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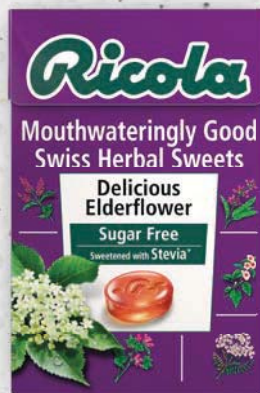


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Welcome...

There are two things it feels I can never, ever lay my hands on: fresh batteries, and a complete pair of socks. With five of us at home, it seems the need for new batteries is constant and never-ending. TV remote controls; children's toys; kitchen gadgets: something always seems to be on the go-slow, the telltale sign that means it requires a fresh set. And, frequently, that's how I feel, too: like someone has left my power switch in the 'on' position for too long and now I'm running on empty. I know it's partly to do with my busy life and partly to do with the past couple of years we've all lived through. But, right now, with the days at their longest and the sun here to guide our path, I want to feel fully charged and raring to go. So, this month, we're turning our attention to how to boost your energy right now. Our dossier (p51) takes a deep-dive into all the things that are secretly draining you, like a TV left in standby (p56), plus looks at ways to supercharge yourself (p60) and how to beat energy vampires (p58).

Someone who's certainly not suffering from a lack of get-up-and-go is our cover star, the brilliant Sara Cox. I've loved Sara ever since she burst onto our screens in the 1990s, and to see how she has evolved over the years, taking the rough with the smooth, including a quiet spell coinciding with having a young family that probably felt like the end of her career, to now holding near national-treasure status as a TV and radio star publishing her first novel, is a huge inspiration. Discover how she makes it all work on page 14.

We've also got some cracking insight from *Postcards from Midlife* podcast presenters Trish Halpin and Lorraine Candy, where they share their journeys into their middle years and how to make the most of this amazing time (p24).

Delving more into our emotions, we consider how to stop people pleasing and start making space for ourselves (p74) and discover why it's actually a strength not a weakness to change your mind (42), plus find ways to improve our resilience and build our mental strength (p34) – all techniques to help us shore up our energy resources.

I'm happy to report that I'm personally already feeling like I have a lot more spring in my step, thanks to all our inspiration this issue. I hope it helps you feel great, too!



Sally x

Sally Saunders,
Editor

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*FOR FULL DETAILS, SEE PAGE 40



JULY

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Fortify your mental
strength with firm
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COVER IMAGE: GUY LEVY

psychologies
DOSSIER

*With you
in mind*



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The advice starts RIGHT HERE!



JEFFREY NEVID

Far from fickle or flimsy thinking, having the ability to examine and re-evaluate your beliefs in the light of evidence is a major strength of character, not a weakness, says Jeffrey Nevid, a professor of psychology at St John's University, New York. Learn how you too can adopt a growth mindset on page 42.

EMMA REED TURRELL

'We are born people pleasers,' says author and therapist Emma Reed Turrell. But by getting to the root of what we really want – and don't want – we can initiate a shift away from sacrificing our needs to please others, and towards learning how to please ourselves more. Find out how on page 74.



EMMA HACKETT

'There are many reasons that compel us to eat and drink,' says Emma Hackett, a wellbeing coach, on page 92. Discover how, by questioning where our hunger is coming from, mindful eating can help us to untangle these different experiences of hunger, so we can respond in the most appropriate way.



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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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



Just for laughs

A good sense of humour really can help you find love (or at least lust), with psychologists rating it the top flirting technique.

Researchers in Norway and America found that making someone laugh is a better way to signal an attraction than eye contact and smiling – although these are good starting points.

Study co-author Rebecca Burch says: 'It is not only effective to be funny but it is very important that you show your potential partner that you think they are funny, too.'

IMAGES: GETTY IMAGES; SHUTTERSTOCK





Let's celebrate the summer!

By Katie Piper



As the weather gets warmer and the drinks get colder, I'm confident that summer 2022 will be a great one. But while summer is often the season where all things are rosy, it's also a time when we are most

hard on ourselves. As women, we are taught to feel the pressure of conforming to the ideal 'bikini body'. But this is your reminder that, in order to be 'bikini body ready', you simply need to have a body and wear a bikini! If you're lucky enough to enjoy some time in the sunshine this summer, I urge you to love yourself just as you are.

In the winter months, it is all too easy to cover up under big baggy jumpers. Summer forces people to peel away the layers. I have found that putting outfits together for warmer weather can be stressful but, recently I have been actively avoiding negative body talk. Instead, I try to focus on what I appreciate about my body and what it has done for me, rather than how it looks.

Despite the challenges that come with summer, it has countless benefits for our wellbeing. Studies show that spending time outdoors in the sun can improve your mood and increase your vitamin D levels, which in turn increases energy levels. I always find that when the sun is shining, I'm far more inspired to get moving. Whether it's a long walk or yoga in the garden, use those bursts of motivation to get out and reap the benefits!

Titanic has been named the UK's favourite period drama film in a survey of Showcase cinema customers, ahead of Gladiator and The King's Speech.



What's in a name?

Deciding what to call your child can be a wonderful part of parenthood, and now Italian women are going to be given more say in the matter.

Judges in the country have ended the practice of automatically giving babies their father's surname, declaring it 'discriminatory'.

Newborns will instead have the family names of both parents on their birth certificate, unless the pair agree to use just one.

Italian women tend to keep their last name after marriage, meaning their children have traditionally had a different one.

Italy's parliament need to pass a law to enact the change, but family minister Elena Bonetti said they were in support and it was a 'fundamental step in achieving equal rights between the women and the men of our country.'



WATCH, LOOK, LISTEN



WATCH The king of rock 'n' roll's life and music are given the Baz Luhrmann treatment in *Elvis*, starring Austin Butler as the singer, and Tom Hanks as his manager. Out 24 June.



LOOK Vivian Maier: *Anthology* at MK Gallery, Milton Keynes, is a striking glimpse of American life by the self-taught photographer, who chronicled her life as a nanny. Until 25 September.



LISTEN Bubbly *The Great British Bake Off* star Laura Adlington and best friend Lauren Smith chat body positivity, plus-size life, dating and health in empowering podcast *Go Love Yourself!*



Inspired by Wimbledon?

Then it could be time to try Pickleball, a hybrid of tennis, badminton and table tennis that is the fastest-growing sport in America and has ambitions to join the Olympics.

Played as either singles or doubles, the game takes place on a badminton court with a lower net, and involves rallying an aerated plastic ball with paddle-like bats. It's kinder on the joints than other racquet sports, while still offering a fun workout.

Tournaments are popping up around the UK, with the English Open taking place on 29 June to 3 July. Find out more at pickleballengland.org

Sorry
can be the
hardest word, especially

when you are hidden behind the cloak of social media. But scientists say honesty is the best policy if you want to keep your reputation and your friends online and beyond. A study by the University of Houston has found that intellectually humble behaviour during a Facebook debate leads to better impression formation, just as in real life.

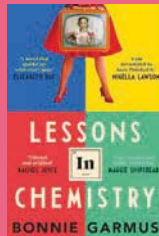
But it is especially vital because the disagreement may have hundreds of witnesses. 'Wrongness admission serves as a cue of intellectual humility, communion and competence,' says study author Adam Fetterman, an assistant professor of psychology.



3 inspiring reads... MATTERS OF THE HEART



1 *Lessons In Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus (Transworld, £14.99) is a humorous tale of an unconventional female scientist using cookery to change the lives of women in the 1960s.



2 *The Time Of My Life* by Rosie Mullender (Sphere, £14.99) sees female journalist Jess relive the worst day of her life again, again, and again, in this warm and witty twist on the film *Groundhog Day*.



3 *Run Rose Run* by Dolly Parton and James Patterson (Cornerstone, £20) is a gripping thriller about an aspiring country singer trying to escape her past. From America's top entertainer and bestselling crime writer.



A lifetime of brisk walking can make you feel 16 years younger by midlife, with University of Leicester scientists finding it slows the biological ageing process.



The secret seven

Seven hours' shut-eye is the ideal amount of sleep for people of middle age and older to keep the brain functioning well, according to a new research study.

University of Cambridge scientists examined data from half a million people and found those enjoying this quantity each night had optimal cognitive performance and good mental health.

But too little and too much were associated with impaired cognitive performance, such as processing speed, visual attention, memory and problem-solving skills.

Lack of rest or oversleeping were also linked to symptoms of anxiety and depression, as well as worse overall wellbeing.



One in a million

A lottery winner has revealed how she is 'addicted' to giving her money to good causes, after handing out around half of her £115m fortune and setting up two charities.

Frances Connolly, 55, from Hartlepool, won the EuroMillions with her husband, Patrick, in 2019, but the couple were determined to do good with their fortune.

The former social worker has a history of good deeds, setting up an AIDS helpline as a student in Belfast and volunteering for St John Ambulance.

Let's go wild!

A stretch of the Thames has become England's second official river bathing site, in a bid to clean up the water.

The status places obligations on the Environment Agency to monitor water quality and ask for action by landowners and water companies to improve it.

The area, at Port Meadow, Oxford, is popular with wild swimmers and joins a section of the River Wharfe in Ilkley, Yorkshire, in the accolade, which was designated as inland bathing water last year.

Grow your own

The avocado has gained a devoted foodie following, but its popularity has led to deforestation in its native central America.

However, despite our sometimes dubious climate, it is possible to grow your own, providing you have a warm, sunny spot indoors. Simply take the seed (the stone) from one and plant it in soil covered with a plastic bag to retain moisture.

Or you can grow it hydroponically by suspending the bottom half in water with the help of toothpicks.



"My go-to saying is that a privilege of a lifetime is being who you are, and I would tell my younger self exactly that — you are absolutely perfect the way you are"

Oscar-winning actress Viola Davis

Viewpoint

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



Star
letter

Small but mighty

In January, I decided to treat myself to a subscription to

Psychologies – and I'm glad I did!

Your May edition has inspired me, especially the interview with Bonnie Wright. As a lone parent, I often feel that some of the more sustainable options are out of my budget, but after reading your article, I checked out Bonnie's YouTube channel. The way she breaks down environmental issues so that they feel less overwhelming, and offers up manageable solutions for all, really had an impact on me.

I've started to collect a handful of litter on each and every walk, so

I feel like I am making a difference. And when a milk delivery leaflet came through the door, it felt like a sign. After researching the prices, I decided it was one small change I could afford, so I now have my milk delivered in reusable glass bottles. It's a small change that makes me feel like I'm altering some old habits in a way that works for me.

And that's the message I took away – if you can't make big changes, start with small ones. I'm looking into going back to a refill store, too, for the items that will fit into my budget. I no longer feel bad for not doing it all. Thanks!

Rachel

Helpful resource

Whilst trying to keep going with all the usual challenges people seem to be facing at the moment (and with waiting lists for limited support), I've found myself turning to *Psychologies* as a source of wellbeing information. What's impressed me is the balance of articles in each edition – some that I connect with and reassure me, but also some I've found hard to read, or uncomfortable to reflect on. I think this balance is so important for improving wellbeing: self-compassion and positive affirmation, alongside honest self-reflection! It's been a real eye-opener for me. The magazine is the most helpful resource I have access to at the moment – and I would imagine for many others as well!

Jen Clarke

Finding focus

Your Dossier 'Find your focus, feel fulfilled' (May edition) helped me to turn over a new leaf. I'd been starting to struggle with my focus at work, as I am still working permanently from home. The article inspired me to clean my desk area, and get an under-desk organiser, leaving my work surface clear and more joyful. I have also been opening the curtains more, to let in the natural light.

The quiz 'What will help you find your focus?' revealed my biggest struggle was connection. As I don't

take regular calls and have only one or two Teams meetings a week, I have been reaching out more to my wonderful colleagues. These were small changes, but they made a big impact straightaway. So thank you!

Krystal Prescod





PHOTO COMPETITION

This is a stunning sunrise across Cumbria, where I spent the weekend with five of my dearest friends. We got up early, wrapped up well, and sat outside to watch this spectacular sight. It was the perfect weekend, enjoying each other's company, recharging in nature, laughing, and nurturing one another.

Anna Brady

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

This may sound strange, but I cry happy tears every time I read your magazine. It usually starts with the Letter of Gratitude and finishes in the recipe section, when I begin to feel hungry! Your magazine reminds me that we all have the capacity to live life to the full, and not to take the little things for granted. So thank you for making me cry every month. I look forward to it – however odd that may be!

Louise Parry

LETTER OF GRATITUDE

I'd like to thank...

Gail Porter,

I have just finished reading my first edition of *Psychologies* via subscription, and I was so happy to see the article about Gail Porter – it felt as if it was meant to be!

Like Gail, 15 years ago I also suffered from alopecia. At the time, I felt devastated and crushed by it. I bought Gail's book, *Laid Bare*, when I was searching the web for information, and I read it over and over, seeking comfort and courage. Finally, I felt that I was not alone, and I was able to gain so much strength from her book.

I was so glad and heartened to read about a confident and energetic Gail today, and I wanted to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to her for writing the book and to thank her for having such a positive impact on my life. Yes, everything life throws at you makes you stronger – and when you are strong, you can overcome anything!

Gracie

Sporting success

I enjoyed Anna Bartter's article 'Celebrate your own success' (Spring edition). Like Anna, I wasn't good at PE at school, but since then, I've kept fit by swimming and going to the gym.

Several years ago, I joined other colleagues at the school where I worked in a sprint triathlon, as part of a relay team. I did the 400m swim and felt cheated when I high-fived the head of design and technology as he set off on the 25km bike ride. Could I train for all three

components of the event the following year? I knew that with training, I could!

When I crossed the finish line of my first full sprint triathlon, I felt euphoric. I sobbed like a child when awarded my medal. All I'd wanted to do was to complete all three events and live to tell the tale.

I've done several sprint triathlons since, aiming to get quicker each time – though for me, the success lies in taking part and enjoying it.

Claire Brown





“After years of frustration, I feel like I’m in my golden era

Radio 2 favourite Sara Cox might be in demand now, but there was a time when work was sparse and she feared for her career. As her debut novel hits the shelves, she opens up about how she turned it all around, and why the future has never looked brighter

WORDS: BETH NEIL

After a lifetime spent mastering the art of self-deprecation, Sara Cox is finally learning to blow her own trumpet. Not too much, mind – she still winces at the idea of actively marketing herself. But since writing her debut novel, *Thrown*, Cox is managing to shout ‘just a little bit’ about the fruits of her labour.

‘I’m getting there,’ she says. ‘My biggest fear is that I’ll be seen as a show-off and then that’s also mixed in with a little bit of “stay-in-your-lane” ism. I overthink and over-analyse.

‘But I’m trying to be better at it because you can’t promote a book by going around saying: “Oh, my God, I’m so embarrassed I wrote it. Please don’t read it! Just use it to prop up your coffee table”.

‘And, you know, when I read for the audio book it helped my confidence, because I was reading it aloud and thinking, actually, this is quite good!’

Cox has every reason to take pride in *Thrown*. It’s a lovely read, set in a local pottery class, rooted in female friendship and full of the sort of heart, cheekiness and giggles you’d expect from Cox. There are well-rounded, likeable central characters and she’s had ringing endorsements from Richard Osman (‘a publishing behemoth!’ gasps Cox), Marian Keyes, and Dawn French, too, whom Cox was particularly thrilled about.

‘She’s always been my comedy hero. Right from when *Girls on Top* started, Dawn and Jennifer Saunders have been my absolute icons. So for her to take the time to have a flick through my book was really special, and when I’m sitting in the Radio 2 home for confused old DJs with my tartan blanket, that’ll be one of the memories I can get all misty-eyed about.’

With a smidge of that familiar self-deprecation, she adds: ‘You know, it’s not a great literary piece!’



But I think it's perfect for on the beach and just to have fun with. There are a few emotional parts, and a bit of struggle in there, but overall I wanted to make people laugh, because that's sort of what I do on the radio.

'Writing a novel has always been a bit of an ambition of mine, but like a wallflower at the school disco, I suppose I was kind of waiting to be asked onto the dance floor. And it's such a special thing to be asked to do, so I wanted to have a really good crack at it.'

One thing she won't be doing, though, is reading the reviews. Cox takes a sharp intake of breath at the mere suggestion.

'Ooh, no. I still remember a negative review for [Nineties TV programme] *The Girlie Show*, by [journalist] Kate Spicer, who said we did for feminism what Fred West did for Neighbourhood Watch.' Ouch.

'I mean, it's quite a funny line, but also pretty cruel – and I've never forgotten it.'

More than 25 years on from her presenting break on Channel 4's *The Girlie Show*, book-writing is the latest plot twist in a varied career and, at the age of 47, Cox – who is mum to Lola, 18, Issac, 14, and Renee, 12 – is enjoying what is possibly the sweetest spot of her professional life to date.

It's seen her metamorphose from the party girl with a penchant for goofing around, into something close to a national treasure – losing none of the irreverence and wit that made her stand out from the crowd in the first place.

But although she has regular presenting stints on the BBC's *Morning Live*, fronts new show *Britain's Top Takeaways* and the fourth series of book club show *Between the Covers* (which started last month), it's radio where Cox's heart lies.

Her daily Radio 2 teatime show is a consistently joyful listen, where she has established a cosy and inclusive community by putting her listeners front and centre. She's a gem of a presenter, with natural warmth and humour in spades, and is clearly in her element, never sounding anything less than delighted to be there.

'I mean, let's not mess about, teatime on Radio 2 is the dream,' she says. 'My biggest ambition was to get a daytime show on Radio 2, and so everything else around it is just an added extra bit of fabulousness.'

'It does feel like I'm in a really golden era of my career. I'm blessed at the moment with a great balance. I actually have to be careful not to say yes to everything, which is a tendency I have from my upbringing, being working class and having that work ethic. But it's been a really, really brilliant few years for me career-wise.'

Which all makes it hard to believe that there

***"I'm
blessed at
the moment
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I actually
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be careful
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say yes to
everything"***

was a time, not so long ago, when everything stalled for Cox and she was left wondering where her future lay. On returning to Radio 1 following her first maternity leave, in 2005, and having previously presented both the flagship *Breakfast Show* and *Drivetime* before that, she was handed weekend afternoons.

It was effectively a demotion and it's where Cox spent the next three years.

In 2008 she returned from her second maternity leave to be made the station's official stand-in host, covering for the main presenters when they were off, but without a show to call her own. And with no TV work to speak of either, it was an incredibly frustrating time.

'There were years where you could not get me arrested,' she says, frankly.

'My agent was amazing because, unless you put yourself in front of them, people do forget that you're there. So she'd take me for a coffee and a biscuit with some commissioner, like she was trying to auction me off.'

'I was trying to advertise myself and it was toe-curling. But she was right, because you just never know. I mean, I was always working but



"That sort of experience teaches you humility and not to take anything for granted. You come back a nicer person"

I was just doing weekends and I wanted to do more. I really wanted to do telly again as well.'

It was during those wilderness years that fellow presenter Davina McCall put Cox in touch with life coach Michael Heppell, and his sessions proved a huge help. She also reached out for advice from other industry names, whose time and support she has never forgotten.

'Funnily enough, I've just been recording a show with Jonathan Ross, and he was one of the people I turned to for advice. It wasn't like he said: "Ring this number, they'll give you a job!" but he gave me confidence. He told me that I should be getting work and was just really encouraging. I met Richard Madeley for a coffee as well and he was lovely.

'I only knew them both "ish" at the time, but it's about not being afraid to ask people for help.'

Cox eventually moved permanently to Radio 2 in 2013 to host Saturday night show *Sounds of the 80s* and it was from there that her patience began to pay off and her fortunes started to change. She became the go-to stand-in for then-*Breakfast Show* presenter Chris Evans – big boots to fill, but the listeners adored her – and, within two years, had landed the role of host on BBC2's *The Great Pottery Throw Down*, which would later inspire her novel. This was followed by *Love in the Countryside* and regular turns fronting *The One Show*.

Today, she's more in demand than ever, but have those years of struggle shaped the person she is now?

'Ah, definitely. That sort of experience teaches you humility and not to take anything for granted. I think you come back a nicer person because you're grateful when work starts to go well again. If you're lucky enough to do a job you love, I think it does you good to have a little bit of a reminder that, actually, you're in a really fortunate position.





"Social media is like the Wild West. I just hope that younger women in the media have the tools to handle it"

‘So, I don’t think I would really change anything, because the way it’s panned out has worked quite well.

‘Plus, my career dips coincided with my children being really young, so that meant that I was about a lot for my kids on the nursery run and the little daytime music classes.’

These days, Cox rarely drinks, preferring to be in bed with a good book by 10pm. It’s a long way from the Nineties when she was one of the original ‘ladettes’, the tabloid term for the female celebs whose party nights at London’s Met Bar and weekends at Glastonbury dominated the showbiz pages.

It’s a label Cox has always disliked and even now it makes her bristle.

‘I thought it was sexist, even at the time, and I’ve always hated it for that very reason. I’ve railed against it. It diminished us and said we were just trying to be like the boys. But we weren’t trying to be like anything – we were just young women having fun.

‘I mean, we literally went out and were a little bit outrageous a few times. Jesus! You wouldn’t believe the fuss by tabloid editors and the think-pieces written about us. It’s like: “Guys, relax! We’ve just been out for a couple of cocktails. We’re in our 20s!”

‘So I’ve never embraced that term. We were never trying to ape men or compete with them.’

Not that she thinks we’ve progressed much since then. Cox reckons the women she undoubtedly helped pave the way for have an even tougher time today, mainly thanks to social media and the scrutiny it places them under.

She says: ‘My God, having to contend with everybody being a critic and being able to reach you and communicate with you? Really, the biggest thing we had to face was, heaven forbid, daring to have a slight dimple on your thigh and ending up with it circled in *Heat* magazine.

‘Social media is like the Wild West. I just hope that younger women in the media have the tools to handle it.’

If the career is golden, so too is Cox’s personal life. She’s been married to advertising executive husband Ben Cyzer since 2013 (her four-year marriage to her first husband, DJ Jon Carter, ended in 2005) and jumps at the opportunity to sing his praises.

‘He’s an absolute sort!’ she says. ‘He’s just a lovely, lovely man and I think we’re a brilliant team. We laugh a lot together, even when the kids are rolling their eyes. That’s a sign of true love, I think.’

A keen runner, horse rider and cyclist, Cox takes active steps to protect her mental health, mainly through exercise. She admits she’s



Thrown by Sara Cox
(Hodder & Stoughton,
£14.99) is out now



easily distracted, and often struggles to focus on one thing at a time.

‘So, halfway through steaming some broccoli, I’ll suddenly remember that I haven’t replied to an email and I’ll start doing that, and then I’ll realise I have to feed the cat, and then remember I have to call someone. I think I’m just really bad at concentrating on one thing at a time, and I get quite baffled trying to live my life like that. But sleep is really important to me. And exercise – that keeps me on an even keel.’

She recently bought a horse, Nelly, and riding her several times a week has been a godsend.

‘She’s a perfect example of being forced to live in the moment,’ says Cox. ‘Obviously, I can’t be on my phone when there’s a broad expanse of sky ahead of me. I ride her in an area just a few junctions up the M1, when you’re suddenly in the middle of nowhere, and it’s fantastic.’

With plans for a second novel already underway, Cox is excited about what lies ahead. This is her second wind and, in many ways, it feels like she’s only just getting started.

‘Without wanting to sound like a boxer,’ she jokes, ‘I’m still hungry for it. I’m still learning, I still find it all exciting – and occasionally nerve-wracking – and I still have that fire in my belly.’

LIFE AS I KNOW IT

Under the influence

It's all aboard for a new adventure, as Harriet Minter gets down with the kids



Of all the things I have allowed carefree twenty-somethings on Instagram to

influence me into buying, paddle boarding lessons were by far the most ridiculous. I blame it on not having had a summer holiday for two years. I was hypnotised by the images of sun-warmed bodies, gliding across a crystal-clear ocean, making the whole thing look so goddamn easy.

