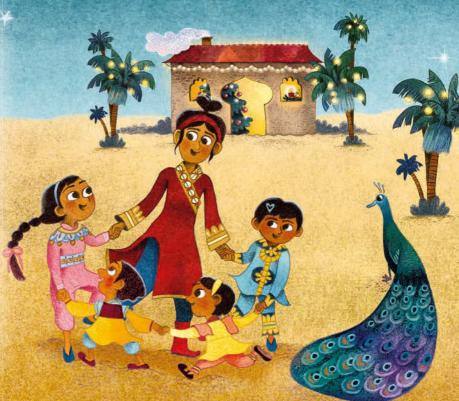
#### **DROME IN ALL AREAS OF YOUR LIFE! CREATE A LIFE YOU LOVE NO MORE PROTECT** HEALTH **YOUR BRAIN** Smart ways to stay Overcome mentally sharp your fears and let go 16-page DOSSIER **Laughter** is the best medicine RECHARGE, comedy makes us feel happy ) RESETT Stacey Solomon Build a new emotional toolkit Techniques to feel calmer, quicker 'Only I can decide Discover your secret weapon to rest how I want to feel. No one else!' ways to get your energy flowing by being creative -4b57-a5c7-e05b9de1c5a6



AVAILABLE WHILE STOCKS

#### FOR A CHEERFUL FESTIVE SEASON





YOGI TEA® is celebrating the best time of year with an Ayurvedic tea blend of aromatic Honeybush and Christmas spices such as cinnamon and star anis. And to give something back during this time of gratitude, YOGI TEA® fully supports the "Nevandra Project" in India.

This is not only where the roots of YOGI TEA® lie, but also where we traditionally source many of the delicious ingredients for our Ayurvedic herbal and spiced teas. As we owe a lot to India, we wish that our spiritual home can also be a beautiful home for their children by contributing to the "Education for You" initiative and supporting the Leilani Orphanage.

Feel Good. Be Good. Do Good.





## Velcome...

How do you feel about this time of year? Do you love the cold, bright mornings, and enjoy kicking up autumn leaves, or are you mourning the long, sunny days of summer? It's true it can be an odd time: there is often a rush at the end of summer, as people return from holiday (or simply juggling the kids) and focus really comes back to getting on with things and making progress. Then, once September is a distant memory, there is usually a bit of a lull, when we fall into more regular, gentle patterns, before things start to get frenetic again as the festive season approaches. However, in today's crazy, always-on world, it can be easy to miss this natural fallow period, and feel you have to keep up full pace all of the time. Your house has to be perfect, you need to be rocking it at work and at home, and you'd better look brilliant while doing it all, right? Well, we've decided to hell with that! Now is the perfect time to take your foot off the pedal and say no, I want to rest, relax and recharge. It might feel a bit counter-cultural, and your mother-in-law probably won't approve, but it's all too easy to get lost in constantly doing and stressing and running around all over everywhere, chasing other people's agendas.

So, this month, our dossier (page 41) is designed to help you discover exactly what you need to be kind to yourself and rest and recharge your batteries. Yes, it will help you recover and make the most of the festive season when it comes, but you might also just find that you enjoy switching off and resting for its own sake – and there's nothing wrong with that!

We think that our cover star, Stacey Solomon, is just the kind of person to take time out for herself when she needs it – yes, she's a bundle of creative energy, but she also seems so secure in her own skin that she won't let other people's expectations of what she should be doing influence her one bit. Be inspired by her refreshing point of view and incredible self-belief on page 14.

We're also discovering the power of comedy, in particular improv classes, to help us learn to say yes to life (page 20); we're finding out why some of us struggle to celebrate the set-piece dates in our calendars (page 28); and examining how

impostor syndrome can affect us in different areas of our lives (page 36). Plus, we'll be looking at how to tackle conflicts with our friends (page 58), learning how our holidays can help others (page 92) and future-proofing our brains (page 76). I hope this issue speaks to you, and helps you have a great month!

Dally x

Sally Saunders, Editor

We hope you love Psychologies. Subscribe today and save!

Go to shop.kelsey.co.uk/XMAS22PY or call 01959 543747\*

\*FOR FULL DETAILS, SEE PAGE 34



#### DECEMBER

## In this issue...

Manage winter health angst post-Covid

#### Regulars

#### 7 In the mood

Enlightening, happy-making facts, fascinating news stories and more

#### 12 Viewpoint

What's caught your eye in *Psychologies*? We want to hear about it!

#### 14 \* Stacey Solomon

The presenter, author and social media superstar, on taking on the trolls and being perfectly imperfect

#### Mind

#### 20 \* Improv your life

Discover the wellbeing benefits of improvisation in everyday life

#### 24 Coaching in action

The award-winning coach Kim Morgan helps a client learn to take the lead

#### 28 A day to remember?

Swerve the stress and jump into the joy of momentous occasions

#### 36 \* Banish your inner impostor!

Overcome feelings of inadequacy and boost your sense of self-worth

#### 39 Soul food

Turn to journalling, not the biscuit jar, to overcome your uncomfortable feelings, urges Jackee Holder

#### Heart

#### 58 Friend or foe?

How to navigate conflict in your grown-up relationships



#### **62** Your dilemmas addressed

Mary Fenwick offers a fresh perspective on what's plaguing you

#### 64 Coming up for air

Caro Giles discovers the significance of her own place in the world

#### Body

#### **68 Mindful wellness**

Conscious and accessible ways to eat, move, look, and live well

#### 72 \* Find peace of mind this flu season

Enjoy festive gatherings and family time free from health worries

#### 76 \* Future proof your brain

Stock up your storecupboard and safeguard your mental health

#### 80 Gather round!

Feed the family – and your soul – with hearty, wholesome recipes from *Joe's Kitchen* by Joe Swash



### Give the gift of self-care this Christmas

Subscribe to Psychologies and pay only £37.99, for a gift that lasts all year long!
Your loved one will benefit from lifechanging tools and advice to help them
live their best life, plus receive free
membership to our Subscriber Club.
See page 34.

OVER IMAGE: CHELSEA WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY



#### Soul

#### 86 \* The art of mindfulness

Find purpose and renewed energy with the Japanese practice of shodo

#### 90 Work in progress

Our agony aunt, Mary Fenwick, resolves your difficulties in the workplace

#### 92 Pay it forward

Feed your wanderlust while supporting struggling communities, with a holiday that gives something back

#### 98 How to be happier

Bolster your mental fortitude with psychologist Emma Hepburn

## Order your next issue now and get free delivery directly to your door

Shop.kelsey.co.uk/XMAS22P

### Rest, reset, recharge

psychologies

OOSSIER

With you in mind

#### 43 The joy of rest

Weave restorative moments into every day

#### 44 Tune out to tune in

Clear some mental space and tap into your intuitive mind

#### **45** Care for yourself

Move yourself to the top of your to-do list

#### **46** Make conscious choices

Choose to say no to the source of your stress

#### **46** Let out your emotions

... and feel the release!

#### **47** Shortcuts to calm

Simple techniques to overcome stress in an instant

#### 50 Breathe it out

Discover the soothing power of breathwork

#### 52 What does your mind need a rest from?

Caring too much? Always striving? Take our psychological test and discover how to break free and avoid burnout

#### 45 Dossier extra: Relax heroes

Brilliant buys to help you recharge and recalibrate

#### psychologies

Kelsey Publishing Ltd, The Granary, Downs Court, Yalding Hill, Yalding, Kent ME18 6AL (01959 541444, email letters@psychologies.co.uk)

#### OUR TEAM

Editor Sally Saunders
Art Editor Jennifer Ratcliff
Chief Sub-Editor and Production Editor Karen Warren
Features Editor Heidi Scrimgeour
Acting Wellness Director Elizabeth Bennett
Online Writer Women's Wellbeing Lily Smith
Social Media and Digital Content Producer Amy Mica Marsden

#### **ADVERTISING & PRODUCTION**

Commercial Manager Sarah Lindsay 01959 543739; sarah.lindsay@kelsey.co.uk Commercial Executive Hannah Lees 01959 543518; hannah.lees@kelsey.co.uk Production and Design Manager Neil Hepden 01233 220245; psychologies@tandemmedia.co.uk

#### **MANAGEMENT**

Chief Executive Steve Wright
Managing Director (Lifestyle) Kevin McCormick
Retail Director Steve Brown
Subscription Marketing Director Gill Lambert
Subscription Marketing Manager Nick McIntosh
Print Production Manager Georgina Harris
Print Production Controller Hayley Brown

#### **SUBSCRIPTIONS**

#### 13 issues of Psychologies are published per annum

- UK annual subscription price: £63.70
- Europe annual subscription price: £77
- USA annual subscription price: £77
- Rest of World annual subscription price: £83
- $\bullet$  UK subscription and back issue orderline:  $01959\,543747$
- Overseas subscription orderline: 0044 (0)1959 543747
- Toll-free USA subscription orderline: 1888 777 0275
- UK customer service team: 01959 543747; subs@kelsey.co.uk

#### Find subscription offers on our website:

shop.kelsey.co.uk/psy

Manage your subscription online shop.kelsey.co.uk/site/loginForm

#### **DISTRIBUTION & PRINTING**

- William Gibbons & Sons Limited, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall WV13 3XA; 01902 730011; williamgibbons.co.uk
- Distribution in Great Britain: Marketforce, 3rd Floor, 161 Marsh Wall, London, E14 9AP; 0330 3906 5551

Distribution in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland: Newspread;  $353\,23\,886\,3850$ 

• The information in 'Psychologies' is provided for entertainment and should not supersede the advice of medical experts. You must not rely on this magazine as an alternative to advice from your doctor or other professional healthcare provider. If you think you may be suffering from any medical condition, seek expert attention.

#### GLOBAL EDITIONS

**Groupe Psychologies,** 2-8 rue Gaston-Rébuffat, 75019 Paris, France. Tel: 01 44 65 58 00



PSYCHOLOGIES FRANCE Editor-in-Chief: Laurence Folléa

PSYCHOLOGIES ROMANIA Ringier Magazines, 6 Dimitri Pompeiu Street, Bucharest. Tel: +40 212 03 08 00. Managing Director: Mihnea Vasiliu (mihnea vasiliu@ringier.ro) Editor-in-Chief: Iuliana Alexa (iuliana.alexa@ringier.ro) Advertising Manager: Monica Pop (monica.pop@ringier.ro)

PSYCHOLOGIES BELGIUM Edition Ventures, Chaussée de Louvain 431D, 1830 Lasne. Tel: +3223792990 Editorial Director: Marie-Christine De Wasseige (mc.dewasseige@ventures.be) Chief Editor (French): Christiane Thiry (christiane.thiry@ventures.be) Chief Editor (Flemish): Barbara Van den Abeele (bvandenabeele@ventures.be) Advertising Manager: Manoëlle Sepulchre (manoelle sepulchre@ventures.be)

PSYCHOLOGIES RUSSIA Hearst Shkulev Media, Psychologies Russia, 31 b Shabolovkaya Street, Moscow 115162. Tel: +7 495 981 39 10
President Viktor Shkulev@Insmedia.ru) Editor-in-Chief. Xsenia Kiseleva (xkiseleva@hsmedia.ru) Publisher and Advertising Manager: Ekatarina Kerova (ekerova@hsmedia.ru)

## The advice starts RIGHT HERE!



#### **ROXY RHODES**

'Any time we are expecting a day to be picture-perfect, we are setting ourselves up to fail,' says psychotherapist Roxy Rhodes.
'What we want to happen versus how life turns out, are often two very different things.'
Learn how to embrace the now and rediscover the joy this festive season, on page 28.

#### DR MARISA G FRANCO

When friendships fall into choppy waters, it can be easier to avoid confrontation and sidestep conflict. But it is by not confronting the issue that we force the friendship to end,' says psychologist Dr Marisa G Franco. Discover how to restart communication and take steps towards reconciliation, on page 58.





#### **ALICE BENSKIN**

'Just as a car requires the correct fuel to run optimally, the brain requires the correct fuel to function well, and deficits can have a negative impact on concentration, memory and mood,' says Alice Benskin, of Food for the Brain Foundation. Explore what foods to eat for better mental wellbeing, on page 76.

#### 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.

#### Psychologies Magazine is a registered trademark. Copyright ©2002

Psychologies Magazine is a registered trademark and is published mornthly by Kelsey Media 2022® all rights reserved. Kelsey Media is a trading name of Kelsey Publishing Ltd. Reproduction in whole or in part is forbidden except with permission in writing from the publishers.

Note to contributors: Articles submitted for consideration by the editor must be the original work of the author and not previously published. Where photographs are included, which are not the property of the contributor, permission to reproduce them must have been obtained from the owner of the copyright. The Editor cannot guarantee a personal response to all letters and emails received. The views expressed in the magazine are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Publisher. Kelsey Publishing Ltd accepts no lability for products and services offered by third parties.

PRIVACY NOTICE: Kelsey Publishing Ltd accepts no lability for products and services are until information. For full details, visit kelsey, coulk, or call 01959 543524. If you have any questions, please ask, as submitting your details indicates your consent, until you choose otherwise, that we and our partners may contact you about products and services that will be of relevance to you via direct mail, phone, email or SMS. You can opt out at ANY time via email: data controller@kelsey.coulk or 01959 543524.

## 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





#### **Shaping** the future

Staying physically active, being social, and having strong interests is the three-part formula for keeping your brain in shape, according to experts.

Norwegian scientists reviewed multiple major studies on how to exercise your grey matter, and found this trio had the most positive impact on mental ageing.

This is because exercise helps to stimulate the central nervous system, relationships aid essential biological processes that slow brain decline, and passions and new skills develop and maintain neural pathways.

### Happiness is... sitting down to eat as a family

A review of contemporary family life by the Children's Commissioner for England has found that shared experiences, such as dining together, are regarded as key bonding experiences by both parents and children.

Seventy-five per cent of those who ate as a household six days a week professed themselves happy with life, against a general level of 70 per cent among all families.

The report, by Dame Rachel de Souza, also highlighted the diversity of British families, with children thriving in stable and loving homes, no matter the make-up.



#### LIFE AS I KNOW IT

### Clean living

Is it time for some quieter, simpler self-care, asks the perpetually pleasure-seeking Harriet Minter

Can I tell you a secret? I'm not a big fan of baths. No, this isn't me confessing that I don't wash (although a few weeks ago a man on a dating site told me a key criteria for him was 'a high sense of hygiene' and unmatched me when I admitted there are days I prefer the au naturel approach). Staying on top of cleanliness is one thing, but wallowing in a bath for hours on end? No thanks.

I tell you this because I was discussing this fact with my therapist the other day and, in response, she told me something that I haven't quite gotten over. I was talking about a friend who rewards herself for writing 1,000 words with an hour of her favourite TV programme. I am in awe of her. I have never yet met a box set that I wouldn't happily abandon three nights of sleep just to finish. Nor have I ever been able to scroll through Instagram for an allotted five minutes without waking up from my social media trance four hours later. But those things that are nice enough but not fully engaging, I just feel a bit meh about. Baths fall firmly into the meh category. All well and good, sometimes nice even, but after ten minutes, I've had enough.

'Perhaps,' my therapist said in the careful tone she uses when she knows she's about to say something that will destroy a belief that I've been

Life

living my life by for 40 years, 'not everything has to be so wonderful you feel like you never want it to stop. Maybe sometimes it's okay to do the things that are a bit dull and easy to stop, just because doing them will be good for you.'

I love a bit of self-care culture, but I wonder if we've spent so long asking, 'Does this bring you joy' that we've forgotten to ask, 'Does not doing this mean you're going to end up a snivelling wreck in three to five working days?' And could it actually be quite useful to have a few acts of self-care under your belt that don't really interest you, so mean you won't lose your entire day to them. but will give you a brief break from the difficult thing you're doing right now?

If you've read this column for a few years now you'll know I am a big proponent of chasing pleasure. I am here for the sensuality of a piece of chocolate melting in your mouth, for the feel of your hair being blown around by the wind, and for demanding that your lover devote themselves entirely to your satisfaction for hours on end. I believe in the power of pleasure to liberate and uplift women. And, yet, perhaps in all of this there is a place for simple, quiet acts of service. Those little chores,

> done not because they bring pleasure but because, by doing them, we care for ourselves. Even when we don't want to.

> > Follow Harriet Minter's writing journey signing up for her

couples admit to sharing toothbrushes and razors, according to newsletter at harrietminter.com a survey by Wilkinson Sword



1 in 20





#### Waste management

Don't bin that half-eaten tub of houmous or slab of feta – freeze it.

The foodstuffs are just two of the unexpected ingredients that can be saved for eating at a later date.

Cheddar, garlic and ginger can all be grated from frozen, while eggs can be cracked into an ice cube tray and thawed later.

If you cook too much pasta, freeze that too and simply throw it into hot water when you are ready to eat it.

#### **Team effort**

Gender equality issues are taken more seriously at work when both sexes raise their concerns together, a study has found. **Researchers from The University of** Texas interviewed more than 3,200 people about proposals such as training for women on pay negotiation and ensuring at least 50 per cent of interview candidates for leadership roles are female. Participants, including those in management roles, reacted most favourably to mixedgender coalitions lobbying for change than men- or women-only advocates. This is because joint pressure signals an issue is important



#### The language of love

There's more to love than looks – your accent could be key to sparking an attraction.

Dating site Match found that 17 per cent of us can tell if we will find someone attractive just from their voice. Received

Pronunciation was deemed most trustworthy by people looking for a partner, followed by the Yorkshire and Welsh accents.

Irish accents were rated sexiest, with Geordie close behind, while Liverpudlians were deemed funniest.

#### WATCH, LOOK, LISTEN

to all staff.



WATCH The Cancer Conflict, a poignant documentary from acclaimed director

Thomas Meadmore, exploring approved and alternative treatment. On all major platforms.



LOOK Cat Spilman at Rhodes Contemporary Art, London. Entrancing

monochrome paintings tackling motherhood, belonging and loss. Until 19 November.



LISTEN The Mid.Point with Gabby Logan sees the broadcaster and presenter chat

candidly to well-known faces about the challenges that face them in midlife.

"To be inspirational you don't have to save lives or win medals. I often draw strength from meeting ordinary people doing extraordinary things: volunteers, carers, community organisers and good neighbours; unsung heroes whose quiet dedication makes them special.

They are an inspiration to those who know them"

The late Queen Elizabeth II, speaking at the 2016 Olympic Games

#### Soothe the sole

A nightly foot rub could be the cure for better sleep during the menopause. A study of 70 Turkish women found that those who were given a foot massage every day for a week slept an hour more each night compared to those who did not.

The 20-minute relaxation technique not only helped to ease nighttime disruption but reduced the resulting fatigue, brain fog and anxiety.

Dr Stephanie Faubion, of the North American Menopause Society, said further studies into the treatment were needed but: 'There is little downside in recommending foot massage as a non-hormone option to help relieve symptoms.'



If other nations cycled as much as the Netherlands, the world would save 686 million metric tons of carbon a year – equivalent to Germany's annual emissions.



## ETTERS ARE EDITED FOR STYLE AND LENGTH

## Viewpoint

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



I absolutely loved your October issue - so much of what I read felt like it spoke to my soul. Regarding, in particular, your article on envy, although I hate to admit it (call it Catholic guilt!), I myself felt envy when I recently saw that a childhood frenemy had self-published a children's book. I haven't even seen or spoken to this person in years, yet my immediate reaction was one of jealousy. It didn't feel fair, but as my mum quite rightly pointed out, maybe it was the kick up the backside I actually

needed to start working more productively towards my own dream. And, so, I channelled my envy into something more positive, becoming motivated and determined to smash my own goals.

Your article really resonated with me; envy might be one of the seven deadly sins, but it's a natural human reaction. It's how we then deal with it that counts. I'm already looking forward to the next issue – *Psychologies* has become a firm favourite. *Justine Machin* 

#### **Touching tribute**

I really enjoy reading your magazine (when I get a moment to myself!), and have been buying it for years now. There are always many articles I can connect with, and useful pointers on how to get the best out of life.

Recently, I felt very saddened by the death of Queen Elizabeth II, and it inspired me to write a poem, which I'd like to share with you...

#### **IN MEMORIAM**

As the light dims and the night falls, the curtains close on the reign of an outstanding monarch.

The nation is enveloped in sorrow and mourning.

Our sovereign Lady Queen Elizabeth II was a figurehead of decency, a guiding moral compass.

She led with humility, dignity, respect, humbleness and duty. Her constant steadfastness provided anchorage, a firm ground on which to build our lives. Always present.

Rejoicing with us in times of happiness, showing stoicism in times of crisis.

The foundations stir uneasily at their core, in this time of profound change.

As the layers of stability are peeled away and the erosion of democracy takes place in the land of the free.

And as the values we once took for granted increasingly show the need to be defended.

A golden spirit forms another star in the sky.

Yet the birds still sing and the world still

God save the king!

Janine Aaron



First and foremost, please keep up the great work you do at *Psychologies*! The varied and uplifting features and articles have become an invaluable resource for me, and they have played a huge part in helping me to rebuild my self-esteem and emotional resilience.

One feature that struck a chord with me recently was 'Wish you were here... again!' (September), about the comfort we feel in repetition and the familiar. My family and I have been fortunate enough to spend many of our holidays on the Channel Island of Alderney, which is now like a second home to me.

The whole experience, from landing in the tiny plane to driving along bumpy

cobbled streets, never fails to make me smile, and I take huge comfort in the familiarity of the island's town of St Anne, with its beaches and soul-nourishing sea views. Another reason why the island is so special to me is the knowledge that my grandparents also loved holidaying there, and so visiting as a family always makes us feel that they are there with us too.

Alderney may be small (three miles long and one-and-a-half miles wide!) but it has a big character, and a resilience that adds to its overall uniqueness (along with the other Channel Islands, it was occupied by Nazi forces during the Second World

War). Every time I visit, I find new things to discover and explore, and in a place that already holds so much special meaning to me, it makes me treasure the time I spend there even more – something so vital in these turbulent times.

This photo of a sunset on the north side of the island was taken by my husband. Looking at it always brings back many fond, nostalgic memories – and the anticipation of more to come from future visits – and is a reminder, I think, that slices of beauty and serenity can be found even in places with the darkest of histories.

Harriet Clayton

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 our favourite. Share your photograph with us and explain its inspiration on Instagram @psychologiesmagazine with the hashtag #PsychologiesPhoto, or email it to letters@psychologies.co.uk

#### **Word play**

Who ever said that writing and drawing in the sand is just for children? Not me! It's a really wonderful way to spend time mindfully on the beach; enjoying the soft sand and being creative. What's even more fun is racing against those waves, to either finish your artwork or to take that quick photo of a special memory!

I chose to write 'Leave Only Footprints' next to our footprints while at the beach recently. I remember learning as a small child, wherever

you visit in nature, you should only leave your footprints. That phrase always pops into my head when I am out and about enjoying all the goodness that nature has to offer us.

