towards each other, but we can control our own behaviour, so we should focus on that.

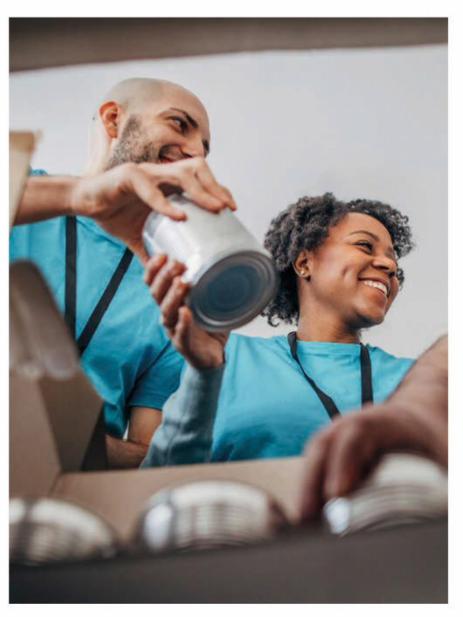
DON'T FEAR COMPASSION Dr Hill recognises that many of us fear that if we allow ourselves to feel the pain of others, we will be overwhelmed by it. 'Compassion doesn't mean you give up or become engulfed in pain or pity,' she says. 'Compassion involves turning toward suffering, offering a caring heart, and making moves to alleviate it – when possible'.

Our response to suffering is one of caring, so we should channel this by practising compassion towards ourselves and others, at those times that we feel helpless as regards the 'bigger picture'.

involve discomfort, but Dr Hill encourages us to 'look for values where it hurts most'. Look for the values that are behind the emotions that you feel during periods of distress. 'Anger, fear, regret, and sadness are some of our least favourite emotions,' she says, 'yet these feelings often point to what you care most about. Spend some time with your hurt to look for the values that are driving it. That care will be your motivation for action.'

CARRY ON WITH COMMITTED ACTION
When you uncover what Dr Hill calls the
'heart behind your hurt', act on it. For example,
if you care about peace and conflict resolution,
practise perspective-taking (seeing a situation from
another's point of view) and encourage this in your
family, too. This may not bring about world peace but,
by acting on your values, you are playing your part in
a movement towards it.

'There is a lot we cannot control right now,' says Dr Hill, 'but when you take control of your actions by acting on your values, you will discover you do have the power to carry on, calm or not.'



FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

The idea of focusing on what we can control is echoed by Dr Neel Burton, a psychiatrist, philosopher and author. He says: 'If we are not to suffer from hope, fear and the other negative emotions, we must learn to distinguish between those things that are within our control, and those that are not. Anything that is external to us is not within our control – or, at least, not entirely within our control. The only thing that is entirely within our control is our own mind.'

Dr Burton believes that when it feels that the world is in turmoil, doing our best in our daily life means doing everything we can to 'shoot accurately'. But, he cautions, 'as soon as that arrow leaves us, we must accept that it is no longer within our control – much like the success of our actions – and, instead, subject to outside forces, such as a sudden change in wind speed or direction.'

'Even less in our control,' warns Dr Burton, 'are wars and natural disasters. Instead of anguishing about them, we would do better to concentrate on making ourselves as useful as possible – which might involve campaigning or charity work, or simply sticking to what we do best.'

We cannot control the outcome of conflict abroad, but we can control our own approaches to conflict in our everyday lives. That is what we can focus our energies on. We cannot control how our actions are received by the world, but we can control what those actions are.



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Your mental wellbeing toolkit

Coping with phobias

We're debunking the myths, challenging the taboos and offering the tools we need to deal with some of the most misunderstood mental health issues affecting us, our families and friends

rom arachnophobia – the fear of spiders – to claustrophobia – the fear of small spaces phobias come in many forms. While it's quite common to have vague fears about specific things, phobias are often more pronounced and can feel very overwhelming. Thankfully, there are a number of tools at our disposal to help us deal with them and even overcome them. This month, Dr Radha Modgil - a GP - and experts from the Mental Health Foundation shine a light on phobias, to offer reassurance, delve into causes and symptoms, and share tips on how we can help ourselves and others.

What are phobias?

'Phobias are fairly common, with nearly three per cent of the UK population thought to be living with one,' says Dr Modgil. 'They are a type of anxiety disorder, which can manifest as an exaggerated or unrealistic sense of danger towards something, such as a place, a situation, object or being. In short, they can be

incredibly debilitating and have a huge impact on a person's life, causing anxiety and leading them to avoid certain activities or situations.'

What causes them?

'There is no single cause for a phobia, but a number of factors may be at play,' explains Dr Modgil, 'such as a previous incident or trauma, a learned response from a parent or sibling, or even genetics, as some people may be more predisposed to feeling anxious than others.

'Phobias are generally divided into two camps: specific or simple phobias, and complex phobias. Specific phobias often develop during childhood and may become less prevalent as you get older. Common examples include a fear of spiders, a fear of the dentist, or a fear of injections. Complex phobias tend to be more disabling and usually develop during adulthood. They are often associated with a deep-rooted anxiety of a certain situation, such as social phobias.' mentalhealth.org.uk; @dr_radha; @DrRadhaModgil

REACH OUT

'Generally, people with phobias are fully aware of the problem, but are unlikely to have a formal diagnosis,' explains Dr Modgil. 'Many are able to live with them and avoid the source of their fear. However, if your phobia is becoming unworkable and so overwhelming that it begins to impact your everyday life, speak to your GP. They may be able to refer you to a specialist with expertise in behavioural therapy, such as a psychologist.'

WORDS: LARISSA CHAPMAN. IMAGE: GETTY IMAGE

HOW TO HELP YOURSELF AND OTHERS 'The good news is that almost all phobias can be successfully treated through a variety of different techniques,' says Dr Modgil. 'One of the most successful ways to overcome a phobia is through a process known as desensitisation, which is general exposure to your feared object or situation. It's understandable that people with phobias often go out of their way to avoid certain situations, however, this can actually serve to keep phobias alive, as you're not able to give yourself a chance to change your perception of what you fear, or see that you might cope with it better than you expected. For many people, facing their fear can help minimise its impact and make it seem less scary. 'There are also a number of self-help options, including counselling, psychotherapy and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), or relaxation and visualisation techniques that you can try yourself at home. It might be a good idea to look at lifestyle changes, too, to help manage anxiety, including regular exercise, eating healthily, getting enough sleep, and avoiding caffeine and other stimulants.' IDENTIFY THE SIGNS 'Like most mental certain situation or health conditions, thing can cause panic. The main symptoms phobias are personal to each individual,' says of any phobia are: Dr Modgil. 'Some people **Anxiety and panic** won't experience any attacks symptoms until face-to-Nausea face with what they fear, **Palpitations Shortness of breath** while, for others, the mere thought of a **Trembling**

Everything life throws at you makes you stronger

Her challenges have been well documented, but have left the indomitable TV presenter Gail Porter with a legacy of eternal optimism, and a desire to live life one day at a time

WORDS: GEMMA CALVERT

ometimes, you have to lose everything to win. Just ask Gail Porter.

After reaching rock bottom a little over a decade ago, the TV host is today not only stronger and wiser, but enjoying a simple life, where gratitude and benevolence deliver daily rewards.

In the late 90s and early 00s, after her nude image was famously projected onto the Houses of Parliament as part of a lads' magazine stunt, former model Porter became a TV presenting superstar.

For a decade, she fronted shows including the BBC's flagship Saturday morning show, *Live & Kicking, The Big Breakfast, Top of the Pops* and ITV's *Fully Booked*. Then, a series of life-changing circumstances caused the walls of the incredible life she had built to crumble.

The decline has been well-reported. In 2004, Edinburgh-born Porter's high-profile marriage to indie musician Dan Hipgrave ended acrimoniously and, the following year, during a work trip to Las Vegas, she developed the hair-loss condition alopecia. Overnight, her long blonde locks disappeared and the once abundant offering of TV jobs dwindled.

By 2011 – then working as a panellist on Channel 5's *The Wright Stuff* and earning a small income with voice-over jobs – Porter's mental health deteriorated.

Battling the depression she had suffered since the age of 19, as well as self-harm and anorexia, she was clinically sectioned under the mental health act and spent almost a month in a psychiatric ward at London's Royal Free Hospital.

She later found herself in financial ruin and spent six months staying on friends' sofas, before eventually sleeping rough on a park bench in London's Hampstead Heath.

'I didn't have any money – I didn't have anything – but I've survived,' reflects Porter, now 51, who is currently penning a part-life story, part-fiction book that will document such episodes in her life.

'Putting it down on paper is a little bit difficult, as I'm doing it on my own, but it's things that I talk about, and I'm not ashamed about,' she explains.

'Every single thing that you go through is a learning experience – it might not be one you ever want to go through, but it makes you so much stronger.

'I didn't want to be in that position, but I was in that position, so what do you do? Do you feel sorry for yourself? Or do you decide "I'm going to make it"?'

Porter chose the latter and a chance opportunity to take part in the 2015 series of *Celebrity Big Brother* earned her enough money to place a deposit on a flat and escape living rough.







'To be honest with you, it was not a lot of money, but it meant I'd have a roof over my head again, so I did it,' says Porter, who has previously described her experience on the Channel 5 reality show as 'the worst thing ever'.

'On *Big Brother*, if you leave, they don't pay you. So I was going into the Diary Room every single day, saying, "Hello, Big Brother, it's Gail. Please get me out of here!",' she says.

'Again, another experience. I did it. I survived.' Fighting spirit she may have in abundance, but it's a mistake to assume that Porter considers herself in any way extraordinary.

'I think we're all survivors,' she says. 'My life has played out in the press and people think, "Gail's had a really bad time." But, no. I've had odd times, but nobody knows what's happening across the road. We don't know what the neighbour or the person downstairs is going through. We're all going through stuff, and I'm quite happy to talk about anything. I hope I've made a difference and made other people think, "We're not on our own in this".'

Porter, who is an ambassador for the Changing Faces charity, which supports people living with a scar, mark or condition that makes them look different, adds: 'I don't want anyone to ever feel sorry for me. If I can make a difference, then we all win!'

Upbeat and quick-witted, Porter once tried her luck as a stand-up comedian, and during our video call leans on self-effacing humour to build rapport. With positive thoughts believed to be instrumental in building resilience to, and recovery from, mental health problems, it's easy to understand Porter's happy-go-lucky temperament, as well as her tendency to not over analyse her past nor overthink her future.

'Success is not a thing that I even think about,' she says, when asked about what motivates her professionally these days.

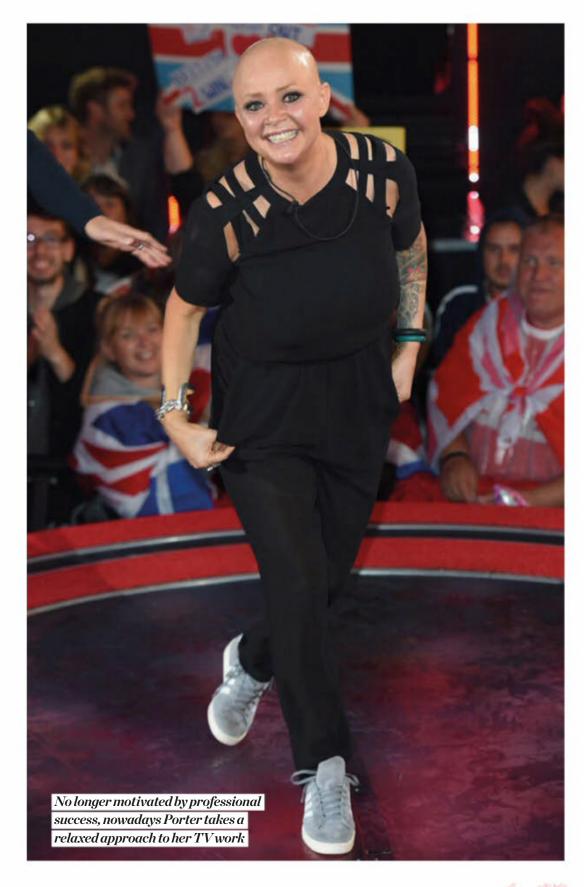
'I lost my hair 17 years ago, I've been homeless, and now I have a roof over my head, so every single day is a blessing. I don't ever think, "I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna do that". I just think, "Tomorrow is a great day and if I can make other people happy, that's a good thing, and if I get a job, that's great." I don't stress about what's next.'

Aside from the joy she reaps from being mum to her 19-year-old politics student daughter, Honey, who she describes as 'a solid, amazing human being', Porter gets a daily kick out of making others feel good by dishing out random acts of kindness.

'I tell every person I meet, "Ooh, I like your trainers", or "ah, your hair looks nice" – although, obviously not myself,' she chuckles.

'If they don't like it, they can just walk away, but there's nothing nicer than giving a compliment to somebody. I do it every single day.'

On the morning of our interview, Porter deposited a bag full of groceries on the doorstep of her



neighbour in the apartment downstairs. 'Everybody should do it,' she says, adding that generosity doesn't have to cost money. 'All you have to do is give someone a hug or say "I hope you have a great day". It makes a difference. I just want to make the world a better place.'

She credits part of her happiness to fitness, taking part in five-times-a-week SoulCycle sessions, Bikram yoga and running regularly.

Living alone in north London with her cat, Pickles, she insists she's happy to be single. 'I've been in love maybe twice and it was amazing, and now I'm quite happy on my own,' she says. 'I'm not really good at talking about relationships because one of the things about having alopecia and looking different is, as much as I feel like I'm strong, I still believe that people look at me and think that I'm not a pretty human being.'

"Kindness makes such a difference. I just want to make the world a better place"

It's a raw and heartfelt admission. So, I ask: does she feels safe beneath the emotional safety blanket of being single?

Porter nods. 'Yeah. I've got Netflix and Disney+. That's my relationship!'

There's no doubt that she boasts strength in spades, but scratch the surface and Porter's vulnerabilities hide in plain sight.

She admits her biggest emotional weakness is rooted in grief. She lost her mum, Sandra, to breast cancer in 2009, then her dad, Craig, to a brain haemorrhage in February 2020. She made an agonising journey to his home in Spain to identify his body, before returning to the UK with his ashes.

'I miss my family – I miss my mum, I miss my dad, I miss my grandparents. That's my weak spot,' she says. 'Every night I say to them, "Goodnight. I don't know where you are, but I love you very much and I miss you".'

Porter has previously credited Honey, from her marriage to Hipgrave, for motivating her to 'save her own life' at her lowest point of mental health, and says her daughter is now a good listening ear.

'We have a really good relationship, so we can talk about things,' says Porter, who is bursting with excitement over their mother-daughter summer plans.

'Honey had plans that didn't work out, so asked me to go on holiday with her. It's probably the nicest thing I've ever heard in my life – a 19-year-old asking "Mum, do you wanna come?"

'I'm going to take a bit of time out this summer and I'm heading up to Edinburgh to do the Festival. I'll get to see everyone that I love from my hometown,' says Porter. 'You can't get better than that!'

She recently returned to her Scottish homeland to film her new ten-part paranormal series for Really's *Spooked: Scotland*, where she joins medium Chris Fleming – her co-presenter on *Dead Famous* from 2004 to 2006 – to investigate supernatural sightings.

'It scares me a wee bit, but I quite like the fact that maybe someone or something is around. Doing this programme, and having an open mind, is the best thing. I'm a big believer that something is out there. I've never seen a ghost, but you know when you just can feel something in the energy?'

Having mingled with the metaphysical, it's a wonder she isn't on tenterhooks when home alone at night, I ask. Porter laughs.

'I'm Scottish. Come on, are you kidding me?! I watch all the crime channels and there are days when my crazy cat will run up and down the stairs and it's like someone's in the house. I get a little bit freaked out, then I think, "Whatever it is, I'll take it. It's not a problem". Nothing scares me because I don't believe in anything bad. I'm a very lucky soul.'

Spooked: Scotland with Gail Porter is on Really from 27 May, and available to stream on Discovery+

A-Zof Coaching

Welcome to Barefoot's A-2 of Coaching series. We aim to distill what might otherwise be complex psychological theories and models and talk about them in a way that anybody can understand. We believe that everybody benefits from learning about and practising coaching skills — and it's catching! Coaching spreads into other areas of our life and work and the positive effects are felt far beyond just ourselves. Each issue we will be focusing on a different element of coaching.

What is coaching?

The International Coaching Federation (ICF) defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential.

Attention

"The greatest gift you can give another is the purity of your attention." - Richard Moss

Attention is an act of creation. The quality of our attention determines the quality of other people's thinking.

Attention, driven by the promise of no interruption, and by respect and interest in where people will go with their thinking. It generates thinking. It is an act of creation. (Nancy Kline, Time to Think, 1999)

Listening is a way of showing that somebody has your full attention. It is an art which many of us have never really learned. We often scan what is being said to us, picking out the key points and getting a general sense of what is being communicated.

At times (particularly when excited or interested), we might be eager to contribute **ourselves**, and so find ourselves waiting for a **pause so that** we can respond.









To help get yourself into the right frame of mind for listening (and to stay there), ask yourself... Why am I talking?

Five techniques for listening

- Quieten yourself down inside and minimise your internal dialogue
- Keep external distractions to a minimum and make a commitment to give them all your attention
- Believe wholeheartedly that you do not need to put your thoughts into their head and that they can think perfectly well for themselves
- Listen without judging or evaluating what is being said
- When they have finished speaking, get into the habit of counting to 10 (in your head) before you begin to speak. This will ensure that they have really said all they wanted to say at that point



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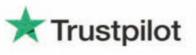


Created by Psychologies Columnist.

Kim Morgan









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Let's get to the nib of the problem

Face feelings head on and let them flow onto the page, to discover your emotional freedom, writes Jackee Holder

How often do you find your weekdays consumed with busyness that finds you pushing your feelings away as you drive your way through your week? Rather than muting your emotions, why not use journalling as a way to meet them head on, instead?

Recently, a friend cancelled on me at the last minute. I felt annoyed and, instead of brushing the feeling aside, I asked myself out loud, 'What are you feeling right now?' It was in the space between pausing that I got in touch with what I was actually feeling; underneath my annoyance was the murky waters of disappointment. That's when I reached for my journal. So, no crisps and no wine. Instead, I took five minutes to write about what was buried underneath my initial response, and what resurfaced was a memory I had long forgotten about...

Uncle Keith was my favourite uncle. I'm nine years old and I'm all dressed up, waiting anxiously by the living room window, anticipating that every approaching car will be the one with my uncle's friend, arriving to take us children to his wedding reception across town. But the car never arrives... The disappointment triggered by my friend cancelling was tempered by a disappointment that actually went way back.

It turned out to be five minutes well spent. Emptying my thoughts onto the page was more liberating than I had anticipated, and what I learnt by the end was that what I had to say on paper no longer needed to be shared out loud. Once I got out how I was feeling, it took the edge off it, too; it was a form of impulse control and emotional self-regulation. The irritation I had gotten caught up in evaporated and I found myself having greater capacity to connect with the empathy I had for my friend's busy schedule. By honouring all of the emotions I was feeling, I was able to recognise that by saying 'No' to me, my friend was actually saying 'Yes' to herself. I was now able to accept the situation in a far healthier way. More than anything, the writing – even though short in time – showed me what I wanted to say and led to me feeling clearer about how I felt.



One way of getting better at the language you use to describe your emotions more expansively is to use a simple journal prompt as a way of checking in with yourself.

At the top of the page write the prompt, 'What am I feeling right now?' Now describe the emotion in as much detail as you can...

- What sensations do you feel in your body?
- Where have you felt this emotion in the past?
- What's the script that's running in your head?

Then, play with asking the questions in different ways...

- What colour are your emotions?
- What shape are your feelings?
- What smells come to mind?

Give your feelings space to move through so they don't get stuck inside you. Put your pen to paper, keep on moving, don't stop now. *jackeeholder.com; @jackeeholderinspires*





TACKLE lanels senses for GOOD

It's never been easier to stay connected, so why do so many of us feel lost and alone? Rebecca Frank discovers how to find solace in solitude, celebrate friendship, and forge new connections



hen you think of loneliness, you probably imagine an elderly person living alone, with little or no family. And while old age can be a lonely time, the truth is,

loneliness affects people of all ages and stages of life. It could be the person whose marriage is failing, the single 20-something working from home, the student in a new city, or the parent left at home missing them. You can have 500 friends on Facebook and still feel lonely – or a 25-year marriage and three children. The extent of loneliness is so wide that experts have called it an epidemic, and its impact on our health has been compared to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and worse than the risks associated with obesity.

I experienced what I now recognise as loneliness after having my first baby. It wasn't acute like anxiety or debilitating like depression, but it was a gnawing feeling of disconnection from the world. It felt as if everything was going on as normal, but I was on the edge of it all. I felt it again after my dad died, a few years ago; that same bubble formed around me, and I found it hard to connect with anyone. On both occasions, the feelings of loneliness passed, as I connected with people, got more sleep, and talked about how I was feeling.

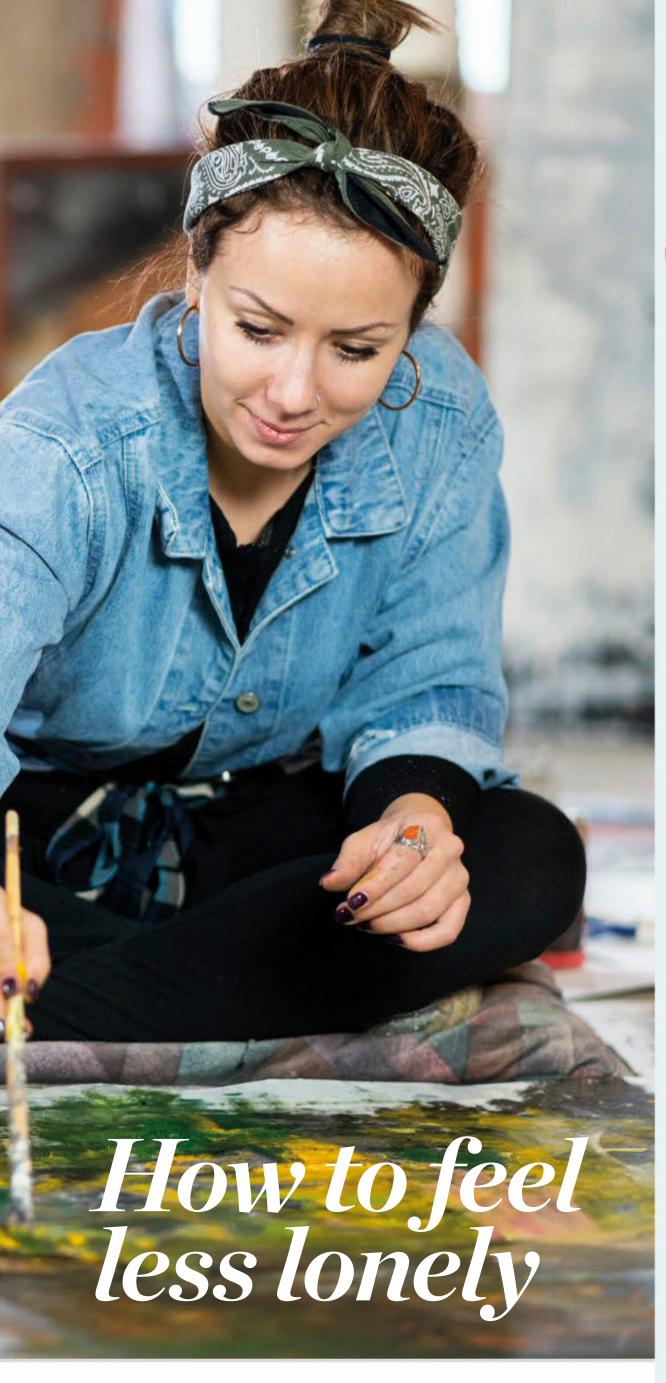
Loneliness can be a difficult emotion to recognise, and even harder to talk about. We talk about feeling angry or sad, but loneliness is harder to define – and more shameful, somehow. Psychologist Dr Audrey Tang explains how there are two types of loneliness: emotional (when your emotional needs aren't being met), and social (not having a wider network of friends). 'Unfortunately, in a fast-paced world where change happens more frequently, people move house, change jobs and travel more, so friendships can become less rooted, and are certainly less

easy to form,' she explains, adding that the pandemic has caused a big shift in lifestyle habits, with more people working from home and making big life changes, having had the chance to reassess their values.

While loneliness can certainly stem from being alone, it's perfectly possible to be alone and not lonely, or to feel lonely in a crowd. 'Unlike isolation, which is objective and based on the number of social connections one has, loneliness is subjective; it's deeply personal and will depend on the individual experiencing it,' says Cheryl Rickman, a Positive Psychology practitioner. It's common to believe that you're the only person experiencing it, but it's important to know that loneliness is extremely common. 'It has the weird property of being utterly ubiquitous yet feeling completely unique,' says Arthur C Brooks, author of From Strength To Strength (Bloomsbury, £17.99), adding: 'Lonely people often feel very alone in their loneliness.' And this is exactly why we need to talk about it, become aware of the signs (in ourselves and others), and get to know the strategies for overcoming it.