I was also influenced by my best friend, who since becoming a mum of two sporty boys, has been on the lookout for a physical activity she could make her own. Never mind the fact that at university she held the record for getting the least value for money from the local gym (£50 for a term's pass, with only one visit in order to register her swipe card. At least the rest of us went to one yoga class!). I think there was also something at the back of my head telling me that midlife was the moment for my inner-adventuress to finally come out. Paddle boarding this week, scaling mountains the next.

Of course, we all know how it ended. Thank God both of us are self-employed so we could book a mid-week lesson, meaning we had our stretch of the river entirely to ourselves. Here's the thing, for reasons that can be explained by how little attention I paid in GCSE science, I somehow thought that an inflatable board, a woman on top, and a fast-flowing river would be quite stable. It was not. And while the first half of the lesson was reasonably successful – we

paddled around on our knees, learnt how to turn and stop, didn't bump into each other – the second half was less so. While I managed to stand up at the first attempt, I quickly discovered I couldn't stand on the board and turn the board at the same time. So I merrily paddled half a mile up the river. And would have merrily paddled the half a mile back, except that, of course, then I fell in.

I have never had much upper body strength and adding drenched clothing and a life jacket meant that the cries of 'just pull yourself onto the board' were not helpful. When I finally did drag myself up there, the act was reminiscent of a sea lion hauling

itself onto a rock for a long overdue sunbathe. And, within ten seconds, I promptly fell back in.

I think it's probably fair to say that paddle boarding is not my 'thing'. But I might go back and try again, just to make sure. Because while I didn't enjoy hauling myself out of the freezing cold Thames, I did enjoy laughing with my best friend. We cheered each other on and giggled at our own incompetence. We had a little adventure together and, in doing so, realised we didn't have to envy the carefree twenty-somethings on Instagram after all because, at heart, we still are them.

Follow Harriet Minter's writing journey by signing up for her newsletter at harrietminter.com



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

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“

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Vicky Barnard - "Health as a way of life"

”



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Mind

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



***What is the
best decision
you have
made in the
past month?
What factors
went into this
decision?
How can you
keep making
decisions
like this?***



Welcome to your MAGNIFICENT MIDLIFE!

Listen. Can you hear it? It's the sound of the quiet revolution that's gathering pace, as women in their 40s and 50s – steadfastly refusing to slope off silently into middle-age – are learning to speak up for themselves

WORDS: HEIDI SCRIMGEOUR

Lorraine Candy and Trish Halpin are on a mission: to help Generation X women make the most of magnificent midlife.

If those names are familiar, it's because Candy and Halpin are former glossy magazine editors; together, they have more than 30 years' experience at the helm of everything we grew up reading, from *Cosmopolitan* and *Red* to *Marie Claire* and *The Sunday Times Style*.

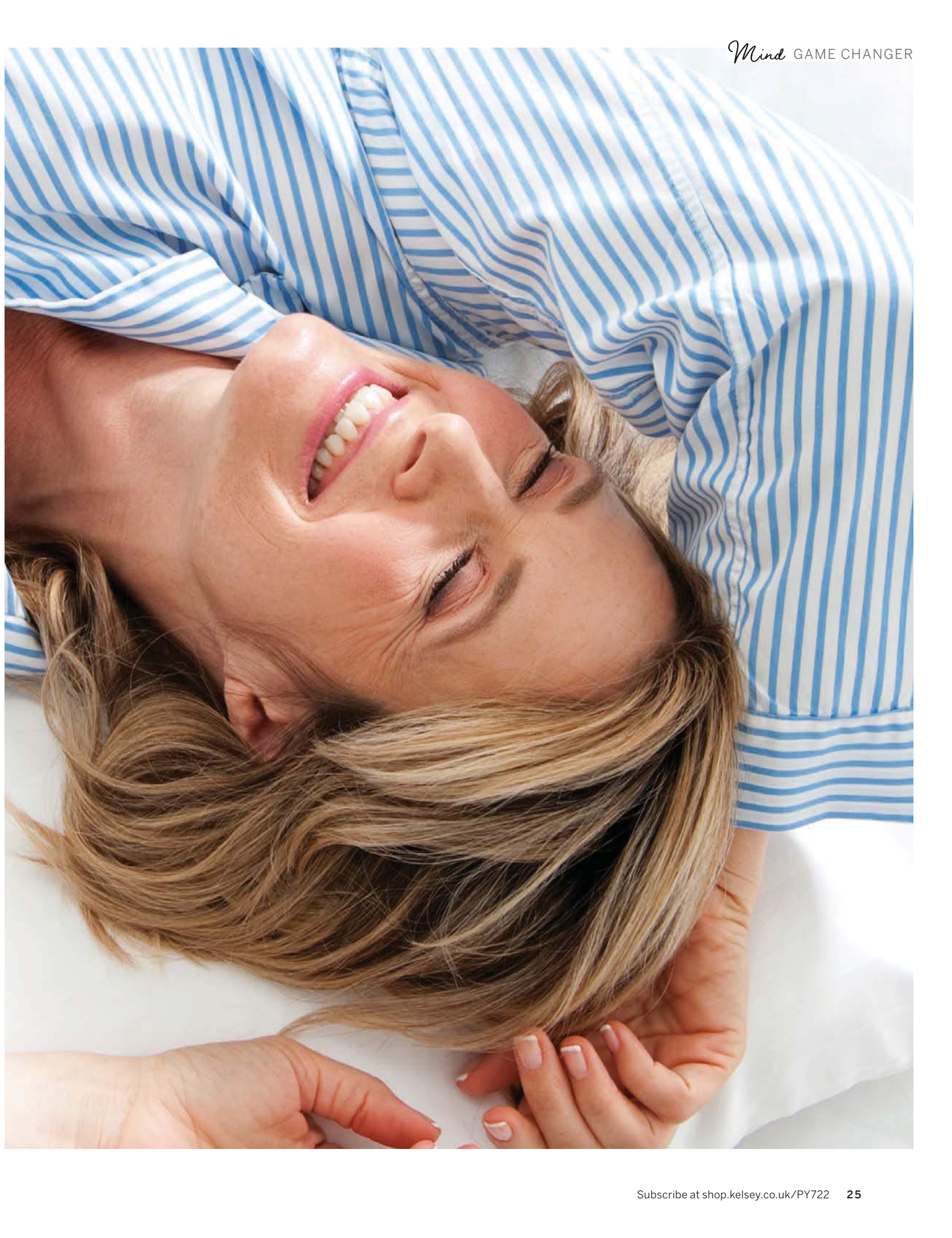
The pair launched their latest venture – a weekly podcast called *Postcards from Midlife* – in January 2020, focused on changing the narrative about what it means to be a peri- and post-menopausal woman. Listeners have since downloaded more than a million

episodes, while their loyal and lively community routinely discuss the topics featured in the accompanying private Facebook group.

Their goal was simple if ambitious: to harness their journalistic skills, and network of experts and celebrity friends, to offer women over 40 advice on how to deal with everything life throws at you in midlife. From parenting teens to caring for ageing parents and finding the energy to have a sex life, no subject is off limits.

Guests have included designer Anya Hindmarch, journalist Caitlin Moran and TV presenter Kate Thornton, who described midlife as akin to burglary: 'It's like someone broke in, pulled all my wires out, stole my hard drive, wiped my memory, kicked me about a bit and left.'





Having known each other as friends and colleagues for more than 25 years, Candy and Halpin came up with the idea for the podcast during Paris Fashion Week almost three years ago. ‘On the last day of the shows, we always have dinner together to catch up, and we realised we were both going through very similar experiences,’ explains Candy. ‘We were feeling angry and depressed, and totally overwhelmed by life and family. We also had a series of strange physical symptoms that we couldn’t work out. We each thought we were having some kind of breakdown.’

Setting out to identify what was happening to their minds and bodies, they discovered they were both in perimenopause – the years leading into the menopause, during which fluctuations in hormone levels can have a significant impact on your brain and body. From there, they began tapping into their network to open up the midlife conversation to a much wider circle of women.

‘We thought, if we were having these kinds of conversations, other midlife women must be having them too,’ says Candy, who describes HRT as a game-changer, and stresses that addressing the physical symptoms of perimenopause is key to embracing what she calls the ‘magnificent’ part of midlife.

Postcards from Midlife was a natural progression for the pair, who have spent their careers focused on understanding what matters most to women. Having guided us through everything from periods to sex positions, it’s fitting that perimenopause was next on their radar. And a podcast was the perfect platform.

‘Generation X women like to talk about things – they have a big voice, and they have a lot to say – so we started to approach relevant experts and celebrities, and asked if they’d come on the show to talk about it with us,’ explains Halpin. Every woman over 40 that they approached had a story to tell, and *Postcards from Midlife* was born.

Caitlin Moran, a recent guest, had this to say: ‘I had presumed I’d done all of the hard stuff but, suddenly, you’re the fifth emergency service – because if you’re a halfway sorted middle-aged woman, you’re the one who gets the call, email or knock on the door and notices there is a problem. It’s like we’re freelance troubleshooters.’

If a podcast about perimenopause doesn’t sound like your cup of tea,

The *Postcards from Midlife* sex survey results:

- 40.5% would like more sex
- 20% have stopped having sex with their partner
- 36.9% are having sex at least once a week
- 35.2% are masturbating at least once a week
- 33.8% orgasm with a partner
- 77.9% orgasm during masturbation
- 56.5% own at least one sex toy
- 44.2% don’t own one at all
- 75% say intimacy is the most important aspect of sex with a partner (ahead of orgasm at 12.2%)
- 65.2% have sexual fantasies
- 82.7% of these do not discuss them with a partner
- 51.8% cite low libido as the main thing that puts them off sex
- 10.8% don’t fancy their partners
- 77% say perimenopause has affected their sex life (in order: low libido, vaginal discomfort, stress, and loss of confidence)

postcardsfrommidlife.com

“We thought: if we’re having these kinds of conversations, other midlife women must be having them too”

think again. It’s as thought-provoking and poignant as it is reassuring and empowering. ‘It’s about this whole stage of life, which can be really liberating and vibrant,’ adds Halpin. ‘We wanted to present a really positive view of women in midlife, and say we’re not invisible over 40 – which is the prevailing narrative – and that ageing is not a bad thing. It’s a privilege, so let’s make the most of it.’

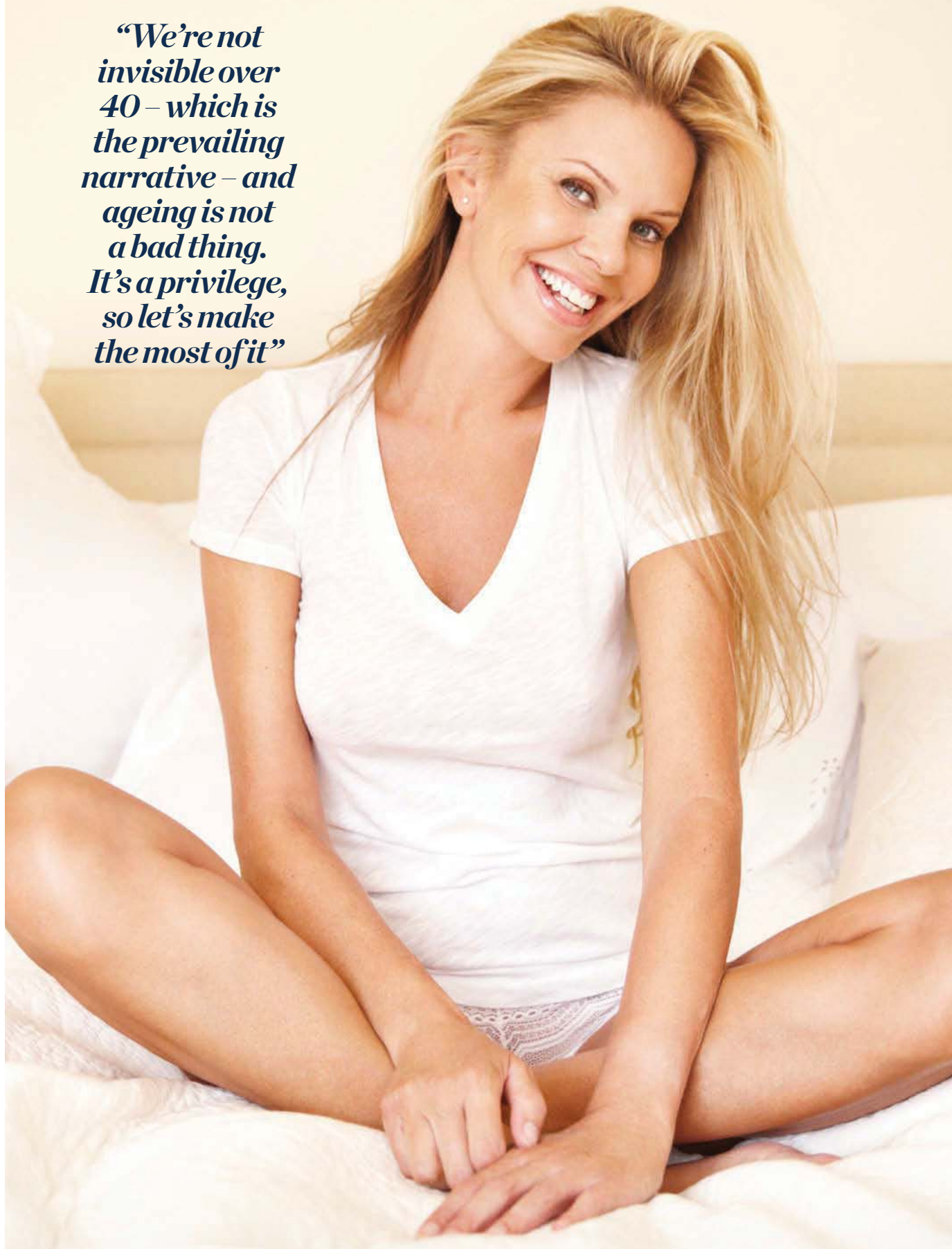
Candy and Halpin have an infectious energy when they talk about giving midlife women a new voice to share their wisdom on how to enjoy a happy, healthy and spirited ‘second act’ of life. Sex, as you might expect, is firmly on the list of topics up for discussion, and most recently they commissioned a listener survey about sex in midlife. It arose from the realisation that, while midlife dating is freely spoken about, their community were increasingly asking questions about sex, intimacy and libido. Several high-profile podcast guests also underlined that sex in the 39–60 female demographic is very much unspoken about. But in contrast to the oft-painted picture of menopausal women lacking sex drive due to dwindling hormones, the survey revealed that modern midlife women not only want *more* sex, but we place great importance on sex and intimacy when it comes to overall happiness and wellbeing.

More than half (51.8 per cent) of the women surveyed cite low libido as the main thing that puts them off sex, with 77 per cent saying perimenopause has affected their sex life, followed by vaginal discomfort, stress and loss of confidence. Intimacy, according to 75 per cent of respondents, is the most important aspect of sex with a partner, ahead of orgasm (12.2 per cent), while 40.5 per cent say they would like more sex.

At the heart of *Postcards from Midlife* is a shared desire to open up this conversation, so women feel less alone. ‘That’s the main thing we want women to know – that if you’re in the depths of despair and feel like your relationship is failing because your sex life has fallen apart due to symptoms of perimenopause, you’re not alone,’ says Halpin.

‘We know that GPs are woefully under-educated on perimenopause, and two thirds will prescribe antidepressants (instead of HRT), which can have a significant impact on your sex life, so there’s an army of women taking the wrong thing for something we are all going to go through – and we want women to know that help is out there,’ agrees Candy. ‘For example, 82 per cent of women experience some form of vaginal atrophy after the age of 40, but no one talks about it. Yet it’s incredibly easily remedied, which can transform your sex life – and thus improve your relationship.’

“We’re not invisible over 40 – which is the prevailing narrative – and ageing is not a bad thing. It’s a privilege, so let’s make the most of it”





The irony that, previously, these two women at the forefront of producing magazines for Generation X women knew nothing about perimenopause isn't lost on them. With poignant sincerity, they describe it as their 'duty' to share what they've learned. 'Generation X women grew up in a very different way to our mothers,' Halpin explains. 'We had far more opportunities open to us, yet we just weren't educated about menopause.'

Candy knew about it, but thought it wasn't something she was going to have to worry about until her 50s. 'I knew nothing about perimenopause, and you can't talk about something you don't know about,' she adds. 'What's fantastic now is that we're part of a wave of women who are openly taking about it. Even in my book club, we're talking openly about perimenopause as a result of women listening to the podcast and bringing it up.'

The pair hope that their survey might do something similar for women when it comes to talking about sex in midlife. 'Sex is slightly different because you're not necessarily going to want to talk to friends about problems you might be having – but I think women will find the survey results quite reassuring,' adds Halpin. 'Take the fact that only 33 per cent of women orgasm with a partner, yet 77 per cent of women orgasm on their own during masturbation – women don't really talk about that, so putting it out there will hopefully give them the confidence to.'

"We all know the benefits of sex in terms of reducing stress, anxiety and cortisol. That is what touch and intimacy brings"

Surprisingly, a refresher on basic anatomy can be key to better sex in midlife, according to many of the experts who have appeared on the podcast. 'There is this assumption that we know how female sexual organs work, but it's about learning and owning what turns you on and then sharing that with a partner,' Halpin says.

'I think we get into routines and habits – always doing it on a Friday night or whatever – and stepping out of that is particularly difficult in midlife because you're at peak busy. There's pressure from your career and parenting and ageing parents, and all the different things that we have to be as women, so sex can end up on the back burner,' she explains. 'But we need to reclaim it because we all know the benefits of sex and orgasm in terms of reducing stress, anxiety and cortisol. That is what touch and intimacy brings. I think women are craving that.'

For more about the psychological symptoms of perimenopause, turn to page 48

▶▶▶ NEXT STEPS

Listen Tune into *Postcards from Midlife* and join the Facebook group; [postcardsfrommidlife.com](https://www.facebook.com/postcardsfrommidlife)

Download The free Balance app, developed by Dr Louise Newson, a GP and leading menopause specialist. You can track symptoms, access personalised expert content, and share stories in the community. balance-menopause.com; newsonhealth.co.uk

Read Search for the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines for helpful advice on how to talk to your GP about perimenopause, menopause and hormone replacement therapy (HRT). [nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23](https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23)

A moment of calm



AVENA SATIVA

Discover and harness the surprising mental wellbeing benefits hidden in your breakfast bowl

If you kickstart your mornings with fruity overnight oats in summer, and steaming hot porridge in winter, or your go-to mid-morning snack is a deliciously dense flapjack, then you'll love this month's hero ingredient. Avena sativa is the Latin name for the common oat that's such a staple of our storecupboards. Both the dried leaves – known as oat straw – and dried fruit – oat seeds – are used in herbal medicine, and each offers slightly different, but equally impressive, benefits for brain and body.

Oat straw is hailed for its ability to reduce anxiety, fight fatigue and boost mood, while the seeds are said to help abate stress and improve cognitive function. This month, medical herbalist and chair of the British Herbal Medicine Association, Chris Etheridge, talks us through the strengths of this powerful and popular plant.

Boost brainpower

'Oat straw is used by herbalists to treat many different conditions, including anxiety and fatigue,' says Etheridge. 'Essentially, it acts like a relaxing tonic for the whole nervous system. However, one of its other benefits is a boost to cognitive function. Research in this area is limited, but early studies in older

adults have proved positive, with the extract thought to help improve memory, attention and concentration.'

Harness relaxation

'If you're looking for something to truly relax you, avena sativa could be an ideal remedy,' explains Etheridge. 'The seeds and leaves contain a range of chemicals – including alkaloids such as gramine, avenic acids and flavonoids – with mild sedative and relaxing actions. Recent clinical studies have shown extracts of the leaves can also help to reduce stress and tension, leaving you feeling relaxed and happy.' *bhma.info*

Avena sativa can be used topically, too. Add oats to a bath – or wrap in a flannel – and use to gently wash and soothe the skin. It's particularly beneficial for those with inflammatory skin conditions.

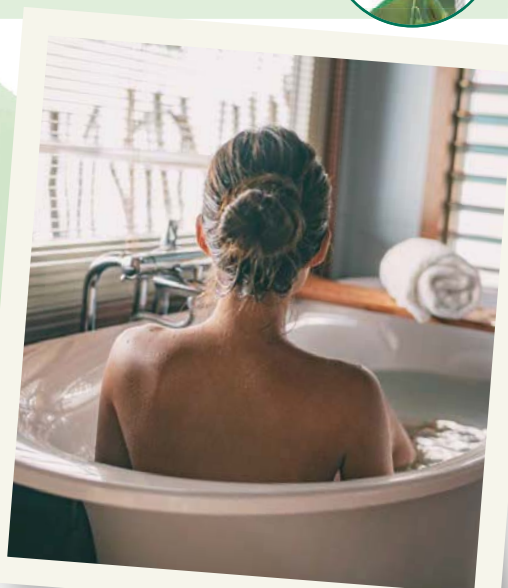


A good old-fashioned bowl of porridge is the best way to harness the benefits of oat seeds. In this form, they are nutritive, soothing to the digestive system, and may even help lower levels of LDL cholesterol. However, both the seeds and the straw can be prepared as an infusion or tea. Try...

Solaris Botanicals
Oat Straw, £4.95
solarisbotanicals.com



A. Vogel AvenaCalm oral drops, £10.85 avogel.co.uk



Coaching in action



Feeling the fear

In their second session together, the award-winning coach Kim Morgan helps her client, Martha*, accept the certainty of uncertainty, for a future free from worry

Session two...

Martha looked miserable when she arrived for her second coaching session, and was decidedly unenthusiastic when I asked about her progress with the coaching exercises that I had given her last time.

‘Okay, I guess,’ she said. ‘I’ve been journalling Three Good Things, like you suggested. I write: “I didn’t stay too late at work”, “I had pasta for dinner”, “The sun was shining” – nothing earth-shattering. But I don’t know if it’s making any difference to my mood or my worrying.’

Martha wouldn’t look at me. I sensed something was wrong, but I also sensed that I shouldn’t push it; her mood was very flat. I always hope that clients return to me feeling better than they did the last time we met, but it didn’t seem that way today.

I waited for a few minutes before asking, ‘What are you thinking?’

Martha let her gaze meet mine for the first time. ‘I’m not really sure that I should have come for coaching.’

On hearing this, I had to work hard to control my own insecurities: my need to please others, to be ‘perfect’, my fear of getting things ‘wrong’. I pushed thoughts of me aside, focused on Martha,



IMAGES: GETTY IMAGES; SHUTTERSTOCK.
*NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED

and asked her to expand a little more. 'If I'm honest, the last session felt a bit too much like therapy. I thought you would just give me some tips to help me stop worrying. I wasn't expecting to delve deeply into my childhood. Now, I can't stop thinking about my parents and how overprotective they were. They weren't the perfect parents I thought they were. It's like a bubble has been burst and I'm seeing them in a completely different light.'

I had lots of thoughts going through my

mind in this moment. Whilst coaching differs from therapy in some ways (which can include the methodologies used), the two practices share many similarities. Both focus on how our past informs our present, and both work with clients to help them create positive changes in their lives, overcome limiting beliefs and behaviours, and realise their potential.

I decided to share a simple description of how coaching works: 'Coaching sometimes requires us to take a look in

the rear-view mirror to see where we have been, whilst keeping an eye firmly on the road ahead.'

Martha nodded, but looked unconvinced. I asked her if I could make an observation: 'I can see that you like certainty, but nothing and nobody is wholly perfect or wholly imperfect. Dividing things in this way can provide us with a short-term sense of safety, but it ultimately leads to disappointment, confusion and stress.'