Delfina Dos Santos



### We'd love to know what you think

Read an article in Psychologies that rings true? Have something on your mind or a poem or a picture you'd like to share? Get in touch and share your thoughts at letters@psychologies.co.uk!

## Only I can decide how I want to feel. No one else!'

She first stole hearts on *The X Factor* back in 2009, but newlywed Stacey Solomon has come into her own as a social media star. Here, she reveals why she can never be anything other than herself, and how she deals with the trolls who try to drag her down

WORDS: BETH NEIL

hatever Stacey Solomon is putting in her tea, she should bottle it. She'd make a fortune. Not only does she possess an indomitable ability to see life's brighter side, but you're also unlikely to meet anyone as comfortable in their own skin.

'When I'm doing a shoot, people ask: "Are you happy with the pictures?" and I say: "Well, yeah, because that's what I look like." I can't change me; I've looked the same for years!

'In my head, I've always thought I was really pretty, and so it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks,

does it? Maybe that sounds big-headed, but I do think I'm really pretty! And I don't get why it's shocking to hear someone say that. It's not that I'm showing off; it's more that I don't see that there's anything wrong with me. I just look like what I look like.

'I've always gone with whatever I want to feel when I look in the mirror. No one can make me feel any particular way. *I* decide how I want to feel,' she adds.

It doesn't come across as big-headed at all, by the way – there is no edge of ego to Solomon. She just knows exactly who she is and is completely at ease with herself in the most refreshing way.





It's why she refuses to allow her pictures to be airbrushed or filtered; no inches are shaved off her thighs or waist, no body hair or blemishes are removed. What you see is the real deal.

'I do feel a sense of responsibility to show what I actually look like,' she says. 'When I went on my hen do this summer, my sister took some nice pictures of me on the boat, which I really liked. But there were other shots where I looked completely different, jumping into the water with my snorkel on, or where I wasn't standing at the "right" angle.

'So I put those shots up as well, to let people know that, actually, this is what I'm like most of the time.'

She adds: 'My sister used to call me Shallow Hal because she said that I could look as rough as anything and walk down the street head held high, oblivious to the fact my skirt was tucked into my knickers and I had chocolate all round my face!'

It's this winning formula of authenticity alongside a capacity to connect with people that has made Solomon, 33, one of the most popular and relatable personalities on social media, where she has built a community of more than five million followers and established herself as the nation's sweetheart, 13 years since first finding fame on *The X Factor*.

Whether it's crafting, parenting or Tap to Tidy (the before-and-after internet phenomenon invented by Solomon), the snapshots into her daily life at Pickle Cottage with new husband Joe Swash, 40, and children Zach, 14, Leighton, ten, Rex, three, and Rose, who has just turned one, are all delivered with the same infectious good humour.

Brands fall over themselves to work with her, and she has lucrative ongoing collaborations with the likes of Primark, In The Style and Dove. She is also a regular member of the *Loose Women* team, is filming a second series of her hit BBC1 show *Sort Your Life Out*, and has just published her latest book in the Tap to Tidy series, this time focused on Pickle Cottage, which is surely now the most famous house on Instagram.

Named after Solomon's term of endearment for her children, Pickle Cottage became the family home in March 2021, and the new book details the blood, sweat and tears she's poured into each room. Given the fact she grew up in a two-up, two-down in Dagenham, and was a teenage mum after becoming pregnant with Zach at the age of 17, Solomon can scarcely believe how her life has turned out.



'I just look out my window in the morning and I can't believe that's what's outside,' she says, referring to the 2.5 acres of green space that surrounds the countryside property.

'When my mum first came to visit, we all cried, because it's just not what we ever imagined possible. Everything I've done in there is because I absolutely love the fact that we get to live there,' says Solomon.

Tap To Tidy At Pickle Cottage is full of useful DIY hacks on how to spruce up your home on a budget. In it, Solomon also pays tribute to her dad, David, the reason she knows her way around a power tool.

'My dad never thought this was the sort of stuff you only teach the boys,' she says. 'He wanted us to

"My dad never thought this was the sort of stuff you only teach the boys. He wanted us to know all the basics – how to wire a plug, change a fuse – and not be intimidated by it"



know all the basics – how to wire a plug, change a fuse, use a drill – and not be intimidated by it. It's the kind of education you don't get at school and I'm so grateful for what he taught me, especially because I didn't end up with somebody who's handy! Joe hasn't a clue. If I asked him: "Can you just flick the fuse box for me?" he'd ask me where it was!' she laughs.

Pickle Cottage is already full of happy memories. It's where Solomon married former EastEnders star turned presenter Swash this summer, surrounded by their family and friends. It's also where she gave birth to fourth child Rose, her second with Swash, last October. Solomon says that having the home birth she had planned for was a 'magical' experience.

'I felt really confident that I could do it at home, so I just wanted to give it a go. I felt so in control and so safe, and I had brilliant midwives. I researched it, because it was a big decision. Obviously, there are risks – no matter where you give birth there's a risk. Growing a human and pushing it out of your vagina or having a Caesarean is major! But home birth was a decision we made, and I don't regret it at all.'

It was knowledge and confidence that also empowered Solomon post-birth, and meant she was able to have the breastfeeding journey she'd always longed for. Shortly after Rose was born, the midwife identified a tongue tie, which can restrict movement of the tongue and interfere with feeding.

'When I had Rex, I had no idea that tongue tie even existed, and I certainly didn't know that it affected breastfeeding. Some people still say it doesn't, but I can tell you it bloody well does. It's fricking painful!

'I think my positive feeding journey with Rose was because I was better informed and made decisions based on that. Just after she latched on for the first time, I was running on adrenaline, but I said I needed to know whether she had a tongue tie. So I had the right questions and the midwife recognised straightaway that she did have one, and we had it snipped when she was 13 days old. From the moment they cut it, feeding was a different experience. It was immediately less painful and became all the things I thought breastfeeding should be,' says Solomon.

'The more children you have, the more you get to know your instincts and that you are well within your rights to ask the questions. But that only comes with experience, sadly,' she reflects.

Rose was born after Solomon and Swash had 'stopped trying' following a series of miscarriages, which they chose to keep private while coming to terms with their heartbreak. The couple didn't announce that Solomon was expecting Rose until she was five months pregnant, and it was then that she also decided to share her experience of baby loss, in the hope that speaking out might help other women going through similar trauma.

'It was almost a relief to say it,' Solomon says. 'It's something one in three women will experience and



yet there's still a stigma around talking about it. You ask yourself: "Am I allowed to be sad about this?" And then you worry about oversharing – but there is definitely something about finding common ground with people who have had the same experiences.

'I had so many women getting in touch to say it had happened to them and that was exactly how they felt. And it made me feel that I wasn't the only one, which was really comforting,' says Solomon.

She adds: 'Life isn't all rainbows and roses, and it's about trying to find a happy medium [on social media] between being as positive and uplifting as possible, but also coming on and admitting to it when you're feeling a bit rubbish. I just try to be as honest as I can with the community I've built.'

These days, life in the public eye goes hand in hand with online abuse, although Solomon is deft when it comes to dealing with trolling. On the rare occasion she engages with the keyboard critics (the 'Wilmas' and the 'Susans' as she calls them) she does so with disarming humour, which immediately takes the sting out of their attacks.

'I feel sorry for people who do it, because if being horrible to someone is what dictates your life, you can't be that happy, can you?' says Solomon.

Does it really never get to her?

'I mean, sometimes it does make me question myself, and I think: "Oh, am I really that annoying?!" but most of the time I can just laugh, because what else can you do? If you put yourself out there, you have to expect people to have opinions.

'If I make something and someone says: "That's a load of crap," well, that's what they think isn't it? Let them say it if it makes them feel better!'

Solomon mentions a notorious gossip forum where users regularly pick apart celebrities and influencers in the most vitriolic fashion. She knows she's one of their regular targets but says they can't hurt her because, quite simply, she never sees it.

'As disgusting as what they might be saying is, I'm never going to read it. I'm never going to go on there! If that's their outlet and being nasty about me is how they cope with life, then that's fine. You guys do what you gotta do.

'I also think it's best that they are there, all in one place, like a big festering pit. They can make each other happy by being nasty and the rest of us can live outside of that. Maybe there's something in allowing people to vent about things that really don't matter, if it makes them feel better.'

It's a rule she seems to apply in her relationship with Swash, whom she began dating in 2016. 'We aren't afraid to have it out. If something's not working, or we're really peed off about something, we will row until we're like: "Okay, that's off our chests now, it's finished. Let's move on," she says.

'But we both have the same values, and that makes a massive difference. We're just floating along and



"It's about trying to finda happy medium between being positive and uplifting, but also admitting to it when you're feeling a bit rubbish"

doing our best, which is all you can do in a partnership.' She says it's the children in their big blended family – Joe has a son, Harry, from a previous relationship, while Zach and Leighton's fathers are both still in their lives – who have felt the biggest change since the wedding in July.

'Nothing's really changed for me and Joe, because we always felt that we were an old married couple anyway. Even when we first started going out! But being married has cemented things for the kids, which has been really nice.

'Having a blended family always had its ups and downs. I don't think you ever get into a groove, and neither is it ever one thing for a long time. You find moments of bliss and joy where you feel like you've absolutely smashed it, followed by moments where you question whether you're doing anything right.

'As long as you do your best and love them all the same, hopefully they'll turn out all right in the end.'

Solomon applies the same logic to her career, which she prefers not to think too far ahead on.

'My only plan is to go for it and just see where we end up. Nothing is guaranteed and you never know where life is going to take you. But I'm just so

grateful for what I'm doing at the moment and all the opportunities that come my way.'



Tap To Tidy At Pickle Cottage by Stacey Solomon (Ebury, £17.99) is out now



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



OCTODET III OCTO

# You don't have to be an actor or a comedian to try an improv workshop. Yvonne Martin took the plunge and discovered



ould you ever
(in a million years)
put yourself in the
position of performing
an improvised dramatic or comic
scene in front of other people? No
preparation, no time to plan, a
completely spontaneous creation?

some valuable life lessons

There are plenty of folk who thrive on this kind of thing, and even if you're a bit of an introvert like me, or you think that putting yourself in that situation will bring nothing but unnecessary anxiety, it's worth considering.

Counter-intuitively, taking part in an improv workshop could ultimately help you to feel *less* anxious.

It could also lead you to some interesting and life-affirming revelations, and perhaps make you a little braver in the process.

I had been thinking about doing an improv workshop for some time when I first gave it a go. I'd heard that it was all about saying yes to what's going on, which sounded positive. Plus I thought it might be fun – and I wanted to do something to push myself out of my comfort zone. So I decided to take the plunge.

Even as I drove to the venue, I was thinking about turning around and going straight back home – but I didn't.







I turned up for the session and had one of the most fun nights out I'd had in ages.

There were a variety of games and exercises, encouraging such skills as giving full attention and seeing the wider picture, rather than just your place in a scene – both useful perspectives outside of the workshop.

Throughout the evening, I laughed a lot, tickled by people's ingenuity and sense of fun, and I came away feeling rather proud of myself for throwing myself into it. In fact, I liked it so much, I went back the next week.

The week after that, however, it was cancelled, as we were about to go into the first lockdown of the pandemic. And, so, that was the end of that.

Recently, though, I've gone back to it, and after two years of working from home, it's filling that gap that was once occupied by office banter. And it's certainly providing some interesting lessons that extend into real life.

'In terms of what improv can do for you outside of a workshop and offstage, the skills of it means you're not afraid of failure,' says Tom Young, improv workshop teacher and one of the organisers of the British Improv Project.

This might be one of the best lessons you can learn during improv – freeing yourself from the worry of getting it



wrong, or not being good enough/clever enough/funny enough. It's much more important to take action and join in than to paralyse yourself trying to think of something perfect to say. In this way, the scene keeps moving, and it just might be that your simple and unflashy contribution is the very thing that allows another participant to add something marvellous and make the scene fly. And then you *all* look good!

'You don't need to have everything. You just need to be able to contribute something,' says Young. 'We might have people who can't do accents, but they sing really well. Or someone might not be the best at developing characters, but they'll drop in the funniest one-liner in the show. It all adds to the bigger picture. You don't need five people who can do the exact same thing. This is why the individuality of it is so important; it's about being able to support one another.'

An improv workshop can really encourage you to feel that your contribution is valuable, as thinking too harshly about yourself is somewhat counter-productive to the process. In fact, putting your nagging inner voice in their place could be one of the best things about giving improv a go.

Wellbeing coach Emma Hackett agrees: 'In coaching, we often refer to the inner critic, which is that voice that says, "I'm not sure I can do this well. I'm not sure I have something clever thing to say. So I'm just not going to do it at all."'

While that inner critic developed in the days of early man and woman to keep us safe from genuinely life-ending dangers, the fact is, it's still warning us just as firmly in modern life, even when the potential 'dangers' are things such as looking silly or not being perfect.

'Because we're not likely to die from going to an improv class, the inner critic will come up with a million and one other things to warn us about,' says Hackett. 'The point of the inner critic is to keep you safe, to keep you in your comfort zone, but to also keep you very small.'

The trouble with this is that you could be missing out on things that you would find fulfilling, exciting, rewarding, or simply just fun.

Challenging that feeling of trepidation in a controlled way, where the stakes are not too high, is a good place to start.

'You need to acknowledge your inner critic and say, "Okay, it's all going to be fine. I'm in a safe environment and I'm going to give myself permission to play," says Hackett. 'Yes, you might look stupid, you might say the wrong thing, but a workshop is a safe space, so just give it a go and try to have fun with it. And in doing so, you will start to rewire your brain. You're teaching your brain: "It was okay, I didn't die, and maybe I looked a bit stupid, but that was okay because it was a fun environment, and it was perfectly safe." Doing these things teaches you really valuable skills, and it starts to rewrite the narrative in your mind.'

Another key aspect of improv is listening carefully to what the other person has to say, and paying close attention to everyone involved.

Learning to truly listen and give attention is vital in improv, and doing so deliberately and with focus is certainly valuable in the rest of life, too.

'The benefits are absolutely enormous,' says Hackett. 'That person feels seen. They feel heard. They feel acknowledged.

'If we could all practise improvisation in our lives that bit more, it would really benefit our relationships.'

And the benefits can ripple out even wider, to the workplace and other creative pursuits and interactions.

'You'll feel more comfortable, knowing that whatever somebody says to you, you'll be able to think of a response,

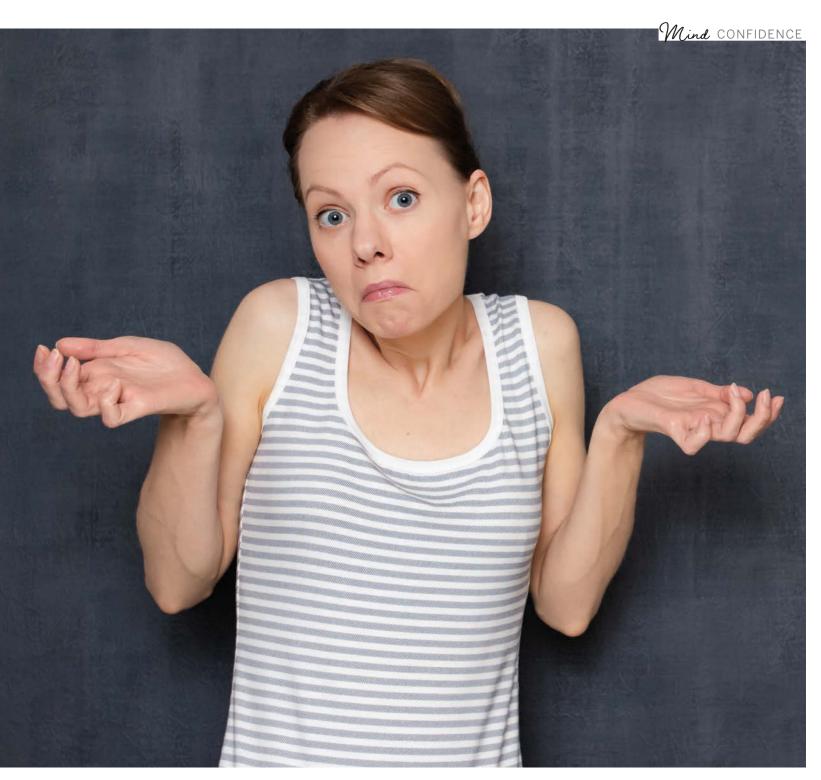
"The benefits can ripple out to the workplace and other creative pursuits and interactions" which means job interviews are less intimidating,' says Young. 'Meeting new people is less intimidating. Networking is less intimidating. Plus, you're more likely to be better connected if you are not afraid of failing in a public situation or meeting new people. You're more likely to be easy to get on with, because you're listening to what other people have to say, and you won't necessarily be so focused on yourself – and, as a result, you'll be better in the creative process, too.'

But perhaps the best outcome of all is laughter... and who doesn't benefit from that? 'Laughter is an extremely powerful way of reducing stress, recharging our energy, and boosting happiness,' says Hackett. 'It's a side effect of an improv class that's not to be underestimated!'

### Yes, and...

One of the exercises in improv is 'Yes, and...' This is where your partner in the scene says something and you say, 'Yes, and...' and, from there, build on it with your own embellishment. This won't work if you dig your heels in and decide not to accept the premise you've been offered. You must go with the flow, but you also have to add to it and build on it.

This approach has enormous benefits outside of the improv workshop, as Young explains: 'What tends to happen is you go to, say, a business meeting and everybody has an idea of how they think the meeting should go. What then proceeds to happen is an hour of people trying to get their idea across over what anybody else has to contribute. Whereas, if you start with one idea and then take some time to explore that by building on it – if you build and build and build, and develop one idea it's a much more productive use of your time collectively.'





#### It worked for me

Sharon Clement, 24, from Leicestershire, found that trying an improv class helped boost her confidence once she'd left the workshop, too:

'Attending an improv class taught me not to be afraid to go for it. In one of the exercises during my first session we had to do a silly little dance, and I thought, 'Oh my God, I'm not doing that!' But, then I just went for it, and it wasn't half as embarrassing as I'd feared. In fact, it was really fun to break through the barriers that you usually hold up in front of other people, and actually quite freeing in a way. At work or in our personal lives, we rarely have that space to just go for it, to do something ridiculous and have fun.'



**WATCH** Whose Line is it Anyway? The improvised comedy from the Eighties is still available to view on Channel 4's streaming site All4; channel4.com.

**READ** Impro by Keith Johnstone (Bloomsbury, £17.99), to find out more about the fundamentals of the craft.

## Taking in action Taking the lead

In their first session together, the award-winning coach Kim Morgan helps her client Heather\* step into the spotlight and become the director of her own destiny

#### Dession one...

eather was thorough in her search for a coach. First, she had calls with me and several other coaches. Then, she narrowed her selection down, and I had a face-to-face meeting with her. She was detail-focused and serious. As I am neither of those, when she called to say I 'had the job', I was amazed! She said she had deliberately selected someone different from herself, who would challenge her and expand her horizons.

As I listened to Heather, I warmed to this earnest and unassuming woman. I sensed that she was uncomfortable being here, but that she was prepared to experience discomfort to make a change in her life. I felt rather honoured to have got through her selection process!

At our first coaching session, Heather told me her story, checking her notes from time to time. 'I was an only child and had a sheltered upbringing. I never learned to have fun, and there was no laughter in our house. I married the first boyfriend I had.' Heather paused. 'After years of marriage, he had an affair and left me. He is now happily re-married with two children. I'm 47 years old, childless, perimenopausal and lonely.' Heather sighed and looked straight at me.

'So, here is your brief: I want to start dating but I am scared. I need you to help me reinvent myself, and to build up my confidence and courage. I want the next half of my life to be full of love, adventure and risk-taking.' She took off her reading glasses and closed her notebook. 'I'm ready for it. So, where do we start?'





I felt the weight of Heather's expectation on my shoulders. I was worried that I would let her down, or that I would incur her disapproval. I had so many thoughts spinning around my head. I was conscious that Heather's business-like approach may be a defence mechanism to protect her from painful feelings. I wondered if she had learned to suppress her feelings long ago... But in this moment, I had to do something – Heather was looking at me expectantly.

'I am going to ask you a series of questions that will help you to get more clarity about what you really want,' I said. 'The words you have used about adventure, risk-taking and courage may mean something different to me than they mean to you. Let's get specific about what you want your future to look like.'

As I asked the coaching questions, Heather decided not to speak, but to write her answers in her notebook:

- What do you really want?
- How will you know when you have it?
- What will having this give you, that you don't already have?
- What will you see, hear and feel when you have achieved your outcome?
- What will keep you motivated on your quest for change? For example, other people, an image or daily reminder, a saying, or rewards along the way?
- What is the bigger purpose behind this quest? Heather took the questions seriously and was fully immersed in the activity. When she finished writing, she looked up, with a smile. 'Dame Judi Dench!' she exclaimed. 'I want to be like her... elegant, well-dressed, playful, witty, adventurous, a role model for the older woman. I now know how I want to look, how I want to spend my time, the places I will go, the risks I will take, and the people who will champion and support me. Could you help me be more like Dame Judi please?' I said I could help Heather with the inner confidence and courage but not the outer image. However, I did know a stylist I could introduce her to. Heather leapt at the suggestion. 'And,' I promised, 'we will get onto the dating conversation next time!'

It was wonderful to see Heather so animated. At the end of our session, she decided she would make a vision board of her desired future and bring it to the next session. As she left, she recited a quote by George Bernard Shaw that perfectly summed up the coaching session for her: 'Life isn't about finding yourself. It's about creating yourself.'

Find out how Heather embarked on her reinvention in next month's issue.

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



## Work it out

Imagine you walk through a looking glass into a parallel world, and you meet another version of you, walking towards you.

This person looks just like you and is the best possible version of you. What do you see, hear, and experience about this person? They have all the best of you and none of the self-doubt or low confidence. Notice their posture and body language, and the way they are dressed. How do you feel about them?

Now step into their shoes and look out at the world through their eyes. How do you feel? How is this different from how you usually feel? Staying in their shoes, look at the 'you' standing there today. What do you see, hear, and experience about this person? What words of kindness, wisdom and advice would you like to give to them?

Come back into your own shoes. What did you learn



#### Identify your feelings

Being in touch with your emotions helps you to understand yourself and to empathise and communicate with others. You may have lost touch with your emotions because you felt it was safer for you to lock them away, or you may have received messages in your life that certain emotions should not be seen or heard, and you learned to suppress your feelings.

Recognising your emotional state gives important signals about how to look after yourself. It helps you know when your boundaries are being crossed, or when you need to ask for help.

Bottling up your emotions can result in you feeling overwhelmed or anxious – or using food, alcohol, spending or other unhealthy behaviours to numb the feelings you don't want to experience.

