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UK edition

psychologies

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YOU
while caring
for others

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- Train yourself to sleep soundly

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personal
milestones
with courage

Mel C

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I had ever dreamed
of, how could I feel
so miserable?'

**'I called my
tumour Roger!'**

Real women share
their inspiring stories

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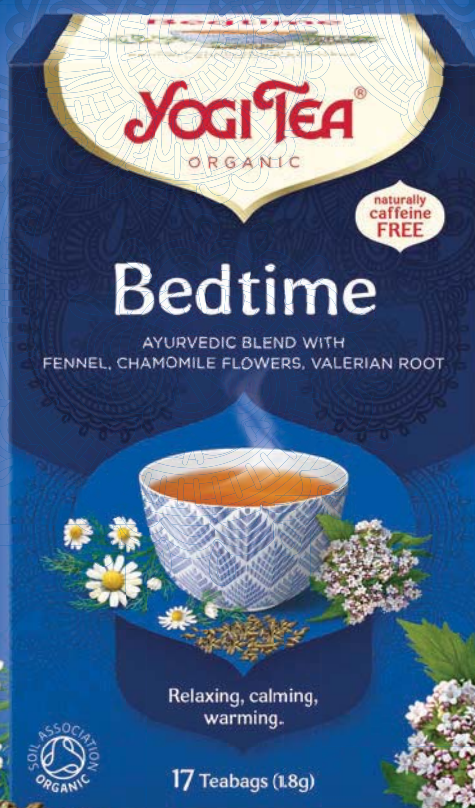


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Welcome...

Which Spice Girl are you? As a teenager growing up in the Nineties, it was a question you could hardly avoid. Even though I classed myself as a die-hard indie kid, I found it impossible to escape the infectious magic of the band's first hit, *Wannabe*, which topped the charts in 1996, the summer I completed my GCSEs. Given my hair colour, you can probably guess which larger-than-life character I naturally gravitated towards, but when the chance came to interview the most-overlooked member of the band, Sporty Spice, for this month's issue, I leapt at the chance. I came off the call buzzing, thanks to Melanie's infectious enthusiasm and Liverpudlian sense of humour, but also touched by the way she opened up about the challenges she has faced over the years. Because, despite being in the most successful all-female group ever, and going on to have huge individual success, she has fought her own demons. From the outside, she had it all – but, inside, was crumbling from the stress. Discover how she feels when she looks back on that time – and what she does to look after her mental health now – in our interview on page 16. And if her battles with stress resonate with you – even if you're not a global superstar – then discover our nine stress busters (page 32) to help you stop your worries getting the better of you.

As the nights draw in and we get ready to put the clocks back, it feels like a good time to turn our attention towards getting a good night's sleep. After all, with less daylight and more time indoors, it's natural for our energy levels to dip at this time of year, so give yourself a boost with our dossier (page 43). Another thing that could be draining your energy is an overload of empathy. Some of us naturally tune in to the emotional states of those around us, which can be exhausting! Find out if you're highly empathetic, and learn some techniques to help you look after yourself while still caring for others, on page 22. Plus, we're discovering how the menopause can help us find our true purpose (page 38), thinking about how to support our youngsters as they go through changes (page 64), and meet three women who share the way an unexpected diagnosis changed their lives, on page 84.

As we go to press, we have just heard the very sad news of Her Majesty's passing. As we celebrate a host of brilliant women this issue, we can't help but reflect that there can be no greater inspiration to us all than Queen Elizabeth. A truly remarkable woman, and an incredible blessing.



Sally x

**Sally Saunders,
Editor**

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*FOR FULL DETAILS, SEE PAGE 30



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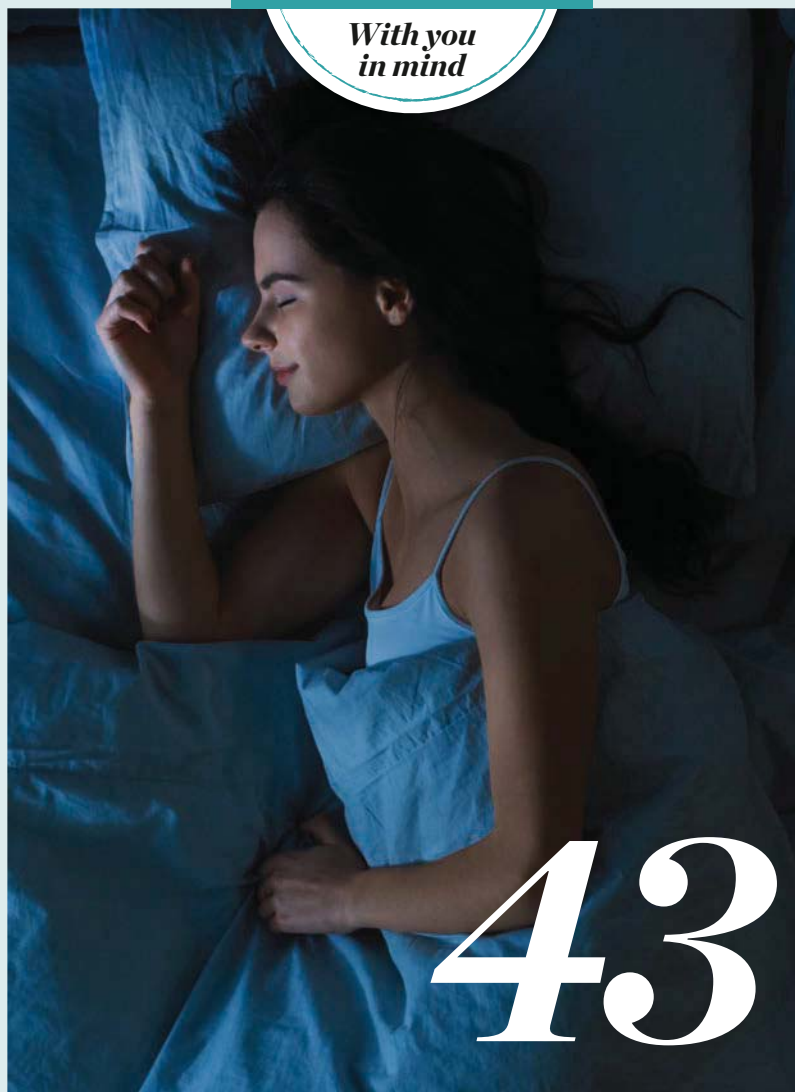
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psychologies

DOSSIER

With you
in mind



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The advice starts RIGHT HERE!



JODI HALPERN

Taking on the emotions of others as if they are your own can be exhausting, and the weight of caring 'too much' can be hard to bear, says Jodi Halpern, a consultant in empathy. Learn how to empathise with others in a way that is therapeutic, and avoid the burnout, on page 22.

DR TINA RAE

As parents, watching a child meet their milestones can bring on feelings of redundancy and loss. But, says psychologist Dr Tina Rae, 'developing a toolbox of wellbeing to manage anxieties around transition is something that we can all do, both adults and children alike.' Discover how to navigate change on page 64.



DR BARBARA PERFAHL

Having your own space to retreat to has never been more important, and research shows it can be fundamental to our wellbeing; 'It's a biological need,' says Dr Barbara Perfahl, a room psychologist and home stager. Discover how to create your own emotional escape room on page 90.

Our mission

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

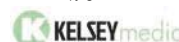
Embracing the four pillars of your life, from mind and body to heart and soul, Psychologies engages with the world around us as well as the world within to help you discover inspiring ways to make every day better and create a life you love.

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Queen Elizabeth II

1926-2022



*‘Good memories are
our second chance
at happiness’*

Feeling stressed and losing sleep?

Try **Ashwagandha+** for free

If you're feeling stressed, you're not alone. In the UK, one in three of us suffers from poor sleep, with stress often blamed. Scientific studies show that ashwagandha – 'the prince of herbs' – can help you to relax and achieve emotional balance during periods of anxiety and emotional stress.

There are lots of ways we can try to manage stress, including regular exercise and a healthy diet. But one of the most scientifically proven is one of the least well-known – a natural herb called ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), also known as Indian ginseng.

Prized as a treatment in Ayurveda for thousands of years, ashwagandha is an 'adaptogen' that promotes homeostasis – an optimal internal state in which all the body's physical and chemical conditions are in a healthy balance.

'Ashwagandha has been shown to help support relaxation, mental and physical wellbeing – and contributes to emotional balance and general wellbeing during periods of anxiety and emotional stress*,' says Dr Miriam Ferrer, PhD, Head of New Product Development at FutureYou Cambridge.

That's thanks to active natural ingredients called withanolides which

help the body to normalise physiological processes and adapt to changes, much in the same way that exercise builds physical performance. This promotes relaxation and helps us better cope with stress.

High-strength Ashwagandha+ from FutureYou Cambridge contains KSM-66® ashwagandha root extract, the most

"I feel calmer and more relaxed during the day, and I'm a lot less agitated than I was before I started on them"

researched full-spectrum ashwagandha formulation available, proven to be effective by 22 human studies. Each capsule contains 600mg – much more than comparable supplements.

A scientific study in 2019 reported that stressed individuals who took 600mg per day of full-spectrum ashwagandha not only showed a significant reduction

in their stress and anxiety levels, but also an improvement in sleep quality.

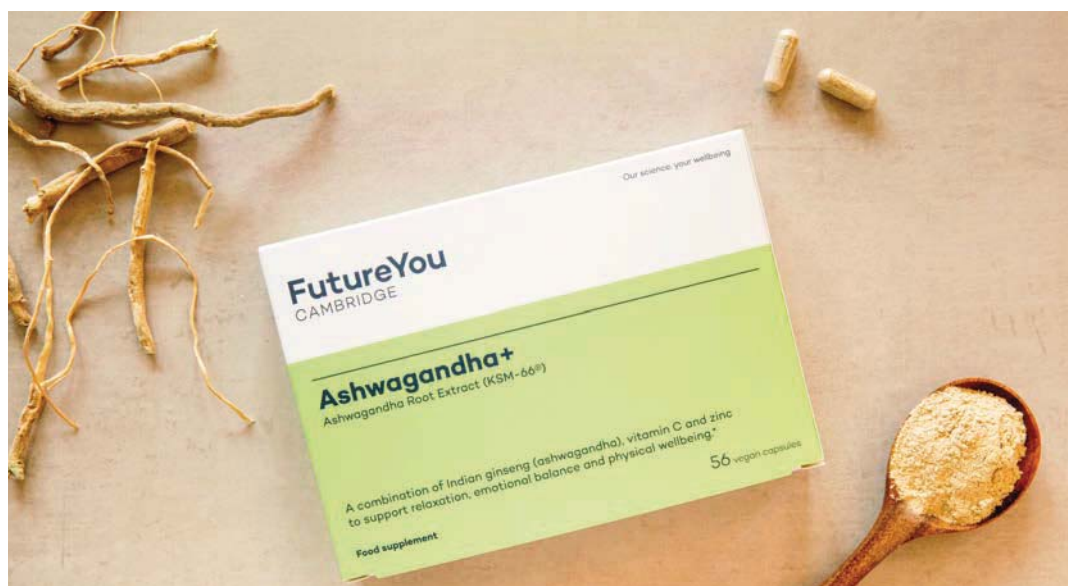
52-year-old Susan Ince from Northamptonshire decided to try Ashwagandha+ after feelings of anxiety left her finding it hard to get a proper night's sleep.

'I feel calmer and more relaxed during the day, and I'm a lot less agitated than I was before I started on them,' she says.

'I take one in the morning and one at night and I have a much more comfortable night's sleep.'

'If I forget, I'll get out of bed and go downstairs to take it – that's how strongly I feel about them. I just feel more like me again.'

**Ashwagandha+ contains ashwagandha which contributes to optimal relaxation; helps to support mental and physical wellbeing; contributes to emotional balance and general wellbeing. Ashwagandha+ also contains vitamin C which contributes to normal psychological function and to the reduction of tiredness and fatigue.*



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In the mood

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

COMPILED BY ALEX LLOYD

Park life

One perk of post-pandemic life is our new-found appreciation of our outside spaces. Now researchers at the University of Connecticut say our perception of the great outdoors has seriously changed as a result, with a growing desire to immerse ourselves more fully in nature.

As people flocked outdoors during lockdown, the study noticed some interesting trends, with people travelling further afield to enjoy nature: 'Rural trail use increased compared to urban trails,' reveals study co-author, Sohyun Park.

The study also picked up on significant changes in keyword usage on social media, with more people referencing nature and their experiences within it, opposed to previous status updates that focused solely on traditional park activities, such as 'walking the dog'.

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK





Sales of football equipment skyrocketed by more than a third thanks to England's success in the UEFA Women's Euros – a bigger leap than when the men competed, according to OnBuy.com.



Sharing is caring

A woman's work is never done – but one gender expert says an equitable split of household chores is achievable, providing your partner is willing.

*For her new book, **Equal Partners** (St Martin's Press, £27), Kate Mangino interviewed 40 couples who shared the domestic load at home, and found that only two of the men came from families where their fathers did as much as their mums.*

Mangino deduced that taking on equal domestic labour was ultimately a choice, and not down to behaviour modelled by parents: 'No matter where you came from, you can say: "I'd like to make this change",' she says. 'It might take some work and it might take some practice, but it is not impossible.'

Three peaks challenge!

Women experience three different types of orgasm, an intimate study has revealed. Researchers from Charles University in Prague asked 54 women to use a Bluetooth-connected vibrator over a number of weeks, to monitor how their pelvic floor muscles move at climax. The study found that there are three variations, dubbed the avalanche, the volcano and the wave. The avalanche is when the pelvic floor has higher tension then lowers at orgasm, while the volcano stays at a steady lower tension and explodes at the end. The most common is the wave, which features waves of tension and release.



Autumn's arrival

By Katie Piper



As the change of season creeps in and the nights get longer, many of us start to feel those inevitable 'winter blues'. But, tempting as it is to draw the curtains and

hibernate until March, the best way to shift your mood is to get out into the fresh air.

Fresh air is not only a natural mood booster, but has been linked to a whole host of health benefits, from aiding digestion and lowering heart rate, to strengthening immunity and reducing obesity rates. As much as I will miss the beautiful summer sunshine, I'm so excited to dust off my wellies and head out for some crisp autumnal walks with the family.

And forget 'spring cleaning' – now's also the perfect time for an 'autumn declutter'. I find the act of cleaning so therapeutic, and the result of a cleaner living space really can help reduce feelings of stress and anxiety. It can also increase focus, productivity and give you a better night's sleep. There really is no better time to cull your odd socks or sort out the dreaded 'kitchen drawer of doom'!

So with home and mind taken care of, what can we do for our bodies during the colder months? Maintaining a healthy diet is vital all year round, but with all the nasty colds going round at this time of year, it's never been more important. Leafy greens, soups and fruits high in vitamin C are my absolute go-to's during the autumn and winter months.

Swimming aid

Outdoor swimming is being trialled as an alternative treatment for depression.

University of Portsmouth researchers believe the activity could offer a source of preliminary support to patients before resorting to medication and talking therapies.

There is already emerging evidence that eco-therapy and immersion in cold water can reduce stress levels and create a greater sense of wellbeing.

Now, experts want to establish the difference it makes, the cost-benefit of this method, and whether people stick with it.



86% of adults admit to enjoying kids' animations, Showcase Cinemas has found. Our top choice? *The Lion King*, followed by *Toy Story*, says Sky Mobile.





Don't bottle it up!

Love it or hate it, Marmite could be the key to easing anxious thinking.

Researchers at the University of Reading believe the high levels of B vitamins in the yeast spread can help modify chemical signals in your brain.

They gave 300 people high-dose supplements of vitamin B6 or B12, or a placebo, and found those taking B6 – found in Marmite – had 'significant' reductions in depression and anxiety.



Question time

Positive thinking might be in vogue, but research has found that a healthy dose of scepticism is actually good for you.

Thinking critically when you engage with new concepts and perspectives will keep your brain sharp and ensure you search for the truth, instead of accepting information as fact.

Psychologists say in times of high anxiety, simply believing what we are told can feel safer and less negative, but is not always beneficial.

You don't need to become a conspiracy theorist, but on International Sceptics Day, on October 13, take the time to flex your questioning muscles.

Positive side effects

Do you wake up feeling refreshed and raring to go? No? Then try sleeping on your left side.

Lying in this position has been shown to improve digestion and reduce acid reflux problems due to the

position of your organs, as well as boost lymphatic drainage. It also helps your brain to eliminate toxins faster. Meanwhile, any type of side sleeping is better for your lower back, and reduces the risk of snoring and sleep apnoea.

WATCH, LOOK, LISTEN



WATCH Emma Mackey stars as enigmatic writer Emily Brontë in *Emily*, a biopic looking at Brontë's life before *Wuthering Heights*. In cinemas 14 October.



LOOK The EY Exhibition: Cezanne at Tate Modern, London, is a rare glimpse at the full career of an artist dubbed 'the greatest' by Monet. Opens 5 October.



LISTEN In the *How to Build a Happy Life* podcast, *The Atlantic's* 'happiness correspondent', Arthur Brooks, probes experts on all the ways to find contentment and meaning.

*"I'd like to think that thanks to me,
women athletes can be themselves.
They can play with aggression and
pump their fists. They can wear what
they want and say what they want and
kick butt and be proud of it all"*

Tennis player Serena Williams

Home grown

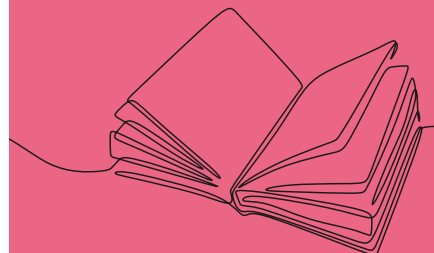
There are more than 7,000 varieties of the humble apple in the world, and one third of these have been developed in the UK.

Charities such as The Orchard Project are working hard to protect ancient species and expand community orchards, yet our fruit bowls remain dominated by New Zealand-originated Gala and Braeburn.

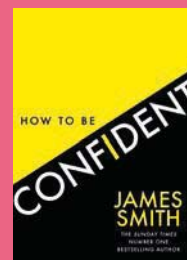
So, this Apple Day, on 21 October, commit to trying one of our native fruits, instead, such as an egremont russet, Worcester pearmain or a golden pippin.



3 of the best... HOW-TO GUIDES



1 *How To Be Confident*
by James Smith (Harper
Collins, £20). The
no-nonsense
PT shows
you how
to move
away from
negative
thinking to
achieve what
you want.



2 *How To Tidy Your Mind*
by Anna Barnes
(Octopus, £10.99) is
packed
with tips
on how to
reduce
mental
clutter
and enjoy
a calmer
life and
mind.



3 *How To Be Your Own
Therapist* by Owen
O'Kane (HarperCollins,
£16.99) sees the therapist
equip you
with all
the tools
you need
to form
healthier
perspectives
on stress.



Viewpoint

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



Sensitive touch

I wanted to write and say how much I appreciated your article on highly sensitive people (May).

When I read it, I felt that I had finally been understood, and that my sensitive attributes were recognised as such, rather than difficulties to overcome.

For as long as I can remember, I've been told I am 'too sensitive' and need to 'toughen up', creating a feeling that there was something wrong with me, and that I needed to change. But having been a nurse for almost 47 years, I feel it is my intuition and sensitivity that has enabled me to pick up on non-verbal cues. I have an

empathy and understanding for the people I nurse that has enriched my practice and led to better outcomes than if I had not had those emotions and sensitivities.

I now recognise why I need quiet time to recharge my batteries after being with other people, and why nature plays such an important part in my life. It has also helped me to see why I have struggled with certain situations at work and academically. I feel a sense of great relief in being recognised.

Thank you again for your insight and for raising such issues.

Desda Jordan



A Heart's Sigh

By Delfina Dos Santos

Take a gentle step outside those big, open doors,
Look up! Notice how beautiful the red kite in the big blue sky, quietly soars.
Take a moment to really open your eyes,
Breathe in deep and then let out one of your biggest sighs.

Pause and look around; as there really is so much to be heard and seen.
Everything, everywhere around you is so beautiful; blue, orange and green,
The subtle scent of red roses deeply inhaled from the crisp, early morning air,
Your heart and mind expands and fills, becoming ever more aware.

There really is a big and beautiful world out there,
Just waiting for you to wake up, take that first step out and show you care.

PHOTO COMPETITION



I took this picture while on holiday with my family on the beautiful island of Madeira. This stunning plant is called the bird of paradise, and it gave me a renewed respect of how creative, artistic and vibrant nature truly is.

Seeing it, I received a new awareness of the wellbeing and mindfulness rewards of slowing down and allowing my senses to fully appreciate the beauty of our natural world.

Zoë Baxter



This photo sums up my sense of gratitude in one. Being outdoors is my tonic. I am grateful to live so close to the Peak District that I can jump in my camper van and immerse myself by beautiful countryside. I am grateful for my dog, Harry, who is my trusted companion on my walks and van-ventures. I am grateful to nature for putting on a show – the sunset on Mam Tor that day was amazing. Lastly, I am grateful to the lady that approached me that evening and asked whether she could take a photo of me and my dog watching the sunset. She thought it would make such a lovely photo... and she was right! It's one I'll treasure forever.

Natalie Houston

Having seen some of your readers' inspirational photos, it prompted me to take one of my own while on holiday in Croatia recently.

I like a sense of calm in order to be creative, and found it here in this peaceful little walkway near our hotel. I took my notebook down with me and captured some thoughts about my business while I sat.

Thank you for inspiring me!
Kathryn Jackson



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

Gratefully received

I recently went on a forest holiday and, on my way there, read your September issue, featuring an article about JOMO – the joy of missing out. The section on being present and content with where one is in life really spoke to me. As a full-time PhD student who is also working as a researcher, my schedule is busy, and I often get stuck in 'striving' mode. Making a 'not-to-do' list was excellent advice, and I did just that right there and then! This included not checking emails, not answering text messages straightaway, and not overthinking things, or worrying about putting on extra weight after eating too many high-calorie holiday treats.