'Coaching can help us to maintain a healthy, integrated view of people and things, which can prepare us better for the uncertainties and inconsistencies we encounter. I think maybe that is what you are struggling with. From what you've told me, your parents were wonderful, and if they had one failing, it was protecting you a bit too much, but that doesn't negate all the good they did.'

Martha broke down in tears, and my heart went out to her.

'Yes, that's what I'm struggling with. I just want things to be lovely all the time. I want people to be predictable. I don't really like being an adult and accepting that life is full of disappointment and uncertainty.'

We talked more about the benefits of embracing uncertainty. Martha eventually said, 'I guess if I accepted that things can and may change suddenly, I would live in the moment more, instead of worrying about things which might never happen.'

I shared with Martha that 'fear' is sometimes used as an acronym for 'Future Events Appearing Real'. She smiled for the first time that day!

Martha asked if she could leave the session early, as she was processing a lot of new thoughts. I could see she was unsettled, so I decided not to give her any homework and simply congratulated her for having the courage to work on herself, her beliefs and her behaviours.

I hoped that Martha would come back next time, but I really wasn't sure...

Find out if Martha continues her coaching journey with Kim in the next issue.

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



Work it out

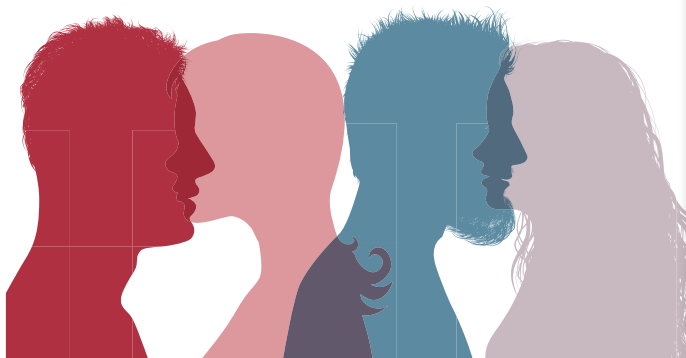
'Changing places' is a helpful exercise if you're experiencing difficulties in a relationship. You can also do this exercise to reflect on a past relationship, or prepare for a future meeting with someone. This exercise gives you an experience of seeing things differently, from other positions. It is effective if you do this by physically moving around and standing in different places.

Step one: This is your perspective. Stand in your own shoes and imagine looking at the other person. Allow yourself to see the relationship purely from your perspective. Say what you think and feel about the situation with the other person – let your true thoughts and feelings out – until you have no more to say.

Step two: Move into the other person's shoes. Stand in a different place. Shake off your own perspective and allow yourself to settle into their shoes. Become them for a while; try to see the situation from their perspective and speak as if you were them. Use 'I' statements. Say what you think and feel about your relationship – from their perspective.

Step three: Move into a different place, where you are detached from the other parties. Reflect on what you have seen and heard from the two 'people'. What words of wisdom or insights do you have from this perspective?

Step four: Return to your own shoes, as in step one. What has changed for you through completing this exercise? What will you do differently now?



10 things I love doing

Doing things that you love can help to reduce worry, stress and overthinking. Focusing on doing something you like can change your mood and lift your energy. Make a list of ten things you like to do. If you get to ten and still have more, keep going and write down some more! Then, for each activity, consider the following questions:

- How long has it been since I last did this?
- Is this something I do alone or with someone?
- What does this give me that I don't currently get in my life?

Start planning some activities you truly love doing and notice the change in your sense of wellbeing.



COACHING QUESTIONS TO CHALLENGE WORRY

If you are overthinking or worrying about something, ask yourself the following questions:

- What aspect of this is within my control?
- How would I react to this if I were at my bravest?
- What resources do I have that could help me?
- What would I say to someone else facing this worry?
- How important will this seem in one, five, or ten years' time?

Lightbulb moments

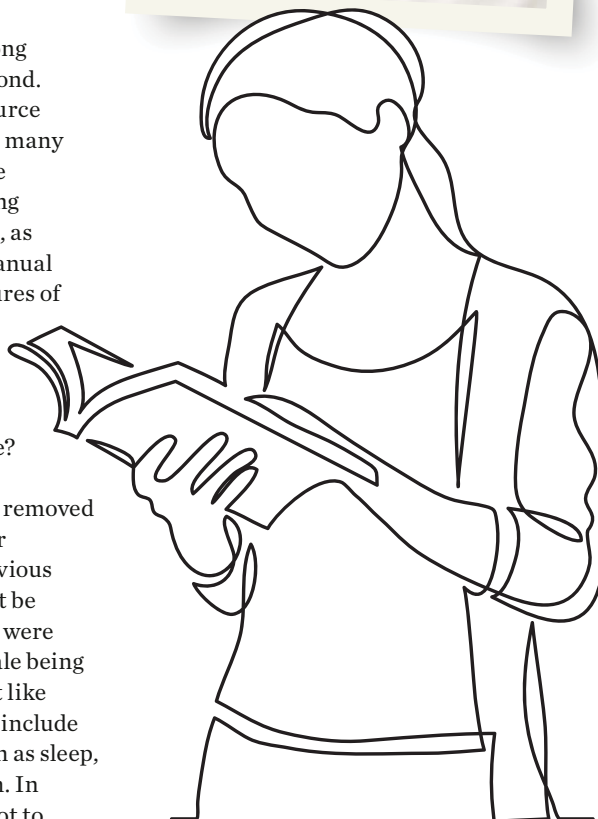
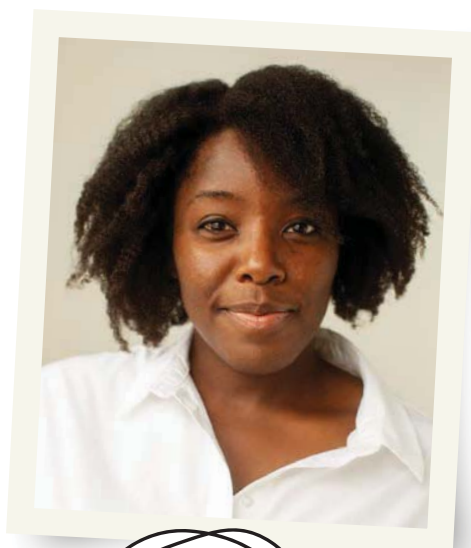
Good grief!

Are we at risk of losing the innately human experience of loss, asks Kimberley Wilson, psychologist and author of How To Build A Healthy Brain

Do you hear that? That low grumbling is the ongoing discontent in the mental health community about the most recent changes to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the encyclopaedia of psychiatry. Published by the American Psychiatric Association, it outlines the definitions and criteria for what constitutes a mental health disorder. And while, technically, the rest of the world refers to another manual – the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) – as with other aspects of culture, the ripple effects of American life are often felt along the shores on this side of the pond.

The DSM has long been a source of contention, owing largely to many of its authors' close links to the pharmaceutical industry posing potential conflicts of interests, as well as accusations that the manual over-medicalises normal features of human emotional life. That is to say that, sometimes, it is healthy and appropriate – and not a sign of illness – to be sad.

So what's vexing us this time? Controversially, the so-called 'bereavement clause' has been removed from the diagnostic criteria for depression. You see, in the previous incarnations, people would not be diagnosed as depressed if they were recently bereaved. The rationale being that normal grief can look a lot like depression. For example, both include dysregulation of functions such as sleep, appetite, mood and motivation. In the past, it was thought wise not to



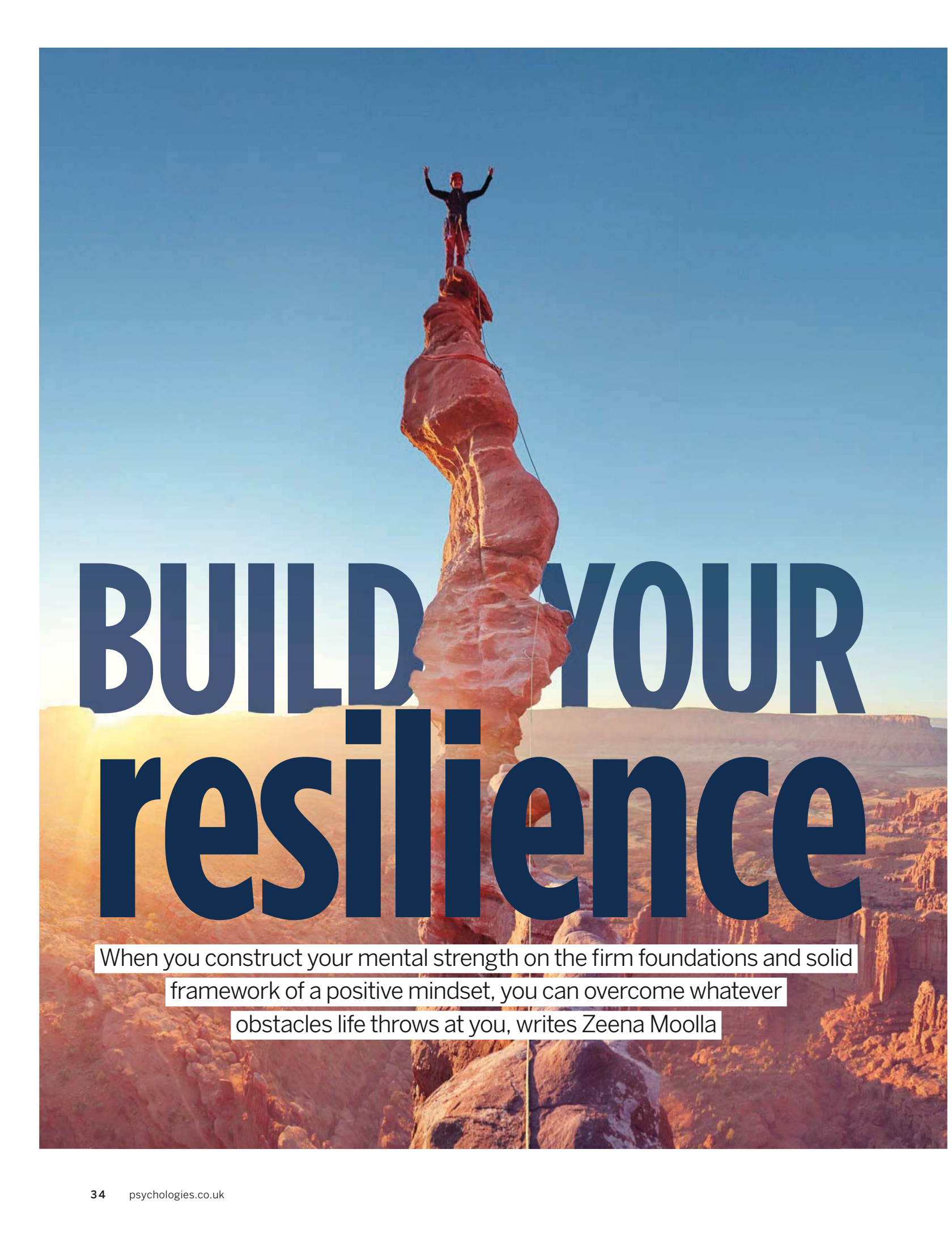
pathologise a normal response to significant loss. So what's changed?

Well, supporters of the amendment say the move benefits patients because being bereaved doesn't immunise you from also being depressed. Depression that emerges soon after a bereavement could be caused by other factors, such as a pre-existing condition or relationship difficulties, for example.

So what's the problem? The thing is, it takes a bit of time (and a degree of skill) to distinguish between grief and depression. Yet, time is in short supply in most doctor's surgeries. How well can a harried physician with just a few minutes with a patient distinguish between the manifestations of normal grief versus clinical depression? With few accessible options, how often will a doctor feel compelled to do something – anything – to make their patient feel better? As a consequence, how many people will find their loss being medicated rather than processed?

It's not that I want people to be in pain; it's not noble to suffer for suffering's sake. But I worry that the removal of the bereavement clause is a sign of a broader cultural trend towards anesthetising and sanitising painful and messy features of human experience; that it's a trickle-down effect of our culture of toxic, dismissive positivity. (Don't cry. Look on the bright side. Don't be sad.) As a consequence, we – as a society – become less able to bear our own grief or to be alongside someone else as they process theirs. And that, in itself, would be an enormous loss.

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

A person is standing on the very top of a tall, narrow, and jagged rock formation that rises vertically from a desert canyon floor. The person has their arms raised in a 'V' shape, signifying triumph or achievement. The rock formation is reddish-brown and has a weathered, textured appearance. The background shows a vast desert landscape with other rock formations and a clear blue sky. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow across the scene. The overall image conveys a sense of overcoming challenges and achieving a goal.

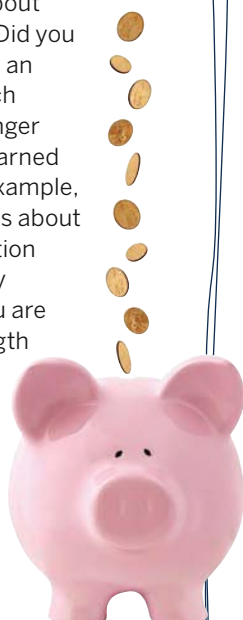
BUILD YOUR resilience

When you construct your mental strength on the firm foundations and solid framework of a positive mindset, you can overcome whatever obstacles life throws at you, writes Zeena Moolla

Imagine you are designing a building. It needs careful planning, sufficient time, hard graft and, after its creation, constant maintenance. Developing your mental strength can be approached in the same way. Consider yourself at the scaffolding stage now. In order to build your mental resilience, you first need that vital support in place to aid your development. Read on to discover how you can set a solid foundation on which to construct long-lasting, all-weather mental resilience...

Money in the bank

Think of your mental strength as a bank account. You need to consciously pay into that account regularly to keep a nice wad of experience to draw from. In a notebook, jot down some past experiences you feel negatively about. Now reframe your perspective. Spend time thinking about each memory. What did you learn? Did you grow from the situation? Next, write an affirmation of strength, starting each sentence with the words: 'I am stronger because...' and draw on what you learned from that particular situation. For example, if one of your negative experiences is about a heartbreak, perhaps your affirmation is, 'I am stronger because I know my boundaries.' With each incident, you are identifying your current inner strength – gumption you might not even realise you have. Congratulations! You've just opened your first mental-strength savings account. Keep these affirmations safe, in case you need to make a withdrawal from that wealth of adversity in the future.



Beat the roadblock

Reframing negative narrative is often easier retrospectively. Let's be honest, when your nerves are taking a battering before a driving test or first date, having the words 'Just be positive' bleated at you isn't always helpful. Instead, in such situations, it's more beneficial to think realistically. Try, 'Even if it's not perfect, I'll be okay,' or 'I can only do my best.' Adopting an internal dialogue like this will help you defeat that dreaded mental strength roadblock: a fear of failure.



It's an honour to be nominated...

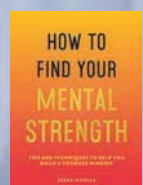
Have you ever watched the Oscars and wondered if the nominees have all practised their 'gracious loser' faces ahead of the big night? How hard must that be, sitting in front of all those cameras, Hollywood's elite, and millions of viewers, knowing your reaction will be scrutinised the world over? Well, the real prep, according to many therapists to the stars, is far deeper than rehearsing a knowing smile and affable applause. It's about not letting the Oscars be the arbiter of how Tinseltown's cast and crew, nominated or otherwise, feel about themselves.

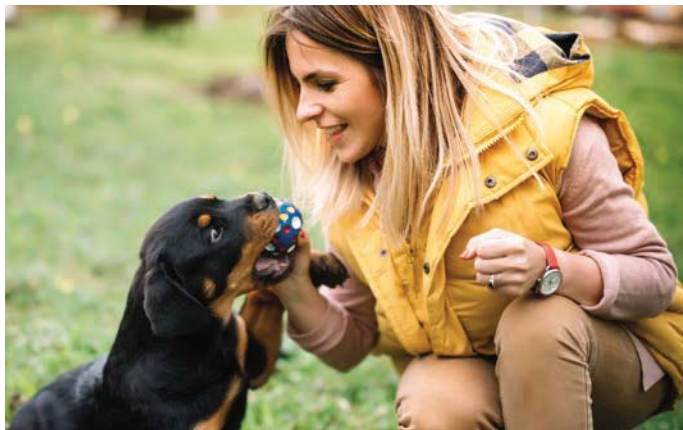
Of course, most of us aren't likely to be in the running for an Academy Award any time soon. Yet the principle, in many aspects of our lives, is the same: if we let external validation determine our self-esteem, we're already exhausting our mental strength. Of course, feeling initial disappointment in such situations is understandable, but relinquishing self-worth to something beyond our control is not. Those words, 'It's an honour just to be nominated,' repeated by stars on the red carpet might sound like a cliché, but there's an enormous amount of mental strength to be gained if we work at sincerely adopting such a rational outlook.

Must have GSOH

Often hugely underestimated while building our mental resilience is the tremendous power of maintaining a sense of humour. Seeing the funny side in adversity can shift a perspective and thus change our reaction to a situation that might otherwise feel overwhelming. Try it! Think of a tricky occasion – such as when it seemed everything that could go wrong in a day has done, or if you've had to confront a friend about an awkward misunderstanding – and, without trivialising your feelings, find the humour in it. Sure, it won't change the past – but you may feel less negatively about it.

Extracted from *How To Find Your Mental Strength* by Zeena Moolla (Octopus, £10.99)





Puppy training

As many dog owners know, training a puppy requires a lot of positive reinforcement. Treats, walks and praise are all means of recognising and rewarding a pooch's good behaviour, in order to encourage obedience. Now imagine you're that puppy! You need to acknowledge and incentivise your own good behaviour. Jot down a moment in your life where you feel you exhibited some mental strength. Maybe it was a time you spoke up for yourself despite feeling reluctant. Or perhaps you

enrolled in a club completely out of your comfort zone. Even if it's just a seemingly small thing, remind yourself that you have that pluck within you. Stick that piece of paper somewhere where you can see it regularly – by your bedside or on the fridge – and keep adding to it. When you clock up another ten 'plucky' moments, treat yourself! It could be your favourite meal, a trip to the cinema, or just a bunch of flowers. Then vow that this list marks the start of never underestimating yourself again.

FACE THE FEAR

Is there something seemingly insignificant you're not looking forward to doing? Sorting some paperwork or cleaning the bathroom, perhaps? Maybe you've been putting that particular thing off for so long, you've got to a point of almost dreading it? Set a date and time in your diary to tackle that task – and promise yourself you'll make the deadline. After that, pledge to deal with a similar minor job or activity weekly. With each simple accomplishment, when you've faced down a fear, comes an increased resilience.



Better to have loved and lost

Tolerating the emotions we are uncomfortable with can be incredibly difficult. Like a gruelling workout, we might be tempted to avoid facing those situations that require exertion and nerve to get through. Yet, much like with physical health, mental strength can really benefit from a certain amount of endurance. It doesn't mean willingly subjecting ourselves to unhappy or dangerous situations but, rather, embracing the emotions that come with inevitable typical life situations. For example, the line from the Tennyson poem, 'Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all,' might feel like little consolation to those in the throes of heartbreak, but its sentiment is true. We learn that the pain can be a worthwhile price to pay for the pleasure, and that we are capable of falling in love. To borrow from the workout analogy, we work through the pain knowing we'll emerge fitter and stronger to navigate life's often amazing unpredictability.



Easy does it When it comes to building resilience, experts agree that patience is vital. Sure, it can be a nuanced quality that needs boundaries on occasion, but it certainly is not an overrated virtue. So, practise patience as you go on your journey of building mental strength, remembering this is not about winning or losing, but learning and growing.



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the song
sings itself”*

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Sally x

Editor,
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Expert advice



*Julia Galef is co-founder of the Center for Applied Rationality and author of *The Scout Mindset* (Little, Brown, £14.99). juliagalef.com*



*Jeffrey Nevid is a professor of psychology at St John's University, New York, and author of *The Minute Therapist* blog*



Gray Webber is a therapist and coach, specialising in working with the body to create a proactive and positive mindset. graywebber.com

IMAGES: GETTY IMAGES

My mind tends to flit around untethered by firm convictions, so I've often found myself envying those people who seem so sure of their opinions. In my role as a journalist, being open-minded has been a useful trait, helping me to see both sides of the story and to present a more rounded viewpoint than if I took a stubborn, opinionated stance on one side of the issue. But, outside of work, my tendency to sympathise with both sides and change my viewpoint has often felt like a weakness of character.

After all, from Brexit to Covid, the last decade has churned out a succession of issues on which we've been encouraged to ally ourselves with one camp or another. But no sooner have I formed a view on something, than I've heard another perspective and started doubting my previous convictions – and myself.

It's something I've sometimes sought to hide, so it's a relief to speak with Julia Galef, an author and co-founder of the Center for Applied Rationality (a non-profit US organisation devoted to helping people improve their reasoning and decision-making), who says it's

nothing to be ashamed of. She describes my tendency to change my opinion as part of having a 'scout' mindset: a scout seeks out the reality of a situation, whereas its counterpart, the soldier, is more interested in focusing on evidence to support what he or she already thinks.

The changing face of changing your mind

The past couple of years have shown us in microcosm the reality of changing your mind, as world leaders have been forced to do so frequently, right in the glare of the public eye. As science presented fresh

evidence, politicians have very publicly had to alter their courses in the light of new circumstances. For one who's mind is so changeable, it's been refreshing to witness people in the limelight re-charting their route.

But this public display of minds being swayed has made me think that perhaps it's okay to express changeable views, and maybe giving a tentative opinion that later changes is not such a bad thing after all. It feels like the dawn of a new age in which uncertainty could topple conviction.

'It's much easier to change your mind publicly if you weren't overconfident to begin with,' says Galef. 'Public figures and agencies that say, for example, "Here's our current picture of the situation, but it could change as we get more data" can retain a lot of trust and respect if they later change their tune. But those who say "Here's what's going on, we're 100 per cent confident, and anyone who disagrees with us is an idiot" are going to face a lot more hostility if they later have to eat their words.'

A matter of reframing

For Jeffrey Nevid, a professor of psychology at St John's University,



Time to **THINK AGAIN?**

An open mind and the willingness to re-evaluate your beliefs shows strength of character, not flawed or flimsy thinking, as Emma Cooling discovers...



New York, switching the language we use can help present changing your mind as a valuable trait, not a flaw.

‘To “change your mind” suggests you are fickle or wishy-washy, which is often seized upon in campaigns by political opponents,’ says Nevid. ‘But I think the ability to examine and re-evaluate your beliefs in the light of evidence is a major strength of character, not a weakness.’

He suggests reframing the concept. ‘I would recast “changing your mind” as rethinking or thinking again, instead. This doesn’t come naturally for most people,’ he adds, ‘who tend not to question their thoughts or beliefs.’

Nevid goes as far as to say that those with inflexible thinking might get dragged down by their rigidity, especially if they take situations at face value. ‘We tend to believe what we see with our eyes and think in our head. But seeing may be misleading, and misguided thinking may make us miserable.’

This sentiment is echoed by therapist Gray Webber, who points out that taking situations at face value can cause us to be harsh in our judgement – whereas, if we are open to considering many options, we are more likely to be tolerant. He cites road rage as an example: ‘A driver who

cuts us up at the roundabout may well be inconsiderate and rude, but they may also be lost, confused, from out of town, or rushing to get to the hospital – if we decide they are the former, we are likely to feel more stressed and angry, however, if we remain open-minded and see any of the latter as a possibility, then we are likely to respond in a much calmer, kinder way.’

For Webber, the ability to change your mind and be open to other views is a trait of having a growth mindset – a way of viewing challenges as opportunities for development.

‘The ability to change our mind is a crucial part of developing this growth mindset, yet is sadly missing from many people’s toolboxes,’ says Webber. ‘Pride, ego, avoiding pain, and stubbornness are among the explanations why someone may find it hard to change their mind. However, when we adopt an attitude of “constant learning”, we can maintain our ego needs without feeling pressure to prove ourselves right all of the time.’