To begin to get back in touch with your emotions, look through the following list of feelings and identify situations when you feel these emotions:

- I feel happy when...
- I feel sad when...
- I feel angry when...
- I feel excited when...
- I feel proud when...
- I feel scared when...
- I feel embarrassed when...
- I feel loved when...
- I feel safe when...

#### **HAVE SOME VISION**

Cut out words and pictures from magazines to create a picture of all the things you would like to do, have or be in your life. Of course, it won't make everything you want magically materialise, but it will be a great way to spend a rainy afternoon, and makes a lovely visual reminder of your goals and aspirations!





Join Ollie's army

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

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

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

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

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

#### Licence to help

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

to talk winner NLP AWARDS

#### Get in touch

To train to become an Ollie coach, find a coach in your area or book an event, visit ollieandhissuperpowers.com, or email info@ollieandhis superpowers.com. The Ollie School is waiting 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

## IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

# A day to REMER?

Secretly find yourself dreading the big set-piece dates in the calendar? You're not the only one who finds them tough, explains Anna Bartter

hat are you doing for your birthday?' It's a question that makes my blood run cold.

It's imbued with connotations of a perfect, Hallmark-style day, where I look amazing, feel amazing and receive amazing presents. And I never choose the 'wrong' thing to do (a family day out at the beach on the rainiest day of the year, circa 2017, I'm looking at you).

Every time I think about my birthday, Christmas, a family celebration, or even just my children's sports days or school plays, I feel a wave of anxiety. I need to have the best time, take fantastic, Insta-worthy photos, and soak up every single second. Because, well, that's what we're supposed to do, isn't it?

Many of us find big occasions stressful. Often there are complex and deeply personal reasons for struggling to enjoy these milestones: bereavements and complicated family dynamics make any kind of celebration especially tricky. This isn't the case for me, but, invariably, I still end up feeling totally overwhelmed by the occasion and unable to enjoy it in the way I'd like. And, afterwards, I guiltily berate myself for not making the most of it.

Don't get me wrong, I love a celebration in many ways. I'm the first to suggest making a day of something, and I go all out for my children's birthdays. But it seems this could be part of the problem. Psychotherapist Roxy Rhodes explains: 'Perfectionists, over-planners, people pleasers and anxious characters tend to feel particularly overwhelmed by special occasions. And there's an overlap in these personalities, so the chances are, if you recognise one of these characteristics in yourself, you're likely someone who may find these types of days a challenge.'

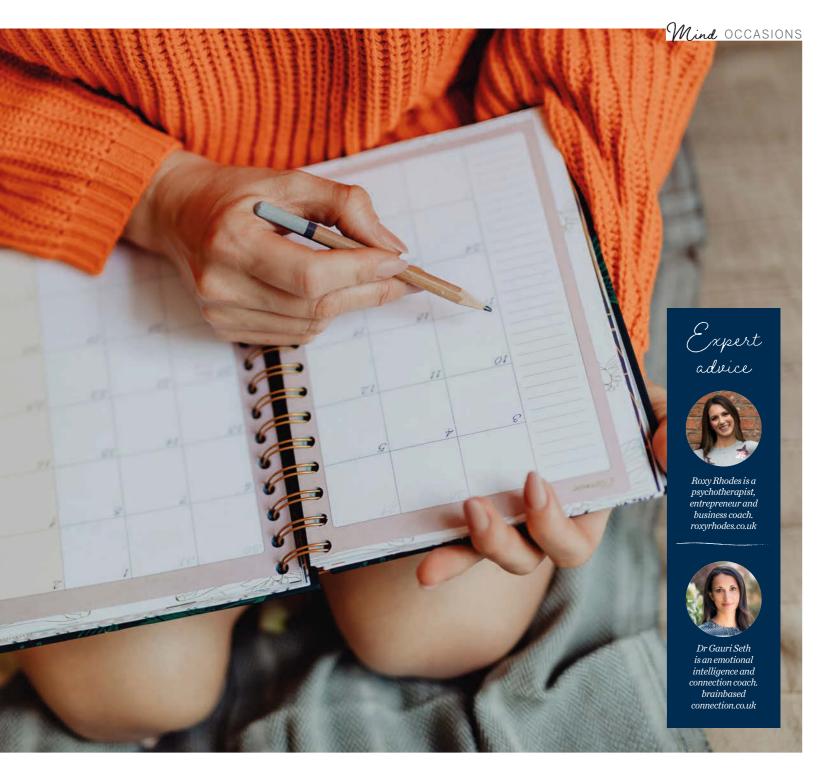
Perfectionism is something that 52-year-old entrepreneur Paola Dyboski, founder of bubble-play product business Dr Zigs, relates to: 'I've struggled with birthdays and Christmas for as long as I can remember. These were always days I'd get so excited about, and would look forward to, but they often ended up filled with disappointment and sadness. Things I could deal with normally became incredibly difficult on these occasions, because I would always be hoping things would turn out different.'

I certainly recognise many of the traits Rhodes describes in myself, and the experts agree that a good dose of



self-awareness is vital when it comes to identifying your feelings. Rhodes recommends 'recognising your triggers'. 'It's important to check yourself and try to work out what's really going on for you,' she advises.

Emotional intelligence coach Dr Gauri Seth explains that healthy self-awareness is less a state of being, and more a constant work in progress. She stresses the importance of regular check-ins. 'There needs to be frequent opportunities for self-care,' she says. 'Try to practise gratitude by doing things that bring you joy, along with making time for



"Many of us find big occasions stressful; often, there are complex and personal reasons for struggling to enjoy these milestones"

stillness and mindfulness, to be able to observe your mind and realign where necessary.'

For Dyboski, knowing herself and what makes her tick has freed her from her complicated feelings about her birthday. She credits being honest with herself as the key: 'It's important to take time to think carefully about what you'd like to do. I make sure I plan ahead; for example, I know that my favourite place is the sea, so I always try to get there, and if I can't, then spending some time alone in nature is soothing for me. And I'll





usually buy myself a present,' she adds, 'Something special that I really love, to mark the occasion.'

If the thought of drilling down to work out what's really behind those feelings is already leaving you overwhelmed, Dr Seth advocates a gentle and compassionate approach: 'My main tip for coping with milestone days is to non-judgementally ask yourself why you don't anticipate enjoying the occasion, and target in on that. Try to avoid perfectionism - I know for some people it's very difficult to change this, especially if perfectionism has led to success and admiration in the past. But if it's compromising your ability to be present and enjoy the moment, it's worth telling that side of yourself to pipe down and relax!'

Alongside perfectionism, expectations play a huge part. Rhodes explains that wanting things to be a certain way is a dangerous trap, and the key might be to have no expectations at all: 'Any time we are expecting a day to be picture-perfect, we are setting ourselves

"Any time we are expecting a day to be picture-perfect, we are setting ourselves up to fail. What we want to happen versus how life turns out, are often two very different things"

up to fail, and we can feel as though we're losing control – which we never actually had in the first place. What we want to happen versus how life turns out, are often two very different things. As soon as we notice we're trying to predict how things will go, whether positive or negative, that's when we need to check ourselves and learn to work from the present moment.'

When it comes to pressure and expectation, it's also important to be aware of whose expectations we are feeling pressured by: is it our own high standards, or other people's opinions that are causing stress?

Dr Seth explains: 'A parent or sibling may have unrelenting high standards of how things 'should be', and with that we can feel moral judgement. If things fall short of the expected standards, we can feel we've done something wrong, or have been lazy or thoughtless. With this desperation to avoid feeling like a failure, it's easy to see how some people can dread special occasions,' she adds.

If you've identified that the pressure

you're feeling is coming from those around you, it might be time to consider putting some boundaries in place. As a starting point, Dr Seth advises: 'Boundaries with family and friends are important, and the aim is to communicate any issues clearly and calmly, which helps to clarify misunderstandings. It might even come as a surprise to others that their expectations are causing you such stress, so speak out.'

Remember, if your own personal sense of self-worth is hinged on the opinions of others, it's likely your self-esteem needs a boost. Dr Seth recommends reframing how you think about the importance of other's opinions. 'Can you build up your self-esteem and validate yourself outside of an approval-seeking schema?' she asks. 'Don't allow yourself to be defined by the approval of others.'

So, the next time you're trying to present a perfect dinner party or upload a life-goals-style snap to Instagram, think carefully about your why. What is it that you're seeking?

If you're struggling to identify this, Dr Seth advises 'zooming out to zoom in' when thinking about why you're feeling a certain way. 'The power of reflection, compassion and non-judgemental curiosity is huge,' she explains. 'It's never too late to stop and reflect on your reactions with a neutral and objective lens. If you first connect with your authentic self, it becomes much easier to tackle emotional turbulence and understand how the current situation is misaligned for you.'

In my case, I've discovered that I'm far more introverted now than I was pre-pandemic. Alongside enjoying time with family and friends and a busy social life, I know that if I don't carve out time to stay home, relax and just be, I find everything too overwhelming. This realisation also explains why I'm not great with large groups of people I don't know very well, and has stopped me feeling bad about it.

As a quick fix, Rhodes recommends being mindful of how you speak to yourself. 'Try switching your language from pressure words to permission words,' she advises. 'Rather than saying to yourself, "I should clean the house before the guests arrive", try "I'll feel better if I clean up a bit." When you use pressure words such as need, should, ought, and have to, your brain

essentially jumps on these and tries to resist; you're setting yourself up to feel obligation and guilt,' she explains.

Rhodes says it's important to remember that you don't have to celebrate things in a certain way. There may be push-back from relatives or friends if you're delivering something radically different to usual, but Dr Seth advises talking to friends and family about how you feel. 'You might be surprised to learn that they also struggle with special occasions, and you might feel better if you realise you're not alone in this, and by sharing some tips and tricks.'

As a recovering people pleaser, being honest about how I feel is something I'm still working on. But, this year, I felt able to be truthful with my family about what I wanted and needed on my birthday (and I don't just mean my gift list!), resulting in a lovely, relaxed day filled with several of my favourite things.

Rather than fixating on everything being perfect and worrying what other people expected of me that day, I decided to lean into the simple joy of it: something I'll be trying to take forward into the festive season and beyond.

drzigs.com



#### NEXT STEPS

**Visit** thehappinesstrap.com, for free coping tools and an online course designed to help with difficult thoughts and feelings.

**Listen** to the Best Friend Therapy with Elizabeth Day and Emma Reed Turrell podcast. Season 1, Episode 5, focuses on special occasions: How do we feel about them? Who are they for?

Read Untamed: Stop Pleasing, Start Living by Glennon Doyle (Ebury Publishing, £14.99), an uplifting memoir and guide for life from the bestselling author

**Watch** Charly Haversat's TED talk *Perfectionism holds us back,* for a look at how perfectionism can be challenged.





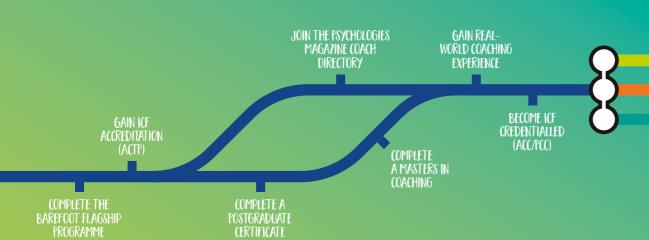
## TAKE YOUR CAREER IN A NEW DIRECTION

#### WITH OUR ICF ACCREDITED COACH TRAINING

Over 4,000 people from around the world have already trusted Barefoot to help them build their coaching expertise and make a change to make a difference; a difference for themselves, for others or for the world at large.

Whether you want to coach friends and family, coach at work, or in a new career as an accredited coach, when it comes to coach training, no two journeys are the same.

Where will the Barefoot Line take you?







#### MAKE A CHANGE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

ICF Accredited and University Approved Coach Training Delivered Chile Ofen 23 11:415 Days 5 oferests Free Instancent Options Available

#### A-Z OF COACHING

Welcome to Barefoot Coaching's *A-Z* 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 *Freud*, this month we will focus on *Goals*.

#### G IS FOR GOALS

Goal setting is a critical part of the coaching process. People who set goals are more likely to succeed than those who don't. Goals are about more than just what you want to do, they're also about who you want to be and how you want to behave. It is important to give the proper time and attention to goal setting, building as clear a picture as possible of what success will look and feel like. Thinking about what you would like to move forward on, ask yourself these questions:

- What is it you would like to achieve and over what period?
- What really matters to you about this goal? How much do you want to achieve it?
- By saying 'yes' to this goal, which other goals are you saying 'no' to?
- What do you need from yourself and others to achieve this goal?

#### JOIN A FREE TASTER SESSION

We offer free Taster Sessions to help you make up your mind about whether we are the right coach training provider for you. Sessions run on a weekly basis from 10:00 - 13:00. Use the code PSYCHOLOGIESMAG when booking to receive a free pack of our Coaching Cards.

## MAKE A CHANGE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE PODCAST

Tune in to hear how Barefoot trained coaches are making a difference to the lives of others.







#### FIND OUT MORE

o1332 863 641 info@barefootcoaching.co.uk barefootcoaching.co.uk









## Give the gift of self-care this Christmas

Treat a loved one to our never-ending pot of self-care inspiration! Pay only £37.99 and make the gift last all year long



psychologies.co.uk7efe8d4f-b5b1-4b57-a5c7-e05b9de1c5a6



ello!

Looking for the perfect gift for someone you love? What could be better than a subscription to your

favourite magazine? It's the gift that lasts all year long, and is the perfect tool to help them prioritise looking after their mental and emotional wellbeing. Psychologies is packed full of inspiring yet simple ways to bring about small changes that make a big difference to how you feel, each and every day. Featuring cutting-edge authors, experts and therapists, as well as real-life readers like you, it's sure to become their new best friend and help them learn how to feel calmer, happier and more relaxed.

So take this opportunity to share the Psychologies *love* and make the next year their best year yet. And if you're not a subscriber yet, why not leave the mag open at this page to give your loved ones the message about what you would like to find in your stocking this year, too!

Dally x Editor, Psychologies

## BECOME A MEMBER OF OUR SUBSCRIBER

When you subscribe, you automatically become a member of the *Psychologies* subscriber club and receive the following exclusive benefits:

- Pay from just £37.99 for a year's subscription
- Save up to £25 on the yearly cover price
- Opportunities to talk to the experts
- Access to our subscriber-only Facebook group
- Special subscriber only weekly e-newsletter\*\*
- Discounts on Psychologies products
- Free delivery to the recipient's door in 100 per cent plastic-free packaging

PLUS! You will receive life-improving content in every issue, to give you the strength and confidence to live your best life



Terms & conditions: UK Direct Debit offer only. You will pay £37.99 for one year ngs are based on the standard cover price of £4.90. Offer ends 24 December 2022. Jubscription will start with the next available issue, and you will receive 13 issues in a . Prices correct at time of print and subject to change. For full terms and conditions, shop.kelsey.co.uk/terms.

**Data protection:** We take great care in handling your personal details and these will only ever be used as set out in our privacy policy, which can be viewed at shop.kejsey.co.uk/

\*\* You may unsubscribe at any time

#### Don't miss out – order today!



Order online at SHOP.KELSEY.CO.UK/XMAS22PY Call now on 01959 543747\* Quote ref: XMAS22PY

\*HOTLINE OPEN: MONDAY-FRIDAY, 8.30AM-5.30PM. CALLS ARE CHARGED AT YOUR STANDARD NETWORK RATE

An estimated 70 per cent of people experience impostor feelings at some point. Anna Lou Walker explains how to combat the syndrome in all areas of your life

eople who are highly capable generally consider other people to be just as proficient as them. This mindset can lead them to believe that they don't deserve to be awarded opportunities over others, because – from their perspective – others are equally worthy of recognition. As Elizabeth Cox explains in her TED talk, What is impostor syndrome and how can you combat it?, 'There is often no threshold of accomplishment that puts these feelings to rest.'

That's why even people widely considered as geniuses, such as Albert Einstein or Maya Angelou, can (and did) experience impostor syndrome. Cox explains that 'pluralistic ignorance' – whereby individuals each privately doubt themselves yet believe they're alone in thinking in that way, because they don't hear others voice the same concerns – means it's difficult to dismiss these feelings.

The best solution? Talk about it! By opening up about our experiences with impostor syndrome, we come to realise that we're not alone – not only with

our feelings of fraudulence, but with the slings and arrows that naturally come with adult life. We may think other people breeze through with comparatively few struggles but, really, everyone is on their own journey, and will encounter their own obstacles on the path to success.

#### The impostor syndrome cycle

The biggest challenge for anybody seeking to overcome impostor syndrome is interrupting the cycle. But before you can do that, you need to recognise how the cycle works. Here's how it goes:

- A new task arises, causing feelings of self-doubt or anxiety.
- Fear of being exposed as a fraud sets in.
- In response, you over-prepare, or you procrastinate.
- After the task is complete, you discount any positive feedback.

The good news is, if you reframe your thinking, it's perfectly possible to break the cycle and stop feeling like an imposter, in *every* area of your life...



Extracted from Ditch Your Inner Imposter by Anna Lou Walker (Vie Publishing, £10.99) IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK



#### Athome...

Impostor syndrome isn't limited to professional settings – in fact, it's a feeling many people can relate to within their home life. Perhaps you're constantly comparing yourself to your siblings or friends, who you perceive as more successful than you. Or maybe you're sensing a gap in achievement between your lifestyle and that which your parents enjoyed at your age.

As a parent, impostor syndrome can be particularly strong – feeling incapable or unprepared for the huge responsibility of raising a child.

However, if our feelings of impostor syndrome in the home go unchecked, they can lead to considerable anxiety and other mental health concerns, particularly as they manifest in our place of rest, which can lead to burnout or emotional exhaustion. Communicating with your loved ones or trusted people in these situations is crucial. Ask yourself how you might reframe your inner monologue to match the ways a confident person might think. What's a new way you could look at this?

### In the workplace...

When people discuss impostor syndrome, often they're referring to experiences at work. Entering work is a big step in any adult's life, and marks a separation from our education days - where mistakes and failure were part of the process - and the start of a new chapter wherein we present an established skillset to potential employers. With this transition comes a shift in mindset that suggests we

somehow need to be perfect, or that the time for learning has ended – but this is not the case. People continue to learn and develop throughout their working lives, although the pressure to hide this often leads to impostor syndrome.

People who struggle with impostor syndrome in the workplace are often held back from asking for a pay rise or promotion, because they attribute their former successes to luck over their

own merit or work ethic. They also frequently feel they must work harder than is comfortable in order to achieve the standard they assume is expected. The shame experienced around impostor syndrome can also negatively impact creativity.

It's crucial to address feelings of impostor syndrome at work to avoid holding yourself and your ambitions back, and to protect your sense of self-worth and confidence.



#### In relationships and friendships...

Impostor syndrome can be particularly challenging when it concerns our friendships or relationships, because it attacks the support network that we'd usually rely upon to reassure us about our doubts or perceived inadequacies. It can manifest in a variety of ways. Newly-wed, perhaps you feel lost as a spouse, as though you don't know how to behave as a married person. In your relationship, perhaps you don't feel worthy of your partner's affection - as though they wouldn't love the 'real you'. Maybe you can't find your place in your friendship group, not feeling funny or cool enough to fit in.

Psychologist Dr Susan Albers explains the damage that can be wrought by the sense that our significant others are giving us affection we aren't truly worthy of – that persistent fear that they're going to discover that we aren't actually that great: 'Sometimes people self-sabotage that relationship and end it before the other person can,' she warns.

A heart-to-heart with a trusted friend or loved one is a good way to navigate this, as they can offer the perspective of someone we trust, who really knows us. But if impostor syndrome is markedly damaging your relationships, it may be time to consider finding a therapist who can help you to devise a practical action plan to overcome feelings of inadequacy.



### In your finances...

Ever received a pay rise at work, only to immediately feel that you 'didn't deserve it'? You may be struggling with financial impostor syndrome, in which you discount your financial abilities or discredit your sense of value. This kind of impostor syndrome is particularly prominent in individuals who have moved between socio-economic classes during their life and career. If you grew up in an environment in which money was

a well-paid job is likely to present feelings of impostorism

Coping with this kind of impostor syndrome requires the same kind of work as any other, and that begins with boosting your self-esteem, to improve the sense that you are 'worth' the financial gains presented to you.

To work on this specific version of impostor syndrome, create financial affirmations tailored to you, for example: 'I am deserving of my income' or, 'I trust the decisions I make with my finances'.

### Impostor syndrome and the pandemic

The coronavirus pandemic changed lives across the globe in several ways – one of them being the move away from office-based jobs. This shift in the way that we work and interact with our colleagues has had a knock-on effect. 'With fewer opportunities to connect and celebrate success, remote work is intensifying impostor syndrome,' explains Dr Sahar Yousef, cognitive neuroscientist at UC Berkeley.

To combat it, ensure you always make time for face-to-face feedback and recognition, and seek out in-person connection with colleagues – and, if you can't, hold meetings with cameras on, to get in some much-needed face time. And be sure to ask for designated time for feedback, as it's crucial for boosting your sense of value.

For some, the pandemic has meant a permanent shift to remote working. While there are definite advantages to this, no longer having the atmosphere of the office or interaction with your colleagues can leave some people feeling flat. As we work alone from our homes, it's easy to let the voice of impostor syndrome grow ever louder. And working in isolation from our colleagues can also emphasise negative beliefs we have around our productivity when we are left to work without the close monitoring that comes with the office setting. 'Being alone for long periods of time and in confined spaces can heighten negative feelings and thoughts, and this can also make someone suffering with impostor syndrome experience a stronger sense of the negative self-talk,' life coach Rebecca Lockwood explains. Gaining an awareness of the extra difficulties posed by home working is the first step towards overcoming them. 'As soon as you notice a negative comment from yourself, ask yourself a more empowering question,' Lockwood suggests. 'Instead of saying to yourself "I can't do that", ask yourself "How can I do that?"

## MAGE: LAURA RICHARDSON

# Soul food

When you pause before reaching for a biscuit and pick up your pen instead, you open the doorway to true nourishment, writes Jackee Holder

Recently, I have fallen into the habit of snacking throughout the day. Despite starting each day with good intentions – meditation and a spot of journalling – I began to notice how there would be a gradual decline in my eating habits as the day unfolded. Our relationship with food is complicated – and often emotional.

But that's were journalling comes in, as an antidote to the mindless snacking it's so easy to fall into. When it comes to food consumption, the notebook can be transformed into a paper tracking device. It's surprising how helpful it is to see the list of foods you've consumed in a day looking back at you from the page. But the information captured in your notebook becomes even more informative when you notice the time of day or events that send you in the direction of that bag of crisps.

