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- Escape from seasonal burnout!

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Hussain*

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Welcome...

Isn't Christmas the most wonderful way to bring the year to a satisfying close? Even when it's had it's challenges, like this one, Christmas is there to remind us to stop working, get on our best party frock and raise a glass (real or metaphorical) to all the things that make us happy. Or perhaps, which is more likely in our house, snuggle up in our pyjamas with those we love and laugh about the ups and downs, remember Christmases gone by and enjoy the simple things.

Of course, being the perfectionists that we women so often are, too frequently we forget all that good stuff and get bogged down in trying to make it a perfect Christmas – for everyone else: Making sure the little ones get every present they ask Santa for; cooking into the early hours to provide for every whim of Auntie Pat and Great-Uncle Ned (sprouts three ways? Of course! Turkey, beef and a luxury nut roast? No problem!), and doing it all with a smile on our face and a carol on our lips, while simultaneously sharing each picture-perfect moment on Insta. Given all that, is it any wonder that one in four women suffers 'seasonal burnout'? More than one friend of mine has declared that by the time she's served Christmas dinner all she wants to do is crawl into bed!

This year, we want to encourage you to make it a Christmas *you* will enjoy just as much as everyone else. Turn to this month's Dossier on page 51, where we show you how to rewrite the rule book and make sure this festive season is one you'll remember for all the right reasons. We're also dialling up the feelgood nostalgia by embracing some old-fashioned Christmas rituals on page 24; helping you work out the gifts you really want (that don't cost a thing!) on page 36; and sharing our tips to enjoy Christmas feasting without the guilt or sugar crashes on page 94. Plus, we show you how to navigate tricky conversations with the kids on page 80, and turn to page 74 to find out how to let go of the past and any lingering sibling rivalry to truly make this a season of goodwill to all men (and women).

This is my very favourite time of year, so I hope it is full of love, peace and joy for you. Wishing you the very merriest of Christmases!

Sally x

Sally Saunders, Editor

We hope you love your new-look 'Psychologies'. Subscribe today!

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*FOR FULL DETAILS, SEE PAGE 44



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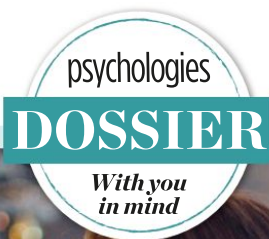
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The advice starts RIGHT HERE!



ALI KNOWLES

'Parents often dive in with an answer to awkward Christmas questions, such as does Santa exist,' says the therapist Ali Knowles. 'But turn the question back to your child for insight into what they're really feeling.' Discover how to tackle those tricky conversations with your kids on page 80.

TABITHA ROTH

Enjoy festive feasting without a side portion of guilt: 'Piling your plate with a rainbow of colours will help you get a broad spectrum of nutrients, and it's surprisingly easy at Christmas,' says Tabitha Roth, a nutritional therapist. Learn smart ways to savour the flavours of the season on page 94.



HAZEL HARRISON

Struggling with what to buy for loved ones? 'How we feel when people are kind to us is the key to giving gifts,' says Hazel Harrison, a clinical psychologist, on page 108. She reveals how we can learn to let go of trying to track down the perfect present and shift into a happier headspace.



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.

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

We're just cooler!

Do you spend winter wrestling over the heating control with the men in your house? Scientists say central heating wars have their roots in evolution – and aren't exclusive to people. Researchers at Tel Aviv University found that many female birds and mammals, including human beings, have a higher core body temperature than males and greater thermal variability, making cold air feel chillier to the sensors on their skin. It also explains why offices and public spaces often feel nipper to women – because standard air-conditioning levels are based on male preferences.

Experts think upping the warmth would make little difference to men but would improve the performance, and stop the shivers, of women. Cold comfort – but all the more reason to push for that extra blanket on the bed!

PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES, SHUTTERSTOCK





We've cracked it: Necessity is the mother of invention

The Christmas cracker could be a casualty of supply chain problems this year, but the possible shortage provides the opportunity to try creative, less wasteful alternatives.

Ensure your festive meal goes off with a bang by making decorated bags or boxes containing jokes, gifts and crowns fashioned from napkins and twine, or get your guests to make them for each other, Secret Santa-style. Boom for more conscious fun!



Are wakeful guests robbing you of sleep? A poll found nine in 10 of us struggle to kip due to noise. Snoring is a biggie, plus stormy weather – and a flushing loo in the wee hours! Time to change the house rules?*

POLL BY MUTE SNORING

Embrace the freedom to make the festive season whatever you want it to be

By Katie Piper



For those with a Christian faith like mine, you'll recognise Christmas as a festival celebrating the

birth of Christ. For others, it's more of a cultural celebration: a time for joy, family and togetherness. And, for others, Christmas means nothing at all. For me, it's a religious and cultural celebration melded into one!

Every year, a huge amount of time, energy, attention and money is directed towards this time of year, causing it to occupy an ever-extending chunk of the calendar. My sympathy goes out to those who find Christmas a seriously challenging time, not due to the religious sentiment of the period, but because of the difficult emotions it can stir for those who aren't able to reflect on the festivities with rose-tinted nostalgia.

The festive season is triggering for so many of us for a vast array of reasons: past experiences, traumas and loss, having to spend time with family members who are overly critical or disrespectful, food indulgence, alcohol consumption, poor weather, (not to mention the expense), to name but a few! So often these factors are glossed over or ignored, while everyone is encouraged to be 'happy'.

So, my message to you this month is this: fear not. Difficult feelings and internal hurt sparked by Christmas is much more common than you think – and there is plenty that you can do to help combat these tough emotions:

1 Welcome the season of giving.

If you don't want to partake in a 'traditional' Christmas due to personal reasons or mental health, you could give your time and volunteer instead. There is a big need for help in countless organisations at this time of year, so choose one that resonates most with you. Homeless shelters, food banks and churches are just a few that need volunteers at Christmastime.

2 Keep perspective. While it can feel like Christmas goes on for ever, it'll soon be over and normal life will resume – without the carpet being covered in tinsel and carols being blasted out day and night.

3 Turn off the box. From adverts and festive programming, there's no escaping Christmas in TV land – so opt for on-demand streaming services without the ads, or go old-school and stick on a DVD.

4 Find others who share your sentiment about Christmas.

You could organise your own 'non-Christmas Christmas Day', sharing stories and memories, and enjoying the time together in a different way. Who knows, some of your nearest and dearest may jump on board with this, having faced similar struggles as you.

If you find Christmas a tricky time, I hope my column this month helps.

And if you are one for festive cheer – enjoy it! Last year, so many of us went without seeing family and friends, so try and appreciate the togetherness that bit more this year.

WATCH, LOOK, LISTEN



WATCH – Feel festive with *Boxing Day*, a romcom starring Aml Ameen and Leigh-Anne Pinnock of Little Mix. Melvin (Ameen) returns to London for Christmas to introduce his fiancée to his British-Caribbean family. Out 3 December.



LOOK – *When A Happy Thing Falls* at Yorkshire Sculpture Park showcases Annie Morris's colourful balancing sculptures that express the hope and defiance of life amid loss. Until 6 February. ysp.org.uk



LISTEN – *Fortunately... With Fi And Jane* features formidable broadcasters Fi Glover and Jane Garvey sharing their musings on life and enticing guests from Ed Miliband to Judy Murray to spill their secrets. bbc.co.uk/sounds



Pick a green tree

The scent of a pine or fir Christmas tree is glorious, and researchers have found that real trees have a smaller carbon footprint, so are better for the environment than fake ones. It's a hot topic because reusing a fake tree is eco-friendly too, but there are sustainable ways to enjoy a natural spruce, which cuts out the carbon emissions from importing new plastic ones, as well as the landfill waste they create.

The best option is to buy a live tree with the root ball attached, so you can plant it in a pot and reuse. Otherwise, aim to source your evergreen from a tree farm or choose one certified Grown in Britain. Dispose of your tree through council wood chip or mulching schemes for green spaces.

SWAPSIES A WIN-WIN FOR CLUTTER AND COST

You can't stop Granny spoiling your children, but you can embrace the trend for borrow not buy by renting gifts. Whirli lets you lease and swap toys, while The Reading Chest is like a postal library. Exchange and hire bikes and scooters at Bike Club, and the monthly subscription spreads the expense.

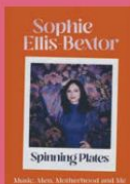
whirli.com; readingchest.co.uk; bikeclub.com



3 holiday reads... **INSPIRING CELEBRITY MEMOIRS**



1 In *Spinning Plates* by Sophie Ellis-Bextor (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99), the kitchen disco queen and mother of five sons delivers lessons on parenting, love and setbacks. A relatable and cheering book.



2 As we'd expect, the outrageously outspoken actor Miriam Margolyes doesn't hold back in *This Much Is True* (John Murray £20). It's an entertaining, anecdote-rich and colourful account of 80 years well lived.



3 In *Misfits: A Personal Manifesto* by Michaela Coel (Ebury, £9.99), the creator of *I May Destroy You* relays her experiences of race, class and gender. A must-read for anyone who has ever worried about fitting in.



Put a wag in your tail

They're known as man's best friend, but experts say the increased happiness we experience from owning a dog isn't solely down to the unquestioning love that they supply.* Interactions with dogs cause the brain to produce the hormone oxytocin, which increases feelings of relaxation, trust and empathy, while reducing stress and anxiety.

Behavioural changes involved in caring for our pet also contribute to general wellbeing. Daily walks together keep us active while spending time in nature and owning a dog boosts social connections and creates opportunities for being in the moment as an antidote to worry.



TELEGRAPH.CO.UK/FAMILY/PETS/SCIENCE_BEHIND_DOG-MAKES-HAPPIER.
*SCIENCEAILY.COM/RELEASES/2021/10/21/02102657/HTM

*Eating mushrooms can cut your risk of depression, a study reveals.** The hearty superfood contains a high concentration of an antioxidant that can protect against mental ill health, while white button mushrooms are rich in anxiety-fighting potassium.*



Worth the paper it's written on

Sending a handwritten Christmas card was the surprise, festive trend of last year, after months of separation made text or email greetings seem inadequate and impersonal.

The effort of putting pen to paper is a tangible expression of love and a ritual that was in danger of dying out until lockdowns made us look for ways to share our feelings from a distance. Charity cards are a good way to send greetings that feel more ethical, or look for ones that are not in plastic packaging and are made from recyclable paper, without glitter, which harms rivers and lakes. Alternatively, make your own using leftover wrapping paper, drawings or collages from last year's cards.



SPROUTING A FALSEHOOD

Pile your plate with vitamin C-rich Brussels sprouts, because experts say NHS guidelines underestimate our need of the nutrient.* The recommended daily allowance of 40mcg was set in 1944 and was based on a minimum requirement to avoid scurvy during rationing and shortages, rather than the optimum amount.