I did not feel compelled to 'be busy having fun', the way I usually do on a holiday. Fun is about doing what you feel like doing, *when* you feel like doing it. Things such as yoga and learning a new skill were duly scrubbed from my holiday 'schedule' because, suddenly, I no longer felt the need to improve myself. I am not perfect, but I am finally content with who I am and, as I get older, I teach myself to value my wellbeing more.


Now that my holiday period is over, I want to continue with the amazing tool of a 'not-to-do' list, as I found it to be so liberating. New challenges and life-long learning are enjoyable for someone like me, but it is also important to seek out micro moments of happiness that bring you meaning outside of professional achievements. I believe this can decrease the feeling of life rushing by.

Thank you for an amazing magazine, full of great and useful advice.

Kludia Matasovska

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!



*I had
everything
I'd ever dreamed
of – how could
I feel so
miserable?*

With the world at her feet, Spice Girl Melanie Chisholm suddenly found herself in free fall. Here, the singer-songwriter talks honestly about her depression diagnosis, mental health and the music industry, and the wellbeing tools she still turns to ►►

WORDS: SALLY SAUNDERS



IMAGES: MATT HOLYOAK

We've had some big names on the cover of *Psychologies*, but few could genuinely claim to have been one of the most famous women in the world. Unlike this month's star. Because, for a couple of years back in the late Nineties, Melanie Chisholm and her bandmates were unquestionably some of the most recognisable young people on the planet. From their unparalleled success in the charts to their constant presence on the covers of celebrity magazines and in the tabloids – and even their own movie – the Spice Girls were true global icons.

'When you're in the eye of the storm, it's hard to see the reality of it,' reflects Chisholm. 'But I can see now that we were so lucky to have had that opportunity.'

Such massive success, however, came at a price: 'I look back over the most exciting period of my life, and I now recognise I was developing really serious issues with food, obsessively exercising, and dealing with depression and anxiety. But I hate giving the impression it was all doom and gloom – because it wasn't; it was the most incredible time of my life. But running alongside that was personal hardship, too.'

Looking from the outside in, you could be forgiven for not realising it at the time. With her bandmates Baby (Emma Bunton), Posh (Victoria Beckham née Adams), Scary (Melanie Brown) and Ginger (Geri Halliwell), Chisholm, now 48, seemed to be having the time of her life. From the moment they took the charts by storm with *Wannabe*, the bestselling single by a girl group ever, followed by the equally successful debut album *Spice*, it seemed like there was no stopping them – something they clearly believed themselves. 'All of us Spice Girls have a rebellious streak, so when someone told us how to behave, we had no time for it – like, to hell with royal protocol! Never tell a Spice Girl what to do. But even more so, never tell a Spice Girl what *not* to do. There was a real camaraderie between us, egging each other on.'

Despite their origins, responding to an advert in *The Stage*, and their clever names to perfectly sum up their personas, the Spice Girls were no record-label product. Today, it feels like a marketing team could sit for weeks sculpting the image that came about by accident.

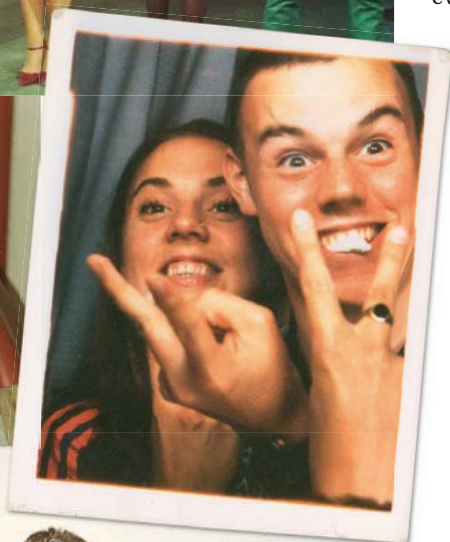


*"Now I'm
in my 40s,
I realise how
vulnerable and
ill-equipped we
were to deal with
the things going
on around us"*

'We've always been accused of being manufactured, but it all happened quite naturally,' she remembers. 'We dressed as we felt comfortable, and were always ourselves. Then one day over lunch, Ryan from *Top of the Pops* magazine came up with our nicknames. And then Geri came up with Girl Power. So when the tabloids said we were manufactured, it used to get our goat, because we knew the truth. One of the lovely parts of writing my book, *Who I Am* (Welbeck, £20), is that I finally get to share my version of events.'

It's at times a heartbreaking read to see how such success also brought such pain.

'On the surface, all these incredibly wonderful things were happening,' says Chisholm. 'But, internally, it was like, "Whoa, how do I navigate this storm?" I was 19 when I answered the ad, and 21 when *Wannabe* came out. When you're in your 20s, you think you're a grown-up. But now I'm in my 40s, I realise how



Clockwise, from top: Chisholm with the Spice Girls on The Oprah Winfrey Show; with brother Paul; and mum and stepdad, Joan and Den, as a child; alongside her bandmates and Luciano Pavarotti; duetting with Bryan Adams; and as a baby

vulnerable we were, and how ill-equipped to deal with a lot of the things that were going on around us.

'Nothing can prepare you for the media attention. You felt like you had nowhere to hide; it was like you were being watched 24/7, frightened to put a foot wrong. But the reality was we were young people, doing all the silly things young people do.

'And the schedule was ridiculous – it never stopped. We were living on adrenaline. And there was also this huge pressure within the band.

'So, yeah, it just kind of came at you from all angles. I think when I was finally diagnosed with depression, I could hardly believe it. I literally had everything I'd ever dreamed of, and financially I'd

never need to worry again – but I was miserable! How? How could I be? And how could I expect anyone to have any empathy or sympathy?'

Coming shortly after the peak of the band's fame, the diagnosis seems to have been a turning point for Chisholm. Suddenly, freed from the restraints of worrying what her bandmates or management might say, she spoke out about her struggles. 'I felt like I didn't have a choice,' she reflects. 'The way the media behaved around that time, I felt like I had a duty. I was just honest about having been diagnosed with depression, and being on antidepressants. And I spoke about my eating disorders along the way.

'So I was a bit of an open book, really. But I think I probably wasn't quite ready, because it was only the beginning of my recovery. In some ways, I felt like I didn't have a choice, because so much was being written in newspapers anyway.'

As Sporty Spice, the brunette from Liverpool was most often seen in tracksuits or her side's football shirt, which at the time set her apart from her bandmates, who were seen as more traditionally feminine. 'Writing the book, I've looked back over articles from the Nineties and Noughties, and I see the narrative they built around me. They criticised the way I looked, questioned my sexuality, and made fun of me. If I was photographed with a guy, then the fallout would always be that he dumped me for somebody else. It was soul destroying.'

Did she ever question her gender or sexuality herself? 'No, it was so funny when they were questioning my sexuality back in the Nineties, as it was never anything I'd questioned in myself. Music is very male dominated, and I've worked with non-binary people and am a big advocate for the LGBTQI+ community. So, I feel like I'm in a privileged situation where I can see past gender. But I've always felt female. Yes, I'm a bit gobby, and I can give as good as I get. But I've never felt anything but feminine.

'It's amazing how things have changed now, in my daughter's generation, where nobody bats an eyelid. You just think, wow, if we've come that far, then this is looking good.'



Are attitudes changing as quickly towards mental health, particularly in the music business? 'Record labels are much more mindful of the younger artists and are starting to provide support for mental wellness,' believes Chisholm. 'But I think there's quite a way to go. It's hard; the workload is a lot if you're lucky enough to become successful, and now it's not only press intrusion, we have social media to cope with, too. And all of these things can affect you.'

Personally, Chisholm says she is much happier – and healthier – now than she was during her time with the band.

'I've learned so much about myself and what I need to stay healthy,' she says. 'Sometimes depression can rear its ugly head – I feel it's always waiting in the wings. But I have my coping mechanisms, such as exercise – but a healthy amount, not too much. And getting out into nature and a good eight hours of sleep a night – and if I'm feeling down, I'll eliminate alcohol completely, because that just doesn't help.'

'So if I'm not feeling good, I now know to just tighten up on those things first.'

Chisholm has also come to understand the power of talking. 'I felt very isolated. I felt very alone. I felt very ashamed. And I didn't want to burden people. But now I realise that so many of us deal with those feelings. There are so many great resources online, and so many great charities – so reach out. Because I know the biggest steps that I took when I was very ill was just saying things out loud. It gives you an opportunity to start figuring things out.'

In the two decades since the band called it quits, Chisholm has enjoyed the biggest solo musical success, with three number-one singles and eight studio albums, selling more than 13 million copies worldwide. She has also won awards on the West End stage, and still spends much of her time performing – when we talk, she is preparing to fly to Austria for a festival performance.

'My happiest places are anywhere I can hang out with my daughter, Scarlet, and being on stage. There's something about that environment I love. That transaction of energy is something that, as I've got older, I really appreciate. During the pandemic I was doing video and live



From top: The newly formed Spice Girls in LA with a waiter; Chisholm performing at Bristol Pride

streaming, instead, but because I didn't have people in the room with me, it was like part of my identity was missing. I do feel I was I born to do this, that I was I put on this earth to entertain.'

But it's with her old friends that Chisholm seems to be at her happiest, citing their reunion tour in 2019 as one of her highlights. 'Like most things Spice Girls-related, there's an element of magic. People would always ask, "When are you getting back together?"' but it's always been a struggle to get everybody to be in the right place at the right time – we're all mums, and we have our responsibilities.

'But when it does happen, it feels like it's meant to be, like when the band first got together,' she reflects.

'I hadn't been into the idea for a long time, because Victoria didn't want to get back on stage. So I was a little bit like, it's five or nothing for me. But I just noticed this kind of snowball effect of people approaching me and the other girls, and a growing realisation that there was a generation of people who had

grown up being Spice Girls fans, and that it had really seemed to affect so many people in such a positive way. I just felt like I was meeting more and more people who had their stories and their connections to us, and I just felt like it was time – you know, something just changed.

'Those shows were really, really special,' Chisholm reminisces. 'I think creatively, we wanted it to be a celebration – we wanted it to be for the fans, you know? We wanted this real inclusivity that we've always fought for. And it just worked.'

'Looking out over those full stadiums each night was the moment we all realised, wow, you know, we really did impact on so many people. You realise you've been a part of people's lives, provided the soundtrack for their memories. And you can't beat that.'



Who I Am: My Story
by Melanie C (Welbeck, £20)





Mind

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



*What inspires you most?
How can you make it more
central to your life?*

5 signs you are a HIGHLY EMPATHETIC PERSON

You can learn to balance being in tune with others' emotions while safeguarding your own headspace, discovers Emma Cooling

Picking up on the subtle signs that someone is struggling can make you a great friend, but when empathy leaves us overwhelmed by the pain of others, the gift can become a curse.

Experiencing the distress of others too intensely can be all-consuming – but how can we stop ourselves becoming emotional sponges, soaking up our loved ones' feelings?

Understanding empathy

Described in the 1970s by American philosopher Susanne Langer as the 'involuntary breach of

Expert advice



Miranda McKearney OBE, founder of the EmpathyLab, is a campaigner for social justice and founder of The Reading Agency, the charity behind the Summer Reading Challenge.
empathylab.uk



Jodi Halpern is a consultant in empathy, ethics and applied psychiatry, and the author of From Detached Concern To Empathy (Oxford University Press, £28.99).
jodihalpern.com



Karla McLaren is a researcher, workplace consultant, empathy pioneer and the author of The Language Of Emotions (Sounds True, £15.99).
karlamclaren.com

individual separateness', empathy definitely has its upsides – it allows us to step into another's shoes, to tap into their joy, to share their highs. And empathy can help us tolerate people's actions, because we understand the emotions behind their behaviours. Plus, it enables us to predict how others might react in tricky situations, and to respond appropriately.

Levels of empathy vary from one person to the next: some of us naturally tap into the mood of those around us, while others will need strong cues to gauge how others are feeling.

For Miranda McKearney OBE, founder of EmpathyLab, an organisation that uses scientific evidence that links the act of reading to building real-life empathy skills, there are many signs a person is highly empathetic. Her top traits are:

- **The ability to listen.** 'Active listening is a key element of empathy,' McKearney says. 'A great listener knows to refrain from giving advice, asks brilliant questions, and reflects back to check they've understood what's being said.'

- **Can blend different aspects of empathy.** Most experts agree there are different components of empathy: thinking (cognitive empathy), feeling (affective or emotional empathy), and acting (empathic concern). The balance of these components will vary from one person to the next. 'A highly empathetic person will blend these elements together in different ways, balancing strong feelings with reason and imagination,' says McKearney.

- **A love of reading.** According to McKearney, a highly empathetic person is likely to be a fiction reader. 'Research shows that when we identify with characters' emotions, we build our real-life empathy and learn how other people experience the world,' she explains.

- **A strong sense of social justice.** McKearney says: 'Once we've really understood how others feel, it motivates us to want to change things for the better. Through history, change has come about because empathetic people want to improve the lot of others.'

- **Curiosity about other people's experiences and perspectives.** 'Empathetic people are open-minded, and curious to learn about others, to step out of their own bubble,' McKearney says.

When it all becomes too much

If this all sounds familiar, the chances are you're a highly empathetic person. And while you are hopefully well aware of the benefits of empathy, you may well also have suffered its downsides. Taking on the emotions of others as if they are your own can be exhausting, and the weight of caring 'too much' can be hard to bear. This feeling of overwhelm can come when we experience another's emotions but cannot



put those feelings to constructive use, says Jodi Halpern, author of *From Detached Concern To Empathy: Humanizing Medical Practice* (Oxford University Press, £28.99). She says: 'Empathy generally involves a combination of emotional resonance and cognitive perspective (trying to imagine what the world looks like from inside another person's experience). Some people respond more with emotional empathy, some more with cognitive empathy. Responding with just emotional resonance – which occurs with sympathy – can lead to feeling overwhelmed emotionally, and burnout.'

Cognitive empathy can be considered under-emotional because it refers to a logical analysis of a person's situation: what has led them to feel the way they feel? What might make them feel better? Emotional empathy, by contrast, can be perceived as over-emotive and unconstructive if it does not prompt any action – being flooded with the pain of another's loss does not help them or you. The key can be achieving a balance between the two – between feeling the emotions of another person and using that to understand them, communicate better with them and, in doing so, help them more effectively.

In her work, Dr Halpern found that those who deal with the suffering of others routinely (for example, nurses and doctors) have less burnout if they cultivate curiosity about their patients' lives. She found these professionals were able to focus on the practical steps they were taking to support an individual dependent on his or her situation, rather than feeling overwhelmed by their suffering. 'This helps them find a cognitive and therapeutic use for their own painful emotions when empathising with others' suffering,' she explains. Dr Halpern says this shows that the idea that it is 'too much' empathy or an 'overload' of empathy that causes burnout is wrong. 'What leads to burnout is when one feels empathy but cannot put it to use in any way. When empathy helps people understand others in a way that is therapeutic, there is less burnout,' she explains.

A skill we can work on

When we struggle to balance being in tune with others' feelings with protecting our own, we need to take steps to avoid being drained of energy by the negative states of those around us. And the good news is, according to author and researcher Karla McLaren, empathy is a skill that can be honed. 'Many people assume empathy is an unchangeable trait,' she says, 'but empathy is, in fact, a skill that can be developed at any stage of your life. And if your empathy is uncomfortably intense (this is hyper-empathy), you can learn how to calm it down.'

For McLaren, the first step to developing healthy empathy is the same no matter where you start: the key is to build a stronger emotional vocabulary, to be self-aware and understand the way you are feeling.



‘Empathy is first and foremost an emotional skill, and emotions are the tools of empathy. Much research has found that – all by itself – a larger emotional vocabulary and greater self-awareness leads to better emotion regulation and better psychological health in general.’

When you can identify and regulate your own emotions, the emotions of others won’t tend to destabilise you. ‘Instead, your ability to identify the feelings and mood of others will help you understand the situation and regulate yourself, so that you won’t lose your footing or your awareness of your own emotional state,’ says McLaren.

Perspective-taking is another focus for McLaren’s work on empathy, as it helps individuals identify the difference between themselves and others. She explains: ‘When people struggle with unsupported hyper-empathy, they often mistake other people’s emotional states for their own. Knowing the difference between yourself and others is vital for healthy and sustainable empathy.’

▶▶▶ NEXT STEPS

Visit karlamclaren.com/start-here/ for empathic mindfulness skills.

Listen to spark-conversations.com/episode-44-empathy-jodi-halpern, a conversation on the art of empathy.

Read *The Age Of Empathy: Nature's Lessons For A Kinder Society* by Frans de Waal (Profile Books, £9.99), which examines how empathy comes naturally to a range of animals, including humans.

Tips for managing hyper-empathy

Use your empathy to understand the best way to react to help a loved one – this may differ from how you would choose to be treated yourself. Seeing a situation from another’s eyes is valuable when it comes to supporting them in the right way. Dr Halpern explains: ‘When one’s empathy enables improved communication with another, this too enables one to feel it has been put to good use.’

Responding with compassion and feeling that you have done something to help someone in need – however small – can help ease the feelings of overwhelm. The gesture can be as small as dropping someone a daily text to let them know you are thinking of them.

Spend time on yourself, not just to restore and to renew, but to become familiar with your own emotions; to spot patterns in the way you react in certain situations. A deeper understanding of yourself will not only help you take time out to recharge before you feel overloaded, it can help you recognise when your headspace is being invaded by the emotions of others.

Separate the self from others. For McLaren, the key to knowing the difference between yourself and others is vital for healthy and sustainable empathy. ‘When people struggle with unsupported hyper-empathy, they often get muddled between their feelings and those of others, and lose their way,’ she says. When you feel yourself sinking under the weight of another’s suffering, show self-compassion by gently reminding yourself, ‘These are not my emotions.’

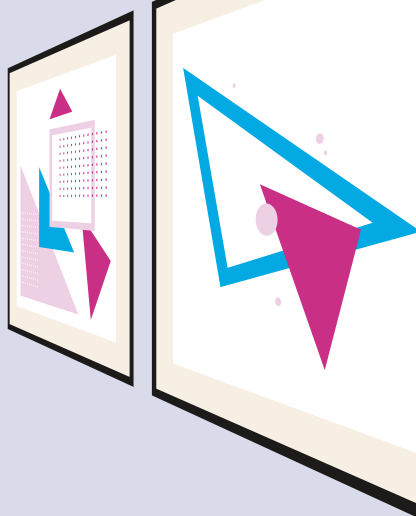
Coaching in action



Picking up the pieces



As her work with client Chrissie* comes to an abrupt end, the award-winning coach Kim Morgan learns her own lessons in loss and letting go



Session three...

Chrissie had breezed away from our last session, fired up about the idea of planning weekends away with her partner so that they could rekindle their relationship and learn to appreciate one another again.

However, since then, Chrissie had cancelled two appointments with me. Now, as I sat waiting to see her for the first time after a long break, I was aware that I was feeling a little anxious.

A very different Chrissie entered the room. She looked tired and gaunt, and lacked her usual dynamism. I waited for her to settle into her chair and to start updating me as she usually did, but instead she sat silently, shaking her head, biting her lip.

‘What is it, Chrissie?’ I asked gently.

Slowly, Chrissie began to tell me what had happened. ‘I booked a weekend away in Edinburgh, taking in an art exhibition I knew Jez* wanted to see. I had decided to take more interest in the things that matter to him. I even bought some new clothes for the trip, so I looked a bit less “corporate” and a bit more “boho”, which I know he likes.’ Chrissie stopped for a minute to compose herself. ‘I feel stupid now, hearing myself say all that. What an idiot!’

I listened with compassion as Chrissie told me more about the trip. Jez was very distant on the first day. He shunned her attempts to hold his hand or kiss him. He seemed as though he didn’t want to be there. ‘On the morning of the second day, we had a massive row. I asked Jez what was going on and that’s when he told me that he wanted to end our marriage.’ Chrissie dissolved in floods of tears.

Chrissie was hurting badly, and she was blaming and judging herself, too, to add insult to injury.

‘Jez said I had ignored him and his needs for years. Apparently, I made him feel completely insignificant. I think he is right! I was so caught up in my own career success that I didn’t give him a thought. He told me he had started to have feelings for a woman at his art club. He said they shared similar values, and that she is “sensitive, gentle and

interested in the spiritual side of life”.’ (Chrissie mimicked Jez’s voice, rolled her eyes and made the peace sign). ‘I think that is intended to mean that I am not any of those things!’ Chrissie exclaimed.

Chrissie was clearly wounded. She was blaming herself for taking Jez for granted. She was feeling shame, guilt, anger, denial, shock, confusion – the whole gamut of emotions associated with grief and loss.

She seemed angry with me, too: ‘I suppose you’re going to ask me to do some more coaching exercises now? Like, what messages did I inherit from my parents about relationships? If I was a fly on the wall, what mistakes would I see myself making?’

I didn’t reply to these questions and, instead, urged Chrissie to practise some self-compassion at this challenging time. I said that now was not the time for analysis, but for self-care and just being listened to. I offered her my continued support, but she said she would ‘rather go elsewhere’.

Chrissie left the session soon afterwards. I knew that there would be different work for Chrissie to do now. She would have to deal with the grief that comes with the breakdown of a long-term relationship. I accepted that she would not be doing that work with me.

I realised that I was doing what Chrissie was doing and beating myself up about things I might have done differently. I reminded myself that I too needed to exercise self-compassion! I would have to deal with my own sadness that I had ‘failed’ to give Chrissie’s story a happy ending. I knew that my ‘rescuer’ and perfectionist tendencies were at play and, not for the first time, I would need to work on these issues with my coaching supervisor.