"We talk about feeling angry or sad, but loneliness is harder to define – and more shameful, somehow"







Grow to like being alone

This might sound like the last thing you need, but there are many benefits that can come from solitude; becoming comfortable with being alone helps you to get to know yourself better and to grow in confidence. 'The positive power of solitude comes from the realisation that solitude isn't being by yourself, it's being with yourself,' says Rickman, who describes alone time as a place of retreat and renewal, rather than something to fear. 'What if, rather than seeing solitude as "lonely time", we saw it as a beautiful opportunity for serenity amid the busyness of life?'

When we have time alone, Rickman recommends doing things that lift us up and help us connect with ourselves or with the world around us, so we become accustomed to being alone without feeling lonely. Think of activities that you love to do but probably rarely find time for, and enjoy doing them uninterrupted at your own pace – whether that's watercolour painting or dancing around the kitchen to your favourite songs. 'Being by yourself gives you the chance to be yourself, too. When there's nobody else around, you don't need to pretend. And you get the opportunity to work through worries, gain perspective, and make future plans.'

You can help this process by writing things down, either in a journal using bullets and prompts, or by free-writing, where you just write continuously without structure, as a way of getting your thoughts down on paper. Daydreaming is another wonderful way to access your inner thoughts and feelings, using your imagination to ponder what is and isn't working in your life.

Whatever you choose to do with your alone time, Rickman says it's about giving yourself the attention you deserve, and making sure you respond to yourself with compassion, encouragement, and respect. 'The more you value yourself, the less tolerance you have for people who don't. So, when you do connect with others, you'll be drawn to those that treat you well.' If you're often busy and surrounded by people, but experiencing feelings of disconnection, the soothing solace of solitude could be just what you need.



2 Find your people

This might seem easier said than done, especially if you're already disconnected, but there are steps that anyone can take to increase their social connections. 'I like to reframe loneliness as being a useful signal, alerting us to the fact that our connection gauge is empty and we need to take action,' says Rickman.

While you can't wave a wand and a group of close friends suddenly appears, you can increase contact with people in different ways, and all the evidence suggests these connections play a key role in our health and happiness. Our relationship with our partner is usually the most crucial for our happiness, but relationship satisfaction is what matters most. While evidence shows that married people are less lonely than those who are divorced, widowed or have never married, the loneliest of all are those who are married but with an 'absent' spouse. 'The most satisfying relationship is a compassionate one, where your spouse is also your best friend,' says Brooks. 'However, marriage cannot be your only true

friendship, as that will put the relationship under pressure to fill every emotional role, which makes rough patches harder to manage.'

Friendships are important throughout life, and it's perfectly possible to be single and happy if you have other fulfilling friendships and family links. In addition to these, we need casual connections with those who we share interests with, or just people we happen to see as we go about our day. Those quick hellos, smiles and exchanges of small talk all help satisfy that need for human interaction. 'Try working out what it is you're missing - for example, a group to associate with, engagement in a hobby, or people dropping in to your home,' suggests Dr Tang, 'then take steps to rebuild that network.' You could sign up for a class where you're likely to meet like-minded people. 'According to research, choir groups can generate the most satisfying social bonds because of the ice-breaker effect of singing together,' says Rickman. Or invite some people over – it can be surprisingly energising to host others.



3 Beyourself

Sometimes, the sheer act of carrying out all your different roles can feel exhausting and lonely, especially if you don't feel like you're being true to yourself. This might be at work or in your relationships, or just a general feeling that you're not getting enough space to be who you are and to do what you love. 'We all spend a lot of time performing adaptive roles,' says Dr Tang, referring to how we flip from professional to partner to child and so on, as we go about our daily lives. She suggests ways to reconnect with your authentic self by spending time doing things that you enjoy, and with the people you feel that you can truly be yourself with. 'These people know

your authentic self; they're the people you confide in and make time for readily, and who you know as much about as they do about you. They're also much harder to "replace", and you'll feel lonely without them."

If you've lost touch with someone and are feeling that friend-shaped hole in your life, pick up the phone and call them, or send them a message to let them know you're thinking about them. The chances are they'll be delighted to hear from you.

Being true to yourself can also mean opening up to feelings of loneliness and any other emotional problems you might have, because struggling in silence and on your own is a very lonely place to be.



Find enough purpose

Purpose doesn't mean that everything you do should have a relevant cause or be for the greater good (that's exhausting, and ultimately dispiriting, because it can't!), but if you feel a general lack of purpose, it can impact your wellbeing and cause feelings of loneliness and isolation. Martin Seligman, the founder of Positive Psychology, named a sense of purpose as one of the three pillars of happiness.

As we get older, it's common to feel our sense of purpose changing and possibly waning — our kids need us less, and we might feel less relevant or happy in the work we do. Dr Tang says: 'An easy way to find a greater sense of purpose is to get involved in your community. Not only do you get to regularly meet like-minded people, but you can also develop skills and see the altruistic benefits of what you've put in.' Community work doesn't have to be about regular volunteering — it can be helping with a one-off event that utilises your skills or contacts, or you could become a trustee or get involved in campaigning. 'You may find that local charities could really use the strengths that you're able to offer,' says Dr Tang.

"Experiencing the wellbeing boost of green space and natural light will lift your mood, and make you feel energised and more inclined to interact with others"











f you think back to a time in your life when you felt your most happy, energised and optimistic, the chances are it would be a time when your friendships were positive and plentiful. There's nothing quite like the company of good friends to lift your spirits, help put things in perspective, and make you laugh out loud. Our friends aren't just good for a giggle, however; they're vital for our health, with research showing that people with positive friendships live longer and healthier lives.

The extent to which friendship influences our wellbeing is evidenced in studies of people living in Blue Zones – areas of the world where a higher number of people live much longer than average. Johann Hari, author of *Lost Connections* (Bloomsbury, £10.99), explains: 'All the evidence shows that the longest lives are the happiest lives, and the most dependable thing you can do to boost happiness and add length to your life is to have a close circle of friends. These are people you can talk to, share values and interests with, and keep each other's minds challenged.'

As much as we need them to function well and survive, however, friendships aren't always easy to navigate. From playground politics to standing at the school gates or setting up life in a new city, there are times in our lives when we all experience loneliness due to a lack of close connections. Rickman explains how loneliness can be a chronic feeling, 'like a hum of discontent', or a milder, uncomfortable but more

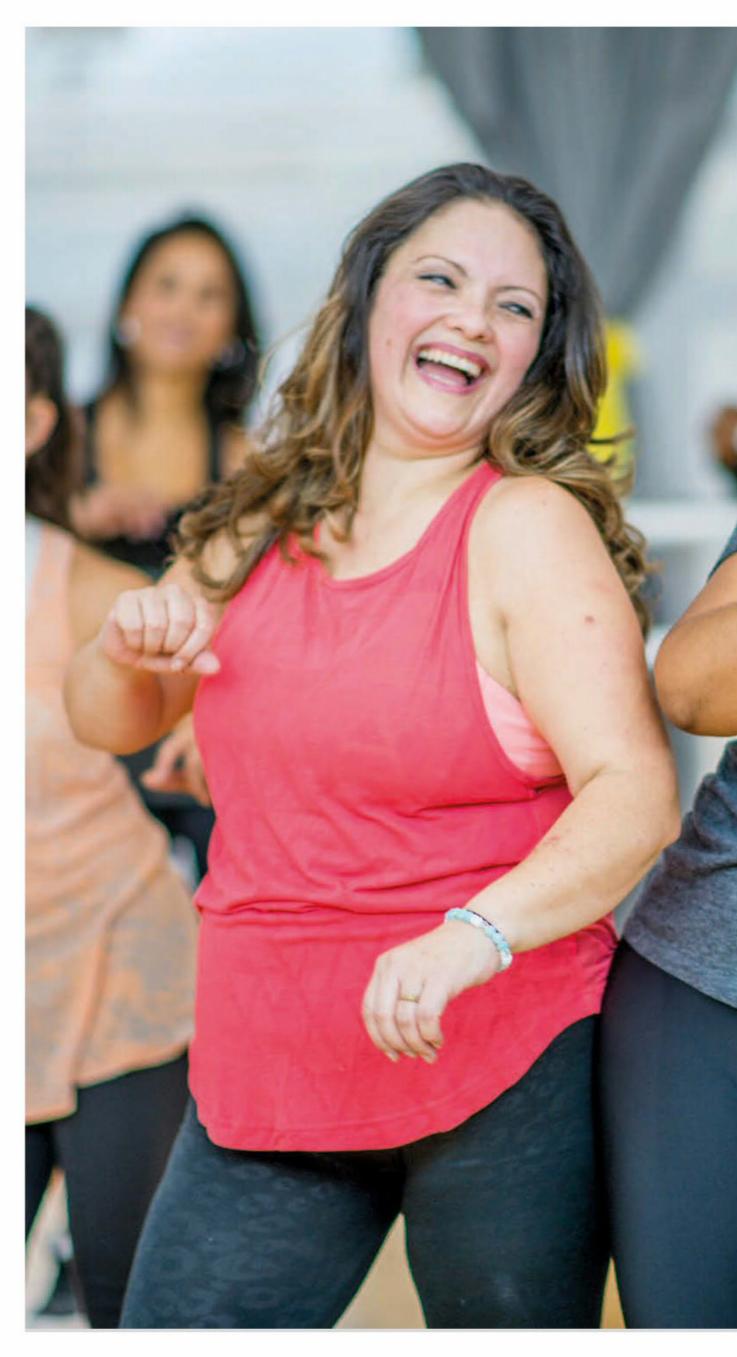


"Our friends aren't just good for a giggle; people with positive friendships live longer and healthier lives" transient feeling, like when you have FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), which is soothed once you feel included again. 'Fundamentally, loneliness is the cognitive discrepancy between our desired and actual social contact; the difference between the quality of relationships we have and the quality of relationships we wish we had (and need to have, so we may function well as humans).'

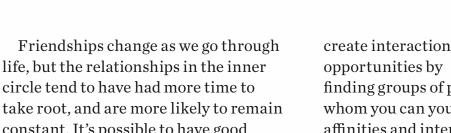
While you might get hung up on how many friends you should have, the experts agree that it's not the quantity but the quality of those relationships that matters. The most important thing is that the friends you have make you feel heard and held, and having one friend that does this is better than several more superficial relationships.

Of course, all friendships aren't equal, and Rickman describes three main types of connection (inner, middle and outer circle), which correspond to the three types of loneliness: emotional (intimate), social (relational) and existential (collective). 'We don't need to have people in every circle,' Rickman explains, 'but having at least one person in our inner circle is important.' This inner circle includes the close confidantes with whom we share deep bonds of trust and mutual support - someone we can count on to call in the middle of the night for support, should we need it. 'Having a relationship network of five or more key confidantes - which can include romantic partners, best friends and perhaps family members – who we can rely on and whose relationship we cherish, means we are less likely to be lonely,' explains Rickman.

In the middle circle are the casual friendships or family relationships people we see quite regularly, enjoy socialising with, make us laugh and can talk to, but don't tend to know on a deeper level. Then, in the outer circle are the weaker ties, with people such as colleagues and neighbours, fellow parents, or people we're in a group with. You might exchange small talk about less meaningful topics, but these are still important, comforting interactions. 'If you're experiencing loneliness, you can work on fostering all three types of connection, but prioritise the inner circle first,' advises Rickman.







take root, and are more likely to remain constant. It's possible to have good friends that you don't see very often, but those relationships should be strong enough to withstand periods of absence and change. 'Close friendships endure, but they take effort,' says Dr Tang. 'They require people staying in touch as lives diverge and change; they need to keep aligning, and to do that requires effort from both sides. Good friends are the relationships that result in emotional loneliness if we don't see them.'

If you're feeling lonely and disconnected, Dr Tang recommends picking up the phone and getting in touch with one of your friends who you trust and respect. 'We don't often deliberately lose touch with people – we just don't always find the time – and if you're worried about not having been in touch, it's likely they feel just as guilty, so don't let that stop you.'

Sometimes we need to focus more on making new friends, which can be difficult and nerve-wracking. 'When it comes to meeting people, you can't wait around for others to come to you,' says Rickman. 'You have to be proactive and create interaction opportunities by finding groups of people with whom you can you build on mutual affinities and interests.'

psychologies

DOSSIER

It can be helpful to practise some communication techniques, such as using eye contact, smiling, asking questions, listening, and responding accordingly. 'We all want to feel seen and heard, so listen to people when they talk to you and respond well.' And don't dismiss those casual friendships that can really help to combat feelings of social loneliness. 'It might be that you're craving a deep friendship, but it will take time to develop that relationship, so don't place too high an expectation on others at the start of an acquaintance.'

You could also find connection and friendship by showing support and kindness to others. As well as leaving you with the 'giver's glow', performing acts of kindness can help root us in our community and give us a sense of belonging. Likewise, if you reach out and ask for help, you're giving someone the opportunity to make a difference and feel good, and it will make you feel better, too, because a problem shared really is a problem solved.

"Friends should make
you feel heard and held,
and having one friend
that does this is better
than several more
superficial relationships"

psychologies.co.uk test

HOW CAN YOU BRING NEW PEOPLE INTO YOUR LIFE?

If you're craving new connections, friendships and relationships, take our test to find out what needs to change first

Tick the answers that most closely apply to you, then add up the symbols. Read the section, or sections, you ticked most, to find out what will help you feel more connected

1 Your deepest connections are with people who • Make the effort to see you	■ Worry about what to say	• Ask them to get involved in various things you're organising
■ Bring you out of yourself	5 At group events, you tend to ▼ Feel pressure to entertain	8 Relationships seem easier for people who ◆ Always seem to fit in
 Bring out the best in you 2 Your ideal social event involves Being in control of how long 	 Stay in the background Do the organising and clearing up Find a way to leave early 	 Know how to say no Can bounce back from rejection Don't overthink everything
you stay Something organised and	6 You are naturally drawn to people	9 You are at your best when you feel On familiar ground
planned in advance	who seem	Like you can finally relax
◆ Something with a definite focus♥ An invitation from an old friend	■ Brave and unconventional	◆ Like you fit in▼ Needed and useful
3 You'd socialise more if it didn't leave you feeling so	To get life's balance right	10 If someone seems to really like you, a niggling voice wonders if
V Unsettled ● Drained ◆ Self-critical ■ Anxious	7 Your usual response when you meet someone new is to ◆ Hold them at arm's length until you're sure you really like them	 ◆ They're your type of person
4 People would be surprised at how much you Worry about being alone	 ▶ Be yourself, but then critically dissect the conversation afterwards ▶ Ask loads of questions and seem very interested in their life 	Turn the page to find out how to deepen your connections



What will help you feel less lonely?



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♥

Self-belief

Does your desire to connect compete with your fear of rejection? When self-doubt sets in, socialising with new people can feel intimidating. It might feel safer to hold people at arm's length – but that can come across as lack of interest. Periods of loneliness can even undermine confidence in initiating social contact with people you know and trust; it's easy to get stuck in an overthinking trap, questioning whether reaching out is appropriate or welcome.

There's still a stigma attached to talking about isolation and loneliness, and it can feel like you've failed at something that everyone else seems to find easy. But opening up to someone you trust can make a big difference in helping you gain perspective on your feelings. Bear in mind that loneliness, like any challenging emotion, can put a negative filter on thoughts. As a counterbalance, before any social interaction, try reflecting on the successful and rewarding relationships in your life – past or present – to boost your confidence and optimism. And try making a point of really paying attention to small daily pleasures and achievements, and talking about them – a positive outlook will help yourself and others feel good.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ◆

Compassion

Loneliness often comes from a sense of being an outsider and feeling different from most people you meet. But what's often at the root of this feeling of isolation is a default mindset of self-criticism. After all, if you carry around a regularly updated mental inventory of your mistakes, or have a list of things that you struggle to accept about yourself, it makes sense that you may also struggle to truly accept that other people are also flawed.

Even when you work hard to be as kind and open-minded as you can, it can be frustrating when you find yourself being inwardly critical, judging people on their appearances, choices and behaviour, or just telling yourself they're different from you. Protecting yourself is a natural instinct when you feel continually undermined by a bully, including the one in your head, so it's not surprising that you feel on unsafe ground when you're meeting new people or those you don't know well. And focusing on people's differences gives you the perfect excuse not to take the risk of connecting more closely. Compassion for yourself and others is the key to combating loneliness for you. And the first step is changing the lens through which you view people, from 'How is this person different to me?' to 'What do we have in common?'



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY

Space

It may seem contradictory, but sometimes loneliness can be a side effect of an overly busy life. It's partly because overwhelm reduces our tolerance for the uncertainty that inevitably comes with social interactions. Overscheduling often starts as a protection against feeling alone, particularly during times of transition. But we can still feel lonely with a packed diary, if the bulk of our social contact doesn't feel rewarding. You may have tried to cut back on commitments when you feel exhausted, only to feel further isolated, so it's no wonder it's hard to resist the knee-jerk reaction of saying yes to everything again. It can feel like a vicious circle, especially if feeling overwhelmed also triggers self-doubt about why you 'can't cope', so socialising begins to feel daunting, even with people you know well.

If people see you as outgoing, it may seem a big leap to admit to feeling lonely, but dealing with this alone is not the solution. Start by taking a step back to assess your commitments and what you can let go of to create some space. Then, can you tolerate the uncomfortable feelings that come up while you adjust to transition? Resist resorting back to busy and you'll make space for meaningful connections.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY

Courage

Even if you're sociable and have a genuine curiosity and interest in others' lives, when you're naturally more introverted, it's normal to take time to be yourself with new people. In a group situation, your tendency may be to hold back and let others do the talking, which can come across as reserve. Worrying what others think of us can also be a powerful barrier to connecting, especially if your every social interaction triggers a mental post-mortem to rate your behaviour. And when you're super-conscious of saying or doing the right thing, you can end up presenting a different 'you' in every relationship, or simply finding an excuse not to go at all.

But taking a risk-averse approach to new friendships may mean missing out on connecting with a wider group of people, or taking casual friendships to a deeper level. When you struggle with social anxiety, it's easy to assume that everyone else finds friendships and relationships much easier than you do, but the truth is that many people share your anxieties, and work hard to hide it (as no doubt you do). It's not easy, but by being a bit braver and willing to devote more time to your relationships, you could create a shift, and may find the depth of connection that you are craving.



Why we need to talk about

loneliness

Despite being such a common emotion, loneliness remains a taboo subject. To break down the barriers and misconceptions, we asked our experts to share some surprising truths about loneliness...

You can have a lot of friends and be lonely

Loneliness has nothing to do with popularity – social butterflies feel lonely, too. Having a few good quality connections is more important and has a more positive effect on our wellbeing than having lots of poorer-quality ones. Successful people might be surrounded by people all day, but are particularly prone to loneliness, because friendships are difficult with people under your supervision. 'Loneliness goes much deeper than not having someone to "hang around with", it's about not feeling seen, heard, loved and appreciated,' says Dr Tang.

Loneliness can be a symptom of other problems

Many women around their mid to late 40s are experiencing peri-menopause, which often affects mood and sense of wellbeing. Dr Tang says that it's not unusual to suddenly feel exhausted, flat, teary or depressed - all of which have a knock-on effect for relationships. When you're exhausted and your mood is low, you don't tend to feel much like socialising. When you do go out, if you don't have a good time, you start to avoid it by cancelling arrangements, or turning down invitations. 'This can easily spiral into loneliness,' warns Dr Tang, who recommends anyone experiencing emotional health problems around mid-life talk to their GP about peri-menopause. Other life events that commonly affect women of this age like grief, divorce and 'empty nest syndrome' can all cause feelings of loneliness. Talking to others in similar situations about what you're going through will help reduce feelings of isolation.

A lot of lonely people are married

A marriage where you no longer feel appreciated or heard will lead to feelings of disconnection and loneliness. Unfortunately, familiarity can breed complacency, and it's often not a conscious thing. If this sounds familiar, relationship expert Anna Williamson, author of *Where Is The Love?* (Bloomsbury, £12.99), says the most important thing you can do is communicate. 'If we're not telling our

partners that there is a problem, then how are they supposed to know? You could write a letter, a poem or email, or leave a voice message – all are good ways to get the conversation flowing and kickstart any changes that might need to take place.'

Men get lonely too

Men are more prone to loneliness in midlife than women. 'While women tend to base friendships on social and emotional support, men are more likely to do so on shared activities, including work and sport,' says Brooks. This matters a lot for wellbeing, especially in later life. Men are also less likely to admit to feelings of loneliness or talk to their friends about it. If you think your partner might be feeling lonely, help him by encouraging him to talk about how he's feeling and to do things together to forge more intimate bonds with friends.

Talking about loneliness makes you feel less lonely

'We don't feel shameful when we say, "I'm hungry", but we might when we say, "I'm lonely",' says Rickman. 'Yet loneliness, like hunger, is simply a feeling that flags up that we're deficient in nutrients – of connection.' Often, by revealing something about yourself and making yourself vulnerable, you find yourself connecting with people on a deeper level. Talk about how you're feeling, whether it's with your friends, on an internet forum, or with a coach. You'll be surprised by how much better you feel.

You won't be lonely forever

'The good news is that while loneliness is unpleasant, it is resolvable, so you needn't remain feeling this way,' says Rickman. 'The first step is to cultivate the ability to be alone without feeling lonely, and the second is about connecting with the right people, so you spend time with those who make you feel good.' If you spend time with people who don't make you feel great about yourself, it can exacerbate feelings of loneliness. 'The better you know yourself, the more authentic relationships you'll develop with people you feel the deepest kinship with.'



How to connect more meaningfully and enjoy loving relationships with our partners, children, parents and friends



MACE: CETTY IMAGE

6 I turned my grief into something positive

Children's author and podcaster Mark Lemon was just 12 years old when his father was murdered, on 12 May 1992, 30 years ago this month. Since then, he has worked tirelessly to become a bereavement ambassador and a beacon of support to help guide others through the complex and undulating world of grief. Here, he talks candidly about his experiences, shares his advice for others facing loss and bereavement, and explains how you can find happiness in the most unlikely of places...

was 12 years old when my dad was murdered and my life changed forever. It was just before the end of the school day, and my teacher told me that my mum had asked me to go home immediately. I instinctively knew something very bad had happened. It was just minutes before the end of the school day: why couldn't it wait until I got back?

When I arrived home, I approached the house from the grassland in front, and felt that sense of foreboding even more. There was a police car in the driveway, and I heard the sound of my sister crying in the living room. My mum took me upstairs and told me that my dad had died. I remember crying for a minute or so, and then feeling like I had to get out of the house; it all seemed so surreal.

I cycled back to school. It was the end of the day by this point, and the kids were all leaving. I remember going up to a friend who had lost her dad a couple of years before, and telling her my dad was dead, before dropping to my knees in tears.





When I got home later that evening, my uncle sat me down and told me what had happened. I remember thinking Dad must have been in an accident in his car – he had a sporty red one, and I thought he must have crashed. So it was shocking to learn he had been murdered – especially when I then discovered that he had been trying to help someone. Our cleaner had been going through a difficult break-up with her husband, and had her post delivered to our house so her partner

"Grief is not a quick-fix process; it's not even a fixable process"



couldn't intercept it. Dad had taken her mail round to her, but her partner saw him, stole a knife and went to the house, where they were having coffee. There was a scuffle and my dad got the better of him, but then the man grabbed the knife and stabbed my dad 17 times. He was stabbed through the heart, which killed him instantly.

Be kind to yourself

Suddenly, my entire life was different. When you lose your role model – someone you used to play sports with, who would take you to all these places, and who you looked up to – it's really hard. When that person is gone in the blink of an eye, your whole world falls apart.

I remember the morning after it happened. For a split second when I woke up, I'd forgotten and everything was normal. But then it dawned on me that it wasn't okay, and that Dad was really gone.

It took me a very long time to be able to get to a place where I could remember the happy times with my dad. It's as if your brain won't let you remember, because it's too painful. Even 30 years on, it can be a challenge. It's like a coping mechanism and I still work through it today – but that's life living with grief.

I've found that talking and writing has been a big help. It's helped me acknowledge what happened, and has made me see these feelings are completely normal. For many years, I used to question why I was still feeling this way, but you come to realise there is no set pattern to grief. It's not a quick-fix process; it's not even a fixable process. No one has a magic wand to make you feel fine; it's not linear, and you're not going to be 'healed'. It's something you have to live with, and you take comfort wherever you can find it.

The biggest thing to understand is that no day is ever the same in grief. Every minute, every hour, and every day you can change how you feel. It might sound like a cliché, but it's important to do what works for you. Some days I think: 'I shouldn't be feeling sad today – the sun is shining, and there's so much to be grateful for.' But these feelings are normal.

For someone recently bereaved, who has just gone through an unbearable loss, please take it easy on yourself. I'm not sure whether time is a healer as such, but



it *will* show you how to live with these feelings you're experiencing. And through your own unique journey, you'll get to the point of understanding yourself that little bit better.