As well as the Christmas dinner staple, citrus fruits, peppers, strawberries and potatoes are top sources, and obtaining vitamin C from food is always preferable to supplementation.



*MEDICAL NEWS TODAY.COM ARTICLES OBTAINING VITAMIN C: REVISITING CONTROVERSIAL STUDY MAY CHANGE RECOMMENDATIONS

HRT WARRIORS MAKE PROGRESS

High-street chain Timpson is to pay for the HRT prescription charges of staff going through the menopause. The firm announced the perk as MP Carolyn Harris welcomed legislation that means women in England will only have to pay for an HRT script once a year, saving up to £200 annually. HRT is free in Scotland and Wales.

"As a woman, I've had to find my voice, have a sense of my own worth and know what I have to offer, 'cos there'll always be someone to question that"

Jodie Comer

Viewpoint

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



Star
letter

Finding my voice

I am so glad I read 'How to stand up for yourself' (November edition); it might just transform my life. I have always found it difficult to stand up for myself, and

know I am out of touch with my own needs and overly attuned to those of others, thereby leaving myself wide open to being taken advantage of by other people. I try to get through my day-to-day life as conflict-free as possible. I feel awkward about asserting myself in certain circumstances, and being caught in tense situations drudges up painful memories and insecurities.

But a lightbulb came on when I read your article. I've realised that I can remedy these issues in time. Firstly, by figuring out what sticking up for myself means to me – a lot. Then, by being OK with a little selfishness, speaking deliberately, with intention, counting to 10 before I speak and making 'no' a common word in my vocabulary, as well as remembering that I deserve as much respect as everyone else. Thank you for these pointers, and so much more great advice.

Being assertive doesn't mean I am being rude. In future, I am going to stand up and speak when it matters, and strive to be braver.

Joanne Aitchison

Starting a new story

It did me a power of good to read 'Time to let go?' (December edition). You see, I felt happy most of the time... but then I would let my mind wander and think of all the things that troubled me: people I have wronged and those that have wronged me. I struggled enormously, with 'letting go'. In fact, the phrase had always mystified me, as I didn't really know what it meant or how to do it.

Having read this article, I feel more able to accept that it involves a conscious choice versus a physical action. It can be challenging and scary. It can also be painful, but letting go is releasing worry

and fear about a situation, person or outcome. By not letting go, I was disrupting my happiness. I know now that I will no longer ruminate on things that are out of my control and, instead, focus on what I can control. Letting go is about accepting what is happening right now and not worrying about what will come up tomorrow. I am indebted to you for this wonderfully helpful article.

Dear Past, thank you for the lessons. Dear Future, I'm ready. After all, I really can't start the next chapter of my life if I keep rereading the last one.

Geraldine Burton

A breath of fresh air

I wanted to congratulate you on the changes you've made to *Psychologies* – I love the new look. The design, artwork, layout, content... everything is so much better, it's hard to pinpoint just one thing. I've been subscribing for years and it's like a brand-new magazine. Keep up the good work!

I'm off now to carry on reading the latest issue – I like to take my time and read it slowly, as I don't want it to end!

Sarah Dolby



PHOTO COMPETITION

For the past few years I have been struggling with anxiety, which has increased over lockdown. But a wonderful holiday to the Lake District made me appreciate the tranquillity and beauty of nature, which I captured in this photo.

Isabella Loveridge

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. We'll print the winner, plus you'll receive a free copy of our bookazine, 'Find Your Calm', worth £6.99. Share your photograph with us and explain its inspiration on Instagram @psychologiesmagazine with the hashtag #PsychologiesPhoto, or email it to letters@psychologies.co.uk



Riding high

I treated myself to a subscription to *Psychologies* during the first lockdown, and it's helped me through a tough time. One positive of the past year has been rediscovering my childhood passion for ponies, with the result that I am now sharing a lovely ex-racehorse and starting to explore equine-assisted therapy. So your article 'Horse power' (October edition) came at just the right time! Thank you for an inspiring magazine.

Katherine Roberts

LETTER OF GRATITUDE

I'd like to thank...

A kind stranger,

A couple of months ago, I was in a car accident. You were a passenger in the other car, a caring elderly man who kept me comfortable and safe while we waited for the police and paramedics to arrive at the scene.

At the time, no one knew for sure the extent of my injuries. Luckily, it was a mild concussion and a case of bad whiplash, from which I am gradually recovering.

As I was coming out of my confused state, I asked if you were my guardian angel, to which you replied: 'No, sweetheart. My name is Peter and I am a retired paramedic. You are going to be all right.' Hearing your kind voice and being in the presence of your random act of compassion that day reassured me instantly, and left me feeling less anxious and scared.

Peter, I hope somehow this message reaches you. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for your gentle nature and kindness.

Selica

Thank you for a magazine packed with information on self-care and wellbeing. I am passionate about this after surviving septic shock five years ago. It's great to find a magazine with in-depth articles rather than just snippets! **Lesley Anne Palmer**



I'm making space for women like me

She's the runaway star of the *Bake Off* juggernaut, capturing our hearts with her humble charm, and now she's conquering the US. The inspirational Nadiya Hussain still pinches herself at her success, but she's honoured to be spearheading change

WORDS: GEMMA CALVERT

I'm like, "Who? Me? Are you kidding?"; Nadiya Hussain confides. 'There are moments when I say to myself, "OK, this is silly now. You're all playing a big prank!"'

Hussain first revealed herself to be a breath of fresh air when she delivered that goosebump-inducing 'I can and I will' speech on winning *Bake Off* in 2015. Since then, she's hosted cookery shows, created a 90th birthday cake for the Queen, fronted a batch of BBC documentaries, released several bestselling cookbooks and a memoir, been awarded an MBE and become an icon of culinary creativity on a global scale.

'I was in Louisiana, in the bayous on a boat looking for alligators, when the guy we were with turned to me and said: "My niece is texting to say she loves you." I couldn't believe it,' recalls Hussain, when we meet over video call late one morning. 'Another time, I was in a tiny independent chocolate shop and a lady came up to me, saying, "You sound like Nadiya..." and I'm like, "That's because I *am* Nadiya!" – and she was so excited. I think of America as untapped territory – until I'm on the ground and I realise it's not. America is quite the beast, so to have my books selling there is a big deal to me.'

One of the first in line for a copy of Hussain's latest release might well be the Hollywood legend Arnold Schwarzenegger, with whom Hussain bonded backstage at *The Graham Norton Show* a few months before the pandemic hit. 'He gave me a kiss and a hug and said "Well done!" and then followed me on Twitter,' she says, shaking her head in disbelief.

For all her achievements, Hussain is no stranger to impostor syndrome, the mindset where people doubt their skills and fear being exposed as a 'fraud'. 'I've thought to myself, "Why am I successful?" In all honesty, I don't have the answer,' says Hussain. 'I've been told in the past that it's because I'm an ethnic minority, but often I think it's luck. As women, we're quite self-deprecating. There are two versions of me and we're always fighting: one's really positive and the other is really negative.'

Surely there's no longer much for Hussain to be negative about? In *The Great British Bake Off*'s 11-year history, no winner's career trajectory comes close. The self-taught cook from Milton Keynes was a batch-cooking, stay-at-home mother of three before landing a place on the show, which her husband, Abdal, secretly applied to on her behalf. 'It's taken





me a long time to get to a point where I believe that I'm good at what I do,' says Hussain. 'Now, after six years, I'm finally starting to see that I'm good at this thing, and successful because I do it wholeheartedly, with passion, and because I am always, always myself.'

And make no mistake, that person is wonderful company, even on the other side of a screen. One of Hussain's most appealing traits is how she seasons her conversations with dry wit. When we discuss how Abdal, an IT specialist, is holed up with Covid, one week after the children were sick, and how Hussain miraculously sidestepped the virus, she says: 'It's already been accepted between my husband and I that I am superhuman.'

Then, on the subject of her birthday falling on Christmas Day, a day after her older sister's birthday, she quips: 'March was a fun time for my parents. Or boring. Perhaps there was no TV.'

As for her own marriage, Hussain and Abdal recently celebrated their sixteenth wedding anniversary. When she posted a photo on Instagram, with the words: 'Sixteen years ago I married him because he had a gorgeous face and a good job. He still has both! Winning!' fans and followers promptly declared #CoupleGoals. 'Oh my goodness, we just get by,' smiles Hussain, brushing off any fuss. 'It's amazing being head over heels in love with someone, but we have to do laundry, ironing and deal with moody teenagers. If we're still smiling through all of that then, to me, that is real love.'

Before their arranged marriage, the Muslim couple had spoken frequently on the phone but had only met each other once – on the day they got engaged. Does Hussain feel lucky to have been matched with a man with whom she felt a genuine connection? 'It took time, a lot of time,' she explains. 'We went through the lust phase, the can't-get-enough-of-each-other

"I'm starting to see I'm good at this thing, and successful because I do it wholeheartedly, with passion, and am always, always myself"



Hussain is one of few women of colour and faith on our screens



Family still comes first for Hussain

phase, the “I don’t like your habits phase”, the “I don’t know if I like living with you any more” phase, the “we’ve had a child, let’s have another child to see if that fixes things” phase. We went through all those motions, just like any other relationship, but we were bound by our marriage and our commitment to our religion. I genuinely believe that because we made that commitment early on, we always worked at it. We couldn’t break up. I said, “We’re doing this. We’re not getting married again!”

Only they did. In December 2018, Hussain and Abdal did ‘an official thing in the UK’ attended by only two witnesses, which was ‘as much about logistics as it was about love’. But she insists there are no plans to renew their vows alongside the family: ‘No. Our kids are at that age where everything is embarrassing,’ says Hussain, pausing before flashing a mischievous look. ‘Although, maybe we should just do it for the embarrassment factor!’



Hussain has spoken recently about her ovaries ‘pulsating’ every time she sees a new baby, but with three children – sons Musa, 15, Dawud, 14, and her 11-year-old daughter, Maryam – two cats, chickens, a budgie and fish to care for, she is not planning to carry another child, although that’s not to say she and Abdal won’t add to their brood non-biologically.

‘Long before *Bake Off*, I started my application for fostering children and got close to the end. Then I did *Bake Off* and everything went on the back-burner,’ she says. ‘It’s something that my husband and I have always talked about, because there are children out there who need a home. Whether it’ll ever come to fruition, I don’t know, but it would be lovely if it did.’

For Hussain, family has always been a priority and, save for the occasional three-week filming trip abroad, she is ‘happy to burn the midnight oil from Monday to Friday’ to preserve sacred weekend time with Abdal and the kids. The formula enables Hussain to live as normal a life as possible and, naturally, cooking features heavily. Hussain gets the kids involved wherever possible and happily reports that ‘repetitive’ jobs, such as podding peas, encourages them to tap into their emotions. ‘I always ask them, “Are you sad? Is there a reason why you’re sad? Do you want to talk about it?”,’ she says. ‘When they concentrate on something else, they tend to open up. In therapy, talking face to face can feel confrontational, so it’s better to talk side by side. We have our most interesting conversations in the car!’