I revisited one of my favourite quotes, by actress Gilda Radner, about letting go of control: ‘I wanted a perfect ending. Now I’ve learned, the hard way, that some poems don’t rhyme, and some stories don’t have a clear beginning, middle, and end.’

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



Work it out

When things have gone wrong in your life, it can be easy to become your own worst enemy – blaming yourself, feeling like a failure, judging and criticising yourself for all the things you did or didn't do.

If you notice that someone else is suffering, what do you do? Do you wade in, judging them harshly, or do you offer them comfort and understanding? Well, if you are suffering, you need to show yourself the same amount of care and compassion as you would show to others. Self-compassion means:

- **Accepting that you are not perfect, and that you did your best with the resources available to you at the time.**
- **Being gentle and forgiving to yourself. Talk to yourself the way a loving parent would talk to a child who was upset with themselves.**
- **Validating yourself. Remind yourself of all the things you like about yourself, and all the good things other people say about you.**
- **Accepting your imperfections, in the same way you accept imperfections in others.**
- **Doing things which will make you feel good and safe.**

WORDS OF WISDOM

*“You have peace,’
the old woman said,
‘when you make it
with yourself”*

Mitch Albom

*“You yourself, as much
as anybody in the entire
universe, deserve your
love and affection”*

Buddha

Coping with loss and change

Losses and changes are inevitable parts of life, and even the changes we initiate ourselves can bring with them a sense of sadness, confusion, and grief. Grief is a complex set of feelings, brought about by the end of a familiar aspect of our lives.

The complex feelings associated with grief need to be acknowledged and expressed so that we can eventually come to accept the reality of the loss, process the feelings, and begin to find ways to move forward with new directions and new goals.

If you have experienced grief or loss, consider doing the following:

- **Ask for help from friends, family, and colleagues. Build a community of support around you – people who will listen without judgement and without trying to ‘rescue’ you or move you on too quickly. Find people who will let you sit down and weep with them, and who won’t mind if you say the same things repeatedly.**
- **Make time for small moments of happiness each day to give yourself a sense of meaning, achievement, and connection with others.**
- **Journal your thoughts and feelings about the ending or loss you have experienced.**
- **Access professional support by working with a specialist grief therapist or grief coach. Speak to your GP for a referral for bereavement counselling.**



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Hello!

If the autumn season is encouraging you to take some time to reflect on your life, what could be a better

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Sally x

Editor,
Psychologies

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9 ways to **MANAGE STRESS**

Armed with a toolkit of techniques and tricks to calm the mind and bring focus back to your body, you can stop stressful situations from sabotaging your day, says Katy Georgiou

1

Ground yourself

Making contact with the ground is your baseline go-to response for stress. This technique can be especially helpful if you find your stress regularly turns into panic.

Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, place your feet flat on the ground so that you feel stable, and then close your eyes. If you're able to sit on the floor cross-legged or to lie down flat, then even better.

Think of this as earthing: really connect with the ground beneath your body. The following pages will teach you strategies to further ground yourself. Some studies suggest that this simple act can help reduce or relieve symptoms of stress such as pain and fatigue, reduce blood pressure, and improve sleep. If you're feeling disconnected from the world, it can also remind you that you belong to it and are a crucial part of it – the ground will always be there for you.



2

Take a breath

Remember to breathe. It sounds simple, but we can often forget to breathe when stressed, which can exaggerate and exacerbate our reactions. With your feet on the ground, take a deep breath as if you're drawing it up from the ground, through your feet, into your legs. Keep breathing it up into your upper body. Hold for five seconds, then breathe out slowly. As you exhale, imagine your breath leaving your body by flowing through your arms and fingertips. Repeat. By focusing on your breath, it can help get your stress response under control and help you figure out a calmer, more measured reaction to your situation.

3

LOVE THYSELF

Adopting regular, daily or weekly routines for self-care can be very containing, creating consistency amid

all sorts of stressful life events happening around you. Looking in the mirror each day can actually remind you that you exist, so feel free to factor some reflective gazing into your daily routine, whether it's while applying moisturiser, shaving, or brushing your hair. Studies have shown that being confronted with your reflection can have powerful effects, taking us out of our heads and into the immediate present. For added effect, pay attention to the way your products interact with your hair and skin as you apply them. Even simple acts like dabbing your neck with perfume, plucking and exfoliating can get you in touch with different parts of your body and different sensations, so long as you enjoy them.

Playing around with smells, colours and textures in your hands will also engage your senses. Using a scented shampoo, treating yourself to luxurious scrubs, or smoothing on body lotion after a warm bath can be easy ways to do this.





4

CLEAR YOUR MIND

Abandon all your thoughts and try to focus only on

your surroundings. What can you see, hear, smell, taste and touch? Identify three things you can hear, one thing you can taste, four things you can see and two things you can feel on your skin. Pick out colours in the room you are sitting in, notice textures and different kinds of light. If somebody is with you, tell them what you are experiencing. The point here is that your senses are your best and easiest route back to feeling calm, by coming out of your head and rooting yourself back in the present. This is incredibly helpful if you're having a panic attack or flop response, and is also a simple way to support someone else if they are struggling.

5

Trace your fingers

A simple breathing exercise you can do at your desk or in the privacy of your bedroom

is to trace the shape of your hand with a finger on your opposite hand, while you breathe in and out. Take a breath in as you trace upwards toward the tip of your finger, then breathe out as you trace down toward your palm, and continue until you've traced all of your fingers. Not only does this help you regulate your breathing, it helps to keep you focused on your body in the here and now. This can be especially helpful if you experience a lot of anxiety, or if you struggle with a flight, freeze or flop response, because it gradually brings you back into your body on your own terms, increasing your feeling of control.

6

Speak out

If you're able to, speaking your process out loud can be a powerful form of self-support. For example, saying: 'My mind has gone blank, just bear with me,' can actually prevent you from panicking or feeling stressed. Naming things out loud can paradoxically help them go away by taking away their power, freeing up some of the energy we're spending on fighting them. It also moves the responsibility to deal with it away from just you. This can feel counter-intuitive or as though you're sharing your weaknesses, but in therapy circles sharing your humanity, especially in a group, is an act of leadership, as it can set an example for others, making them feel comfortable to do the same thing.



RELAX YOUR MUSCLES

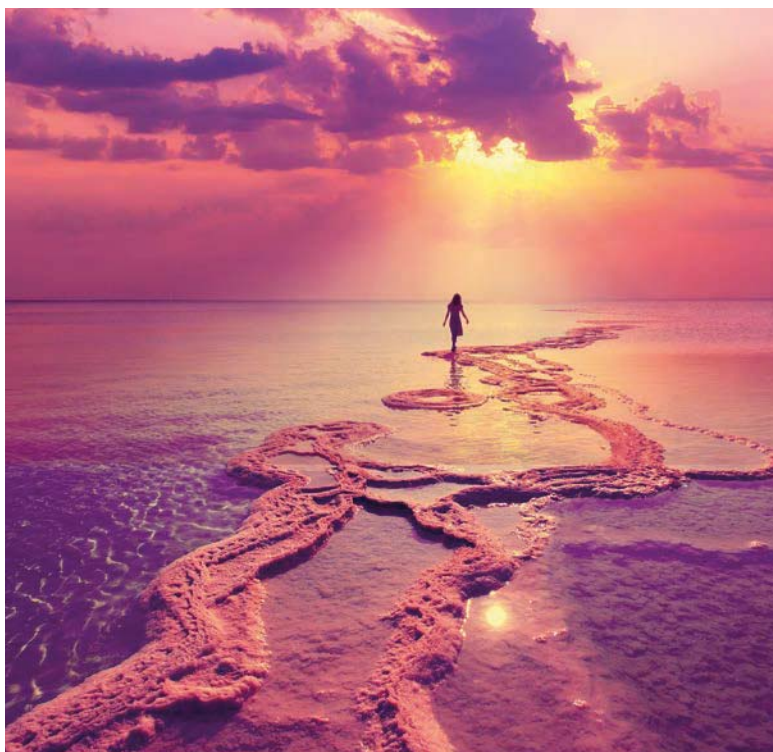
When your muscles are relaxed, your amygdala receives a message that there's no threat. Notice if you're gritting your teeth or clenching your jaw, and try to relax it. Then close your eyes and drop your shoulders. Make your arms go limp, so that if somebody were to pick one up and let go, it would drop right down again with a thump. Do a quick scan of the rest of your body, relaxing each part as you go. This helps to slow down breathing and heart rate, and lower your blood pressure, triggering your body's relaxation response.



Harness your imagination

Imagine lying on a white sandy beach with crystal clear waves lapping around you, or picture a sunset on a warm, summer evening. Whatever your idea of serenity, take a few

moments away from what you're doing just to close your eyes and picture this scene. Think of the colours, sounds and smells. Visualisations such as these are powerful ways to expand your ability to relax, by regulating your breathing and heart rate as you focus.



BE PRESENT

We can get so caught up in our thoughts and daily tasks, we can forget what's around us right now. Take a step back from whatever is happening and notice the obvious. Speak out loud if you want: 'I'm in a room. I'm sitting on a chair. I'm looking at my computer.' This gives you an outsider perspective of what someone would be seeing if they were looking at us. This can be a sobering way to get out of our heads and back into the present.



*Extracted from
How To Understand
And Deal With Stress
by Katy Georgiou
(Vie Books, £6.99)*



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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 **Evolution**, this month we will focus on **Freud**.

'F' IS FOR FREUD

Love him or loathe him, Freud made an important contribution to psychology. When we train coaches, we cover Freud's theory of the unconscious mind and how it finds ways to make our repressed wishes and fears known, in disguised ways. For example:

- The Freudian Slip - blurting out the wrong word, calling your partner by your ex's name, or sending someone a text you were writing about them not to them!
- The 'door handle moment' - what we say when we think it is 'safe' to leave the room
- Projection - projecting how we feel onto others or external objects e.g. 'that cat looks sad'

Listen and watch out for these unintended 'slips' from yourself and others. It's fascinating to wonder whether they represent true thoughts that we didn't feel able to expressor whether they are just random mistakes!

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FIND YOUR TRUE CALLING!

This World Menopause Day, *Wise Power* authors Alexandra Pope and Sjanie Hugo Wurlitzer share how the menopause will help uncover your real purpose in life

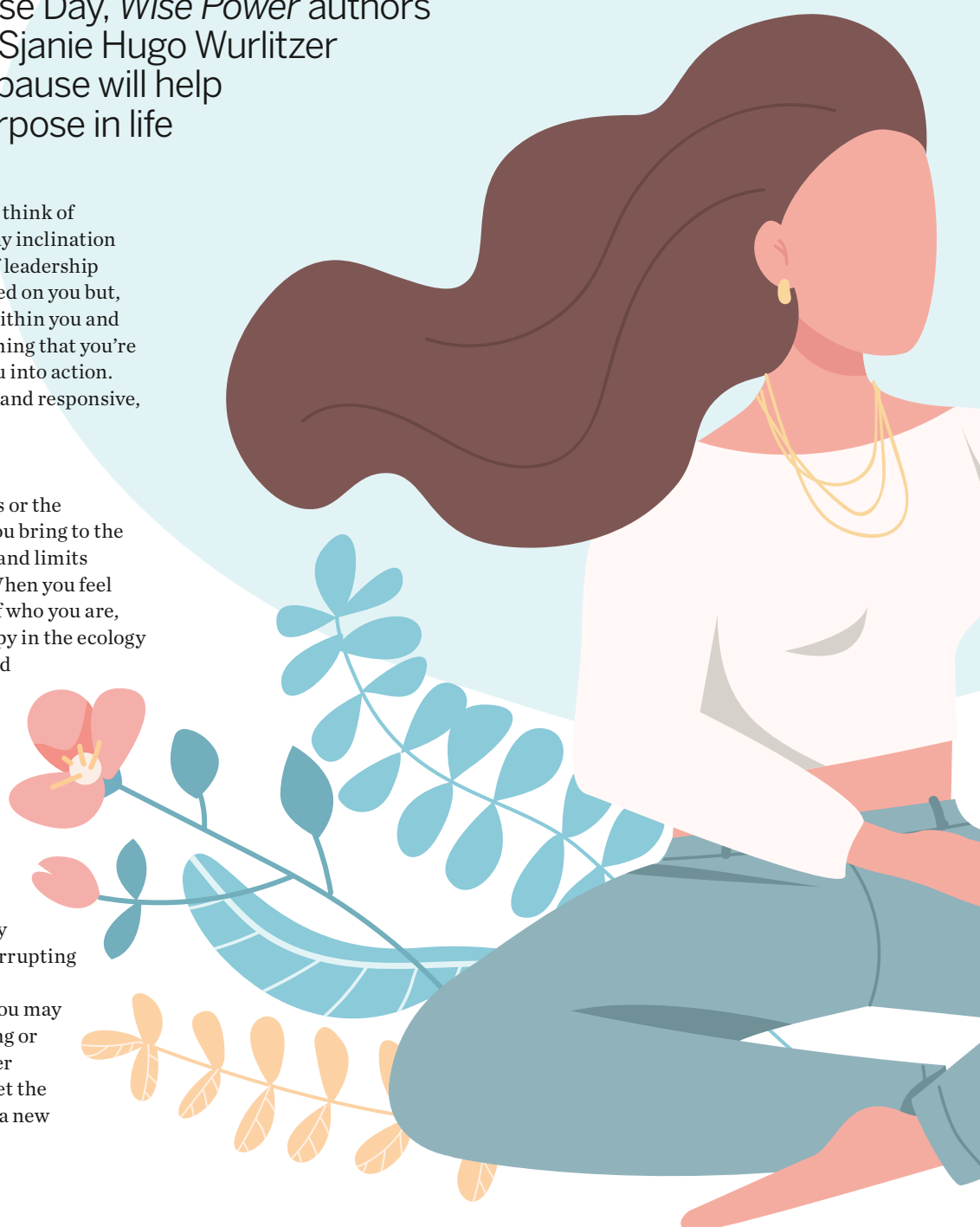
It's quite likely that you'd never think of yourself as 'a leader' or have any inclination to be one. However, the kind of leadership we speak of isn't a role conferred on you but, rather, something that grows from within you and grows you. It's your 'calling', or the thing that you're passionate about, that galvanizes you into action. Heartfelt, sophisticated, service-led and responsive, it's leadership as a way of being.


What is the calling?

Your calling is your particular genius or the compilation of talents or gifts that you bring to the world, alongside your shortcomings and limits – this original combination of you. When you feel your calling, you feel the rightness of who you are, and the vital place or niche you occupy in the ecology of life. You sense that who you are and what you offer are wanted.

A calling is more than just being good at something. You may have many different skills, some or all of which will be crucial in serving your calling but are not the calling in and of themselves. To state the obvious, your calling calls you. It has a compelling quality. You might, for instance, be on another trajectory but something keeps nudging or interrupting the status quo.

When you turn up at menopause you may or may not have a sense of your calling or feel a deep purpose to your life. Either way, the initiation – if you rise to meet the challenge of it – will deliver you into a new





“When you feel your calling, you feel the rightness of who you are”

awareness or relationship with your calling. Perhaps it will bring greater clarity, more refinement, and a more evolved understanding of what you're about – or possibly more charge behind the mission you already have. Maybe you'll feel more up for the task – a greater trust in who you are and your capacity.

For some, the calling might not be a defined mission but more a sense of restedness and ease within oneself; a rightness with life – as though all is okay and you're in the right place doing the right thing, whatever that may be.

How does the calling appear?

For some, the calling can be very grand and dramatic in the way it announces itself. For others, it's a quiet, intimate unfolding, without any words to name it, emerging as you stay close to your day-to-day responsibilities. It makes itself known almost imperceptibly, and sometimes with hindsight.

The calling can be a compelling presence, thought or feeling that won't let you go. A sudden download that reorganises your life in an instant, or something that just feels good and right to do.

Either way, you can't abandon your calling, even as you continue with your daily life. For Alexandra Pope, co-founder of Red School – part of a growing global menstruality movement – it was a gradual unfolding that was kick-started in her early 30s by the severe menstrual pain she was experiencing. Pope chose to keep faith with her body and, over time, her calling with menstruality emerged. Each menstrual month as she bled, and as the pain lifted over time, she'd feel great waves of love and ecstasy course through her being. She'd be filled with a sense of rightness about who she was, and would get downloads, visions, or simply 'knowings' of a work that she should be doing.

Pope had no language to name it properly, but she was filled with an energy – a power – that sustained her more and more. It kept her close to herself, trusting her own intuitions and promptings on what she should and shouldn't do. And with time, the path she'd always been walking became plain as day to her. She could then name it. She'd known something all along, but now – and menopause itself was the great cementing moment of this – she could give it words.



Clare Dubois is one of those people who have an almost lightning-bolt moment of hearing their calling, and in her case, it came with a job description. When she accidentally crashed her car into the side of a tree, a clear message came through that she was to reforest the tropics. At that point she wasn't involved in any environmental projects, and there was no infrastructure in her life into which she could slot this vision. So, after starting from scratch, she went on to set up the global environmental and women's leadership charity TreeSisters, which to date has funded the planting of more than 20 million trees in countries in the tropics.

Of course, this didn't happen overnight: to get to this point it's taken about 11 years of very hard work and a team of dedicated people. Dubois herself is a force of nature – a powerful example of someone who didn't back down in the face of the call, even as it has demanded much of her. But that's callings for you – you can try to dodge them, but they keep snapping at your heels, waking you in the middle of the night, or quietly inveigling their way into your thoughts and feelings until you relent.

A homeopath, wife and mother with a fierce commitment to social justice and environmental issues, Helen has always held true to herself in her way. Now on the other side of menopause, her world work has only become stronger. She's someone who, whether wittingly or not, has been quietly serving something true in her without being able to say she had a calling. And then, one day, she had a revelation.

She was assisting on leadership training at Red School and was on an early morning walk in nature when her mission landed. She felt ecstatic. She wrote afterwards: 'I intend that every single being on this earth, and Mother Earth herself, shall receive the love and nurturing they need and deserve... and may I offer love and nurturing to all that cross my path, including myself.'

Awakening clarity and knowing

Clearly, unlike Clare, Helen didn't receive a job description as such – and in fact, there's nothing much about her current life she'd want to change – but, finally, she had words to name what was and is fuelling her commitment to life. This revelation, she says, has become the 'guiding principle for my ongoing path and the choices I make'. It empowers her when she has to step up to the sometimes edgy and challenging work she's committed to.

While menopause is a catalyst for awakening your calling, it can of course arrive at any time and also stir each month at menstruation.

If you're still in your menstruating years, take time out at menstruation to tap into the deep well of inspiration that's available. It may just suddenly



expose your calling or reveal clues each month.

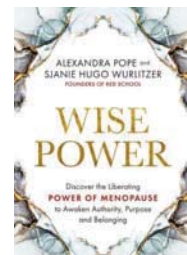
If you've arrived at menopause feeling a bit lost and uncertain, and wondering what your life's all about, Pope wants you to deeply trust the process of menopause to awaken clarity and knowing.

Serving the world

The world needs to be served in a myriad of ways, from the subtle to the practical, and from the smallest acts of kindness and care through to the grandest roles and tasks on the world stage. What defines this new postmenopause leadership is that it's for the sake of the world and not to aggrandize our ego. Although we do strongly hope you can nonetheless enjoy it, and celebrate yourself for what you do!

Menopause awakens great power in you and plugs you into a life that feels ever more meaningful, purposeful, and pleasurable, although not without challenge. None of this may be immediately apparent while you're in the depths of menopause. And, as is the nature of initiation, there are no guarantees of realising your potential. But the process of menopause itself is here to serve you; to get you psychologically and spiritually fit so that you can have your best damn shot at it.

redschoo.net; treesisters.org



Wise Power: Discover The Liberating Power Of Menopause To Awaken Authority, Purpose And Belonging by Alexandra Pope and Sjanie Hugo Wurlitzer (Hay House, £12.99)

LIFE AS I KNOW IT

Divine intervention

On the eve of enlightenment, and anticipating a natural high, Harriet Minter finds herself at a new low...



'I promise, I'm not going to take magic mushrooms for the first time age 40 in a tent in the woods in Berkshire.' This was the text I sent to my friends when I told them about my plans to attend a small festival celebrating the power of plant medicine. Obviously, it was a lie. I'm a journalist in the 21st century, and if there's anything I know about being a journalist in the 21st century, it's that your life is ruled by one question: will this make good content?

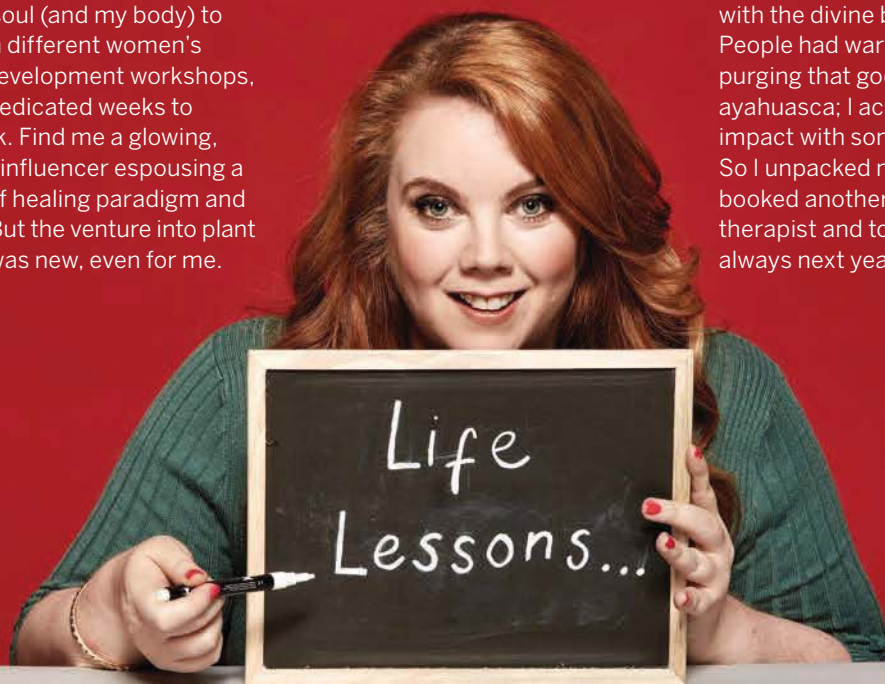
If you've read this column for a while, you'll know I love a bit of woo-woo. My early mid-life crisis has been managed through the power of sound baths, tarot cards and occasional chanting. At last count, I've tried over five different types of talking therapy, have bared my soul (and my body) to at least ten different women's personal development workshops, and have dedicated weeks to breathwork. Find me a glowing, luxe-hippy influencer espousing a new type of healing paradigm and I'm there. But the venture into plant medicine was new, even for me.