What grief taught me

Grief has shown me how to be empathetic and compassionate towards others. You never know what people are going through; everyone's grief is individual, and I always try to treat people with kindness and respect. It's also taught me about my own feelings. Once you get to the point of understanding that the grief never goes away, you have the power within you to let your feelings in and to process them.

Grief is my Superpower is the name of my podcast, which might seem an odd statement – but it's true in many ways. Grief has given me a certain amount of resilience, and if there's something I want, I can be quite singleminded about it. Life is short and for living. Ultimately, it makes you stronger. You've gone through this awful thing, but you're still standing and still functioning.

Helping others

I often get asked about how people should help their friend or loved one through grief; it might sound obvious, but the main thing is letting them know you're there for them, whether it's in a text or simply sitting down and saying, 'I'm here when you need me.' In the early stages, practical help, such as picking the kids up, getting some shopping or cooking a meal, can also be hugely helpful. You might not be able to take their pain away, but your support will mean the world. One of the most difficult things is when people avoid you because they don't know what to say. My logic is this: that person has already felt unbearable pain, so anything you say won't make them feel any worse.

During the early stages of grief there are the flowers, the hugs at the funeral, and all the people around you – it's like a

wave of support – but after a while, that disappears and you're left alone with the reality of what's happened. Reassuring a friend that you will still be there, even after time has passed, can be a real comfort. Again, it comes down to regularly showing up and letting them know that you're there for them. A simple text asking how they are or whether they need anything is all it takes. Even if they don't reply, that's kind of the answer in itself and you shouldn't feel disheartened.

Getting over the loss of his

dad has been a lifelong

journey for Mark





I'm married now and have two
wonderful children of my own,
though that in itself is tough. As
you reach different milestones,
it becomes more obvious that
someone is missing. I often think
what it would be like to just be able
to have a chat with my dad now.
Thankfully, I've always felt like he
is around me – but I appreciate not
everyone shares that belief.

It's 30 years since Dad's death and we always mark it. We make pancakes in the morning, a bit like on a birthday. We don't want it to be sad; we want it to be a day to remember him. My kids are seven and 10 now, so they've become more involved. We set a place for him at the table, and the kids write a note for Grandpa and attach it to a balloon.

There are things throughout the day that might trigger me, and I do like to have some quiet time to reflect, but it's all part of the process. Life moves forward and you have to move with it. Your sadness and the way you deal with it might change over time, but that's okay – it's perfectly normal. Even in the face of grief, you can go on to live a wonderful life.

Mark's podcast, Grief is my Superpower, aims to show how it's possible to live a positive and fulfilling life, even in the aftermath of loss. Tune in on Spotify. Follow @marklemonofficial

Tm not sure whether time is a healer, but it can show you how to live with the feelings you're experiencing"

NEW FROM KATIE PIPER

of Little Bit of Faith

CAN TAKE YOU A LONG WAY

'A must read to brighten up your days.'

Laura Whitmore

'Katie's zest for life is a tonic for the soul.'

Susanna Reid

'Faith, positivity and spirituality can be such a powerful tool in life. No one epitomizes this more than Katie Piper does.'

Nadia Sawalha

'If you're in need of something to lift you up and fill you with confidence, then this book is for you.'

Alice Liveing

'A gift of a book that every one of us can learn and grow from.'

Julia Samuel

'A wonderful, uplifting book for those who need daily guidance and light in their lives.

Louise Pentland







A Little Bit

of Faith

Hopeful affirmations

for every day of the year

















'Katie is such an

empowering person' Matt Haig Kalie radiates positivity

> Laura Whitmore

Our agony aunt, Mary Fenwick, offers a new perspective on whatever is troubling you



After 18 years as a single parent, I had almost convinced myself that I did not need anyone additional in my life. But with both my children now in their 20s and living independently, recently, close friends – who all have partners – have suggested I join a dating site. I have a clear idea of the kind of partner I would hope to find, but little confidence that my search will be successful. Should I be brave enough to at least give it a try – or resign myself to a life of bespoke solitude?

I love the way you write: your personality comes across even in this short letter, and I encourage you to bring that into your dating life. Online dating is an efficient way to meet people and, even pre-pandemic, 39 per cent of couples in the UK met virtually, compared to 20 per cent meeting through friends.

Social psychology researcher Rachel New uses her scientific and practical experience to help people understand the world of 21st-century dating. She runs an eight-week online programme, which starts with learning to feel good about yourself, and also covers the costs and benefits of online dating, and how to work out what your own needs are.

New suggests the dating app Bumble, which puts women in control of the process (you have to make the first move), as a great place to start. Although you have clear ideas at the moment,

the things that initially attract us to somebody are not always the qualities that build a deeper relationship. One example is conflict styles – does the other person sulk, or can they make a relaxed comment about a different point of view?

It might be helpful to know that, on average, one in ten first dates leads to a second date. In the meantime, how can you make the process fun? Could you create opportunities to try a hobby or go to a concert with someone new? You might even consider a video meeting as a first step, to check that the person seems trustworthy. Do you feel at ease and able to be yourself?

Even though initial contact might be online, it's the quality of connection in real life that matters. If being able to spend some time in 'bespoke solitude' remains important to you, it will also matter to a person who cares about you.

rachelnewdatingcoach.co.uk

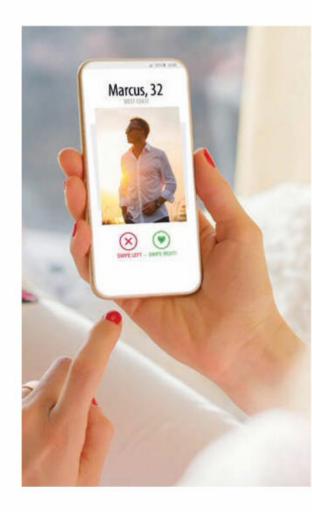
"Even pre-pandemic, 39 per cent of couples in the UK met virtually"



MARY FENWICK is a writer, speaker and executive coach. She is also a mother, divorcee and widow.

GOTA QUESTION FORMARY? Email letters@psychologies. co.uk, with 'Mary' in the subject line.

FOR MORE about Mary's work in leadership and team coaching, her 'Writing back to happiness' programme and free resources, go to maryfenwick.com





I find it easy to help others – so why am I incapable of helping myself?

Helping others with life's challenges comes naturally to me, yet I cannot for the life of me sort out my own family problems. I divorced my husband of 19 years, due to 'unreasonable behaviour', as it was then labelled (now known as 'coercive control'). At the time, my son was 16 years old and at college, and I left the family home with my daughter, who was just 10. My son is now married and living abroad, but frequently levels accusations at me such as: 'you're not a mother' and 'you're playing happy families, when clearly we're not'. My only contact for him is via email, and I feel so sad and confused. It brings all the trauma of the abuse and my divorce back to the surface, and it's exhausting.

I'm so sorry to hear about this pain, which you detail in your longer letter. Like you, I welcomed the 2015 change in UK law that, in my case, made it easier to explain why I'd left my first marriage.

It's understandable that you have a desire to help others – a need characterised by Carl Jung in 1951, in the phrase 'wounded healer'. But we all need to accept our own limitations (for instance, a doctor wouldn't treat their own family).

I discussed this further with therapist Lou Lebentz, who says: 'It's more useful to speak from the scar than the wound.' By this, she means that we need to be reasonably sure that we've dealt with our own issues before we get involved with those of others, even our own children.

When you say that the awful abuse you suffered comes back to mind, it sounds as if it is still affecting you in the present. Again, I will use my own example to say that there are certain incidents that, previously, I was unable to speak about without hyperventilating. But, after therapy, I can now talk about them calmly, and know that they stay firmly in the past.

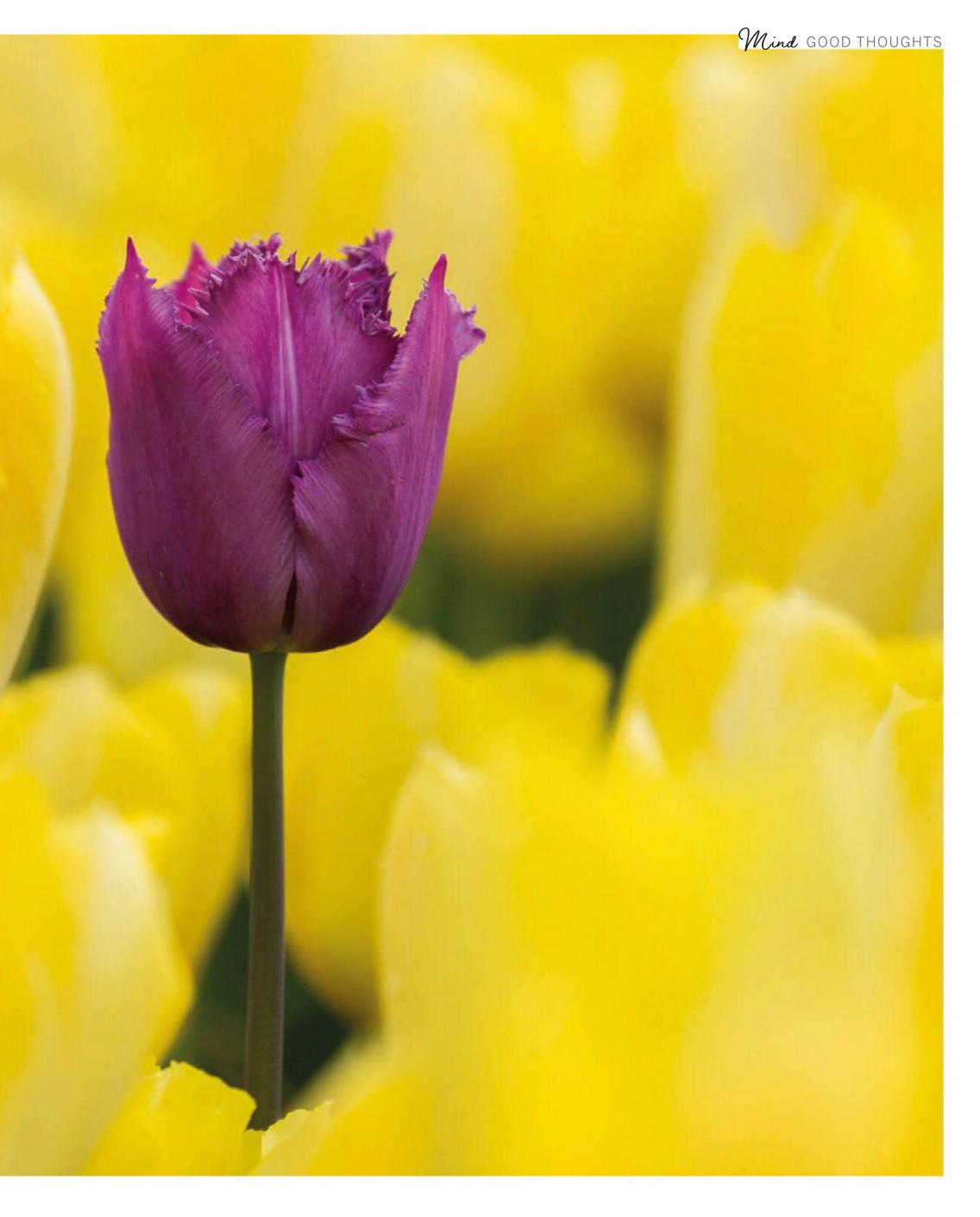
Lebentz suggests that you take a look at the support group Co-dependents Anonymous. Co-dependency is about your own happiness becoming too tied up with that of other people. It's not necessarily negative (for example, it's a natural state when you have a baby), but some people find they can't give up these roles. Like other support groups, there's an initial process of exploring whether the group feels right for you. The only requirement is a desire for healthy, loving relationships, and there's a 12-step recovery programme, if that's what you choose.

Remember, it took strength and courage to walk away from nearly two decades of abuse. Those qualities will serve you in this next stage of becoming free of the legacy.

codauk.org

Don't feel stupid if you don't like what everyone else pretends to love"

Emma Watson



How to talk to your kids about... OPPORTUGE How to talk to your kids about... OPPORTUGE How to talk to your kids about... OPPORTUGE How to talk to your kids about...

Whether it's RuPaul's Drag Race or playground chatter that sparks debate, young people today are discussing gender more than ever. Verity Gough explores how we can join the conversation

y 11-year-old daughter and I have a daily debrief at bedtime, where I hear all about her day. She tells me the banal stuff: which teacher she likes best, what she's making in DT, who fancies who. But, most notably, since starting secondary school in September, she talks about gender. She confidently uses terminology that is still a little unfamiliar to me; non-binary, genderqueer. A straw poll of my friends with children of the same age confirms that it's not just my daughter and her school – it seems that it's every child in every school, everywhere. A quick search on TikTok and Instagram brings up a plethora of gender-diverse tweens using new pronouns, challenging my rather pre-fixed notions of identity. And in the past month alone there have been repeated headlines in which our political leaders are being asked challenging questions around gender identity issues that are causing quite the furore. If you want to make it easier to join in the conversation with your young person in a more calm and collected way at home, then read on. After all, it's obvious that this is a subject that we need to broach. Gender identity has entered into the realm of topics that are broadly discussed in our society today. And while you might be perfectly happy to chat about the latest gender fluid popstars or which actor is now non-binary over a glass of wine with your friends, suddenly being dropped into an indepth discussion of the differences



between gender fluid and non-binary or cis and trans with your own youngster can provoke feelings of fear and confusion. For one thing, when you're used to being the authority on most subjects, it can be disorientating to find your little love is more clued up than you are. But it's important to remember that talking to your child about these issues in an open and loving way shows them that you are there for them, whatever is going on in their lives. Expressing your unconditional love for them like this is a great way to strengthen your bond at an important time.

Perceptions of gender

Even before you begin talking to your child about this topic, you are likely to be examining your own thoughts about identity. One of the most powerful things that you come to realise as you go on this journey of education with your child is that gender is a social construct, and has changed much over the years. 'Often, parents will say: "This was how I was raised, and this is how I will raise my own children," but these social constructs are handed down – acknowledging this is important, but we have to see beyond the binary,' says Rebecca Minor, a gender specialist who works with trans and gender non-conforming young people and their

"It's important to remind yourself that you can grow and learn with your child"

families (genderspecialist.com). 'Parents think they're supposed to have all the answers, and if they don't, it means they're doing something wrong. It's important to remind yourself that you can grow and learn with your child,' she adds.

How these conversations go will largely depend on how you already communicate within your family. If you've already discussed sensitive issues – such as sex, drugs and online safety, for example – why should this talk be any different? Choosing your moment is paramount, advises psychotherapist Siobhan Triggs, who runs specialist courses on child and teen mental health for parents, schools and community groups, and offers counselling services for young people (eclipsepsychotherapy.co.uk). She advises





that taking a gentle and honest approach is the best tack to help keep emotions in check. 'Remember, this is an invitation to talk and it's important to go at your child's pace. If they don't want a discussion right now, just let them know you're there if ever they want to chat. You may feel it has fallen on deaf ears, but rest assured they have received the most important message – that you care, and you're there for them when they are ready.'

She recommends putting yourself in their shoes, and thinking back to times that you've discussed a tricky issue with someone and how you wanted to be treated. Try to do the same for your child, bearing in mind that communicating thoughts and feelings at this age isn't always easy. If you disagree with them, take a breath and a step back. It's your role to keep any tempers under control right now. If you're starting to feel angry or frustrated, maybe you can ask yourself why. Perhaps it's because your child is growing up and starting to make their own choices.

Try to allow your child the space and time they need to work through how they feel without imposing your own views. 'The worst thing you can do is be dismissive of feelings or respond in unhelpful ways, such as with anger or not taking them seriously. This can give the message to your child that their feelings aren't important, that it's wrong to feel a certain way, that it's not safe to open up and, if they do, they are shamed, punished or rejected. As a result, they're much less likely to come to you for help and support with other issues, too, leaving them feeling isolated and unsupported,' adds Triggs.

Exploring identity

When you have the discussion, if you discover that it is an important issue to them, remember that young people have always talked about sex and relationships to figure out who they are. Technology has enabled them to connect with others who are also exploring their identities and who, a generation earlier, might have never found the right words to talk about how they're feeling. This can leave us, like our parents before us, feeling completely out of the loop.

'The notion of your child "questioning" themselves, or challenging the ideals you have, can be crushing,' says Minor. 'Fear and shame disconnect us, and even the most loving parents can be afraid and not able to show up in the way that they want to for their child. These feelings can be overwhelming for parents who might blame themselves or think that they did something wrong, that their child is confused, or that it's just a phase.'

Of course, gender-curious tweens and teens *might* just be flexing their identity muscles, pushing the boundaries of what is and is not appealing to them and exploring different ways of expressing themselves. However, much of the official material on this area can be rather bewildering, and focus more on adults who have already done their exploration than younger people who are just looking to find out more about who they might really be inside. Sifting through the sea of information on

the subject can be bewildering (for you and them) and, often, resources tend to focus on the medical pathways available to adults wanting to transition, rather than approaching it more from an informational point of view.

I feel fortunate that my daughter is happy to discuss what is going on in her world with me, and hope we can keep lines of communication open so that she's never left to deal with such a topic on her own. Because one difficult issue, says Minor, is that often when serious questions about gender identity come up, they are usually surrounded by negativity, or are broached in a reactive way at a time of crisis. 'Perhaps you've had a call from the school over concerns about your child's mental health, or you've noticed that they are not themselves,' she says. 'The gender diversity piece gets linked with bad things happening.

'Instead, you need to see it as a possibility for a more expansive understanding of gender, and a possibility for your child to feel more freedom and be more like themselves,' she says. To help break down the discussion, Minor has curated a raft of resources and insightful blog posts on her website that



offer helpful advice as well as a list of terminology. 'Reading up on gender diversity will give you a broader understanding of what your child may be experiencing, which – in turn – helps forge a deeper empathy, providing a new perspective that separates your own feelings from theirs,' says Triggs. 'It's guaranteed that there are other parents out there who are going through the same issues as you. Look for some support groups on Facebook or locally – peer support can be invaluable.'

It is natural to want to remove your child's worries, but instead focus on providing love, support and understanding. I have a friend with a refreshing point of view: rather than fear of the unknown, she is excited for this next generation. They can play around with their identity and push the boundaries, which she perceives as positive. And simply opening the lines of communication with your youngster is the first step to supporting them. 'This is a parenting challenge – but not one that you can't overcome,' says Minor. 'Keep coming back to the fact that you love your child – and what a gift it is when they trust you with letting you truly know them.'

CHEAT SHEET

We know you probably know this, but just a quick refresher so you're on top of the key ideas...

Cisgender or Cis Someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender dysphoria The term used to describe when a person experiences discomfort or distress because they feel a mismatch between their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity. This is also the clinical diagnosis for someone who doesn't feel comfortable with the sex they were assigned.

Gender expression This is how a person chooses to outwardly express their gender, within the context of societal expectations of gender.

Gender identity A person's innate sense of their own gender, whether male, female or something else (see non-binary, below), which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth.

LGBTQ+ The acronym for lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, and questioning.

Non-binary An umbrella term for people whose gender identity doesn't sit comfortably with 'man' or 'woman'. Non-binary identities are varied and can include people who identify with some aspects of binary identities, while others reject them entirely.

Queer A term used by those wanting to reject specific labels of romantic orientation, sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Source: stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/ faqs-and-glossary/list-lgbtq-terms



NEXT STEPS

Read Beyond The Gender
Binary by Alok Vaid-Menon
(Penguin Putnam, £6.99)
Listen TILT Parenting Podcast:
Dr Laura Anderson on Gender
Nonconformity and Differently
Wired Kids; tiltparenting.com
Visit genderspecialist.com,
and check out the helpful 'Ever
Evolving Glossary of Gender
and Sexuality Terms' for even
more indepth information

19TH JUNE

Happy Father's Day

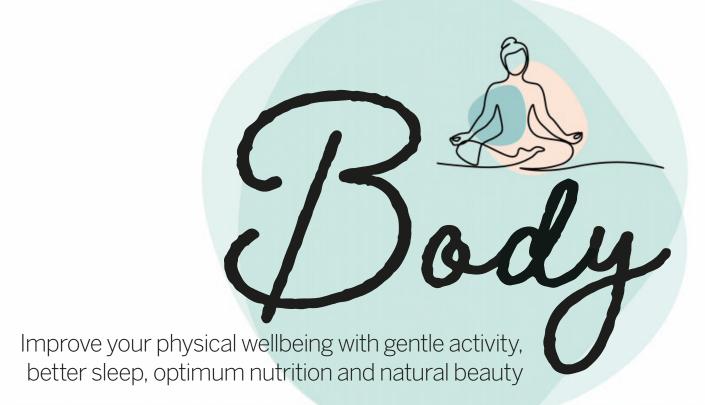
We have something for everyone this Father's Day. Whether he's into farming, sports, cars or photography, we have a subscription for every interest and hobby.



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"Health is the thing that makes you feel that now is the best time of the year" Franklin P Adams

MAGE: GETTY IMAGE



MINDFUL WELLNESS



Our Acting Wellness Director, Elizabeth Bennett, shares new research, strategies and wisdom on all aspects of wellbeing, from activity and nourishment to meditation and conscious beauty

Lat well Fill up on fibre We all know how important fibre is for digestion, as well as for warding off diseases, such as stroke, type 2 diabetes and bowel cancer. However, new research indicates it may also play a part in preventing dementia. Research from the University of Tsukuba, which looked at more than 3,500 Japanese adults, found that those who consumed more fibre were less likely to go on to develop the disease. It's time to pack your plate with lentils, beans, nuts, whole grains and veggies, such as broccoli, carrots and beetroot.



Beat the bloat 5 AYURVEDIC TIPS

Ayurveda is an ancient system of health, founded in India. Here, pharmacist and Ayurvedic practitioner Lara Ecroyd shares her Ayurvedic wisdom for reducing bloating and improving digestion.

Spice things up
Spices increase digestive
strength (known in Ayurveda
as agni) by stimulating digestive
enzymes. Ginger and fennel are
great choices to add to meals, due
to their anti-bloating properties.

Reduce your intake

of raw foods
Raw foods are harder to digest.
Over time, this can weaken agni and increase bloating. If you bloat easily, try sticking to predominantly cooked foods to reduce the digestive workload.

Drink warm water and avoid ice-cold drinks
Cold water, particularly during cooler months of the year, can reduce digestive strength and contribute to bloating. Conversely, warm water supports agni, so it is beneficial for those who bloat easily.

Chew properly
Chewing works to mechanically break down food and also helps in the production of digestive enzymes. Not chewing enough can increase fermentation and excess gas production in the gut. Chew each mouthful at least 30 times, or until you have achieved a purée-like consistency.

Ginger tea
Ginger has many benefits, and in Ayurveda is known as the universal medicine. Ajwain has anti-flatulence properties. After meals, try adding 1–2 slices of fresh ginger and half a teaspoon of ajwain seeds to hot water. Let it infuse for 5 minutes, strain and drink.

Make ajwain and



Aubergine and broccoli coconut curry

Amok is Cambodia's national dish. Lemongrass, galangal and fresh turmeric provide its distinctive character, all of which are here in this vegan version. Serve with jasmine rice.

Serves 4-6

- 3 tbsp coconut oil
- 2 red onions, thinly sliced
- 4 fresh or dried makrut lime leaves, fine central ribs removed
- 2 large aubergines, trimmed and cut into bite-sized pieces
- 800ml coconut milk
- 150g broccoli florets and stalks, chopped
- 200g frozen peas
- sea salt
- spring onions, sliced, to garnish

For the curry paste

- 6 garlic cloves, chopped
- 6 fresh or dried Makrut lime leaves, central ribs removed
- 2-3 fresh red chillies, ideally Thai chillies, to taste, chopped
- 15g shallots, chopped
- ¼ lemongrass stalk, outer layers removed and the stalk bashed and finely chopped
- 3cm piece of galangal, peeled and finely chopped
- 1cm piece of fresh turmeric, peeled and grated, or 1 tsp ground turmeric

- 4 tbsp freshly squeezed lime juice
- 4 tsp Demerara sugar

1 First, make the curry paste. Put all the ingredients in a food processor and process until a smooth paste forms, scraping down the side of the bowl as necessary. Set aside. 2 Heat a wok over a high heat. Add the coconut oil and swirl it around until it melts. Add the red onions, along with a pinch of salt, and stir-fry until softened. Add the makrut lime leaves and aubergine, and continue stirring to sear the aubergines. 3 Lower the heat to medium-high, add the curry paste and stir for 2-3 minutes to cook out the rawness. Stir in the coconut milk and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat to the point where the mixture just simmers. and leave for about 10 minutes, until the aubergine is half tender. 4 Stir in the broccoli and a splash of water, if necessary, so there is enough liquid to just cover the vegetables, and simmer for a further 10 minutes. Add the peas and continue simmering until all the vegetables are hot and tender. Taste and adjust the salt, if necessary, then garnish with spring onions and serve.