And, according to Webber, one of the most important traits to nurture when trying to change habits and adopt a healthy lifestyle is that of a growth mindset. ‘Essentially, this means

appreciating that our brains are capable of change (through a process of neuroplasticity), and that very few of our thoughts, feelings and behaviours are set in stone. A growth mindset understands that, often, our experience of life is influenced by many factors – most notably our associations with things such as our environment, relationships, previous experiences, role models, learning and so on.’

So, while I may curse myself for being hesitant to voice a strong opinion (aware that I may feel very differently the next day), there are clearly benefits to being open to changing my mind. It’s time to embrace my changeable mind and wear the scout badge with pride.

▶▶ NEXT STEPS

Read *The Scout Mindset: Why Some People See Things Clearly And Others Don't* by Julia Galef (Little, Brown, £14.99)

Read *Mindset: Changing The Way You Think To Fulfil Your Potential* by Dr Carol Dweck (Little, Brown, £10.99)

How to develop a growth mindset and keep your mind open

1

For Galef, the first step is self-awareness. She says: 'It's not realistic to be a perfect scout all the time, but we can at least make incremental shifts towards a scout mindset. That requires a few skills, such as self-awareness: the ability to catch yourself being a soldier. We all sometimes rationalise away our mistakes, or dismiss arguments we don't like without even considering them, and most of us don't even notice we're doing it. Noticing is the crucial first step to changing a habit.'

2

For Nevid, staying open to new information – even if it challenges your beliefs – means making a conscious effort to see the other viewpoint. He says 'A psychology professor of mine once said that the hardest thing for graduate students to do is to think of even one alternative way of interpreting a given set of facts or findings. It may take practise, but we should always try to look for other angles and different explanations.'

3

When you express an opinion, don't be afraid to make clear that it may be subject to change, as it's based on your knowledge in that moment. It's also okay not to commit to a view at all, and say, 'I don't know enough right now to have an opinion.'

4

Remember that very little in life is binary and black or white, urges Webber. He says: 'More than one thing can be true, and frequently two opposing views can both be true at the same time. As a coach and therapist, it is all too common for me to reply "It depends" when asked for the "best" way to achieve a goal – we know that $5+5=10$, but so also does $8+2$!'

Own it. Don't be ashamed to admit that you have had a change of heart – it is evidence that you have given a matter serious thought, and that you have the ability to reflect and to learn.

5

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BAREFOOT
COACHING

A-Z of Coaching

Welcome to Barefoot's **A-Z OF COACHING** series. We aim to distil 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. Last month we explored **ATTENTION**, this month we will focus on **BELIEFS**.

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**.

YOU ARE FAR TOO SMART TO BE THE
ONLY THING STANDING IN YOUR WAY.

Jennifer J Freeman

Beliefs

Tackling limiting beliefs about ourselves sits at the core of most coaching work. It is often not enough to try to simply change behaviours, because the beliefs we hold drive our behaviours, so we need to change our beliefs too. For example, if we behave unassertively, it is probably because, at a deeper level we do not believe we have the right to say what we want, or that other people matter more than we do.

Limiting beliefs can reverberate through our lives until we start to challenge and question them, and, with the help of a coach, we can replace them with more empowering beliefs.

How many of us do not have some limiting beliefs which would benefit from being re-examined and questioned in a safe and mutually respectful relationship?

IF YOU ACCEPT A LIMITING BELIEF, THEN
IT WILL BECOME A TRUTH FOR YOU.

Louise Hay

Coaching questions to challenge your limiting beliefs

- Was it true once – another time?
- Is it still true today? What evidence do you have?
- If you absolutely knew that this belief was not true, what would you do differently?
- Is there one good reason to keep this belief?
- What is the pay-off to you holding on to this belief?
- What would your best friend say to you about this limiting belief?
- How could you change this belief to be more positive, empowering and true for you?



BAREFOOT
COACHING

Perimenopausal depression uncovered

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

Transitioning through the perimenopause and menopause can be a challenging experience for many, as we adapt to the physical and mental changes. And, sadly for some, perimenopause can come hand in hand with an unwelcome partner: depression.

This month, Dr David Crepaz-Keay, from The Mental Health Foundation, is shining a light on perimenopausal depression, exploring how you can recognise it, and ways you can support yourself and others.

Perimenopause debunked

'As the name suggests, perimenopause describes the time when your body starts transitioning towards the menopause,' explains Dr Crepaz-Keay. 'During this time, you may experience hormonal changes that directly impact ovulation, causing irregular periods, hot flushes and changeable moods. So, what has this got to do with depression, you might ask? Well, fluctuating hormones cause mood swings, low spirits and anxiety, and studies have linked perimenopause directly to depression and the worsening of existing depressive symptoms.'

Dealing with depression

'While perimenopause and menopause are not mental health conditions in themselves,' says Dr Crepaz-Keay, 'the hormonal changes that come with them can trigger mental health conditions or make existing ones worse. Not all women are affected in this way, but if you notice changes in your demeanour it's worth exploring further.'

mentalhealth.org.uk

REACH OUT

'If you think you may be going through perimenopause and experiencing perimenopausal depression, your GP is a fantastic support and will be able to offer a wealth of advice on how to manage your symptoms,' says Dr Crepaz-Keay. 'Low mood experienced during perimenopause is different to other kinds of depression, so antidepressants should not be the first option. Your GP is more likely to opt for talking therapies, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), or medications to balance your hormones, such as hormone replacement therapy (HRT).

'The NHS website also has a whole host of information on treatment and self-help options for menopause symptoms – visit nhs.uk for more details.'

“Studies have linked perimenopause directly to depression and the worsening of existing depressive symptoms”

IDENTIFY THE SIGNS

'Perimenopausal depression symptoms can be similar to other forms of depression, but it's important to keep a check on how you're feeling and take note if you don't feel quite yourself,' adds Dr Crepaz-Keay. Look out for...

- Mood swings
- Irritability
- Feeling tearful for no reason
- Heightened anxiety
- Trouble sleeping
- Fatigue
- Reduced concentration levels

HOW TO HELP YOURSELF AND OTHERS

'Although seeking medical advice for perimenopausal depression is recommended,' says Dr Crepaz-Keay, 'there are a number of simple lifestyle tweaks that you can try that may help improve symptoms. These include...

- **Regular exercise.** As well as giving your mind something else to focus on, exercise boosts your serotonin levels, your feelgood hormone, helping to lower stress levels and boost mood.
- **Mindfulness and mindful breathing** can help reduce symptoms of anxiety and keep negative thoughts in check. There is an array of apps available to guide you through breathing exercises.
- **Enjoy a healthy, balanced diet and avoid skipping meals** to keep physical symptoms in check, and blood sugar levels – and mood – on an even keel. Protein-rich foods containing the amino acid tryptophan, such as turkey, oats and legumes, help to boost your serotonin levels, thus lifting your spirits.

Turn over a new leaf

Step off the beaten track, get inspired by nature, and let your feelings take flight, writes Jackee Holder



When you are in need of a different perspective – when you keep coming up against the same responses in your writing or your thinking – it's time to change location. Getting out into nature, connecting intentionally with the trees and plants, can be a natural way of unearthing novel solutions and different points of views.

You don't need much to journal outside. Bare essentials are a pen or pencil, and a small notebook or wad of paper. Going analogue is a perfect response to going offline. The analogue equipment to hand will be more reliable than needing to find a plug or a charger to top up your mobile battery.

Nature is saturated with metaphors, giving you masses of material to play and have fun with. It fills the air with metaphors such as 'rooted', 'planted', 'growth', all fertile with possibilities of deeper, introspective reflection. Watching a leaf blowing in the breeze can be a metaphor for penning a response to the question 'What needs to be blown away in your own life right now?'

Trees are on hand to lend a listening ear whenever needed. Dripping in years of knowledge and wisdom, writing outdoors with trees gives you instant contact with the powers that be of the 'wood wide web'. Perhaps you're fighting with a challenge or a dilemma right now. Try posing a question to an aged tree. What would the wise ancient tree have to say about your problem? Writing with the trees creates space not only to get creative but to look at your problem from a whole new perspective.

One writing practice I like to share with clients is the seven leaves exercise. It requires taking a short mindful walk for the next seven days. Every day, collect a couple of leaves from trees on your route. Title each leaf with a quality you value and appreciate about yourself. Have fun and write out each quality individually on each leaf. For the next seven days, take each quality into a short, timed writing practice, which can be done whilst outside on your walk or once you're back indoors.



Decide on the first quality you'll write about. Everyday, spend seven minutes exploring your relationship with a different quality. Use the prompts below to dive deeper.

- **What is your relationship with this quality?**
- **How well expressed is this quality at work, at home, and in your relationship?**
- **What more of this quality could be expressed, and in what ways?**
- **How might expressing more of this quality make a huge difference to your life?**

Take a couple of minutes to reflect on what shows up in the writing. At the end of seven days you will have a list of actions that are a reflection of you becoming more of the individual you want to be.

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A lack of energy can be a natural response to life's challenges. But that doesn't mean you have to live with it. Tired of always running on empty, Heidi Scrimgeour discovers how to build energetic resilience... ▶▶

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I've always been a high energy kind of person. One of those don't-do-things-by-halves people. I got married two days after I graduated, which meant planning a wedding during my finals. I did a Masters degree whilst working full-time and graduated with Distinction – then had my first baby shortly afterwards. And I ran my first half-marathon when my third child wasn't even a year old, squeezing long training runs into her nap time while other mums were putting their feet up, catching up on *Corrie*.

Lately, however, I seem to have lost a little of that vim and vigour. Eight years on from that race, I find myself thinking twice about taking the stairs if there's a lift within staggering distance. I never got round to joining a new gym when mine closed during the pandemic. And some days I spend all day looking forward to crawling back into bed – and often do so at the point in the evening that I once thought of as 'going out' time.

My age plays a part in this, of course. I was 37 when I ran my half marathon but, at 45, I can't face pounding the pavements after a day at my desk. I'm more likely to reach for my slippers than my running shoes. And, yet, I refuse to just give in to the narrative that we inevitably slow down as we get older.

After all, plenty of women keep running well into their 40s – and beyond – and the benefits of keeping active at all stages of life are well documented. But my lack of energy isn't just tied to running or even exercise. I have a general feeling that someone has pulled out my plug. My get up and go has got up and gone. And I am tired of feeling tired.

I'm not suggesting we can all have the boundless energy to keep running marathons into our 80s. There are myriad legitimate reasons why our energy levels might run low, from physical illness, injury and disability to mental

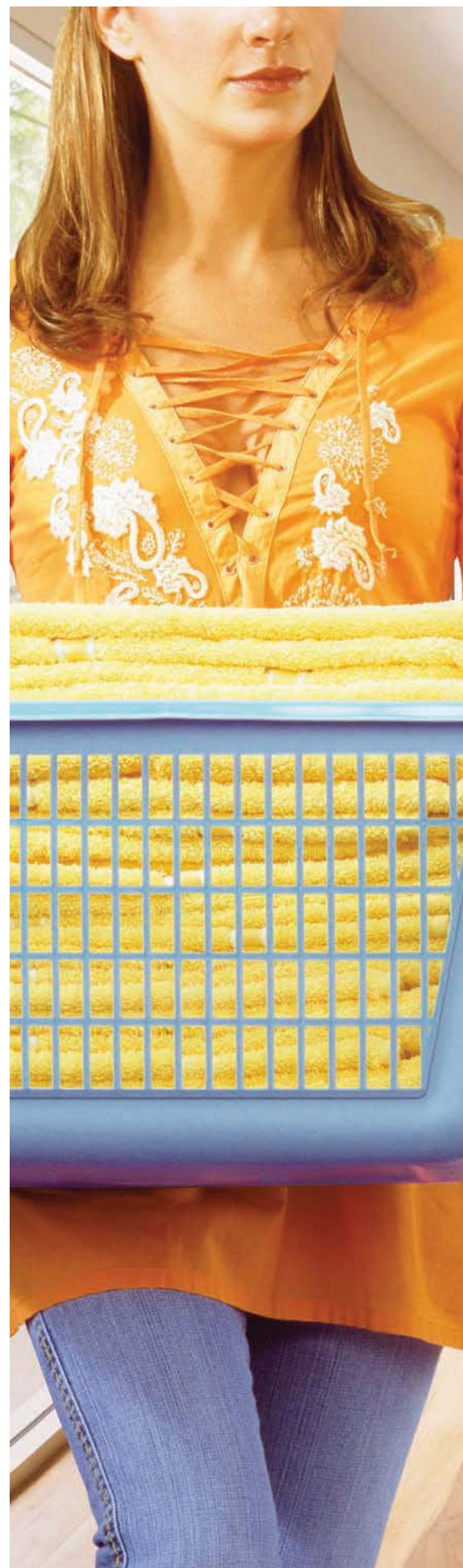
health struggles and menopause – and everything in between.

And that's not to mention Long Covid. According to Government statistics, the number of people still adversely affected by symptoms at least 12 weeks after contracting the illness is anything from one to two million, with women more affected than men, and symptoms increasing with age. With key issues being around fatigue, brain fog and mental health issues generally, it's clear that we are facing huge challenges.

But whether we're hitting the 'peak busy' years of midlife and managing a family and a career while caring for parents or others, or just navigating a post-Covid reality that has left us unable to manage in the ways we did before, perhaps we can develop new habits that will help energise us emotionally for this particular season of life.

With good self-care, the right mindset and the appropriate tools, we can better resource ourselves to cope with whatever we face – without losing every ounce of energy in the process. Convinced of this, I decide to ask the experts to teach me how to combat the things that are sapping my emotional and physical stamina. My hope is that I can discover some new ways to boost my energy. And, who knows, maybe my running shoes haven't seen the last of me after all.

***“Someone has pulled out my plug.
My get up and go has got up and gone.
And I am tired of feeling tired”***





How to reset your energy economy

We often fall into the habit of thinking of energy as something we lack or never have enough of. But what if we thought about it more like we think about money? Rather than being a mysterious quality that we can never amass enough of, energy is a resource like any other. We can choose to spend it or save it and even earn it and invest it, explains Suzie Cuthbertson, a coach who specialises in helping women avoid burnout.

‘Energy is defined as the capacity to perform work, because everything we do requires us to expend energy – so, for this reason, energy is a precious resource that needs to be invested wisely,’ she says. ‘If we look at energy more like money, and start to prioritise where we spend and invest it, we will definitely have more of it.’

On hearing this, I am struck by the realisation that I am a spendthrift when it comes to energy. I say ‘yes’ to almost every request that comes my way. Whether it’s my teenagers asking for a lift to work, or a friend calling in a favour, I invest energy on demand. I wouldn’t spend money so readily with no thought of how to earn more, yet I fritter energy recklessly and then wonder why I feel so depleted.

My dwindling energy levels, I now realise, have coincided with the phase of life in which I became a mother of three, turned 40, lost my dad, and started a new career. Grief, in itself, burned energy that I didn’t have to spare. No wonder my running shoes haven’t seen the light of day for years; my energy economy is firmly in the red.

To rebalance things, it’s crucial to examine your life to understand precisely what’s draining you of energy. Spoiler alert: it’s probably not what you think. ‘In today’s world, we often try to cram too much into our daily lives, so when we think about being tired, we always look at the surface-level things that are causing this, such as lack of sleep, long hours at work, or running after the kids,’ says Cuthbertson. What most people don’t see are the

things that aren’t so transparent. These can include emotional triggers, such as bereavement or perfectionism, as well as physical triggers, such as chronic illness and nutritional deficiencies. ‘Spiritual triggers, in the form of belief systems at a conscious and subconscious level as we connect and lean into our deeper selves, can also use up a huge amount of energy,’ Cuthbertson adds.

With clarity around what’s actually draining your energy, it’s possible to begin resetting the balance. Make time to reflect on the deeper things that could be consuming your energy; is it really the demands of your job, or could it actually be deeper anxieties that are whirring away in the background, taking up energetic bandwidth?

To help identify what’s impacting your energy, Cuthbertson recommends trying a simple heart coherence exercise. ‘Sit quietly and place your hand on your heart and ask what support it needs today,’ she says. ‘When we drop into our heart space it will always guide us.’

I realise it’s probably not realistic for me to scale back the things that make demands on my energy (I work full-time, freelance a little, and I’m doing some professional training in the evenings. And did I mention I have three children?). However, I can offset those energy drainers by investing more time in things that I know will re-energise me. I can phone an upbeat friend, take a walk while listening to an inspiring podcast, or soak in a bath on my lunch break, instead of telling myself that I’m too tired to do any of those things. Actually, they’re essential if I want to preserve my energy supply.

‘If we want more energy, we need to do more of what makes us feel good,’ agrees Cuthbertson. If you’re not sure what those things are, she recommends asking yourself what good boundaries feel like. ‘Where do you feel them in your body? Then look at who and what makes you feel like this – and use that as your own GPS system to create more energy for yourself.’

Expert
advice



Suzie Cuthbertson, formerly a HR director for Office, is an accredited coach, qualified energy practitioner, EFT therapist and mediator. suziecuthbertson.com



RECONNECT WITH YOUR POWER SOURCE

*Expert
advice*



Lydia Kimmerling is an ICF accredited master coach who runs The Happiness Explorer, to help people live a life they love. thehappinessexplorer.com



Thinking about energy as power is another helpful analogy. 'Energy is the essence of who you are and it's what gives you power, but it's also what people sense from you the moment they make a connection with you,' explains Lydia Kimmerling, a coach and founder of The Happiness Explorer.

'You have to charge your phone to give it energy, which then gives it power and allows you to switch it on,' she adds. 'Your energy is the same – it needs to be plugged into a source that positively charges and fills you up, so that you have the power to show up. And the more positively charged you are in relation to what you want and who you want to be, the more this energy is felt around you, creating a ripple effect in your life.'

This brings home how little I do to keep my energy levels topped up, compared to others. My husband meditates and goes mountain biking. A friend swims in the sea daily. Me?

I fall asleep on the sofa trying to watch TV shows I don't currently have the capacity to concentrate on.

When we're disconnected from our power source – whether we see that as our inner self or external things that help equip and empower us to be our best – we're more likely to succumb to mental noise. 'This is often when our minds begin to control us,' adds Kimmerling. 'You may experience more inner dialogue, more comparison or feel more depressed.'

When your connection to yourself is healthy, you're more likely to have an abundance of energy. At this level, we are our own energy source. To improve your relationship with yourself, Kimmerling recommends comparing it to a romantic relationship. 'Is it filled with love, trust, support, good communication, joy, motivation and thoughtfulness?' she asks. 'Choose one quality that you would like more of in your relationship with yourself and then

consider how you can demonstrate that.'

The word that springs to mind for me is intimacy; I'd like to feel a deeper sense of closeness with myself. For that to be possible, as in any other relationship, I must invest more time in nurturing connection.

Later, I have an opportunity to practise a short meditation, led by Kimmerling. At first, I am restless, but end up having an astonishingly vivid image of my own interior world. It's a lush, vibrant landscape, pulsing with an overwhelming sense of peace. It's an expansive place and yet I 'see' it tucked inside the physical dimensions of my body. This is an unusual encounter for me, but I am energised by the sense that this interior world lives in me, and I can return here any time. It astonishes me to think that re-energising myself might be as simple as taking time each day to connect more deeply with my own internal world through meditation.

*"When your connection to yourself
is healthy, you're more likely to
have an abundance of energy"*



How to deal with energy vampires

It's not the kindest of phrases, but we've all encountered energy vampires – those people who seem to extract every ounce of energy from us. Encounters with them can leave us feeling exhausted, empty, even violated. 'The best way to deal with an energy vampire is to identify who or what they are, and then look at the boundaries you need to put in place to support you in maintaining your energy supplies when you're around them,' says Nathalie Salaun, a psychologist.

'If a friend always spends too long on the phone, state at the beginning of the call that you are only available for 15 minutes as you have to do X, Y or Z – and stick to it,' she adds. 'I often find those that drain us the most either have no consciousness of it or get annoyed at themselves for their lack of personal boundaries, so you will be doing them a huge favour, as they will most likely follow your lead and adopt similar boundaries in their life, too – that's the ripple effect.'

Accepting that you have negative thoughts and feelings about the energy vampire in your life is important – as is giving up the tendency to blame either them or yourself for the dynamics. 'We are complex, unique, forever-changing individuals and we do not always get on,' explains Salaun. 'If we can accept that and not get caught up in the drama of the situation, the right or the wrong, and accept that we have different perceptions, then we are more likely to let go of negative energy and less likely to enter into conflict.'

Working on our insecurities so that we feel less triggered by difficult people and circumstances can help us connect with our own desire for wellbeing and harmony, and acknowledge our limitations and abilities as well as

Expert advice



Nathalie Salaun is a chartered counselling psychologist specialising in the treatment of stress, depression and anxiety using cognitive and behavioural therapy and mindfulness.
nathaliesalaun.co.uk

those of others. 'We can then begin to set boundaries to further support ourselves in dealing with difficult situations and people,' explains Salaun. 'Setting boundaries is part of the process of asserting oneself, but it is most effective when we understand, accept and value ourselves and others. If we do not prioritise ourselves, we may feel depleted.'

There are many ways in which we can prioritise ourselves. Physical methods are obvious – these include getting enough rest and exercise, good nutrition and giving ourselves time to engage in activities that are replenishing, pleasurable, and fulfilling.

Emotionally, we can become more aware of our needs, wants and desires, and give ourselves permission to care for ourselves. 'At a mental level, prioritising ourselves might include becoming aware of our negative pattern of thinking, working on ourselves and choosing a more positive and compassionate way of being with ourselves and others,' adds Salaun. 'Having a lot of fun and acting in ways that sustain us and make us feel balanced are key behavioural ways to prioritise ourselves, thus boosting our energy.'

Approaching an energy vampire from a place of positivity can also help to protect your own energy supply. 'Remind yourself that you desire a harmonious encounter or outcome, and that if you approach the situation from a place of calm, understanding, flow, compassion and kindness, you will at least feel you have tried your best,' adds Salaun. 'Of course, this does not guarantee a positive outcome – but it makes it much more likely.'

***"Approaching
from a place of
positivity can
protect your own
energy supply"***

How to supercharge your energy

Master coach and happiness expert Lydia Kimmerling shares her top tips for boosting your energy levels

STEP OUT OF OTHER PEOPLE'S ENERGY SYSTEMS

We often take on the energy of others after spending time with family, clients, friends or work colleagues. This can lead to feeling drained and even resentful or sad. Visualise stepping out of every single person's energy system you have interacted with that day.

Observe how good boundaries feel

If we want more energy, we need to do more of what makes us feel good. Try asking yourself what good boundaries feel like. Where do you feel this in your body? Then look at who and what makes you feel like this – and use that as your own GPS system to create more energy for yourself.

DISENGAGE FROM THE ENERGY BATTLE

We all unknowingly take part in a battle for energy. Until you actively opt out, you'll be giving your power away to other people, places and things. For example, if you need your partner to say the right thing for you to feel secure, the relationship will feel unstable because security needs to come from within. If you need to weigh a certain amount to feel worthy, it will never be enough, because this power feels weak. Or if you need a job title to make you feel successful, you risk losing the success you identify with if your job title changes.



Beware negative energy boosters

Negative energy boosters are things you hope will boost your energy but which, in fact, sap it. When you feel lonely and eat a whole tub of ice cream. When you say 'one drink' but finish the bottle. Seeking validation on Tinder.

Spending on your credit card with a 'screw it' mentality... Negative energy boosters are used to lose yourself and not connect to yourself, whereas positive energy boosters leave us feeling good afterwards as well as in the moment.



WHAT BOOSTS YOUR EMOTIONAL ENERGY?