That's when journalling plays the role of both friend and observer in becoming conscious and mindful about what food goes into your mouth. Once I track my eating, it soon becomes obvious that each time I reach for food it takes me away from the desire in both my head and my heart to take creative action that would leave me more nourished. Julia Cameron, the grand dame of journalling, suggests that by keeping a food journal, 'we put language between us and a binge'. By pausing, it can help us see what's really going on, and what might be causing us to overeat or not eat much at all.

So, this month, I'll be keeping a food journal, and I encourage you to keep one too. As soon as you feel a snack attack coming on, instead of diving into the packet of crisps, reach for your journal. At the top of the page in your notebook write the words, 'I'm just about to eat...' or a prompt that works for you, then keep on writing. Often, you'll find that there's something else that's the trigger for reaching out for food. Anxiety about a relationship; a worry or concern at work.

One of my clients noticed that she was great at managing what she ate during the day, but threw her healthy eating out the window as soon as she walked through her door at night. When she began engaging with the free-write food prompt,



she was surprised to see how many times the word lonely appeared on the page. She had a great circle of friends and a full diary but, underneath all of this, hiding in the shadows, was an overwhelming sense of loneliness she wasn't willing to admit to. Eating mindlessly numbed her to what was really going on.

Once my client faced her loneliness, the fear she imagined would take hold of her started to fade. In its place, she found herself looking at ways she could connect with new people. But what surprised her most was when she found the courage to open up to trusted friends and family members about how she was really feeling. She experienced an unexpected flurry of warm conversations, and started to feel a great connection and intimacy with those around her. Facing her loneliness worked in her favour and helped her to get closer to those who really mattered. *jackeeholder.com; @jackeeholderinspires* 





BetterYou supplements are designed to optimise your nutritional health, so you can feel better and live better, whatever the season

ho didn't feel the benefits of this year's beautiful summer? Day after day drenched in sunshine gave us all a boost – in mind, body and soul. But with duller days and longer nights now upon us, we're feeling the dip in our vitamin D levels, with low mood, tiredness and fatigue, achey bones and muscles, and more frequent colds.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) estimates that vitamin D deficiency in the UK affects one in five adults and one in six children – that's 10 million of us! – and advises that everyone should take a vitamin D supplement containing at least 10 micrograms (400IU) a day during the winter months. And those more at risk of deficiency – pregnant and breastfeeding women, those aged 65 and over, children under five, people with darker skin tones, and vegetarians and vegans – should take it all year round.

The BetterYou range of vitamin D oral sprays have been specially formulated to deliver vitamin D directly into the mouth. Thanks to its soft, absorbent tissue, and because it is so close to the

body's vein system, the mouth makes an excellent receptor, so it's a convenient solution to traditional vitamin D supplementation. BetterYou's award-winning range of vitamin D supplements, with 100 per cent natural flavouring, are available in a number of dosage strengths for the whole family, and for different at-risk groups.

#### Self-care made simple

BetterYou believes that balanced nutrition is vital for better living, and has tailored its smart supplements to make it easier for you to optimise your nutritional health every day.

Traditional tablets and capsules rely heavily on our overworked digestive system for absorption, and aren't suited to everyone. That's why, in conjunction with leading doctors, biochemists and nutritionists, BetterYou has developed its award-winning range of pill-free nutritional oral sprays and topical magnesium supplements, which are designed to bypass the digestive system for increased absorption, whilst being easy-to-use.

BetterYou provides nutritional solutions to support your health and wellbeing for every stage of life, including immunity, sleep, stress and children's health. All of its products are palm oil and palm oil-derivative free, and packaged with 100 per cent plant friendly plastics.

BetterYou Vitamin D Oral Spray, from £7.45, betteryou.com









Judith Kleinman is a musician and Tai Chi, yoga and Alexander Technique teacher, who is focused on integrating these practices into education and performance. Her new book, Finding Quiet Strength (Hawthorn Press, £24), is out now. Findingquiet strength.com



Marina Fernández
Julián is an
advanced executive
coach, NLP master
trainer, and author of
new book Balance:
Living A Life True
To Yourself (£14.99).
marinazest
forlife.com



Stuart Sandeman
- aka Breathpod - is
a breathwork expert,
host of BBC Radio 1's
Decompression
Sessions, and author
of Breathe In
Breathe Out
(HarperCollins,
£16.99). @breathpod;
breathpod.me

aking time to slow down, turn it down, and recalibrate in these quieter autumnal weeks will help build up some reserves in your tank. When December comes, you'll be feeling stronger, calmer and ready for the action, rather than hiding under the duvet filled with dread.

The first time I did 'dry November' was a few years ago. I was busy but not achieving very much, and catching every bug going, and knew that I needed to up the self-care if I was going to cope with December and all it inevitably brings. As well as cutting out the booze, I had more early nights, slept better (thanks to no wine) and was surprisingly, quietly productive. For the first time, I felt ready for Christmas. I was calm and rested, my decks were cleared, and my usual stressed out, cynical self was nowhere to be seen. It really opened my eyes to how topping up the tank now can be a total game changer for the weeks ahead. Judith Kleinman, author of Finding Quiet Strength, likens it to building and organising your emotional toolkit: 'I think of it as gathering the skills, or tools, so you're refreshed, ready, and in a stable emotional state when things become busy and stressful,' she says. Having experienced the festive season in a not-very-stable emotional state, I can vouch for the difference a steady foundation makes.

Resting doesn't come easily or naturally to many of us, but if you understand that rest can take many forms, it will be easier to find a way for you to fit more restful activities into your day (for me, it was a 30-day yoga programme I did for up to half an hour in the evening before bed). And while we tend to think of the new year as the best time for a mental reset, if you go too long without giving your mind the chance to recalibrate, you can end up very stressed and overwhelmed. 'It's like releasing the pressure that's built up so you can then go out and reconnect with the world,' says Kleinman. Stealing some quiet time in November has now become a habit that I look forward to - the secret to enjoying Christmas, rather than just surviving it. As coach Marina Fernández Julián says, 'Once you've taken some time out, you can go back outside, play big, and spread around your new zest for life.'







## TUNE OUT TO TUNE IN

'If you want to tune in, you need to tune out,' says Fernández Julián,

in her book Balance. 'A head full of thoughts and a noisy environment are not going help you tune into your intuition.' Clearing some mental space will allow you to listen to your intuitive mind, she says, which helps you to make better decisions and choose what's best for you, rather than what people expect from you or you think you should be doing. To do this, Fernández Julián suggests planning a bit of time to yourself free from distractions. This can be hard, particularly if you live in a busy household, but you could try setting the alarm and getting up earlier than anybody else, and making the most of the silence and the space. An hour to yourself before you need to start your morning routine can really change the course of your day. Or, for a proper chance to reset, take a day off in the middle of the week when everybody else is at work or school, and devote that day to yourself. Think of it as a mini-retreat – prepare some nourishing food, do some yoga or stretching, try meditating, curl up with a book, or have a bath or a nap. Allow yourself to have nothing much to do and use that time to tune into your thoughts and emotions.

#### **TRY THIS**

Move yourself from the conscious thinking mode we spend most of our time in by doing something physical but calming, such as silent walking, meditating or a creative activity. These kinds of activities allow you to be present, which allows your intuition to come through. 'The voice might not come when you ask it to, and you may notice it the next day, as you wake or are doing something routine.'

"Clearing some mental space will allow you to listen to your intuitive mind, which helps you to make better decisions"









## CARE FOR YOURSELF

Feeling secure and comfortable with yourself helps you to interact well with others and be open to new experiences. It's all too common for women to put themselves to the bottom of the priority list, perhaps moaning from time to time about how we look after everyone else but nobody looks after us. 'But caring for yourself is actually your responsibility and nobody else's,' says Fernández Julián, and accepting that will help you switch some of your care and attention onto yourself. The first thing you need to remind yourself is that you are good enough. 'When you know you are enough, regardless of what's been happening in your daily life, you feel safe and adequate; you have faith that everything will work out fine.'

You could use this time to catch up on some of the less exciting but important self-care stuff that clogs up headspace and keeps you awake at night but doesn't get done when things are busy. Think dental appointments, and other work and life admin.

Remember, too, that those close to you aren't mind-readers – they don't know what you need unless you tell them, and there will be times you need their help. Asking for help should never be a source of shame, and doing so sooner rather than later can stop a problem escalating into something bigger and more unmanageable.

#### **TRY THIS**

Say out loud, 'I am enough!' Don't worry if you feel awkward; simply doing this exercise and repeating it regularly will make a difference.





## MAKE CONSCIOUS CHOICES

How many times have you said yes

when you really mean no? We often forget when we are under pressure that we have choices. 'When we're overwhelmed by life and in a constant state of anxious reaction, we lose the feeling of being in the driving seat,' says Kleinman. By creating some space for yourself, you can take time with making decisions. 'When life feels out of control. it's harder to navigate the ups and downs of having a lot to do. We can also feel crowded by being with a lot of people, and our fuse becomes short.' she adds. 'Sometimes, we're reacting to an outside event, such as Christmas, but often we're reacting to our own feelings towards that event.'

Breathwork expert Stuart Sandeman warns that this need to be busy all the time is yet another addiction. 'We're always on, glued to our busy life, with adrenaline, cortisol and dopamine dripping in,' he says. Stuart advises banning the B word (busy), reframing it, and challenging yourself to be honest and say what you've actually been doing. 'Whatever you're doing, don't just say, "I'm busy". This will help you to identify what you're spending your precious time on, giving some focus, energy and motivation towards the tasks and projects that matter to you.'

#### **TRY THIS**

Think of something you know isn't quite right in your life. Imagine observing it from a distance. Take an objective look at it and see it for what it is, then accept it with no judgment. Allow any emotions to come up and notice how much easier and lighter you feel when you accept them. You can choose whether to make any changes or not, but just accepting and noticing how you feel will help.





## LET OUT YOUR EMOTIONS

When we stop rushing around and take time out to rest and reflect, it can trigger a release of emotions. If you're feeling angry or sad or frustrated, let it out. 'When you're sad, cry until you have no more tears. And when you're done crying, let all the emotions go,' says Fernández Julián.

'Crying is the best release mechanism,' she adds. 'It's comforting and helps us to express sadness, pain and frustration.' If you stop yourself crying, your emotions will be felt elsewhere – you might end up being ill, or experience pain and tension in your body, or have an emotional breakdown by bursting into tears or losing your temper in a stressful moment. 'Letting anger and sadness and steam out at the right time and in the right place is good practice.'

#### **TRY THIS**

If something has upset you, Fernández Julián recommends writing to the person and telling them how you feel and why. Then wait a few days and read it back, as though you're hearing about it for the first time. This will help you see it from a different perspective and make sense of the emotions you were feeling. When you've done that, you can burn or bin the letter.



## Shortcuts to calm

Use these short and simple techniques to quickly access calm. Practise them this month to help soothe your nervous system, and get to know what works for you – then, you can tap into their power whenever you need them over the busier weeks to come. Remember that a little thing done often makes a big difference over time.

#### GET OUTDOORS

Being outside and connected with nature gives an important sense of spatial awareness, helping you to see the bigger picture and gain a sense of being part of a sustainable whole. Walking is a wonderful activity for coming back to ease in your mind and body. Walk with your opposite arm to leg swinging, look out and see the world around you. Avoid thinking; just enjoy the space and movement, and let it all happen freely.

#### Take a child's pose

A child's pose in yoga is like sending a 'do not disturb' signal to the world. It's a safe and comfortable place where we can withdraw, hide, retreat and rest. From a kneeling position, fold forwards from the hips, keeping your sit bones on your heels, and rest your head on the floor in front of you or on a cushion. Your arms rest by your side, palms facing upwards, or stretched out in front if you want the extra back and shoulder stretch.

#### Have a hug

Hugs are hugely comforting and soothing. Make sure you remember to hug your loved ones and hold it for a bit longer than usual. You can also hug yourself. Place your right hand under your left arm pit (near your heart), and your left hand on your right shoulder or upper arm, noticing the movement of your breath and the touch kindly containing you. Sense you are soothing yourself, giving yourself a kind and friendly hug.

#### THINK YOURSELF HAPPY

Think of a place you enjoy being in, someone who loves you unconditionally, a moment that makes you smile, or a time or activity you really enjoyed. Stay with the good sense of these thoughts and absorb them for a few seconds. Try pressing your thumb and middle finger together to feel like you're embodying the process, and do this the next time you want to capture this feeling again.

#### Do a seated sphinx

This is a great way to release your arms and upper back if you're working at a desk.

- Sit at your desk with space on its surface where you can rest your lower arms, including your elbows.
- Let your sit bones land on the chair, allow your spine to be soft and tall. See the room around you.
- and tall. See the room around you.

  Let your arms feel supported by the table but not heavy. Try typing with this sense of ease, freedom in your hands, wrists and arms. Stay grounded, resist pulling your head forward, to the side or down when you use your arms.

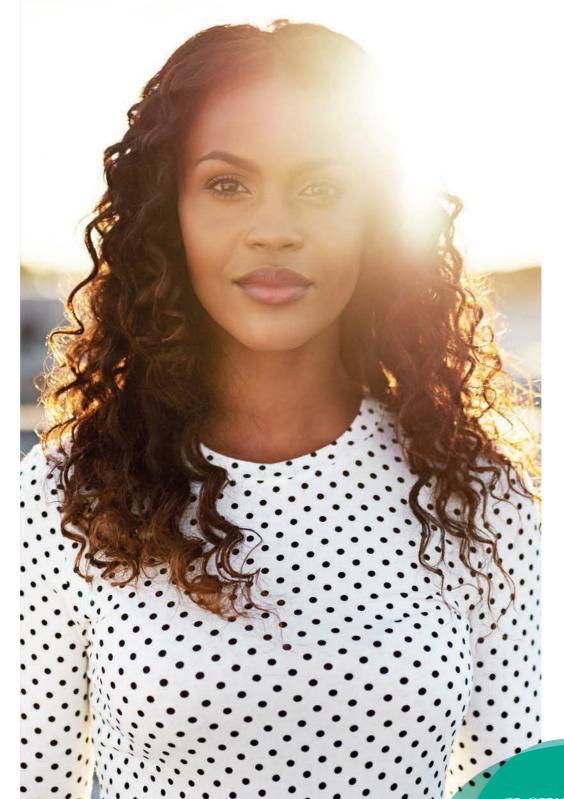
#### **RELAXYOUR FACE**

Are you frowning? Is your jaw relaxed? Notice if you're pressing your tongue into the roof of your mouth. Try to let go of tension in your face, mouth and neck. Lightly engage the tip of your tongue behind the top teeth. Breathe gently, being aware of the freedoms of the face, mouth and neck, with an ease in your chest and shoulder area.



#### Do what you love

Make time for things that make your heart sing, whether it's painting, swimming, baking, meditation, walking, reading, sewing, yoga, dancing, or having sex. We all have different ways of relaxing and embracing life. Explore what makes you feel happy and connected with life, and make time for it.





### The big questions

Stop and take a moment to ask yourself the following three questions. It can help to get out of that mental spiral and connect you to the bigger picture.

**Am I seeing?** Are you seeing the big picture or are you overfocused on your screen?

**Am I breathing?** Or are you holding onto one aspect of the breath cycle?

Am I soft and tall? Are you standing with your weight balanced between your feet, feeling free and easy? When we're tense, our chest and abdomen tighten and clench, and we literally get smaller, tighter and stiffer. If we're tired or upset or overwhelmed, our flexor muscles come into play, making us feel physically heavier, so we collapse our posture.

#### **BETHANKFUL**

Pause for a moment and breathe in thoughts of gratitude. Feel gratitude for loved ones, for nature, for happy times, for when the washing machine works! This really helps restore feelings of belonging and being valued, reminding us that we are capable, valuable, lovable, powerful and equal.

Read more in Finding Quiet Strength by Judith Kleinman (Hawthorn Press, £24)

#### **SLOWIT DOWN**

Can you slow down whatever you're doing? Sometimes, it's really nice to hear the water running into the sink or feel the sun coming in through the window.





There's a secret weapon to feeling physically and emotionally better, and it's something you do all day every day

ou know that feeling when you come out of a yoga class and you feel like your head has been through a rinse cycle? That's mostly down to breathing better; slowing down and breathing through the diaphragm, releasing tension, and shutting off the things that usually race around your head. But you don't need to do a yoga or meditation class to feel the effect – a simple breathing exercise can shift you from feeling stressed out to serene in a matter of minutes.

The health benefits associated with breath have been known for centuries by yogis. In fact, the ancient yogic Vedic tradition believed that the number of breaths allotted to us for this lifetime are pre-determined at birth. In other words, the quicker we spend our breaths, the sooner we age and die. While that might sound extreme, when you understand how the breath affects the nervous system, it makes a lot of sense.

The way you breathe causes you to move between your stress (sympathetic) and rest (parasympathetic) nervous system responses. The faster you breathe, the more time you spend in your sympathetic nervous system, and the more stress you put on your body and mind. With better breathing, you can reduce the amount of stress your body and mind are under, get more and better-quality sleep, improve your digestion, increase your energy, and boost your mood. Just by breathing differently you can shift from living in a state of chronic stress to one of calm and positivity.

#### **Breathwork basics**

When doing breathwork, the first step is to fix your breathing mechanics. There are two key players here: your nose and your diaphragm.

Your nose is designed for breathing. Its job is to filter the air, get the perfect moisture and temperature of air to your

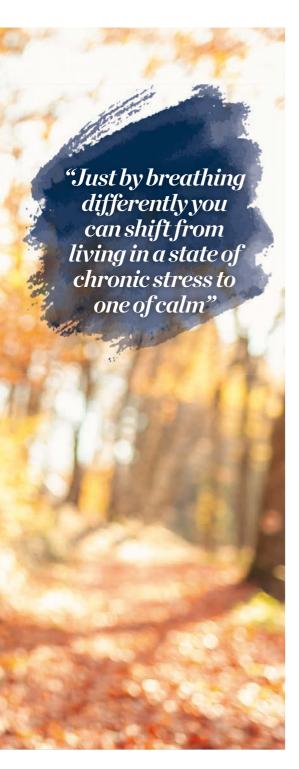


lungs, and to improve the delivery of your body's key fuel component (oxygen) to your cells. Your nose also flushes the air with nitric oxide, a gas that opens your airways and helps with circulation. And it slows the speed at which you breathe so you remain in a calm, youthful state of mind. So, first things first – shut your mouth. And unless you're eating through it or speaking out of it, keep it shut!

Next up, your diaphragm. This is your primary breathing muscle. It helps you maintain correct posture, stabilises your blood pressure, and slows down your heartbeat. When you breathe with your

diaphragm, it opens downwards, massages all your internal organs, and helps with your digestive process. This acts as a pump for your lymphatic system, which clears toxins from your cells.

Switching to nose-only, diaphragmatic breathing will go a long way to helping you feel upbeat and energised. But it's not an instant win, especially if you have been habitually breathing badly. Switching to using only your nose and to diaphragmatic breathing may feel a bit uncomfortable at first, as your body takes time to adjust and find a new state of balance.



One way to speed up this process is to add a daily five-minute breathwork practice (see right) that encourages nose and diaphragmatic breathing, but also works to slow your breathing and increase the amount of carbon dioxide in your system. This may seem odd, but your body doesn't like elevated CO2 in your system, so when you do this regularly the body steps in to correct it by creating more oxygenated red blood cells. This means your breathing becomes more effective, and that allows you to get more energy from the same number of breaths.



#### TRY THIS

#### Week one

Set a five-minute timer:

- Find a comfortable position, seated or lying down.
- Close your eyes or bring them to a soft gaze.
- Place your hands on your belly, so you can feel it rise and fall.
- Breathe in through your nose for a count of four, feel your belly rise.
- Hold your breath for a count of four, keep calm and relaxed.
- Breath out for four, steady and controlled, feel your belly fall.
- Hold for four.

Repeat this until the timer ends. In week two, increase the lengths to five counts – in for five, hold for five, out for five, hold for five.

#### Week three

Increase to six – so six, six, six, six, and then seven, seven, seven, seven the following week, until you are comfortable with ten, ten, ten, ten, for five minutes. This will help you naturally move into a more functional

breathing pattern: nose, diaphragm and a nice slow flow. You will feel more relaxed and energised.

Sometimes, our days don't go smoothly and we need some extra help to tame our worries or manage our stress. In such times, try the magic technique below. A nice, long, drawn-out breath hits the off button to your stress and tells your mind and body you are safe and calm. It's also great to do before sleeping to help you relax, and before eating to help your body to move blood flow and improve digestion.

- Breathe in through your nose for a count of four, feeling your belly rise.
- Hold for four, keep calm and still.
- Breathe out through your mouth for a count of eight, relax your shoulders, face and jaw.
- Repeat until you feel calm.

 $Find out \, more \, in \, Breathe \, In \, Breathe \, Out \, by \, Stuart \, Sandeman \, (Harper Collins, \, \pounds 16.99)$ 



## psychologies.co.uk test

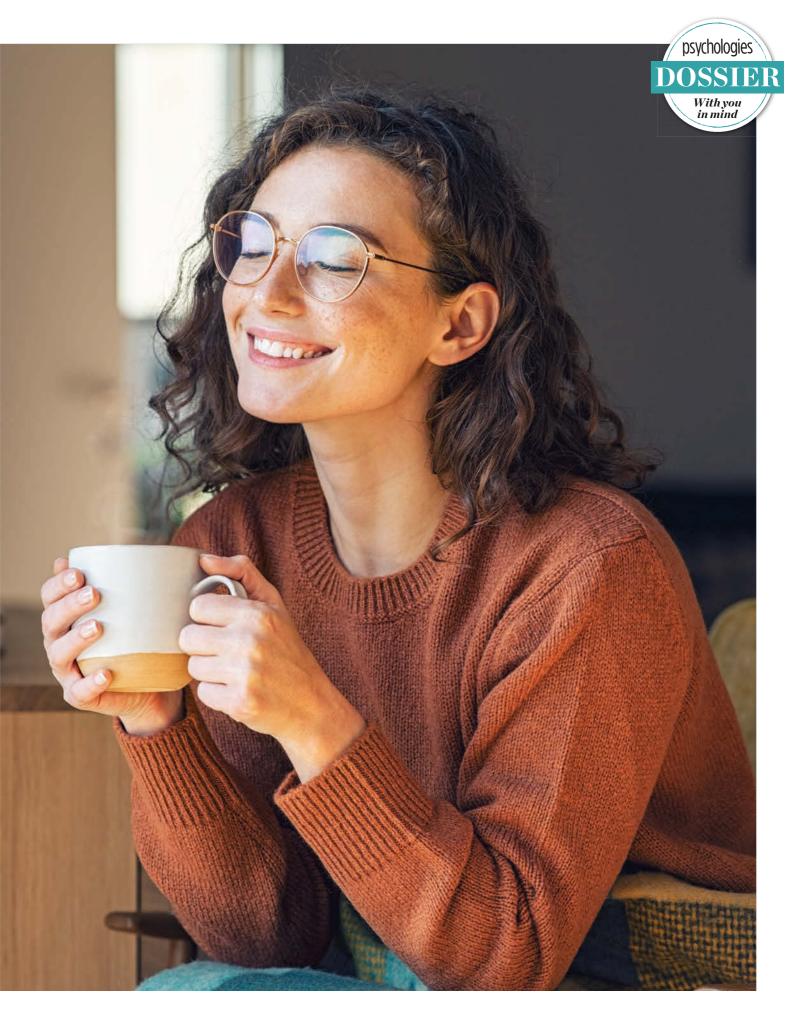
# WHAT DOES YOUR MIND NEED A REST FROM?