Curry Everyday by Atul Kochhar (Bloomsbury, £26). Photography by Mike Cooper



Mind

LET'S CHAMPION CREATIVITY

Whether it's music. movement or art, as children we tend to embrace our creativity. Yet, as we age and become self-conscious of our abilities, many of us declare ourselves as without creative ability. Interesting new research from The Ohio State University, however, has found that anyone can be trained to be creative. no matter how old they are. Working with the US army, the researchers have developed a new method of training people in creativity, based on telling stories.



Book pick

Bittersweet by Susan Cain

From the author who brought us the bestselling Quiet – a book that revolutionised how the world sees introverts – comes a new release that will

alter your perception of the world. *Bittersweet* explores the idea of embracing the title notion – a tendency to feel a sense of longing, poignancy and sorrow. Think revelling in sad music or finding comfort in a rainy day. Cain shows how a bittersweet state of mind is the quiet force that helps us find creativity and connection.



Bittersweet by Susan Cain (Penguin, £20)

Get more creative with a course

FUTURE LEARN

From baking to drawing to learning a musical instrument, Future Learn has a course for you. Even better, the majority are free. The digital education platform offers an ever-changing line up of online courses from leading universities or organisations.

futurelearn.com

DOMESTIKA

Perhaps you have always wanted
to try calligraphy; maybe you've been
yearning to brush up your watercolour
skills; or perhaps you're looking to finally
get your head around graphic design.
Domestika has it all, with its range of
professionally produced
online courses.

domestika.org

CURTIS BROWN CREATIVE

Fancy trying your hand at writing?
Curtis Brown Creative, the school from
the top London literary agency, is on hand
to help. Its roster of acclaimed writers
and agents run courses from complete
beginners to those further along
their writing journey.

curtisbrowncreative.co.uk

Move well

Head out for a hike

As the weather warms up and thoughts turn to summer trips, Sweaty Betty has you covered when it comes to hiking gear that's practical, comfortable and – whisper it – looks really nice, too. Plus, it's suitable whatever the weather throws at you!



3 yoga poses for Glowing skin

Yoga teacher Libby Stevenson shares three yoga poses that nourish the skin by improving circulation and eliminating toxins from the body.

Downward facing dog

The head below the heart promotes more efficient circulation of blood to all the organs of your body, including the skin. Start on hands and knees. Press into your hands and lift your knees and hips. Keep your head between your arms, toes in line with heels and feet a comfortable distance apart. Bring your chest towards your thighs. Knees can be bent and heels can be raised.

Seated spinal twist
This abdominal twist squeezes the digestive organs to stimulate the elimination of toxins from the gut. Sit with legs stretched out, spine upright, hands on mat by hips. Cross your left leg over the right, with the sole of your left foot flat on the mat. Hug your left knee with the right arm and place your right hand on the outer thigh of your left leg. Inhale, then on the exhale, keeping sit bones on the mat, twist to the left (left hand is on the mat with fingers pointing away from the body). Turn your head to look over the left shoulder.

Legs up the wall

A blissfully relaxing pose that improves circulation and relaxes the gut, for more efficient digestion. Start sitting, with knees bent and the side of your body making contact with a wall. Spin your body so your legs flip up onto the wall, while your hips, spine and head are on the mat. Place your arms away from your body, palms facing up. Place a cushion under your lower back for more comfort.

NEVER FORGET Now, you can add improved memory to the long list of benefits gained by regular exercise. A meta-analysis of 3,000 patients over 36 studies, conducted by the University of Pittsburgh, found that adults may be able to prevent declines in a certain kind of memory by exercising three times a week. Time to start scheduling more movement into your diary!



Look well, naturally—

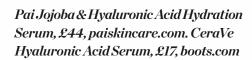
WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH...

HYALURONIC ACID?

While the name may suggest otherwise, hyaluronic acid is not an acid after all, but a sugar molecule.

Found naturally in the skin, it's what keeps your

complexion looking plump. It's superpower? Holding onto water and keeping skin hydrated. HA, as it is often known, can hold up to 1000 times its weight in water – impressive stuff. Best of all? It can be incorporated into your skincare to improve hydration and, subsequently, give you plumper, more glowing skin.





BRAND WE LOVE: UPCIRCLE

Affordable, sustainable and good for your skin? UpCircle ticks all the boxes. The vegan and cruelty-free brand specialises in using ingredients that might have ended up in the bin – think waste

coffee, avocado stones or fruit from the

juicing industry. And it's just been accredited as plastic negative: not only does it do everything to remove plastic from its brand, it also invests in projects that clear up plastic from the environment.

Organic Face Serum with Coffee Oil, £14.99; Hand and Body Lotion with Bergamot Water, £14.99. Both upcirclebeauty.com







3 massage tools to try

Massaging your face is a lovely self-care ritual that not only helps you feel more relaxed and relieves tension in your face, but also benefits skin. It does this by boosting circulation to create glow, helping to drain toxins in your face, and combatting puffiness. While you can massage with your hands, these helpful tools make light work of the exercise. Use a light oil or moisturiser on your skin, and then work upwards and outwards across your face. Working into the jaw line, along the cheekbones and across the forehead can be particularly beneficial.





-Good mood food -

RADIANT RADISHES

This eager veggie appears early in spring, and boasts a whole host of body and brain-boosting benefits

art of the nutritious cruciferous vegetable family, the radish is renowned for its health-giving qualities, along with its peppery flavour. This versatile veggie can be eaten raw, cooked or even pickled. Radishes contain large quantities of vitamin C and are also purveyors of energising potassium, which can help to reduce blood pressure and the anxiety that accompanies it. These bright red spheres are low in calories and low on the food waste scale, as you can even cook and eat their green tops. Our expert nutritionist, Alison Cullen, is on hand to share the many advantages adding radishes to your dishes may bring...

Soothe inflammation

'Radishes add to the benefits of a plantbased diet in countering the inflammation that is part of so many degenerative diseases, including many mental health issues,' says Cullen. 'A juicy radish as a regular part of your menu plan will also stimulate bile production and help you to metabolise those healthy fats that keep your brain cells functioning well.'

Boost blood flow

'The natural nitrates in radishes help to improve blood flow to your vital organs,' adds Cullen, 'including the brain, which always benefits from a boost of slickly delivered blood, bearing its gifts of oxygen, glucose and other nutrients.

These natural nitrates are also thought to have antimicrobial qualities, which help to prevent the growth of bad bacteria.

Note that natural nitrates differ in their health effects from nitrates that are added to foods such as processed meats, which are best avoided.' avogel.co.uk

The Greek name for the radish, Raphamus, means 'appearing quickly', as they are often the first vegetable to appear in the spring.

Why not
grow your own
spicy radish sprouts?
Perfect for adding to soups
and salads. A.Vogel's
BioSnacky Little Radish
Seeds are ready to eat after
about five days. £1.99,
avogel.co.uk

CULINARY CREATIONS

'Older radishes can become woody as they age, so shop fresh,' says Cullen. Your gut wants the fibre they offer, but not in woody form. Including more fibre in your diet means a happier gut microbiome, which is increasingly understood to contribute to good mental health.

Once you've selected the perfect radish, you can...

- Sauté it along with the onions, chilli and garlic in a curry
- Roast with garlic to produce a power-coupling antioxidant
- Add to a salad for extra zing
- Pair with radicchio lettuce to accompany a main meal
- Add slices to a sandwich
- Eat on its own as a low-calorie, crunchy and tangy snack!

Missed our feature on the gut-brain connection last month?

Don't worry, find it here: shop.kelsey.co.uk/psychologies-magazine

WALKYOUR WAY TO MENTAL WELLBEING

We celebrate National Walking Month, as whether it's an all-day hike, a saunter around a local beauty spot, or a brisk walk through city streets, walking comes with a whole host of benefits for body and mind

better we feel when we get out of the house and blow the cobwebs away with a good old stroll. Physiologically, walking helps to get oxygenated blood circulating around your body and to your vital organs, including the brain, which is essential for uplifting your mood. In addition, it provides you with a bit of time and space to free your mind and focus on your surroundings. Walking is an effective form of mindfulness, which allows you to park your worries, even if just for a few hours, thus lowering stress.

There's also an abundance of evidence that shows that walking with worries can be a lot easier than sitting with them. This is because, as we walk, the neurons in our brain start to make new pathways – meaning you might just stumble upon a solution to a predicament you'd never have found, had you sat at home stewing on it instead. This boost of brain activity also helps develop our creative side, too.

Here, we chat to award-winning author and walking enthusiast Annabel Streets about easy ways we can all give our walks a mental-wellbeing boost...

BOOST YOUR VISTA VISION

'In today's modern world, it's no surprise to hear that most of us spend our days focused on a screen,' says Streets. 'We've become quite accustomed to it, but it's actually very stressful for our bodies, particularly our eyes. A really simple thing we can do to combat the effects of this is to go for a walk. By all means, take your phone for emergencies, but try to leave it in your bag or pocket, and focus instead on what's ahead of you. Lift your gaze towards the treetops and beyond – over the rolling hills, across the fields, past the clouds or over the rooftops – whatever's in front of you, look ahead as far as you can. This sort of gazing into the distance will boost what's known as your vista vision and is incredibly restful and restorative for your eyes and mind. This will also automatically reduce the amount of cortisol – the stress hormone – flowing around your body, allowing tension to simply melt away.

'Another reason we enjoy walking in hills and mountains and other places where there are good views is due to something innate and evolutionary from our early existence. It's a type of safety feature – when we can see out for miles, we can see there are no predators or enemies, meaning we feel instinctively safer and more at ease.'





HARNESS HAPPINESS WITH WATER

Walking along the promenade with the sound of the waves lapping against the shore; tiptoeing over stepping stones through a babbling brook; sauntering by a flowing river; meandering around a peaceful lake...

Anyone who has walked by water will know it's a truly uplifting experience, and there's a scientific reason for this: 'It dates back thousands of years and is hardwired into our DNA,' says Streets. 'Water equals survival. When our ancestors heard the sound of water, it signified life and somewhere that would provide the food and drink needed to survive. Things may be different now, in that we don't have to hunt for our food, and water flows freely into our homes, but these innate feelings are still within us.

'Because light is reflected off the water's surface, you're exposed to twice the level of light when walking close by. When light falls on our skin, it creates the hormone serotonin – known as our feelgood or happy hormone – so it stands to reason the more light we see, the happier we feel.'

Walk further with friends

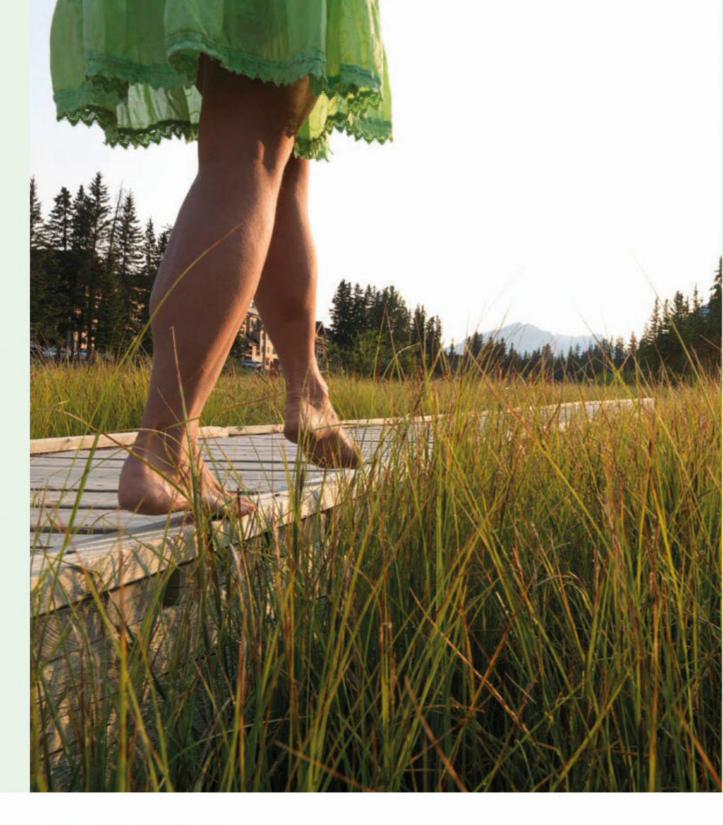
'Walking alone is ideal if you feel in need of time for reflection,' explains Streets. 'But walking with friends can have huge benefits, too. If you're taking on a challenging route, then walking with others can be extremely motivating; studies show that when you walk with a friend, distances seem less intimidating and heights don't seem so high. This is because you're chatting with people and thinking of other things, rather than focusing on a route's difficulty level. You're also motivated and encouraged by the presence of others. A recent study shows that if you are on your own and the walk suddenly appears to be getting the better of you, simply imagining a friend with you encourages you to push on. It's also a fantastic bonding experience - conquering something with others brings you closer and gives you that shared sense of achievement.'



FEEL GROUNDED WITH BARE FEET

'It may be a slightly more obscure and niche area of the walking world,' says Streets, 'but a fantastic way to achieve serious relaxation benefits is with a spot of barefoot walking.

'Barefoot walking is exactly as it sounds - walking barefoot without socks or footwear - and it's soared in popularity in recent years. It's a renowned sensory and psychological experience. Barefoot walking gives you complete harmony and connection to your whole body, which, in turn, helps you to disconnect with some of the noise going on in your head. A little like mindfulness, it allows you to be completely present in the moment and not distracted by negative thought. With barefoot walking you have to concentrate and focus on your body. Sandy beaches are the ideal setting for barefoot walks, as the ground is softer. There aren't too many barefoot-friendly trails in the UK, but there are plenty throughout Europe. A grassy local park or field can also work well, but a beach or sandy coastline is the dream.'





DE-STRESS WITH WALKING MEDITATION

'Meditative or "paced" breathing is a technique long used by Afghan nomads, which was first identified by Frenchman Édouard Stiegler in Kabul in the 1960s. They reportedly walked more than 30 miles a day, yet always appeared radiant,' says Streets. 'They explained to him how they had developed the meditative breathing style to help them walk further. Paced breathing is where you inhale through your nose and exhale through your nose or mouth in time with your steps. For example, inhale for a count of three and, in that time, complete three walking paces; hold it for one pace and, as you do another, exhale. This helps to create a very mindful and rhythmic way of walking, and aligns mind, body and heart, allowing you to walk further and feel refreshed.

'Embrace this on familiar routes. If you're going on a walk where you haven't been before, you don't really want to be doing your paced breathing, because you want to be taking in the sights and sounds. If you're walking a regular route – perhaps to work or school, and you're very familiar with your surroundings – then it's an ideal time to try it.'



FEEL UPLIFTED WITH THE TIPTOE TECHNIQUE

'It's not always possible for us to escape our towns or cities - we might live in an urban location or spend a lot of time working in a city - but it doesn't mean we can't still find joy walking around these areas,' says Streets. 'It may seem a little wacky, but walking on the balls of your feet – a little like walking on tiptoes - can really put a spring in our step in more ways than one. A recent study found that when we walk with more bounce, we feel naturally uplifted in our demeanour. The bounce can be made subtler for those who feel a little self-conscious springing around the city streets: simply exaggerate the transition from heel to toe as you walk, and add a little lift as you come up onto the balls of your feet. This technique is not advised for long distances, but makes a perfect start to your day while walking to the office or as a little lunchtime interlude away from your desk. If you're feeling very brave, skipping around your local park can really uplift your mood - but it depends how daring you feel!'

Reduce anxiety with added variety

'A recent study found that walkers who regularly walk more varied and different routes enjoy brighter mood, and suffer much less anxiety,' explains Streets. 'The reason for this? Researchers found that our brains rather enjoy novelty. Walking the same route each day creates boredom, but being a little more ambitious and adventurous with our routes will boost wellbeing and help to suppress feelings of anxiety and depression. This is because, on new routes, we are distracted and entertained by our surroundings and our brains are occupied with trying to work out where we are and where to go next.'

BOOST WELLNESS IN THE RAIN

'We've already touched on the benefits of walking close to water, but there's something extra special about being near to crashing, fast-flowing water, such as waterfalls or waves,' says Streets. 'A recent Austrian study, which took a group of stressed care workers and split them into groups, found that the workers who enjoyed regular walks near waterfalls had better overall health, immunity and mood compared to those who hadn't been exposed to this kind of setting. This sense of wellness is attributed to the negative ions, which are generated as air molecules break apart from fast-moving water, such as rivers, sea waves and even fountains. These negative ions actually change the air we breathe and increase the flow of oxygen to our brains, making us feel more alert and energised.

'This is the reason why people often talk of the benefits of sea air. And if you can't find a local waterfall, never fear, because rainfall – in plentiful supply here in the UK – can have the same effect. So, don't be afraid to don your raincoat and wellies this season and embrace a summer downpour – it's proven to lift your mood!'





outdoor adventures with our round-up of goal-setting gadgets, ethical workout wear and stay-on-track snacks

UP YOUR HYDRATION Whether you want to warm up or cool down, stay hydrated with these funky flasks...

Air Up bottle, £34.95, uk.air-up.com

This funky BPA-free bottle makes staying hydrated easy and fun. Clever 'aroma pods' allow you to drink pure water while tricking your brain into thinking you are slurping anything from Kola or Iced Coffee to Cucumber or Basil-Lemon – with no sugar or chemicals, just natural aromas extracted from fruits. plants and spices.



EarthWell Roaster insulated travel flask, £32.95, earthwell.co.uk

Whether you're looking for a warming cuppa or something chilled, EarthWell's insulated travel flask is ideal for keeping things warm for up to 10 hours, or iced for 40! The large size can hold up to 590ml, which is plenty of tea to keep you going all day.



Contigo Ashland Autospout water bottle, £10, asda.com

If you're on the lookout for a simpler option, then the Contigo Ashland Autospout is a bargain. An integrated locking mechanism prevents the cap from opening accidentally, thus eliminating leaking - perfect for when it's bouncing around your bag, up hill and down dale.



WORDS: LARISSA CHAPMAN. IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK; INNTRAVEL

Take a walking break

Keep fit, free your mind, and feel refreshed as you take in stunning scenery on a walking holiday



Contours Walking Holidays, contours.co.uk

Skip the airport queues this summer and embark on a self-guided UK walking holiday. With a vast array of routes to discover right on your own doorstep, there's never been a better time for a staycation. Contours has an easy search function to help you select the best walking holiday for you.

Wild Rambling, wildrambling.com

Looking for a guided walking adventure with the girls? Or wanting to go solo and meet new people? Wild Rambling holidays offers women-only guided walking adventures in the UK and abroad.

BOOST YOUR ENERGY LEVELS

Keep your energy stores – and taste buds – happy with these on-the-go snacks...

80Noir Ultra Wonkies training bars, £2.50, 80noirultra.com

Studies have shown cacao can help to boost cognition and mood, while dark chocolate contains serotonin and neurotransmitters responsible for relaxing the brain. These bars contain both, and are the perfect snack for mind and body.

Bounce Energy Balls £16 for 12, uk.bouncefoods.com

If you're looking for a high-fibre, high-protein snack to keep you energised, these live up to their name. The nutty treats come in a variety of flavours and make the perfect mid-hike snack.



Clif Bar Crunchy
Peanut Butter, £1.79,
hollandandbarrett.com

With a tagline of 'built to sustain your adventure' Clif Bar prides itself on keeping your energy levels boosted throughout a long workout.

Baked using wholesome, organic ingredients, it's a nutritious, energising snack.



njoy maximum comfort

Feeling comfortable is essential when exercising, and these products are designed with just that in mind...



Seamless Bra, £32.95, boody.co.uk Finding a bra that's both supportive and soft can be a challenge. Enter Boody – the Ribbed Seamless Bra is designed with a four-way stretch fabric, to give complete freedom of movement with ample support. It's also sweatwicking, so

perfect for

a summer

workout.

Boody Ribbed

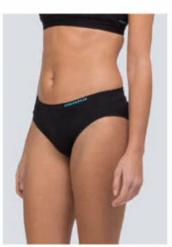
Pour Moi Energy Printed Mesh Panel Leggings, £34, pourmoi.co.uk

Having a sense of style and confidence is important whatever the activity. These flattering high-rise leggings have mesh inserts to keep you cool in warmer weather, and are made from clever sweat-wicking fabric to keep you dry and comfortable.



Runderwear Women's Anti-VPL Running Hipster, £18, runderwear.co.uk

Never underestimate the joy of a comfortable pair of knickers, particularly when exercising. Runderwear has designed a selection of lightweight, ultra-thin, seamless pants to eliminate both chafing and a visible panty line. At £18, we think they're a must-buy!



WALK FOR A CAUSE Challenge yourself and take your walking to a new level as you raise money for these fantastic charities

Cancer Research UK's Big Hike Challenge, cancerresearchuk.org

It already has the 5km races, now Cancer Research has introduced the Big Hike challenge. With a series of long-distance hiking events set in six stunning locations across the UK, you'll take in spectacular views while raising money for a good cause.



Help For Heroes Challenges, helpforheroes.org.uk

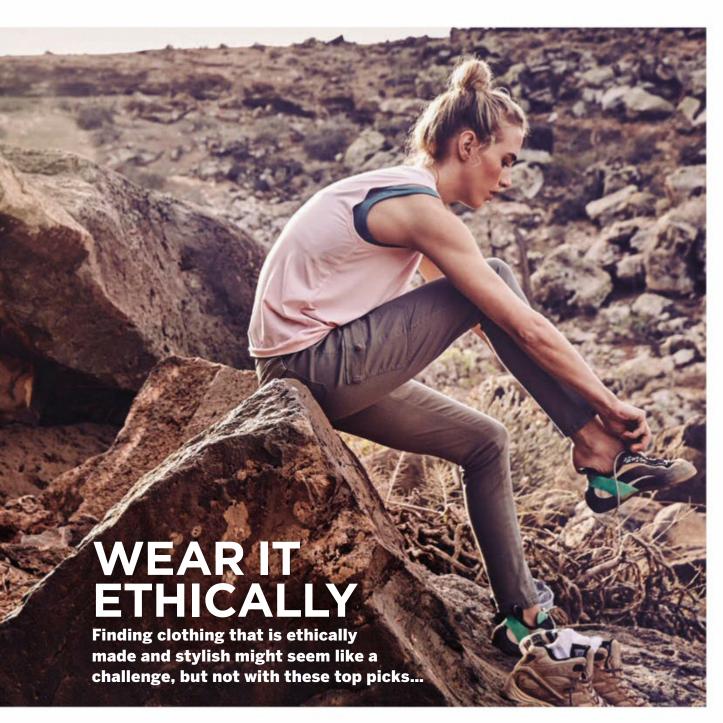
Fancy a bespoke fundraiser? Help for Heroes is encouraging people to take on their own challenge and raise money for charity at the same time. It could be climbing a mountain or walking a marathon – the only limit is your imagination!



Macmillan Mighty Hikes, mightyhikes.macmillan.org.uk

If you want to go on a journey of fun with family and friends, then check out Macmillan Mighty Hikes. With one-day full or half marathon hikes in beautiful UK countryside, you're sure of a challenging but rewarding day out, all while raising money for people in need.





BAM Clothing Roborough Bamboo Cargo Trousers, £75, bambooclothing.co.uk

Many a walk leads straight to a village pub or picturesque café, so you probably want your gear to be stylish as well as practical! These cargo pants tick all the boxes. Made from durable and sustainable bamboo twill, they're soft, breathable and ideal for hiking and climbing, while the skinny fit design is bang on trend.

Finisterre Zephyr Merino Wool Base Layer, £60, finisterre.co.uk

Ideal for cooler days, this base layer features a cosy roll neck and is made

from 80 per cent Merino wool blend for warmth, with 20 per cent polyamide added for shape retention and longevity. Soft, versatile and comfortable, it's ideal for getting out into the great outdoors.





Cotopaxi Coso 2L Hip Pack, £50, uk.cotopaxi.com

Looking for a convenient way to carry those hiking essentials? This hip pack is surprisingly spacious and keeps hands and arms free, so you can ramble across the countryside to your heart's content. And, as it's made from recycled polyester, it's sustainable, too.



For happy hiking, plan ahead and stay on track

Komoot route planner app, £4.99 per month, komoot.com

One of the most exciting parts of outdoor adventures

is the planning. This app allows you to plan your routes and trails and ensures you don't get lost, making for a calmer, more tranquil hike.



Harvey Maps Coast to Coast (307km walking route across northern England), £16.50, harveymaps.co.uk

If you prefer a more traditional method of planning your hikes,

Harvey Maps has a fantastic array of printed maps to choose from, covering all different parts of the UK. Plus, they fold up neatly in your bag.



Gear Tekk TekiCount 3D **Walking Step Counter with** Carabiner Clip On Pedometer, £59.99, geartekk.com

If you want to accurately keep track of your steps on your walks, then this pedometer is ideal. Its carabiner clip means you securely to anything from belt loops to bag straps.



Foodfrom the heart

Nourish the soul with these recipes from Asma Khan's new cookery book, *Ammu* – a collection of dishes steeped in nostalgia, rooted in tradition, and handed down through her family with love

Zarda (Sweet Rice with Saffron and Nuts)

Anyone attending a milad (religious gathering) or a Muslim wedding in the subcontinent would have come across this saffron-infused glistening dessert. Saffron is one of the world's most expensive spices, but you only need a little, and infusing it in warm milk is a very effective way to bring out its flavour. The addition of nuts gives this dessert a further luxurious touch. Serve with some thick or clotted cream.