With Mary Berry in 2016, collecting a BAFTA on behalf of *The Great British Bake Off*

“Talking side by side helps the children open up; we have our most interesting conversations in the car”

Growing up in a Bangladeshi community in Luton, Hussain’s childhood was far from idyllic. She describes her mother, Asma, as a ‘negative Nancy’ and says life was ‘just about survival’. At 10, she became a victim of school bullies who flushed her head down the toilet and repeatedly ‘smashed’ her fingers into door hinges, causing her fingernails to dislodge – behaviour she describes as ‘torture’.

Although the anxiety and panic disorder Hussain later developed is no longer ‘all-consuming’, she says haunting flashbacks occasionally knock her for six. Whenever she has a manicure, for instance, she is transfixed by her nails, which ‘grow at a weird angle’. Other times, the weekly bathroom clean is impossible: ‘I have days when I say to Abdal and the kids “I can’t do the toilet today”, so they do it instead. I’m lucky in that the kids really understand what the experience did to me,’ says Hussain, adding that both her boys have read her memoir, *Finding My Voice* (Headline,

£10.99), so understand that she was also, at the age of five, sexually abused by a relative in Bangladesh. ‘By reading my story, my boys really grasp what sexual abuse means. With everything that’s happening in the world right now, where women aren’t safe to walk the streets, it’s vital that they understand the importance of respecting women. And that it starts at home by respecting their mum and sister.’

On a wider scale, Hussain hopes her honesty will create a ‘ripple effect’ of openness in the Bangladeshi community where, she says, abuse is prevalent. ‘It is brushed under the carpet within the Bangladeshi community and it happens so frequently. Literally everybody I know, apart from one friend, has suffered some sort of sexual abuse at the hands of a relative or family friend. It’s a big problem and it was important to me to talk about it.’

Truthfully, no topic is off limits with Hussain, and why should there be when she is one of very few

Turn to page 100 to discover Nadiya’s tasty new recipes for an alternative festive feast

women of colour and faith on prime-time TV and in publishing? ‘I’m literally the only one of me,’ she says. ‘There wasn’t a space for me, so I had to create it, but that space is small and suffocating, so it’s about making it bigger. By being present and consistent, I’m creating space for others. Whether they’re of colour, no colour, religion, no religion, or have self-doubt or mental health issues, they can look at me and say, “If she can do it, why can’t I?” I want to inspire people to get out there and embrace their differences as unique and special. It’s taken a long time for me to feel comfortable in my brown skin.’

While Hussain is encouraged by pledges from big corporations to improve diversity and inclusion, she says overall ‘progress is slow’. She describes a shocking incident in September, shortly after the twentieth anniversary of 9/11, when she and her daughter were verbally attacked as they walked to her brother’s house. ‘I ran to my brother’s place and Maryam was in floods of tears, saying, “I don’t understand why the man was shouting at us.” My sister-in-law took the words out of my mouth, saying, “We are who we are and we have to be proud of that.”’

She pauses... ‘I don’t want to say that you get used to it but, unfortunately, racist abuse becomes part and parcel of life. My kids have been called all sorts of names. People have made reference to the things that we eat in a negative way. The truth is I don’t think I’ll ever feel equal to my English counterparts.’

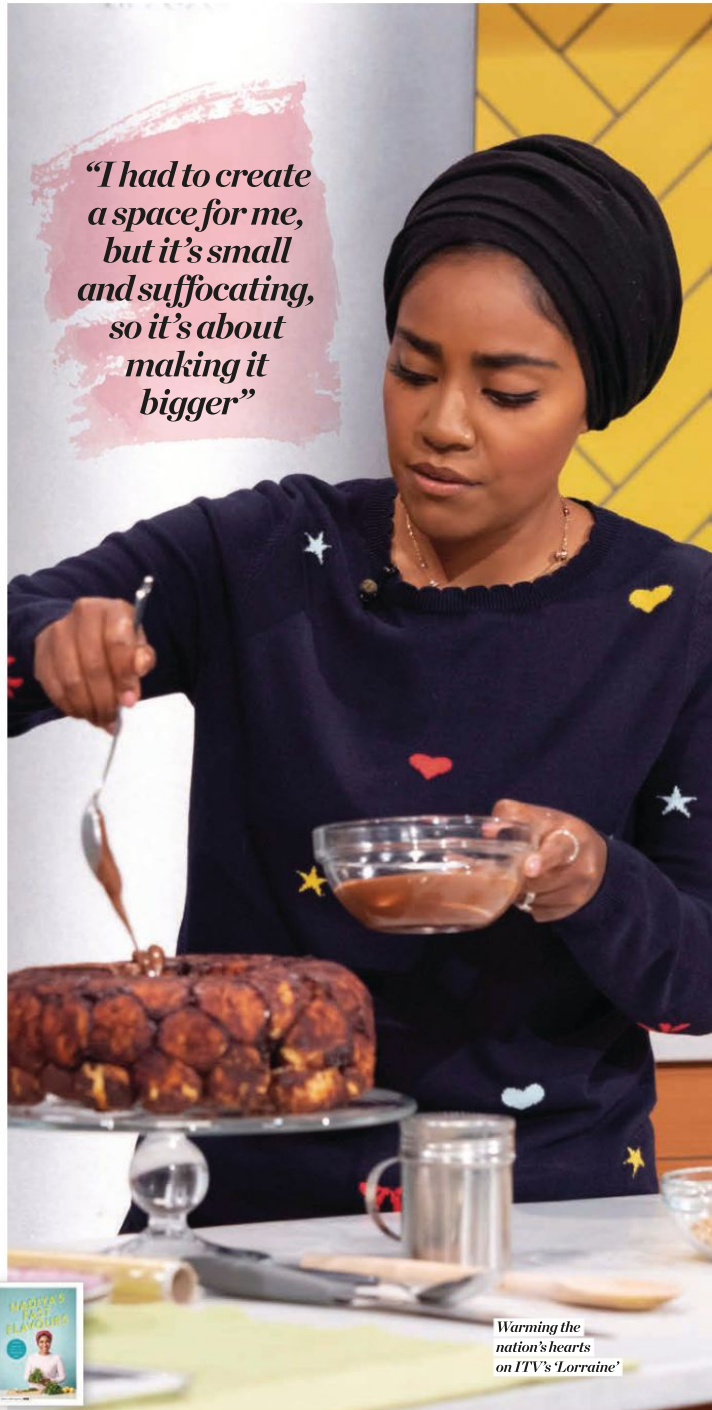
Hussain also doubts the future holds greater promise for her children. ‘They will always be on the back foot because of their name and skin colour. The only thing with which my sons might have a slight leg-up on my daughter is the fact that they’re men. My daughter is a girl, she’s Muslim, she’s a woman of colour.’ She adds: ‘This is why my career is about so much more than writing recipes. It is about existence and presence, and being part of a community that was never really made for me.’

Hussain’s vision for change knows no bounds. A few days before our interview, she was scrolling on Instagram and looking at pictures from the Met Gala and London Fashion Week. ‘I thought, “Imagine being able to go to the Met Gala” and then I thought, “Why is there no one like me on the catwalk at London Fashion Week?” – because all the models are very tall and there’s a box that everyone has to fit into,’ says Hussain, who began ‘manifesting Met Gala and London Fashion Week’. She goes on: ‘We’ll see what happens. Maybe I just need to give someone cake and say, “Please let me do it!”’

Of course, there would be no arguing with a hunk of Hussain’s legendary Swedish princess torte, but something tells me it won’t be necessary: Hussain’s ‘I can and I will’ attitude has got this one covered.

‘Nadiya’s Fast Flavours’ (Michael Joseph, £22) is out now. The television series is on air now on BBC Two

“I had to create a space for me, but it’s small and suffocating, so it’s about making it bigger”



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LIFE AS I KNOW IT

All I want for Christmas

Harriet Minter is patiently waiting for her promotion from sprout peeler...



Every family has things it passes down the generations. In my family, these have

included my grandmother's engagement ring, a mock-1920s lamp, an insatiable love of sugar and a firm belief in ghosts. However, there are a few things my sister and I are still waiting for, and top of my list is Christmas.

When I was a small child, Christmases had two clear forms. In the first, we'd stay at home and my mother would host, sweeping up waifs and strays and forcing my reluctant paternal grandparents to get involved. In the second, we'd pile into the car early on Christmas Eve morning and head for Liverpool, where my maternal grandmother would host Christmas lunch and the house would be filled with aunts, uncles and cousins. As kids, we didn't care which Christmas happened as long as there were gifts. But as I got older I became aware that it really mattered to my mother – she loved hosting Christmas. My grandmother only gave up the fight in her late 70s, but for a few years my mother reigned supreme as Queen of Christmas.

Inevitably, things changed. My parents split up, the extended family extended so far that connections were lost, and Christmas became a much smaller affair. Sometimes we'd piggyback on the Christmas of friends, but I could always feel my mum wishing she was back in charge.

Finally, three years ago, I was



granted the honour of hosting. It was just my mum and I, but I loved every minute: sourcing the food, organising drinks with neighbours on Christmas Eve, declaring that I would be following the Jamie Oliver turkey cooking method and swapping the traditional trifle for a chocolate log. My inner control freak delighted in being in charge

and it felt like a rite of passage, a signal that finally I was considered an adult.

And yet, it turns out that the handing over of Christmas was only temporary: my mother has decided she wants it back. And I feel distinctly out of sorts about it. I'll be back at my mum's house, probably sleeping on the sofa bed and definitely starting a row with my sister over who got the better gifts. Obviously, if I was a proper adult, I wouldn't care, but apparently I'm only a grown up when I'm the one in charge of the turkey and not the one peeling the sprouts.

It's impossible for me to get through Christmas without feeling behind in some way, that I should have my own family to fit around a table. And even though I know my friends who will be hosting with kids under their feet will be desperate not to do it next year, I feel a pang of envy. Maybe that's the legacy that has been passed on from my grandmother to my mother, and my mother to me, the agony of waiting for it to finally be our turn, to finally be Queen of Christmas.

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

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Mind

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



*'Real change, enduring change,
happens one step at a time'*

Ruth Bader Ginsburg



THE LITTLE RITUALS WE LOVE

Prepare yourself – the festive season is fast approaching.

Emma Cooling discovers why she can't wait to get the tree up and settle down in front of *Home Alone*

From lighting my winter spice candle to making mincemeat to the sound of jingly Christmas tunes, I will not – indeed *cannot* – wait until mid-December to throw myself into my favourite festive rituals. Just as I did in 2020, I will be putting up the tree a little earlier this year and flicking on the Christmas films that bit sooner than usual. Forget the blasé sophistication of waiting until a few days before Christmas for the fun to start or approaching with caution in case plans change abruptly – after the uncertainty we've all been through, I am itching to envelop my family in the comfort of our seasonal rituals as soon as possible.