Yet, here I was, in my fifth decade of life, deciding that now was the moment. During lockdown, I'd lived with someone who really believed ayahuasca – a psychoactive plant-based brew – had saved his life, and his enthusiasm for it had piqued my curiosity. I'd always held firm that plant medicine was for middle-aged men who were too scared to go to therapy, but maybe I was wrong. Perhaps it was time to let go of the science classes of my childhood, which had been very firm on never eating anything that didn't come wrapped in plastic and bought from a shop, and instead see what nature could offer me. The only problem with this burgeoning idea was that, apart from the occasional drag on someone else's joint on my gap year (which sent

me into a paranoid spiral where I was convinced men were trying to keep women in birdcages), I have never had so much as a sniff of anything more intoxicating than a glass of warm Sauvignon.

So I did my research. I talked to people about what would best suit me at this current point in my life. I watched YouTube videos and read scientific papers. I took as geeky an approach to getting off your face as I possibly could. And the day of the festival I felt ready to cast off my past as someone who was too scared to ever leave behind the rational mind, and re-emerge as someone who knew how to commune with the divine.

Except, of course, that isn't what happened. What happened was that, just before leaving for the festival, I ate some sushi and spent the next 48 hours communing not with the divine but with my loo. People had warned me about the purging that goes with taking ayahuasca; I achieved the same impact with some dodgy salmon. So I unpacked my rucksack, booked another session with my therapist and told myself, 'There's always next year.'



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

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¹ Adopted from: Reddy DS. Physiological role of adrenal deoxycorticosterone-derived neuroactive steroids in stress-sensitive conditions. Neuroscience. 2006; 138(3):911-20. doi:10.1016/j.neuroscience.2005.10.016



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psychologies

DOSSIER

*With you
in mind*

SLEEP EASY

Calm your mind and uncover the key to quality,
restorative rest, writes Rebecca Frank ►►



IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Sleep is one of our most natural and necessary functions, and allows us to grow and maintain healthy brains and bodies. And, yet, getting good quality sleep is a challenge for many. Nearly half of people in the UK say they have trouble falling asleep at least once a month, and a huge 60 per cent of menopausal-age women experience sleep disturbances.

But while it's easy to get hung up on achieving that magic eight hours of sleep, physiologist Dr Nerina Ramlakhan says that the quality of sleep is much more important than the time spent in bed. 'It's critical to think about sleep quality and to ask whether the time you're spending in bed is restorative,' says Dr Ramlakhan. 'Ten hours of fragmented sleep won't be as beneficial as seven hours of undisturbed sleep.'

While the practical elements of creating a good night's sleep are important, experts are realising that our minds may hold the key to getting the quality, restorative sleep we all dream of. And just as we train babies to have good sleep habits, we can retrain our adult brains and bodies,

breaking the stress-sleep cycle that keeps so many of us awake at night.

Good sleep hygiene doesn't just start when you get into bed. It begins from the moment you get up in the morning, and carries on through the day as you work, rest and play. 'A sleep-care routine that lines up with your lifestyle, helps you manage the stresses of daily life, and makes you feel more relaxed, will give you the best chance of achieving deep sleep,' says Dr Ramlakhan. The good news is that introducing positive habits to help you sleep better will impact many other areas of your life, too, from your focus at work, to your relationships and self-esteem. Get ready to improve your sleep drive...

Expert advice



Dr Nerina Ramlakhan is a physiologist, sleep expert, and the author of Finding Inner Safety: The Key To Healing, Thriving And Overcoming Burnout (Capstone, £12.99). drnerina.com



Dr Rebecca Love is a behavioural scientist and the founder of Stella, an app that supports women through the menopause, and symptoms such as sleep disturbance. onstella.com



Ruth Timms teaches yoga and mindfulness to individuals, groups and organisations, online and in person. Ruthtimmsyoga.com; @ruthtimmsyoga

SOUND SLEEP HABITS

Build your day around these four restful rituals, and enhance your ability to fall asleep easily and to stay that way for longer

Stick to a routine

Just as babies and children need a regular sleep routine, so do we. It's all down to the circadian rhythm, the body's internal 24-hour clock that's responsible for our ability to fall asleep at night and wake up in the morning, responding to external cues such as daylight or darkness. 'Going to bed and waking up at roughly the same time each day will help to maintain your circadian rhythm even as the seasonal changes mess with it,' says Dr Ramlakhan.

When it comes to bedtime, she recommends an earlier night than most of us will be used to. 'According to Traditional Chinese Medicine and Ayurveda, the sleep before midnight has deeply healing and restorative effects. Ideally, this means being in bed by 10pm.' Don't worry if you're not asleep by this time, but switch off electronic devices, and read a book, write in a journal or meditate instead. 'Research shows that going to bed earlier and around this time has significant health benefits,' says Dr Ramlakhan.





GET UP AND GO

If you've managed to have an early night, you'll be ready to wake by 6 or 7am, but even if you're still sleepy, setting your alarm and getting up and out of bed around this time will set you up for a better day and keep your body clock in sync. 'The way you sleep, and your energy throughout the day, is directly related to how you start it,' says Dr Ramlakhan. 'Even before you open your eyes, take a deep breath in, breathe out and ask yourself, "How am I feeling right now?" And then move into your day from this place.' Avoid looking at your phone or switching on the TV or radio first thing, and do something relaxing instead.

Dr Ramlakhan also recommends eating within 30–45 minutes of waking, to shift the body into the rest and digest parasympathetic nervous system gear, which 'stops the body running on adrenaline and cortisol'.

Getting outside in natural light, even on a cloudy day, plays a crucial role in the healthy functioning of your sleep/wake cycle, so try to get outdoors as early as possible – even if it's just for a few minutes – and again at intervals throughout the day.

KEEP STRESS LEVELS IN CHECK

When we're stressed, the adrenocortical system is dysregulated and our energy sources are diverted, resulting in sleep disruption and mood changes. 'These disruptions don't just mean we're getting less sleep – this lack of sleep heightens stress, trapping us in what's referred to as a "stress-sleep" cycle,' says Dr Ramlakhan.

Unfortunately, most women will experience some emotional changes around the time of the menopause due to hormone fluctuations, from increased anxiety to overwhelm or feeling down. If you're also not sleeping well, this compounds the problem. 'If you're spending a lot of time lying in bed awake, this will lead to increased worry and it becomes like a rolling ball,' says behavioural scientist Dr Rebecca Love. 'Without rejuvenating sleep, your brain is less able to control anxious feelings, and it can also become harder to retain information or to concentrate.'

Adding some calming rituals to your day (see Restful rituals, on page 50) will help set your mind for sleep. You might also want to try a herbal remedy, such as valerian, suggests Dr Ramlakhan, which research shows can reduce stress, helping you to fall asleep more quickly, and improve sleep quality. Valerian is what's known as an anxiolytic, and by increasing calming chemicals in the brain, it acts as a natural sedative, aiding sleep drive without causing drowsiness.' She recommends Kalms Night One-A-Night (£5.25, boots.com), 'to help support a restful night's sleep.'



"The key to sleeping well is to be able to let go of the day; we all need a wind-down routine to help prepare body and mind for sleep"

MAKE SLEEP A SAFE SPACE

The key to sleeping well is to be able to let go of the day, and Dr Love says that we all need a wind-down routine to help prepare body and mind for sleep. 'A consistent calming routine helps to ease you into the mood for sleep by activating the parasympathetic nervous system, your relaxation response. Without it, your brain will be left processing the day's stress and your body will be tense – what we call "tired but wired".'

Aim to stop work at least three hours before bed, eat your last meal no later

than four hours before sleep, dim the lights and do something relaxing, such as take a walk, have a bath, or do a breathing exercise. If you happen to wake up in the night, don't panic. It's normal to wake several times a night, as we go through a 90-minute sleep cycle. If you can't get back to sleep, try following the 15-minute rule. 'Through research, we know that it takes up to 15 minutes to drift off to sleep, and if you're awake beyond this point it's unlikely you're just going to drop off,'

says Dr Love, who advises getting up and doing something relaxing outside of the bedroom. You could read a book, listen to relaxing music, do some gentle stretching, or drink a herbal tea – but avoid technology! Only go back to bed when you feel sleepy, and give yourself 15 minutes to fall asleep. If you're still awake after this time, get up again and repeat the cycle. 'It might sound counter-intuitive, but pushing your brain to learn that bed is for sleep will strengthen your ability to drift off once you're in it.'



Train yourself

No matter your age, retrain your brain to let go of the worries keeping you awake, with these tried-and-trusted techniques to break the stress-sleep cycle

Preparing your *mind* for sleep is just as important as preparing your body. While physical symptoms such as night sweats or needing the toilet can wake us up in the night, it's usually our brains that stop us from falling back to sleep easily. So important is the stress-sleep cycle that the NHS is now recommending people with difficulty sleeping try a sleep app over medication. Apps such as Stella and Sleepio use Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques to help you increase your 'sleep drive' by training and challenging your brain to stop nighttime ruminating and break the cycle. Try these techniques, recommended by Dr Rebecca Love, founder of Stella...

Quieten your mind

Whatever your age or life stage, one of the main problems with falling asleep is an overactive mind, and – as most of us know – it's rarely positive thoughts that keep us awake at 3am. 'Catastrophising in the night is really common,' says Dr Love, referring to the escalating worries we have as we lie awake worrying about everything from the things we

need to do the next day to the things that didn't go well today, and the fact that we can't sleep and won't be able to cope with life. And so it goes on, until before you know it, you've talked yourself into losing your job, your home and your relationship! 'What we challenge women to do is notice these thoughts as quickly as possible, and practise techniques to interrupt this cycle.' These include:

Cognitive defusion

This helps you to perceive your thoughts as only thoughts – and not facts – by taking you through steps that allow you to reflect on past situations. Try this:

- Think about the last time you struggled with sleep, and what thoughts were running through your head. Write them down and repeat this thought to yourself. For example, 'I can't cope with this; I want to give up.'
- Ask yourself what emotions you felt in that moment and how your body physically reacted. For example, 'I am sad and frustrated that I can't sleep and am constantly tired'.
- Add in the phrase 'I am having the thought' at the start of your thoughts and

emotions. This will help you see that the feeling originated from a thought and is not a fact, and so enable you to identify a negative thought before it goes too far.

Thought challenging

- Ask yourself: is there any evidence to support those thoughts? For example, if you lie there thinking 'I'm never going to sleep' remind yourself of the fact that in the past you did get to sleep, and you were tired but you did get through the day, and you didn't mess up. Think what you would say to a friend if she said she was never going to sleep again and tell yourself that tomorrow will be a better day for rest and rejuvenation.

Sleep compression

One of the first things Dr Love recommends for women having trouble sleeping is to keep a sleep diary for a week, noting the time you went to bed and how long it took you to fall asleep; if you woke in the night; how many times and for how long; and what time you woke up in the

"Notice these thoughts as quickly as possible, and practise techniques to interrupt the cycle"

morning. From this, you can work out how many hours of uninterrupted sleep you're getting on average (your sleep window) and work on reducing the difference between this and the time you currently spend in bed. 'The important thing is to reduce the time spent lying in bed awake, which will help reset and increase your sleep drive – your ability to fall asleep when you get into bed.'

The Stella app guides you through a successful clinical technique called sleep scheduling, or if you can't do this for health reasons or you're doing it unsupported, you can try sleep compression, which works in a similar way:

- Reduce the time you spend awake in bed. So, if you're asleep for an average of six hours each night, but are spending eight hours in bed, then the difference is two hours. You need to reduce your time

"The important thing is to reduce the time spent lying in bed awake, which will help reset and increase your sleep drive"

in bed by 15 minutes each week until you're spending just six hours in bed.

- Set a time you want to wake up in the morning, such as 6am, and work backwards from there. So you would start going to bed at 10.15pm, sticking to your bedtime and morning anchor of 6am even if you're tired and want to sleep in.

- Each week, reduce your time in bed by 15 minutes until you reach your sleep window (six hours).

- Once you're sleeping six hours each night for a week, it's time to start 15-minute increases with an earlier bedtime. If you're sleeping well with your new bedtime, carry on adding 15-minute increases each week, up to eight hours. ▶▶

RESTFUL RITUALS

We spend most of our time with our brains in thinking mode – solving problems, getting work done, managing our lives. ‘This can be very useful and productive, but we tend to spend too much time here (about 80 per cent) and not enough in the sensing or experiential mode,’ says yoga teacher Ruth Timms, ‘and this can lead to heightened stress and difficulty sleeping. Mindfulness and meditation techniques help you to switch gears and dampen down the stress response.’ Add some of the following rituals recommended by Timms into your daily routine, to help your body cope with the demands of the day and ease into the calm of the night.



START THE DAY WELL

SALUTE THE SUN

Doing some dynamic yoga – such as a few sun salutations – in the morning will raise your energy levels, stretch out sleepy bodies, and set you up for the day. If possible, practise outside or by an open window, so you get some morning light and fresh air, too.

MINDFUL HABITS

You will already have your morning rituals, but try doing them more mindfully. For example, notice the feeling of the water on your body in the shower. Wash your face slowly, massaging your moisturiser into your skin. Drink your morning coffee sitting down, noticing the smell and taste of the coffee, and have conversations with your family over breakfast where you actively listen to what they're saying, rather than looking at your phone or checking the news.

Set your intentions

These are very different from goals, explains Timms. 'Where goals are what you're going to do, intentions are about how.' These intentions are very personal to you and how you're feeling in this moment – so, if things are a bit fractious at home, your intention might be 'to really listen when my children or partner talk to me'. If you're exhausted, you might have an intention 'to do one thing at a time and recognise when my body needs rest.' Importantly, Timms says that you mustn't beat yourself up if it goes wrong; just notice what you're doing and begin again. 'Try to laugh at your own humanity,' she says, 'and, in doing so, you can recognise what you're doing.'



MINI BREAKS

Ultradian rhythms are like mini circadian rhythms that occur many times a day. They follow a typical pattern of about 90 minutes productivity followed by a 20-minute drop – or an energy crash, as you might recognise it. Use these necessary low energy or rest periods well, rather than reaching for a coffee or sugary snack and trying to push on through. This will ensure you reach peak productivity again afterwards and, ultimately, set you on the right track for a restful night's sleep.

1 Take three breaths

Close your eyes, plant your feet firmly on the floor and take three conscious breaths. If you can, move position and lie on the floor for five minutes with your eyes closed (or with a soft gaze) and focus on taking long, slow, deep breaths. You could try raising your lower legs onto a chair or sofa – if the legs are higher than the heart it slows the heart rate down and can be very restorative.

2 Have a lunch break

Get away from your desk or wherever you work and take a proper break while you eat your lunch. Take time to eat and enjoy your food, without rushing or trying to do something else at the same time. If you're eating lunch with somebody else, enjoy some conversation and the shift in focus from your work.

3 Do a body scan

Resting after lunch is helpful for your digestion and a body scan (see overleaf) is a great way to reset and notice how you're feeling. This can be as short as 10 minutes or as long as 40 minutes. Many people fall asleep doing a body scan, which is why doing it at this time is better than later in the evening, when it might disrupt your circadian rhythm. If you do nod off, try not to sleep for longer than 20 minutes.



SLEEPY SUNDOWNERS

As the day progresses, make your rituals more focused on winding down, slowing your heart rate and lowering your body temperature in time for bed. This isn't the time for high-energy exercise or too much stimulation of any kind.

1. Get outdoors again; the fading light of the day will help increase the sleep hormone melatonin, keeping you in sync with your sleep/wake cycle, so try an evening walk. Or do some gentle exercise such as yin yoga, where you're close to the ground in seated, lying postures.

2. Reflect on your day; what went well? Any unfinished business you want to deal with now before you wind down for the evening? Dealing with these thoughts and worries by getting them on paper or talking about them will help prevent them from keeping you awake at night.

3. Do a gratitude practice; try the 10-finger appreciation, where you take your thumb in your opposite hand and work through all your fingers and thumbs, noting 10 things you've appreciated. The idea is to choose small things, like the feeling of the sun on your face.

BODY SCAN

This meditation is one of the first things you'll practice in any mindfulness programme. If you're new to it, try a guided body scan through a meditation app or a YouTube tutorial. If you're feeling strung out, it's worth bearing in mind it takes 20 minutes for the body to fully calm down the stress response, so allow yourself plenty of time.

- **Lie down and take a few long, slow breaths.**
- **Starting with your toes, work your way up through your body, noticing how it feels and any sensations you might be experiencing in that area. Is it warm or cold? Tingling? Or is there no sensation at all?**
- **When you get to an area of tension, such as the lower back or shoulders, focus on that area and try to let go of the tension.**
- **Finish at the crown of your head.**

*"It takes
20 minutes
for the body to
fully calm down
the stress
response"*



WHAT WILL CALM YOUR SLEEP ANXIETY?

Sometimes, it's your mistaken sleep beliefs, not your lifestyle, that stand in the way of rest. Take our test to identify yours

Tick the answers that most closely apply to you, then add up the symbols. Read the section, or sections, you ticked most, to find the root of your sleep anxiety

1 You most associate sleep with

- ◆ Uncertainty ☐
- ◆ Annoyance ☐
- Worry ☐
- Ambivalence ☐

2 Achieving optimum health

- Feels increasingly elusive ☐
- ◆ Is worth the effort ☐
- ◆ Should happen naturally ☐
- Feels impossible at times ☐

3 Your usual bedtime routine involves

- ◆ Tried and tested ways to wind down ☐
- Trying to distract and relax your mind ☐
- ◆ Going to bed later than planned ☐
- Getting to bed early whenever you can ☐

4 You're convinced you won't sleep well if

- You're out of your usual routine ☐
- You're feeling overwhelmed ☐
- ◆ You go to bed too early ☐
- ◆ You're somewhere new ☐

5 If you wake in the middle of the night, you think

- ◆ 'Here we go again' ☐
- ◆ 'Is it too early to get up?' ☐
- 'Why can't I stop thinking' ☐
- 'Tomorrow will be a nightmare' ☐

6 Your sleep history can be summed up as a

- Downward curve ☐
- ◆ Bit of a rollercoaster ☐
- ◆ Quite erratic ☐
- Barometer of your stress ☐

7 Your most valued sleep benefit is

- ◆ Resilience ☐
- ◆ Focus ☐
- Calm ☐
- Energy ☐

8 You would be happier if sleep was

- Guaranteed ☐
- Longer ☐
- ◆ Consistent ☐
- ◆ Unnecessary ☐

9 A good sleep usually means you

- ◆ Were in your own bed ☐
- ◆ Got to bed early for once ☐
- Felt safe and secure ☐
- Had time to wind down ☐

10 Deep down, you know you should

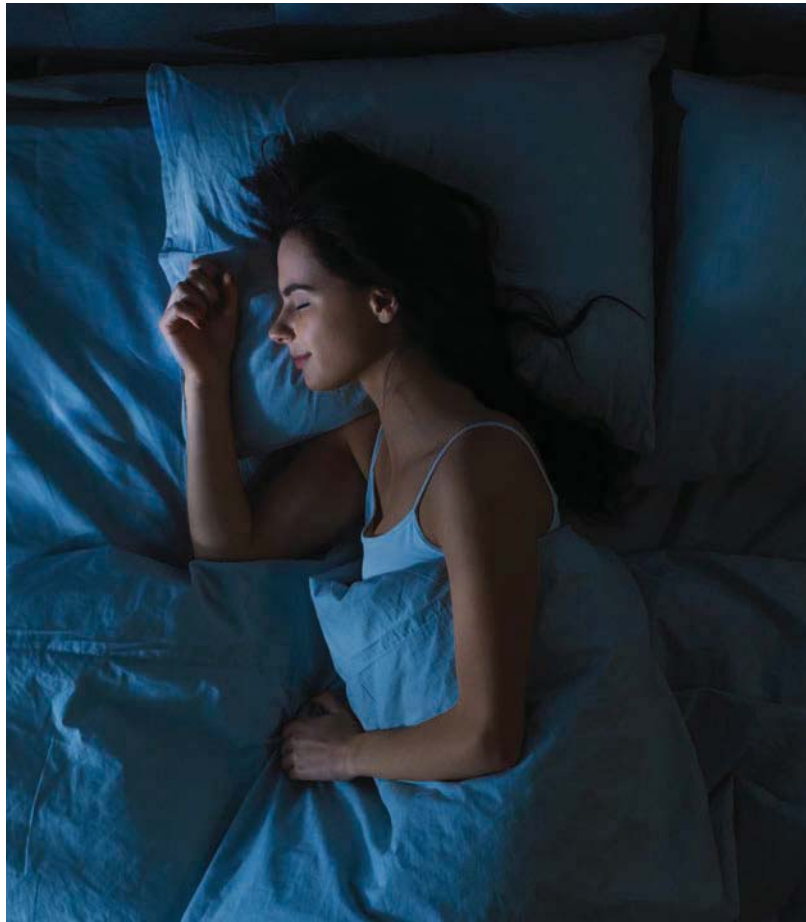
- ◆ Look after yourself more ☐
- Do more to calm your mind ☐
- Just relax about sleep ☐
- ◆ Trust you're getting enough sleep ... ☐

Turn the page to find out how to change your sleep mindset





What do you need for better sleep?