SERVES 4-6

- ½ tsp saffron strands
- 2 tbsp milk
- 250g basmati rice
- 100g ghee or butter (or flavourless vegetable oil), plus extra for greasing
- 6 cloves
- 8 green cardamom pods
- 40g each shelled unsalted pistachios and unsalted blanched almonds, cut into thick slivers
- 30g dried apricots, cut into small cubes
- 150g granulated sugar
- 2 tbsp kewra (screwpine) water or rose water

1 Put the saffron in a small bowl, warm the milk to tepid, and pour over the saffron strands. Gently wash the rice in a large bowl with cold water (not under running water, as this will break the tips of the rice, which will make the rice sticky). Change the water

several times until it looks clear, then soak the rice in cold water for at least 30 minutes, or up to 3 hours. Drain the rice well in a strainer. 2 Bring 1.5I water to the boil in a large pan. Add the rice once the water is boiling, and boil until it is half done; it is hard to give an exact time for this as there are too many variables, but the way to check is to remove a single grain of rice from the hot water and squeeze it between your fingers – there should still be a hard core of slightly uncooked rice. Drain the half-cooked rice in a strainer and spread it thinly on a platter to cool and prevent it from continuing to cook. 3 Preheat the oven to 180°C, 160°C fan, gas mark 4. Heat the ghee or butter in a heavy-based pan over a medium-high heat. Add the cloves and cardamoms, followed by the pistachios, almonds and apricots. Add 250ml cold water and the sugar, and stir until the sugar dissolves.

4 Butter a casserole dish and add the rice, then pour over the warm, spice-infused sugar syrup. Add the saffron-infused milk and stir gently to ensure the saffron is evenly distributed. Cover tightly with foil and bake for 15 minutes.

5 Take the dish out of the oven. Gently fluff the rice, then re-cover and bake for another 10–15 minutes. Remove the foil and leave the dessert to stand for a few minutes. Sprinkle the kewra or rose water over the warm rice before serving.







before serving.



Navratan Korma (Nine-Jewel Korma)

Navratan is a traditional South Asian style of gem-setting, based on nine different precious stones. This korma is made up of nine colourful vegetables. It's a great way to use up odd veg from your fridge. Try red, yellow and orange peppers, aubergine, courgettes, baby sweetcorn, mangetout, cabbage and spinach. Or you could par-boil some carrots, parsnips, potatoes, French beans and pumpkin, then add red pepper, peas, sweetcorn and purple sprouting broccoli. A comforting, creamy (and extremely nutritious) curry that is ideal for children, too!

SERVES 6

- 1kg mixed vegetables
- 6 tbsp vegetable oil
- 2.5cm piece of cassia bark
- 2 green cardamom pods
- 1 clove
- 1 large bay leaf
- 2 large onions, cut in half and thinly sliced
- 3−4 garlic cloves, crushed
- 6cm piece of fresh ginger, grated
- 2 tsp ground coriander

- •1 tsp chilli powder
- ½ tsp sugar
- 2 tsp salt
- 250g full-fat Greek-style yoghurt
- 400ml thick coconut milk
- 2 tbsp ground almonds

I Cut all the vegetables into evenly sized pieces and set aside on a tray. Heat the oil in a deep pan over a medium-high heat. Add the cassia bark, cardamoms, clove and bay leaf, then immediately add the onions and fry until golden brown.

2 Add the garlic and ginger and stir for 1 minute. Then add the ground coriander, chilli powder, sugar and salt, and stir for 2 minutes.

3 Add the yoghurt, lower the heat to medium, and stir until most of the liquid has evaporated. Add all the vegetables, stir and cook until tender. If the vegetables start to stick, add a splash of water. When they are cooked, add the coconut milk and ground almonds, and stir until the gravy thickens.

4 Taste and adjust the seasoning before serving. This korma goes very well with any kind of rice or pulao.







Join Ollie's army

Ever wanted to make a difference and train to become a coach? With the Ollie School, you could be changing lives before you know it

espite the very best efforts of our education system, it is struggling to cope with fully supporting the emotional wellbeing of our children within the curriculum. Have you ever felt that you would love to help, but were powerless to act? Well, here's your opportunity to do something positive.

The Ollie School plans to build an army of coaches who can make the world a better place, one child at a time. Ollie Coaching is a holistic approach that leads all our youngsters to a place where they can thrive in the chaos of modern living.

So many schools are battling to provide an appropriate mental health environment and busy parents are up against it in our fast-paced lives ruled by social media. That's why Alison Knowles, who was challenged throughout her life with undiagnosed dyslexia, decided to set up the Ollie

School. The Ollie methodology is all about empowering children to seek solutions and take control of their emotions, rather than be controlled by them. The Ollie School trains coaches in a blend of methodologies that brings together NLP, CBT, EFT and play therapy to make sure they cover all the bases. The Ollie methodology is all about personalisation and identifying which technique will work with each individual child - no one-size-fits-all approach here.

Licence to help

The Ollie School graduates are awarded a certified qualification in NLP and a licence to work as an Ollie coach. If helping children and their families to be more emotionally resilient appeals to you, contact us for a prospectus and let's talk about getting you with the programme.

Courses are now online and in the classroom, combining the best of both worlds with a limited number of trainees, maximising learning potential. See ollieandhissuperpowers.com



To train to become an Ollie coach, find a coach in your area or book an event, visit ollieandhissuperpowers.com, or contact us via email at info@ollieandhissuperpowers. com. We would love to hear from you!





Discover ways to make your soul sing... with creativity, nature, finding your purpose in life and at work, travel and spirituality

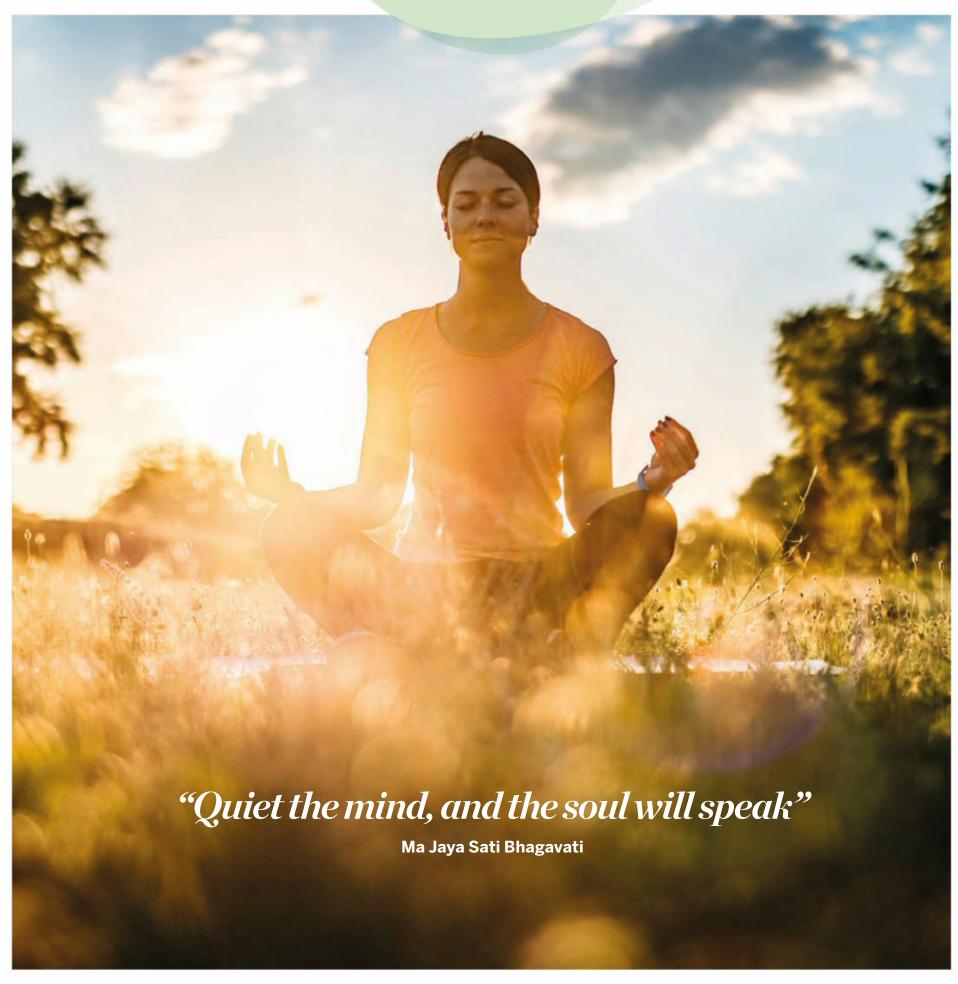


IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES

y family have always been avid letter writers. My grandparents wrote letters; my parents wrote letters; I wrote letters to my cousin when she was at boarding school. I stood over my children and insisted they wrote thank-you letters.

In my family, we always knew a letter might well be passed on. It was all a bit P.G. Wodehouse: Uncle James' letter about cousin Mabel's peculiar behaviour being shot around the family circle ('Jane, please read this carefully and send it on').

Nowadays, however, I don't have any ongoing correspondence, not like the exchanges I used to have with two great aunts. One of them wrote to me after abdominal surgery ('My belly looks like a crinkle-cut chip'). The other, at age 86, wrote about startling her lunchtime friends with the words 'I think sex is gorgeous'.

Once, I would have declared confidently, 'Writing letters is part of who I am'. But now? I'm not so sure. Why should anyone write to me if I'm not writing to them?

How about you? Do you drop a note to let someone know you're thinking of Athes Inimus . Season and Annidamed Annidamed Care Care whereast as whereast as whereast as the season as the seas

IMAGES: GETTY IMAGES

ETTERS

When you commit your thoughts to paper, you make a declaration that you have held someone in your heart for the entire time of your writing. And what could possibly be more touching than that, asks Mary Fenwick



"I love the idea that you can put marks on a page and send it off, and two days later, someone laughs somewhere else in the world" David Nicholls, author

them? Will you write postcards on holiday this year? Or are we watching a centuries-old art die out?

The statistics look grim. The Postal Museum talks about a 'precipitate' drop in letter volumes since 2006, and 'a flight of social and transactional correspondence to the internet'. It's the social correspondence that I'm interested in. All those missives - love letters, condolence letters, the letters that record your view of some historical event - who sends them now?

I put a call out on social media (yes, the irony): Has a handwritten letter changed your life? The stories come flooding in.

Mental health consultant Mia Livingston says she wouldn't exist at all without letter writing, because it's how her parents met: 'Two schools in Sweden and the Philippines did a letter exchange for students to practise English. We still have every one of the hundreds of letters sent between my parents through the years. They met in their 20s and were madly in love for 55 years, until Dad died.'

For artist and musician Junseok de Back, his mother gave him something even more unexpected: 'I was born in South Korea and adopted as a baby. When I was 16, I received a letter from my birth mother. It changed everything – it even showed me how to spell my own name correctly.'

It's clear that some people are determined to keep the flame alive. In Dublin, Ireland, Liz Maguire hosts a digital archive of vintage love letters, Flea Market Love Letters, 'a resource for historians, romantics and especially romantic historians'. During lockdown, New Yorker staff writer Rachel Syme got 10,000 strangers signing up to pen pal exchange Penpalooza. And, in England, we have The Hand Written Letter Appreciation Society, with members from 29 countries. Founder Dinah Johnson calls it 'a quiet revolution in the art of

intimacy'. She loves social media, but 'sharing' online is different from writing to just one other person: 'You can be flawed in a letter – you don't have to put a face on, do you? And you can put in the little details that make it unique. If you put that stuff on the internet, it needs to be really funny.'

It's the low-key gentle side that she loves – 'letters don't seek celebrity' – although her high-profile supporters include Stephen Fry and Dermot O'Leary, and Dame Vera Lynn was a fan.

Her children keep up the habit, too: 'You think you know your children well. And then they write a letter and there's a different side to them - maybe a funny angle - and you think, oh, I didn't know that was in him.' This resonates with me, because I do still occasionally write to my children, and they write to me. My youngest daughter kept one of my letters to show her flatmates, because apparently not every mother tells the story of their birth to a child on their birthday (well, who else is going to tell her when I'm gone?).

I find that I think differently when I hand-write, and there's just me and the page. Despite my earlier reflection on our family letters being passed around, there's something about an email that feels more likely to be shared and misquoted.

One thing I notice about all the stories people share with me is how excited they are: there's pride and delight and joy. This seems to apply even if the letters themselves are sad or difficult; they form a real human connection and become part of a legacy.

Charlotte Tarrant is a freelance writer, and the founder of Starlike books. 'I've written almost 50 letters to my dad since he died in June 2019,' says Tarrant. 'It's been so helpful in the grieving process and in keeping our relationship alive.'

She's published those letters on a WordPress site, and as I read it, those



words about intimacy and small-butsignificant details come back to me.

Tarrant writes about being picked up from a friend's place when she was a child. It had been snowing: 'My hands were in gloves on top of your head, messing around with your thick hair. You carried me all the way home, Dad – we didn't say much to each other – but it was just fine in the white and silence together. Rather like now.'

Liz Kentish is the managing director of Kentish and Co, working in behavioural change management. She remembers her dad differently. 'He died when I was 21, and I didn't feel I'd had enough time with him. He was very English; not at all emotional. But one thing I remember, on a Wednesday evening he used to watch M*A*S*H, and I remember him roaring with laughter at Alan Alda, who played Hawkeye. So I wrote to Alan Alda. I didn't hear back – but just sending it made me reconnect with my dad.'

For Kentish, it doesn't matter if she gets an email or WhatsApp message in return: 'I've decided it's much more about the writing than receiving. It's landed. They know that during that time I spent writing to them, I held them in my heart.'

I love that phrase: 'I held them in my heart'. It takes much longer to write a letter than it does to read it, and for all that time you're thinking about the person you're writing to – although they might be unaware. It's a bit like the way runners talk about fast-twitch and slow-twitch

muscles for speed and endurance; emails have speed, but letters have endurance.

A letter doesn't need to be written on beautiful stationery (that's a whole other story) – it can be scribbled on paper ripped from a jotter pad. Your only limiting factors are likely to be envelopes and stamps (maybe I can become a person who always keeps a packet of stamps in my purse). Aside from everything else, I just love those old-fashioned letter sign-offs, and the idea that we might start communicating more sincerely and faithfully.

After my husband died, I carried around a card that he had given to me. It was from years earlier, when I'd gone away for a month without him. He wrote: 'Whenever you think about me, I'm with you,' and that's what I needed to know.

When he was in the hospice, he also wanted to write letters to our children, but didn't have the energy by that stage. It's an idea that's mirrored by the charity From Me to You, which arranges for letters to be delivered to people undergoing cancer treatment. Talking about the absence of a sense of touch in today's digital communication, the charity's co-founder, Alison Hitchcock, explains: 'I can't say that a letter will release oxytocin like a handhold. But as one of our writers once wrote, "This is me, reaching out my hand to you." It seems to me that this is just what letters are. fleamarketloveletters.com; penpalooza.com; thehandwrittenletterappreciationsociety.org; yourstoryisntoverdad.wordpress.com;



FROM ME TO YOU

Hitchcock began writing to her friend Brian when he was in cancer treatment. The idea grew into From Me to You, which delivered 9000 letters to cancer patients last year. It's changed Alison's life, too, and she shared her story with me:

'To begin with, Brian was just an acquaintance. I made this rather odd offer, that I would write letters to him to cheer him up through his treatment. I have no idea why I said it. The only things I ever wrote were 60-word posts to go on jobs boards.

'Brian's cancer lasted for two-and-a-half years, and I wrote over 100 letters. I loved the way that I started to see the world. I'd go around with a notebook, hunting out good or funny stories to share with him, and it made my own life much nicer. You slow down and become more reflective and considered. You give of yourself a lot more, because it's very intimate between the two of you, and other

people are not going to see it. He used to take my letters to chemo, and he said it was like I was there with him. He always wanted to go on his own. He had a partner, and lots of family and friends, but he didn't want to burden them. Or he would save the letter for a point when he was feeling quite low, and sit down with his cup of tea. And he knew it would brighten up his day.

'By the time Brian got the all-clear in 2013, we were best friends. The letters completely changed my life. I'd fallen in love with writing, and I signed up to do an MA in creative writing as a result.

'In 2016, we started the charity. We encourage people to write to someone they know with cancer, because it's lonely when everybody else has gone to work or the pub, and you're at home. And the only thing that you get is pity.

'Something as simple as a card or a letter can get through that bubble. And it's all on the person's own terms. They read it when they want; they might reread it; or put it in their memory box. But they know that you were thinking of them.'



Letters are among the most significant memorial a person can leave behind them"

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

with your little detail. And,

- no matter how clumsy

'Use tiny detail. Maybe

they have a detail in their life that connects

the words, if it's from the heart, you can't go wrong.'



My daughter is 25 and returning to the UK after two years studying abroad. She has no idea what to do with her life, and is terrified of feeling lost and directionless. She has sought careers advice before, but it was an alternative style, focusing on words that resonated with her. I'm relieved she's asking for my help, but I don't know where to begin; both her dad and I have spent our lives in professions with a clear path of progression.

The phrase you've used is a useful one - rather than big questions, such as 'What do I want to do with my life?', it's helpful to ask 'Where do I want to start?'.

Gina Visram has a multi-layered career supporting young people's job choices at a secondary school, a university, and via her podcast, *Dive into Your Career*. She aims to normalise the idea that we don't have to do just one thing for the rest of our lives, and points out that even if someone spends a decade in education, they will be working for another three, four or five times as long in a different setting.

In terms of where to start, Visram suggests thinking back to the subjects that your daughter enjoyed in school. What did she like about them? If it was maths, did she like the fact that it had definite answers? Did she enjoy an argument? Or come alive in art class? Was she keen on outdoor activities? Did she prefer the times she was left alone and could get deeply absorbed?

This is a way of thinking about her wider skill set. At university, she will have been diving deeper into one or two areas. But that was one set of choices, and it can be empowering to think more broadly. Even abstract ideas can help is she attracted to the idea of stability, or adventure, or creativity? Could she ask other family members to name the times they've seen her at her most fulfilled?

A tool called Values in Action can help understand character strengths, such as courage, prudence, zest, or love of beauty and excellence, while the website Prospect lists more than 400 job profiles, where young people can get a feel for which careers they might be suited to, from academic librarian to zookeeper.

If none of these clues work, sometimes it's easier to be clear about what we don't want. When my youngest did work experience at Microsoft, her supervisor said, 'I think we've both concluded that a corporate environment isn't for her.' (And it was true; she hated the feeling of being lost in a big space.) Once your daughter has an idea about industry, or

speciality, or even specific businesses that appeal to her, then the relationship building begins (see box, right).

The key, says Visram, is to get moving: 'If you're in a car and you're moving, you can turn left, you can turn right, you can even do a U-turn if you want to. You can travel in any direction. But if you're stationary, you're waiting for someone else to pick you up.'

The first role may not be your daughter's dream, and there will be things she doesn't like, but even that doesn't mean she's on the wrong path: 'If you enjoy a good amount of what you're doing,' says Visram, 'and you're learning along the way, you've cracked it for those first few roles.'

Even quite big decisions can and do change once you get moving. I know someone who trained in medicine, but has started her own tech company, related to what she found missing when she was a doctor. And Steve Jobs famously talked to graduates at Stanford University about the lightness of being a beginner again when he got fired from Apple. Your daughter has a beginner's mind, and long may it continue, but as Visram says: 'It's the action where the magic is.'

viacharacter.org; prospects.ac.uk

Mary **Fenwick** is a writer and director ofcoaching at teamsand leadership. com. She's also a mother, divorcee and widow. Connect with her on LinkedIn or Twitter @MJFenwick

Got a question for Mary? Email letters@psychologies.co.uk with 'Mary life' or 'Mary work' in the subject line

Getting to **knowyou**Once you've pinpointed an

industry you want to build a career in, and identified specific companies that excite you, it's time to begin building a connection...

GOOGLE

Set alerts for two or three organisations, so you'll see their updates about new products, business changes, and any public comment.

TWITTER

A website is static, but Twitter is where you'll find out if a company is running a webinar series, has launched its own podcast, or is responding to a lot of questions on a particular subject.

LINKEDIN

Search on the company name and 'Hiring'. Who is posting roles at that business? These people are good to connect with, because finding talent is their job.

SPEAK UP

Engage with people's content. Comment on their posts. Ask questions. Share.

CONNECT

Don't start with, 'I'm looking for work experience, an internship or a permanent job.' Instead, try: 'I read your post on this and found it insightful,' or 'I'm aiming to connect with people who are doing interesting things in your industry. Are you open to that?' Keep it light and genuine.

@yourcareerandfuture; Dive into Your Career Podcast

"Choose your industry, then build relationships"

The power of VEDIC MEDITATION

In search of an uncluttered mind, self-confessed control freak Caroline Sylger Jones discovers a salve to the stress of modern living, and the joy of letting go

hecking my calendar, I do a double take. It's now been over three months since I learnt Vedic meditation on a retreat.

And every day since, without fail, I have managed to meditate twice a day, for 20 minutes each time, both morning and afternoon. I've always loved the way I feel after meditation retreats of various kinds, but on returning home, have never been able to incorporate the process into my daily life. That is, until now.

'The only thing you can do wrong when you meditate using this technique is to try,' says my teacher, Jillian Lavender, co-founder of the London Meditation Centre and a leading expert in Vedic meditation. 'There's also no such thing as a bad meditation – except the ones you don't do,' she adds. As someone who tries hard too much of the time to get everything in life 'right', including meditation practices, this kind of thinking feels exactly why the method has been working for me. It's easy – enjoyable even – and fits into normal life.

Learning Vedic meditation is simple and, yet, it's a delicate and subtle process that is tailored to each individual. The teacher needs to meet with the student in person in order to assign the right mantra, and to ensure they are meditating

correctly; Vedic meditation cannot be learned properly online or via an app. Lavender and her partner, Michael Miller, teach Vedic meditation in person, either on short non-residential courses in London and New York, or on a sprinkling of beginners' retreats at handpicked venues, such as Casa Fuzetta in Portugal – which is where I learnt. Whichever you choose, the point is to bring the practice straight into your life, twice a day and every day, after your very first session.

So what is it? Vedic meditation is a 5000-year-old meditation practice, originating from India, that involves you sitting comfortably (whatever 'comfy' means to you - no compulsory crossed legs here), closing the eyes, and having a preference to think a sound (a mantra) to orient the mind towards quieter levels of thinking. 'Your mind is always looking for whatever is most charming, and finds a mantra more charming than anything. It is like a vehicle that the mind hops onto and moves with, so you experience finer and finer layers of thinking,' Lavender explains. 'A point comes when the mantra then disappears and the mind falls quiet. This is a state of pure inner contentedness, where the mind is alert, but with no thoughts going on.' In this state, your de-excited system experiences

a profound level of rest, deeper than sleep, which enables you to release your stress and exhaustion, and re-emerge to re-engage with life in a more skilful way.

Lavender began our retreat with a short and simple ceremony, in honour of the lineage of teachers who have passed this knowledge down over thousands of years. We were then each given our mantras individually. The mantras, Lavender informed us, had been chosen from a selection of sounds, for their resonance to suit our mind-body physiology, our life stage, and the state of the world, and we were told to keep them private, because 'their power is in the subtle'.

We then meditated together, simply by closing our eyes and 'picking up the mantra', as Lavender called it; her language was straightforward, yet precisely chosen, and this helped us learn quickly and easily.

'Have a preference to think the mantra, but nothing more,' she told us. 'Work lightly with it – take it as it comes – don't attach to how you say it, how often, or whether it's in rhythm with your breath or anything else.'

After 20 minutes, Lavender instructed us to stop thinking the mantra, but to keep our eyes closed, so that we came out of our meditation slowly. A few minutes on, we opened our eyes and, just like that, we were meditators.



During the course of the retreat, we meditated together again, and also alone, all the while getting tips from Lavender about how and when to meditate once back home, and listening to inspirational talks outlining why to bother. I forgot my mantra on my second group session, and panicked – but no matter. After a check-in with Lavender, when I was reminded of it – and reassured that it was a natural part of the process – I picked it up again easily. Throughout the retreat, I continued to be amazed that so simple a task could offer me such a feeling of deep rest.

As someone attracted to decluttering in every possible way, it's this simplicity that resonates with me. Until now, I've mainly experienced the Buddhist art of Vipassana meditation, during which you focus on the in and out breath to calm your monkey mind. I've always left retreats of this nature feeling smoother, calmer, and more at one with myself and the world – but it's only with Vedic meditation that I've been able to keep up the practice at home, alone.

Now, in the mornings when I wake, I'm often genuinely excited that, after sitting up in bed, sipping water and closing my eyes, I gently think my mantra for 20 minutes to steady and ready myself for the day ahead. And, in the afternoons, I actively look forward to the same closed space of rest and calm, when I can climb inside my mind, pick up my mantra, re-energise and reclaim myself again.