It's not just your body that needs to recharge.

Take our test to find out what you need to mentally let go of to get truly restorative rest

Tick the answers that most closely apply to you, then add up the symbols. Read the section, or sections, you ticked most, to find your psychological barrier to rest

1 You feel most nourished by ■ Support and encouragement	<ul> <li>Doing something new and inspiring</li> <li>Organised for you by someone else</li> </ul>	8 You often feel overwhelmed by  ■ Everything you want to achieve□  ■ Your mental list of faults□  ▼ Finding time to see everyone□  ◆ Everything you hold in your mind□
	5 After restorative rest, you feel	
The root of stress for you is often     Not feeling good enough	■ Better about everything	9 You'd relax more if you could  ▼ Take more time for yourself
	6 People often tell you to	
3 You'd feel more rested if you could	◆ Get things into perspective	10 You feel recharged by
▼ Let go and care less	■ Have more self-belief□	<ul><li>Learning something new</li></ul>
● Say no and do less	■ Be okay with good enough	Knowing you've made
◆ Analyse and worry less	♥ Put yourself first	a difference
■ Self-criticise less		▼ Time with people who know
	7 You're most likely to worry about	you well
4 An ideal weekend is	♥ Past conversations	◆ Seeing the lighter side of life
Busy and booked up well	<ul><li>Something that might</li></ul>	<b>.</b>
in advance	never happen	Turn the page to find out
<ul> <li>About catching up and</li> </ul>	Your to-do list	what you need in order to
getting ahead□	■ Things you've messed up	recharge and recalibrate



# What do you most need to take a break from?



#### IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♥

### **Caring**

For you, meaningful relationships are what life's all about, and you know that being open about the tough times builds intimacy and a deep connection. But it's hard to let go enough to get really restorative rest when your peace of mind is tied up with what other people think, and how they're feeling. Being immersed in the emotional lives of your friends or your family can provide meaning and purpose but, without boundaries, it can also become depleting.

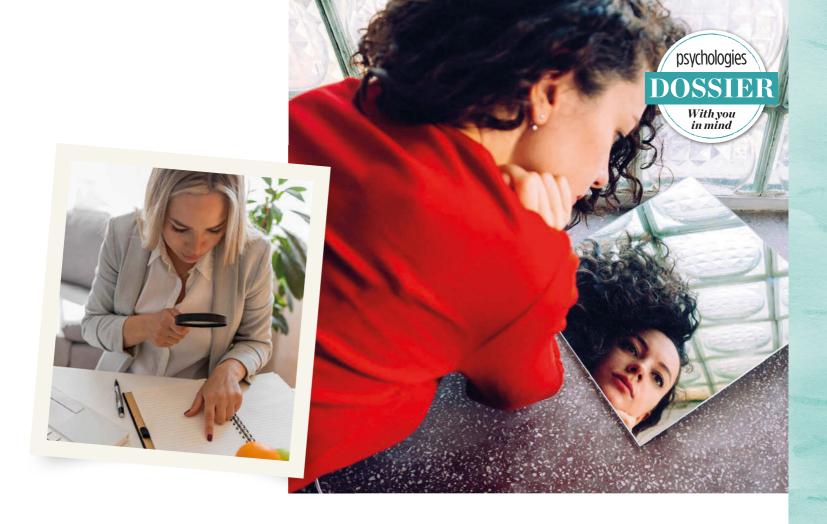
Giving without getting enough back to recharge your resources can have a drip-drip effect, leaving you constantly craving rest. When you have a naturally empathic nature, it can be hard to draw a line and say enough is enough, especially if you can also feel energised by your emotional connections. It's getting drawn into drama and conflict or trying to sort out other people's problems that can gradually drain reserves. But watch what gets triggered when good friends do share their problems with you. Do you get that sense that they leave the conversation feeling lighter, and you walk away carrying their burden? The key to restorative rest for you is putting that burden down, and seeing what happens – you might be surprised at how well people cope.

#### IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ◆

## Thinking

Mind and body are in constant communication, so an overthinking mind can quickly undo the benefits of any break or relaxation exercise. And when you're in full overthinking mode, it may even feel that rest is impossible or pointless – ever spent a yoga class or walk on autopilot, as your mind churned though your to-do list? You may be well aware that you need to turn down your internal stress dial, but you can also tell yourself that your overthinking habit is normal, or that it's even useful.

Of course, there is an upside to an active mind and imagination, but an analytical mind can become an overthinking one if it sucks you into a toxic spiral of 'what ifs' and worse-case scenarios. You may tell yourself that you just like to be prepared, as you endlessly run through all the possible consequences of any decision you might make. But the truth is that worry only gives you the illusion of control. It's hard to think yourself out of overthinking, so try distraction instead – find a creative activity that's challenging enough to require a level of concentration, such as a craft or new exercise class. Rest doesn't always have to be passive and, for some of us, active rest offers the deepest restoration.



#### IF YOU SCORED MAINLY

### Striving

Whether you identify as a perfectionist or just consider yourself conscientious, people who set the bar high for themselves can often struggle to prioritise rest if it doesn't seem to have a 'purpose'. When in balance, a commitment to personal growth and reaching your full potential can be energising, providing a sense of meaning to life. And fostering curiosity for life and learning can be sustaining in a busy life, protecting you from getting stuck in an energy-zapping routine. But you may find it hard not to overschedule or be over ambitious about what you achieve with your time, and sometimes your enthusiasm to do everything can work against you. And if you're not careful, even those activities you've included in your life to help you recharge such as meditation or yoga – can become another task you have to 'do well' at.

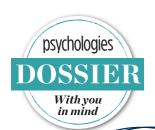
Next time you do something that you regard as rest, check in with yourself about how you feel afterwards – if you're left feeling unsettled about how you did, rather than relaxed, it's time to drop it from the list and try something else. Sometimes, the best rest is spontaneous and happens in the gaps in between plans and projects.

#### IF YOU SCORED MAINLY

## Judging

Your biggest barrier to truly restorative rest is knowing when you have done enough to 'deserve' it. If taking time out comes with the shadow of guilt, it will leave you feeling uneasy rather than recharged. It's hard to feel okay about taking care of yourself if your default mindset is self-criticism. Sometimes, a self-attacking mindset can become so ingrained that it feels like 'self-awareness' or 'being realistic' rather than criticism. Or you may feel you're motivating yourself when, instead of recognising when you're in need of rest, you berate yourself for not being able to cope and keep going.

The irony is that you may be super-supportive of other people's self-care, encouraging them to get the rest they need to recharge. But different rules seem to apply for you, making it hard for you to ever feel like it's okay to invest the time and resources needed to find what you need to properly relax. Deep down, you know that no one needs permission to take care of themselves or should have to earn the right to rest. So it's time to commit to making self-care a priority, not least because ensuring that you feel rested and recharged on a regular basis will help you gain the perspective you need to treat yourself with more self-compassion.



# psychologies RELAX HEROES

## **REST**Slip into a peaceful slumber...





Scentered De-stress Five-minute Foot Mat & Mindful Aromatherapy Balm, £35, scentered.me



Lavender Necklace, £22.90, kodes.me.uk

## RESET

Get your energy flowing again

Espa Energising Bath & Shower Gel, £25, espaskincare.com

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









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



MAGESCHITTERSTOR

# FRIEND SIENDER STATE OF THE PROPERTY OF THE PR

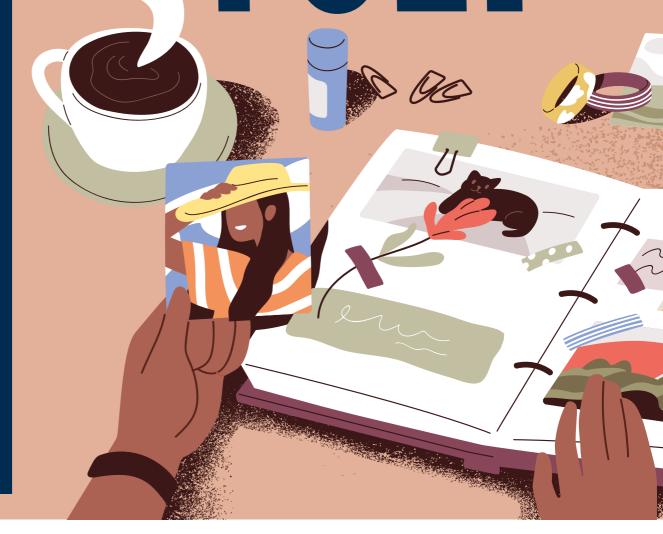
Expert advice



Dr Marisa G Franco is a psychologist and friendship expert, a public speaker, and the author of Platonic (Pan Macmillan, £16.99). drmarisagfranco.com



Irene S Levine
is a psychologist,
producer of The
Friendship Blog, and
the author of Best
Friends Forever:
Surviving A Breakup
With Your Best Friend
(Abrams, £14.54).
irenelevine.com



#### How should we deal with conflicts within friendships, asks Yasmina Floyer...

reakups can be devastating. When it comes to romantic relationships, we know roughly the shape that a breakup takes. Lovers breakup on our screens and in the pages of our books, and hundreds of song lyrics lament the heartache. A breakup between friends, however, rarely receives the same level of recognition, yet the hurt it can cause can be just as painful.

When I parted ways with one of my closest childhood friends, there were no songs to help guide me out of my grief, no tearful evenings spent crying to loved ones who acknowledged that my heart was broken. The reason for this is because we elevate romantic love above

friendship when, in fact, our friends are some of the greatest loves of our lives. This friend of mine had another baby, sold their house and was moving out of the city we both lived in. Typically, these would be milestone events we'd celebrate together. Their first baby had inherited my baby's Moses basket. When they bought their first house, I was there to help warm it. They met my husband when he was just my boyfriend and, years later, played a significant role at our wedding.

So, when my friend told me in a text conversation that the baby had not only arrived but was already a month old, coupled with news of an imminent move, I was floored. I didn't know when things had changed between us – but clearly something had. I was shocked, but swallowed it. I congratulated them, wished them all the best, and we made loose intentions to get together before they left town. And we haven't spoken to one another since.

Within that final text conversation, I began a variety of sentences, each one confronting the root of my hurt feelings; how devastated I was by their sudden distance, how it seemed as though I was no longer important to them. A series of words ebbed and flowed on my screen, depicting my hesitation to confront the issue as I typed, deleted, typed, deleted.

Ultimately, I spoke nothing of my true feelings. Saying nothing would mean avoiding conflict, and surely that was a good thing? It's only now that I wonder whether things could have been different if I had allowed myself to be vulnerable.

Psychologist, friendship expert and author of *Platonic*, Dr Marisa G Franco, tells me that by *not* confronting the issue, we are forcing the friendship to end. 'If we have the conflict, maybe it will go badly – but maybe it won't,' she says. 'At least by having that conflict, there's an opportunity to reconcile.'

When we are children, conflicts are handled in a more direct and supported manner. But, as adults, how we navigate conflict resolution is less clear, since it

> should know how to avoid conflict by now. 'Adults tend to be passive-aggressive

is assumed that we

and indirect,' explains Dr Franco. 'We think that by not addressing conflict we are saving the friendship by not causing friction but, in fact, we're actually making things a lot worse.'

My mind is pulled back to the receding tide of deleted words, my reluctance to share my feelings and the yawning absence of communication since that final conversation. Perhaps avoiding conflict *isn't* the way to maintain a healthy relationship. I realise that my strongest relationships are the ones where conflict isn't perceived as a



destructive force at all. With my brothers, for example, conflicts are frequent and firey. In these moments, our words are sharp, scraping along the boundary of our familial bond, knowing when to pull back where the boundary is thinnest. My brothers and I are fiercely close, and I know they will always be there for me. The same cannot always be said of friends. Psychologist and friendship expert Dr Irene S Levine reminds me that 'Friendships are voluntary relationships that should be reciprocal and satisfying to both parties.' These are bonds that we chose to form, unlike the bonds that tie us to our family.

'One of the major barriers to addressing problems with friends is we think they'll abandon us if we challenge them,' Dr Franco explains, 'but, ironically, when we don't address the problem, it tends to lead to the abandonment that we fear, because we don't get a chance to talk through conflict.'

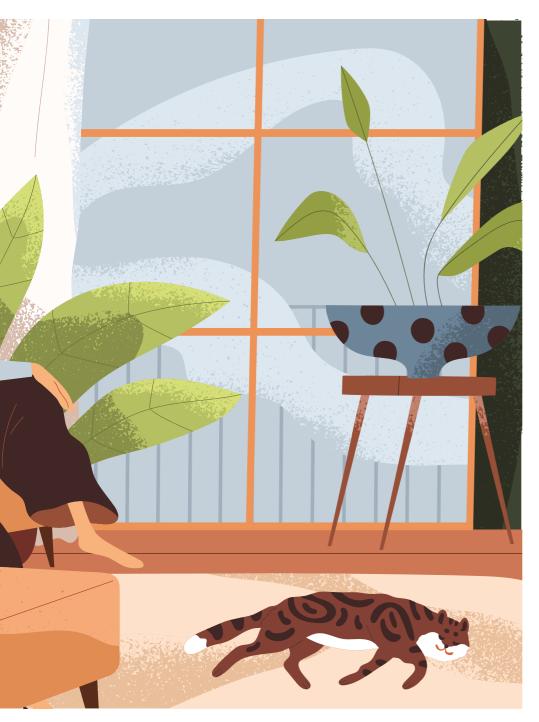
The relationships that we have with romantic partners are among some of our most intimate, largely owing to the way in which we allow ourselves to be vulnerable - whereas within our friendships, we are less likely to be this emotionally exposed. 'We think, "I don't want to burden my friends, so I'm not going to be vulnerable," says Dr Franco, 'but we are then missing out on feeling that sense of closeness and intimacy. So if we can see conflict as part of intimacy, that just means you have a close relationship with each other instead of it being a sign that you're going to be abandoned.' I ask Dr Franco if we ought to approach our friendships in the same way as we approach our romantic relationships. 'As adults, we're less likely to address problems within our friendships than in our romantic relationships,' she tells me, 'but we need to see our skills as transferable. Many of us have to learn how to work through conflict in our romantic relationships, and this is something we can bring to a friendship.'

So how do we set about resolving these conflicts? 'The worst thing is to let conflicts fester,' says Dr Levine. 'It's better to have the conversation when tempers have cooled down and both friends are relaxed. However, don't wait so long that both friends become more entrenched in their opinions.'

Dr Franco agrees: 'One of the benefits of friendships compared to romance is



"Many of us have to learn how to work through conflict in our romantic relationships, and this is something we can bring to a friendship"



that we don't have to try to work through our trigger while we're triggered. The added breathing space that we get in friendships gives us time to pause and bring our reactivity down. We can use that anger as a signal that we need to reflect, rather than a sign that we need to be reactive and yell.' I ask Dr Franco what we should be thinking about while we are having that reflective period before we confront the issue. 'We could ask ourselves questions like, "How am I going about this conversation? Am I ready to share my side but also hear the other person's side? Am I in a place to see this conversation as a way for us to grow and reconcile our friendship rather

than attack this person and tell them about themselves?'

Dr Levine adds: 'It helps to talk to another person in confidence (perhaps, a family member or another friend), one who has no stake in this friendship. Journalling can also help someone understand their feelings.'

Is my own friendship salvageable, or has it run its course? 'Big signs of when a friendship becomes unhealthy is when a friend isn't rooting for your success,' explains Dr Franco. 'You share an accomplishment and they bring you down. They're outright malicious. They betray your trust. They told you they'd hold something in confidence, and they

don't. They're not really trying to support you in your times of need and there's a breakdown in mutuality, so maybe they're only thinking about themselves.'

This has given me a lot to think about. I have had a period of reflection and I haven't yet confronted my friend about what is going on between us, yet it has been well over a year since we've spoken. Was there a breakdown in mutuality between us? I think perhaps there was. I believe that for a significant period of time preceding our distance, our friendship wasn't functioning in an equal way and this left me feeling disappointed and resentful. Without having confronted these feelings, however, I can't be sure if things could have been different.

What is mutual is the fact that neither one of us has attempted to contact the other. My birthday came and went with no text from them. On their birthday I refused to send a text. When I examined the reason for this uncharacteristically stubborn behaviour of mine, I found fear lurking beneath. I was scared to text them because I love them. If we speak again and they let me down again it will hurt again. This way feels safer. For now. I find myself mentally composing messages, words coming and going, apologies omitted, reinstated, emotions surprisingly raw in spite of the time that has passed, secretly hoping that they will be the one to message first.

#### NEXT STEPS

Read Platonic: How The Science Of Attachment Can Help you Make – and Keep – Friends by Dr Marisa G Franco (Pan Macmillan, £16.99), a jackpot of psychology research on forging and maintaining friendships.

Visit The Friendship Blog, created by Dr Irene S Levine, for resources and expert advice on navigating friendships at every life stage; thefriendshipblog.com Read Friendship Addict by Elizabeth Day (Fourth Estate, £16.99), the story of one woman's journey to understand why she's addicted to friendship.

# Our agony aunt, Mary Fenwick,

offers a new perspective on whatever is troubling you

## Am I wrong to turn a blind eye?

The neighbours are complaining about my daughter smoking weed. They don't like the smell, and seem very judgy about me as a parent. I have to be honest and say that it doesn't really bother me, because I'd much rather she was smoking at home, and I knew where she was and what she was up to, than going out and getting drunk. Am I acting irresponsibly? Should I be more concerned?

There are several strands here, and I'm not sure which you are most focused on. Is it your daughter's health, the legality, your relationship with your neighbours, or your parenting record? In similar circumstances, I looked to the independent website Frank, and I can't recommend it highly enough.

The information found there is non-judgemental and straight talking – for example, it will want to know how regularly your daughter is smoking, and whether it's socially with friends, or something that she relies on as an escape from her worries. In the latter case, your daughter might feel more justified, and there could be a longer-term concern about psychological addiction. If she's smoking marijuana with tobacco, she may have all the usual challenges of giving up smoking, too.

Meanwhile, whatever she's worrying about is still in the background, and it's probably your focus as a parent to help her deal with that. For ideas about opening that conversation, you could phone the Frank helpline yourself. The service is anonymous and confidential, and you'll get ideas about non-judgemental language.

In terms of legality, cannabis is an illegal, class B drug – but, in practice, having a small amount for your own personal use is not likely to be a police priority. She might get a fixed penalty notice, similar to a fine for littering.

Depending on your relationship with the neighbours, you might have a chat and let them know that you are also worried. But I'd only suggest this if you can treat the conversation on a practical level rather than getting into the morality.

In essence, I'm suggesting a focus on this as a health and relationship issue, and a prompt to help your daughter begin to think slightly more long-term. Anything that creates a weighty sense of shame is likely to close down communication and backfire on you both.

talktofrank.com; 0300 123 6600

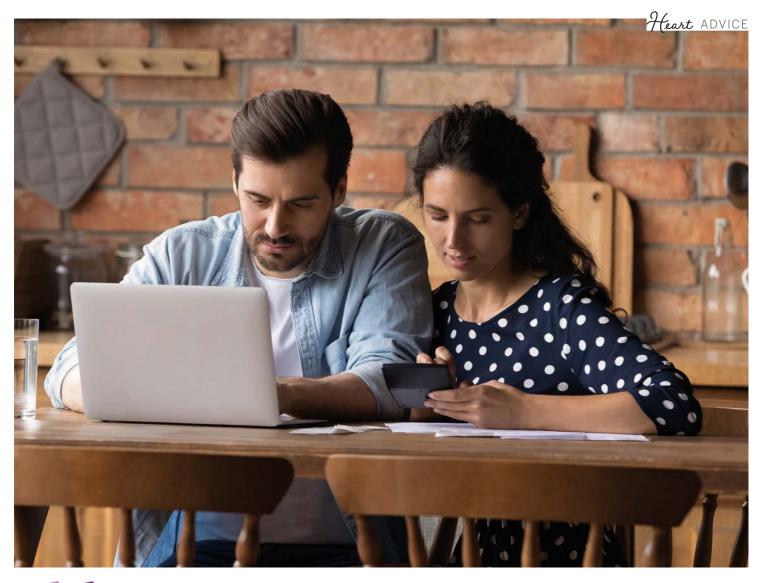


MARY FENWICK is a writer, speaker and executive coach. She is also a mother, divorcee and widow.

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







Q

My partner and I have very different views about money. For example, we went on a day out and he insisted we stopped a mile out of town to save on parking. As we walked, he said, 'Doesn't it feel good to save that money? Now we have more to spend on lunch.' But I would have gone for a nice lunch regardless. Now, my memory of the day is about the walking rather than the lunch. Can we get over this kind of thing?

The short answer is that you might not get over it if you mean: 'Can one of us convince the other to think differently, so we can stop having this conversation?' The longer answer is that it might not feel as biting as it does now, if you can grasp a better understanding of how you discuss money, and why it matters to each of you.

Research by The Gottman Institute says that in any long-term relationship only about one third of your arguments have a neat and tidy solution. The rest will come up again and again, and it's common for money to be on this list. As soon as you choose a person, you're also choosing

their set of unresolvable problems, and they'll be living with yours.