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♥

Confidence

The roots of a belief that a good night's sleep is more elusive for you than for other people can go right back to childhood, but more recent events can also be a trigger for sleep disruption, creating a cycle of doubt over whether you'll ever again find it easy to get to sleep or stay asleep. Even a short period of sleep disruption can undermine sleep confidence, leaving you apprehensive about any changes to routine, such as holidays or staying with friends. It can create extra pressure if healthy living is important to you and you are well aware of how vital sleep is to general health.

When you believe in taking a proactive approach to supporting wellbeing, it makes sense to prioritise sleep. But counter-intuitive as it may sound, you may need to downgrade your efforts. The more attention we give to complicated bedtime rituals, the more we confirm the belief that sleep is problematic.

Confidence in your own ability to cope is the key, and it may be linked to a general wavering of self-belief, or a tendency to question yourself. If, most of the time, you function okay during the day, then you are coping, so make a conscious decision to remind yourself of this.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♦

Acceptance

For some of us, our biggest sleep saboteur is an outdated belief that getting more than the bare minimum of sleep is unnecessary or even a bit of an indulgence. Part of you may be well aware you need more sleep, but there may also be a part that resists, or equates it with missing out on life. Perhaps you grew up in a family where you were praised for 'doing' and keeping busy, and find it hard to stop and wind down in the evenings. You might be a natural night owl, but early risers can also suffer sleep deprivation when life gets busy and bedtime gets pushed back.

Reluctance to accept you need more sleep can often be tied up with resistance to accepting vulnerability in general, especially if you're going through a life transition. For others, it's a red flag that you've let self-care slip. If that's the case, you could try mentally reframing sleep as the key to feeling strong, active and in control.

Acceptance is the key for you and it starts with open mindedness – try experimenting with an earlier bedtime, and see if you notice a difference in mood and energy levels. You may be surprised to find that as well as feeling more upbeat, you are also more productive.



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ●

Clarity

Sleep disruption can provide the perfect fuel for overthinking, especially if you find yourself awake in the small hours. It can be especially hard to resist disappearing down a rumination rabbit hole when you're tired, and you can then add another layer of overthinking about the consequences of lack of sleep on your health. The key for better sleep for you is in creating more calm throughout the day, which will help to support your emotional resilience, putting you in a stronger position to detach from overthinking.

It's impossible to shut off your mind completely, but managing it so that it doesn't wander into dark places is important – left unchecked, rumination can lead to anxiety and low mood. Sometimes, getting caught up in pre-sleep overthinking is about not holding onto control, and you may be even fighting sleep without even realising it. Greater clarity about your personal overthinking triggers is your foundation for better sleep. Start by taking time to check in with how you're feeling and what your mind is doing at regular points throughout the day. Using breaks to do some mindful breathing can also help calm your nervous system.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ■

Perspective

When you're health aware and conscious of the role good quality sleep plays in supporting mood and energy levels, it can be hard not to catastrophise about not getting an optimum night of rest. If your mind then creates doubts about you 'not coping' with the day ahead, you may even resort to cancelling plans and taking time off work, with a knock-on effect on mood. It's true that sleep is integral to health and wellbeing, and you have no doubt learned from experience that life feels easier with more energy. But at times you need to remind yourself that sleep is not the only component of a healthy lifestyle – a balanced diet, keeping active, and managing stress also contribute to supporting energy levels, mood and immune system.

Aiming for the perfect night's sleep every night is setting yourself up for failure. Those with perfectionist tendencies can benefit from a fresh perspective on their sleep expectations. Next time you get fewer hours of sleep than usual, resist the 'I won't cope' thoughts. You will survive, and in all probability function perfectly okay, and that will build confidence in your ability to cope on those inevitable occasions when you don't get a 'perfect' night's sleep.

psychologies SLEEP HEROES



There's no simpler route to self-care than getting a good night's sleep!



SLEEP-SOUND SUPPLEMENTS

Natural remedies to help you drift off

Kalms Night One-A-Night, £5.76, kalmsrange.com

'Research shows that valerian can help people fall asleep more quickly,' says sleep therapist Dr Nerina Ramlakhan. 'By increasing calming chemicals in the brain, it functions as a natural sedative, enhancing sleep drive without causing drowsiness the next day.'

You can find valerian in Kalms Night One-A-Night, a traditional herbal remedy used to promote relaxation and sleep, without that next-day fug.



Neurexan, £11, nelsonpharmacy.com

The stress hormone, cortisol, plays a vital role in stress and sleep – namely, too much cortisol leads to too little sleep! Neurexan might look medical, but it's actually a natural remedy that contains passionflower, oats, valerian zinc salt and coffee, to help you get your hormone levels under control.



Unbelievable Health Bee Rested Sleep Support, £12.99, unbelievablehealth.co.uk

As well as honey, our clever friends the bees produce not one but two more products that help us rest – royal jelly and bee propolis extract. Alongside lavender, chamomile, magnesium, cherry and more, this will help you snooze even when your brain is buzzing.



FutureYou Ashwagandha+, £21, futureyouhealth.com

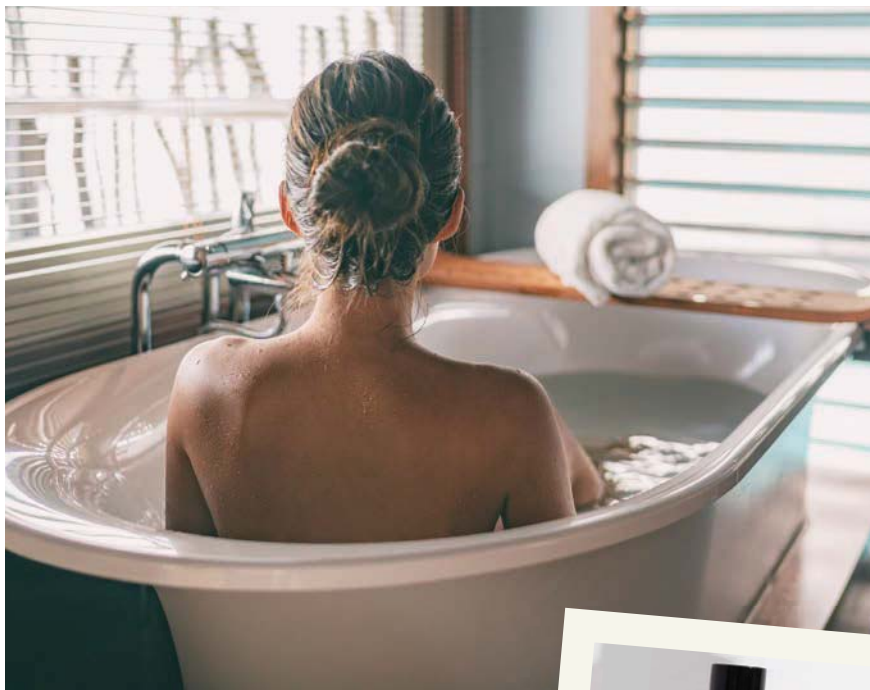
If you struggle to nod off due to racing thoughts, give this a try to calm your busy mind. The key ingredient is a group of flavonoids called withanolides, which help the body adapt to changes and promote relaxation. It has been specially formulated to support emotional wellbeing, reduce stress and improve sleep quality.



WORDS: SALLY SAUNDERS. IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Pre-sleep pampering

Unwind with a soothing bedtime ritual



Tisserand Sleep Better Bath & Shower Wash, £14, tisserand.com

There's a good reason we bath babies before bed: the warm water is a great way to relax muscles and get the body ready for sleep. Soothe your body and mind with this blend of jasmine, sandalwood and lavender, to leave your skin nourished and your mind relaxed, ready for a peaceful snooze.



Wild Science Lab Night Shift Renewal Eye Serum, £30, wildsciencelab.com

Your eyes will see the main benefit from this lifting, firming and brightening serum, but it also features hemp seed oil and a blend of eight essential oils, including magnolia, yarrow flower and rose geranium, to soothe and relax you.



Faith In Nature Shea & Argan Nourishing Hair Mask, £7, faithinnature.co.uk

While you're in pamper mode, a relaxing scalp massage with this nourishing hair mask is sure to signal to your body that it's time to sleep. It's made with fairtrade shea butter and argan extracts, to naturally treat a dry scalp and hair while you snooze.



TECH TO TRY

Proof that some electronics actually help at bedtime!

1 Withings Sleep Analyzer, £119.95, withings.com

If you don't like wearing a fitness tracker in bed (or need to charge it at night!), but still want feedback on your night's sleep, this mat is worth a try. It gives a full analysis of your sleep patterns and, more usefully, provides a personalised sleep programme to help improve your rest. If you have smart bulbs, it can even turn down the lights when you drop off!



2 Peep Club Hydrating Portable Humidifier, £55, peepclub.com

Are your eyes often sore when you wake up? It might be that they don't quite close when you sleep. Combat that gritty feeling with this clever little humidifier to keep them hydrated. Your skin might feel the benefits too!



3 HoMedics Deep Sleep Mini Sound Machine, £59, homedics.co.uk

White noise machines have become a popular gadget in recent years, but if their price tag leaves you tossing and turning, try this pocket-friendly option. Its pared-back design is simple to use and features multiple sounds, plus a guided meditation.



Doze-off drinks

Trade in your cup of hot chocolate for one of these blends, specially formulated to help you sleep



Sleep Well Milk Drink, £4.99, sleepwellmilk.com

Valerian has been used to help people sleep for hundreds of years. Now, it's being combined with those other sleep superstars – milk, cocoa and oats – in this range of tasty drinks, providing a soothing way to help you establish a healthy bedtime routine. Just sip warm or cold 30 minutes before you want to nod off.

Yogi Tea Bedtime, £2.59, yogitea.com

One of the best things about a good night's sleep is it means you feel better the next day. Prepare yourself for that happy feeling with Yogi Tea Bedtime, to help you relax at the end of the day. Calming ingredients such as lavender and valerian root envelop you in warmth, while fragrant herbs such as mint gently help you unwind.



Rokit Coffee Sleep Well, £4.99, rokit-health.com

It might seem like an odd time to be getting out the coffee machine, but Rokit Coffee Sleep Well offers a different taste before bed. This decaf coffee, which comes in a Nespresso-compatible, compostable pod, is infused with passionflower and valerian, to help you drift off.



SLEEPY SPRAYS

Aurelia London Perfect Sleep Pillow Mist, £24, aurelialondon.com

If a warm fog of lavender means instant calm for you, try this scent on your pillow before bed. Combining the perennial favourite with neroli, geranium and chamomile, it will reduce your stress and have you dozing in no time.



BetterYou Magnesium Sleep Body Spray, £13.95, betteryou.com

Supplementing your body's magnesium intake is a great way to relax muscles and help you drift off. This oil spray combines the mineral with lavender and chamomile, in an easily absorbed formula that gets to work on muscles and mind at once.



Sanctuary Spa Wellness Solutions Sleep Mist, £12.50, uk.sanctuary.com

Find lavender a bit cloying? Look out for this mist, which features a blend of jasmine, violet and sandalwood. As well as your pillow, you can also spray it on your skin, where the hyaluronic acid will moisturise and replenish, too.



Heart

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



IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

*Who are you
grateful for
today? Why?*



Coming up for air

Just keep swimming

As mum-of-four Caro Giles finds herself in a metaphorical sea fog, fighting to be seen and heard, she clings to the lifebuoys of community and connection



This month, I have found it difficult to allow myself to be seen. My caring responsibilities have increased

and, once more, I am struggling to make my voice heard by underfunded services and reluctant ears.

As summer fades, it can feel natural to retreat behind my front door and embrace the darkness – but this is less appealing when staying inside for much of the day is enforced by the needs of a poorly child and the element of choice is taken away. As I listen to a podcast on the importance of connection, I wonder if this is yet another thing I am failing at.

Early one morning, unable to sleep, I feel my way downstairs using the torch on my phone and step into the kitchen. A small grey tabby cat winds herself around my legs as I fill the kettle and

wait for it to boil. I am tired from the lack of respite and all the emotional drama, yet this exhaustion sometimes manifests itself as a brain that wakes up in the middle of the night and refuses to slow down. Leaves are dropping from trees and mulching into the ground, leaving branches stripped and stark against the darkening skies. Droplets of almost-rain hover in the glow of streetlights in these strange hours, when night is waiting to hand over to day. A candle burns on my desk and I feel less alone as bats dance in the drizzle outside my window.

In a strange reflection of my own stifled isolation, this week the beaches near my home have been drenched in a sea fret – a swathe of fog that swirls like vapour from a potion. I can see the fret from my doorstep, wrapping itself around distant trees. Several times this week I have driven to the beach with my children, a ritual that is developing

around the complex needs of one of my daughters. We leave the street in bright sunshine, but as we drive up the hill and out of town, a dirty strip of cloud appears, as if a steam train has just passed by. Less than a kilometre from the beach, we enter a chilly ghost world, as the sun is swallowed by the fret. Dog walkers drift in and out of the haze, and the milky sky melts into a pale sand clogged with seaweed.

Stepping out of our clothes and onto the shoreline, the air is both fizzing and silent. The fret is constantly moving around us, imitating the waves. A fishing boat looms out of the mist and slides silently by. I am surrounded by daughters holding my hands and gasping at the cold – tentative, but brave. No one else has come out to swim; we are alone inside this weather phenomenon where cool meets warm. We occupy only a small area of sea, reluctant to swim out too

“My family’s needs are complicated and do not always fit into neat boxes – but isn’t everyone’s life messy?”

“Maybe by letting people know when we feel weak, we are actually showing our strength”

far from the beach because the visibility is so poor. In a way, this stolen moment in the wild – just a few therapeutic minutes – is a little like the life I lead at home: always surrounded by daughters, making magic where I can, yet it can feel that no one sees me.

It is common for carers to feel isolated, and as a single-parent carer, the feeling is amplified by being the only adult in the house. Constantly turning down invitations, but finding it hard to explain why my child will not manage that particular situation. Being painfully

aware that, if I see a friend, I will struggle not to pour everything that is crammed into my head out into the room – and it might not be pretty. Concerned that people will lose interest because every ounce of energy I have is used up by the caring and the advocating, and now I feel empty, with nothing left to give.

Despite all of these worries, this month I have tried to reach out and remind people that I am still here; that I understand the value of connection and community. My family’s needs are complicated and do not always fit

into neat boxes, but isn’t everyone’s life messy behind the image we choose to present in public? It is true that we never know what is going on behind a closed door, but perhaps if we allow people into our lives it will lead to more understanding. I hope that people will remember that I can be a good friend, that underneath all of the caring and the angst is someone who listens and laughs and desperately wants to be there for others. Maybe by letting people know when we feel weak, we are actually showing our strength.

Expert advice



Ruth Chapman is a registered and chartered counselling psychologist, and director at Reach Psychology. reachpsychology.co.uk



Antonia Bifulco is professor of lifespan psychology at Middlesex University London, where she researches attachment styles.



Tina Rae is a doctor of applied child and educational psychology, and the author of multiple books on the subject.



Taking a step backwards to help them move forward

Some of our children's most ordinary milestones can evoke difficult and painful feelings for us as parents. Counselling psychologist Ruth Chapman explores why some transitions can be so hard – and what we can do to get through them

Let me tell you about Katie*. She's a 42-year-old mum of three. She's done the first-day-at-school ritual twice before: taken doorstep photos of her sons in pristine uniform, and shed fleeting tears on both occasions – but she's really struggled with the thought of her daughter, Zara*, starting reception this year. Bemused by her reaction, in therapy she said, 'I thought I'd feel relieved – but I feel like it's the end of an era.' Such rites of passage don't sound up there on the list of difficult life events, but these transitions have the power to stir up a lot of emotions.

Like Katie, you might have just experienced a child going to nursery for the first time, starting infants, or moving to secondary school. You might have a teen becoming more independent, a near-adult going away to university, or an adult child starting their first full-time job. And while you might have expected to embrace these meaningful milestones, for many they feel like painful endings – which might emerge as anxious or depressive thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

Katie had become preoccupied with how Zara was going to cope, citing that she was less resilient than her siblings and that she had struggled to develop friendships at nursery, because her attendance had been so erratic due to the pandemic disruption.

Initially, all Katie's concerns were about Zara and the signs of anxiety she'd seen every time they discussed her next steps.

Attachment (the psychological connectedness between people) can help us understand this. Professor Antonia Bifulco of Middlesex University London, who researches attachment styles, explains: 'These steps are also difficult for parents, and some find them particularly hard, ie when they have insecure attachment style. For example, this can be when the parent has an anxious style – fearing even brief separations – with a strong need to be physically close to their child at all times.' She says that 'while this seems to be about protecting the child, it also serves to lessen their own fears of abandonment.'

Therapeutic conversations with Katie focused on what it really meant to her that her last child was now of school age. It quickly revealed that the distress centred on the change in Katie's role as a mother, rather than her daughter coming of age. Loss of role is also often a central theme to the unease of these points of transition, regardless of the age or stage of the child. They have the potential to challenge our identity about who we are and what our job is. They can leave us with a sense of redundancy, as our relationships and responsibilities evolve.



Attachment theory also helps us look deeper at what underpins our worries about change. Bifulco explains: 'Other fears may also be involved – for example, mistrust of others' competence and the loss of control involved when others are in charge. This may affect those with more dismissive styles who have a strong need for control over their environments.' Bifulco says that, for such parents, 'brief separations can cause distress, and this in turn can be transmitted to the child, who may react similarly. Emotions escalate and these transitions can turn into painful events.'

Katie was probably on to something when she noticed some of Zara's anxieties. She spoke about Zara having gone from being a good sleeper to frequent calls for attention, requests for drinks, and anything to avoid the bedtime routine. She felt Zara had regressed a little and was more dependent on her than before. What she assumed would be a productive shopping trip for school uniform resulted in Zara refusing to try on her pinafore, and there was a battle to get her feet measured for her first pair of school shoes.

Bifulco explains: 'Transitions can be difficult for some children; those with more anxious temperaments or more clinging attachment styles. These children need physical closeness to their parent (usually the mother) to feel safe, and feel distress when separated. However, most children do adapt and gradually become more relaxed and confident when the parent leaves and they start to interact with their peers and engage with a learning environment.'

Fortunately, there's lots you can do to ride the storm, but if you're still really struggling after a few months, seek some professional help to determine what's beneath it. Dr Tina Rae, an educational and child psychologist, says, 'Developing a toolbox of wellbeing to manage anxieties around transition is something that we can all do, both adults and children alike. It is essential that adults themselves understand anxiety, how to recognise it, how to reduce it, and how to effectively manage it and, in turn, support their children to do likewise.'

“Developing a toolbox of wellbeing to manage anxieties around transition is something that we can all do, adults and children alike”

Navigate times of transition



Take time to reflect

Digging deep to wonder what else is at play can be really helpful. Both Dr Rae and professor Bifulco encourage self-reflection: 'Transitions can be eased if parents develop some insight into their interpersonal style,' says Bifulco. 'Attachment is sometimes described as being able to judge emotional distance from those close. Too close can be suffocating; too distant can be cold. All of us need to find just the right level of space we give to those close to us.'

CONSIDER YOUR OWN LIFE EVENTS

Some of us have had life events that make some of even the most ordinary changes feel quite overwhelming. Acknowledging your own experiences might explain why you are finding this more difficult than most. Sometimes, difficult relationships or traumatic experiences can lead us to find asking for help difficult, keeping other people at a distance and struggling to make close relationships. This might mean you fear your son or daughter being left out or lonely. If your own feelings were not validated as a child, you might be dismissive of them as an adult. This might have led you to feeling anxious when you experience strong emotions, or you might struggle to name them. You might also find that you are quick to dismiss your feelings as invalid and, as such, may be frustrated that you are finding these transitions hard. For some people, their experiences mean that they are highly sensitive to the words and actions of others, and there is a tendency to assume the worst. This may generate a sense of mistrust within your household, which your child might have picked up on.

Become solution-focused

Dr Rae says, 'We must never lose sight of the fact that when children experience these worries and concerns and anxieties, they are very real to them. Making use of techniques from emotion coaching is vital here. This process is not a therapeutic approach – it is simply a practical way of affirming a child's fears or worries, validating them and letting them know they are normal, and then problem solving with the child. For example, ask: what can I do to help you? What can you do to help yourself at this moment in time? What would be the best thing that could happen here?'



SEEK OUT COMFORT

Transitional objects are things that we can touch and hold on to that can help us feel safe or give us comfort. They can be reminders that someone is thinking of you, and can help you to feel close to someone who can't be with you. They can act as a bridge between home and school for younger children, and memories

of home for teens. I've known these to be key rings, pebbles, and even an 'X' in Biro on the wrist of mother and daughter on the day of any significant event.



Separate what belongs to you and what belongs to them

When there are strong feelings in the mix, it's important to realise whose feelings are whose. I encounter lots of young people who are anxious because their parents' behaviours have strongly implied the change is unwanted or insurmountable. I also see young people who haven't had the space to explore their thoughts or feelings because their parent has minimised them, and the emotion hasn't had anywhere to go.

The healthiest message is a balanced one. One that distinguishes between the ownership of the feeling, so it's not all yours and not all theirs.

REFRAME IT *When we have evaluated our own responses to these life events, clarity usually occurs. Recognising that these milestones invite new opportunities can lead to affirming change. While they might feel like painful endings, these transitions can signify positive new beginnings for you all.*

Q&A

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



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

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

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

“Life is finally calm – so why am I craving a crisis?”

Q I've been in a relationship for eight months now, with a really lovely woman, and in many ways it's the best I've ever experienced. My friends all tease me because so many of my previous girlfriends and relationships have been dramatic, and there's always been some sort of crisis. This time, it feels much more like we're equals, and we are both keeping our independence as well as enjoying each other's company. So why is it that I keep thinking about my ex?