'Rituals are things we do that speak in the language of our heart and, therefore, connect us to what gives our lives deeper meaning,' says Theresa Cheung, author of *21 Rituals To Change Your Life* (Watkins, £8.99). 'And, after the trauma of recent months, never has it been more important for us to connect with what truly matters in our lives.'

Cheung encourages us to embrace our annual rituals more than ever, make

extra time for them and recognise their benefits: 'This year, put up those decorations and ritualise what you are doing by understanding the reason why you are doing it. It's about connecting with loved ones, doing something special and meaningful for yourself, cherishing memories of the joys of Christmas past and nurturing hopes for a better Christmas future. Festive rituals may seem utterly trivial right now, but they can bring comfort and optimism right when we need them most.'

The term ritual can be off-putting, with its connotations of smoke and incense and strange religious talismans. But by ritual, I simply mean a set of repeated behaviour that is familiar to me and that I perform in a certain way. Rituals are often part of tradition and the word is derived from the Latin word 'ritualis' which, while it often has religious associations, can refer to any collection of deliberate actions that form part of a process.

Throughout the tumultuous times of late, I have realised the incredible power of such small repeated actions.



"Festive traditions are like a lighthouse in the sea of a turbulent year, offering us safety, security and familiarity"

Some are as simple as making myself a cup of tea (Earl Grey, served in my favourite folksy-style mug), leaving it to brew, savouring the first sip and allowing myself 10 minutes to stare into space while I drink it. These moments brought me a sense of control and calm when the world felt in flux, particularly during the trials of homeschooling. These little acts are symbolic of something far bigger – my cuppa represents me recognising that I need time out in the day, and giving myself permission to relax and recharge, if only for a short while.

Our Christmas rituals are similarly meaningful when you look at them more closely. They involve us coming together as a family or as a community, being thankful for all that we have, demonstrating love for those close to us and being mindful of those who have less, perhaps by reaching out to help others. Just thinking about my winter rituals brings feelings of warmth – festive traditions are like a lighthouse in the sea of a turbulent year, offering us safety, security and familiarity.

From putting up the tree, coming together for a festive feast and games nights with family and friends, most of us have at least a few rituals at this time of year. One of our special customs at home is the way we exchange gifts: we have a tradition where our children sit around the coffee table in the living room and give the gifts they have chosen for each other on Christmas Eve, instead of waiting until the big day. Already, I can feel that the anticipation of these moments is building, and there is much more chatter about these events than usual – this year, they seem to carry a

much deeper meaning. And is it any wonder? After the chaos of the pandemic left us dizzy and disorientated, depriving us of established routines, now – at Christmas, a time of year heavily punctuated by traditions – we soak up the comfort and control that familiar, repeated sets of behaviour bring.

Robbie Davis-Floyd, an expert in rituals and a professor of anthropology at Rice University in Texas, says that it is our need for stability that draws us to rituals. 'During Christmas 2020, many people clung even more tightly to their seasonal rituals because the sense of stability and continuity they provided became much more important than usual in those uncertain times,' explains Davis-Floyd. 'The preservation of such stability is one of the major functions of ritual. Thus, we can expect that during Christmas 2021 the performance of seasonal rituals will again be intensified in order to give both children and adults the sense of security that they very much need during this ongoing period of social instability,' she explains.

'Even if Covid-19 becomes a non-issue by the holidays (which, of course, is highly unlikely), people will still cling to their seasonal rituals, both in celebration of the pandemic's end and out of a desire to get things back to normal.'

Rituals relight memories of happy times and it is those recollections that steady us in periods of uncertainty. For Phoebe Garnsworthy, author of *Daily Rituals* (£5.50), the key to success is in their repetition: 'We turn to rituals for inner strength and comfort. Our rituals have the ability to provide us with confidence in ourselves and faith in what

may be, igniting a happy memory that we know will deliver the love and care that we seek,' says Garnsworthy. 'This positive emotion continues to build in power with each repetition and therefore, over time, we establish our own harmonious environment through doing so.'

Even those rituals I thought my children had outgrown seem to be creating a buzz this year – our tradition of buying a chocolate lollipop from the farm shop where we get our tree is definitely still on my 13-year-old's festive agenda.

In her upcoming book, *Ritual: What It*





Is, How It Works, And Why (Berghahn, £27.95), Davis-Floyd acknowledges that the traditions surrounding Father Christmas's visit, which for most families involves the hanging up of stockings and leaving treats for Santa and his reindeer, create feelings of awe and wonder, whatever your age. 'Parents who continue to live inside that myth with their children find a magical reinstatement of their own childhood Christmas rituals as they

If you're itching to break away from some of those old rituals and traditions, turn to our 'Reclaim Christmas' Dossier on page 51 for ideas on how to give this festive season a new slant.

work to make their children's beliefs in the magic of Christmas come true once again,' says Davis-Floyd.

So perhaps you *will* want to get out the milk and cookies for Santa one more time, embrace the sentimentality of old rituals, revive traditions and relish those festive moments alone – as pockets of calm and reflection when you need to recharge. Who knows what the season will hold, but our simple rituals, many of which take place in our homes, can bring us comfort and plenty of joy.

Coaching in action

“My in-laws take over at Christmas

The award-winning coach Kim Morgan meets Maria,* a gentle and people-pleasing client trying to navigate the festive season with overbearing relatives who won't take no for an answer



Session one...

It took Maria a while to explain why she wanted coaching. First, she asked how I was feeling, then she admired my jacket, then apologised for booking a late-afternoon session in case I was tired. Within minutes, I could see that Maria was someone who put other people's needs before her own.

I reminded Maria: 'These 90 minutes are for you. You don't need to take care of me. Feel free to use this time to think about yourself. What's brought you here?'

After more fretting about me and minimising her own needs, Maria finally got to the point: 'I'm worried about Christmas with my husband's family. They are strong-minded, and they demand that the whole family attends their "famous Christmas" every year – they actually call it that,' she said.

As Maria spoke, her story gathered momentum and she became agitated. 'They bulldoze me into doing what they want and, if I don't, they guilt-trip me and make fun of me for being "a little mouse" – that's what they label me,' she said dejectedly. 'Then they try to confuse me by insisting it was all agreed, when I'm sure that it wasn't. Eventually, I feel so pressurised and unsure of myself that I cave, and feel guilty for being difficult.'

Maria was close to tears. 'I haven't seen my own parents on Christmas Day for years because every year I get coerced into going to my in-laws, and my parents roll over and accept that I won't see them. We have children and my in-laws insist on seeing them all the time, while my parents don't get much of a look-in.'

I made notes and told Maria that I was going to read out some of the words and phrases that she used about her in-laws: 'Bulldoze. Pressurise. Coerce. Guilt-trip me. Strong-minded. Demand. Make fun of me. Confuse me. Insist...'

When Maria responded, 'I was surprised. I feel terrible now, because they mean well and are generous hosts. They are just different to me – a strong and tight-knit family. Deep down, they are kind. Oh dear, they would be really hurt if they knew I had said these



"Seeing things from your own point of view is not an act of disloyalty"

dreadful things about them.' Maria went on: 'You must think I am a horrible and disloyal person now too.'

I reassured Maria that I didn't think she was a horrible or disloyal person, that her feelings were valid and that it was important to be able to express them in a safe and confidential space.

I challenged Maria to accept that seeing things from her own point of view was not an act of disloyalty to others, and I reminded her that she has rights and needs too, which she has to be able to express. These include the right to say no and make choices about her own life and family.

But I could see that Maria wasn't really listening to what I was saying, so I stopped and asked her: 'What are you thinking right now?'

'I was thinking that I am making a fuss about nothing,' said Maria. 'All they want is for me to go there for Christmas, so I should just go and be grateful.'

Maria was backtracking and feeling bad about what she had said about her in-laws. I had worked with clients like her before who were so responsive to the needs of others that they had lost touch with what they felt, wanted and needed or, indeed, what they had a right to expect in terms of how people treated them.

I knew that I needed to take things very gently with Maria. I told her she was a kind and compassionate person and that it would be wonderful if she learned to show herself the same kindness and forgiveness that she shows to others.

I gave her a book to read about people pleasing, reassured her that everything she had told me was confidential, and we agreed to meet again in a couple of weeks.

After Maria left, I looked again at the list of words I had written down and made a note to myself to avoid falling into the trap of coercing, pressurising or bulldozing Maria to make the changes I wanted her to make!

Find out what Kim discovered about Maria's struggles with assertiveness in the next issue.

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

Work it out

Are you a people pleaser? Read the following statements and mark each one on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being 'this is not me at all' and 10 being 'oh my goodness, this is exactly what I am like!'

I go out of my way to avoid conflict.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

When someone is unhappy, I automatically think they are upset with me or that I've done something wrong.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I feel responsible for other people's happiness.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I sometimes try to assert myself, but I give in if challenged.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I accommodate other people's preferences and end up doing things I don't want to do to keep the peace, telling myself, 'It doesn't matter that much to me.'

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I feel guilty easily.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I often don't know what I want and find myself saying, 'I don't mind, you choose.'

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I am easily swayed by others to change my mind.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I like to believe that, deep down, everyone is good and fair and, if I behave kindly, they will reciprocate.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I am forgiving and tolerant of people who consistently let me down.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

UNDER 30: You have an assertiveness superpower – a skill from which others would benefit. Just watch that you don't overplay it.

30-50: You succeed in balancing your needs and the needs of others. You probably manage to assert yourself and your needs most of the time.

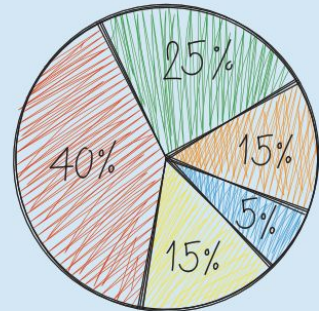
50-75: It's time to check yourself. It's wonderful to be nice, but you have needs too, so don't end up being someone else's doormat.

75-100: In the words of the actor and comic Whoopi Goldberg, 'You in danger, girl!' It's time to start owning your space and learning some assertiveness skills.

Share the pie of responsibility

If you are someone who always feels guilty and to blame for external events – and for other people's reactions and feelings towards them – this simple exercise will help you develop a more balanced perspective.

First, draw a circle to represent something you are feeling responsible for or guilty about. Next – thinking about the situation objectively – divide the circle into a pie chart by apportioning responsibility for the situation between yourself, other people and external factors.



TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT, WHAT YOU REALLY, REALLY WANT!