Rest and release

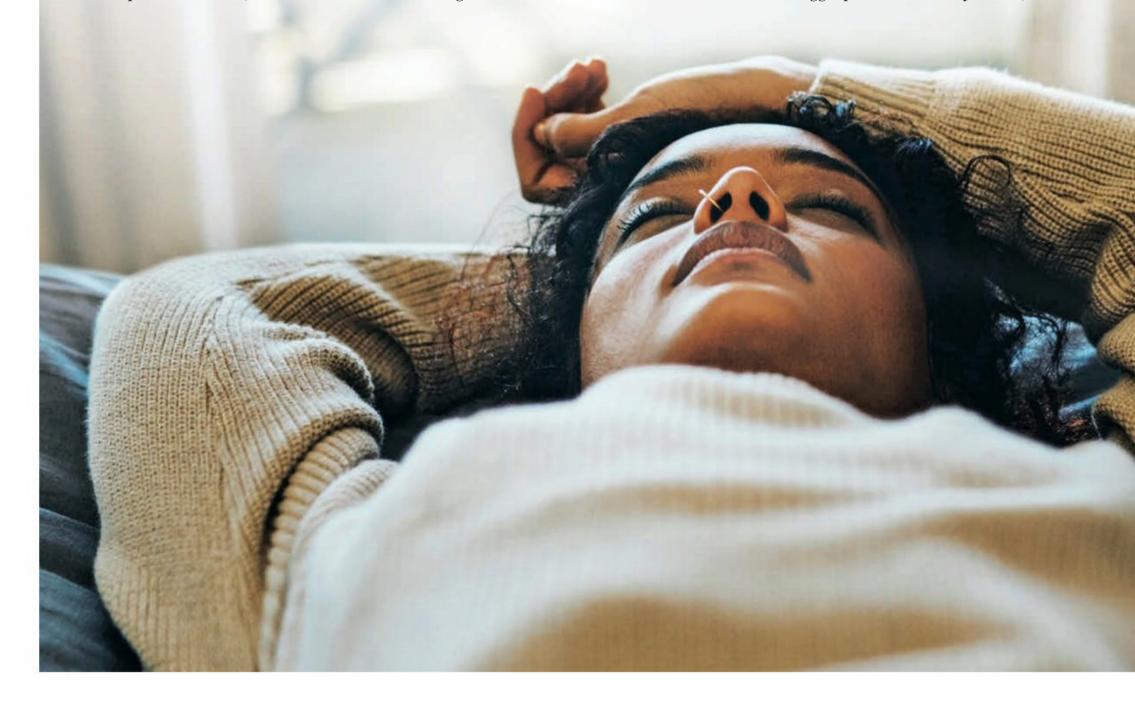
So what's going on? As we experienced over the four days of our retreat, each meditation session shifts continually and is often packed with thoughts. But rather than trying to do something about these thoughts during the meditation – such as taking our focus back to the breath – all we need to do is 'have a preference for picking up the mantra', and be reassured that any thoughts are in fact the byproduct of meditation, and a sign that everything is working. 'Thoughts are a result of release of stress, and so a thought-filled meditation is a valuable

meditation, in which lots of stress has been released,' explains Lavender.

During the retreat – and for a week or two after – I felt exhausted, which I was assured was my body releasing an accumulation of tiredness, too. As time goes on, we get to release the deeper body stress and tiredness inside us – going back years. Most profoundly, by meditating twice a day, we are then releasing stress faster than we gain it.

'There is no such thing as a stressful situation. Yes – situations can be very demanding and challenging. However, it's how we adapt to these demands that determines whether we gain stress or not,' says Lavender. If we are stressed and tired, we cannot adapt, which is why we get negatively stressed. 'The antidote to stress is deep rest – it's that simple.'

Once you give your system this regular and profound rest through Vedic meditation, you will be more able to be in the present and respond appropriately to any given situation. To focus, but also to see the bigger picture. To trust yourself,



and to make better decisions based on your gut rather than your head.

Meditation, in fact, is a masterclass in letting go of control – another reason the technique appeals to me, a self-confessed control freak. 'Change is the one constant in life, but we all use control to feel safe when we cannot adapt to it,' says Lavender. Trying to control things is exhausting and costly, and the very opposite of evolution. This is why, when you've been meditating for a while, you notice how the wrong things start to fall away - whether that's a toxic relationship or a preference for reaching for wine rather than something more nourishing. Only three months on, and I am no longer beating myself up for saying 'no' if I don't want to go out somewhere, and feeling better for any decision I make for myself that means I'll get better sleep, more family time, or more creative time for myself.

Happily ever after

Over the course of our retreat, we refined the technique, understood more of its

effects, and learnt tips for how and when to meditate once we were back at home. But Lavender and Miller don't just leave it there – their aftercare is a crucial part of the process, and may well have made the difference between my carrying on or not.

Each week, I am sent a Meditator's Map email with a short video or paragraph offering useful and reassuring tips to help you keep going, and every Wednesday evening there's an optional live online session in which the couple explore a life issue then lead a group meditation. As this is crucial family time for us at home, and I have found the optimum time for my afternoon meditation is more like 3.30pm, I don't attend these live, but I always listen back to them and find them enlightening. Cleverly pivoting on a question from a meditator, they cover everything from relationships to socialising, to how to respond to a crisis such as the war in Ukraine - they have become to me supportive and reassuring guidelines on how to deal with being human.

What The Beatles knew

Ultimately, Vedic meditation is, as The Beatles knew, a practice that moves the practitioner beyond activity and thought to pure transcendental consciousness or what some meditators call 'the unified field'. 'This is a fourth state of restful alertness, different to waking, sleeping or dreaming', explains Lavender, 'in which we and everything around us are connected, and we are no longer suffering from our separateness'. It can take a few years to reach this state, she adds. I for one am looking forward to the journey.

For details of the London Meditation Centre beginners' courses and retreats, visit londonmeditationcentre.com. For more ideas on meditation retreats, visit queenofretreats.com

Optimise your Vedic meditation practice

- Meditate on an empty tummy, ideally before drinking caffeine or alcohol.
- Meditate for 20 minutes, twice a day – no more, no less, unless you are travelling, pregnant, or recovering from an illness.
- Come out of your meditation slowly. Let go of the mantra, but keep your eyes closed for three minutes further.
- When you plan your meditations, they're more likely to happen. So when you finish your morning meditation, decide where and when you will meditate that afternoon - and do the same during your afternoon meditation.
- Know you can meditate anywhere where you can sit comfortably and safely close your eyes – on trains or planes, at home or at work, in the loo or on a park bench.

"Once you give your system this regular and profound rest, you are more able to be in the present"

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These are just some examples of the situations the 100's of UK managers and professionals I have worked with, have found themselves in.

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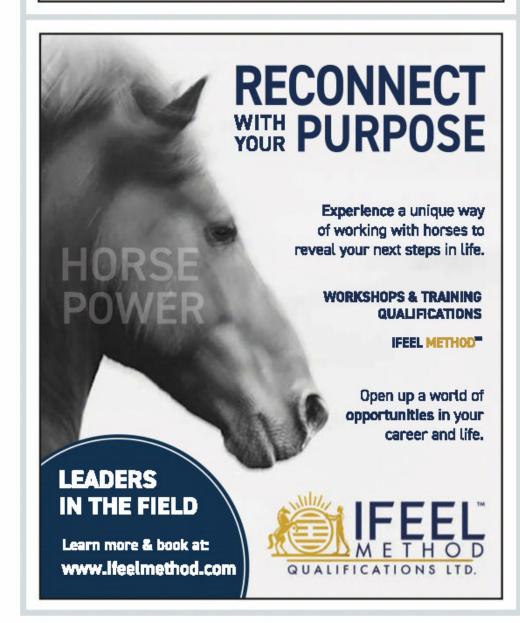
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Keeping your cool

Much like outdated views on the menopause, it's time to consign uncomfortable, clammy nights to the past, says Jessica Cross, owner of Southdown Duvets

The hundreds of social media groups focusing on issues associated with the menopause, bears testimony to the fact that millions of women suffer hugely, and from a variety of related symptoms. It's also evidence that the menopause is now being openly discussed in mainstream forums – and this can only be a good thing.

In our mothers' and grandmothers' eras, the 'change of life' was something to be embarrassed about; an unmentionable inevitability and a burden to be endured in stoic silence. All too often in those days the medical profession (mostly men) appeared to shrug it off, and women were often labelled as being melodramatic at best, hysterical at worst.

While the social media forums today still refer to the noncommittal, even indifferent attitude of some GPs, there is an ever-increasing recognition of the need for women to speak out in a collective attempt to address what are the very real - and often disabling - symptoms of the menopause. And it appears as though their voices are being heard – at long last!

Read these threads and what becomes patently obvious is that women are desperate for practical, safe ways to reduce the disturbing and distressing effects of age-related hormonal changes.

Many talk about HRT, numerous supplements and plentiful alternative therapies to assist with alleviating the effects of night sweats, which can disrupt sleep to the point of reducing the sufferer

SOUND PROMISING? Call Jessica on 01404 861 117 or visit southdownduvets.com for more

information

to the status of a walking zombie. But what about another possibility? Step forward wool duvets, pillows and mattress covers.

Pure wool absorbs moisture, from where it simply evaporates through the fibre. The upshot is that a wool duvet will not prevent the night sweats, but it will greatly reduce the awful results and symptoms when compared with synthetic and feather or down bedding. The whole idea is to keep you cosy and comfortable, but without the clamminess, to ensure a better quality and quantity of restorative, healthy sleep. Now that's one change we can all get on board with.

"Comfort without the clamminess, for restorative, healthy sleep"



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How to be happier

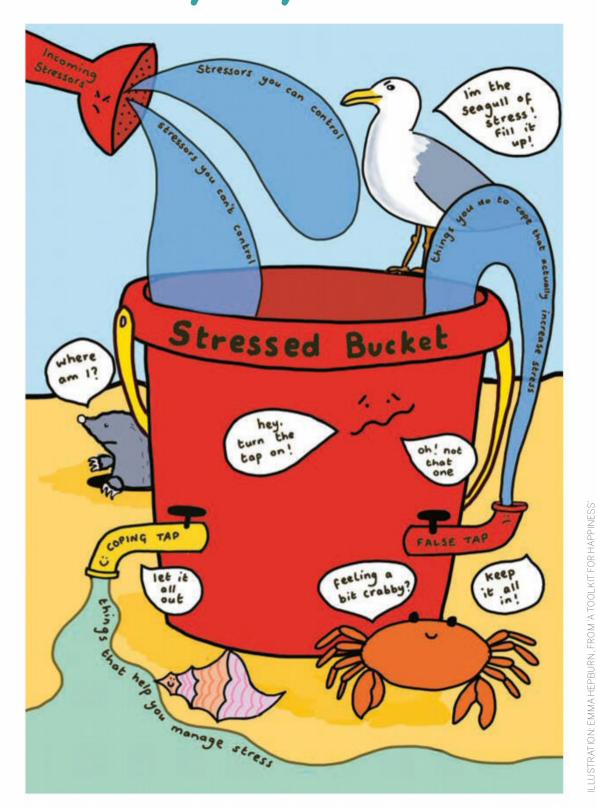
Emma Hepburn, aka The Psychology Mum, shares how to bring more bliss into your life

tress comes from the Latin word *strictus*, meaning 'drawn tight', and anyone who has ever felt their shoulders tense or jaw tighten when they experience stress will know just how apt this meaning is. Stress and its causes can be thought of as the relationship between what's going on in the environment (stressors), our appraisal of these stressors and the resources we have to manage them. When there is too much threat and/or when your perceived demands outweigh your perceived resources, you can feel stressed. Stress is linked fundamentally to how we feel and our bodies, so when we consider its impact, it can be thought of as an imbalance in essential body functions. The balance between the stress/threat response (sympathetic nervous system) and relaxation (parasympathetic nervous system) response is a bit off: there's too much firing up of our body due to activation of our threat system, without enough calming down of our body, which we require to function well.

Stress impacts on wellbeing in a variety of ways. Firstly, anyone who has ever been stressed (i.e. nearly everyone) knows it can make us feel terrible. Secondly, the stress response itself can impact on immune functioning, brain functioning, and many other physical components of the body, including arteries, heart and stomach function. Chronic stress is also a predictor of poor wellbeing and mental health difficulties. It can disrupt sleep and impact on energy levels and diet, which make us feel even worse. Furthermore, our well-intended attempts to cope may even be unhelpful to our wellbeing. We might start to drink too much or avoid the stressor. We might feel like we don't have the time to do the things that make us feel good.

Recognising and managing stress is fundamental to happiness and needs to be a priority. Of course, we can't control it all, but we can look at how we manage stressors, helpfully or unhelpfully.

Use the illustration to identify the fullness of your stress bucket. What are the signs it is getting full? Do you have clear behaviour signs, things you stop or start doing when stressed (e.g. seriously increased



Pringle eating)? What are your emotion signs
– things such as irritability or increased tears.

Physical signs vary but often include: tense muscles, upset stomach, disrupted sleep. Finally, your thought signs might include a racing mind, difficulty concentrating and negative thoughts. Spotting your signs helps you identify when you need to act.

What is filling your bucket? Classify these into two categories – the stressors you can control and those that you can't. When you are at risk of spilling over, think about which stressors you could stop to help manage your stress and how you might do this.



A Toolkit For Happiness' by Emma Hepburn (Quercus, £14.99)

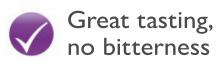
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Information given is not a substitute for medical advice so ensure you check with your GP before making changes to your healthcare routine. Prices in *Top Santé* are correct at the time of going to press.

WELCOME

It's official - walking is our favourite healthy pastime! A recent survey conducted by the team at Top Santé found that readers of the magazine most like to walk, often two to three times a week or more. It far outweighed the next most popular forms of exercise, and for good reason. Pretty much anyone can lace up a pair of trainers and head out into their local neighbourhood for a stroll. The health benefits of doing so include getting your joints and muscles working, as well as giving you some mental headspace. If you can head further afield to a forest or the coast - or are lucky enough to live by one or the other, as I am -



then you have even more opportunity to make walking a part of your healthy lifestyle. The benefits of walking are amplified many times over when you're surrounded by trees, or are breathing in the ion-rich air by the sea. And even if you can't get to the seaside, a walk around an inland body of water can have a calming effect. We're looking at all these health benefits and more in this special 48-page walking supplement, as well as helping you increase your mileage and also your pace with some helpful walking plans and expert tips.

Joining a walking group in your area, or simply making plans with friends to explore a local walking trail near you, can make for a great weekend activity – especially if it ends with a meal somewhere! So what are you waiting for? Get striding out today, as better health awaits!

Katy Sunnassee xx

Editorial Director

Instagram.com/thehealtheditor

Cover image: Shutterstock

Photo of Katy: Suffolk Brand Photographer

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FROM-SLOW-

Our plan from walking expert Caroline Sandry uses the latest interval training techniques to help you up your intensity in two weeks!

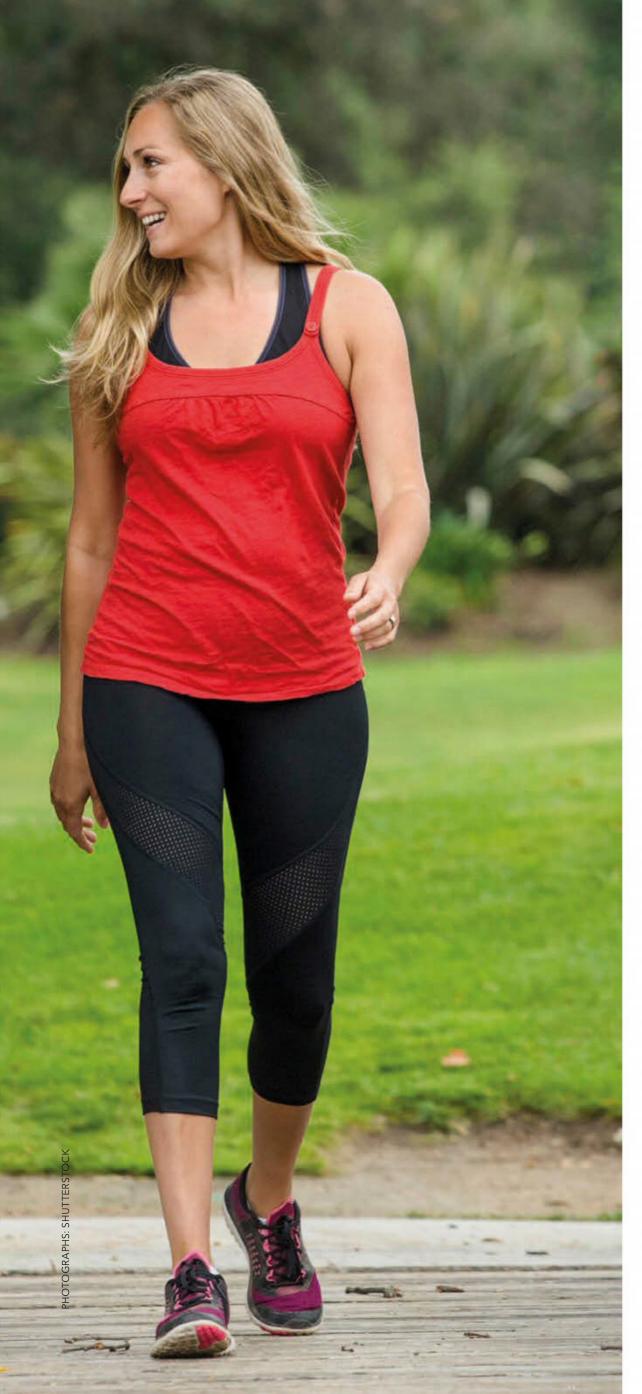
ALKING IS ONE OF the most basic forms of exercise known to us. But it's about much more than just getting from A to B.

'We were born and built to walk; it's movement our bodies were designed for,' says fitness expert and personal trainer Caroline Sandry (carolinesandry.com). 'Walking is a powerful tool to getting yourself fit – plus, it doesn't cost anything, you can do it any time, and it's much more accessible – and less daunting – than heading out to the gym or starting a new, complicated fitness regime.'

But it still has all the benefits! A study based on the US Women's Health Initiative found walking at least 40 minutes, several times week, leads to 20-25 per cent lower risk of heart failure in post-menopausal women.

'We know that physical activity lowers the risk of heart failure, but there may be a misconception that simply walking isn't enough,' says Dr Somwail Rasla, a cardiology





specialist at Salem Hospital in Massachusetts in the US, who conducted the study while at Brown University.

MAKING YOUR STEPS COUNT

'Our analysis shows walking is almost equal to all different types of exercise that have been studied before in terms of lowering heart failure risk,' he says. 'Essentially, we can reach a comparable energetic expenditure through walking that we gain from other types of physical activity.'

The key words in this study are walking 'medium to fast'. So, while we are all keen to 'get our steps in', and reach that magical 10,000 a day, not all steps are equal. 'There's a difference between just improving your number of steps and increasing your fitness,' says Caroline. 'Your intensity and speed are important because when you walk faster you use different muscles. If you go faster you stand up straight, you activate more of your muscles and use them properly. You breathe better and you feel invigorated.'

INCREASE THE INTENSITY

'When you're walking at a good pace you should feel like you can't sustain it forever, but you feel good, like you're really working hard,' says Caroline. 'That's when you'll really see the benefit in terms of weight loss and improvements in your muscles and cardiovascular health.'

Caroline has developed this walking plan to help you increase the length of time you can keep up that intensity, by introducing 'intervals' to your walking regime. Interval workouts involve periods of increased effort interspersed with periods of reduced effort. You can complete tougher bits of a workout (the intervals) which, when stitched together, produce greater results than trying to sustain that higher intensity for one longer effort.

It's intensity that drives calorie burn and energy expenditure, burns more fat and boosts fitness. And these benefits can last beyond the conclusion of your workout. This is due to something known as Excess Postoxygen Consumption (EPOC). The more intense a workout is the longer it will take for the previously elevated metabolic processes in your body to return to a steady state so you go on burning calories. And, if you incorporate intervals and higher-intensity sessions regularly into your workouts, it's possible to near permanently increase your metabolic rate by as much as 20 per cent!

TWO-WEEK PLAN

Caroline's plan should take you from casual strolling to happily doing five miles at a speedy pace in just two weeks – bringing all the benefits of improved fitness!

PACE GUIDE

TACE GOIDE		
STEADY	Your warm-up speed – not exactly a stroll, but a gentle pace you can build from.	5 out of 10 effort You could easily chat while you're walking.
BRISK	Walking fairly fast, swinging your arms. A pace you can maintain, but with some effort.	7 out of 10 effort You could talk to someone, but only in more clipped sentences.
VERY FAST	Pushing yourself to a pace which makes you breathe harder; a pace you can't maintain for long. Swing your arms and ensure you keep good posture.	9 out of 10 effort You find it near impossible to sustain any conversation while walking at this pace.

WALKING SPEED AND CALORIE BURN (per hour)

2mph
195
calories

3mph
260
calories

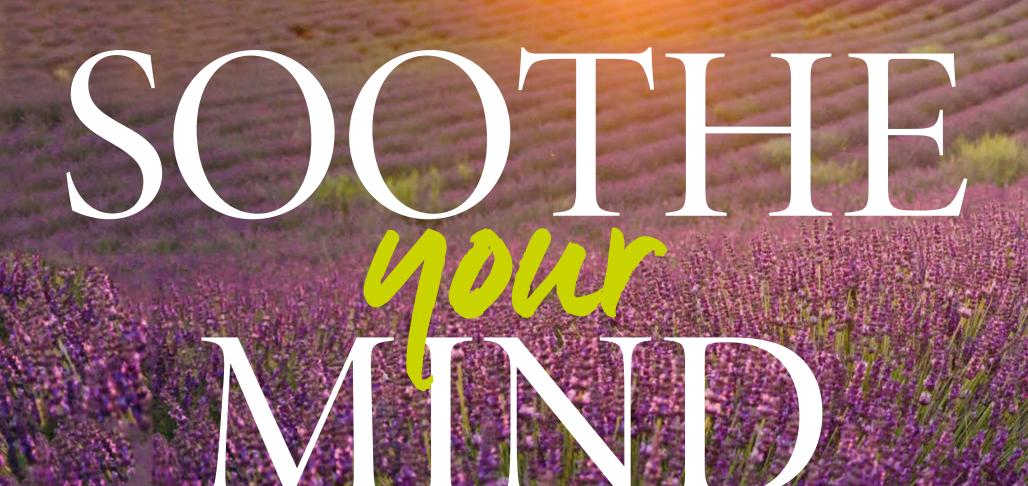
 $\begin{array}{c} \text{4-5mph} \\ 293 \\ \text{calories} \end{array}$

The average walking pace is around 3mph.

Figures based on a 65kg individual. Fitter and/or lighter people will burn fewer calories, and heavier and/or less fit people will burn more.



DAY	AIM	SESSION
1	This is your starting point. Here, we're introducing your body to interval-based walking training.	 Steady 5-min warm-up Very fast 1-min walk Repeat x 4 Steady 3-min cool-down
2	It's a slightly slower pace today, so you're ready to go for it tomorrow.	 Steady 4-min warm-up Alternate brisk 1-min walk and steady 1-min intervals for 20 mins Steady 3-min cool-down
3	Time to ramp up the intensity!	 Steady 4-min warm-up Brisk 10-min walk Fast 1-min/brisk 3-min intervals x 5 Steady 6-min cool-down
4	Today we give your body time to adjust to the changes, but there's still some exercise included to boost recovery should you wish.	● Day off/yoga/swim/stroll – 30 mins
5	We're going to increase the interval time now to challenge the heart and legs.	 Steady 4-min warm-up Brisk 4-min walk Very fast 2-min/steady 2-min walk intervals x 5 Brisk 10-min walk Steady 5-min cool-down
6	We increase the time and effort to start really making those positive changes.	 Steady 6-min warm-up ● Very fast 2-min/steady 2-min intervals for 20 mins ● Brisk 12 mins Steady 12-min cool-down
7	Today we have another interval session.	 Steady 5-min warm-up ● Very fast 1-min/brisk 2-min intervals for 20 mins ● Steady 10-min cool-down
8	Do something that makes you relax today!	Day off/stroll/yoga/swim – 30 mins
9	We now come back hard after your recovery day.	 Steady 2-min warm-up Brisk 3-min walk Very fast 2-min/steady 1-min intervals for 20 mins Brisk 10 mins Steady 5-min cool-down
10	This longer, steadier walk should be well within your fitness levels. Aim to cover around 4 miles.	 Steady 3-min warm-up Steady 3-min cool-down
11	Today we have a slight increase in interval time and intensity to keep your fitness on the up.	 Steady 2-min warm-up • Brisk 8-min walk Very fast 2.5-min/brisk 1.5-min intervals for 20 mins Steady 10-min cool-down
12	We now increase the challenge again with both shorter recovery time and longer intervals.	 Steady 2-min warm-up Brisk 3-min walk Very fast 3-min/brisk 1-min interval walks for 25 mins Steady 10-min cool-down
13	Now it's time to slightly increase the duration of your walk.	 Steady 2-min warm-up Brisk 5-min walk Very fast 3-min/brisk 1-min interval walks for 30 mins Brisk 10 mins Steady 3-min cool-down
14	Keep up a good pace and see how far you go in an hour – your goal is 5 miles.	 Steady 2-min warm-up ● Brisk 60-min walk Steady 3-min cool-down



Walking doesn't just enhance your physical health – it gives your mental health a boost, too. Discover the different ways to turn a simple stroll into a feel-good pastime.