You don't mention exactly what the thoughts are, but perhaps it's like a child in a cosy bed, thinking about monsters, but feeling safe.

I wonder if you're falling into a trap of 'thinking about the pink elephant', which is shorthand for the fact that trying to suppress your own thoughts makes them more likely to stick around (imagine someone telling you *not* to think about a pink elephant!).

Psychologists call it ironic process theory and, in a further twist, one way to deal with it is to schedule a time to think about what might be meaningful. What would happen if you followed the thoughts to their logical conclusion? Would you talk to your current partner, and meet your ex for coffee? Your new partner might find it understandable that you are still concerned about somebody you were once close to.

Or is there a part of you which believes love is all about the drama, so you're

subconsciously creating a crisis?

Consider all the possibilities and give equal weight to the good and the bad. Sometimes it's useful to write these thoughts down, or ask a trusted friend to listen to you.

In parallel, take a look at some of Esther Perel's writing about the realities of sustaining any long-term relationship. This might be the first time you can fully explore everything that love can mean. A lot of us have absorbed the mythology of 'the one', which implies there's no doubt. But, as Perel says, there is ambivalence in every relationship – it just depends how much. One definition of self-esteem is being able to see ourselves as flawed, and still hold ourselves in high regard. Maybe the same is true of relationships.

Perhaps the very fact that you feel safe in your new relationship will allow you to reflect differently on your own past.

Mating In Captivity by Esther Perel (Hodder & Stoughton, £10.99)





“Why does passing on our mother’s possessions feel like a betrayal?”

Q I’m feeling really upset about a family heirloom that my sister has given away, and I’m worried that talking about it will just make us both feel worse. It’s a ring that belonged to my mother, and my sister has given it to her son’s girlfriend. I didn’t even know until I saw her wearing it, and the shock took my breath away. I feel like it’s gone out of the family. What if the couple split up?

I can really identify with the way we link objects and people when someone dies: we seem to merge their being into some of their things. When I unexpectedly found a pair of my late husband’s shoes, I burst into tears that were almost projectile.

I hear two threads here: one is how to recover your own emotional equilibrium, and the other is how to have an honest conversation with your sister in a way that might be healing.

Bereavement therapist Jessica Mitchell says her clients can feel embarrassed about their attachment to objects – but it’s a common part of grief. She wondered whether your sister might have similar feelings but is dealing with them in a

different way: ‘Perhaps she feels “I’m giving and growing into a new connection”, while you feel “If this floats away, what am I losing?”’

I know it might be a cliché, but the feelings are about losing your mother, not the ring. What are the things that still linger with you, in your sense of loss? This could be an opportunity to share something emotional with your sister. It’s tempting to believe that other people can read our minds, but perhaps for her any issue about jewellery was done and dusted when it was divided up, while you were too numb to process that at the time.

You might acknowledge that the strength of your own reaction has

surprised you: ‘I’ve realised that I’m not as resolved about mum’s death as I thought; could I talk to you about it?’

Mitchell also suggests that you think more widely, rather than get stuck on the immediate pain. It might be helpful to talk to another close friend first, to practise the words, or try writing a letter to your sister, even if you don’t send it.

I read a great phrase recently about using regret as fuel. Your mother is gone, but your sister is still here. What do you want your relationship to look like in the future? How can you use this immediate incident as a stepping stone towards that?

thegoldfinchpractice.com; bacp.co.uk



Join Ollie's army

**NOW
ONLINE!**

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

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

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

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

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

Licence to help

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



Get in touch

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



IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

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



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



Think back to when you last felt really well rested. How long ago was that? How could you help yourself feel like that more often?



IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK



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



Plant power

Looking to eat a more plant-based diet, but short on time? Meal delivery service AllPlants may have just the thing. It produces chef-created vegan dishes that you can keep in your freezer. Whether you feel like a Miso and Tamari Tofu Bowl, a Tex Mex Rice Dish, or Kale and Chickpea Dahl, each meal is equal parts nutritious and delicious. allplants.com

Go boldly!

We're often told to 'eat the rainbow', and now new research from the University of Georgia provides even more evidence as to why. Its study, which focused on women in particular, has found that eating brightly coloured fruit and vegetables prevents visual and cognitive loss. Fruit and veggies high in pigmented carotenoids, such as sweet potatoes, kale, spinach, watermelon, peppers, tomatoes, oranges and carrots, proved among the most beneficial sources of all.





Extracted from Ottolenghi
Test Kitchen: Extra Good
Things by Yotam Ottolenghi
and Noor Murad (Ebury Press,
£25). Out 29 September

OTTOLENGHI
TEST
KITCHEN
EXTRA
EXTRA
EXTRA
GOOD
THINGS

Baked polenta with feta, béchamel and za'atar tomatoes

Cook time: 1 hr 30 mins
Serves 4–6

- 80g unsalted butter
- 50g plain flour
- 750ml whole milk
- 4 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed
- 200g quick-cook polenta
- 65g pecorino romano, roughly grated
- 180g Greek feta, roughly crumbled
- 5g oregano sprigs (try to use the softer sprigs)

For the za'atar tomatoes:

- 400g datterini or cherry tomatoes
- 120ml olive oil
- 1½ tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed
- 2 tbsp za'atar
- ½ tsp caster sugar
- 5g parsley, roughly chopped
- 5g oregano leaves, roughly chopped
- salt and black pepper

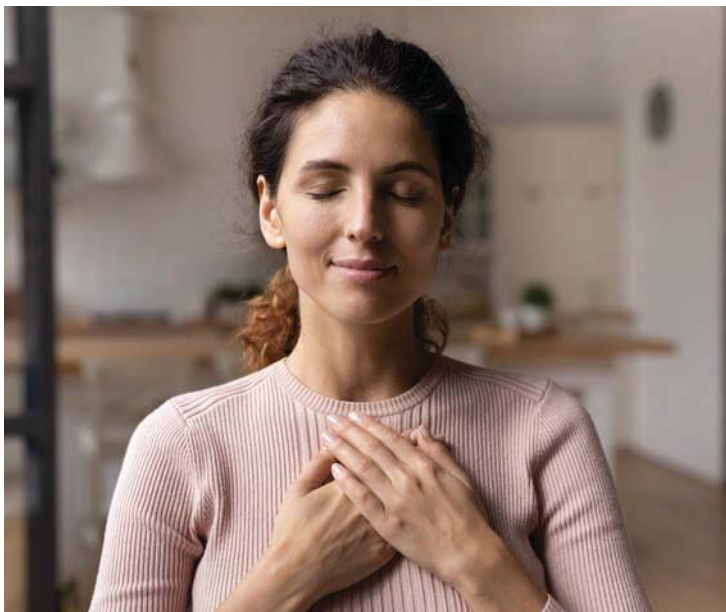
1 Preheat the oven to 170°, 150°C fan, gas mark 3½. To make the za'atar tomatoes, put the tomatoes, oil, vinegar, garlic, ½ teaspoon of salt and a good

grind of pepper into a medium baking dish, roughly 30cm x 20cm. Cover tightly with foil and bake for 40–45 minutes, stirring halfway through, or until the tomatoes have just burst but aren't completely falling apart. Remove the foil, gently stir in the za'atar and sugar, and leave to cool completely. Once cool, stir in the herbs (gently, so as not to break up the tomatoes). **2** Turn the heat up to 210°, 230°C fan, gas mark 8. Line a large baking tray roughly 40cm x 30cm in size with baking parchment. Put 40g of the butter into a medium saucepan over a medium-high heat. Once melted, add the flour and cook, whisking continuously, for 30 seconds – or until it smells like popcorn. Slowly pour in 350ml of the milk, whisking continuously to avoid any lumps, then add the garlic, ½ teaspoon of salt, and plenty of pepper. Turn the heat down to medium and cook for 5 minutes, stirring often, until quite thick and no longer floury-tasting. Set aside and cover with a piece of baking parchment to stop a skin from forming.

3 Meanwhile, prepare the polenta by first putting the remaining 400ml of milk, 300ml of water, 20g of the butter, 1¼ teaspoons of salt and a good grind of pepper into a medium sauté pan (or saucepan) over a medium-high heat. Once it gently bubbles, turn the heat down to medium-low, slowly add the polenta, whisking continuously to incorporate, and cook for 2 minutes to thicken. Add the pecorino and the remaining 20g of butter, and stir with a spatula until incorporated. Quickly transfer to your prepared baking tray and spread out in a large oblong shape about 1cm thick and 38cm in length. Spoon over the béchamel and spread it so it covers the surface, leaving a 1½cm rim exposed around the edges. Top evenly with the feta and the oregano sprigs, and bake for 22 minutes, or until golden and bubbling on top and starting to brown around the edges. Leave to cool for 5–10 minutes. **4** Spoon about half the za'atar tomatoes on top of the baked polenta, serving the rest in a bowl alongside it. Use a pizza cutter to cut into slabs, and serve warm.



Meditation + mindfulness



TAP INTO WELLBEING

Tapping on parts of the body can help release stress and boost energy. Here, expert Poppy Delbridge shares a short calming routine:

STEP 1: Find your connection

Place your hands one on top of the other across your chest and move them outwards to locate two 'sore spots' about 2in under your collarbones. Massage them with a firm pressure, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.

STEP 2: Make a positive shift

Identify an emotion that is unhelpful to you (such as feeling anxious). Say it aloud: 'I feel...' then take a deep breath in and exhale a sigh out as you give voice to it. Add the reason why, for example, 'I feel anxious

because I have too much work.' Make a choice to accept that this is the way it is right now. Now, edge yourself into the possibility that this feeling is temporary and that positive change can happen, and recite: 'It is possible for me to be calmer and to smile anyway.'

STEP 3: Tap in

Now use both hands to tap in large circles on your chest, collarbones and heart area, as you try to smile. Close your eyes, think of something that brings you joy, and focus on that. Notice the change in your mood, an ability to breathe more freely, or a little tingly feeling of hope.

Tapping In: Manifest The Life You Want With The Transformative Power Of Tapping by Poppy Delbridge (Little, Brown, £16.99)

BOOK CLUB

'A Happy Poem To End Every Day'

Close the day by reading an uplifting poem from this collection of poetry, chosen for its joyful sentiment. From cosy fireside idylls in winter to outdoor adventures in summer, encounters with the beauty of nature in spring and moments of quiet reflection in autumn, there's a poem for each day of the year. Pop this book on your bedside table and create a lovely nighttime routine.

A Happy Poem To End Every Day edited by Jane McMorland Hunter (Batsford, £20)



A calming cuppa

While not everything can be solved by a cup of tea, it certainly improves the majority of situations! From pouring a hot cuppa, to curling up and sipping, it's an age-old wellbeing ritual. When it comes to tea brands, NEMI Teas is truly doing the good work: the specialist London-based tea company is organic, fairtrade and provides employment to refugees.





Bit of a stretch

MOVE MORE MINDFULLY

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

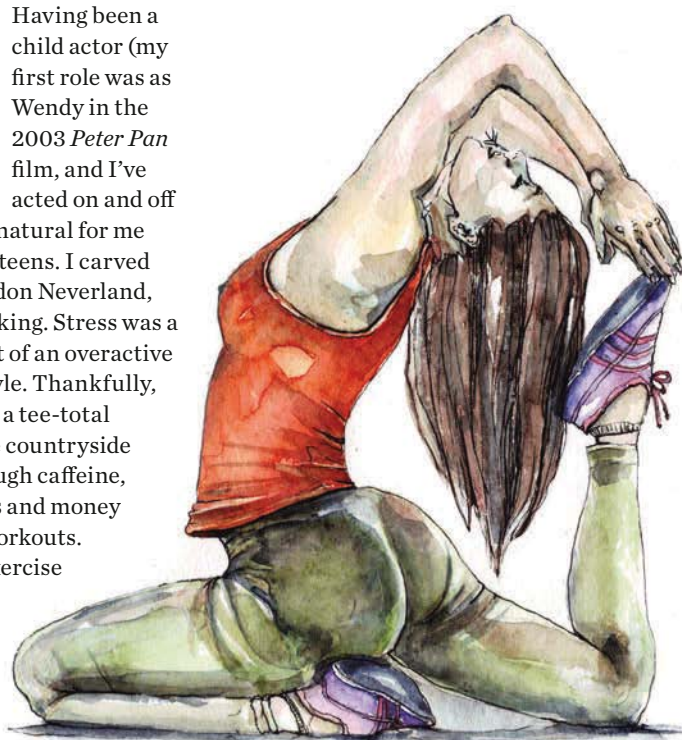


Having been a child actor (my first role was as Wendy in the 2003 *Peter Pan* film, and I've acted on and off

ever since), it was only natural for me to go off the rails in my teens. I carved out my own North London Neverland, partying and thrill-seeking. Stress was a constant – a by-product of an overactive mind and erratic lifestyle. Thankfully, I've since matured into a tee-total mother who lives in the countryside and gets her kicks through caffeine, yellow-sticker bargains and money laundering. Kidding, workouts.

I generally like my exercise to be short and sharp – 20 minutes of HIIT is ideal. The speedy pace and racing pulse lifts my mood and blasts away any sluggishness or negativity that comes creeping in when I sit still for too long. But I'm learning that there are times when it's better to s-l-o-w d-o-w-n. Like last year, when I was diagnosed with postnatal depression after having my daughter. Once my pelvic floor was willing, I tried to squat-jump and burpee my way out of the state I was in. But rather than the boost I expected, I'd finish feeling just as hopeless and angry – but with bonus aches and sweat patches.

While high-intensity exercise can be a great antidote to general stress and lethargy, it's not necessarily the answer if you're feeling low. You already have



a surplus of cortisol flowing through the system, and charging around releases more. The knock-on effects can range from chronic fatigue to anxiety, overwhelm, sleep disturbances, changes in mood, even a repressed immune system. In short, if you're already feeling burned out, hardcore workouts are only going to speed up the process.

Instead, it's time to go easy on yourself. Try Pilates, yoga, walking. Their gentler movement helps to lower cortisol and stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps you relax. I was lucky that my PND eventually lifted of its own accord, helped along by supportive family and friends. But I know it also helped to move my body more mindfully.

The most important thing to remember today? Listen to your body, especially when it's asking for rest. Without enough of it, the muscles and joints don't have enough time to repair themselves, meaning progress will be limited anyway. Take it easier for a couple of weeks and you'll reap the rewards.

Follow Rachel on Instagram @rachel.hurdwood

INSIDER SECRETS



Skin In Motion Blend It Sweatproof Concealer, £16, skininmotion.com
'My go-to; it doesn't budge, even after exercise!'



D. Louise Pleated Hoop Earrings, £55, dlouise.co.uk
'I've worn them all summer – sunscreen, swimming pools and all – and the gold remains intact and tarnish free'



YANA Activewear, from £30, yanaactive.co.uk
'Comfy, stylish workout clothes made from recycled ocean waste. What's not to like?'



GUT
INSTINCT

Soothe with self-compassion

Mindful gut advocate Cara Wheatley-McGrain sheds light on this much maligned and misunderstood organ...



How's your gut doing today? Not sure? Try placing a palm on your belly. You may sense the swish

as your last meal journeys through the 30ft of your digestive tract, the soft burbling of a contented belly.

Savour that glorious, sated sensation. Thank your most under-appreciated organ for the work it does each day. You're one of the lucky ones.

However, if – like me – you're among the millions in the UK living with a chronic gut condition, your relationship with your gut may be rather more complex. If you're regularly suffering with gut troubles, it's natural to feel frustrated. A stretched and sluggish gut; an exhausted, overactive gut; or that oh-so-familiar frustration of a bloated belly... it's hard to be happy with an unhappy gut! You've gone

gluten-free and dairy-free, and done the low FODMAP... so why can't it just get on and do the job? I hear you. But now's the time to grow some gut compassion...

The gut's enteric nervous system – the source of your gut feelings – is populated by 150 million neurons. A super-sensitive intelligent system that informs the gut-brain axis.

Your gut is inhabited by trillions of tiny bacteria that live in the dark recesses of your colon. These gut bugs are busy synthesising hormones and sending chemical messengers along your gut-brain axis throughout the day, influencing your behaviour and shaping how you feel. To thrive, these gut bugs need to be nourished with the right kinds of fibre-rich prebiotic foods: opt for apples, pick up an unripe banana, and add in some asparagus, for starters. Give your gut the love it deserves with good food choices.

Struggling to make changes that stick? Some studies have found that higher levels of self-compassion increase the likelihood of sustaining dietary changes over time.

Still not fully convinced that something as 'soft' as self-compassion supports gut health? There's evidence that self-compassion may reduce levels of inflammation in our bodies. Yes, fascinatingly, measures of the inflammatory marker interleukin 6 were found to be lower in people with higher levels of self-compassion.

So are you ready to try a little gut compassion? It's time to transform the habit of gut-frustration into gut-love with a daily gut check-in. Grabbing a bite to eat? Slow down for a breath, place a hand on your belly and tune in – is your gut ready to digest? How are your gut bugs feeling?

Try asking your dear gut, 'How can I best take care of you today?'

Women in wellness

Proof positive

Carolyn St John Loder, 57, is the founder and director of the Health Coaches Academy. Here, she shares her journey...



Having run a busy vocational college for many years, after my third pregnancy, I found I just couldn't do it anymore.

I was exhausted, my hair was falling out, my nails were weak, and I felt unwell and irritable most of the time. So I had to sell the business, as I wasn't coping. I knew I needed to do something about my health, but when I went to the doctor, all my tests came back as normal. Yet I knew I didn't feel 'normal': I'd stand at the bottom of a flight of stairs, wondering how I'd get to the top.

I went to see a consultant for advice about diet, who went through a complicated form, then gave me a list of changes that felt insurmountable in the circumstances. I went away with the list, and on top of everything else, found I now had something else to deal with. I returned two weeks later, having made what changes I could, but this wasn't enough – I didn't understand about how to remove the barriers to change. It's hard to make changes unless we can change our lives first, in order to accommodate those changes, and sometimes all we can do to get on the upward spiral of success is to make small positive changes that are celebrated. I felt like a failure, and so I never went back.

Around that same time, I was studying counselling, psychotherapy and coaching. So, I then started to think: 'Okay, well, there doesn't seem to be anybody who can help in a holistic way, so you're going to have to do this on your own.' One of the first things I figured out was that I didn't have any time for myself. The changes I needed weren't about changing my diet – it was about changing the way I lived my life, and finding space to prioritise my health. And that's what health coaching is all about: it looks for the root of the problem, which is

often not a question of changing one thing about yourself, such as your diet.

One of the reasons I wasn't allowing time for myself was that I was putting my needs to the bottom of the pile. I was a pissed off, exhausted people pleaser. There was a psychological barrier that needed to be broken down before I could start changing. And the more I read about it, and learned about it, the more I could see that the barriers to people changing their health are often psychological.

My journey back to health was one of finding a new sense of purpose; getting some more help with the kids so I could get some time back for myself; making small changes that ultimately led to big differences. I ended up using that same approach in my work when beginning to help others to regain their health and energy, and lose weight.

When I worked with clients who wanted to lose weight, I never weighed them – there was no point. Because they might say, 'I've been to the gym three times this week. I've started eating nuts and seeds, and have cut back on my sugar. I'm not drinking coffee anymore. I look fantastic. I feel fantastic' – and then they step on the scales and find they've gained a pound and feel disappointed. But that doesn't mean anything! That's not the measure. Look at how you feel, what you've done, and what you've achieved. I've coached people in weight loss who decided that they didn't want to lose weight after all, because once we started working together, they felt great and could begin to enjoy good health, and get their bodies working better rather than focusing on losing a few pounds for a few weeks. I soon realised it wasn't about weight loss, but about health and

happiness. Don't focus on a number, focus on wellness, and then choose lifestyle habits that support this; how you look, how you feel, your quality of life, your relationships, your sense of purpose. They're the things that really matter.

Health Coaches Academy is where I've taken everything I've learned over the years about what it is on a personal level to enjoy good health; the connection with positive psychology and the key to how to live life well. We've spent the past five years writing and developing this process into an accredited training programme, so others can become great health coaches and make the same sort of difference to others. Health coaching is the missing link in our current healthcare crisis, helping people to understand themselves and create a life they love. The course takes approximately nine to 12 months, and you can be helping others in this way, too, in less than a year.

Everyday, I hear inspiring stories about how our students and graduates are transforming the lives of others. And it's making a real and lasting difference with the positive ripple effect that happens naturally as others pass on the message too. Our health is in our hands, but we need a good coach to guide us.

When you choose you want to do more, be more, have more, with health coaching, you will quickly realise the power you can have to change other people's lives, and your own. There's nothing better.

healthcoachesacademy.com



ON MY WALK TODAY

FORAGE AS YOU WALK

With nature's larder at its most abundant in autumn, enjoy a feast for all the senses, says walking enthusiast Annabel Streets

Autumn is my very favourite time to walk – the crimson-and-gold foliage, the scents of damp earth and wood smoke, the morning mists, the rattling roll of dry leaves blown by the wind. I love the feel of nature pausing after the frenzy of all that summer bloom. I love the new stillness in the air, which reminds me that I should slow down too. The memories of summer are close enough to touch, while the hint of frost in the air reminds us to savour these last light-filled days while we can.

But, most of all, I love the tasting and eating that accompanies an autumn walk. It's the one season when we can genuinely eat as we walk. And I don't mean snacks in plastic wrappers. I mean blackberries, apples, damsons, hazelnuts. Then there are the mushrooms, crab apples and sloes, and while we can't munch these on the move, taking them home for cooking, steeping and preserving is just as enjoyable.

Every autumn, my family forages for blackberries, sloes and crab apples. The sloes are made into sloe gin and given away as Christmas presents. The blackberries are put into the freezer for scattering over winter porridge. And the crab apples are turned into jelly for serving with a Christmas cheese board. We've also experimented with autumn rose hips, which make a nutritious and delicious syrup. And all for free!