If you are used to putting other people's needs before your own, you are likely to be hypervigilant to the needs of others and out of touch with your own. Here are a few activities for you to do regularly to help you re-establish what matters to you and what you want and need:

- **Decide what you want for dinner, or what you would like to watch on TV, regardless of anyone else's preferences.**
- **Read about items in the news and develop your own opinion or position on current affairs.**
- **Make a list of what matters to you, and what is unacceptable to you in your relationships with others.**
- **Plan your perfect day, doing exactly what you want.**
- **Get through a day without saying, 'I don't mind, it's up to you.'**

Notice how it feels to engage with what you want. What are the benefits to you?

A moment of calm

VALERIAN

Relax your mind, rebalance your body and nurture your soul with this powerful perennial herb



Hailing from the honeysuckle family, valerian's uses date back to ancient Greece. History has it that this wholesome root was used by medical herbalists to treat an array of ailments, including anxiety, excitability, headaches, depression and digestive issues.

'These days valerian continues to be celebrated as a healing hero for its ability to calm nerves, boost mood and improve sleep,' says Chris Etheridge, a medical herbalist and chair of the British Herbal Medicine Association. 'It carries a pungent pong, but the benefits of valerian far outweigh this compromise.'

All-round soother

Etheridge adds: 'Valerian is proven effective at aiding relaxation, both physically and mentally. It works as a muscle relaxant, but also helps calm nervous energy and anxiety. The dried roots are used medicinally and contain an essential oil, which gives the herb its characteristic scent, and it works wonders on physical tension,' he says.

'Studies also show that valerian extract can help those who are struggling with sleep. It's believed that compounds found in valerian extract are essential for the brain to perform the sleep function properly.

It's also said to help reduce the chance of waking in the night, so you can rest uninterrupted. And, unlike other sleep remedies, valerian won't leave you feeling groggy the following day – it simply helps support your natural sleep cycle.'

Harness valerian

However, Etheridge warns: 'When taken correctly and in moderation, valerian is well tolerated, but it can be too stimulating for some. If you're one of those people, it is best to avoid it or take lower doses. Speak to your GP before taking valerian if you are pregnant, breastfeeding or on any other medication, as it may not be suitable.'

bhma.info

PICK OF THE PRODUCTS

Valerian is a wonderfully diverse herb and can be taken in many different forms. It can be enjoyed as a herbal tea by infusing a small amount of dried herb (0.3-3g) in 150ml boiling water. Alternatively, it can be bought over the counter in tablet, liquid tincture or essential oil form, for use in aromatherapy. But beware: the oil can smell a little strong, so use it sparingly.

The capsules

Valdrian valerian root capsules, £10.95 for 60, bio-health.co.uk



The tincture

Dormeasan valerian-hops oral drops, £10.85, avogel.co.uk and hollandandbarrett.com



The essential oil

Baldwins valerian essential oil, from £16.95, baldwins.co.uk



According to ancient texts, valerian – or valeriana officinalis, to give it its full name – was referred to as 'phu' by the Greek physician Galen, no doubt due to its sharp scent!





psychologies inspiration

*“Winter is not
a season, it’s
a celebration”*

Anamika Mishra



“DON'T GIVE UP... GO AT YOUR OWN PACE”

She made history when she became the first woman to play the title role in *Doctor Who*, but Jodie Whittaker says it's fabulous to be old news already!



I grew up in a village called Skelmanthorpe in Yorkshire. There were only the four of us in my family and we were really close. My ambition as a child was always to be an actress, even before I could articulate it. I'm a 1982 baby, so I was blessed with a decade of incredible cinema that the whole community could enjoy. From the second the kids slid down the waterslide in *The Goonies* and I realised that was someone's job, I was sold.

I'm not a natural rule breaker in any way, so at school I was always really good. If you told me to do something, I'd do it. I was not an academic kid. I've always been emotionally intelligent, and I've always been encouraged to be adventurous, but my academic achievements weren't anything to write home about. Because I was enthusiastic and always supported, I think I generally had a really happy childhood.

I applied for drama school and got into my first-choice school. I realised that this required a dedication and a level of self-worth and self-awareness that you're not necessarily ready for. I was graduating from drama school in 2005 when two job opportunities came up. I got a job at the Globe theatre, and I got a debut feature. Without those two jobs, I don't think I would be sitting here. I was given a platform in a way that not every person graduating from drama school gets. With those

Jodie Whittaker was the first female to play The Doctor in the iconic science fiction TV show 'Doctor Who', a character played by men for 56 years. She appeared in the eleventh series, which premiered in 2018. Whittaker later announced that she would reprise her role into its thirteenth series, which is available on BBC One and BBC iPlayer.

This is an extract from *'The Female Lead: We Rise By Lifting Others'* by Edwina Dunn (Impress, £25). You can nominate a UK school, college or university to receive a free copy of the book at society.thefemalelead.com/sign-up

opportunities, it meant that I auditioned and met the right people that led to me being cast as the first female Doctor Who, which is my pinnacle.

It's an absolute pleasure because of what it means emotionally to me and what it meant politically to me. Being cast as the first female Doctor – it's already old news and that's why it's brilliant. I'm already one of two now. [The finale of the twelfth series featured a second female Doctor, played by Jo Martin]. Girls thought they would only get to be in the Tardis with The Doctor, and now we realise we don't have to think like that.

It's really exciting when young people find a role model in a character. Girls and boys absolutely adored The Doctor in whatever form. The Doctor still remained a hero to all but what's brilliant for the girls is that they suddenly had an active role in their role play of being that character.

I don't think that the previous Doctors represented all male actors. If someone took a particular issue to the casting, it was about that actor, whereas with me, I wasn't just Jodie Whittaker playing the part, I was representing actresses and women. If I was annihilated for my interpretation of the role, I could have a really detrimental effect on us in the future and that was a massive amount of pressure.

PHOTOGRAPHS: SANE SEVEN; FROM 'THE FEMALE LEAD: WE RISE BY LIFTING OTHERS' BY EDWINA DUNN; GETTY IMAGES

My teenage self would be delighted that I didn't pursue a backup plan. My mum and dad never encouraged one, but there were a couple of suggestions from other people that maybe wanting to be an actor wasn't necessarily a sensible thing to do. I didn't listen to that, and I had this really great support at home. I had parents who said, 'do it' and don't worry about a backup plan until your first plan doesn't work out. Don't spread your energy. I'm so chuffed that I listened to that advice.

I would tell my teenage self, 'You're not going to grow out of the anxiety, but you'll get better at dealing with it.' I still feel as stressed and anxious as I did when I was 14, but life has given me coping mechanisms. I'm not flawless but I've got better at it. I've learned to deal with the noise.

The best life advice I've ever received is from my dad, who said, 'If you don't ask, you'll never know,' so I've never been embarrassed to say I don't understand. I didn't realise that not everyone is blessed with that kind of confidence.

If I could give any advice, it would be to celebrate you. That sounds like something you might find on the inside of a card, but it's really hard when you don't feel like you fit in. Don't give up. You have a long life, and you go at your pace and be you.

The living woman who inspires me most is my mum. She had me in her early 30s and I was really lucky to be brought up by someone who, without realising it, is incredibly progressive, incredibly nurturing, incredibly loyal and non-judgmental. I realise those are not easy things to achieve as an adult or as a human. Without that, I wouldn't have achieved anything. She takes up no space but is the brightest light in a room for me.

SIGNIFICANT OBJECT

I've got a pair of my nephew's pyjamas. Those are my most treasured things because they will forever remind me of him. Some of us are lucky enough to get older, whereas some of us live short but beautiful lives. [Whittaker's nephew, Harry, died in 2014 at the age of three.] Whatever is happening in life, there is a fragility and honour in being alive. We should never take those things for granted.



The best gifts don't come with a bow

A photograph of a person's legs sticking out of a white bathtub. The tub is filled with thick, white bubbles. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

It's easy to neglect our own wants and needs at this time of year, but if you can gift yourself a few simple pleasures, you'll be rewarded with a much calmer you, discovers Rebecca Frank

Whether you're a giver of gifts to rival Santa himself, or the mere mention of presents sends you into a tailspin of indecision (if so, fear not – turn to page 108 for help), the chances are you're a darn sight better at treating others than yourself.

Most women excel at meeting everyone else's needs during the festive season – be they brightly wrapped and placed under the tree on Christmas Eve, the constant supply of clean clothes and satisfying dinners, and preparing to host half the family for several days over the season of goodwill. But while you're busy sorting out what everyone else requires this Christmas, what gifts could you give yourself to make this one to remember?

They might not be quite so prettily packaged, but we think you'll enjoy them far more than another pair of slippers or a sparkly trinket...



1 The gift of... REST

Whatever you've got planned over the next few weeks, try to ensure there are moments when you can just stop for a while. In a large global survey, The Rest Test, conducted by Claudia Hammond, author of *The Art Of Rest* (Canongate, £9.99), two thirds of people said they weren't getting enough rest. 'Resting is not just good for wellbeing, it's good for productivity,' says Hammond. 'It helps us make better decisions, lowers our risk of depression, boosts memory and means we catch fewer colds.'

Of course, rest will mean different things to different people, but the survey found the most common ways people chose to rest involved having time to themselves, such as taking a walk, reading, soaking in the bath or doing nothing at all.

When you have time to rest, make sure you use it well. If you're feeling stressed or anxious, try some DIY relaxation techniques, such as lying on your back with your legs up against the wall while taking a few slow, deep breaths. Or give yourself a massage using aromatherapy oils or even a simple moisturiser. If you want to get out of the house, go for a walk and spend time in nature, or find a quiet place to listen to music. Or just breathe and watch the world go by. 'Rest is not a luxury, it's a necessity,' says Hammond.

2 The gift of... KINDNESS

How do you talk to yourself? Do you use understanding and compassion, or do you tend to use more of a nagging, critical voice? Most of us are much harsher on ourselves than we would ever be on other people, regularly telling ourselves things like, 'You're not good enough,' 'You're unlovable,' or 'You messed up again.' It's this self-criticism that gets in the way of us going for a new job, trying new things, meeting new people and even enjoying Christmas. ►►

And the weird thing about this inner critic is that it usually develops as a form of self-protection – if we tell ourselves we're not good enough, we can't disappoint, right? Next time you hear your inner critic pipe up, consider this: Would you speak to a friend like that? If the answer is no, which it usually is, imagine what you would say to them instead. Now show that same level of kindness and understanding to yourself.

Sophie Mort, a clinical psychologist and author of *A Manual For Being Human* (Simon & Schuster, £14.99), explains: 'When we're growing up, our brain internalises and summarises all the messages that tell us who the "ideal" child is. This creates a blueprint of who we think we "should" be, and every time we deviate from this our inner critic gets louder.' She suggests this exercise to help you recognise and quieten the negative voice in your head:

- **Spend the next 48 hours paying attention to your self-talk, the positive and the negative. Jot down key sentences in a notepad or type them into your phone.**
- **After the two days, write them down again in two columns, dividing the positive and negative.**
- **Are there more positive or negative comments?**
- **Now go through the negative comments, noticing any themes. Whose words do they sound like? Has anyone said these things to you in the past?**
- **Recognising that we are in control of our lives, and don't need to keep pleasing the internalised voices of others will help us believe our own voice and what we know to be true about ourselves.**

"The inner critic is self-protection... if we tell ourselves we're not good enough, we can't disappoint"



The gift of.. FUN

If you expend all your energy making sure others are having a good time, you won't have much fun yourself. Say yes to that party or night out with friends, take an evening off from the cooking and order a takeaway, and watch a funny film. Play daft party games, dress up, hang out with your silliest friends and let yourself go a bit. The benefits of a good belly laugh are proven and long-lasting, from reduced stress levels to better sleep and greater immunity.