E'VE established how good walking is for toning muscles and

boosting your heart rate, but there's also something intangible that a good yomp in the countryside does for your mood. As you'll know if you've ever headed outside with a niggling question in your mind, there's nothing that eases a frazzled brain like putting one foot in front of the other.

'Our bodies are designed to move, and when we don't do that, pent up energy gets stuck inside and creates more stress,' says Jonathan Hoban, pioneer of walking therapy and author of Walk With Your Wolf: Unlock your Intuition, Confidence and Power.

'We have a fundamental, primal need to walk – at least 40 minutes per day if possible. Time to walk helps re-energise your brain, calm adrenaline levels and create a sense of clarity. That's why when you return from a walk, you normally have the answer to an issue or any problems you may have been pondering about,'

Professional therapist Jonathan, who made walking part of his own daily routine years ago, now helps people decompress from everyday life, simply through walking, whilst in the process reducing depression, anger, high blood pressure, anxiety and even addiction problems.

'Sometimes it's one of the hardest things for my clients to do, but I make them schedule regular break alerts into their digital calendar,' says Jonathan. 'I recommend an hour of walking throughout the day – ideally a minimum of two 30-minute walks – to get your brain working at its best. This amount of time helps reduce your cortisol levels and calm down the adrenal glands. Too much of the stress hormone cortisol can cause increased anxiety and adrenal fatigue.'

So, put a note in your diary to go for a walk with a difference. Try some of Jonathan's tips for releasing stress, resolving problems and setting your creative mind free – for an altogether more peaceful, productive stroll.



Get out into nature and near a body of water

Walking provides a way to connect with the primal, animal nature that lies dormant inside you, according to Jonathan, who uses the metaphor of an 'inner wolf' to represent his own wild nature. 'We have disconnected from our sense of intuition, and we tend to try to think our way out of problems rather than feel our

way out,' he says. 'Walking helps you feel grounded in nature, which helps you remember you're a primal being. It creates a feeling of connection to the world.'

Science certainly backs this up. Walking somewhere green for five minutes, even if it's just the local park, helps improve your sense of wellbeing and lower your risk

of mental illness. This was discovered in an analysis of 1,252 people from different backgrounds across the UK.

For even greater benefits, just add water; natural landscapes combining green and blue – whether lakes, rivers, ponds or the sea – increase wellbeing even further. See p26 for more.

POWER WALK TO DISPEL ANGER

Anger is a natural emotion, but if it's not effectively dealt with and dissipated, it can cause blocks in your body. This exercise is a great way to remove pent-up anger from your system: 'Warm up with a gentle five-minute walk. Then, think about why you're angry and start walking as fast as you can,' says Jonathan. 'Walk with purpose swinging your arms fast and strong for up to four minutes if you can. Then taper down. Aim for at least two minutes of slow walking, then speed up for two; then one slow, one fast. When you're done, note your anger levels. Walking quickly, pumping your arms up and down with the intention of driving out negative energy helps release the stress you'd otherwise internalise. This way your body is able to physically express itself as an alternative to vocally expressing that anger.'

Turn off the tech

If you're one for walking and talking, or listening to things on your phone, Jonathan advises occasional time off from your device. 'Having your phone open and to hand is the mental equivalent of simultaneously engaging with an actual diary, camera, TV, radio or more. All the apps and notifications lead to retinal overstimulation, as your brain can only process so much,' says Jonathan. 'Taking adequate walking breaks helps you manage your stress levels, and turning off technology for the duration means you're creating a natural boundary in your day.'





Tune in to your senses

Mid-way through a walk, find somewhere quiet to sit for a minute. Close your eyes and breathe through your nose. What can you smell? Concentrate on the feelings and associations that come up. Does the smell remind you of a colour? Or a shape? 'What comes up for you can be an indication of how you are feeling inside. Perhaps you need some healing? Take some time to consider your present state,' says Jonathan.

JOIN OTHERS

If you're going through a stressful time, there's good reason to make your walk a family affair, join an organised group walk or persuade friends to join you. Group nature walks have been linked to significantly lower levels of depression and enhanced wellbeing, especially in those who had recently gone through a stressful life event, according to a study at Michigan University.

Develop self-compassion

Jonathan believes many of our mental health issues stem from a feeling of shame or inadequacy. 'Before a walk, write down in a journal how you're feeling. Notice your inner narrative: is it critical? Do you feel like a victim? After a walk of at least 20 minutes, aim to write a more nurturing script. Talk to yourself in a way that a kind parent would do if they were encouraging their child.'

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RUN A CONDITION CHECK

If you are really pushing yourself, part of your brain should focus on how you are feeling. 'When I'm walking I remember to ask myself: "Are my feet landing properly? Are my abs tight and leading me forward? Are my shoulders back and down?" This way I am getting the most out of every step,' says fitness expert and personal trainer Roger Love (rogerlovept.com).

TAKE A BREATH – THEN DOUBLE IT

Oxygen is energy when it comes to walking. 'I like to really fill my lungs with air. I think of it as double breathing

— I breathe twice as hard as usual,' says
Roger. 'If I usually breathe in for three steps, or three seconds, then I'll breathe out for three. And when I'm breathing out I make sure that I empty my lungs, which will expel stale toxins from my muscles and lungs,' he adds. 'It's great if you're starting to tire, as it gives you an extra burst of energy.'

BOOST YOUR BODY LANGUAGE

You might think body language is all about communication, but it's much more than that. 'To be effective, walking needs to be done with purpose and vigour,' says Roger. 'I always say it's like walking up to a manager to make a complaint! You should walk with your chest up, with focus and dignity, purpose and pride – that's how confident you should look. 'Walk like you are really going places, and feel confident about what you are doing. A lot of my female clients say they find they are then able to bring this confidence over into their day-to-day lives – into the office and the home, so that's another benefit.'

UPGRADE YOUR,

Whether you're short on time or simply want to make the most of your stroll, we've got some great ways to take things up a gear.





TRACK YOUR PROGRESS The amount of people wearing fitness trackers reached an all-time high recently. They can be a wonderful motivational tool, both in terms of moving more, and increasing the intensity of your walks. Whatever you focus on, it appears the mere act of measuring your activity can encourage you to do more. A recent study found that people who used trackers to count their steps as part of a walking plan had a more active lifestyle several years later than those without one. UNDERSTAND YOUR FOOT TYPE affect footwear choice, here

RELAX YOUR HANDS

You might not always focus on your hands, but every little helps. Some people clench them and this can spread tension up your arm, into your shoulders and affect your posture. 'Imagine you are holding something that needs to be held carefully, like a baby chick!' says Roger. 'We call it "soft and engaged". Your fingers are curled, they are active and working, or dynamic, but they are not tense.'

'Your body is an amazing, interconnected system. But this means bad footwear can cause aches and pains in your feet, knees, hips, back or even your shoulders,' says personal trainer Simon Cass. 'Good walking shoes will provide you with the support you need.'

If you go to a reputable outdoor shop, they should be able to analyse how you walk and help make sure you are wearing the right kind of shoe. Does your foot roll inwards or outwards as you go? A certain amount of roll is normal, but if it's too much, specialist shoes might help. If you think your foot might have a particularly high or low arch which could

affect footwear choice, here is a test you can do at home.

- Wet the sole of your foot.
- Stand on a dark surface, so you can see your footprint.
- Examine which of the images below matches your footprint most closely. If your arches are high or low, it might be worth talking to footwear experts before you increase your activity.



STRETCH TO IMPROVE YOUR STRIDE

'Walking is an incredibly positive, inclusive exercise, but there are things you can do when you're not walking to get even more out of it,' says walking expert Caroline Sandry.

FORWARD BEND

- Stand tall with your feet close together
- Inhale and stretch both arms overhead
- Exhale and fold forward
- Bend your knees to accommodate hamstring length, and place your hands on the floor beside your feet
- Hold, and take deep slow breaths, breathing into the whole of your back
- Release your arms and curl back up to stand upright. Repeat, trying to gently straighten your legs in the bend position. Do it three to four times.

RUNNER'S LUNGE

- Stand with your feet hip-width apart
- Take a big step back keeping feet hip-width apart and parallel
- Bend your front knee and gently sink into the stretch, pressing your back heel towards the floor (keep your hips square to the front)
- Stretch your arms overhead and gently sink forward
- Look up and breathe deeply in and out
- Do this three to four times each side.







physical results of walking. 'A brisk 20-minute walk each day is all it takes to improve overall health markers,' she says.

HOW IT KEEPS YOU SLIM

'Walking helps you target visceral fat around your waist,' says Dr William Bird, a Berkshire GP and pioneer of Green Gyms and Health Walks. 'Visceral fat accumulates around organs and is designed as a temporary fat store for the body. When we were hunter gatherers and food was in short supply, we needed a fat store that could quickly be turned into energy to keep us going. It sat on the waist because there it didn't get in the way of throwing a spear or running!'

The problem with this type of fat is that it stores hormones and proteins that cause inflammation in the arteries and cells when they get into the blood stream. 'It's very harmful fat, unlike the fat in other parts of your body, such as the superficial fat found just beneath your skin,' explains Dr Bird. 'Fortunately, because it's designed to break down more quickly than other fat stores, it's the first fat to go when you exercise. Even a small amount of weight loss around the waist can bring big benefits for health.'

But, you need to keep up a good pace in order to gain maximum benefit – this means walking at a brisk pace rather than a stroll. 'Brisk walking speeds up your metabolism, which has an effect that lasts for two to six hours after you've finished,' says Dr Bird. 'To reap the benefits, walking has to be at a pace that leaves you slightly out of breath.'

In fact, rather than counting steps, Public Health England has urged people to focus instead on their pace and launched the Active10 app to help. It tracks your walking and lets you know when you are going at the right speed.

'Physical activity can be hard to sustain at times,' says Dr Bird. 'But if it's combined with meeting friends and being out in nature, it's infinitely more pleasurable and, therefore, an activity that people are much more likely to stick with.'

You might feel walking is such an everyday thing that it's unlikely to bring waist-whittling results, but it does work! In fact, data in the *Journal of Exercise Nutrition and Biochemistry* reports that overweight women lost 1.1 inches from

their waistline through walking for just 50-70 minutes three times a week – all from regularly putting one foot in front of the other!

'Walking really can help melt off excess pounds,' says Lucy Wyndham-Read, YouTube fitness and walking expert. 'It's a full-body workout that engages all of the major muscle groups and it trumps running in that it will encourage you to take a fuller range of motion, especially through your hips and shoulders.'

This means it can help to tone and sculpt the surrounding muscles, and when you've got more muscle, it boosts your metabolism so you naturally burn more calories – even while resting.

Of course, the benefits of a spritely stroll don't stop there. Walking is low-impact so it puts less stress on the joints and bones. However, because it's a weight-bearing activity, it can still improve bone density. 'It's kind on joints and also on the elasticity of skin, which makes it great for preventing unnecessary sagging skin,' adds Lucy. 'The list of benefits really does go on – it's great for cardiovascular health, mental health and is an instant energy-booster, just to name a few!'

But how do you turn an everyday jaunt into a weight-loss walk? As we touched on before, the trick is to pick up the pace. While a brisk walk will burn up to 400 calories per hour, a slow walk burns just 225 calories an hour – that's quite a difference.

'To get a calorie-burning effect, it's really important to turn up the intensity of your trek,' says Lucy. 'Think of it like this: the speed you stroll around the

you stroll around the supermarket is your slow-to-moderate pace, but the speed you walk at if you're late for a meeting is your fast pace – and this is the speed to go at if you're going to use oodles of energy and burn calories.'

So, you see, walking doesn't have to be an easy option, so if you're looking to pummel pounds while you stroll, this plan is for you...

A brisk walk is all it takes to significantly improve various long-term health markers 'Walking is great for your cardiovascular system, mental health and energy levels,' says expert Lucy Wyndham-Read



FOUR KEYS TO SLIMMING SUCCESS

Set the pace. Build up your speed at a gradual pace – as explained on p4. You are aiming to increase it so that your heart rate speeds up, but you should still be able to breathe without gasping and be able to talk as you walk.

Pump your arms. To develop speed, pump your arms as you walk. The faster you go, the more calories you'll burn. Bend at the elbows and move them back and forth. You'll find it hard to go at a decent pace if your arms are by your sides.

Plan your route. Before you set off, plan where you will walk, so you know how far you'll go. It's a good idea to set a circular route so you are never far away from home.

Incorporate rest days. These are crucial, to let your body recover. Do calm activities such as yoga, Pilates or go for a gentle swim on these days.



WAIST-WHITTLING WALK PLAN

'The beauty of walking is that you can just open your front door and go,' says Walk the Walk's Nina Barough. 'But, before you set off, follow my tips to make your walking sessions even better...'

WEEK ONE

MONDAY: 15 MINUTES OF BRISK WALKING

It's the first day of your new walking routine, so enjoy it. Plan it into your day, pick a nice park or some nearby countryside and get going! Wear trainers or walking shoes with a fairly flexible sole. If you're walking off-road, invest in a pair of trail shoes, which have extra grip for muddy paths.

TUESDAY: 15 MINUTES OF BRISK WALKING

In these first few days, you're aiming to start building your fitness and make walking a habit. Think about the best time of day for your walks and schedule them in. You might feel getting up a bit earlier hard at first, but the reward is it's lovely and quiet.

WEDNESDAY: 20 MINUTES OF BRISK WALKING

Find a local walk that takes in some hills. They don't have to be huge steep slopes – just some undulation to challenge you a little and get you working a bit harder. Aim for 20 minutes and really power up the hills, using your arms as accelerators.



Good posture will help you avoid getting aches and pains from your daily strolls, so make sure you're not slouching!



Adding in these hills helps build strength in your legs and bottom, and boosts the cardiovascular benefits of your daily walk.

THURSDAY: 20 MINUTES OF BRISK WALKING

Today, add in some strength work for your upper body. Every five minutes or so, stop at a bench and do 10-15 press-ups. Start with your body in a straight line, either place your hands on the bench backrest (easiest) or on the seat (harder) and lower yourself up and down. If you're not in a park, use a tree or wall for standing press-ups.

FRIDAY: 20 MINUTES OF BRISK WALKING

Focus on your pace and technique. Good posture will help you avoid getting aches and pains from your daily strolls, so make sure you're not slouching forwards or looking at the ground.

Imagine a string from the top of your head, pulling you up tall. See if you can keep up that briskness for the whole walk without unconsciously slipping into a stroll.

SATURDAY: 20 MINUTES OF BRISK WALKING

Today when you're out on your walk, find a step or park bench every five minutes and step up on to it, then step back down.

Lead with your right leg, then step back down with the right leg first. Then step up with the left, stepping back down with the left. Aim for six to eight step-ups each time you stop.

SUNDAY: REST DAY OR MOBILITY WORK AT HOME

Complement your walking with a Pilates or yoga YouTube video to help build up your core stability and get the good mobility needed for fast, efficient walking.

Some well-chosen stretches can help you avoid some potential pitfalls of walking, such as an achy back and stiff legs and feet.

We love Brett Larkin's Easy Yoga for Your Feet and Ankles (15-min). You can find it on YouTube.



WEEK TWO

MONDAY: 25 MINUTES OF INTERVAL WALKING

Warm up by walking for five minutes. Then, do two minutes at a pace that you couldn't sustain for the whole walk, so you are a bit more out of breath than usual; then two minutes at a steady pace. Do this four times. Then, walk at a steady pace for the final four minutes.

TUESDAY: 25 MINUTES OF BRISK WALKING ON A HILLY ROUTE

Return to your previous hilly route, or find a new one. If it only has one or two short inclines, walk up them, back down and up them again, then continue with your walk so you get as much of a hill challenge as possible.

WEDNESDAY: 25-30 MINUTES BRISK WALKING

Stride out briskly and make sure you keep up the pace. Swing your arms to help your speed and look ahead of you. Repeat the upper body work you did in Week 1 by stopping to do some bench or tree press-ups every five minutes. Try to add five press-ups to the number you managed last week.

THURSDAY: 20 MINUTES OF BRISK WALKING

Walk for five minutes to warm up. Then every three minutes, lunge walk for 16-20 paces. Keeping your torso upright, take a big step forwards and bend your front knee to 90 degrees (or as close as you can get it), push back up, swing the back leg through and repeat. Lunge

walking opens up your hip flexors and strengthens the muscles in your legs and your bottom.

FRIDAY: REST DAY

If you want to, today you can do a 15-minute steady walk. Include some mobility work at home as well, as you did on the Sunday of Week 1. Some stretches or a yoga session would be perfect. Maintaining mobility and flexibility will mean that you can walk further and faster without picking up injuries from tight hips or a stiff lower back.

SATURDAY: 30 MINUTES OF BRISK WALKING

Add in intervals into your training once again. Warm up by walking at a steady pace for five minutes and then aim for three minutes at a higher pace, with two minutes of recovery.

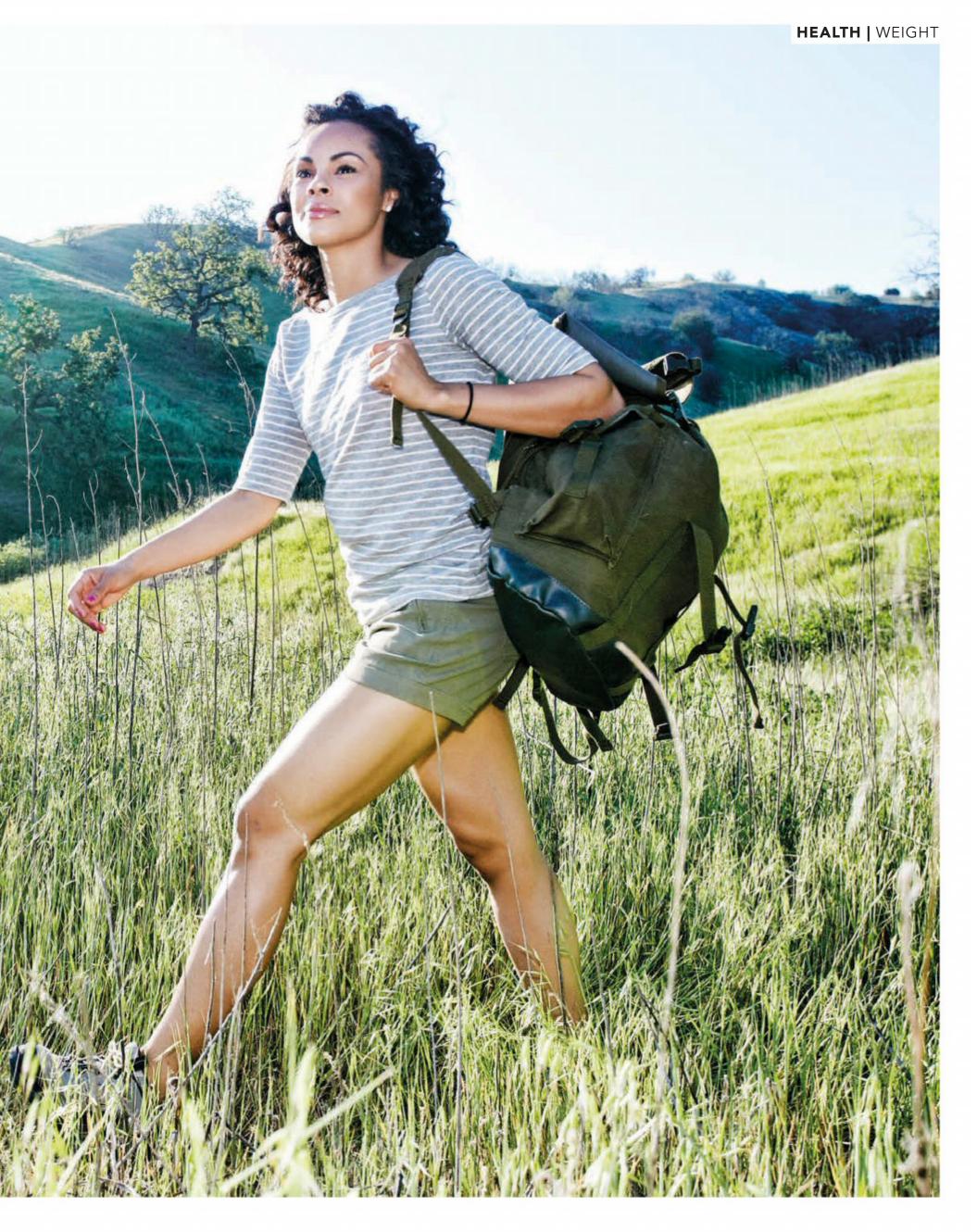
Do this four times so you get 20 minutes of interval training. Finish with five minutes at a steady pace to cool down.

SUNDAY: 35 MINUTES OF BRISK WALKING

You can walk for longer if you wish! Your stamina and strength will have progressed hugely in the past fortnight because of all of the work that you've put in.

Enjoy your new fitness and keep up with the moves you've done in the last two weeks, such as press-ups and bench stepping.

You'll notice that walking for this length of time at a brisk pace feels easier. The world is now your walking oyster!



THE WONDERS OF JUNE WALLS

A bracing beachside walk can blow away the cobwebs and clear your mind, and what's more, striding across sand has bonus fitness benefits too, as our writer Katherine Watt explains...

EMORIES OF THE SEASIDE always take me back to Norfolk, where my Nana was born and raised before retiring in Holt, near Cromer. Whenever we visited, we were guaranteed a trip to go crabbing in Cromer, or a brisk stroll along the Blakeney coast. Even after one of Nana's famous Sunday lunches, an afternoon walk by the sea would help all sluggishness dissipate, clearing our heads and getting our blood pumping again before we had to drive back to the city.

The benefits of coastal walks have been the subject extensive research, including a UK-wide survey by the European Centre for Environment and Human Health at the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry at the University of Exeter, which aimed to discover whether living by the sea boosts your health and wellbeing.

'We looked at a census of 48 million people, their distance from the coastline and their self-reported health,' says senior lecturer and environmental psychologist Dr Mathew White. 'It showed that living closer to the sea made you healthier.

'Three main reasons are that people relax more by the sea, which lowers blood pressure; they take more physical activity, strolling along the beach and coastal paths all year round; and they have more positive social interactions to boost brain health,' he adds.

Wherever you live in the UK, you're never more than 70 miles away from the coast – often much less – so read on to find out why it's worth taking a trip to the seaside to walk along our rugged shores...





YOU BURN MORE CALORIES

Walking on sand enables you to burn
2.7 times more energy than walking on
a solid, flat path, as your body requires more
effort to lift your feet out of the loose surface. This
means that while your usual 30-minute walk burns
around 170 calories, a half-hour seaside stroll can
burn more than 400. Coupled with the fact that
your basal metabolic rate – the number of
calories you use daily, even at rest, to keep
your body functioning – increases in colder
temperatures, a short walk along the
beach on cooler days could
help you walk off any
extra weight.

YOUR DIGESTION SPEEDS UP

A post-meal meander quickens your digestion and helps regulate your blood sugar levels. One German study tested people who'd had either a digestif, a coffee or done a slow 20-minute walk, and found that the latter experienced significantly quicker digestion than those who'd had the drinks*. Another study looked at blood sugar levels of people who walked for 20 minutes, 15 minutes after they'd eaten, and found their glucose levels were lower than those who hadn't walked after they'd eaten*.

YOU ENHANCE YOUR IMMUNITY

The air beside a body of water is filled with health-boosting negative ions. These are formed when water particles crash together and cause oxygen atoms to gain an extra electron. It's said that when the air has anything above 50,000 negative ions per cubic metre, it's so pure that germs can't survive. This purer air quality is not only better for your lungs, but stimulates disease-resisting cells in your immune system.

Considering that seaside air has around 70,000 negative ions per cubic metre, it's the perfect place to take in these 'vitamins of the air'.

YOUR LUNGS GET A BOOST

Sea air keeps your lung function healthy, as it has been proven to thin any mucus by breaking it down. This is thanks to the salt air's natural antibacterial properties, which reduce coughing by clearing irritants from your airways, and decrease sinus pressure due to the decongestant effect. Salt water has also been used for thousands of years in spa towns around the coast, such as Brighton and Bexhill, where you'll find centres dedicated to thalassotherapy – the use of sea water to cure health issues. One such treatment is the use of saline steam baths to ease lung problems.

THE WAVES CALM YOU

If you're feeling overworked or have a lot on your mind, taking a break to wander amid the sounds of crashing waves could be just what you need. Californian scientists found that when people listen to the sounds of the sea, the same neurons in their brain light up as when they are engaged in deep meditation. When you attain a relaxed state like this, you produce less of the stress hormone cortisol, and your blood pressure naturally decreases.