As my birthday falls in October, I always make my family do a Big Birthday Walk, which invariably includes a forage. The

most memorable walk was a guided truffle hunt, where we roamed through acres of beech woods with a woman called Melissa and her trained truffle hound. Melissa taught us how to spot potential truffle sites (truffles grow underground on the roots of beech trees) and how to sniff them out with our noses. Trying to smell a truffle lurking beneath a thick layer of earth and damp leaves was almost impossible. Except for my 12-year-old daughter, who turned out to have a remarkable fungus-finding nose. To our astonishment, she was better at finding truffles than the trained hound. So the dog chased rabbits and my daughter crawled around on her hands and knees shouting whenever she caught a nutty, earthy smell – which you'll know if you've ever had truffle oil on your pizza or pasta.

Melissa then carefully dug out the strange, brown protuberances with a small trowel. We sliced one open, sniffed and tasted it, then shaved it into our picnic lunch. We eventually returned home with five truffles – perfect for my birthday supper.

Walking, talking, picking, digging, smelling, tasting, eating – there's something about a foraging walk that makes it more companionably enjoyable than any other. Because surely this is what our bodies were designed for? Roaming through the countryside in small groups, identifying edible plants, carrying them home; this was exactly how our nomadic foraging

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

ancestors lived for millennia. Little wonder it feels so right. And little wonder that evolutionary psychologists believe the satisfaction we feel after a foraging amble comes from somewhere deep in our DNA.

Foraging walks are great levellers – there's no race to a summit or finish line. Children are often the best foragers, able to spot a hazelnut from a distance, and small enough to wriggle between brambles to pick the juiciest berry. Grandparents and the less fit appreciate the frequent rests. And the energetic can always run ahead to seek out new spots. Even friends who dislike walking can often be persuaded to join a foraging adventure.

Foraged bounty is particularly rich in nutrients. Not only is it organic and fresh, but many wild foods are also 'superfoods'. Blackberries are rich in vitamins, antioxidants and anthocyanins (shown in studies to improve memory, among other things). Mushrooms contain a compound that reduces the risk of depression as well as an amino acid – ergothioneine – believed to protect against cancer. Rose hips are proven to reduce joint pain and stiffness for those with rheumatic disease. Nuts can lower cholesterol.

Always consult a foraging handbook before you set off – I'm currently using *The Forager's Calendar* by John Wright (Profile Books, £12.99). Even better, start with a guided foraging walk. There are many to choose from and some also include a meal cooked from your foraged fare. Always mushroom-hunt with a professional mycologist or fungi hunter. Avoid areas polluted by heavy traffic or pesticides, and never take either entire plants or more than you need. Check the land you're foraging on is public. If not, you'll need permission from the landowner.

A foraging walk immerses us in nature like no other walk. This is one of its great joys, but it also means that things can get messy and prickly, so wear old clothes and take a pair of gloves, along with plenty of containers, and rugs for those frequent rests. Oh, and take a gang of friends and family for the authentic 'foraging nomad' experience. What's not to like?



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

A TASTE FOR *adventure*

Want fresh and delicious flavours in super-fast time? All aboard Rukmini Iyer's *India Express* – a collection of simple, speedy dishes for every day, made with just a few storecupboard spices



All-in-one aubergine, tomato & nigella seed curry

Serves: 4

This is my version of a spectacular Madhur Jaffrey dish that my mother makes: 'aubergine in a pickling spice'. The original calls for the aubergines to be deep-fried before making the spiced tomato sauce, but my mother has long since roasted off the aubergine pieces in the oven. In this version, I go one step further, cooking down cherry tomatoes under the aubergine. I was delighted to find that this makes for an extremely low-hassle, but no less beautifully balanced dish.

- 300g vine cherry tomatoes, halved
- 5cm ginger, grated
- 3 cloves garlic, grated
- 6 baby aubergines, halved (or 2 large aubergines, thickly sliced)

From the storecupboard:

- 2 tsp nigella or black onion seeds
- 1 tsp fennel seeds
- 1 tsp coriander seeds, lightly crushed

- ½ tsp ground turmeric
- ½ tsp mild chilli powder
- 2 tsp sea salt flakes
- 3 tbsps neutral or olive oil

1 Preheat the oven to 200°C, 180°C fan, gas mark 6. Tip the cherry tomatoes, ginger, garlic, spices, salt and oil into a roasting tin or oven dish just large enough to hold the tomatoes in one layer, then add the aubergine pieces.

2 Mix everything really well, then arrange the aubergine pieces on top of the tomatoes. If you like, use a sharp knife to gently score a cross-hatch pattern into the cut side of the aubergine pieces and then gently rub in some more of the spice mixture.

3 Transfer the tin to the oven and roast for 40–45 minutes until the aubergine is cooked through. Serve hot.

Tip: This is perfect with buttery white rice. Keep leftovers in the fridge for up to 2 days – this reheats well in the microwave.





Beetroot, curry leaf & ginger brunch buns

Makes: 8 buns

Curry leaves, mustard seeds and ginger are a classic seasoning combination in South India, so I decided to use them as a flavouring for these vibrantly pink buns. They were born from wanting to make something carby but fairly hands-off to serve for an Indian brunch with friends – there's a little light kneading, but otherwise the rising and baking time require no intervention. Fresh curry leaves give the most incredible flavour,

and you can often find them at larger supermarkets – but if you're stuck, use a fistful of chopped coriander instead.

- 15 fresh curry leaves
- 325g strong white bread flour
- 4g fast-action dried yeast
- 150g raw beetroot, grated
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 2.5cm ginger, grated
- 100ml water
- Beaten egg, for brushing

From the storecupboard:

- 70ml neutral or olive oil
- 1 tbsp mustard seeds
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 tsp sea salt flakes

1 Heat 30ml (2 tablespoons) of the oil in a small frying pan over a medium heat; when hot, add the mustard seeds and curry leaves. Let them snap, crackle and pop for 30 seconds to 1 minute until aromatic, then turn off the heat and set aside.

2 Mix the flour, yeast, sugar, salt, grated beetroot, lemon juice and ginger together, then add all the remaining oil and 100ml water. Pour in the infused mustard seed and curry leaf oil, then stir together. Knead the dough by hand or in a stand mixer for 10 minutes, adding a tablespoon more water if the dough is looking dry.

3 Let the dough rise, covered, for 1½ hours, or until doubled in size. Punch down the dough, divide into 8 and then roll each portion into a ball, twisting the dough underneath so you have a smooth top. Place on a baking tray lined with baking paper, twisted side down, and leave to rise for 20 minutes.

4 Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 200°C, 180°C fan, gas mark 6. Brush the buns with the beaten egg, then transfer to the oven to bake for 25 minutes, until well risen. Let them cool slightly on a wire rack before serving with plenty of salted butter.



South Indian Puy lentil & Tenderstem broccoli stir-fry

Serves: 4

This is a quick and easy weeknight stir-fry – if you serve it with rice or flatbreads, it's all your food groups on one plate. Tenderstem broccoli is perfect for this dish as it retains its crunch and works beautifully with the simple mustard and cumin-infused frying oil. A teaspoon of chilli flakes will give you a good kick of heat in this dish; reduce by half if you're after a milder dish.

- 300g Tenderstem broccoli, halved
- 500g vac-packed Puy lentils
- Juice of 1 lime

- Handful salted peanuts, roughly chopped

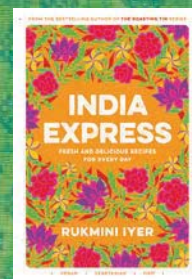
From the storecupboard:

- 2 tbsp neutral or olive oil, plus extra to serve
- 1 tsp mustard seeds
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 1 tsp chilli flakes
- ½ tsp ground turmeric
- 1 tsp sea salt flakes

1 Tip the broccoli into a bowl of boiling water and let it blanch for 2 minutes. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a large frying pan and add the mustard and cumin seeds. Turn the heat down to medium to low and let them splutter for 30 seconds, or until the cumin seeds start to darken very slightly. Drain the broccoli and add it to the pan.

2 Add the chilli flakes, turmeric and sea salt and stir-fry over a high heat for 2–3 minutes before adding the Puy lentils. Stir for a further 2–3 minutes over a lower heat, then add the lime juice, taste and adjust seasoning as needed, and add a little more oil if you wish.

3 Serve hot, scattered with the peanuts, with rice or flatbreads and yogurt alongside.



**From India Express: Fresh
And Delicious Recipes For Every Day
by Rukmini Iyer (Square Peg, £22).
Photography by David Loftus**

“I wanted to take back some control... so I named my tumour Roger the Lodger!”

Three women share their inspiring stories, and the life-changing diagnosis that put them on the path to self-discovery...

Simone Baldwin, 45, was diagnosed with a brain tumour in 2017. She has since written a book, which she hopes will help other parents suffering from serious illness to talk more freely with their children

Working as a primary school teacher, I had just returned from a few weeks teaching in China, when one of my ears began to feel strange. I thought it was the flight, or the swimming pool, and I was so busy that I ignored it, expecting it to go away. But it didn't. Then I started to notice my hearing was affected. My friend works at a hearing care centre and persuaded me to get it checked out. They couldn't see anything wrong, but I was now almost deaf in that ear. She said asymmetry was a worry, and urged me to look into it further. So I went for a consultation, where the doctor wanted to do a scan to make sure there was nothing untoward at play. I went back for the results on my own. And there it was – a 4cm tumour staring back at me. Normally when tumours are found, they're anything from a couple of millimetres to a centimetre, so it was quite sizable. And as it was pressing on my brain stem, there were no alternative treatment options, only surgery.

I think one of the hardest things for me throughout all of it was telling people for the first time that I had a brain tumour, because you see people's reactions writ large. It's all there – your own emotions, almost mirrored in their faces. It's a reminder, every time, of how big a deal it is.

But I'm a big believer in talking about things and getting things out in the open – that's how I deal with life. The longer I avoid talking about something, the bigger it becomes in my mind. I'd far sooner somebody asked, 'How are you doing?' Sometimes, even if I have nothing new to talk about, it just helps, because it stops it becoming that elephant in the room.

My advice would be to ask people, 'Do you want to talk about it?' And don't feel afraid – there isn't one of my friends who has upset me by saying the wrong thing. I suppose it's almost like with a bereavement, when you've lost somebody you care about. They're always on your mind, but other people feel scared to mention their name, because they don't want you to think of them or don't want to upset you. But they're always there

WORDS: SALLY SAUNDERS



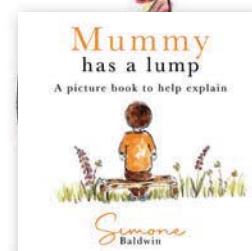
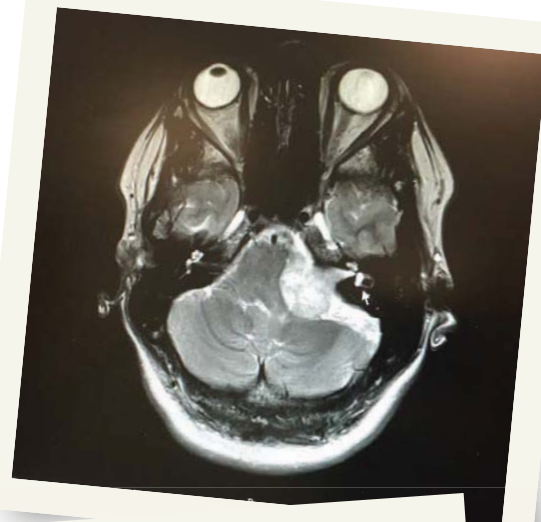
regardless and, sometimes, someone asking about them is actually quite nice. And I think it's the same with serious illness – bringing it up isn't going to upset me, because it's always on my mind.

Instead of hiding away from it, I talk about it. I named my tumour Roger the Lodger. It was my way of taking back a bit of control: I couldn't choose how it was treated. I couldn't choose anything. I either went with it, or gave up. So I think the naming of it was me saying 'All right. You started this, but I've got some power. You're not going to take over my life. Yes, you're going to impact it. But you don't get to become my identity.'

My stepsons were teenagers when I was diagnosed, and we could talk about it with them, but my son was only six, and there was nothing to help me explain it. I wanted something to help him be able to visualise something in my brain that shouldn't be there, and make it a bit more concrete. As a teacher, if I want to learn

about something, I look to books – but there was nothing; the only pictures I could find were medical pictures that were clinical, cold and hard. I wanted to be open with my son, but I was trying to communicate in a way that didn't sound scary. I needed to explain what was happening, and that it was far from ideal, but also what we were going to need to do about it. And that sowed a seed for me.

I never imagined I would write a book, but one day, while out for a bike ride with the boys, I couldn't ride any more because my balance was affected. So I started writing in a notebook and playing around with the idea. And, eventually, I came up with my story. It's not right for everyone, but it's a resource for people who want to use it. It's not a how-to – it's just written from my experience – and this is what worked for me. My hope is that it can help other people find the right words.



Mummy Has A Lump by Simone Baldwin (£6.99) is available in local bookshops by request, and online at Amazon, WHSmith and Waterstones. It is also available as an e-book (£2.99) through Amazon, Kindle and Apple Books.



Georgie Moseley lost her son, Harry, to a brain tumour 11 years ago this month. She established the charity cancer drop-in centre Help Harry Help Others to provide support for sufferers and their families

My son, Harry, was diagnosed with a brain tumour age seven. He went through chemo, then radiotherapy, and for three years, he was well. But then he needed more treatment and his last option was surgery, during which he had a brain haemorrhage and was in a coma for three months – and, devastatingly, didn't wake up.

Everything I do today is because of the impact cancer had on our family, and our frustration with the lack of support outside of treatment, both emotionally and practically. Although I'm CEO of a charity, really, I'm just a mum who has lived and breathed that cancer journey.

Everything was fine while Harry was in hospital, but things are very different once you leave. Whether you're going through cancer or someone you love is, people just stop talking. They hold everything back, for fear of upsetting you. But I always urge people to communicate to those around them how they want to talk about things moving forward.

Choose someone close to you that you feel you can openly and freely talk to. Even about those darkest thoughts. And if you don't have access to somebody like that, then reach out to organisations that can offer support with trained listeners.

If you're having difficulty talking to someone who has just received a diagnosis, or whose loved one has, it's about addressing that, being open, and saying, 'I really don't know what to say here.' That there are no words, but that you're happy to sit and listen. It's about letting people know you are there.

At the centre, we offer everything outside of treatment that a patient or relative might need, with emotional and psychological support through trained listeners and qualified therapists. We also offer a coaching programme: when people come through cancer, they put themselves under pressure to pick up their life as it was prior to diagnosis. But it doesn't work like that. And, often, this is when people

crumble. All sorts of things have changed for them. We try to help people move forwards and rebuild their lives after cancer, and I think that's what makes us unique. So often with services there are waiting times but, here, we try to meet that urgency. Because if you've reached out, you're probably at your lowest.

It's 11 years now since we lost Harry, and he was 11 when he died, so we've been building up to this anniversary for months – we can't comprehend that he will have been gone as many years as he was with us. But this is our legacy for Harry, and it's making change.

Georgie Moseley is founder and CEO of cancer drop-in centre Help Harry Help Others. The centre is based in Birmingham but can offer support to those in need across the country. Visit hhho.org.uk

Rhianna McKenna, 28, thought her breathlessness and bruises were just part of feeling run down. But less than a week later, she was diagnosed with leukaemia

It all started on a Saturday. I was feeling breathless and dizzy, and when I got in the bath I had bruises across my body. I left it for a few days, thinking I was just worn out and needed rest. My partner and parents urged me to call my GP, so I did, and they prescribed antibiotics for tonsillitis. I was stuck in bed, had zero energy and felt awful.

When I woke up on the following Wednesday morning, I had clots in my gums, so I called my dentist, who prescribed more antibiotics for a gum infection. But despite the medication, I was getting worse. I felt confused and scared, but told myself to let the antibiotics kick in and that I would soon feel brighter. Then things got even worse – my sight started to go in my left eye. My parents had been pleading with me to call 111, but I was too scared.

Come the Friday, my mum took matters into her own hands, making the call. They ordered her to get me straight to a hospital, and I don't remember much from there. I vaguely recall hearing my dad say he had called an ambulance, as I had passed out at the bottom of the stairs, and the paramedics telling my mum I had to go on my own to hospital due to Covid-19.

The next thing I knew I was being woken by a haematology doctor, who said, 'Rhianna, I'm really sorry to tell you, you have acute promyelocytic leukaemia. You are very poorly, and it's important we get you better very quickly.' My heart broke. I was alone, with nobody to help me process the information. My parents were told that the next few days were crucial. If they couldn't get my white cell count down, I possibly only had a few days left to live.

Thankfully, day by day, my white cell count began to drop and, eventually I came off the ventilator. It was the start of my recovery journey. My mouth was covered in sores and, for the first two weeks, I could only eat jelly and yoghurt. Meanwhile, my hair began to fall out in clumps. I remember asking the nurse to just cut it all off, to save the heartache of watching it fall out every time I showered. I lost all my independence – I needed help going to the toilet, washing, getting



dressed, and eating. And because of Covid-19, I wasn't allowed any visitors during the five weeks I spent in hospital. But I began learning things about my body I'd never known, and that it was stronger than I ever thought.

Eventually, I was allowed to go home. I was excited but so nervous. I had felt safe in the hospital, knowing there were doctors and nurses there if I needed them. What would happen if I felt poorly again at home? Or what if something was wrong with my blood? It took a while to re-adjust.

I started having chemotherapy twice a week as an outpatient, and after two cycles, my bone marrow biopsy results came back clear. There were no visual signs of leukaemia. I felt overwhelmed. It had been a tough couple of months, but the treatment had worked.

Now, I feel more and more positive with each day, and I'm slowly getting back to some sort of normality. The NHS saved my life and I will be forever grateful. And my family, partner and friends have been my support system, making the journey so far a little easier.

I finished my treatment 19 months ago, marrying my amazing partner, Aidan, in September 2021. Keen to move forwards with our lives and start a family, we were told that, unfortunately, as a result of the



intense chemotherapy treatment, my egg reserve was low and the chances of us conceiving naturally were very small. But, in November 2021, we found out we were pregnant, and I gave birth to a healthy baby girl on 8 July. I am still in complete molecular remission and have a bone marrow biopsy every three months to keep an eye on my blood cells.

Early diagnosis is so important with leukaemia, yet so many people are unaware of the signs and symptoms. I want to help raise awareness. You know your own body best, and if you feel something is not right, I urge you to get it checked out straightaway.

The most common symptoms of leukaemia are fatigue, bleeding and bruising, repeated infections, fever or night sweats, bone or joint pain, and shortness of breath. If you have any of these symptoms, contact your GP and ask for a blood test. Visit spotleukaemia.org.uk

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***If all your
work and
appointments
were suddenly
wiped clear
from this week,
what would you
do instead?***

A woman with long blonde hair is sitting on a light-colored sofa, holding a dark mug with both hands. She is looking out a large window at a lush green forest. String lights are visible in the background, creating a warm and cozy atmosphere. The woman is wearing a blue and white patterned sweater. The overall scene is peaceful and inviting.

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

Emotional escape rooms are gaining popularity. Hazel Davis finds out what they are and how you can create one in your own home

Expert advice



Dr Barbara Perfahl is a room psychologist and home stager. She has written two books about the psychology of habitation, barbara-perfahl.com



Lee Chambers is an environmental psychologist, wellbeing consultant, entrepreneur and radio host. leechambers.org

If there's one thing we've learned about our homes over the past couple of years, it's that having somewhere you can escape to is – to put it scientifically – really bloody desirable.

In fact, Italian research from 2021 showed that for younger generations, objective and subjectively perceived spatial features have a key role in mitigating the stressful effects of having to stay at home under lockdown. The research showed, perhaps unsurprisingly, that space available at home, in terms of residential satisfaction and crowding, is fundamental to wellbeing and perceived stress.

The idea of an emotional escape room is based on the concept of a safe room or panic room – a fortified room inside a house to provide protection in the event of a break-in or disaster. But where do we go when we're experiencing an emotional disaster?

The concept of emotional escape rooms is not new, according to room psychologist Dr Barbara Perfahl. 'Only the name for it is,' says Dr Perfahl. 'Each person has always needed a room for her- or himself. And if your housing situation does not allow a room for every person living in the house, everybody needs at least an area in the house or apartment that is his or hers alone.'

In her work, Dr Perfahl studies the impact and influence rooms have on individuals and advises them on room design and decoration. She also works as a home stager, preparing homes for sale, and has written books on how couples can design their home for easy and peaceful cohabitation.

'Privacy has become a very important aspect of habitation since we divided working space and living space in the course of industrialisation,' explains Dr Perfahl. 'It's a biological need – or instinct – to find and hold a territory. It means having control over social interaction.'

When weight coach and yoga teacher Vicki Snow's mother died just before lockdown, in January 2020, she says she suffered emotionally and mentally. 'I felt lost without her and I was having grief and anger outbursts that weren't healthy for me or my family,' says Snow, a founder at Yoga Moves. 'The person I turned to for support was gone and I felt like I was flailing around emotionally.'

So, at the start of lockdown, Snow turned her spare room into a yoga room, which doubled as a personal space. 'I started to spend hours and hours in there practising yoga and meditation,' she says. 'And I have

carried on doing so. I got rid of the double bed that was in there for guests – much to my other half's annoyance. But, seriously, who was using it when we weren't allowed guests?'

For Snow, it took extreme circumstances to come around to the idea of the concept of an emotional escape room. She says: 'Ordinarily, I just wouldn't have put myself first like this. In the past, I put others before my own emotional wellbeing. But I needed it after a day's home schooling, and with Mum passing. I needed it and my family needed me to have it too.'

As well as yoga mats and blocks, Snow has 'all my important things in there – photos of me and Mum, and a lovely candle she bought me, which I light on special occasions'.