Sabina Brennan, author of *Beating Brain Fog* (Orion, £14.99), says that among all the items on our to-do list we need to make time for hobbies,

socialising and relaxing. 'These may seem unimportant or a frivolous waste of time when we have so much to do, but engaging in things that interest us is a wonderful stress-buster that can bring a real sense of achievement when we're feeling overwhelmed. Hobbies have the capacity to totally engage us, to the point where we lose track of time and find distance from the stressors in our life.'

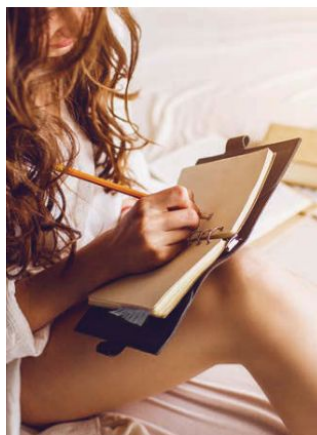
With a bit more time for fun and doing the things you enjoy, you may be looking at a calmer Christmas, with fewer ailments and arguments and more smiles all round. And what's not to like about that?

4 *The gift of...* BOUNDARIES

How is it that one minute you're complaining you have too much to do, and the next you're agreeing to bake cakes for a Christmas fair or to look after a friend's kids for the weekend? An inability to say no is not uncommon but something we all need to feel more comfortable with, because taking on more than we can handle is a recipe for stress and overwhelm. Learning your motivations for saying yes will help you distinguish between should, must, need and 'want to' activities.

If you're worried about what people might think of you if you don't say yes, Emma Reed Turrell, a therapist and author of *Please Yourself* (HarperCollins, £9.99), says it's important to remember that 'pleasing yourself is not the same as displeasing others. It's not about caring less, it's about caring more and caring better, for yourself and for others; caring enough to acknowledge that we cannot truly say yes unless we can also say no'.

Know your limits and try not to overcommit. Schedule time for rest and fun, and know that in doing so, you're caring for others as well as yourself. If you say yes to something you can't really manage, you're never going to be able to give it your best.



PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES, SHUTTERSTOCK



5 *The gift of...* IMPERFECTION

For many people, this becomes a positive ideal from a young age – but perfectionists set themselves up for failure because perfect is rarely attainable. Unfortunately, Christmas and perfectionism can create the perfect (or imperfect!) storm, as we desperately try to recreate the fairy tale, from beautiful decorations to original presents and a calendar brimming with social commitments, such as parties and pantos. Far better to set yourself reasonable and achievable standards and learn to be happy with 'good

enough' – from yourself and others – rather than endure the disappointment of falling short of perfect.

It's helpful to remind yourself that people would rather have a happy and relaxed mum/partner/friend/host than an exhausted, stressed-out version who probably makes them feel bad about what *they* haven't managed to achieve. 'To be honest, "good enough" for a perfectionist is usually a pretty high standard and you'll probably find you're far exceeding people's expectations of you already!' says Brennan.

A caged bird does not sing



Does your hardest taskmaster live inside your head? After a year of striving, exertion and flying headlong towards burnout, Vee Sey frees herself from the mental prison of her own design



A light-footed lark ready to conduct the dawn chorus myself, I wake at 5.30am and seize the day! I make a decaf because, you know, journal morning pages to inspire

creativity of the highest calibre, then head out for my pre-work run. I must go further than yesterday because I have a target and I cannot fall behind. I do it, plus a kilometre. I stumble indoors, mottled from the chill. I have a scalding scrub – no bubbles, no time – and let my hair dry into my jumper because there isn't a spare moment for preening... Before I start rat-a-tat-tatting on my keyboard with hard intention and supreme focus as the busy workday begins.

Lunchtime o'clock sharp, after gulping down two slabs of toast with peanut butter and banana – because I must exceed my five-a-day, some say 10 – is mindful walking for 60 minutes along the soothing riverbank to bring me peace and a clear head, fewer quandaries and more solutions. I see a dainty robin redbreast and wonder if he is a Scandinavian holidaymaker for a nanosecond... Lucky him. I rush past mute swans gliding, stretching, turning languidly... I dart into the supermarket to get fresh vegetables for dinner, which I always make from scratch. The mallards, I think, have left for a more hospitable place...

Downtime is listening to self-improvement, spiritual fulfilment and healthy living podcasts or reading books about how to run faster, achieve greater, get happier, be more. I am a wide-eyed owl devoid of wisdom. That light-hearted murder mystery my friend gave me is too dusty to touch. I really must clean in here. My phone buzzes relentlessly because I overcommunicate on text, email and call. I give it, them, my all. I work. I bring the worms. I'm just a girl who can't say no, so I take on a project to do at weekends. I do my best every time, all the time. Aren't I marvellous?

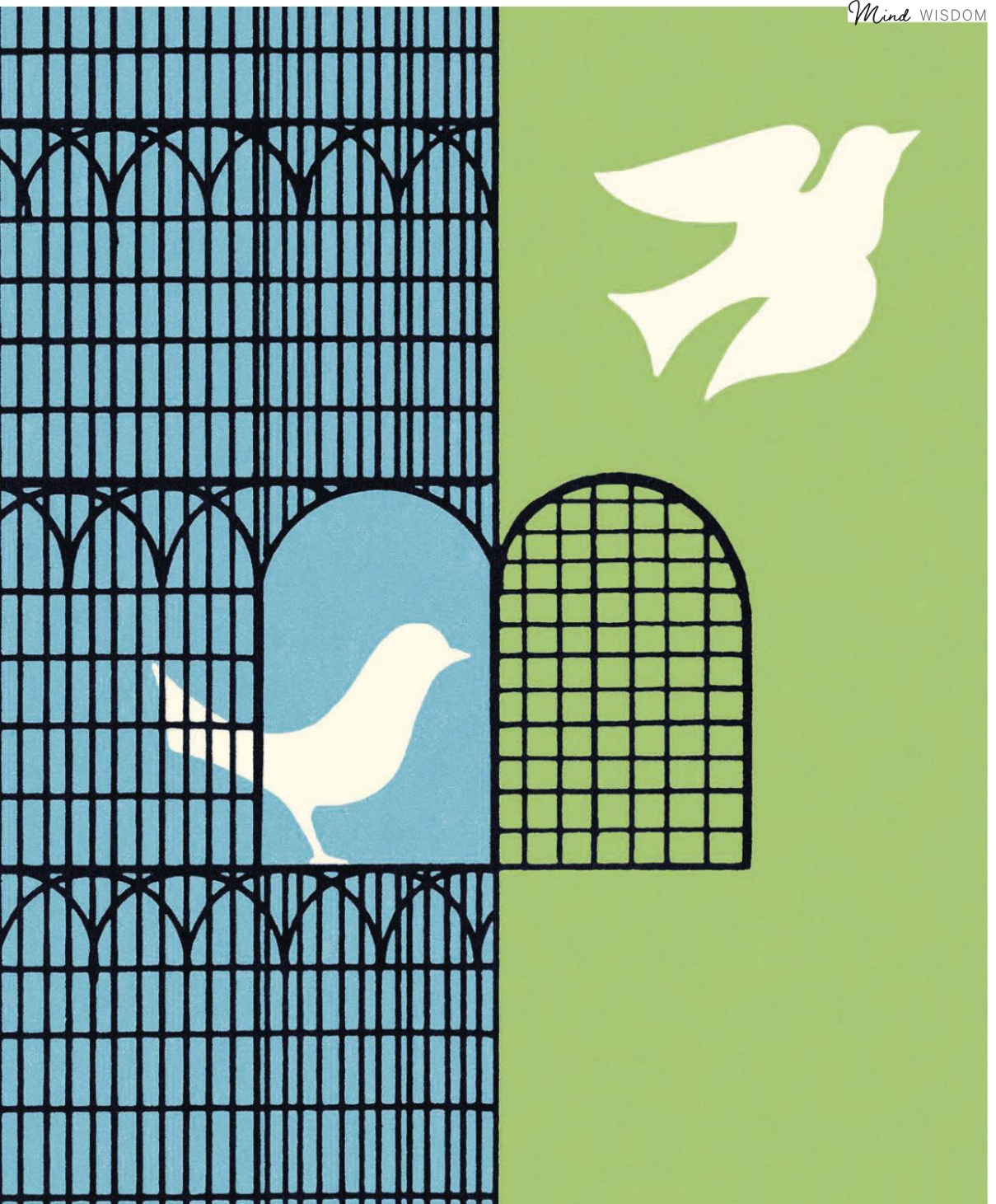
I do not feel marvellous. My body and mind are weary. It's been an interminable year and I have been pushing myself for most of it. I am stretched to brittle, and I know I am not the only one. I spot you in the mornings, checking your speed and time. I see you in the shop, wildly grabbing items while planning something life-and-death urgent on the phone.

Multitasking. I watch you online, amending files at a frenetic pace and always replying swiftly to my never-ending double checks. I am sorry about those.

On morning gallop-plus-plus, out of the frosty blue, I come to an abrupt halt and begin to cry. If I could sink to my knees like a defeated Rocky without causing upset, embarrassment and an unnecessary ambulance call by a passerby, I would. The wall they say you hit is touching my nose. The inflexible day goes on and by 9pm I can barely shuffle. As I make a cup of tea, I spill boiling water on my thumb. 'You stupid bitch! Look what you did!' shrieks a hostile voice. She is me. Being horrible to myself. Always cracking her whip.

My message to you and me is this: Please stop. Your perfectionism and slave-driving cannot go on. Look after yourself. Allow a protective wing across your overburdened shoulders. If you don't have someone to offer you one, nurture yourself. *That* is what is pressing. Ease into a morning and see how it evolves unscheduled. Linger over something pleasurable just for you. Read for entertainment because enlightenment doesn't come in a flash. Batch-cook so you don't have to do it on repeat. Stroll free, don't run. You don't have to exert yourself to full capacity every waking moment. Have fewer waking moments.

We talk of slowing down and self-compassion so knowingly, but what do they mean? Release that breath you are holding and stop trying so hard. You are doing a brilliant job and it's time to rest. And, conscientious and well-meaning little bird, there is never, ever, any reason to speak to yourself that way. @veejanesey



Alter course and find fulfilment

Do you yearn for a fresh start and rewarding work? Training to be a coach could bring the transformation you seek – and allow you to help others. But where do you begin, and what does it entail?