STAY FIT ALONG THESE COASTAL WALKS

SCOTLAND

The wide beaches of Balnakeil Bay in Sutherland, the Highlands, provide lots of opportunity for calorie-burning power walks. Shifting sand makes your legs work harder so you'll tone up faster.



NORTH ENGLAND

With dramatic sand dunes and the surrounding pine woods, Formby beach in Lancashire is a great location for giving your glutes and thighs a thorough workout.



SOUTH ENGLAND

At Bolberry Down in Devon, you can stroll along the sand or choose the grassland paths, where you'll hear a meditative mix of calming waves and the sound of wind rushing through the long grasses.



EAST OF ENGLAND

Essex contains the longest stretch of coastline in the UK, providing plenty of seaside walking opportunities. Most of it is flat, too, so it's perfect for jogging, such as at Bradwell-on-Sea (below).



WALES

Walks along the Gower Peninsula are stunning, particularly when you get to the Worm's Head at Rhossili, where the waves crash against the rocks. Breathe deeply for a boost of negative ions.



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Perfect your CSTURE

With the right walking posture you can focus your energy and avoid injuries. Personal trainer Simon Cass tells you how...

BEFORE YOU START

It's a good idea to warm up your spine before you set off on your walk. Firstly, jog or march on the spot for about a minute. Then, stand up straight with your hands on your hips, keeping them facing forward and rotate from the waist in both directions, five times. Next, imagine you are standing between two panes of glass, and lean over to one side, then the other. Do this five times.

Finally, bend forwards from the waist and then lean back, five times.

Don't force anything - you will find your range of movement gradually increases if you stick with it. See p17 for more pre- and post-stroll stretches.

KEEP CHECKING YOUR POSTURE

In an ideal world, once you had set yourself in the right posture, you would stay like that... forever! Sadly, this isn't the case, so whenever you have a break, check how you're doing. Pausing before you cross the road? Take a deep breath and stretch your spine. Stopping to take a drink? Make sure your shoulders are relaxed when you pick your bag back up and set off again. Frequent checks like these, whether it's a long walk or you're just popping round to the shops, will help you stay problem free.

HEAD

Keep your head up and look to the horizón. If you spend your time looking at your feet as you walk this puts more stress on your neck muscles and can lead to postural problems. In contrast, looking into the distance is good for your eyesight, and counteracts long periods of looking at phones or screens.

You can also do some neck exercises to help keep the correct alignment. Starting in an upright posture with hands on your hips, tuck your chin to your chest, hold, then tilt it back as far as it will go. Then look over each shoulder as far as you can without discomfort. Finish by moving your head from side to side, trying to get your ear as close to your shoulder as you can. Do five in each direction.

STOMACH

When walking, draw your tummy in towards your spine. When you breathe,

imagine you are breathing deeply into your stomach.

Engaging your stomach muscles this way will strengthen your core which will, in turn, improve your balance. When you breathe deeply your muscles will become stronger, as will your diaphragm. Deep breathing also means more oxygen and more energy flowing into your muscles. In between walks, doing planks

and push ups - as described in the shoulder section, opposite - will strengthen your stomach.

You could also try bridge raises and abdominal bracing. Start by lying on your back with knees bent, feet flat on the floor and palms by your sides. Slowly raise your hips towards the ceiling, and lower under control.

Do eight to 15 of those, then raise your right knee towards your chest and push against it with your right hand. Hold for five seconds and then repeat on the other side.

SHOULDERS
Before you begin
your walk, set your
shoulders in the right position.
Simply stand up straight, lift
your shoulders towards your
ears, pull them back, then relax.
Your shoulders are essentially
part of your core. Holding them
correctly will help keep your
chest open, so you can breathe
more easily and move more

efficiently. It saves your energy too, so you can enjoy more of your walk without feeling tired.

Between walks you can strengthen your shoulders with simple bodyweight exercises. Try supporting your body in a plank position for about 15-30 seconds, three times. Aim to complete three sets of eight to 15 push-ups, resting on your knees if necessary.

HIPS

Your hips keep your pelvis in the correct position, which will prevent lower-back aches and pains. To keep them strong and flexible, do some squats and lunges to cool down after and between walks. Try eight to 15 repetitions.

To do a squat, stand tall with your feet shoulder-width apart, toes forward. Cross your arms over your chest, then hinge your hips back and bend your knees. Keep your back in a neutral position. Try to lower yourself as far as you can. Then push your hips forwards again to stand.

To lunge, start in the same position as a squat. Step forwards in line with your hips and bend the lead knee. Lower yourself as far as you can, keeping your knee and foot in alignment. Push off the front foot to a standing position and repeat on the other side. After your walk, hold a squat and a lunge for 15 seconds to stretch your hips.

KNEES

If the muscles that move your knees are strong, it will help keep the joint healthy and allow you to absorb the impact of walking. Squats and lunges are great for your knees. As you do these exercises, your knee bends and this means the muscles either side of the knee are working. You can also vary your lunges by stepping to the side and to the rear. If you're worried about your balance, hold onto a support before doing your squats and lunges.



drought. Cue natural calming thoughts!





IT HELPS YOU SHIFT PERSPECTIVE

When next in the rain, take a moment to become present to your surroundings (rather than shuffling along, head-bowed, to the nearest shelter!), and you'll be astounded by what you see. The world becomes a different place when shrouded by rainfall, diffused in a unique light, with everything changing in shape, colour and sound. You may even encounter natural splendours reserved only for those who venture out in wet weather: steam rising from the ground, yellow storm light, flowers closing their petals until the sun emerges again.

This different view of the world can help inspire a shift in perspective in other areas of life, too. A little shake-up of how you see things is sometimes all you need to make positive progress.



YOU BREATHE CLEANER AIR

If you're hoping to get a little fresh air, there's no better time to go for a walk than when it's raining. As a raindrop falls through the atmosphere, a natural phenomenon occurs whereby the droplet attracts tens to hundreds of air-pollution particles such as traffic pollution. This process does a remarkable job of cleaning the air around you, making it better to breathe in.

A 2015 study published in the journal *Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics* demonstrated just how effective rain is at reducing air pollution.

Dan Cziczo, of MIT in the US, which carried out the research, said the results of the study showed rain had the potential to improve air quality and human health.

1

YOU'LL LEARN TO LET GO

There are many things in life beyond your control, yet sometimes it can be a struggle to let go and truly accept what *is*.

From grieving a lost loved one, to feeling stressed about a job interview, there are times when releasing control is the best and only thing you can do... and taking a walk in the rain can help.

You can't control when it rains, just as you can't control so many aspects of life. The weather is unpredictable, so a stroll in the rain can help remind you of that. And if you can learn to be OK with rain, you can take that acceptance into other areas of your life.

HOWTO ENJOYA RAINWALK

Next time you hear the pitter-patter of raindrops, resist the urge to hole up indoors. Don your wellies, grab a brolly and head outside for a rain walk. Maintaining a positive outlook all comes down to being truly present in the moment...

BREATHE MINDFULLY

Being fully present always
begins with breathing, so bringing
your awareness to your breath is the
first step. Mouth-breathing triggers a
subtle anxiety response, whereas
deliberate and focused breathing through
your nose is calming and works wonders
for clearing your mind. Take a series of
deep, steady inhales and exhales
through your nose, releasing
slowly and focusing wholly on
the process at hand.









lifestylist, Tony Riddle (tonyriddle.com). 'But many modern shoe designs are the complete opposite. This means your feet could be squashed into shoes that change their shape, or they've got thick soles that shut off receptors, so can result in a less natural walk and cause problems further up your body, such as tight hamstrings, lazy glutes and a weak core.'

But don't worry, there's no need to kick off your heels in the middle of a restaurant or ditch your slip-ons in the supermarket. What you can do is embrace the barefoot ethos as much as possible in and around your home and garden – as long as the weather's ok. By spending more time barefoot or even switching to so-called 'barefoot shoes', such as the eco-friendly Vivobarefoot Primus Lite III. (from £110, vivobarefoot.co.uk), for some of your daily activities, you can help free your feet and trade any

health niggles for a lean, defined physique and a stronger, healthier posture, just as nature intended!

WHAT A FEELING!

'Psychologically, it feels incredible to experience the earth beneath your feet,' says fitness expert Anna Toombs (trbalance.com). 'Think about the first thing many people do on a sandy beach – they get their shoes off asap to feel the sand between their toes.

'The feel of different textures and temperatures adds to any experience. Just as a walk in the countryside can be better than trudging around a concrete city on a grey day, it's much more fun to feel mud, grass and gravel under your feet than the monotonous inside of a shoe!'

HEALING FROM YOUR SOLE

Barefoot walking gives you
a direct connection with the earth,
and this element of grounding can
have a healing effect on your body.

There's an increasing amount of research being
carried out in this area. Martial artists and yogis
have recognised the importance of earthing
connection for thousands of years.

'By simply removing your shoes and touching
base with the earth you can start to
reconnect and rewire pathways in your
brain that have been waning since
you started wearing shoes as
a baby,' says Tony.

THE BIOMECHANICAL BENEFITS

'I go barefoot as much as possible,' says Anna.

'I'm nearly always barefoot in my house or around the garden. I recognise that it's certainly not the social norm to be barefoot in all situations, but it's good to do it as much as possible,' explains Anna.

Your feet are incredibly

sensitive and they are equipped with a complex array of nerves to relay signals back to your brain, but shoes dull this feedback. If you begin to spend time in bare feet, you'll notice how your balance and proprioception (sense of body position) improve.'

EACH FOOT IS MADE UP OF...

26 bones

33 joints

100 muscles

HOW YOUR FEET WORK

Feet have 200,000 exteroceptors

– highly-tuned sensors in your soles
to help you tune in to surroundings.
'Your feet have the ability to mould,
grip, grab and switch from softness
to tension and stiffness in a
millisecond,' says Tony.

'Terrain information from the exteroceptors in your feet is used to adjust your joints, core and other muscles and tendons, as well as

alter your posture to protect against injury. All the while, your brain makes subtle microadjustments to the shapes your feet make over varying terrain, not only to minimise the risk of injury, but also to maximise the efficiency of your movement.' See p16 for info on your foot type.

Eyou go down to the ...or parks, hills or anywhere in nature, you're sure of a big boost to your wellbeing. Find out why the great outdoors is the best mind-body medicine and where to get your fix. 38 topsante.co.uk

Time among
the trees brings
feelings of
calm

of pine trees, the calming effect of an ocean view, the beautiful sunset that can move you to tears... we've all felt the power of nature. But a groundswell of research is now showing that spending time in the great outdoors gives you more than just a good feeling – it has real, measurable benefits, both mental and physical, that add years to your life.

'Scientists are quantifying nature's effect not only on mood and wellbeing, but also on your ability to think – to remember, plan, create, daydream and to focus – as well as on your social skills,' says Florence Williams, author of *The Nature Fix* (Norton).

But, the more everyday technology tends to dominate the way we navigate modern life, the less likely we are to tap into the sense of wellbeing so readily available to us in the wild.

The average Brit now spends more time using technological devices than they do sleeping – let alone exploring, socialising or taking time to 'just be' in the great outdoors. 'We don't experience natural environments enough to realise how restored they can make us feel,' says Florence.

THE NATURE EFFECT

With science exploring the positive impact the wild has on our brains, the 'nature effect' is now a hot topic. And the findings are hard to ignore— while even tiny 'nature snacks' have been shown to boost wellbeing, if you seek out longer forays into nature — for example an extended weekend in the wild or a short rural retreat — you'll reap even bigger benefits. The Japanese study mentioned in the next article showed evidence of a 'three-day effect'. After people spent this amount of time in a forest, their levels of killer white blood cells — so-called because they attack infections — soared by 50 per cent, and their heart rates also lowered.

No matter how much of a nature fix you opt for, and no matter where you do it, there are some serious health benefits to be had. Ready to re-wild yourself? Then it's time to step outside...

Feel the forest

Forests have been grabbing health headlines in the past couple of years thanks to Japanese research into Shinrin-yoku, or 'forest bathing'. Its popularity has spread into the UK so much so that Center Parcs' refurbished Sherwood Forest spa has a dedicated forest bathing area, where you can stroll in the woods and enjoy treetop saunas!

In studies that looked at walkers' wellbeing when they returned from a woodland stroll, they were found to have lower blood pressure and fewer adrenaline-triggered stress responses. One of the

intriguing reasons for this is the antibacterial phytoncides we breathe in when in a forest. Plants – particularly pine trees – emit large amounts of airborne particles that encourage your immune system's defences, and activate your parasympathetic nervous system, the rest and digest part of your nervous system.

TAKE A BREAK

Spending time among trees gives the cognitive portion of your brain a break from the drain of multi-tasking. When your mind overloads, it can cause attention fatigue, which makes it difficult to focus, but you can help your brain refresh by practising a little 'forest meditation'. Notice the sounds, smells and sights of the forest, while allowing your inner dialogue to fall silent.



Don't underestimate the power of the park! Even the smallest **n**ugget of **nat**ure can **unlea**sh serious

benefits to those who make time for it. Simply being in green spaces – in fact, just looking out of a window at a natural scene – can diminish stress and boost memory and concentration. Researchers from the University of Michigan, in the US, found that students performed better in memory and attention tests after they took a walk in a park, compared to those who walked through the city streets.

In a Finnish study, city dwellers who strolled for 20 minutes through an urban park reported significantly more relaxation than those who strolled in a city centre. But if you live in an urban area, there are still benefits. Try tweaking your daily habits so you consciously seek out nature more. You could vary your commute so you walk through a park, seek out routes with trees, and enjoy the natural (or otherwise) sounds around you.

CALM AND CONNECTED

A grassy park is a great place to kick off your shoes. Walking barefoot maximises sensitivity of the 200,000 nerve endings in your feet, helping your whole body to function better and encouraging you to feel more calm and mindful (see p37).

Of course you have to pay more attention if you are barefoot, so that you don't step on anything nasty. This means your mind is less likely to wander, making it easier for you to be present in the moment.





Big, goosebump-inspiring views make people feel more inclined to help someone in need, according to researchers from the University of California. They found that awe – the feeling of being in the presence of something vast that transcends your understanding of the world – leads people to think less of their own entitlement, and more of others'. It may also boost your defence system. Like with the forest bathing study, researchers linked the awe we feel when touched by the beauty of nature with fewer inflammatory proteins called cytokines, which benefits your immune system.

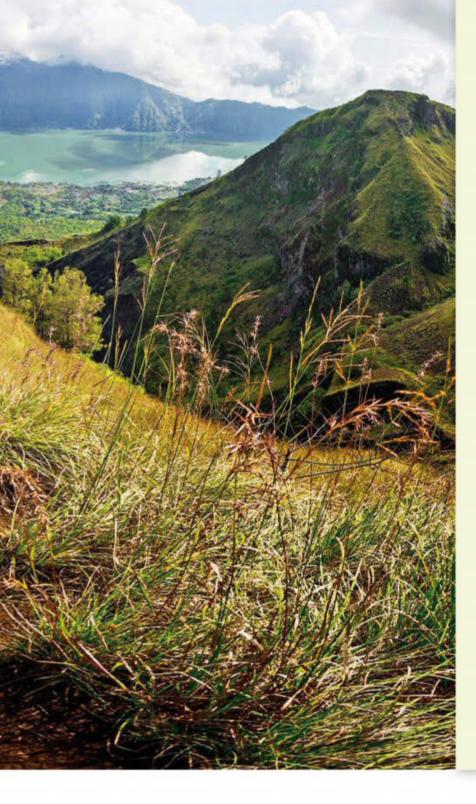
'The fact that awe, wonder and beauty promote lower levels of cytokines suggests the things we do to experience these emotions – including a walk in nature – have a



direct influence upon health and life expectancy,' says study co-author, psychologist Dacher Keltner.

LOOK AROUND YOU

Being in the hills also gives you the opportunity to look up and cloud gaze. Lie on your back and watch the clouds change and morph above you. Pretend you're a child again and flex your imagination, looking for pictures in the clouds. Soft, drifting clouds are also a great focus for some outdoor meditation. Simply watch, notice and join the clouds in their natural state of flow.



RE-WILD IN A WEEKEND

• QUIRKY CRAFT IN THE LAKE DISTRICT: From raku pottery and willow sculptures to wood carving, there's a unique course for you in the great outdoors. See: quirkyworkshops.co.uk

• YOGA BY A WATERFALL:
Set in magnificent scenery of hills, lochs, rivers and forests nestles Ecoyoga, a rustic, off-grid retreat near Argyll, Scotland. There are no yoga classes, but you can practise in and around the studio and enjoy solar-powered hot tubs. From £760 for a self-catered cabin for two. See ecoyoga.

COASTAL WALKABOUT:

Explore the wild and spectacular South West Coastal Path near Prawle, Devon, and learn about the edible and delicious food available and the abundance of wildlife. Forage, fish, wild camp and wild swim. See wildwise.co.uk for more on this and other events.

BAREFOOT WALKING:

Book a barefoot ramble with an inspirational guide,
Cumbrian shepherdess Alison
O'Neill. Cross wildflower meadows and take a dip in a waterfall. Alison offers different events and makes and sells a range of woollen products. See shepherdess.

• SLEEP IN A
TREE CANOPY:
Unwind and listen
to the wind in the

co.uk.

treetops as you relax in The Forager's Cabin, a rustic secluded treehouse in Powys, Wales, complete with two decks, an indoor wood burner and outdoor chiminea, plus rustic hot tub. Enjoy outdoor cooking on the fire bowl in the evenings or simply listen to the sounds of nature. Find secluded treehouses and other unique retreats at canopyandstars. co.uk

• STELLAR STARGAZING:

Officially the best place in England to enjoy the heavens, Northumberland International Dark Sky Park is Europe's largest area of protected night sky. Visit the Kielder Observatory and stay in the Posh Huts at Kielder Water with woodland or river views and wood burning stoves to keep you cosy at night. See: poshhuts.com





in the previous article, every time you head out for a walk you're treating your body and brain to a spot of ecotherapy. Whilst that sounds like some pricey new spa experience, ecotherapy – the term for the healing benefits of spending time in the great outdoors – is easily accessible and absolutely free!

'Human beings have existed for around seven million years,' explains Professor Yoshifumi Miyazaki, author of Shinrin-yoku: The Japanese Way of Forest Bathing for Health and Relaxation (Aster). 'Considering urbanisation coincided with the industrial

revolution, that particular history is only 200 to 300 years old, meaning humans have spent 99.99 per cent of their history living in nature. Your brain, body and even genes are adapted to nature, but we now live in an artificial environment.'

This can lead you into a state of overstimulation and pressure that causes your body underlying stress without you even realising it.

'In recent years, stress-related diseases have become a social problem on a global scale,' says Professor Miyazaki.

THERAPY OF NATURE

So, the professor devised 'Forest Bathing' – inspired by the abundance

of woodland in his home country of Japan. His studies showed just how beneficial the stress-lowering effects of being among the trees were for people's health. 'As well as lowering blood pressure for five days after the walk, the improvements in immune function continued for a week afterwards,' he says.

A BREAK FOR YOUR BRAIN

When you walk through nature and purely focus on what you can see, hear and feel there, it relieves your brain from the daily multitasking that it's used to. This is how ecotherapy calms and renews your focus in the same way that a session of meditation would. Man-made



according to research undertaken by the University of Exeter.

In nature, without interference from various emotional or physical stress responses – no matter how subtle – you'll not only have clearer thoughts and better physical health; you'll feel happier and sleep more soundly, too.

'When you come into contact with any kind of nature, your body automatically unwinds pent-up tension without you even noticing,' says Professor Miyazaki. 'This simple act helps to regulate your nervous system, promoting a healthier balance between activation and relaxation.'

the cherry blossom or leaf foliage, sitting solo while mindfully sipping tea, or feeling the warmth and texture of the trees themselves. Wherever you walk, just tune in to what personally helps you feel good at the time. This could mean a walk with no particular destination in mind, a lazy cloudgazing stroll as you focus on your breathing, or simply enjoying time away from your phone.

Before you know it, you'll be combining the physical advantages of walking with the meditative, mindful benefits. Learn more on how to tune into senses as you stroll on p46.

- negative ions, which positively react with the oxygen you breathe. See p26 for more on the benefits of blue space.
- If you're in an urban area, apps such as Walkit and Hikideas can guide you to the 'greenest' route.
- Phytoncides are essential oils emitted by wood and plants, which boost your immunity.

WALK YOUR WAY TO BLISS

With a little focus, you can boost the mental benefits of your walk even further by incorporating moving meditations.

OT ALL WHO WANDER ARE lost, said JRR Tolkien, and he was right. A gentle stroll helps you feel calm, collected and present. And when you walk with meditative purpose – reflecting on the beauty of nature and taking time just for you – you'll return feeling more grounded and, ultimately, happier.

Walking meditations have been used for centuries and are rooted in Buddhist, yogic and Taoist teachings. 'Different traditions have different ways of doing the practice,' says Live and Dare meditation teacher Giovanni Dienstmann (liveanddare.com). 'Some walks

focus on physical health, some use visualisation to harmonise body and mind, others are more free-form.'

Walking meditatively is as relevant and effective today as it ever was. In a recent report from UK mental health charity MIND, it was revealed that 94 per cent of people found an improvement in their mood after spending time reflecting in the great outdoors.

It doesn't even need to be a long walk for you to feel the benefits. Wherever you are across the country, no matter how much time you have, you can always find a few minutes, or maybe longer, to put one foot in front of the other and feel uplifted.



If you have 5 minutes... CREATE POSITIVITY

It might not seem like much, but just five minutes of being out in the great outdoors can have impressively positive effects on your mind. More than 1,000 people studied by the University of Essex said that their mood and self-esteem was significantly higher as a result of this short space of time spent outside.

What's more, this is all the time it takes to fit in a short walking meditation to further elevate these good feelings. The Taoist 'ball of energy' meditation focuses on the flow of energy within your body known as chi. It helps draw out positive feelings within you, putting a spring in your step and lightening your mood for the rest of the day.

TRY THE BALL OF ENERGY MEDITATION:

- Start walking to the rhythm of your breathing for example, breathe in for three footsteps, then out for three. You could breathe in for up to six or even 10 seconds whatever you're most comfortable with.
- As you walk, look around you and absorb the energy and promise of nature.
- Start to feel the energy being pulled into your stomach, specifically the space two inches below your navel. Focus on the happy, warm feelings that this brings.
- As you breathe out, visualise this energy expanding to a ball around your body. You can take this ball of positive energy into the rest of the day with you by closing your eyes and revisiting your walk.

If you have 30 minutes... WALK MINDFULLY

Even if you only have half an hour for lunch, it's plenty of time to take a mental pause and connect fully to the great outdoors. 'Taking a more mindful walk helps to reduce your cortisol levels and boost your mood,' says psychologist Emma Kenny (ekenny.co.uk). 'A lot of us are so busy – and distracted by electrical devices – that we rarely have enough time to recalibrate. But a mindful walk helps you be happy in the here and now.'

HOW TO WALK MINDFULLY:

- Mentally scan your body and acknowledge what you feel and where. Perhaps there are aches or niggles turn your focus away from them and let them go.
- Next, move on to your mind. Notice feelings that come and go. Don't be tempted to divide them into 'good' or 'bad' accept that they're passing through your mind instead of dwelling on or challenging them.
- Start to walk slowly and keep noticing things around you. Can you see anything you've overlooked before? Be like a tourist, even if you've walked the route hundreds of times. Marvel at the landscape or the buildings even the most mundane office block has beauty if you look for it.
- Keep accepting, and feeling grateful for, everything you see and feel as you walk in a leisurely way.
- After your walk, note down something you felt particularly thankful for and put it in a jar. At the end of the year, if you've walked like this regularly, you'll be able to track what a positive difference it's made to your long-term happiness.



If you have 1 hour... ENGAGE YOUR SENSES

Make the most of your surroundings by tuning in to all of your senses as you stroll. 'Start acknowledging what emerges from your walks,' says Clare Barry, founder of Urban Curiosity – a wellness and creativity company (urbancuriosity.co.uk). 'Notice a smell or sight, and then let it fall away with each breath and footstep.'

ENJOY SIGHTS, SOUNDS AND SCENTS:

- Set off at a steady pace. You want to elevate your heart rate, but stroll rather than power walk. Now, start to focus on each sense in turn.
- Follow the motion of your footsteps as your heels hit the ground then roll through to your toes. Pay attention to the feeling of the ground beneath you.
- Notice the air on your skin and the warmth of sunshine on your cheeks. Stretch out your hands to engage your fingers too, feeling the air between them.
- As you walk past flower-filled hedgerows or people's gardens, breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Notice the light floral fragrances mingling with each other. Does the scent change as you pass different displays?
- Admire the numerous species of blooms. How many different shades of red, pink or purple can you see? How many different types of petal shape or form? How do they make you feel?
- Listen to how the rustle of plants ties in to other noises, such as birdsong, garden machinery or laughter from people nearby. What joyful emotions do the different sounds evoke?
- As long as it's not private land, you could even take a keepsake of petals, or a nice stone or leaf, to keep a reminder of your sensory walk and the positive feelings you experienced.



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