Mindset has a big impact on energy levels, so take our test to identify your personal emotional energy drainer

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 your secret emotional energy source

1 Which of these would affect you most?

- ♥ Moving job or house and feeling lonely ☐
- ♦ Failing an exam or not getting a promotion ☐
- Being laid low by a bug..... ☐
- Anything that clashes with your values ☐

2 When you have spare time you

- ♦ Catch up or get ahead ☐
- Just enjoy the peace ☐
- ♥ Invite people over ☐
- Do some extra exercise or yoga ☐

3 If possible, you prefer to avoid too much time

- ♥ On social media ☐
- ♦ With dull people ☐
- Sat at a desk ☐
- Doing routine things..... ☐

4 A low energy day means feeling

- ♦ Not as productive as usual ☐
- ♥ The need to have people around you ☐

- Drawn to self destructive habits..... ☐
- Lost and lacking in purpose ☐

5 More optimum energy would allow you to

- ♥ Get the most out of every opportunity ☐
- ♦ Achieve your goals and be your best self..... ☐
- Feel and look fit, strong and healthy..... ☐
- Feel clearer about what matters..... ☐

6 Which of these do you consider your best qualities?

- ♦ Optimism and a growth mindset ☐
- Motivation and determination ☐
- ♥ Openness and humour ☐
- Empathy and curiosity..... ☐

7 It's a good weekend when you've

- ♥ Organised a social event that went well..... ☐
- ♦ Read an inspiring book, or seen a great film ☐
- Really nurtured and looked after yourself..... ☐

- Done something that's made a difference ☐

8 When you're under stress, you want

- To get away from everything..... ☐
- To connect with life's meaning..... ☐
- ♥ Someone else to do all the organising ☐
- ♦ Something to look forward to ☐

9 You know you need to work on

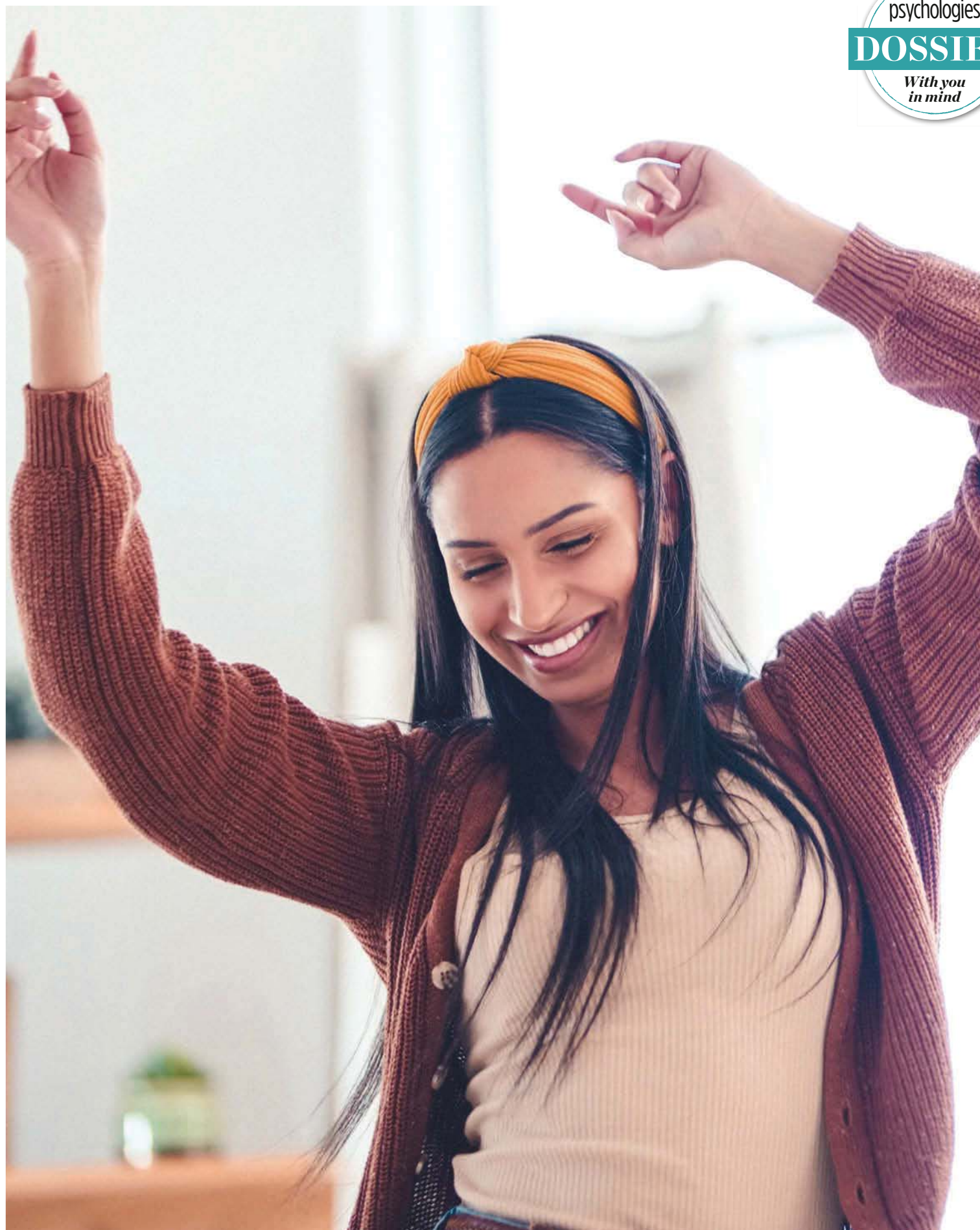
- Trusting you're on the right path ☐
- Your all-or-nothing approach to wellbeing ☐
- ♦ Appreciating what you have..... ☐
- ♥ Saying no and feeling okay about it... ☐

10 Your go-to mood booster is

- ♦ An inspirational podcast..... ☐
- A walk somewhere beautiful ☐
- A good deed for someone in need... ☐
- ♥ A catch up with a good friend ☐

Turn the page to find out how to maximise your energy





What helps recharge your energy levels?



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♥

Connecting

Feeling isolated is never comfortable but, for you, it's also an emotional energy drainer. Even quieter types can be extroverts, needing regular social interaction to feel their best. You may find yourself in the initiator role in any social group, keeping the momentum going. If you thrive on good conversation and feeling connected, time with like-minded people will be your go-to way to boost your mood and energy levels. So it's not surprising that you won't feel good if you find yourself feeling disconnected. Ironically, another energy drainer for you is social media – it's a quick-fix connection, but one that usually just leaves you wanting the real thing.

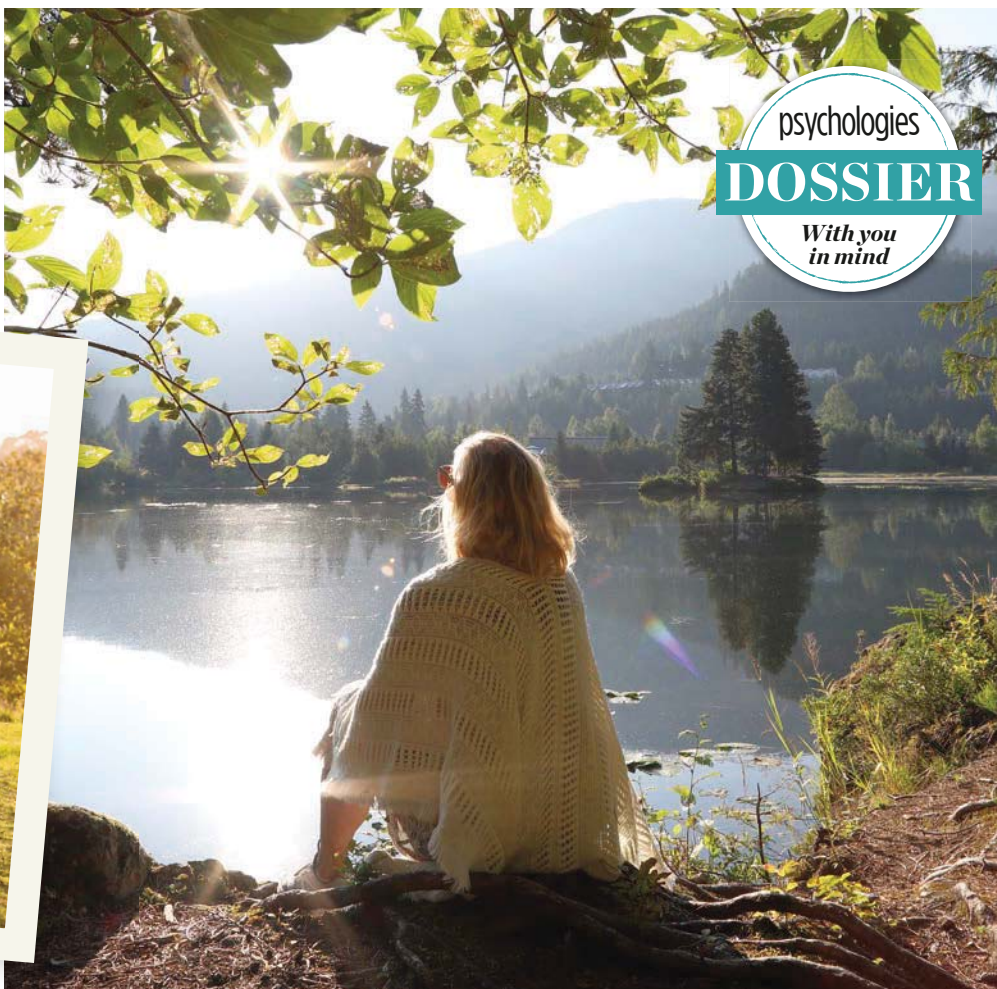
Your energy-boosting mantra is 'lean in' – you feel at your best when you're at the centre of things, so your instinct is to say yes to everything. But it's worth reminding yourself to pause and consider the impact on your existing commitments before taking on anything new. And if you're saying yes to social commitments to avoid spending time alone, it can quickly become energy draining, even for extroverts. Don't forget, the most important relationship in your life is the one with yourself, and that also thrives when you devote some time to it.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♦

Learning

Personal growth and reaching your potential are core values for you, so it's no surprise that you're sustained by new ideas and experiences. You're at your best when you're in a state of flow, focused and engaged in what you're doing, and you thrive when you have a creative hobby. Routine or unfulfilling work is the enemy of your natural energy reserves. You could also be drained by feeling stuck or unsure of the way forward. Stress can also take its toll if you get trapped into exhausting overthinking. But no matter how exhausted you feel, you get a mini energy burst when you tick something off your list, even if it's a relatively small achievement.

You need to feel inspired by life, so can start to feel low if you don't step outside your comfort zone on a regular basis – a life that's too deeply embedded in routine will drain your energy. You need to feel a sense of achievement, so if you're not getting that from work or your social life right now, it's time to make room for new adventures. That might mean spending time in a new place, or simply getting involved in a project you feel passionate about. Consider taking up a hobby that involves lifelong learning, such as playing an instrument or learning a language, to keep your energy reserves topped up.



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ●

Moving

We know that mind and body are connected, and you're more aware than most that you're at your best when everything is in balance. Sitting in one place for too long is your biggest energy drainer, and it also takes its toll on your mood. Moving your body and stretching to release tension held in the muscles may already instinctively be your go-to way to top up your energy reserves throughout the day. Even a brisk walk around the block can be transformative.

You know your core personal energy boosters are good quality sleep, a balanced diet and a regular exercise routine, but sometimes life gets in the way of the best of intentions and it's easy to let the balance slip. If energy is bound up with your self-image as a fit and healthy person, don't be surprised to find your confidence takes a knock when you're tired or just not feeling your best. A red flag for you is feeling overwhelmed or daunted by things you normally take in your stride. Start the day by tuning into your body and asking what you need to feel at your best in the day ahead. Then, throughout the day, check in to see if you're holding any unnecessary tension, or whether you could slow and deepen your breathing.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ■

Reflecting

Living a life in line with your values energises you, and you can find the motivation and drive to achieve almost anything you set your mind to, if it feels meaningful. Being there for people who need you is really important to you, but too much small talk or spending a lot of time with people who aren't on your wavelength depletes you. And spending time on your own isn't an optional extra – it's an essential for recharging, refocusing and rebalancing.

As a naturally empathic and compassionate person, unfairness and injustice can drain you, so the right work environment is important. If that's out of your control right now, seeking out a project to be involved with in your own time can help provide balance and the sense of meaning that gives you energy in life. Without that, you can start to feel a bit lost. You cherish time on your own, but you also need to feel part of a tribe, and you know that spending time with the right people is vital for keeping your motivation and energy levels up. Regular journaling can help sustain you during a demanding time, because it keeps you connected to your values and what really matters. And simply taking time to pause and reflect every day is another simple way to top up your energy tank.

Letting go of the past

Your energy can be greatly impacted by past events. People could have wronged or shamed you, caused you trauma, or simply acted in a way that hurt you, and you can carry this around for years. The vibrational energy of this daily can have a large impact on our nervous system, which will ultimately drain your energy stores.

Letters of forgiveness have been shown to help heal unresolved issues. If you make a conscious choice to let go of toxic emotions, this will benefit your body, psychologically and physically. Forgiveness is, therefore, a powerful method of stress relief. Grab a pen and paper and start by writing to someone that you feel you are harbouring bad feelings towards. Be prepared to go on an emotional journey. You will know if you are ready and, most importantly, anger should be replaced with calm and compassion. The point of this letter is not to send it to the other person, but to free yourself from the emotions that are trapping you. You can even write one to yourself if you feel the need. This is sure to boost your energy after the emotions and new perspective have settled.

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**Neal's Yard Remedies
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 Energy, £8, [nealsyard
 remedies.com](http://nealsyardremedies.com)**

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Neom Energy Burst Body & Hand Lotion, £22, neomorganics.com

Our hands have had it tough these past couple of years, but this lotion means you can take care of them while also lifting your spirits. It features 17 essential oils to help invigorate the body and sharpen the mind, all while nourishing your skin.



Aromatherapy Associates Revive Shower Oil, £28, aromatherapyassociates.com

Get going first thing in the morning with this therapeutic essential-oil blend of grapefruit, rosemary and juniper berry. The luxurious oil-to-milk formula gently cleanses and lets you turn your daily shower into a self-care ritual.



DRINK UP

Raise a glass and send your energy levels soaring, too!

1 Our favourite energy soft drink Tenzing, £14.99 for 12, tenzingnaturalenergy.com

A healthy alternative to traditional canned energy drinks, Tenzing is based on ancient recipes handed down by the Sherpa people in Tibet. It's made from plants and natural caffeine, energising vitamin C and hydrating electrolytes. Plus, it's carbon negative and hugely sustainable, too!



2 Our favourite energy tea Yogi Tea Women's Energy, £2.69 for 17, hollandandbarrett.com

For days when you need more than a regular brew to wake you up, try this Ayurvedic blend of hibiscus, angelica root and ginger, plus licorice root and raspberry leaves, for a rich, heady aroma to bring back your zing.



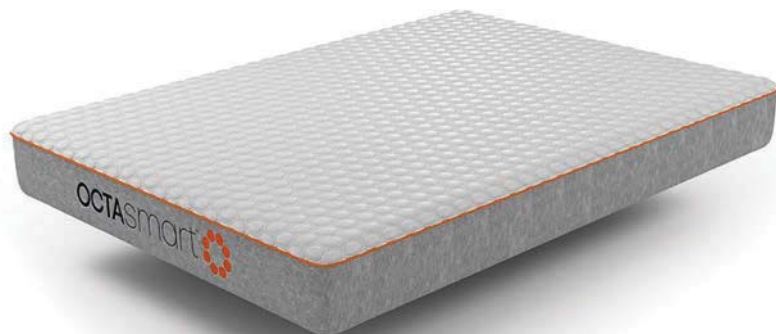
3 Our favourite energy shot Unrooted Mighty Ginger Fresh Energy, £25 for 12, unrooteddrinks.com

For an intense burst of flavour that gives you a real wake-up, we love this ginger shot, which also includes turmeric and scotch bonnet chillies, plus baobab fruit to boost your energy.



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Our favourite mattress

Dormeo Octasmart Plus Memory Foam Mattress, from £299.99, dormeo.co.uk

Memory foam is a brilliant invention, but there's no doubting it can make a mattress much hotter than usual. So we love this design, which – along with memory foam – features hundreds of Octasprings to cradle your body, plus a venting system to cool the bed by up to 3°C!

Our favourite pillow spray

This Works Deep Sleep Pillow Spray, £19.50, thisworks.com

It's won a whole host of awards for one reason: just as the name suggests, it works! Featuring lavender, camomile and vetivert, this spray doesn't just smell good, it's been proven through brain imaging studies to help you fall asleep faster and wake feeling more refreshed.



Our favourite bath product

Cowshed Calming Bath Salts, £18, cowshed.com

A relaxing bath before you turn in for the night can be the perfect way to get ready for sleep. We love this blend of lemon balm and lemon myrtle essential oils to relieve tension and stress in your mind, with Himalayan sea salt to ease aching muscles.



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Saskia's Flower Essences Focus, Energise, Create, £12, saskiasfloweressences.com

Formulated to give you a shove when you're feeling stuck, this blend provides an energising combination for unblocking creativity and helping with procrastination. Among other essences, it contains Nan's polyanthus, to help you kickstart any project, and buttercup, to help you feel more creative.



TO LIFT YOUR MOOD

Australian Bush Flower Essences Dynamis Essence, £10.95, ausflowers.co.uk

If you're looking for a little extra bounce, this might be just the thing. Designed to combat feelings of sluggishness and burnout, it contains old man banksia, macrocarpa and crowea, to give you back your joy for life.



TO HELP YOU RECOVER

Bach Original Flower Remedies Olive, £7.79, hollandandbarrett.com

The Olive flower remedy from Bach is designed to support and restore you when you feel tired after making an effort, giving you a positive emotional boost.



HELPING HANDS

Fortify your defences and fight off fatigue with these super-charged supplements...

Our favourite spray

BetterYou Boost B12 Oral Spray, £11.95, betteryou.com

If you haven't tried them before, give oral sprays a go. They provide a super-dose of easily absorbed vitamins. This one is expertly blended to boost energy levels, containing a huge 1,200µg of vitamin B12, plus green tea and chromium to support brain functions.



Our favourite gummy

Get Nourished The High Flyer Stack, £35.99 for 28, get-nourished.com

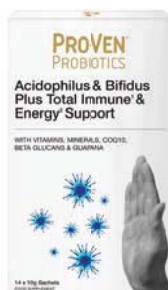
Nourished uses 3D technology to print a stack of vitamins, minerals and nutrients in a delicious sugar-free formula. This blend has ashwagandha to relieve stress, with LactoSpore® probiotic to strengthen the digestive system.



Our favourite probiotic

Pro-Ven Probiotics for Immunity and Energy, £12.95, provenprobiotics.co

The stress we encounter every day can reduce the level of good bacteria in our gut, which can impact on our energy levels, as we need good bacteria for energy creation. This drink boosts good bacteria and provides vitamins and minerals to support immunity.



Our favourite liquid supplement

Vitabiotics Feroglobin Plus, £8.50, vitabiotics.com

If you want a gentle supplement, Feroglobin Plus is a honey- and orange-flavoured liquid providing iron plus trace minerals and essential vitamins. It also contains Siberian ginseng, Co-Q10, L-carnitine, green tea and beetroot extracts, which all work to provide a pick-me-up.



Our favourite effervescent

Natures Aid Energy effervescent, £5.95, naturesaid.co.uk

There's nothing quite like an effervescent to give you an instant boost, and this one provides a combination of B vitamins, vitamin C, guarana, ginseng and caffeine, for those times when you need a top-up.



Our favourite multi-vit

Viridian Woman 40+ Multi, £29.15, viridian-nutrition.com

Tailored for women approaching perimenopause and beyond, we're impressed by this multivitamin, mineral and phytonutrient blend. It features pomegranate, grape skin and green coffee bean extracts, plus B complex vitamins to tackle fatigue and aid your brain function.



LET'S GLOW!

Infuse the air with positivity and potential



Aery Living Positive Energy candle, £27, aeryliving.com

Create the perfect uplifting atmosphere with pink grapefruit, vetiver and mint, plus hints of amber, violet leaf and lemon.



Espa Energising candle, £37, espaskincare.com

Made from hand-poured soy wax with uplifting peppermint and stimulating eucalyptus.



L'occitane Revitalising candle, £20.50, uk.occitane.com

Designed to emulate the fresh air of Provence, featuring mint, pine, rosemary, sweet orange and litsea cubeba, for moments of wellbeing and vitality.



Join Ollie's army

**NOW
ONLINE!**

**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**

Despite 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.



Get in touch

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!

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



Heart

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



Who haven't you spoken to for a long while who you miss the most? Give them a call or write them a letter to let them know you are thinking of them.



Expert advice



Emma Reed Turrell is a psychotherapist who works with individuals and organisations to help them overcome limiting beliefs and realise their potential. She is the author of Please Yourself (HarperCollins, £9.99). emmareedturrell.com



It's time to **PLEASE YOURSELF!**

You can't please all of the people all of the time, as the saying goes. But when we care better for ourselves, we care better for others, discovers Yasmina Floyer

It was a Friday evening, my family's weekly circuit breaker, where we enjoy the three Ts: take-out, TV and time together – except things had changed. My daughter had recently been offered a funded place at a dance class. She wanted to do it. Even though it's on take-out night. Even though she would be back late and still need to be at ballet for 9am the next morning. But, three weeks in, she admits that she doesn't want to do the class, never has. It turns out she thought it would make me happy, because I took dance classes as a teen. She worried it would displease the performing arts school to turn down a funded place; that because this opportunity came her way, she had to accept it so as not to appear ungrateful. I realised that for women in particular, the message that we ought to be a 'good girl' and acquiesce has persisted well into my daughter's woke generation. I've never considered her (or myself, for that matter) as much of a people pleaser – but, it turns out, it isn't as avoidable as I had thought.

When I was her age, I paid very close attention to what my peers wore on non-uniform day. Sweatshirts with Ellesse and Adidas logos emblazoned on the front like a modern-day fleur-de-lis indicated status

and street cred. These logos were more than just branding; they acted as a cultural semaphore, signalling that you belonged. As a first-generation Mauritian girl, it was important to me to be accepted, and to try to reflect what I saw around me, even if popular culture did not reflect me back. Part of that meant wearing the 'right thing' on non-uniform days, and I strived to do just that – though I never quite got it right. Therapist and author Emma Reed Turrell speaks to me about how primal this desire to be accepted is: 'We are born people pleasers. As a human baby, we're born roughly 12 months prematurely to any other mammal, and our initial code of conditioning centres on working out how to stay in favour. Part of the human condition is that we are dependent on a pack, and our caregivers are the difference between life and death.' The relationship between people pleasing and survival is all the more poignant if you've experienced a childhood where capitulating to the needs of a caregiver was connected to safety or ensuring that your basic needs were met.

It wasn't until my early 20s that I decided I was done trying to please others in order to fit in, and



began to embrace my individuality. My daughter is almost 14 and already far more in touch with her sense of self than I ever was at her age. She dresses in her dad's old band shirts, tartan trousers and Dr. Martens. Her favourite author is George Orwell. She has a disdain for fashion (it's fleeting) though loves exploring personal style (it's authentic, idiosyncratic) and isn't on any social media. She likes to be as helpful as possible to those around her, and going out of our way for others is valued as a positive trait. But when does the desire to help others spill into people pleasing?