The challenge is to keep this in perspective, so having some sense of humour or lightness can really help. This might be what Gottman calls a repair attempt – 'any statement or action, silly or otherwise, that prevents negativity from escalating out of control'. How about singing an Abba line ('All the things I could do, If I had a little money'), or adopting the persona of a sitcom character (as long as it's genuine and affectionate)? If you can defuse the tension, you'll both be able to engage the problem-solving

parts of your brains better. Your real work involves understanding each other's deeper dreams. For instance, for one of you, money might be linked to 'My dad left me money when he died, but I'd rather it was good memories of days out with him'. You can see how a person with that attitude would clash with someone who feels 'I missed out on school trips because we were too poor'. The good news is that sharing these stories with each other is much more interesting than discussing the price of parking!

gottman.com/blog/make-repairattempts-partner-feels-loved/



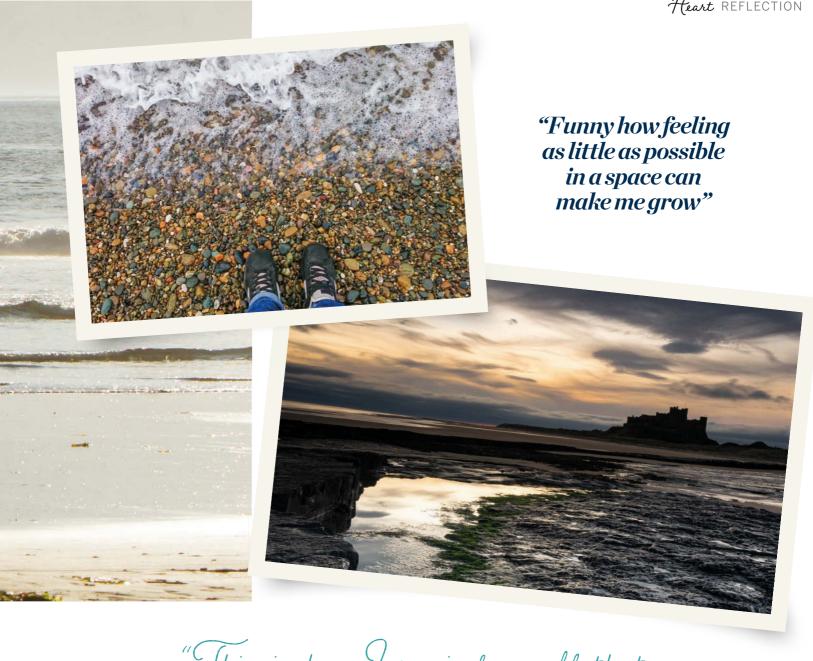
This morning, I sat at my desk, my brain stuffed with unhelpful thoughts. Life is currently full of appointments and jobs that push creativity into the shadows, but somehow I have to find a way back into the light. Writing my life has become a necessity: a way to discover who I am, to share experiences and attend to the voice inside me that is sometimes only a whisper. But today, I could notice only the dust on the leaves of my peace lily, as the tiredness settling into fine lines around my eyes was reflected back at me through my screen. Somehow, the beauty of the mundane that I have grown to love was missing, everything slightly fragile and out of place. My head can be a breeding ground for

My head can be a breeding ground for counterproductive thoughts. The seeds are planted by frequent interactions with health and education professionals who question my words and actions, and force me to defend myself. Much of my life is defined by my role as a mother and a carer, my heart wrapped up in girls who cannot conform and need me to advocate fiercely. I think I am a good mother, a thoughtful carer, but when I am told each week that my instincts are wrong or my actions insufficient, the seeds germinate. Perhaps my best is not good enough. Perhaps I am not good enough.

Over the past few years of learning to be alone, I have also been trying to understand that other people's perceptions of me are not who I am. Sometimes, the best way to remind myself of this is to step outside and allow myself to be buffeted by the breeze. I can't always do this because outside sometimes feels too hard for two of my children, but today is a lucky day. Today, a small daughter needs salt on her skin as much as I do.

At the beach, the sea shone grey under clouds glowing with trapped sunlight. Rose hips popped out against a hedge glistening under yesterday's rain. The sky was wide, and straightaway I felt small and insignificant in the best possible way; in the way that nothing matters except bare legs and the smell of damp seaweed. Depending on the tides, it can be hard to get in the waves, so we walked down a track towards a pool that is only revealed when the tide is low. My daughter slowly unfurled as we passed a field of cows, the grip of her hand softer and less full of fear. Clambering down a steep muddy bank towards the rocks, there was no one to tell us we were doing things wrong, and the absence of judgement was a balm.

I am sometimes scared when I swim in the sea, worried about what lies beneath. A bit like the way subtext in people's comments can cause more damage than the words themselves. Once, I saw a huge



## "This is how I remind myself that I am entitled to take up space in the world"

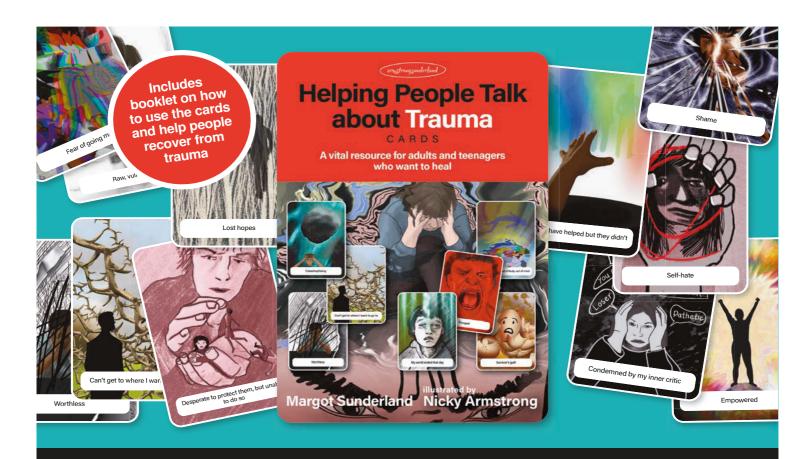
Lion's Mane jellyfish floating in the pool, spreading like a bloodstain across the surface, when a tiny sting is the worst it can do. Another time, tiny fish darted around my legs and nibbled at my toes, more curious than dangerous. This morning, I dipped my toe in and the water swirled a strange grey-blue, opaque and mysterious. It was impossible to determine how deep the pool was because my skin took on a cloudy quality as I lowered my body in and watched myself disappear.

Funny how feeling as little as possible

in a space can make me grow. Floating on my back, everything was sky and chill and the repetitive crunch of waves on rocks. This is how I can be mindful and slow down my busy brain. This is how I remind myself that I am entitled to take up space in the world, and that my words and feelings hold value. This is why I return to the icy fear again and again, to feel that odd push-pull between shrinking to nothing and expanding to take up all the room I deserve.

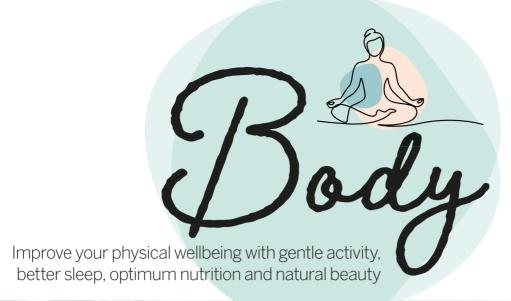
After our rock pool dip I felt sandy and wild, and the unhelpful thoughts had flown away with the oyster catchers. Once more, I felt able to draw upon my reality to be creative, to locate that part of my brain that allows me to dream.

Next week, my diary is full of appointments and phone calls that threaten to reframe me if I let them. But I will try to remember the rock pool's lack of judgement, the calm presence of a heron fishing nearby as the sun strains through the clouds. Maybe I will remember standing above the pool watching my reflection ripple and showing me exactly who I am.



Available from Amazon www.amazon.co.uk









## 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

### No more midnight feasts!

As the nights draw in and the weather gets gloomier, out go early alfresco suppers, and in come late dinners on the sofa in front of the TV. But new research has found that eating later at night actually makes you more hungry, burns fewer calories, and increases your

level of fat. The study by
Brigham and Women's
Hospital in the US,
published in the
journal Cell
Metabolism,
compared two
groups eating
exactly the same
meals, with one
eating early in the
day, the other
four hours later,
which was found
to have a negative

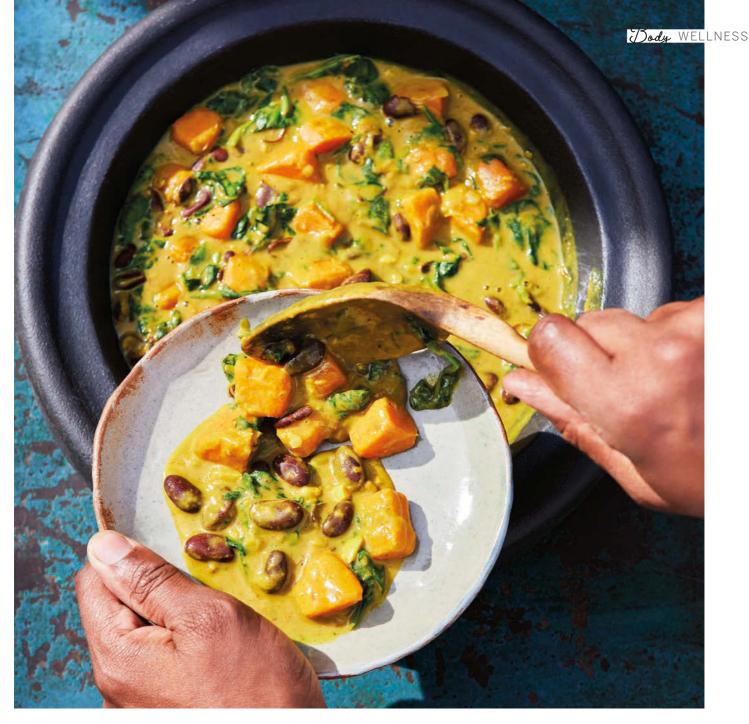
health impact.

## Homemade heroes

When you're short on time, it can be tempting to rely on ready-made shop-bought food, but a new study has given us yet another reason why it's best to avoid processed meals.

The research, from Florida Atlantic University, found a link between processed food and poor mental health. Looking at depression, the number of mentally unhealthy days, and the number of anxious days, it revealed that people who swerved this type of food reported better mental wellbeing.





#### **Peanut and sweet potato stew**

Serves 4-6

- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2.5cm piece of ginger, finely grated
- 2 tsp ground turmeric
- 1 tbsp ground cumin
- 1 tbsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp ground fenugreek seeds
- 2 sweet potatoes, peeled and chopped into 2.5cm cubes
- 400ml vegetable stock
- 400g can of red kidney beans, drained

- 2 tbsp peanut butter
- 2 mature bunches of spinach, washed and roughly chopped, coarse stalks removed
- Sea salt, to season
- Boiled rice, to serve

1 In a large saucepan, fry the onion in the vegetable oil. After 8 minutes, add the garlic and ginger, and cook for another couple of minutes before adding the spices, mixed with a little water to prevent them from burning. Stir and cook until the spices become aromatic. 2 Add the sweet potatoes and stir to coat, then pour in the stock and add

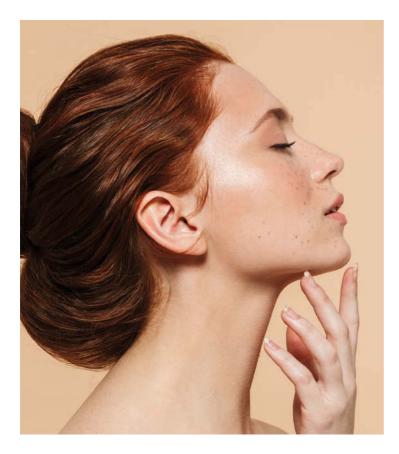
the beans and peanut butter. Put a lid on the pot and cook for 10–15 minutes, until the sweet potatoes are soft. 3 Remove the lid, mix in the spinach and leave for 5 minutes until cooked through. Taste, then add salt to your liking. Serve with boiled rice.



Extract from Motherland: A Jamaican Cookbook by Melissa Thompson (Bloomsbury, £26). Photography by Patricia Niven



## Look well



#### WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH...

Retinol

The so-called gold-standard ingredient when it comes to anti-ageing, retinol can actually help your skin whatever your age. Its superpower? This form of vitamin A speeds up cell renewal to plump skin, reduce fine lines, combat pigmentation and tackle spots. Retinol is normally formulated as a serum with different strengths available. Don't underestimate its potency, and start small. Opt for a low strength formula (0.1–0.3 per cent) and apply every other day, always at night. Over time, you can work your way up to a stronger formula and nightly use.

LA ROCHE-POSAY
VANDATION BY
SERVIN
CONCESTIVE ANY MERCAN
ANY ANY M

La Roche-Posay Retinol B3 Serum, £40; CeraVe Resurfacing Retinol Serum, £14. Both boots.com

#### NEW BRAND WE LOVE:

## Djusie

Hailing from Finland, this natural brand is powered by adaptogenic botanicals that work hard to tackle the signs of stress in the skin. Whether it's sensitivities, breakouts or lack of brightness, the three-part range, made up of a cleansing oil, essence and facial oil, is the simple routine you've been looking for. Designed to be used alongside facial massage, the range makes skincare a mindful moment to clear your head and connect with your body. *djusie.com* 



PICK OF THE PRODUCTS

#### Pai C-2 Believe Vitamin C Brightening Moisturizer, £49, paiskincare.com

Looking to get your daily dose of vitamin C – the ultimate brightening ingredient – in a sensitive skin-friendly formula? One of our favourite organic brands, Pai, has delivered the goods. This light and silky moisturiser is formulated with an all-natural vitamin C, alongside upcycled bilberry extract to strengthen the skin.





## Bit of a stretch

## TRUST YOUR INTUITION

Hollywood child actress Rachel Hurd-Wood swapped the red carpet for a yoga mat in her new life as a Pilates teacher and mum of two

Some people enjoy getting a sweat on through running, team sports or yoga. Others drag their reluctant Lululemon-ed

selves to the gym and push through a punitive workout, because it's what they think they 'should' be doing. Or flap about on the cross-trainer while swiping ferociously through their socials, totally disengaged.

I used to fall firmly into the punitive/ checked-out camp. My career, combined with a natural disposition towards extremes, meant disordered eating haunted me throughout my teens and

## THREE TIPS FOR INTUITIVE MOVEMENT:

- Free yourself from the pressure of 'should'.
- 2Choose a form of movement that you enjoy; prioritise feeling good over aesthetics.
- Remember that all movement counts and there's nothing wrong with rest.

early 20s. Moderation in any form evaded me, with my fluctuating weight dependent on how 'in control' I was with food. Exercise was a loathed activity, undertaken as self-imposed punishment.

Fast forward to now and I'm a Pilates teacher who loves being active and helping others feel the same way. So, what changed? I healed my relationship with food and body image and, subsequently, found forms of movement I truly enjoy.

Intuitive movement is being able to connect with your body and listen to its internal cues: from what type of exercise, how long for, how gentle or intense. There's no right or wrong. No rigid structure or rules. The focus is on how it makes you feel, rather than look. By removing the emphasis on the external, we can tune into what our body actually needs on any given day. In turn, this is way more likely to foster a positive relationship with exercise. Best yet, there's a much greater likelihood vou'll find longevity in your \*Gwyneth Paltrow voice\* movement journey, as you won't have burned out in a New Year's Resolution bootcamp frenzy.

Maybe one day you're feeling fierce and in need of an up-tempo HIIT workout, maybe the next a calming Yin yoga class is more your speed. Maybe you need the sofa and the company of Ben and Jerry. Your energy, both mental and physical, ebbs and flows; by tuning into your body and respecting what it needs, choosing how and when to move is so much easier and freer.

# WORDS: LARISSA CHAPMAN. IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCH

## FIND PEACE OF MIND THIS FLU SEASON

Enjoy festive gatherings, embrace family and friends, and live life to the fullest with our guide to managing post-Covid angst

he hum of laughter and clinking of glasses at the office drinks, the warmth of hugs from extended family as they pile into the living room, fire crackling and mulled wine steaming as children play during the firework display... there's so much to love about winter and the events it brings with it. We've missed out on a lot of laughs over the past two years, and many of us are itching to get back to

it – but perhaps with a little more trepidation than before. With months of masks, hand gels, social distancing and restrictions, it's only natural that many of us are on high alert since Covid. For some,

the thought of navigating a fresh winter flu season only adds to the anxiety. Whether it's festive family gatherings, bustling shops or packed out trains, many will be wondering how to handle these situations in a post-Covid world. Suddenly, it's not only our physical health we have to manage, but our mental wellbeing too. Covid-19 has left us feeling anxious when it comes to winter bugs – the common cold that we may have shrugged off without a second thought in a pre-Covid era now fills us with dread.

'If you've found yourself experiencing higher anxiety levels since the pandemic, particularly around how to avoid catching Covid or other viruses, you're not alone,' says clinical psychologist Dr Aria Campbell-Danesh. 'Recent research has shown that many people have been affected by the pandemic, which has caused a significant spike in anxiety related concerns,' he explains.

However, despite the worries, there's plenty of reason to stay positive and try to overcome them, as gathering with family

groups, and it cannot be underestimated how beneficial getting together with your loved ones is for health and wellbeing.'

#### **Break free**

'Everyone will be moving through this unprecedented chapter at different rates,' says Dr Campbell-Danesh. 'Be kind to yourself and practise compassion. Adjust your internal monologue and speak to yourself as you would to a good friend.

Reassure yourself that you're not wrong for feeling the way you do, and take small steps to manage your anxieties.

'It's okay to continue to wear a mask or use hand

gel if that makes you more comfortable. However, if you feel these measures are holding you back from living life to the full, try to ease yourself away from them' advises Dr Campbell-Danesh. 'For example, continue using hand gel, but reduce the number of times you use it throughout the day. When wearing a mask, reserve it for those times when an area is particularly crowded, and try to go without when outdoors or when shops and spaces aren't so busy. These tiny steps will still allow you to feel secure, while helping you feel a little freer and more "normal".'

"It cannot be underestimated how beneficial getting together with your loved ones is for health and wellbeing"

and friends is good for you, and essential to your mental and physical wellbeing. Humans are sociable creatures who thrive being around others, as chartered psychologist Dr Meg Arroll explains: 'Studies show that social isolation substantially harms both physical and mental health, with new research demonstrating that loneliness and associated feelings of depression can age us faster than smoking,' she says. 'This is why it's so important to manage health anxiety, so we can interact and connect with others. We are social creatures who have evolved to live and function in



#### And breathe...

'When the sound of coughing and sniffling on the train sends you into a spin, stay calm and focus on your breathing,' adds Dr Campbell-Danesh. 'Notice your chest rising and falling as you breathe in and out, listen to the sounds your nose and mouth make. If your breathing is fast or laboured due to anxiety, try to slow things down if you can - breathe in for three seconds and out for five. This should help shift your focus from what's going on around you and bring you into the moment. Before you know it, it'll be your stop.'

at our fingertips, the brain's natural tendency to reassure itself can go into overdrive, leading to negative thought patterns and anxiety-behaviour loops, something which has only been heightened since the pandemic.

'To break this unhelpful pattern,' says Dr Arroll, 'you need to curb the health doom-scrolling. Before reaching for your phone or tablet, ask yourself this: "Am I concerned enough to see my GP?" If the answer is no, chat through your worries

with friends and family or visit your local pharmacist to explore some over-thecounter remedies, rather than jumping headfirst down a rabbit hole of online diagnosis. If the answer is yes, pick up your phone and instead of Googling your symptoms, make an appointment to see your GP or nurse practitioner, and speak to them before browsing the web. Taking control in this way will help keep your health anxieties at bay.'

dr-aria.com; drmegarroll.com

#### Dr Google won't see you now

'When we're worried about our health, our mind seeks out reassurance,' explains Dr Arroll. 'Often this is a positive and productive process, which leads us to visit a medical professional who can check our symptoms and offer treatment. However, now that we all have Dr Google



## TOP 5 WINTER HEALTH TIPS

One of the most helpful ways to deal with health anxiety, particularly around Covid and flu viruses, is to arm yourself with the facts and understand what works. Dr Ross Walton shares his top tips to minimise virus transmission this winter, without having to lock yourself away from loved ones...

#### To mask or not to mask?

'Masks can help bring down the overall risk of the amount of virus exposure and transmission,' explains Dr Walton, 'but it should be a personal choice, with no judgement or stigma on either side, especially if it reduces stress and makes you more comfortable.

'Assess each situation individually as to whether you feel you need a mask. There are many factors including size of space, number of people and duration of time that impact whether you feel the need to use one; there are no hard or fast rules.'

#### BOOST VENTILATION

'Having effective airflow indoors is
proven to help lower infection risk by 50
per cent,' says Dr Walton. 'Keep a window
or two ajar when entertaining at home if you
can, and leave internal doors open to allow
air to circulate from room to room.
Public transport can be a little trickier
to navigate, but opening at least
one window can help.'

#### Increase hand washing

'Washing your hands is one of the most effective and simple ways to reduce viral infection and transmission,' explains Dr Walton. 'It's most effective when you wash thoroughly and for the appropriate amount of time - at least 20 seconds. A hand sanitiser is a useful alternative when hand washing isn't possible, or you're in contact with touch points that are used by many people in public places - but you don't need to use it excessively."





"Vitamins C and D are key,
but maintaining levels can be
hard — consider supplements
to boost your levels"



## FUTURE PROOF YOUR BRAIN

You are what you eat, so the saying goes, and it's particularly true when it comes to brain health, discovers Kellie Gillespie-Wright

our brain is, quite literally, who you are. It's the odd-looking container of your thoughts and feelings and memories, and it controls your ability to communicate, make decisions, problem-solve, and live a productive and full life. So it's a wise idea to keep it in peak condition!

Luckily, we're learning more by the day about what impacts our brain health, and it's becoming clear that lifestyle is the key. And while most people probably already know that eating lots of fruits and veggies (organic, if possible) is good for our bodies, we're now discovering that maintaining a healthy diet, rich in vitamins and minerals, is just as important for our minds.

So how do we begin to care for and future proof our brains? That's where nutritional psychiatry comes in.

When you stop to think about it, your brain is always 'on'; it works hard 24/7, even while you're asleep, which means it requires a constant supply of fuel. That fuel comes from the foods you eat, and what's in that fuel makes all the difference.

'People are often surprised to hear that although it only accounts for about two to three per cent of your total body weight, your brain takes up around 20–25 per cent of your daily energy requirement,' explains psychologist and author of *How To Build A Healthy Brain* (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99) Kimberley Wilson. 'But it's not just about the calories your brain needs to function

optimally; the brain uses vitamins and minerals in all of its cellular activity, and all that activity creates a huge demand for nutrients. And, if you start running low on those, your brain simply will not be able to function properly,' says Wilson.

With that high energy demand comes a need for a steady supply of nutrients to keep it functioning properly, and when it doesn't receive these nutrients, mood and mental functioning can be impaired.

'Just as a car requires the correct fuel to run optimally, the brain requires the correct fuel to function well, and deficits in nutrients can exert a negative impact on concentration, memory, mood and energy levels,' says Alice Benskin, head of scientific research and human nutrition at the charity Food for the Brain Foundation.

There are a few different reasons for this, but the one that has gained the most traction over the past few years involves the gut-brain axis. Scientists have discovered that the brain and the gastrointestinal system are intricately linked via neurotransmitters, including serotonin and GABA, which help control depression, fear, and anxiety, and central to mood regulation and brain health is a happy, healthy gut microbiome.

'The health of our gut microbiome, and the balance of the bacteria therein, is paramount for brain health,' says Benskin. 'Key neurotransmitters are synthesised by gut bacteria and,



Mood Company.

foodforthebrain.org



therefore, imbalances in the bacteria in the gut may affect production of these vital neurotransmitters.'