After 25 years at the forefront of coaching and coach

training in the UK, I remain fascinated by the psychology of human experience and behaviour.

As pioneers of coaching to the highest standards, our focus is to inspire personal growth and make the world a brighter place through exceptional coaching. More than 4,000 people have completed our International Coach Federation (ICF) ACTP-accredited training and students leave as confident coaches ready to make a difference.

Kim

Kim Morgan MCC, CEO
Barefoot Coaching Ltd

HOW COACHING CHANGED MY LIFE

When she became too overwhelmed to make clear business decisions, Siobhan Casey, an interior designer, partnered with Barefoot-trained coach Karen Fugle. She now feels more confident and decisive and has found a renewed energy and focus regarding her entrepreneurial goals.

1 Coaching helped me think strategically about my business. Being so busy with the day-to-day work meant I didn't have time to plan ahead or even glimpse the bigger picture, but Karen helped me establish a clear vision. We broke it down into manageable chunks, which gave me the momentum to make gains on my larger goals.

2 As a business owner, I needed an objective and non-judgmental coach. As a designer, I'm a perfectionist, so if I have an idea, I want to make sure it's the best one before I act. Coaching allowed me to expand my options, rather than focus

on an instant solution. Karen is great at transforming thoughts into a concrete format. Using diagrams, notes and role-playing scenarios, I came away with tools that turn ideas into actions.

3 Our sessions gave me distraction-free thinking space. I was surprised at the perspectives I gained on who I am and how I work. The realisation that I undervalued my services was an eye-opener. We can be our own worst enemy sometimes. My confidence has increased and my ability to make timely decisions has never been better.

**sleepinggiant-consulting.com;
caseyandfox.com**

"The realisation that I undervalued my services was an eye-opener. We can be our own worst enemy sometimes"



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**BAREFOOT
COACHING**

HOW I BECAME A COACH

Karen Fugle

A disenchanted consultant, I wanted to switch from technology to people. I was drawn to Barefoot's down-to-earth approach and was confident it would provide the quality of coaching I wanted. My life and work have changed completely. I coach architects, designers and creatives, and have a better work-life balance.



Nick O'Connor

As a recovering recruiter, my journey to coaching was less of an epiphany and more of a gradual realisation that technology was eroding a lot of the human aspects of our business, yet people still want career and personal support. I now combine one-to-one coaching with a career guidance business to support 16-25-year-olds in finding their best career.



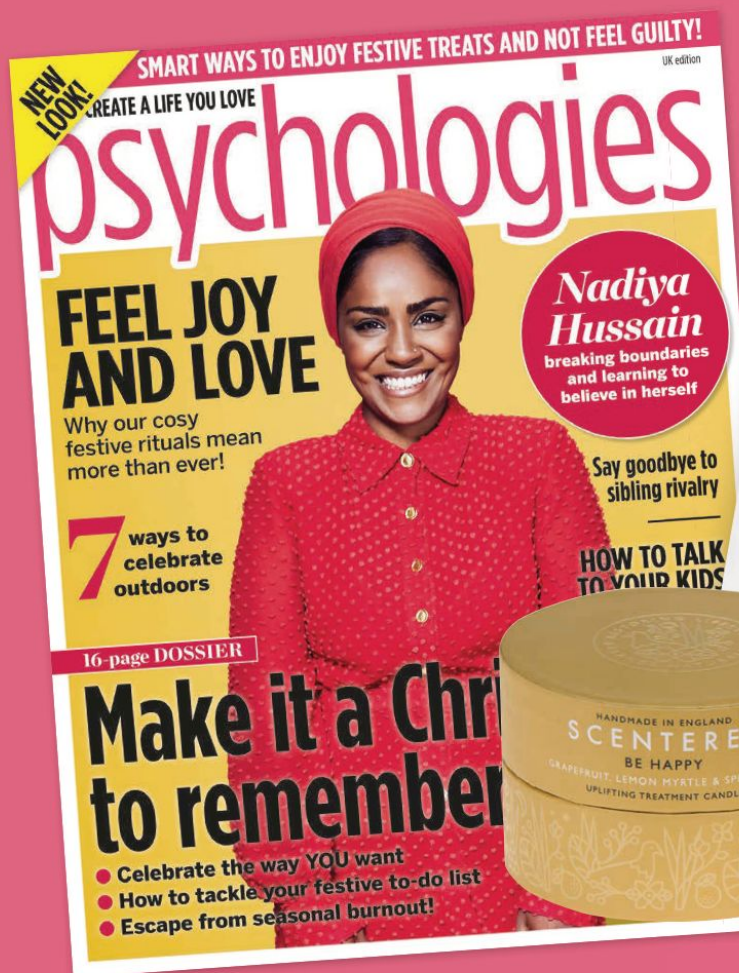
Steph Durbin-Wood

I wanted to combine my strengths of commerce and leadership in a people-focused direction. Five years ago, I trained with Barefoot, mainly due to their approachability and professional pathway options. I'm now an ICF PCC executive coach and a coaching supervisor, and I founded The Coach Directory. It was the best career choice I ever made!



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Sally x

Editor,
Psychologies

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How to cope with stress

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

Life is full of wonder and demands, a melting pot of happiness and sadness, ups and downs. With all life's events come different feelings and emotions, yet as a society, we are so busy rushing around that we rarely pause for breath before moving on to the next task. It's not surprising, therefore, that sometimes we feel stressed, overwhelmed and even burnt out. Stress is something many of us experience, particularly around this time of year with the busyness of the festive season. No one should be ashamed of feeling stressed.

Radha Modgil, a medical doctor, and experts from the Mental Health Foundation shine a light on stress, offering reassurance, highlighting potential causes and symptoms, and sharing tips on how we can help ourselves and others who feel stressed.

What is stress?

Put simply, stress is our body's reaction to feeling threatened or under pressure. It's very common, with most people experiencing it at different times in their lives. 'Believe it or not, stress can be really useful,' says Dr Radha. 'It can help us get through the demands of the day and complete challenging tasks, such as delivering a speech or running a race. However, too much stress can have

a negative impact on our mood, physical health and self-esteem. It can also make us feel anxious and irritable, which affects the people around us who we care about the most.'

What causes stress?

Dr Radha explains further: 'Stress is usually a reaction to mental or emotional pressure and we often associate it with something negative, such as work pressures, relationship issues, ill health or financial problems. However, sometimes stress can be triggered by a positive but demanding situation, such as planning a wedding, having a baby, moving house or even trying to please your family at Christmas. Occasionally, there is no obvious cause. If you know what is causing your stress, it can be easier to find ways to manage it.'

Are you overwhelmed?

It's important not only to spot the signs of stress, but to realise when pressures are becoming too much. 'Experiencing a lot of stress over a prolonged period of time can lead to a feeling of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion, often called burnout,' says Dr Radha. Stress can cause many different symptoms – physical, mental and behavioural. Read on for the indicators...

REACH OUT

'If you continue to experience stress, seek help,' says Dr Radha. 'Talk to your GP, who may suggest talking therapy, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), which can change the way you think about stressful situations. They might also recommend counselling to help you develop coping strategies or prescribe mindfulness exercises for you to try.' Other resources include:

- Every Mind Matters: nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-health-issues/stress
- NHS 10 stress busters: nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/tips-to-reduce-stress
- NHS breathing exercises: nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/breathing-exercises-for-stress

"The largest known study of stress in the UK found that 74 per cent of adults felt stressed and unable to cope at some point"*

“Believe it or not, stress can be useful, helping us get through the demands of the day and complete challenging tasks”



HOW TO HELP YOURSELF AND OTHERS

● **Make it bite-sized.** If a task seems overwhelming, try breaking it down into small, manageable chunks, and give yourself credit for completing each one, no matter how small.

● **Think positively.** Take time to think about the good things in your life. These positive thoughts will help drown out the negative ones.

● **Get moving.** Exercise of any kind is a fantastic way to burn off nervous energy. It can't get rid of stress totally, but it can make it less intense.

● **Plan ahead.** If you know what generally causes your stress, being prepared can be beneficial. Plan downtime during a demanding work project, stick positive affirmations around the house and make a manageable to-do list.

● **And breathe...** If you find yourself in a stressful moment, focus on your breath. Simple breathing exercises can help you overcome a feeling of overwhelm. Try breathing in through your nose for a count of five, then out through your mouth for a count of five.

IDENTIFY THE SIGNS

Physical symptoms

- Headaches or dizziness
- Feeling tense
- Upset stomach
- Palpitations or fast heartbeat
- Loss of libido

Mental symptoms

- Unable to concentrate
- Being indecisive

Feeling overwhelmed

- Feeling anxious
- Being forgetful

Changes in behaviour

- Snapping at people
- A change in sleep patterns
- Overeating or loss of appetite
- Avoiding people or places
- Turning to unhealthy habits, such as drinking or smoking

Lightbulb moments

Lessons from the edge

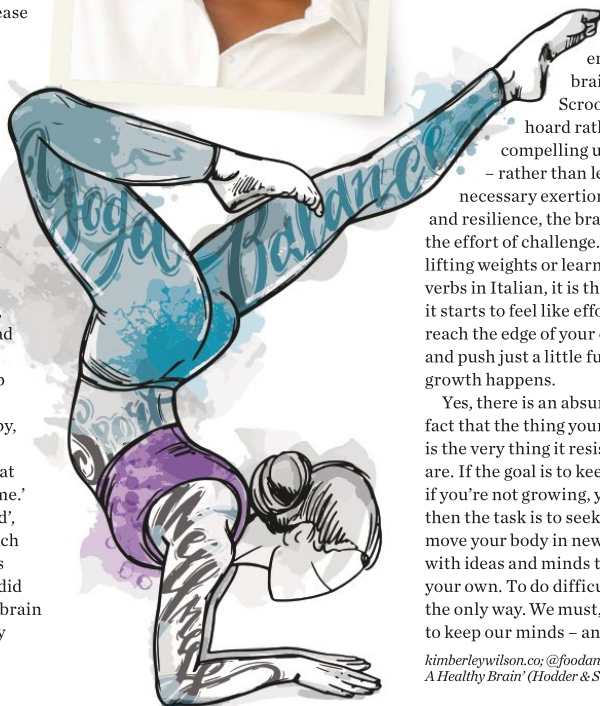
Push to the perimeters of your comfort zone and beyond, says Kimberley Wilson, a psychologist and author of 'How To Build A Healthy Brain', because personal growth waits for you there

I am creakier than I used to be. A bountiful assortment of areas pop and crack whenever I move – knees, hips, shoulders, you name it. I am less human, more percussion section. Like the noisy hinges on a garden gate, my joints are letting me know they need some TLC. So, determined to be a good custodian of my body, I tried my first Kinstretch class this week. For the uninitiated (and it really did feel like an initiation) it's a movement method designed to increase joint control and range of motion.