When I learnt of the four types of people pleaser that Reed Turrell describes in her book *Please Yourself: How To Stop People-Pleasing & Transform Your Life* (HarperCollins, £9.99), I recognised just how relatable they are. 'The Classic,' Emma tells me, 'is the type we most often associate with people pleasing. This is the person who wants everyone to be happy, and they're willing to go the extra mile to do so. They plan the perfect party, organise the most thoughtful gifts – there's nothing too much for the classic. They get their sense of validation from the appreciation that they're shown by having gone above and beyond.' Whilst I wouldn't call myself a classic people pleaser, the mother and friend in me recognises the need to accommodate the comfort of others. Things like hospitality, over-catering and anticipating the needs of your guests are ingrained in my upbringing, so I wonder whether cultural expectations feed into people pleasing? 'It feeds in massively!' Reed Turrell confirms. 'Whether you were told that this was the right way to be, or you just followed what you saw around you, there's a lot of different cultural impacts that tells us that there is a code of conditioning; that you follow that code and that's the way things have to be.'

Societal expectations placed upon women to be pleasant and agreeable lead me to question if women are more susceptible to people pleasing, but Reed Turrell explains how these behaviours manifest within gendered spaces affecting all of us: 'When I was working in private practice, I became more aware of people pleasing through the male clients. They were also up against social constructs around being pleasing, though they weren't necessarily pleasing in the same way. They weren't planning the perfect party, but they were trying to be what they believed a male should be in society; trying to suppress some of their emotions in order to please the same patriarchy that the women were trying to.'

'The Shadow' is the second type of people pleaser Reed Turrell describes to me: 'Typically, a person who has grown up around someone who already occupies the limelight. What that means is they got really good at helping someone else achieve their goals. They're the number one number two; the perfect wing person; everybody's favourite backup

deputy. They always help other people to get where they want to get to, but they often forget what they want themselves.'

Reed Turrell then tells me that the third type is not so much about people pleasing as much as not *displeasing*, hence why she calls them 'The Pacifier'. 'These are the people who get off on harmony,' says Reed Turrell. 'They thrive on the sense that no one's displeased or disappointed with them, or having any feeling that could be perceived negatively at all. They want to keep this very comfortable, slightly benign middle-of-the-road approach in life, which means they daren't ever speak their truth. They can be very hard to get to know because you never really understand what they think or feel about anything.'

This got me thinking about the pleasing behaviours I engage with as a woman of colour resulting from societal and cultural conditioning, sentiments echoed in an article for *Harper's Bazaar* by academic and author Pragya Argawal. Here, she speaks to complexities that are found at the intersection between gender and culture: 'Women, in general, are expected to moderate their emotions, to be passive, to please others. Immigrant women more so. Women of colour are expected to comply, be passive, not ruffle any feathers, not cause any discomfort to anyone.'

'The Resistor' is the type I identify with most, and I am unbelievably reluctant to accept that this type even counts as a people pleaser. I'm grateful that Reed Turrell also declares herself a resistor when she explains this fourth category: 'I spotted that there was a whole group of people who didn't identify with the previous types and they actually say they don't care what other people think, so much so that they opt out of situations that have certain rules or a prescribed way of doing things. These are the people who realise that they are still affected by the pressure to please or to get it right for other people, and the safest bet for them is to artificially thicken

"Going out of our way for others is valued as a positive trait. But when does the desire to help others spill into people pleasing?"





▶▶ NEXT STEPS

Read *Please Yourself: How To Stop People-Pleasing & Transform The Way You Live* by Emma Reed Turrell (HarperCollins, £9.99). Through the stories of people pleasers across all walks of life, Reed Turrell offers insights and techniques that will help you live more authentically.

Watch Salma Hindy's TEDx Talk *Why People Pleasing is Hurting You*. Award-winning engineer-turned-comedian Hindy explores the wider impacts of people pleasing, and how to learn from it; youtube.com/watch?v=55HERZnmHT8

their skin and keep people at arm's length – to opt out.' Suddenly, my extremely small, close-knit friendship group, and reluctance to participate in things like school mums' drinks, takes on a whole new light. As much as I didn't want to admit it, choosing not to engage doesn't omit me from people pleasing, because opting out is still relational to it. Reed Turrell continues, 'If you don't play, you can't lose – but, actually, sometimes in that resistance people are giving up some of their authentic needs just so they don't have to be exposed to the criticism that they can't tolerate.'

Whilst I'm a resistor the vast majority of the time, when I'm hosting, I can be a bit of a classic. Around certain family members, I sometimes lean towards pacifier. Reed Turrell says that we can be more than one type of people pleaser depending on who we're

*“The
key is
to work
towards
our
authentic
feelings”*

around, and that, throughout our lives, we 'go through different stages and recycle different pleasers.' The key, she tells me, when we talk about my daughter's dance class, is to work towards our authentic feelings, to 'come out of either compliance or defiance, so that we get to have a conversation that is about what we actually want to do.'

Telling her that it's okay to say 'no' to things, that whilst I wasn't disappointed at all, it's okay to be displeasing sometimes, that other people's reactions are not in our control and we have to be okay with that, was not only something that my daughter needed to hear, but also something I needed to remind myself of. Getting to the root of what we really want – and don't want – initiates the shift away from sacrificing our needs to please others and towards learning how to please ourselves more.

Q&A

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



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

GOT A QUESTION FOR MARY? Email letters@psychologies.co.uk, with 'Mary life' 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

“Will suggesting change seem like a criticism?”

Q Generally speaking, all is well in my life, and from the outside I am extremely fortunate. I am fully aware that my situation, compared to many, is one of privilege – yet my life lacks inspiration and feels dull. I'm 45 and have always lived in a relationship where fun has not been a priority – although my husband is a good man. What should I do? Is it even possible to introduce an element of fun into my life when, at the top of my list of concerns, is not to cause hurt to my husband?

In summary, not only is the fun missing from your life, but you're also worried your husband may take it personally. And you're not wrong to have that concern. Clinical psychologist Michaela Thomas says that, in her experience of working with heterosexual couples, the man is often not ready for those insights.

So it might help to expand your own understanding and definition of fun first. Human enjoyment comes on two distinct levels, which the research calls hedonism and eudaimonia. In my family, we call it Type 1 and Type 2 fun. Hedonism is the immediate rush of pleasure from something sensory, such as food, sex, or a massage, while eudaimonic happiness is related to our deeper sense of purpose, so it might be achieving something difficult, even if it wasn't all fun at the time (think pain, blisters, or sacrificing leisure time to study).

It's possible that there's even a part of you that is frightened to explore the idea of fun. Thomas says that many of us fear joy, because it often comes hand in hand with thoughts such as 'It isn't always going to be like this', 'This will end',

and 'Oh, I wish it could be like this every day', which slowly starts to sabotage our joy.

What aspect of fun are you craving? Is it spontaneity, adventure, or deep relaxation? What have you enjoyed alone or as a couple in the past? Could you listen to each other's music, watch a comedy show, or transform a corner of your garden together? It might be that you agree about a local volunteer project you'd like to support. Even litter-picking can be fun if it connects you to new people or feeds your sense of purpose!

Without having a big, heavy meaning-of-life conversation with your husband, could you invite him to join you in one of these activities? Then simply say, 'That was fun, wasn't it? Shall we do it again sometime?'

thethomasconnection.co.uk





“Arguments are part of the way that people who are close to each other renegotiate boundaries”

“How can we navigate being back under one roof?”

Q Two of my adult children have been hard-hit by the pandemic, and it looks as if they will both be back living at home with me for a while. I’m struggling not to feel fed up at just the thought of this. I know it’s a cliché about falling back into old patterns of behaviour, but these two are prone to having dramatic arguments and expecting me to sort them out. How can I reset all of our expectations so that I don’t feel so resentful?

It’s perhaps ironic in this context to say that you’re not alone – but, statistically, the pandemic hit young people particularly hard. One piece of research found that, in 2021, 56 per cent of 23-year-olds were living at home. Incidentally, another study found that this led to an increase in parental depression – so you are also right to pay attention to yourself.

I talked to integrative therapist Abbey Robb, who says you can be proud to have raised children who consider moving back, because it shows that the relationships are basically good. Having said that, it is a process of re-negotiation, because you’re now dealing with adults.

One way to start that conversation is to

say, ‘Now that we have this bonus time of living together, how can we make it work for all of us? I know you’re adults, so it’s not just down to me.’ This acknowledges that your young people could have mixed feelings, too – for example, if they’ve been used to staying out all night on a whim, you might have to remind yourself that this has been happening without your knowledge. It might be wise to set some ground rules, for example, they each have their own key, they don’t wake everyone else up, and the dishes still need to be done before midday, regardless.

When it comes to conflict, Robb points out that ‘arguments are part of the way that people who are close to each other

renegotiate boundaries. As long as it doesn’t escalate beyond a certain point, it’s healthy to have these discussions’. People who don’t care stop arguing, so withdrawal can be a bigger indicator of a relationship in trouble. Although, you should feel free to say, ‘I’ve given you all of these life skills; this is your drama, you sort it out’.

I’m writing this as a parent who has had an adult child at home for the past two years, so I know that while this might be simple, it’s not easy. Keep your eye on the big picture and trust that, as much as you want the best for your children, they also want the best for you.

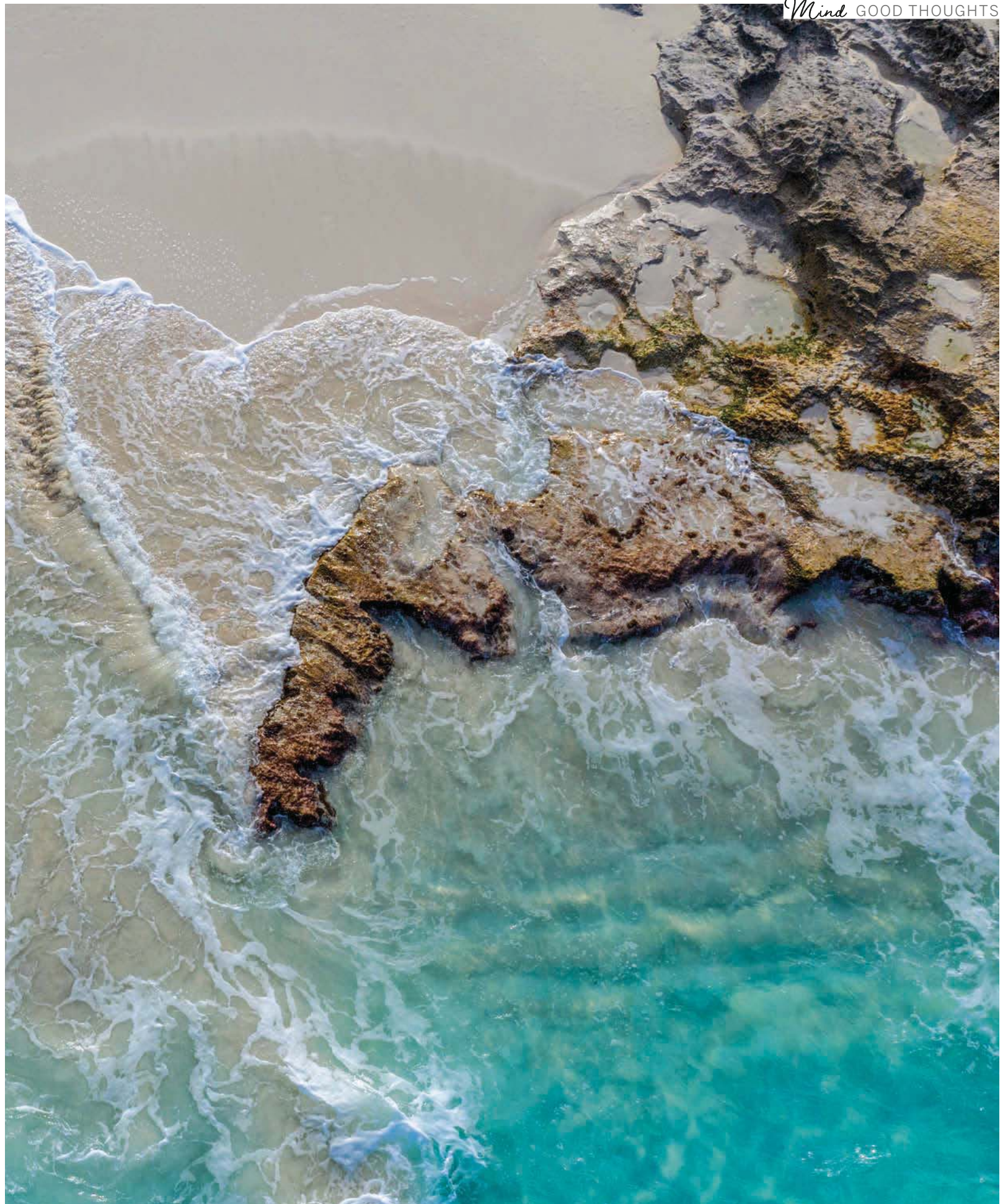
abbeyrobbtherapies.co.uk



psychologies inspiration

*“In the ocean, I slip
from my skin into
the soul of the sea”*

Angie Weiland-Crosby



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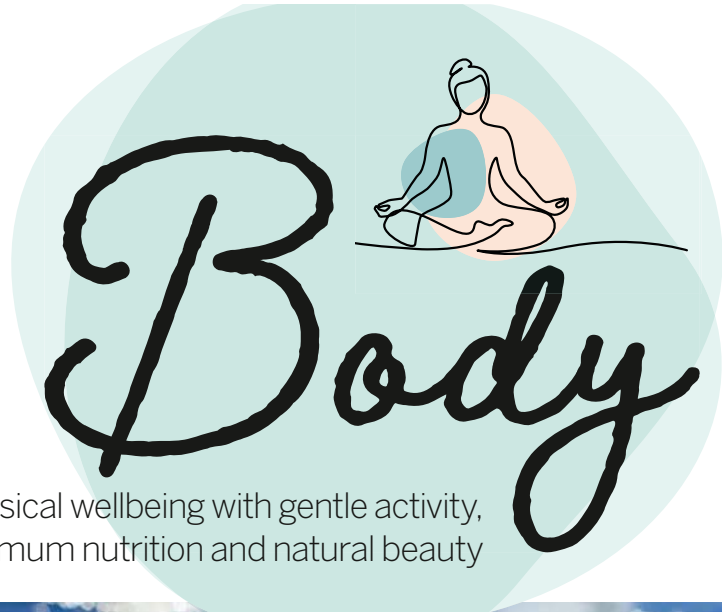
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Improve your physical wellbeing with gentle activity, better sleep, optimum nutrition and natural beauty



Do you feel well rested when you wake? If not, what steps could you take to help you feel better?

IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES



MINDFUL WELLNESS

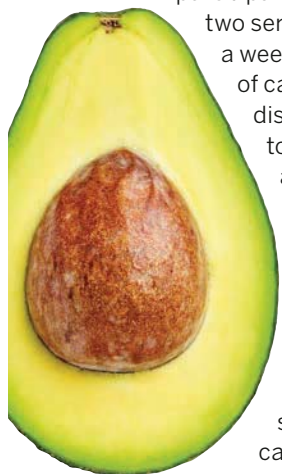


Our Acting Wellness Director, Elizabeth Bennett, shares new research, strategies and wisdom on all aspects of wellbeing, from activity and nourishment to meditation and conscious beauty

Eat well

Eat your avocados

We've talked previously about the vibrant avocado's superstar status in the age of social media, but the fruit (yes, technically it's a fruit!) is much more than just a pretty picture. A 30-year study published in the *Journal Of The American Heart Association* found that participants who ate at least two servings of avocado a week had a lower risk of cardiovascular disease compared to those who rarely ate avocados. Luckily, you can add avocados to many a meal. Try it topped on toast for brekkie, in a filling salad for lunch, or as a side with chilli con carne for dinner.



What's cooking?

If you love cooking, we have some good news – and, if you don't, some inspiration to pick up those pans! New research from Australia's Edith Cowan University has discovered that being confident in the kitchen isn't just good for your diet – it's also beneficial for your mental health. Participants who took part in a seven-week healthy cooking course witnessed significant improvements to their mental wellbeing.



Roast asparagus, feta and almond salad with sourdough croutons

Typically, the short asparagus season ends around the summer solstice, so the last of the crop heralds the start of summer. For this salad, the spears are roasted to enhance their amazing flavour, while retaining a good crunch.

Serves 2 as a main, 4 as a starter

- 2 slices of slightly stale sourdough or good-quality wholemeal bread, crusts removed
- 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- Sea salt and black pepper
- 100g almonds (skin on), roughly chopped
- About 500g asparagus (at least 16 spears) – once the asparagus season is over, grill plump spring onions instead

- 1 little gem lettuce, leaves divided
- 150g good-quality feta cheese
- Juice of 1 lemon

1 Preheat the oven to 230°C, 210°C fan, gas mark 8. Cut the bread into 1cm cubes and place in a bowl with 2 tbsp of the olive oil and some salt and pepper. Toss to coat.

2 Scatter the bread cubes on a baking tray and toast in the oven for 5 minutes, until golden brown and crunchy. Tip the croutons onto a plate and allow to cool.

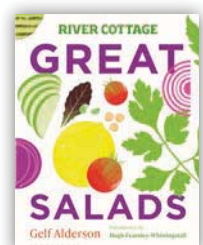
3 Spread the chopped almonds out on the baking tray and toast in the oven for 3 minutes, then set aside to cool.

4 Break off the tough ends of the asparagus and cut the spears in half on the diagonal. Place on a baking tray,

trickle over the remaining 1 tbsp olive oil, and season with salt and pepper. Roast the asparagus in the oven for 4 minutes, then remove and set aside for a few minutes to cool slightly.

5 Transfer the roasted asparagus to a large bowl and add the almonds, lettuce leaves and croutons. Crumble in the feta cheese, then trickle over the lemon juice. Add a touch more seasoning if you feel it needs it, then serve.

Extract from River Cottage Great Salads by Gelf Alderson (Bloomsbury, £20). Photography by Emma Lee



Sleep well



ASK AN EXPERT

IS IT NORMAL TO WAKE UP DURING THE NIGHT?

Waking in the night is not only common but also very normal. We often wake a couple of times in the night long enough to remember it and then fall back to sleep relatively quickly. But we also wake up more than we realise, and often *don't* remember it. In deeper sleep, our larger muscles of movement are paralysed, so each time you change your sleeping position you are a little bit awake or in very light sleep. Plus, we wake up more the older we get – often from needing the loo! These kinds of awakenings are nothing to fret about, and worrying about them can feed into sleep-related anxieties that create more prolonged awakenings and more ongoing sleeping difficulties, such as insomnia.

'You can help get more solid sleep by ensuring you have access to plenty of daylight during the day and have lots of physical exercise,' says Tracy Hannigan, a sleep coach. 'Checking the clock or tracking how long you are awake in the night isn't helpful. If you wake very frequently, really remember it, or the periods of being awake are long (more than 30 minutes), this could be a sign of a type of insomnia. Luckily, there are evidence-based treatments, such as cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia, which are helpful for these more problematic wakings.' tracythesleepcoach.co.uk

Under pressure

Struggling to switch off and get to sleep? A weighted blanket could help. Much like the name suggests, these blankets – which you lie on top of your duvet – are weighted with either beads or heavy cotton. A sensory tool, they are designed to stimulate deep touch pressure and help with anxiety. Like a comforting hug, the cocooning feeling can even release the feelgood hormone serotonin.

Wellbeing Weighted Blanket, £70, silentnight.co.uk



SWEET DREAMS!

If you're looking for an alternative to chocolate that will hit that sweet spot while also instilling a sense of calm, give Dirtea's Mushroom Cacao Super Blend a go. Made from organic raw cacao, it also contains a hefty serving of potent organic reishi and ashwagandha, two super herbs that help to detox the liver, combat stress and improve sleep.

Dirtea Mushroom Cacao Super Blend, from £31.99, dirteaworld.com

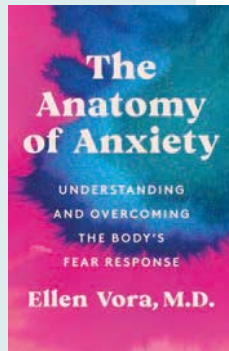


Meditation + mindfulness

A new look at anxiety

When it comes to anxiety, it often feels like it's all in our heads. In *The Anatomy Of Anxiety*, psychiatrist Dr Ellen Vora explores how anxiety begins and ends in our *bodies*. It provides a new way to understand why so many of us are suffering, and offers hope for a better way forward, with actionable tips.

The Anatomy Of Anxiety
by Ellen Vora (Orion, £14.99)



MINDFUL MOMENTS

Sign up to House of Jiriki and expect the zen feeling of a wellness retreat delivered direct to your door. The quarterly box contains a selection of five full-size wellbeing products – think incense, herbal tea or a gratitude journal – and an online mindful ritual for you to take part in.

House of Jiriki The Box, £120 per quarter, houseofjiriki.com

THE POWER OF WRITING DOWN YOUR GOALS

'Writing down your goals might seem a strange exercise – after all, you know what you want to achieve, it's all in your head, right? But do you really – or is it all a bit of a blur? Writing goals down and doing this simple activity daily cements them and almost instantaneously brings them to life!' says Monique Sveinsson, director of Perfect Planner Company (perfectplannerco.com). Here, she explains why...

1 Clarity
'Many of the clients I work with struggle to be clear on what it is they actually want to achieve. They may say they want to be healthier, wealthier, fitter or have a better work-life balance – but then they get stuck, as they don't explore any deeper. Seeing your goals written down in front of you and repeating the writing process can help your understanding of why you want to achieve the things you do. This can

make the steps of the journey become clearer and easier to achieve.'

2 Visualisation
'Seeing is believing. Creating an image in your mind makes goals more tangible. When you write down what your goals are every day, you can start to picture what your life will be like when you accomplish them. This then gives you the motivation you need to take the necessary steps.'

3 Habits
'Those who create better habits are far more likely to achieve their goals. Writing down a list of daily habits which will push you towards your goals gives an enormous sense of satisfaction. It's like a little internal competition. The more we tick off, the more satisfied we feel and, without even realising it, suddenly we are well on our way to smashing our goals!'



Move well



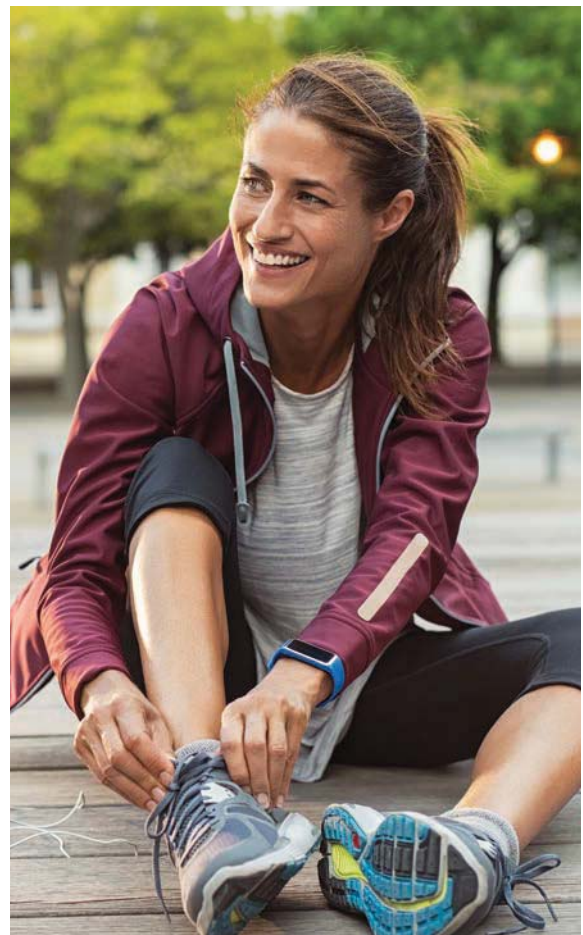
Walk this way

As we age, exercise isn't just about protecting our physical body but maintaining brain health, too. New research from the University of Georgia shows that physical activity could help protect your brain – and it doesn't have to be intense exercise to make an impact; the research looked at how walking impacted cognitive ability and the possibility of remaining independent for longer. Time to step on it!