Because the foods we eat have a major impact on our gut microbes, the first step is on the end of your fork. To begin with, know your enemy. Eating a poor diet, low in nutrients and fibre, can cause inflammation that can seriously affect your mood and trigger feelings of depression and anxiety.

Processed foods, which are often high in sugar and refined carbohydrates, may "Eating a poor diet can affect your mood and trigger feelings of depression and anxiety" deliver a quick rush of dopamine but, in the long run, research shows that a junk-food diet, high in sugar, refined carbs, unhealthy fats and processed foods, can contribute to a weakening of the gut barrier lining, allowing food particles to leak out into the bloodstream where they do not belong. Because these food particles are out of place in the bloodstream, off go the alarm bells of our inflammatory response. When poor-quality foods are a part of your daily diet, the body maintains this low





level of alarm, and it is believed that this is a risk factor for mental health problems such as depression.

But back to the good news: the headline is, eating gut-friendly foods that contain lots of fibre, healthy fats and probiotics can help power your brain and lead to better psychological wellbeing.

'For the most part, people simply are not eating enough fruits and vegetables, organic or otherwise,' says Wilson. 'Only 8 per cent of children and 27 per cent of adults achieve their five-a-day. So, for most people, the emphasis should just be on increasing their intake of fresh produce in any way that is affordable and enjoyable.'

cabbage, onions and Jerusalem artichokes are great, and fermented or probiotic foods (such as kefir, kombucha, kimchi and sauerkraut) are also essential for supporting gut and brain health.'

In recent years, an anti-inflammatory diet, such as the Mediterranean diet, has been associated with better brain functioning, including enhanced memory and improved attention, but Kimberley recommends paying special attention to a modified Mediterranean-style diet called the MIND diet, which has been shown to

have a range of neuroprotective benefits, including slowing brain-ageing by around seven years, and even preserving memory and thinking skills in those who already have some of the early signs of dementia.

The key foods included in the MIND diet are leafy green vegetables, berries, nuts, olive oil, whole grains, fish, beans, poultry and a little red wine: all rich in vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.

And, of course, there are things to avoid, such as butter, cheese, red meat, fried foods, sweets and pastries.



While the emphasis really is on an overall dietary intake, Wilson goes on to point out the growing evidence that a broad range of micronutrients can support brain health and stress resilience, too, because vitamins and minerals often have special roles in the brain. And a few star players deserve a mention due to their role in supporting the gut-brain axis, synthesising neurotransmitters and protecting the brain.

Omega-3 is one; it's a major building block of the brain and an inflammation modulator that can't be synthesised by our bodies but plays a key role in sharpening memory and improving mood, as well as protecting your brain with anti-inflammatory properties and fighting oxidative stress. Fatty fish, from salmon steaks to tinned sardines, is a rich source of omega-3 fatty acids, and for people following a vegetarian or vegan

diet, seaweed, algae and seeds such as chia and hemp are prime sources, so be sure to add some spirulina and flaxseed to your smoothies.

Next up are the B vitamins. There are eight essential B vitamins, and low levels can lead to depression. Deficiencies in B vitamins can also contribute towards neurological disorders such as memory loss, mood disturbance and cognitive decline. 'It's essential to be getting B vitamins by consuming a wide array of vegetables,' says Benskin, and she recommends plenty of fruit and whole grains, along with good-quality sources of protein, such as eggs, poultry, fish, chickpeas, lentils, beans, nuts and seeds.

Another important contender is iron, and new research on iron levels in brain tissue has found that the mineral could be more crucial in brain development and function than previously thought. It is involved in many biological processes in the brain, including oxygen transportation, DNA synthesis, and neurotransmitter synthesis, and, as Benskin points out, 'a deficiency may increase the risk of experiencing anxiety and depression, as well as autism and ADHD.'

Iron is mostly found in red meats but some plant-based sources include beans, pulses, legumes and dark green veg, such as kale and broccoli. Last up is magnesium, and magnesium L-threonate in particular, which is essential for improved memory, focus, and mental clarity. Magnesium also has a calming effect on our brain because of its role in regulating our stress-response system. 'You can increase magnesium levels through increasing your intake of green vegetables, and also consuming dark chocolate (85 per cent and above) or raw, unrefined cacao with no sugar added,' says Benskin.

So, the science is clear that, by taking a whole-body approach to brain health, we can feed and future proof our brains.

You could start by paying attention to how eating different foods makes you feel, not just in the moment, but during the next day. Try cutting out processed foods for two to three weeks and see how you feel. Then slowly introduce foods back into your diet, one by one, and take note of any changes.

When some people try this they cannot believe how much better they feel both physically and emotionally, and how much worse they then feel when they reintroduce the foods that are known to enhance inflammation.

Changes won't happen overnight, but if you start by mixing a variety of plant-based foods into your diet, you'll be on the right path towards looking after your brain for the long term.

"Eating gut-friendly foods that contain lots of fibre, healthy fats and probiotics can help power your brain and lead to better psychological wellbeing"

# GATHER ROUND!

Feed the family – and nourish the soul – with food meant for sharing; homemade, happy-making meals from Joe Swash's new book, *Joe's Kitchen* 

#### Caramelised Onion and Tomato Tart

I didn't think I could make stuff like tarts before I went on Celebrity MasterChef – but look at me now! Nadia Sawalha is a good friend, and she was such an amazing support to me when I was on the show. She'd give me loads of good advice on things like making good pastry. For this tart, make sure you cook the onions for a really long time, so they get all soft and delicious.'

#### Serves 4

- 1 portion shortcrust pastry (see right), or 450–500g shop-bought pastry
- Plain flour, for dusting

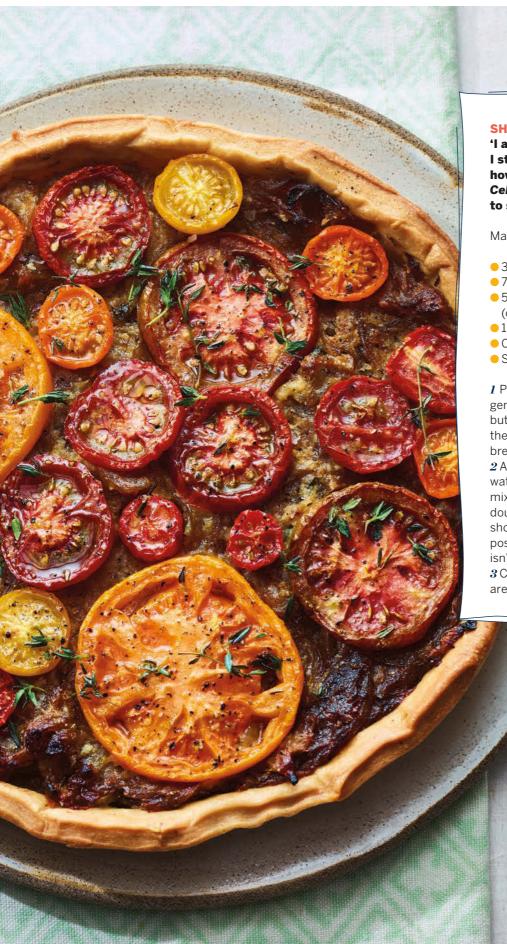
#### For the filling:

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 15g butter
- 3-4 medium onions (about 500g), finely sliced
- 1 tbsp sherry vinegar
- ½ tsp demerara sugar (optional)
- 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 large sprig of thyme, leaves picked, or 1 scant tsp dried thyme
- 2 tbsp Dijon mustard
- 100g Gruyère or Comté, grated
- 50g Parmesan, grated
- 500g mixed tomatoes, thickly sliced or halved
- Salt

*I* Preheat your oven to 180°C/160°C fan/gas 4. Put a baking tray into the oven to heat up. Roll out the pastry on a floured

surface and use it to line a 25cm round fluted tin. Leave some pastry hanging over the edge as it will shrink a little. Prick the pastry all over with a fork, then place in the fridge to chill for 15 minutes. 2 Cover the pastry with a piece of baking paper, then add some baking beans or dried beans to weigh it down. Place the tin on the heated baking tray and bake for 15 minutes. Remove the beans and paper and bake for another 5 minutes, then remove from the oven and leave to cool. 3 Heat the olive oil and butter in a large frying pan. When the butter has melted and foamed, add the onions and fry them very gently for 30–45 minutes until soft and golden. Add the sherry vinegar and sprinkle with the sugar, if using. Stir until the sugar has dissolved and looks slightly sticky. Stir in the garlic and most of the thyme, then cook for another 2-3 minutes. 4 Cool the onions - the quickest way is to transfer them to a large bowl rather than leaving them in the hot pan. Stir in the mustard and cheeses, making sure that they are evenly distributed and not clumped together. Spoon everything evenly into the pastry case. Arrange the tomatoes on top, keeping them as close together as possible. Brush with oil and sprinkle with salt and more thyme. 5 Bake in the preheated oven for 20-25 minutes until the tomatoes have softened and are lightly browned. Remove from the oven and leave to stand until almost room temperature before serving.





#### **SHORTCRUST PASTRY**

'I always used to buy pastry – and I still do sometimes - but I learned how to make it myself while on Celebrity MasterChef. And, I have to say, it is better.'

Makes 450-500g

- 300g plain flour
- 75g unsalted butter, chilled and cubed
- 50g lard, chilled and cubed (or another 50g unsalted butter)
- 1 egg yolk
- Chilled water
- Salt

1 Put the flour in a bowl and add a generous pinch of salt along with the butter and lard, if using. Rub the fat into the flour until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs.

2 Add the egg yolk and some chilled water, a tablespoon at a time, until the mixture clumps together into a firm dough. One of the keys to really good short pastry is adding as little water as possible but making sure your dough isn't too crumbly.

3 Cover and chill the pastry until you are ready to use it.

> "Mealtimes aren't just about eating - they are the calm after the storm, a moment of clarity; that time to talk and share the day"



#### Mushroom Risotto

'I didn't like mushrooms as a child and wouldn't eat them. Much later, when I was in the jungle for I'm a Celebrity..., the basket would come down with everyone's food and it would be kangaroo tail or something. But Timmy Mallett, another contestant, was a vegetarian and he'd be given some wild mushrooms. He'd fry them up and I just had to try some - they smelled so good. After that, poor old Timmy had to share his mushrooms with me every night. Now, one of my favourite things is a good mushroom risotto.'

#### Serves 4-6

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 50g butter
- 1 small onion or shallot, finely chopped
- 1 leek, finely chopped
- 300g mushrooms, finely chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, very finely chopped
- 1 large sprig of thyme, leaves picked
- 400g risotto rice
- 100ml white wine or Vermouth
- 1.5l chicken or mushroom stock
- 50g Parmesan, grated, plus extra to serve
- Salt and black pepper

#### For the garnish:

- 15g butter
- 250g mixed mushrooms, sliced if large
- chopped

1 Heat the olive oil and half the butter in a large sauté pan. Add the onion or shallot and the leek, and cook very gently, stirring, until soft and translucent. 2 Add the mushrooms to the pan. Turn up the heat and fry until they have given out their liquid and look dry but glossy. Add the garlic and thyme and stir for a couple more minutes.

- 3 Add the rice and stir for a couple of minutes until glossy with butter. Season with salt and pepper. Pour in the wine or Vermouth and let it bubble away until almost completely evaporated.
- 4 Add a large ladleful of the hot stock. Stir constantly but slowly until most of the liquid has been absorbed by the rice, then continue to add ladlefuls of stock in the same way until the rice has plumped up and is al dente and the sauce around it is creamy. You may have a small amount of the stock left.
- 5 Add the remaining butter and the Parmesan and beat it into the risotto - this will make the risotto extra creamy. Taste and adjust the seasoning if necessary. Cover and keep warm. 6 Place a frying pan over a high heat and add the butter. When it is foaming, add the mixed mushrooms and fry quickly until well browned. Add the garlic and stir for a couple of minutes, then







#### Yule Log

'When I was little, I was easily put off some foods by the name – I didn't like the idea of cheesecake or mince pies. They didn't sound right to me. But a yule log had everything I liked - sponge, chocolate, cream. I'd eat that. We'd always have it when we went to my nanny Betty's on Christmas Eve, and it was almost as exciting as Christmas!'

#### For the honeycomb:

- Oil, for greasing
- 175g caster sugar
- 50g golden syrup
- 25g honey
- Pinch of salt
- 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda

#### For the ganache:

- 300ml double cream
- 150g dark chocolate, broken up
- 100g milk chocolate, broken up

#### For the sponge:

- Oil, for greasing
- 4 large eggs, separated
- 100g caster sugar
- 50g self-raising flour
- 35g cocoa powder





Extract taken from Joe's Kitchen: Homemade Meals For A Happy Family by Joe Swash (Pavilion Books, £22). Photography by Dan Jones

#### For the filling:

- 200ml double cream
- 75g honeycomb
- 4 tbsp jam (black or sour cherry, or apricot)

#### To decorate:

- Shards of honeycomb
- Any Christmassy decorations, such as edible gold stars

I First, get the honeycomb started, if making your own. Lightly oil a shallow, 1-litre dish and line it with baking paper. Put the sugar, golden syrup and honey in a medium saucepan with a pinch of salt and 50ml of water. Slowly heat until everything has dissolved, then continue to cook, stirring, until the mixture has turned a rich golden brown - it should read 149-150°C on a thermometer. 2 Remove the pan from the heat and whisk in the bicarbonate of soda. Pour it into your prepared dish. Don't touch it once you have poured it out, as this might make it deflate. Leave to cool and harden for at least 2 hours. Break up into large chunks or shards.

**3** Next, make the ganache. Put the cream and chocolate in a heatproof

bowl and place it over a pan of simmering water. Heat, stirring regularly, until the chocolate has completely melted and combined with the cream – it should start to thicken. Pour into a container and leave to cool. Transfer to the fridge to chill.

4 For the sponge, grease a 33 x 23cm Swiss roll tin with a little oil and line it with baking paper. Preheat your oven to 180°C/160°C fan/gas 4.Put the egg yolks and sugar in a bowl and whisk until the mixture is thick and foamy. You should be able to make a trail across the surface with the whisk and it will hold for a few seconds. In a separate bowl, whisk the egg whites to stiff peaks. 5 Sieve the flour and cocoa together into the egg yolk and sugar mixture. Carefully fold them in until you have no streaks, and the mixture is a deep brown. Take a couple of spoonfuls of the egg whites and fold them into the mixture to help loosen it a bit, then add the remainder and gently fold in until there are no streaks.

6 Scrape the batter into the prepared tin and smooth over the top to make sure it is even. Bake in the oven for 8–10

minutes, checking after 8 minutes. Be careful not to overcook as if the sponge dries out it will be harder to roll.

7 Carefully remove the cake from the tin and upturn it onto a fresh piece of baking paper. Peel off the paper from the underside of the cake. Cover with a tea towel and leave to stand for 5 minutes.

8 Roll up the cake, still in the baking paper. It rolls better while still a little warm and it will be less likely to crack when you re-roll later.

9 Whisk the cream for the filling until thick and quite stiff. Stir in the honeycomb. Then unroll the sponge and spread with jam. Add the cream, spreading as evenly as you can - this is best done with a palette knife. Roll up the sponge again, making sure it isn't so tight that the cream oozes out. 10 Remove the ganache from the fridge. If it is still very soft, put it in the freezer for 5–10 minutes, then beat to loosen. Spread it over the sponge, then chill. Remove from the fridge and make lines along the logs with a cocktail stick or tip of a knife to make it look like bark. Add shards of honeycomb and any other decorations you like.

# Become a health coach, and change lives

Are you fascinated with nutrition and natural ways to be healthy? Would you love to have the skills to improve the health, happiness and wellbeing of others? Perhaps you would like to change your own health and find a brand-new purpose in life?

Then consider a new career as a Health Coach, one of the fastest growing professions in the UK. You can be qualified and making a difference to yourself and others in less than a year.



I have never experienced anything close to this course - partly because the team are so passionate - what I saw on the live training was life changing. You have empowered us so we can empower others. So professional, but so person-centred and a feeling of being part of the HCA 'family' too.

#### WHAT IS HEALTH COACHING?

Have you ever made New Year's resolutions to improve your health or fitness and found, like 85% of us that by the 3rd week in January they are a thing of the past? It can be difficult to make positive changes to our health and stick to them. A Health Coach works alongside clients to re-think the way they live and create a brand new set of lifestyle habits that lead to living a more vibrant and energetic life. Health Coaches then support clients and hold them accountable to achieve their goals and enjoy a new found level of health and wellness.

#### Why are Health Coaches needed now more than ever?

With spiralling statistics for preventable diseases such as heart disease, obesity and cancer, there is more awareness about the changes we need to make to avoid certain 'lifestyle' related diseases and prevention is always better than cure; but how do we change and where can we get the right support? People must take a more active role in their own healthcare and this is where a Health Coach comes in, Health Coaches can

educate people on how to be healthy and importantly, then help inspire and motivate them to change their lives for the better. Health Coaching is a 6 billion dollar profession in the US and has more recently taken off in the UK as we recognise an area of healthcare that has not yet had sufficient focus — mindset and behaviour change. That's exactly how a health coach can help.

#### Could you be a good Health Coach?

Most Health Coaches who train with us have their own story that led them to the profession. This could be their own health reaching crisis point or the sadness and frustration of seeing those who matter to them suffer when so much could be done to help them. Whatever story brings people to us, the common theme is a deep desire to do something positive to change the quality of the lives of others, a fascination with natural ways to promote health and wellness and a strong desire to work in this field and do something that really matters. Does this resonate with you?

#### Become a Health Coach with the Health Coaches Academy.

Founders Carolyn St John Loder and Ann Garry and their expert team have been Health Coaching in the

UK since 2003 and provide a thorough and professional training pathway to becoming a highly skilled professional Health Coach.



The HCA Health Coaching Diploma course is part-time and flexible with a blend of online, distance learning and 6 days of in-person live training. There are 6 intakes per year and the next course starts 26th September 2022.

Scan the QR code below, to join one of our free events or book a personal call to discover health coaching for yourself.







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







encapsulates the idea of a perfectly clear mind and an unpreoccupied heart, free from disturbance and thoughts. It is a state that can emerge only when the mind and body become flawlessly connected as one. The body is part of the mind and the mind is part of the body. In other words, the body is the continuation of the mind and the mind is the continuation of the body.

An awareness of mushin can be achieved by being in the present moment. This could be during meditation, calligraphy practice, having a cup of tea, performing any of the '-do' arts, playing musical instruments, or simply walking in a forest. Your body and mind are in sync and flowing moment by moment; you will feel lighter for sure, and an absolute inner silence. This can be for a short while or last for a longer period of time. It's when the ki energy – our life resource – can also flow more lightly. You feel happy.

In order to sense mushin, we need to unite mind and body. First, we should relax as much as we can. We can do this by focusing deeply on our breathing and letting go of the tension in our body little by little. And then we can slowly start to become aware of our senses and pay attention to the finer sensations. It is really like meditation. Yes, you can meditate with calligraphy. Because to calligraph in a proper, mindful way can connect together the wonder of your senses, body and the whole universe – thereby creating a true sense of mushin and helping your ki flow in the present moment.

Ki energy is our life resource, the nucleus of our wellbeing and our inner energy. To access it, first check your posture. Make yourself comfortable and stable, whether you are sitting on the floor, a cushion, or a chair. Your bottom should be fully seated. Check that your spine and middle line – the core of your body – are steady. Straighten your back, and relax your shoulders. Imagine that your spine is hanging from the sky above you and that you are pushing up at the sky with the top of your head. Be conscious not to arch your back too much.

Lift up each of your arms, one at a time, exposing the armpit and reaching up in order to open up that side of your body. Your fingers and arm are stretched long. Do this three times on each side.

Now, raise your shoulders high up toward your ears and hold for a few moments. Slowly relax and let your shoulders drop while you breathe out at the same time. Repeat this three times to release any tension.

You will notice that tension is fading and a sense of lightness is emerging. We need this sense of lightness in shodo, as this means your ki energy can flow now much more easily through your upper body.

Now, let's check the neck area. Allow your neck to move back and forth, and then gently to the right and left. Do this three times and then circle your neck in both a clockwise and anti-clockwise direction three times. If you have any stiffness or chronic pain, stay



with a small circle, acknowledging and accepting the painful area at this stage. When you practise, acknowledge and move with an awareness of any pain, rather than trying to ignore it.

Next, breathe in and out to expand and open up your chest and rib-cage, so these areas feel wide open.

Now, loosen all the joints from the fingers to the shoulders, making sure there are no blockages between your fingertips and the navel area of the hara, so the path for the ki energy flow is totally free.

Next, let's check our breathing. Breathe in and out deeply through your nose, using natural abdominal breathing, which is an important part of meditation. Place your hand below your navel and check that your lower abdomen expands and contracts as you breathe.

Now your body and mind are relaxed, it's time to become aware of your own ki and learn how to activate this energy. First, check the middle of your fingertip pads closely, and find the centre of the fingerprint patterns, where there is a small whorl or the middle point of a loop or arch.





Now bring the fingertips of your left and right hands together, and overlap the central fingertip points as precisely as possible. Focus on the contact and rub your fingertips gently and slowly together. No pressure or speed is needed. You can close your eyes while rubbing your fingertips if you wish.

After a minute or so, check the warmth of your fingertips but without making further skin contact: place your fingers maybe 1 to 2cm away from your face. If you feel the warmth pouring out from the fingertips, this is your ki energy, your life resource. If you can only feel this warmth very faintly, then keep rubbing your fingertips together a little longer.

When you are ready, breathe in and out a few times. Close your eyes, tuck your chin, and lightly touch the tip of your tongue to the base of your upper front teeth for three to five seconds.

Open your eyes and rub your palms together, and lightly touch your face, neck, shoulders and arms, as if you are showering ki energy over your skin and body.

Through shodo practice we can bring ki energy out of our body and let it flow onto the paper, and in this way our energy becomes instantly visible. In order to assist this manifestation of energy, visualise the path that your ki energy follows from your navel to your shoulder, elbow, wrist and hand, and fingertips. Think of the hara navel point as being an energy source, where an unlimited amount of ki can arise. This focused visualisation will help you to be clearly aware of your energy flow and to be in the present moment. By feeling this subtle energy, which we don't normally feel, we can stop negative thoughts from arising and regain a sense of 'here and now'.

Stay in the flow – which means this energy movement of ki. Take your time and enjoy your every flow of ki. Where the focus goes, the energy flows!