Rachael Field calls her emotional escape room her 'soul sanctuary'. She created the space because, she says, 'I take my own self-care seriously.' Living with chronic illness, having an area dedicated to her own healing felt important for Field. She also wanted a space that felt sacred in which to meditate, journal and do reiki.

Field's soul sanctuary is in what was a detached garage in her garden: 'It's surrounded by nature – I can even hear the owls – and I also created a picture window, which looks out onto my favourite camellia. When you're lying on the floor, it has uninterrupted views of the sky. I find being connected to nature is so important for emotional connection.'

Field runs a wellbeing business, Eva & Alma, supporting others on their own healing path and unlocking their inner calm. 'I feel

it's important I practice what I preach, so having a space like this feels non-negotiable,' she says.

For Field, her space is away from the home, so she says it's easy to separate from everyday life. 'It is a space dedicated to self-care, with no daily visitors, pets or TV,' she says. 'It's like visiting another world when I go inside. I have flower bouquets hanging from my ceiling. It has a different energy to any of the rooms in my house, and has a specific purpose that helps me focus on my self-care in a safe space.'

You don't need to have a large house with separate wings or outbuildings, or an enormous flower budget, to create your own emotional escape room. It could be as simple as carving out space within a living room. In fact, it's about creating a place to retreat within your own everyday life. The pandemic allowed many of us to reconsider our living spaces altogether.

'The lockdowns put the focus on our homes and raised the question of whether our homes fulfilled our needs,' says Dr Perfahl. 'To have a space of your

"Space available at home, in terms of residential satisfaction and crowding, is fundamental to wellbeing and perceived stress"

own, where you can be yourself, where you do not have to fulfil a role, a place where you can relax and recover from everyday obligations, is one of the main functions of our homes.'

But redecorating your house to incorporate a snooker table, or sticking a desk in the hall, isn't quite the same as creating an emotional escape room or space. So what makes a room an emotional escape room? Dr Perfahl says it's all about the 'successful personal appropriation' of the room. 'The interior, the colours, all the items in the room should be exactly as you wish them to be,' she says. There should also be positive emotional touchpoints in the room – things you look at that give you positive feelings. 'This could be pieces of furniture – the little old desk you got as a present from your grandmother, for example; pictures of your loved ones; things that bring you back to a beautiful trip to Italy you had three years ago.'

What matters is that the room or space doesn't double up as a work room – that it doesn't have reminders of your usual obligations, such as washing, work or pets, in it too.

Some things to consider, says environmental psychologist Lee Chambers, are jotting down your visual thoughts on what denotes a peaceful space, as we are all different in how we interact with our environments. 'Many of us would find the cooling regenerative aspects of blues and greens perfect for their space, but some would gain more benefit from a lighter mellow peach or lilac,' he says. 'For others, minimal decor creates space and reduces stimulation, while some people find some meaningful items provide familiarity and safety.' Chambers adds that scents play a role in the sensory experience. 'For example, different floral scents resonate,' he says. 'Most importantly, it's about defining this space as your place to escape to and find serenity; it's whatever brings the elements together to make your shoulders relax as soon as you enter.'

yogamovesyou.co.uk; evaandalma.com

"Introduce positive emotional touchpoints to the room – things you look at that give you positive feelings"

How to curate your own emotional escape room

● Think about how you will use your room or space before you design it. How often are you likely to be in there? What do you need to have in place to make it truly relaxing? What do you need to have in place so you don't need to leave? (If a coffee machine or sweet dispenser is crucial to your enjoyment, stick 'em in!).

● **Try and install proper cupboards to shut things away. If you're trying to clear your head, unnecessary clutter won't help – unless cosy clutter gives you solace, in which case knock yourself out.**

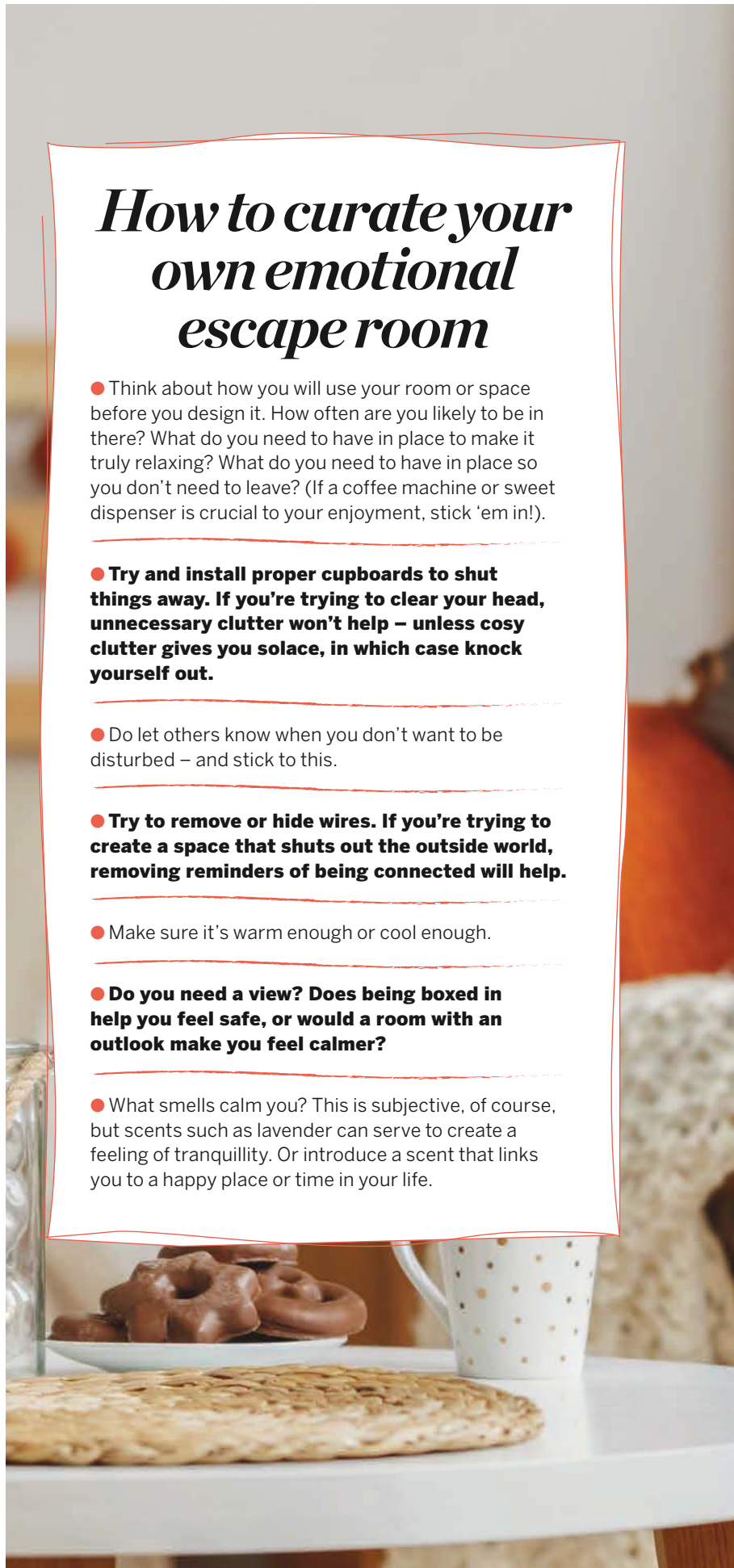
● Do let others know when you don't want to be disturbed – and stick to this.

● **Try to remove or hide wires. If you're trying to create a space that shuts out the outside world, removing reminders of being connected will help.**

● Make sure it's warm enough or cool enough.

● **Do you need a view? Does being boxed in help you feel safe, or would a room with an outlook make you feel calmer?**

● What smells calm you? This is subjective, of course, but scents such as lavender can serve to create a feeling of tranquillity. Or introduce a scent that links you to a happy place or time in your life.



“To have a space of your own, where you can be yourself, is one of the main functions of our homes”

▶▶ NEXT STEPS

Visit business.pinterest.com/en-us/pinterest-predicts/2022/emotional-escape-rooms/ on Pinterest, for ideas of what to put in your own emotional escape room.

Listen to interior design podcast *The Render's* episode on the relationship between environment and our happiness: podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/fact-vs-fiction-what-science-says-about-interior-design/id1516039889?i=1000486740001,

Read Dr Perfahl's blog on how room design affects us: barbara-perfahl.com/blog/

How can I voice my growing frustration?

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

Q I took on a new job about six months ago, and have gradually realised that my boss just cannot make a decision. She seems to have a very intense relationship with her own boss, and nothing gets decided unless the two of them have agreed. This means that I waste my time getting on with what I think are the priorities, only to discover that these have changed in a meeting that I didn't even know about.

Reading your letter, I found myself thinking things like, 'What an impossible situation; she's going to have to leave.' Feeling frustrated or powerless is understandable, but unfortunately

that's not a space where we are likely to find the solution to your issue.

I talked to mediator Dr Esse Menson, who says the first step is to work through your own emotions enough to get to a place of genuine curiosity. Most of us go into work fully intending to do our best, so let's assume your boss has her own perspective on why this works. The useful thing about curiosity is that it trumps other emotions such as fear or irritation.

Dr Menson suggests practising non-judgemental words so this is a work problem, rather than a 'you' problem. Adults tend to have resistance to rehearsing things, 'but you wouldn't let someone take out your appendix if they hadn't practised. Get over the

embarrassment, and try it out with a friend – it's worth it,' says Menson.

Be playful and try to connect with your sense of fun. Have a look at @loewhaley's 'How do you say professionally?' series on TikTok. Here are some options to start with:

- 'It doesn't look like I'm fully aligned with your way of working; what do you think?'

- 'I've noticed that you work closely with your boss, and it looks as if you like to get agreement from her before we proceed; is that how it feels to you?'

- 'If I understood more of how you like things done, I think we'd be more productive; how would that be for you?'

Two other crucial elements are valuing the other person's time ('Have you



Finding the right words

So, you've plucked up the courage to communicate your feelings. But beware these three common traps that can occur when we disagree...

'FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION ERROR'

This occurs when we attribute our own actions to circumstances ('I snapped because the bus was late') but other people's to personality flaws ('She snapped because she's impatient').

THE GAP BETWEEN INTENTION AND IMPACT

We know what we mean to say, but not the impact on the other person – and as recipients we feel the impact but don't know the intention. In both cases, the only way to know is to ask.

WE BELIEVE FEELINGS ARE IRRELEVANT

Research says that we need both facts and feelings to come to a balanced judgement. The best way to start managing our emotions comes from acknowledging them. The need to blame, for example, is often tied to unspoken emotions.

Pathways To Possibility by Rosamund Stone Zander and Ben Zander (Penguin, £10.99); thedecisionlab.com/biases/fundamental-attribution-error

"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there"

Rumi

got 15 minutes to talk about this with me?") and being explicit about acknowledging their perspective. Saying things like 'I wonder how that is for you' or 'I understand that reasoning' don't have to mean agreement, but they allow the other person to feel heard.

Offering to take notes can also reinforce that you are taking the conversation seriously: 'How about I write this down, so I can check my understanding with you?'

We spend a huge chunk of our lives at work, so think of this as investing in your creativity and problem-solving for the longer term.

beyondintractability.org/bksum/stone-difficult; medicalmediation.org.uk



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.

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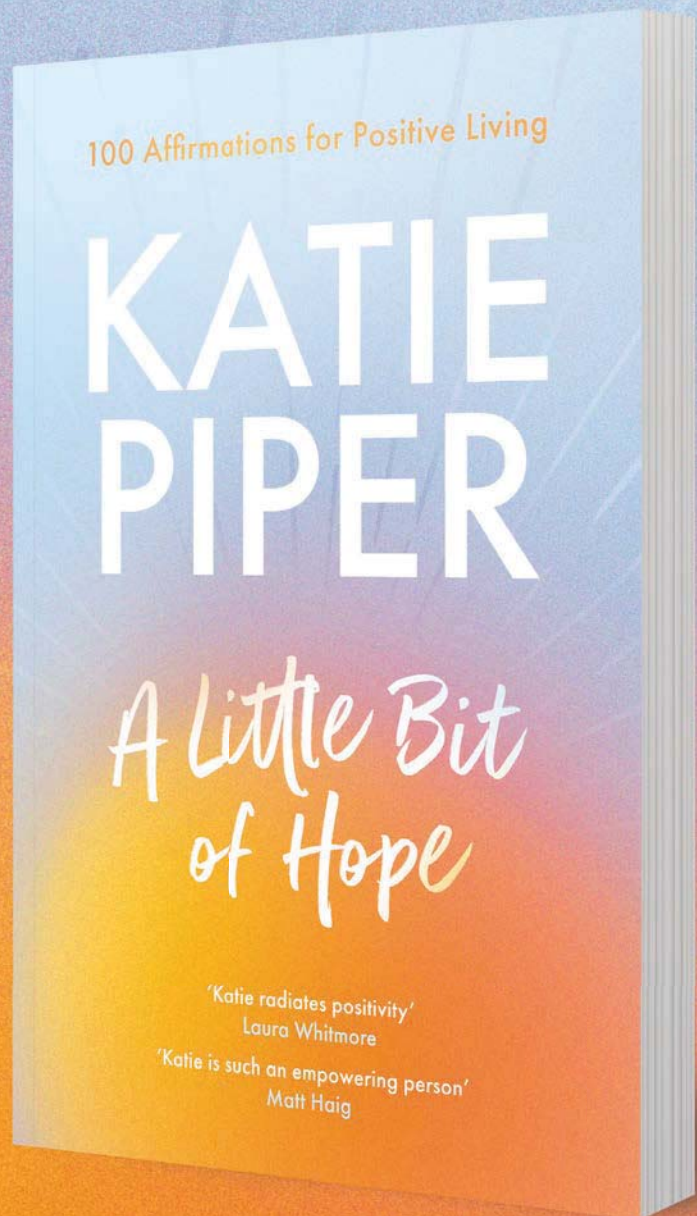
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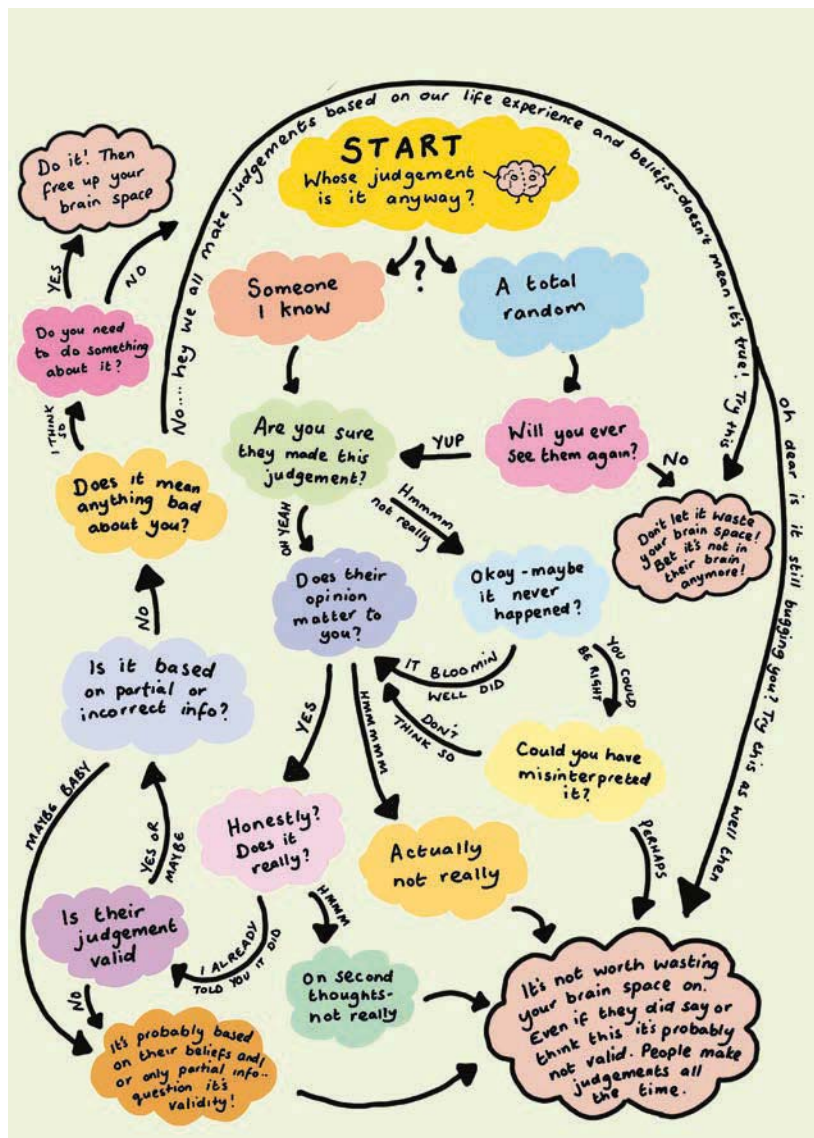
Emma Hepburn, aka The Psychology Mum, shares how to bring more bliss into your life

Often, we get caught up in what other people think and the judgements they are – or we perceive they are – making about us. We are social animals, and the brain is designed to imagine what other people are thinking and feeling; sometimes called ‘theory of mind’. There have even been neurons identified called ‘mirror neurons’, thought to play a part in feeling and perceiving the emotions and actions of other people. This is an important skill of the brain, as we need this ability to be able to interact effectively and form social groups, which help us be safe, survive and thrive.

Like all amazing brain abilities, this can have a downside. We can get caught up in other people's opinion of us and stop ourselves doing things we want to do in case we are judged. We can all misjudge what people are thinking, and misinterpret their responses. If we place too much value in the wrong people's, or too many different people's, opinions, and integrate them into our self-belief and worth, then it can become detrimental to us. We may try to live by others' opinions rather than being guided by what's important to us and our own values.

People judge. We all make judgements because we are basing our opinions on the small bit of information we see, and brain biases drive us to make decisions quickly. Our judgements are also influenced by our belief systems, and we know we are driven to see what we believe. We will all have to face the judgements of others. How can we make sure these judgements don't start to influence us negatively and impact on our happiness?

I once worked with an amazing person who had a brain injury. People judged him all the time. They thought he was drunk when he walked around shops, they tutted at him at the shop counter, or beeped as he crossed the road, taking longer than they wanted him to. How did he react? Well, we couldn't rationalise this, because it was clear they were judging. So, he said to himself, 'They don't know the whole story', reminding himself that people were making judgements based on small bits of information and their own beliefs. Of course, this didn't make him immune to judgement – it still upset him sometimes – but he was able to step



A Toolkit For Happiness
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back and say, 'It's not a judgement about me and it doesn't reflect on me', and separate this from his self-judgements. He was one of the wisest people I've met, and I've carried this with me to this day – and use it myself.

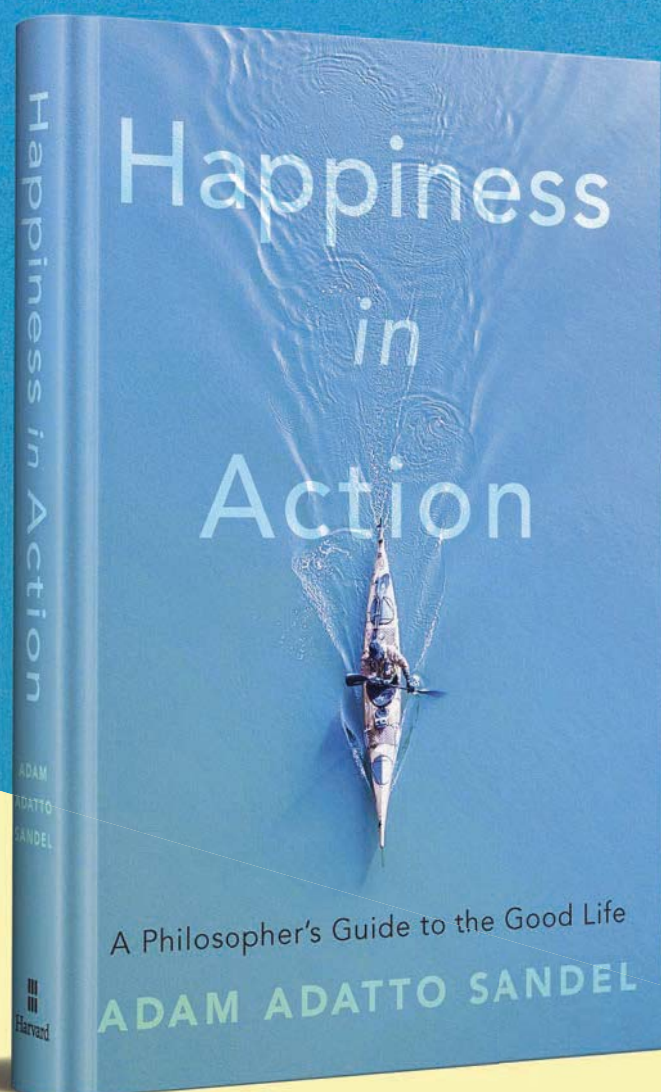
So let's look at helpful ways to think about judgements to protect your happiness with the flow chart above...

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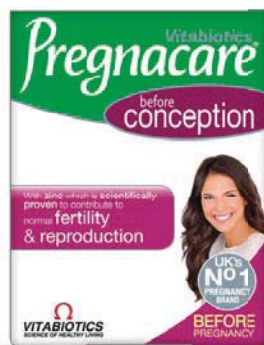
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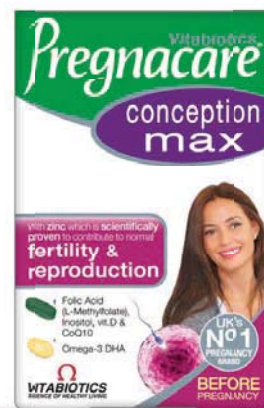
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