New launch we love!

From its cult long-lasting leggings, to super comfortable sports bras, Lululemon is one of our favourite fitness wear brands. Now, it's launching its first-ever footwear range. Designed specifically for women, the shoes have been tailored to complement the female foot – after years of trainers being designed for men. Combining two decades of research and the analysis of scans of over one million feet, the first model to launch is a running shoe, with four more styles soon to follow.

Blissfeel Running Shoe, £138, lululemon.co.uk



When is the best time to exercise?

'According to science, the optimal time of day to train is in the afternoon, as your body's response to exercise is greater. But, let's face it, making time for yourself in the afternoon can be tricky – whether you're tied to school pick-ups, making dinner, or trying to get out of the office on time. And while your body might be at its optimum for physical exercise in the afternoon, the mind, however, is focused on the day you've just had. Before the day kicks in, therefore, is probably easier, as there are less distractions. And there's definitely a greater sense of achievement when you do. Energy creates energy and you have better focus and make healthier choices.

'In the evening, it's a great time to practise better breathing techniques, refocus, and recover to have a good night's sleep.

'Despite all this, however, realistically, the best time to train is whenever you can!'

Haylene Ryan-Causer, founder of Energy Studio at Café Volonté

Look well, naturally

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH... sea plants?

Not just for wrapping up sushi, sea plants also have benefits when you put them on your face. Sea plants such as seaweed, sea buckthorn oil and sea kelp are packed with free-radical-fighting antioxidants that combat the signs of ageing and promote healthy skin. These antioxidants also brighten the skin, leaving it more radiant and giving it a glow. Take into account their impressive cocktail of hydrating and soothing nutrients, and it's no wonder more and more brands are including sea plants in their skincare formulations.



The Ordinary 100% Organic Virgin Sea-Buckthorn Fruit Oil, £14.90, boots.com



Pai The Impossible Glow, £29, paiskincare.com



MARA Algae and Zinc Sea Kale Sunscreen Serum, £45, cultbeauty.co.uk

Brand we love

AROMA ACTIVE

The sister brand of Aromatherapy Associates, Aroma Active offers the same beauty-meets-wellness principles at much more affordable prices. We love the Soothing Overnight Face Balm, £15, a nighttime cleanser enhanced with a calming blend of blue tansy, lavender and patchouli, and the Overnight Recovery Face Oil, £15, a nourishing and grounding blend of ylang ylang and Buddha wood.

aroma-active.com



Why is my hair falling out?

Google searches for hair loss are up 300 per cent and, yes, we can blame Covid.

Hair shedding – known medically as telogen effluvium – can be caused by both illness (like Covid itself) or a period of extended stress (hello pandemic). Put simply, when the body has bigger fish to fry, it puts less resources into the hair.

The reaction is delayed, with the results of hair loss happening six to 12 weeks down the line. Luckily, illness or stress-induced hair loss is short-term and your locks should be back to their former glory within a few months, but you can give it a boost with products. Supplements containing biotin, zinc, iron, vitamin C, collagen or B12 can be helpful (try OUAI Thin Hair Supplement, £26, cultbeauty.co.uk), while looking after the scalp is also key; try massaging in an oil to activate the follicles – we like Fable & Mane HoliRoots Hair Oil, £29, intl.fableandmane.com. Avoid heat, and try kind-to-hair brushes, such as Tangleteezer Fine & Fragile Detangling Hairbrush, £13, boots.com.





ON MY WALK TODAY

I FOLLOWED A RIVER

In the first of our brand-new series with author and walking enthusiast Annabel Streets, we take a wander by water and discover the joy of the journey



Annabel Streets is a writer, a founder of The Age-Well Project, and author of *52 Ways To Walk: The Surprising Science Of Walking For Wellness And Joy, One Week At A Time* (Bloomsbury, £12.99). @annabelabbs

I was in Sydney recently, alone and jet-lagged, with a broken phone, a miniature map confined to the city centre – and a sudden urge to walk somewhere green and blue.

So I followed the example of our ancestors who – unskilled in navigation and fearful of getting lost – would find a nearby river and simply follow it. I caught a ferry out of the city and, 20 minutes later, I hopped off at a landing station that looked suitably, lushly green. I had one decision to make: upriver or downriver? I chose to head inland. And then I walked.

Without needing to navigate, and without any anxiety about losing the way, following a river allows us to mind-wander, to reflect, to focus utterly on our surroundings. We are free to listen to the river, to watch the play of light on its surface, to feel its cool air on our skin, and breath in the plant life that thrives.

Within two minutes of leaving the ferry, I found myself accompanying the river through a nature reserve, with the smell of eucalyptus in my nose, the sound of exotic birdsong in my ears and enough smiling dog walkers and joggers to know I wasn't too far from the bustling heart of Sydney.

Whenever the path emptied, I walked with my eyes closed for a few seconds – an easy way of giving our ears space to hear, without the distraction of sight. A study from King's College London found that birdsong can lift our mood for up to four hours, a finding confirmed when researchers at California Polytechnic State University discovered that hikers exposed to plentiful birdsong returned home with a greater sense of wellbeing. Evolutionary biologists speculate that this is because birdsong indicates the presence of life, which meant survival to our ancestors. Psychologists think that birdsong (the right sort) allows our brains to switch off and rest. During the pandemic, Dr Eleanor Ratcliffe, an environmental psychologist at the University of Surrey, investigated the effects of birdsong on listeners in the UK and Australia, finding that some birdsong was particularly restorative. 'People like listening to bird sounds that are quiet, high frequency or have a level of complexity, such as a melody,' she explains. Her study identified the song of

greenfinches, dunnocks and blackbirds as particularly uplifting. Personally, I'm partial to a woodpigeon or a robin. Either way, tuning into the sound of birdsong is hugely uplifting – and rivers have a wealth of birdlife, from tiny songbirds to ducks and herons.

When I wasn't hearing birds, I listened to the soft swash of the water. While birdsong is often cited as the most uplifting sound, the music of water is usually agreed to be the most relaxing. Once again, researchers think the sound of water calms us because it was – to our nomadic ancestors – the sound of survival. Quite simply, water meant food and drink. It's hard-wired into our DNA to find the burbling and lapping of water deeply soothing. Another theory is that our brains like the combination of repetition and novelty that comes with both looking at and listening to water. There's enough to interest our brain – but not enough to worry it. This balance of familiarity without boredom produces the perfect equilibrium for busy minds.

Rivers are often safely social places to walk – think rowers, canoeists, fishermen, passing boats – which is another reason I often seek them out when I'm travelling alone. So when I noticed wildlife I didn't recognise – crested birds, yellow-billed birds, an exuberant shrub frothing with golden flowers – and unable to consult the internet at the push of a phone key, I decided to ask a passing photographer. For the next half hour we walked and talked, as she shared her (extensive) knowledge of local birds and plants. As a result, I'm now quite well versed on the wildlife of the Parramatta River in the suburbs of Sydney. Would I have approached a passerby if I'd had my phone? Probably not. Which is to say, even my broken phone turned out to be a stroke of serendipity.

I arrived back with plenty of energy for a dinner with friends. In the past, I'd have thanked the flat, hill-less river path for my lack of post-walk fatigue. But now I know better: to follow a river is to feed the body, brain and soul. Nothing is more restfully restorative than a riverside stroll.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

FOOD *for* THOUGHT

If we learn to ‘hear’ our hunger, and adopt a more mindful mindset, we can climb off the diet merry-go-round for good, discovers Kellie Gillespie-Wright

We’ve heard the experts tell us time and time again that we need to change our relationship with food. And, hands up, who else is sick of dieting? Especially since studies show that most diets don’t even work in the long term, with 95 per cent of those who lose weight regaining it within the next five years. So could the answer to our woes be to become more mindful about our eating?

Adopting mindful practices is a way to get off the dieting rollercoaster and make us more watchful over what we eat. It aims to transform our relationship with food by encouraging a more holistic point of view. Ultimately, this means we have a better chance of understanding what foods nourish us and help us stay healthy, while also encouraging a deeper appreciation of every mouthful.

In its simplest terms, mindful eating is about connecting head and body, being present in the moment, focusing on what we’re eating, and noticing when our body is full. Just by slowing down and paying attention to the way we eat can help us to make better food choices and manage cravings.

It works by combating the ‘mindless’ eating practices that lead us astray, such as eating on the go or eating until we’re fit to burst, allowing us to not only make more nutritious choices but also foster a healthier relationship between food and our body.

‘Mindful eating is about having better quality eating experiences, feeling relaxed around food, and not feeling that food is the enemy,’ says nutritional consultant Emma Randall. ‘Mealtimes shouldn’t be a battleground; food is there to be enjoyed.’

She adds: ‘Eating mindfully is about noticing your food, savouring the flavour and paying attention to your body’s signals, such as whether you’re enjoying the food, whether you actually need to be eating, and when you’ve had enough to eat – but it’s also about giving yourself choice and permission.’

Expert advice



Emma Randall is a mindful eating and nutrition consultant based in Surrey. mindfuleating.org.uk



Emma Hackett is a resilience coach, specialising in holistic wellbeing for the mind, body, heart and soul. emmahackett.co.uk

Randall emphasises that, when it comes to mindful eating, no one food is ‘bad’ – it’s how often you eat that food and how much of it you eat that counts. ‘For people who have a long history of following weight-loss diet plans, their “diet head” tells them that foods are either “allowed” or “forbidden”; and, yet, if we deny ourselves the foods we love, we only end up wanting them more.’

Where are you hungry?

The first step is checking in with your body and identifying your hunger, says Emma Hackett, a wellbeing coach with a special interest in mindful eating. ‘One of the essential aspects of mindful eating is becoming curious about the sensations of hunger, developing the ability to listen to bodily signals, and learning to recognise which hunger it is that’s making us eat,’ she says.

‘There are many reasons that compel us to eat and drink: these are known as the Eight Hungers of Mindful Eating. The most basic hunger is our body’s request for food, and if we were able to only respond to stomach hunger and body hunger, we would eat in a simple way.

‘However, because we take pleasure and delight in food, it calls to all our senses and encourages us to eat for reasons other than physical hunger. The other six hungers have the power to create the desire to eat, even if we’re not physically hungry, and include eye hunger, nose hunger, mouth hunger, mind hunger, heart hunger and thirst.’

By encouraging us to analyse our hunger and question where it’s coming from, mindful eating enables us to untangle and separate these different experiences of hunger so we can respond to them in the most appropriate way. This means eating and drinking when the body requires fuel and hydration, and nourishing ourselves in different ways when we are feeling hunger of the heart and mind.



*"An essential
aspect of
mindful eating
is becoming
curious about
the sensations
of hunger"*

Focus on the food

When we know where our hunger is coming from and have decided that food is the only answer, the next step is to ‘drop the distractions’.

How many times have you sat down with some popcorn to watch a movie and, before the opening credits have ended, the popcorn is finished and you can’t even remember eating it? You’re not alone: research from the University of Bristol has found that people eat up to 100 per cent more when they’re distracted than they would have otherwise.

‘To get the most out of mindful eating, it’s crucial to be fully present with the food we’re eating in any given moment,’ says Hackett. ‘So put your phone away, switch off the TV, and step away from your computer. Focus on the food in front of you and concentrate your mind on your mouth.’

Once we bring our attention to the entire experience of eating, we stop getting lost in the thinking mind and become less caught up in any complicated emotions we might have around food. Quite simply, we allow ourselves to be reacquainted with the pleasure of eating.

‘This is important because the mind has two distinct functions: thinking and awareness,’ adds Hackett. ‘When we are distracted by the TV or our phones, the thinking function takes priority and we’re not fully aware of the food in our mouth. We can eat an entire meal and not taste more than a bite or two, leaving us dissatisfied and wanting more.’

Another reason we may reach for an after-dinner snack during an evening on the couch is that multitasking during mealtimes can hamper our brain’s ability to gauge exactly how much we ate. If we don’t remember eating, neither does our ‘mind hunger’, and it thinks we still need food. The same study from Bristol showed that memories of the food we consume influence how hungry we feel later, and distractions can influence the formation of these memories, leading to greater consumption of food later on.

Engage the senses

We might think: ‘The problem is that I love food too much.’ But if that’s the case, why do we eat while driving, reading a book, or while watching TV? The truth is we rarely appreciate our food enough to satisfy all our senses. When was the last time you tasted every bite of a meal or appreciated how it looks (eye hunger), how it smells (nose hunger) or how the different textures feel (mouth hunger)?

Hackett says: ‘When you sit down to eat, take a moment to really look at the food. Appreciate the colours, smell the aromas. As you eat, notice the tastes and textures. Ask yourself how the food makes you feel, and really savour the things you put into your mouth. By doing this you will discover that mindful eating is the very best flavouring!’

Take your time

The final cornerstone of mindful eating is simple: just ‘slow down’. Chew your food slowly, take time to savour the flavour and appreciate each mouthful. Put your fork down between bites and let your body catch up to your brain. It takes about 20 minutes for your stomach to signal to your brain that it’s full, so give yourself time to digest the meal and get in tune with the feeling of fullness and satisfaction that you get from eating. Learning to pause and check-in with our stomach hunger while we are eating can help us become more aware of the difference between stomach fullness, which is a measure of volume in our stomach, and satisfaction, which is an emotional response to what we are eating.

Research has found that slow eating (and lots of chewing) helps trigger the release of gut hormones that aid digestion. It also releases endorphins that relieve stress, which in itself can often be a cause of overeating.

‘The more we chew, the more the brain registers that food is being eaten, and we’ve got a better

chance of feeling more satisfied after a meal or snack,’ says Randall. ‘This is why fast eating is often linked to overeating, particularly if it’s mindless too, which usually happens when we’re distracted, or when we’re eating for emotional reasons, such as feeling upset, stressed or bored.’

But this new way of interacting with food takes practice, and as Randall points out, ‘There will always be external triggers to eating (such as the sight and smell of food), but by slowing down and thinking first, we can make much more mindful food choices, and can end up feeling a lot better for it too.’

She adds: ‘If you feel you’ve made a “bad” food choice, move on, don’t let things snowball, and ask yourself how you can make a choice you are happier with at the next eating opportunity. Perfect eating doesn’t exist, so it’s about making the best food choices we can in the circumstances we find ourselves in, and not beating ourselves up if it doesn’t go according to plan.’

And always remember, food is just food – it’s our relationship to it that matters.

“To get the most out of mindful eating, it’s crucial to be fully present”





Easy breezy!

Staycationing this summer? Take to the open road and feed your creativity with a few pots, some thrifty purchases, and the *Van Life Cookbook* from chef Danny Jack and his wife Hailee Kukura

Buckwheat Shortstack

'Pancakes served American-style. Known as shortstacks, they are quite a bit thicker than the crêpes you find in Europe and nicely soak up the syrup and juice from the berries. If you prefer the thinner variety, just add a bit more milk to your batter.'

Serves 2–3 (makes about 6 large pancakes)

For the batter:

- 150g buckwheat flour or 150g plain wholemeal flour
- 2 tsp golden caster sugar or white caster sugar
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 small pear or apple, cored and grated (optional)
- 250ml milk (dairy or plant-based), at room temperature
- 2 eggs, separated
- About 1 tbsp butter, for frying

To serve:

- 1 tbsp date syrup, honey, maple syrup or sweetener of your choice
- 2–3 tbsp Greek-style yoghurt (dairy or plant-based)
- 1 x 150g punnet of berries, such as blueberries or raspberries



- 1 For the batter, mix the flour, sugar, baking powder, grated pear or apple (if using), milk and egg yolks in a mixing bowl with a whisk until smooth.
- 2 In a separate bowl, whisk the egg whites until soft peaks form, then fold into the flour mix. Cover and rest for at least 10 minutes.
- 3 Heat your large, non-stick frying pan over a medium-high heat and grease generously with some of the butter. Ladle some batter into the centre of the pan and leave to cook, then flip when the batter begins to bubble in the middle, about 2 minutes. Cook on the second side for 1–2 minutes, until the pancake is light brown on both sides and a little crispy on the edges. Remove to a plate and keep warm.
- 4 Repeat the process, re-greasing the pan with butter as needed and cooking one pancake at a time, keeping the cooked pancakes covered with a clean tea towel until all the pancakes are cooked. Divide them up between your plates, drizzling your sweetener over the top. Serve each portion with a dollop of yoghurt and a scattering of berries on top.



Harissa Beans on Sourdough Toast with Poached Egg and Feta

'Harissa beans are our go-to breakfast accompaniment. The base is essentially harissa spices cooked with onion and garlic, slowly stewed down with canned beans and tomatoes. The mix of saucy, spicy beans with a soft poached egg, sharp feta, and crunchy sprouts is a lovely combination (and hearty, too). Enjoy on thickly sliced sourdough.'

Serves 4

For the harissa beans:

- 3 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 small fresh red chilli, deseeded and finely chopped
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 red onion, finely diced
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tbsp smoked paprika
- 2 x 400g cans cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 x 400g can tomatoes
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

To serve:

- 1 tsp combined flaked sea salt and black pepper
- 4 eggs
- 4 thick slices of sourdough bread
- 75g feta cheese, crumbled
- A large handful of alfalfa sprouts or rocket leaves (about 100g)
- Olive oil, for drizzling

1 For the harissa beans, take a large pot and sweat down the garlic and chilli in the olive oil with a pinch of salt over a medium heat for 1 minute. Add your onion and continue to cook, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes.

2 Next, stir in the cumin and paprika, then pour in the drained beans and the tomatoes, swilling some water in the tomato can (about a third of a canful) and adding that to the pot, too. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to a simmer, cover with a lid or plate, and cook for 20 minutes,

stirring occasionally. Season to taste with salt and pepper and keep warm until ready to serve.

3 Put a separate pot of water on to boil for the eggs, adding a little salt and pepper to help keep them together while cooking. Crack one of the eggs into the gently simmering water, making sure it's simmering again before adding the next. After 3–4 minutes, lift out each of your eggs with a large spoon.

They'll be done when the white is opaque and there's a firm bounce on the yolk. Remove with a slotted spoon and put on a plate.

4 If you want your sourdough toasted, place in a large, dry, non-stick frying pan over a high heat for about 2 minutes or until browned on each side. Spoon the beans over the toast and place a poached egg on top of each portion.

5 Finish with crumbled feta, sprouts or rocket, and a drizzle of olive oil, and season to taste.

Huevos ‘Van’ Cheros

‘Huevos rancheros (or ranch-style eggs, as they are known throughout Mexico and the US Southwest) was one of the first meals Hailee made for me and I’ve been in love ever since. This is our shared method for the road, using scrambled instead of fried eggs. The pico de gallo is optional here; store-bought salsa will work just as well instead. Just make sure you don’t forget the hot sauce!’

Serves 4

- 200g raw rice (any type)

For the beans:

- ½ red onion, diced
- 4 garlic cloves, sliced
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- ½ small bunch of coriander, stalks finely diced, leaves saved for garnish
- 1 tomato, chopped
- 2 tbsp ground cumin
- 2 x 400g cans black beans, drained and rinsed
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the rest:

- 4 large corn tortillas (1 per person)
- A knob of butter
- 8 eggs, whisked together with a fork and a little salt
- 200g mature Cheddar cheese, grated
- Pico de gallo or store-bought salsa, to taste
- 1 lime, cut into quarters
- Tabasco sauce or similar hot sauce, to taste
- 4 dollops of soured cream or Greek-style yoghurt (optional)

1 The first step is to make the rice. Once cooked, keep it warm in the pan. While your

rice is simmering, take out a second pot for the beans. Cook the onion and garlic with a pinch of salt in the olive oil over a medium heat, until translucent, about 5 minutes.

2 Add in the coriander stalks and chopped tomato. Cook for another minute, then add in the cumin and a splash of water, and keep stirring for 5 minutes or so.

3 Add in your black beans, then add about a canful of water to cover them. Bring to the boil, then simmer over a medium heat for 20 minutes until the sauce is reduced and thickened, stirring occasionally. To finish, mash the beans a little with a fork, and season to taste with salt and pepper. Reduce a little more if they’re too runny. Prepare the rest of your ingredients while the beans are cooking and rice is resting.

4 Take a large, dry, non-stick frying pan and heat until hot. Cook your tortillas, one at a time, over a high heat for about 30 seconds on each side, flipping them over once. Transfer to a plate and cover with a clean tea towel to keep warm. Repeat until they’re all cooked.

5 Finally, make your scrambled eggs. In the tortilla pan, add in a knob of butter and your eggs. Keep over a low heat, stirring with a spatula and cooking through until the egg comes together with large folds but is still a little runny. Turn the heat off to finish cooking and keep warm.

6 Now to assemble. Place each tortilla flat on a plate and top with the rice, beans and some scrambled eggs. Sprinkle over the grated cheese, then top with the salsa. Garnish each portion with a wedge of lime, the coriander leaves and some hot sauce. Add a dollop of soured cream or yoghurt to the side.

For the pico de gallo

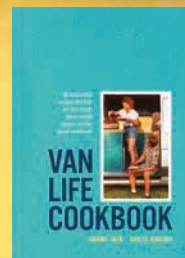
- 3 ripe tomatoes, finely chopped
- ½ red or white onion, finely diced
- 1 garlic clove, minced to a paste with a little salt
- 1 fresh chilli (any variety), finely chopped
- A few coriander sprigs, finely chopped (optional)
- A pinch of salt

- Grated zest and juice of 1 lime
- 2 tbsp olive oil

1 To make your pico de gallo, stir the tomatoes, onion, garlic, chilli, coriander (if using) and a pinch of salt together in a small bowl.

2 Stir in the lime zest and juice, and the olive oil. Set aside.





Extract from Van Life Cookbook: Resourceful Recipes For Life On The Road: From Small Spaces To The Great Outdoors by Danny Jack and Hailee Kukura (Pavilion Books, £14.99). Photography by Holly Farrier



19TH JUNE

Happy Father's Day

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***What new
creative
activity
would you
like to try
this month?
How does
this make
you feel?***



How to free up your

FREE TIME

Plan your spare time carefully and you'll soon feel like you have a whole lot more of it, says Rebecca Frank

The way we spend our time is changing: the traditional nine-to-five, Monday to Friday job is becoming increasingly rare, along with an annual two-week holiday and Sundays spent lounging around reading the papers. We take shorter breaks and have blurred boundaries between work and home, and while that might mean working at the weekend, it can also mean popping out for a run on a sunny Monday morning.

It's not that we have less free time – in fact, research shows the average person in Britain has around five hours and 49 minutes a day (or 40 hours a week), which is more than ever – although few of us would even realise that. According to James Wallman, author of *Time And How To Spend It* (Ebury, £9.99), the reason we feel time-poor is because we don't use our free time very well. You know how it is – if you have half an hour spare, it's all too easy to reach for your phone or switch your screen to browse social media, check the news, or do some online shopping. Suddenly, that window of leisure time has disappeared. Instead of allowing our free time to get sucked into a void of unmemorable, unfulfilling sameness, Wallman says we should start treating it as something precious and worthy of our full attention. As a result, we'll do more, feel more fulfilled and happier, and less stressed. And who can't make time for that?

Plan your free time

According to Wallman, one of the main reasons we've become so bad at using our free time is that we don't treat it as important or as a priority. So, we don't plan things for the weekend or lunchtime or those couple of hours in the evening – we just let it come along and get sucked up by all the usual suspects. That doesn't mean you should have something exciting planned for every minute of leisure time (that would just cause more stress), just that you could and should plan the little things that don't require much organising but do require conscious

intention. Things such as getting outdoors, spending time with family and friends, doing some exercise, or watching a great film – even having sex with your partner. If you want to look at Facebook for an hour or binge-watch Netflix, that's fine, says behaviour expert Nir Eyal, author of *Indistractable* (Bloomsbury, £9.99) – but only if it's done intentionally.