#### **WORK IN PROGRESS**

# How can I frame my skills and experience?

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

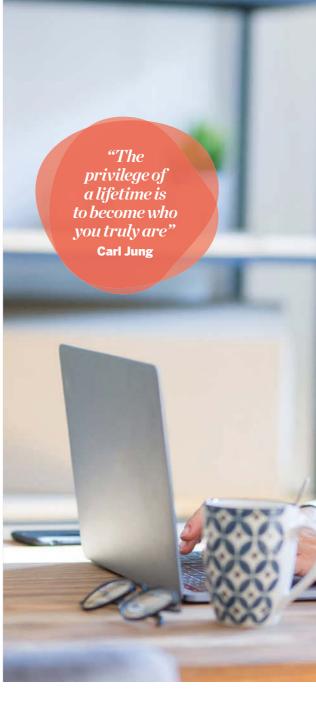
I haven't had a proper job for 15 years, and I feel the time is now right to take on a contracted role - but I don't know where to start.

I've been doing freelance graphic design work, and while I'm proud of myself for making a living and supporting my children since my partner left, I'm worried that when my youngest child leaves home it won't be a good idea to be both living and working on my own. Office work also looks more appealing now that employers have become a bit more flexible. But what do people look for in a CV these days? Should I be honest about my work history, or will I look too old and out of touch?

The fear you are talking about – 'no one wants to hire someone my age' – is the number-one concern of women in your position, according to the network Women Returners. Others include 'I won't be able to get to grips with new technology', and 'My skills are no longer relevant'. But the fact that you have carried on working suggests that your skills are still in demand; not only that, but you are motivated and resilient.

CV consultant Jaqui Winston started her business ten years ago because many of her friends at the school gate lacked confidence about going back to work. She applies her background in sales and marketing, and says it's crucial to be honest: 'If you start tweaking things, you'll trip yourself up in an interview.'

Your CV is a business marketing document, and you have two options you can either write it based on your skills, or on chronology. The latter is less common now, since many people have that information on their LinkedIn profile. Winston says that even without meeting you, she could start writing about your skills [see panel, right]: 'Multitasking in a phenomenal way by single parenting while running a business, securing clients, keeping them happy and delivering to deadlines, not to mention negotiating and probably managing conflict, too ... 'Include a personal profile at the top, which is effectively your brand, and in your case there's the advantage of making it visually appealing as well.





It's not about the CV alone; you also need to tailor your covering letter for each role, and appeal to the ego of the company. Aside from proving you can do the job, you need to express why you want to work for this specific business. Don't forget this is a two-way process: you don't need to decide whether you really want the job until they offer it to you - up until that point, your goal is to reach the next stage. So the aim of your CV is to get an interview; from there it might be a second interview or meeting another key decision-maker. Treat each step as an opportunity to gain more sense of the unwritten culture. A job description is usually a wish-list, and the company might not really know who they need until you turn up. womenreturners.com



#### **CV success**

Stand out amongst other applicants with these top tips...

**TAILOR IT** Keep a long version of your CV as a blueprint, then adapt it for specific roles.

**BE BRIEF** Even if your CV is chronological, have a bullet-pointed list of key skills.

#### STICK TO THE RULES

Your first reader might not be human, so follow any formatting guidelines.

**TEST IT** A human reader will get bored quickly, so run your CV past friends and former colleagues.

**FOLLOW UP** Ask existing clients for feedback on your CV, too.

**BE BOLD** Use dynamic language – verbs like 'drove' and 'delivered' – and quantify specific results where possible.

**READ UP** Immerse yourself in the writing of Avivah Wittenberg-Cox, who talks about 'generational balance' at work.

**REACH OUT** Investigate local business networks, or The Athena Network (for professional or entrepreneurial women).

20-first.com; theathenanetwork.com; newcv.co.uk; Stage (Not Age): How To Understand And Serve People Over 60 – The Fastest Growing, Most Dynamic Market In The World by Susan Golden (Harvard Business Review, £22)

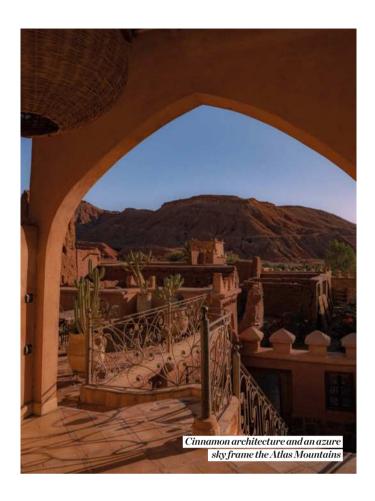
Mary Fenwick is a writer and director of coaching at teamsandleadership.com. She's also a mother, divorcee and widow. Connect with her on LinkedIn or Twitter @MJFenwick

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

# OTOGRAPHS: SHULIN @DEJASHUU; VEE SEY; FOK GOVERNMENT ADVICE AND TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS BEFORE TRAVELLING TO MOROCCO

# Pay it forward

At a school for underprivileged girls, in industrious domestic kitchens, an art studio alive with creation, and a tea room in the sun-baked lanes of an ancient kasbah, Vee Sey meets the Moroccan women who simply cannot wait to meet you



arah Chakin's young face glows with pride and gratitude as she shares her story, which is more inspirational than perhaps she realises to a westerner like me, who is familiar with a contrasting model of youth. Were it not for her hunger for knowledge and almost unattainable dream of a different life, Chakin would have undoubtedly followed the same path as her sister and been married at the age of 14, possibly to 'an old man', she says with a grimace, a multi-generational fingerprint of her High Atlas mountain world. Instead, the Amazigh girl from a remote village went to a school run by an independent charity, Education for All, and became an electrical engineer.

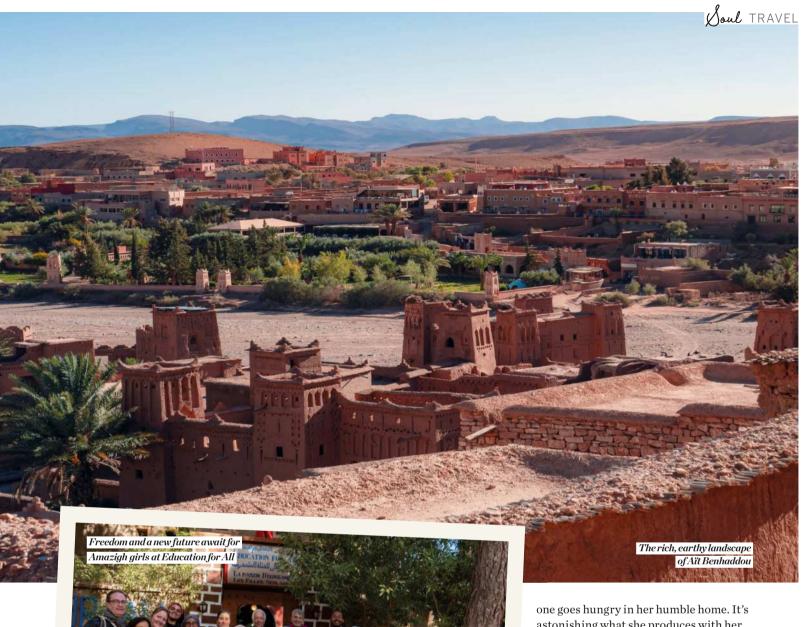
Chakin, pupils and volunteers at the school near Asni village welcome me excitedly with cascades of sweet mint tea, pastries speckled with lime-coloured pistachios, and animated introductions that leave me under no illusion that they take nothing for granted up here, where

the air is thin and opportunities for women even more so. Under the wing of nurturing villagers employed as house mothers, they have found freedom, choice and confidence – in themselves and the future – in this land where East meets West and Sahara meets sea. And while divorce is rarely called a happy ending, Chakin's sibling, galvanised by her sister's bright future, split from her husband and went to school too.

#### Journey with care

The travel industry may be changed for ever by the pandemic but, in its wake, our approach to holidays has hopefully evolved into a more conscious and less grasping beast - because there are responsible ways to see the world, and travel can be a potent force for good. I am part of an enthusiastic group chugging along in a minibus from the frantic and fragrant city of Marrakech to the imposing cinnamon-coloured citadel of Aït Benhaddou, via the settlements of Tahanaout and Ouirgane in the Toubkal National Park, where the silent power of nature and a slower way of life soothe the busy brain after the urban confusion. Our wonderful guide, Fouad Oulmyr, who is given to singing in falsetto at high volume en route, is a fount of knowledge and good

"They take nothing for granted up here, where the air is thin and opportunities for women even more so"



humour. Shaking his head, he tells me that the term Berber, used for indigenous North African people, means barbarian and is derogatory, so I make a promise to write the more respectful and appropriate Amazigh.

We begin in the mellah – or Jewish quarter – of Marrakech, where we snake through labyrinthine streets and up a narrow stairway to foodie heaven. The best dining in Morocco, according to our guides, is provided by the home cook, and we are not disappointed. Our hostess, Zineb, who is too busy delivering steaming clay pots and serving us attentively to be pinned down for a full name, has the tiniest kitchen adjoining a comfortable dining room, which is also the family bedroom when guests depart. Zineb makes a living by feeding tourists and no

astonishing what she produces with her daughter in their incy preparation area: I can't get enough of zaalouk, a blissful marriage of grilled aubergine and tomatoes; aromatic green bean, potato and carrot tagine with golden couscous; interesting salads of all colours, textures and complexities; and discs of khobz -Moroccan bread - torn and dipped. Mmms fill the air, tea flows freely, and sticky cookies dripping with honey and stuffed with dates are abundant. After, we dance to tribal drumbeats made by a trio of riotous and guffawing women, and get our hands tattooed with an intricate henna pattern that I worry will stain my bedding at the Riad Nesma Suites & Spa.

#### A claim to progress

The magnificent ksar, or fortified village, of Aït Benhaddou, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and an outstanding example of Moroccan architecture, was once a heaving stop on the former



caravan route from Marrakech to the Sahara. The backdrop for the films *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Gladiator*, cooks, growers, artisans and artists trade in the skinny streets that meander to the summit.

Past jaded, lazy-eyed camels, rich fabrics and tapestries, and musicians plucking tirelessly for pennies, we come to Tiwirga, the gallery of Hafida Zizi, an artist who works in the charming naïve style. Zizi's brother was the painter in the family, our translator tells us, and she did not believe in her talent until she was in her 30s and it could no longer be contained. The artist, with a kind. self-conscious smile and gentle aura, shows me her work and explains its meaning in her lyrical Amazigh tongue. The stone coolness of her studio houses warm images of Moroccan women going about their daily lives, never again to be left in the shadow of their menfolk.

At the Tawesna Salon De Thé (teahouse), run by the Women's Association of Aït Benhaddou, we have lunch with the charity worker and women's advocate Loubna Mouna, the co-founder of We Speak Citizen, the non-government organisation that backs the enterprise, and meet the women who work joyfully in its busy kitchen. Money made by the tea room is used for community projects and, crucially, Tawesna is where often isolated rural women find solidarity and friendship. 'This our place,' they say emphatically. The tea house recently reopened for business, and their delight is unmistakable. The message is clear: 'We need the tourists to come back.'

On the outskirts of the desert, we spend the evening drinking cocktails under bracing, black skies at the fashionable Hotel Riad Ksar Ighnda, and I wish I hadn't packed quite so lightly as I slope down to dinner in my dusty trainers.

There is time for reflection at our independently owned inn, Auberge Chez Momo II, and I stretch out my weary traveller's body practising yoga in a bit of a boot-camp style, thanks to our trendy Instagrammer yogi, who commands the terrace with his cap backwards like a grinning sergeant major. But this





isn't just a terrace, it's one of the most breathtakingly glorious spots in the High Atlas, surrounded by leafy paths and lofty views that only a poet could do justice. Dinner is a tasty, authentic and musical affair, with a raucous band giving further insight into the lively culture of the Amazigh people.

But I yearn for Mother Nature and

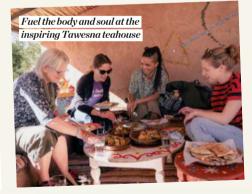
retire early ahead of a dawn hike with our mountain-wise escort, who clambers over the earth, reddening to rich ochre, like a nimble goat, despite his years. Fluent in bushcraft and crossing rushing riverbeds on his tippy-toes, he identifies green oak, Aleppo pine, eucalyptus and juniper trees, and the hand of Fatima painted by his ancestors on doorways to protect us on our way. He explains that the original Chez

Leaving the highlands for the Atelier de Cuisine Chef Tarik cookery school, in a scented and

Momo had to be relocated when a

reservoir swallowed its predecessor!

sunny kitchen garden, we learn how to make the refreshing mint tea that anoints our every Moroccan social gathering. Royal tea, as it's known, is poured by the male elder of the household from an impressive height from pot to glass, to aerate the brew, aid infusion and show respect to the guest. Moroccan tea is green tea leaves infused with mint, thyme, lemon verbena, lemon geranium, marjoram and lemon grass, sweetened with countless cubes of that ubiquitous







Amazigh staple, sugar. Calorie-rich sugar loaves have cultural importance in rural communities where food is scarce, and if you're ever asking for a woman's hand in marriage here, be sure to present her papa with a few cones to sweeten your chances! A sugar-free royal tea is more acceptable these days, as people become more aware of the health implications, explains our teacher, the chef Youssef El Khadli, before he ushers us into his classroom kitchen to learn how to cook three types of tagine: chicken with olives and preserved lemons; vegetable; and lamb with caramelised onions and dried fruit.

I met many inspirational and strong women on this immersive and enriching trip, my first to this intoxicating country, but sometimes there is a soul that is waiting to touch yours more profoundly. Nora Fitzgerald, a social entrepreneur, is American born and was raised in Morocco, and her unwavering purpose is to empower women from disadvantaged backgrounds: widows, single mothers, orphans and former child maids. She founded the Amal Center (amal means hope in Arabic), which offers a culinary training programme so home cooks can use the skills that have been ingrained in them since childhood to improve their prospects. Eighty per cent of the centre's graduates are employed in the food

industry and strive to find their way out of poverty. 'I knew I had to do something,' she explains, about establishing Amal in Marrakech in 2012, 'I could not go on in my life as it was while these women were living in such adversity.'

Her determination and compassion speak to my sense of sisterhood and stir my hatred of inequality – which to my shame lies mostly latent – and I hope that one day I will do more than observe and record. I am honoured to be in the company of a woman who does not just want to make a difference but *does*.

Visit Morocco and contribute in some small way to the work of such visionaries while you satisfy your curious traveller's mind. And as you broaden your horizons, hold the door ajar for those who are less fortunate than you.

Vee Sey travelled with Intrepid Travel on its Premium Morocco in Depth trip. Prices start from £2,096 per person, including accommodation, selected meals, activities, transport and the services of a local guide. All Intrepid trips are 100 per cent carbon offset and the not-for-profit Intrepid Foundation has raised £6 million for non-government organisations since its inception 20 years ago. Solo female travellers make up a large percentage of Intrepid travellers. intrepidtravel.com; theintrepidfoundation.org

#### 5 GIVING-BACK HOLIDAYS

Spread your wings while supporting others...

Egypt Starting and ending in the capital, Cairo, see the pyramids of Giza and the tombs of pharaohs, sail down the Nile, visit the temples of Abu Simbel and share meals with host families. Explore the Valley of the Kings, Karnak temple and the city of Alexandria, all with an Egyptologist.

Jordan Discover sisterhood in this inspiring desert nation. Spend a night in Wadi Rum, learn the art of henna, float in the Dead Sea and visit stunning Petra. Learn about traditional marriage from a professional matchmaker, and enjoy afternoon teas with local women.

Greece Uncover the mysteries of Greece and the Cyclades, tracing a path through historic ruins in Delphi, visiting secluded monasteries high in the Meteora valley, and watching the sun set over picturesque Santorini. Socialise with locals and enjoy fresh Aegean cuisine.

Norway Circumnavigate the largest island of the Svalbard archipelago, Spitsbergen, and look for Arctic wildlife in its natural habitat, including polar bears and Arctic foxes on this unique voyage. Wildlife is abundant in this stark marine environment, while there are also zodiac excursions on land.

Turkey Venture into the diverse heart of Turkey and immerse yourself in its culture. Discover dazzling islands and a sunken city on a cruise, then take a cooking class before joining a family feast. This trip includes tours of Gallipoli, Troy, Ephesus, Antalya and Cappadocia.

For more details and prices, visit intrepidtravel.com

### CHRISTMAS CHEER THAT LASTS ALL YEAR!



£19.99

OVER 60 TITLES TO CHOOSE FROM VISIT SHOP.KELSEY.CO.UK/XMAS22

OR CALL 01959 543 747 AND QUOTE 'XMAS22'

Offer ends 24/12/2022. The subscription will start with the first available issue after uniquities.

For full terms and conditions visit shop, kelsey.co.uk/tarms. To see how we use your data view our privacy policy here inop.kelsey.co.uk/privacy.co.uk/tarms.

## PSYCHOLOGIES essentials

#### **CAREER SOS?**

Do you wish that you could get a job you'll love or deal with the challenges you face in your current role?

#### Now you can!

Whether you are looking for:

- · Clarity on what you could do next
- How to showcase your talents in today's job market
- Improving your skills e.g. influencing, time management
- Building your confidence and handling your limiting beliefs
- · Re-balancing your life

I can help. These are just some examples of the situations the 100's of UK managers and professionals I have worked with, have found themselves in. As a qualified coach, HR Professional and Trainer I offer a range of expertise and my support is totally tailored to you.

Life is too short to let work worries take over. Stop drifting and take action.

Take that first step and book your free Let's Talk Session:
www.careersoshelp.com/book-online
E-mail: michelle@careersoshelp.com
Tel: 07789 922842

Life Changing Career Coaching with Michelle Tranter www.careersoshelp.com

\*Using Zoom/Teams, appointments: weekdays, evenings & Saturday mornings\*







healthier hair and stronger nails - is every woman's wish.

That's why beautivite, a natural, pure collagen supplement, is the perfect way to combat the effects of ageing. Also helps improve joint health, flexibility and general well-being, beautivite is a proven way to replace lost collagen from ArthroVite, the UK leader in





Call a collagen expert on FREEPHONE 0800 0181 282
Details available at www.beautivite.com and www.arthrovite.com

collagen supplements.

#### Thoughtfully curated and bespoke gift boxes with a personal letter



Show you care when you can't be there
A perfect way to say: Thank you ...Get well soon....
Sorry for your loss.....I am here for you...I appreciate you....

#### From just £12

Please come and take a look

www.friendinabox.co.uk jane@friendinabox.co.uk





@friendinaboxuk



## How to be happier

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

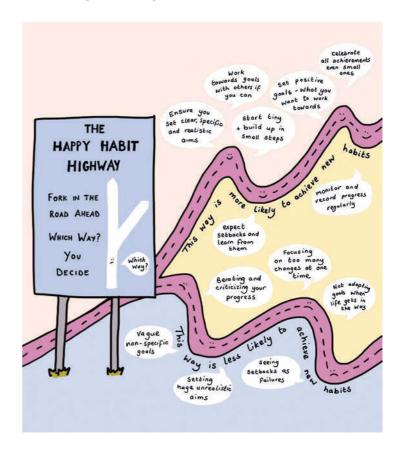
ften, we know what makes us happy... but, despite this, often we don't put the theory into action. I'm going to use myself as an example: why do I (the person who tells you that taking breaks reduces stress and makes you more efficient) sit at my computer eating my lunch, while working to the point where I can't remember if I've even eaten that lunch? I know this is unhelpful for me, so what on earth is going on? To answer that, I'm returning to our old friend (or perhaps, more accurately, our 'frenemy'), the brain. This behaviour is habit. I didn't always do this; it started at a time of huge pressure when I was training (and it was probably also the cultural norm), and I began eating my lunch at my desk to save time. I did it over and over again until it became habitual to my brain. My brain will choose this route by default, because it is the most learned behaviour. Something in my office context (probably my stomach rumbling) will send a cue to my brain that it's lunchtime, and I will pick up my sandwich and eat it with very little awareness. It is a no-brainer to my brain; it's just what it does.

Habits don't require new learning from the brain; they are stored as a sequence of activities in our sensory motor context. The brain adds a routine of behaviours together so they all happen automatically in sequence when triggered by a cue (that rumbling stomach) to get us to a reward (my lunch), which in turn reinforces that learned behaviour. The cue sets off a double whammy of behaviour that I require the help of both Diana Ross and Britney Spears to explain. Before you know it, your brain is 'in the middle of a chain reaction', and once you start, you can't stop (or at least it's difficult to), so you're soon saying, or singing, 'Oops, I did it again' (because your brain will default to this automatically). Your brain uses habits to minimise effort and save energy, and will default to these behaviours when cued.

So, how can we help it shift away from habits that are incompatible with happiness and, instead, build happiness habits into our lives?

#### Step 1: What is it you want to do?

Decide what you want to add as small daily habits. Next, think about how and when you will do this. Alternatively, consider the habits that are incompatible with happiness and that you want to break. Like me, do you want to stop eating lunch at your desk and get outside instead? Don't just focus on what you don't want to do here, but focus on what you will do as well.



#### Step 2: Be clear about your why

What will you gain from this new happiness habit? Why is it important to you? This helps you to want to make the effort to override your default habits.

#### Step 3: Be specific

Decide when specifically you will engage in your new habit and what you will do – for example, 'I want to go for a walk to connect with nature at lunchtime.' Make sure this is manageable. Start as small as you can, because this is more likely to be achievable, repeatable and rewarding – three things

we need to happen to shift from an effortful new behaviour to a habit. Don't overwhelm that poor brain of yours with too much in one go, as it will give up and return to your default natural habits. Start by introducing one happiness habit at a time.

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





#### make life better... become a homeopath

find inspiration, work from home, have a career in healthcare

Homeopathy First Aid Courses
Homeopathy Taster Course
Homeopathy Foundation Course
Homeopathy Advanced Practitioner Course
Anatomy & Physiology Courses
Pathology & Disease Courses

Additional School of Health courses:

Herbal Medicine Foundation Course

Yoga Foundation Course

Nutrition for Beginners

Nutritional Advisor & Therapist Course

Naturopathy Course

Learn to be a homeopath with our professional courses.

Flexibility: part-time (1 weekend a month in Stroud) or home study

Choice: option of certificate from beginner to practitioner level

Creativity: dynamic, innovative and world renowned curriculum

Accessibility: no prior training required, indepth continual assessment

Quality: School recognised by the Society of Homeopaths

Delivery: graduates eliqible to apply for registration and start practice

01453 765 956 or 0800 0439 349 info@soh.uk www.schoolofhomeopathy.com www.schoolofhealth.com



RECOGNISED

SCHOOL OF HOMEOPATHY®



Be better, naturally... 7efe8d4f-b5b1-4b57-a5c7-e05b9de1c5a6



"Wellwoman helps support me for the busy days ahead."

Tess Daly



Original



No.1 women's vitamins\*

From Superdus &, Holland&Barrett, supermarkets, health stores, pharmacies and wellwoman.com