'The time we plan to waste is not wasted time,' Eyal says. Doing nothing is a good skill, and one that's hard to perfect and worth practising, because if you constantly feel like you should be doing something,

you're much more likely to make poor choices with your time.

►► Next steps

Ask yourself what you want from your free time. If you've had an exhausting week and need to flop, then plan to go to the cinema, download a film you've been wanting to watch, or schedule a lie-in. But if you'd like to do something different from the routine, then why not book tickets to the theatre or a comedy club, or try a class or restaurant you've never been to?



Start the day well

Before you check your phone, or switch on the radio, TV or any devices in the morning, take 15 minutes to do something you really enjoy. It might be yoga, reading a chapter of your book, going for a short walk, baking some muffins, or cuddling your partner. This will set your mood for the day and get things off on the right track – well worth setting your alarm a little earlier for. Author Stephen Covey says we spend most of our time responding to urgent tasks (both important and unimportant), and the tasks that are important but not urgent get pushed to the bottom of the to-do list – and we so rarely get around to them. Yet, very often, these are the things that hold the most meaning and lasting value. Things like making a photo album, planting your garden, inviting friends over or arranging a girls' weekend.

►► Next steps

- **Take proper breaks throughout the day where you spend 15 minutes doing something intentional and relaxing that allows you to feel connected to the present.**
- **Make a list of non-urgent, high-importance things you want to do, and aim to do something from this list every day. Whenever you do, add it to a new chart called Daily Wins.**



Avoid distractions

Are you full of good intentions but rarely see them through? Eyal says that to understand distraction, we need to think of its opposite: traction. 'Traction is the action that pulls you towards what you want to do with your time,' he explains. 'Then, there are the distractions – the things that prod us and steal our attention away.' These can be external triggers – the 'pings and dings' in our lives – but a more common source is what Eyal describes as the internal triggers – the uncomfortable sensations we seek to escape. Just like with physical discomfort, when we experience an uncomfortable emotional state, we seek some kind of emotional pacification to help us cope. 'When we're lonely, we go to Facebook; if uncertain, we Google it; bored, we check the news – all of these are catering to uncomfortable emotional sensations,' says Eyal, who likens time management to 'pain management'. The way to avoid this is to control how you respond to feelings, so, instead of them leading to distraction, you channel those emotions – stress, anxiety, uncertainty – into good. Start by recognising the trigger and identifying the preceding emotion to that distraction. Ask yourself what were you feeling before you got distracted? Just writing that down is incredibly powerful. It's helpful to remember that emotions crest and subside like a wave and, just like a surfer, you can ride them out.

►► Next steps

- **Try the 10-minute rule, where you allow yourself anything you want in 10 minutes. When you feel the temptation to give in, spend 10 minutes getting back to your task or exploring that sensation.**
- **Self-compassion is very helpful here. Rather than shaming or blaming, accept that maybe you're stressed because what you're doing is tough. The idea is that when you get distracted in the future, you'll know why and can do something about it.**



Do one thing well

The term 'time confetti' was coined by experts to convey the fracturing of time that happens when we multitask. Also known as contaminated time, it goes like this: you've got a spare hour, so you decide to do something like go to the gym or for a coffee with a friend. During that time, you receive a few emails and texts, some of which you read and reply to, get a phone call, a reminder to do your online shop, a pop-up from a food delivery company about tonight's offer, which you click on and read... In total, these may only take a few minutes, but what they do is interrupt you continuously, so you never get a decent spell of undisturbed time. This can happen while you're out for dinner, in the park with the kids, or on holiday. The result? Leisure time feels unrelaxing and stressful, because work or your friend's problems or a decision about what to eat for dinner causes your mind to shift away from what you're meant to be doing, and it takes time to shift back again.

►► Next steps

● **Disconnect when you're enjoying free time. Try leaving your phone at home if you're going to the park with the kids or out for dinner, and lock it away in the evening, or at least block notifications. If you're going away for a weekend, see how it feels to take a break from social media – one study showed that taking a five-day break from Facebook reduced levels of the stress hormone cortisol, and improved feelings of life satisfaction.**

● **Prioritise chores and delegate – at home and at work – so your time doesn't become about servicing everybody else's needs. Rethinking your expectations can help here, too – things can't always be perfect.**



Make the most of time off


The length of time we spend on holiday has been gradually decreasing. In 2019, the average length of a holiday was 8.7 days; short breaks are getting more popular, as are staycations. While you might think that the longer you're away for, the more relaxed you'll feel afterwards, research suggests it's as much about what you do on holiday that makes you feel satisfied and rejuvenated, as how long you're away for. Obviously, different people find different kinds of holidays relaxing but, as a rule, if you make your days varied and include some different experiences, you'll stay interested and engaged as you adapt to new environments. In his book *Four Thousand Weeks* (Vintage, £9.99), Oliver Burkeman explains how the reason that time seems to speed up as we age is that we have fewer new experiences. 'Life becomes more about routine – we stick to the same few places, the same few relationships and jobs. The novelty tapers off.' New experiences are important but not always practical – if you have a job and kids or parents to care for, you can't keep moving house or going on holiday. 'The alternative is to find novelty in the life you have,' says Burkeman.

►► Next steps

● **At home: 'Go on unplanned walks, take a different route to work, take up photography or nature drawing, or keep a journal. Play I Spy with a child – anything that draws your attention more fully to what you're doing in the present,' says Burkeman.**

● **On holiday: If you like going back to the same places, that's fine – familiarity can be really relaxing. But try to include some new experiences, too, to challenge your brain and help create new memories.**





*"Your ability
to trust yourself
directly affects
your ability
to trust others"*

David Horsager

WORK IN PROGRESS

How can I learn to let down my guard?

Our brilliant agony aunt, Mary Fenwick, turns her gaze to the world of work, helping sort out the problems you are struggling with day to day

Q I've started a new role, after leaving a very toxic work environment. And, so far, it seems perfect: great boss, great colleagues, and a great company. I'm getting positive feedback on my work, too – but I still don't feel safe or secure, somehow. I question what I say and how I say it, scared to come across as rude or mean; am fearful of giving constructive feedback; and if my boss wants to chat, I immediately freeze up, terrified that she will berate me. It's been three months since I started now and, although I'm feeling a little better, I'm still uneasy. How can I move on and learn to relax again?

Congratulations for not only finding a new role, but also for acknowledging the effect this former negative experience has had on you. You are having a normal reaction to a very stressful time, and your emotional awareness is a great asset. Some people would be so deep in panic mode that they wouldn't notice the cause-and-effect detail of freezing up when your boss wants to chat.

Business psychologist Fiona Kearns says there's not one agreed definition of a toxic workplace, but it typically means you are constrained, and under more pressure than could be reasonably expected. 'Add in some bullying, gaslighting, people leaving (so the workload increases even more), and mental health soon suffers,' says Kearns.

Along the way, you might have received a whole heap of advice from well-meaning friends: 'Just leave', 'Make an official complaint', 'Suck it up for a bit longer'. All of this can end up undermining confidence in your own judgement, which shows up as constantly questioning yourself.

In David Whyte's book *The Three Marriages* (Penguin Putnam, £14.99), he talks about three key relationships: with work; with another person; and with yourself. It all starts with recreating trust in yourself. Just as the new external environment is giving you space to recover, your internal voice will need some kindness and understanding, too. After all, you wouldn't put a timeline of three months on someone recovering from leaving an abusive relationship.

Journalling is a good place to start exploring these deeper feelings, because it's completely secure – just you and the paper – and you don't have to deal with anyone else's reactions. Throwing away or burning the pages can also be

a useful symbolic gesture. Ask yourself how you can work on trusting yourself, as the basis for all of your other relationships. What does trust mean to you? (See box, right, for further exploratory questions.)

Another aspect is to acknowledge that there is likely to be some feelings of shame. One of your questions will be whether it's your fault. In psychology, this is called Fundamental Attribution Error, where we underestimate how much of a role is played by environment. You wouldn't blame a plant for sucking up poisoned water, would you?

Words like healing and forgiving yourself are not commonly used in the workplace, but Kearns says, 'These things didn't happen overnight, and you might have to forgive yourself for staying for the money or security, or for not acting in some way'.

I know it's a cliché, but you have learned a lot from this challenge, and it's worth digging a bit for those insights. Knowing what you don't want can be just as useful as knowing what you *do* want. As Kearns says, 'In a perfect workplace, you don't have to be perfect. But in an imperfect place, you can never be good enough.'

You now know that you have the courage to make change, and no one can take that knowledge away from you.

kearnsconsultancy.com

Mary Fenwick is a writer and director of coaching at teamsandleadership.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.

Exploring trust

Put pen to paper and take a deep-dive into discovering what trust means for you...

BE BRAVE

Researcher Brené Brown uses the acronym BRAVING for: Boundaries, Reliability, Accountability, the Vault, Integrity, Non-judgment, and Generosity. Each one of these words could be a journalling prompt. The vault is understanding what is ours to share and what is not. It means being a person that other people can confide in, knowing that the information is safe. For you, it might mean being careful who you share your vulnerability with, while you are rebuilding.

FORGE A NEW YOU

Get clear on how you would like to show up at work. What tiny gestures do you admire in your new colleagues? What are the small daily opportunities for you to step into being the person you want to be?

SEEK FORGIVENESS

Your journal pages are a safe place for you to practise giving the same understanding you would give to a good friend in this situation. What do you want to forgive yourself for? What are the new strengths you feel growing within yourself as you reflect?

Brené Brown: [Braving; youtube.com/watch?v=OSqFiTeka_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSqFiTeka_I)



Mud, glorious mud

Feeling connected with nature has been proven to make us happier and healthier, and one of the most effective ways to boost that connection is to get your hands (or feet) dirty. From gardening to growing, foraging to bushcraft, Rebecca Frank explores how getting closer to the earth can boost our wellbeing, while also introducing us to new skills and increasing our knowledge of the natural world



Gardener's glow

I must confess that my gardening know-how extends little further than an appreciation of pretty flowers and a few strawberry bushes I once planted. However, if I can do something that will make me feel happier, learn something new and end up with some homegrown produce, I figure it's time to up my game and start growing.

It turns out the gardener's glow is about more than sunshine and physical activity (though they play an important role). The secret lies in the soil, and the serotonin-boosting bacteria it contains. Research shows that when we inhale the microbe *M. vaccae* from soil, it increases levels of happiness hormones in the same way as an antidepressant.

On the rare occasions I do some planting, I always wear gloves, mainly because I can't be bothered to scrub my hands afterwards. However, with my serotonin levels in mind and a tray of seedlings in reach, I discard them and use my hands to press them into the earth. The soil is cold and wet, and there's no denying that going glove-free makes for a more sensory experience. After I've finished planting a bed full of seeds and seedlings, I'm tired but also relaxed, and though my nails are full of soil, it's strangely satisfying. Studies show the effect of the soil bacterium can last up to three weeks, so I figure a couple of hours in the garden is equivalent to a weekend yoga retreat – and a lot cheaper.

I water my plants first thing every morning with the backdrop of birdsong, and again in the early evening while decompressing after a day at work. It's satisfying to watch something growing slowly but surely, and I'm resisting the temptation to plant more and overcrowd my bed. Patience it seems is a gardener's secret weapon.

TRY THIS When it comes to growing, Helen Rook, author of *Urban Wild: 52 Ways To find Wildness On Your Doorstep* (Bloomsbury, £20), says to start by growing what you like to eat. And you don't need a veg bed – an outside pot will do. Try small varieties, such as dwarf cherry tomatoes, mini-courgettes or short carrots.

'If you prefer flowers, dwarf multi-stemmed sunflowers will provide cut flowers for the house, and dwarf nasturtiums brighten up any corner.' Whatever you choose to grow, make a point to notice them growing. 'Planting something and keeping it alive actually boosts your level of happiness,' says Rook.





Earth mother

When I first moved from London to Somerset, I was keen to immerse my kids in the natural world I felt we had been missing out on. One of my first outings with my three-year-old son was to a local woodland activity centre, Hidden Woods. We built dens, learned basic bushcraft skills, and toasted marshmallows over a campfire. I clearly remember all the kids crowding around the 'mud kitchen', where cakes and sandwiches were moulded from dirt and presented with grubby fingers and big smiles (who needs Play-Doh?). My 'toddler' is almost as tall as me now, but we still spend a lot of time in the woods and, during lockdown, it was where we walked and talked each day.

It's no coincidence that being among trees makes us feel better – essential oils (phytoncides) released by trees and plants have been shown in Japanese studies to reduce stress, depression and anger, as well as improving immune function. A common activity in Japan, this form of woodland aromatherapy, known as shinrin-yoku or forest bathing,

is becoming increasingly popular around the world.

To really absorb the sounds, smells and sights of nature, you need to pause and switch on your senses. Next time I'm out walking the dog, I find a log in the woods, in a clearing where the sun filters through the tree canopy, and I sit a while. I spend a few minutes looking down at the forest floor and then up at the trees, touching the bark and picking some up off the ground. After a while, I hear children running towards me, gathering sticks to make dens, their hands and knees caked in dirt. I think to myself, it's no wonder they laugh around 300 times a day compared with adults' 15–30.

TRY THIS Find yourself a sit-spot – somewhere you can sit or lie for a while amongst the trees in a wood or park or garden, and soak up your surroundings. Observe the sights and sounds in your immediate area. Who are you sharing this space with? Focus only on what is right here, right now.

BAREFOOT AND CAREFREE

If you're not into growing or gathering, you can reconnect with nature by simply taking off your shoes. Some experts say that walking barefoot ('earthing' or 'grounding', as it's known) can reconnect you to the earth's subtle electric charge, which we have lost through spending most of our time in buildings, our feet squeezed into shoes. Evidence suggests that if we increase barefoot contact, it can help with chronic pain, boost immunity, improve sleep and reduce stress.

I take off my shoes in the garden and think about how rarely I do this. The feel of the grass underfoot reminds me of doing cartwheels and having constantly muddy feet as a child. It's a pleasant sensation and I wiggle my toes, enjoying the waves of nostalgia. Rook suggests walking on different textures, such as soft moss and rough pebbles. 'It's not important whether you walk fast or slow, for ten metres or ten miles; it's about enjoyment not endurance. All that matters is that your feet are in contact with the ground.'

TRY THIS Picnics are a great way to enjoy getting closer to nature and gather with friends and family, not least because you don't have to clear up the kitchen afterwards. If the grass is dry, ditch the blanket, take off your shoes and enjoy the feeling of the grass on your skin, noticing how it supports you. Why not make a daisy chain or lie back and watch the clouds?



THE JOY OF FORAGING

With escalating food costs, any produce we can grow at home or forage for is to be welcomed. Every spring, our Somerset woodland is carpeted in wild garlic, with its pungent green leaves that add flavour to risottos or stir-fries and make a delicious butter. Wild garlic is pretty easy to spot due to its strong scent, but if you're foraging for edible plants, it's always best to learn from an experienced guide. On a two-hour foraging walk, I discover how to pick nettles for making soup and bread without getting stung (a firm grip), and learn how to tell a poisonous hemlock from abundant cow parsley. I pick and nibble at lots of little leaves with different flavours and medicinal benefits. It's enjoyable to wander at a slower pace, pause and observe the hedgerows that I normally stride past. Studies show that the simple act of noticing nature is especially effective in unlocking the mental health benefits, and it's all there waiting to be discovered.

TRY THIS Forage for edible flowers and berries to decorate cakes, salads and cocktails. Look out for mallow with its pretty purple flowers, meadowsweet (found near water), wild strawberries, wild rose and nasturtium. For guidance, read *The Hedgerow Apothecary Forager's Handbook* by Christine Iverson (Octopus, £10.99), a month-by-month guide to foraging, with lots of ideas on how to make the most of your bounty.



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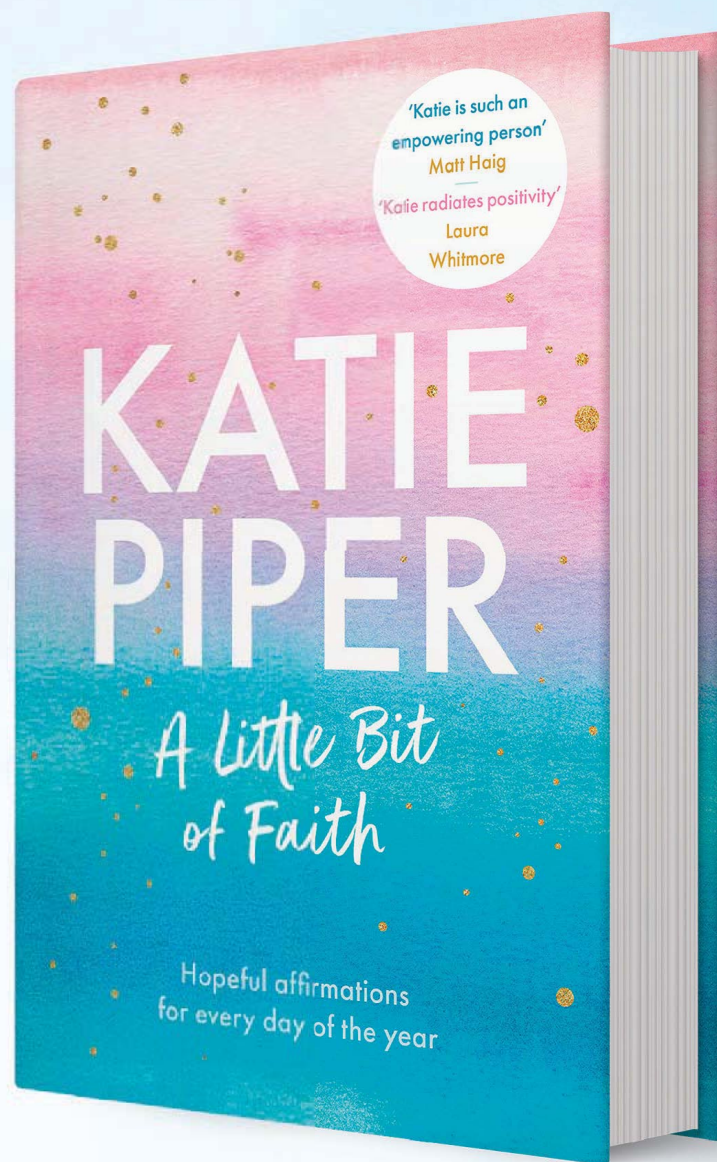
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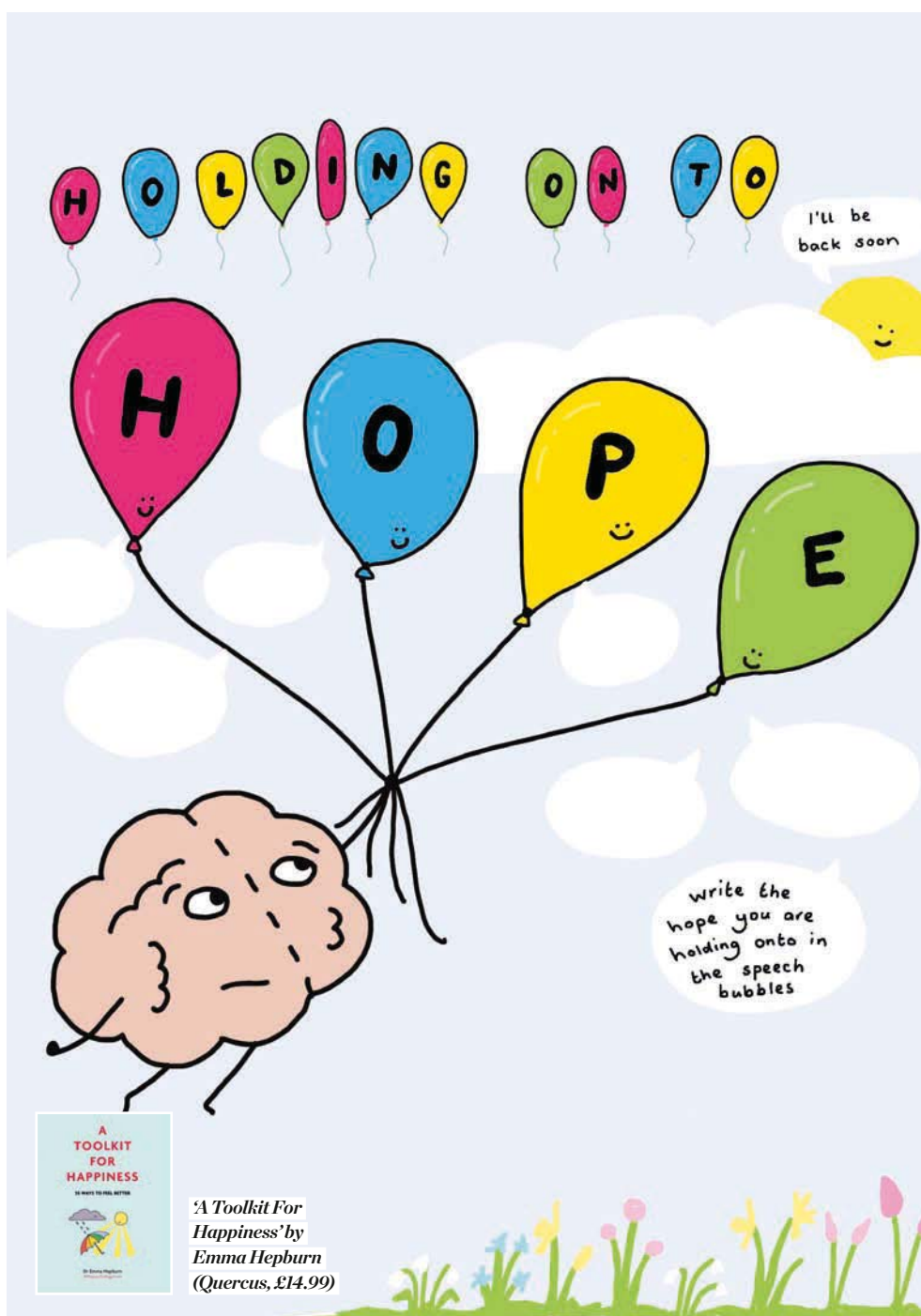
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How to be happier

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

Remember, the brain relies on how it feels currently to predict the future. This is great if we are feeling good, but if we are feeling bad, it's difficult to see a future that feels anything other than rubbish. This can add to a sense of hopelessness that makes us feel even worse. To find a way round the brain's design flaw, you need to remind it (and yourself) that the way you are feeling now is not a constant. You can direct your brain's attention to signs of hope and remind it to hold on to these to predict a different future.

What hope means will be personal to you and your circumstances. It could be as simple as reminding yourself you won't always feel this way, or thinking over how you got through tough times before. This could be through looking at photos of good times, speaking to someone else, or hearing words that are meaningful to you. It could be noticing small things that make you feel good – the spring flowers blooming or the laughter of your child. A powerful way to do this is hearing other people's stories of positive change they never thought would happen. Matt Haig and Jonny Benjamin often use their own experiences of how they felt at their worst, to remind people to hold on to hope when they are at their lowest. This is hard for a distressed brain to do but is really important. Use this image to identify the signs of hope that you can hold on to in your particular situation.





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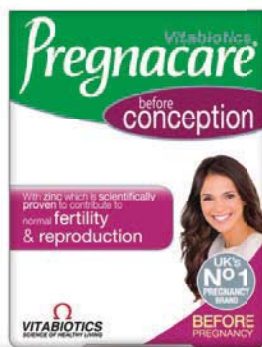
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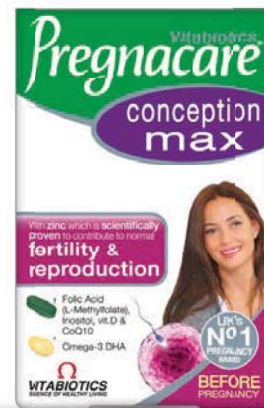
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