Many of the prescribed movements of Kinstretch are subtle but... crampy. Sitting on the floor with my knees turning in, feet turning out, trying to lift my feet from the floor, the position bordered on the masochistic. It was the kind of discomfort that made me question the life choices that had brought me to this place – a teeny, tiny existential crisis.

While my mind silently screamed, I was transported to a yoga class I had attended years earlier. There, in the midst of a particularly juicy little hip opener, my yoga instructor gave us a beautiful cue: 'Imagine you are a baby, new to the world,' he said, 'and the sensation in your hip is an orange that you are encountering for the first time.' Rather than judge the feeling (as 'bad', for example), he invited us to approach the sensation with curiosity: What is this? What can I do with it? When I did so, a few things happened: First, my brain stopped screaming. Second, my body relaxed. Third, my hips opened.

This touches on something I have

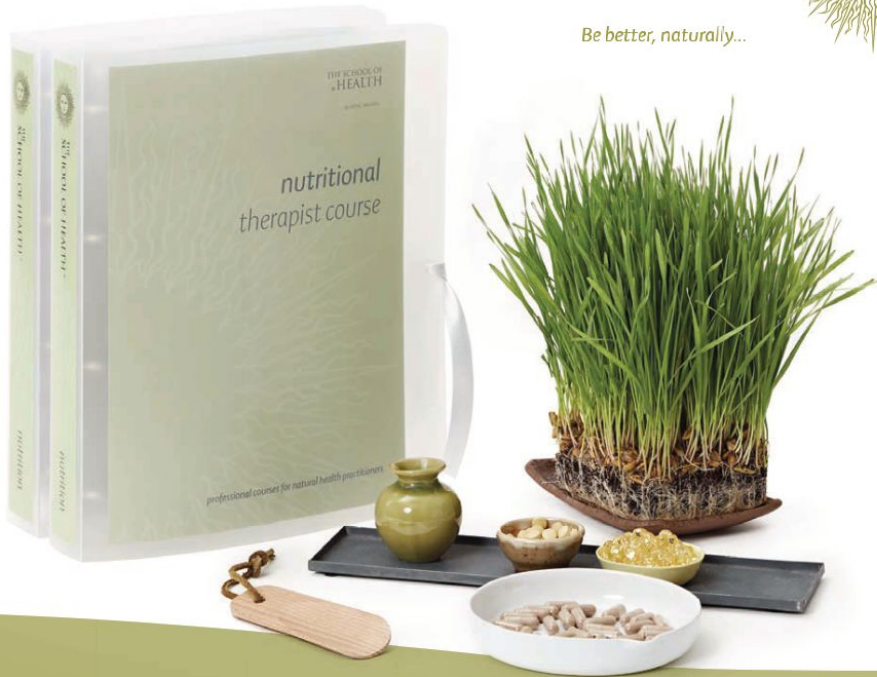


mentioned previously – how the label you give an experience can materially change the quality of that experience. But it's also a reminder of what happens at the edge of your comfort zone. We all fall into habits – in movement, ideas, beliefs and even food choices. We do and think the same things over and over again. But, like my hips after years in the therapist's chair, we risk becoming limited, less agile and resistant.

Our brains like habits because they are efficient. Change takes energy and the brain is like Ebenezer Scrooge, preferring to hoard rather than spend, compelling us to retreat from – rather than lean in to – the necessary exertion. Yet, for growth and resilience, the brain and body need the effort of challenge. Whether you're lifting weights or learning to conjugate verbs in Italian, it is the point at which it starts to feel like effort, when you reach the edge of your current capacity and push just a little further, that growth happens.

Yes, there is an absurd irony in the fact that the thing your brain needs most is the very thing it resists, but there you are. If the goal is to keep growing (and if you're not growing, you're stagnating), then the task is to seek challenge. To move your body in new ways. To engage with ideas and minds that differ from your own. To do difficult things... It's the only way. We must, annoyingly, work to keep our minds – and hips – open.

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



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"Wool duvets will not release harmful microparticles into our water system"

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MAKE IT A *Christmas* TO REMEMBER

Rewrite the rule book of tired traditions, excess and extravagance. Heidi Scrimgeour discovers how to reframe Christmas and say no to festive frazzle for a season that's meaningful, memorable and magical



On-trend tree? Check. Festive table dressed to impress? Carefully picked-out presents (sustainably wrapped, of course) and cards sent weeks in advance of the final posting date? Check, check. From the expectations placed on us by friends and family to the names we follow on social media – but mostly by ourselves – the pressure to pull off an Insta-perfect party season can mean Christmas takes its toll.

And last year's late rule changes were particularly challenging, when suddenly we found ourselves with empty chairs and pared-back plans, which – no matter how stoically accepted – left the uneasy sense that the Grinch had truly stolen Christmas.

Yet, for many of us, the pandemic delivered a most unexpected gift: the chance to reconsider our festive to-do list and rewrite the usual Christmas script. A change that was perhaps long overdue, but took a global crisis for us to be able to consider.

For decades now, our expectations have grown. When we were children, a trip to see Santa at the local department store the Saturday before the big day was a special treat. Now, we feel we must take our little darlings to the very best grotto money can buy, with real reindeer, personalised gifts and an enchanted forest, all watched through the lens of a camera and shared with the world before we even get back home.

Likewise, the meal, the tree, the parties, the presents grow bigger and better, more expensive and more... exhausting. Because, make no bones about it, a recent study revealed that seasonal overload is real, with one in four women suffering from exhaustion and emotional burnout before the big day rolls around. My only question: Is it *really* only one in four?

But last year gave all our plans a kicking, and made us do things differently. And the good news is that we don't have to climb back on the Christmas carousel of excess and extravagance. Many of my friends have expressed a desire to do Christmas differently this year. As we make plans, freed from some of the expectations that previously seemed set in stone, we also feel determined to throw off the festive burnout that plagues women in particular during this most wonderful time of the year.

We have learned that a simple Christmas can be profoundly meaningful and memorable. We're no longer buying the myth that seasonal exhaustion is simply the price we must pay for pulling off the perfect Christmas. And in discovering what we missed when Christmas was duly upended, we're reconsidering everything from what it means to us to how we wish to spend it.

So instead of hurtling into preparations you've perhaps never felt you could question, take a breath and make plans that truly serve you and those you love this Christmas...



“Freed from the weight of expectation, we can throw off festive burnout and choose not to climb back on board the Christmas carousel”



REWRITE... *your family time*

If you've been used to seeing your parents for breakfast Buck's Fizz, before heading over to his mum and dad's for lunch, then visiting Gran mid-afternoon, last year you may have really missed seeing family and friends. Or maybe... you didn't. If you're reluctant to revert to the pre-pandemic Christmas chaos of dashing from pillar to post, now's the time to break free from obligation. It's about rerouting your usual plans rather than doggedly holding on to what you've always done.

'What stops many of us from following through on a desire to do Christmas differently is the fear that someone important will be upset

if we fall out of step with their expectations,' says Holly Matthews, a self-development coach and founder of The Happy Me Project.

'If you know someone is going to feel annoyed, remember that their feelings probably stem from the fact that they have their own version of the ideal Christmas.' Find ways to remind them that they matter, and reinforce that you want them included in your plans, Matthews suggests. 'Making them feel special will help them see that your new rules are about you, not them.'

Your could, for example, visit loved ones on a more leisurely schedule during the month, instead

of making it all about one or two crushingly busy days.

Be kind to yourself, as well as to others, as you shake up your plans. Some of the routines you're seeking to dismantle may have been around for quite some time, so changing them is bound to be emotive, Matthews explains. 'It's not your job to manage other people's emotions, but you can be understanding enough to know that certain feelings might surface,' she says. 'Try not to change everything at once, or leave some wriggle room for compromise, so that those you care about can have a bit of their perfect Christmas too.'

iamhollymatthews.com



REWRITE...

your festive traditions

There can be much joy and comfort to be had from our Christmas rituals (as we discover on page 24), but if you've ever tried to challenge a long-held family tradition, you'll know how strong the reactions can be! Understanding why we hold so firmly to family customs – even ones that don't serve us – is key to dismantling them with grace and respect, says Geraldine Joaquim, a psychotherapist, stress management consultant and author of *Understanding Your Stress Footprint* (£9.95).

'Traditions bring steadiness in a confusing world and can provide a sense of belonging and comfort, while old family rituals can nurture connection, not just to our immediate family but to past generations,' she says. 'Developing your self-awareness is not for the fainthearted – it can bring up all sorts of emotions and memories – but as you go through the process, it also brings clarity and choice. You start to discover yourself in among the routine and can decide whether the activities still serve you, or whether you want to replace them with new ones. Customs such as what you eat for dinner and when you put up your tree are wrapped in family history that may stretch back to your childhood and beyond – your parents were probably trying to recreate the Christmases *they* had as children.'

Try reflecting on why you uphold a tradition. Consider who enjoys it and whether it adds meaning or brings you closer. But remember that traditions can also just be for fun! Talk to your relatives about why you've always done something a certain way: 'This is a great way of discovering family history,' says Joaquim.

But what can you do if the family customs you feel tied to no longer bring you happiness? If they're not working for you, you can change them, or ditch them. 'It can be hard to let go of tradition,

but there's a danger that you'll resent it if you continue with a ritual that no longer brings you joy,' adds Joaquim. 'It might make you feel uncomfortable and could even create cognitive dissonance – the state of having inconsistent thoughts or beliefs, which result in feelings of unease and tension, which is not what you want when you're trying to create an atmosphere of warmth and comfort at Christmas!'

If you anticipate fallout from others, take it gently, Joaquim advises. Make time to explain why a tradition doesn't work for you any more, and think up new ones that could

replace it. 'If you hate turkey, you could suggest another dish to serve alongside it, or even offer to provide an alternative.'

Ultimately, it's down to you to decide what to hold on to and what to create as new, but do so with an awareness of how it will affect others. Don't forget, Joaquim cautions, to consider the impact on future generations if your tradition includes children, because they'll be repeating your rituals – at least until *they* decide to abandon or change them!

'You don't have to rip up the rule book,' adds Joaquim. 'Just think about tweaking what you have because, in the main, it probably works. A lot of our traditions actually come from popular culture rather than being steeped in ancient family history, so that gives us leave to make alterations. And bear in mind that times change. Sending Christmas cards was popularised in the mid-1800s, but with today's awareness of climate change and waste, it's perfectly acceptable that people are turning to e-cards or not sending cards at all, perhaps making a donation to a charity instead.'

And remember, nothing is set in stone, says Joaquim – you may choose to stop a tradition but, if you miss it, there's nothing to stop you picking it up again next year!'

mind-yourbusiness.co.uk

"It can be hard to let go of tradition, but there's a danger that you'll resent it if you continue with a ritual that no longer brings you joy"





"Compassion, for yourself and others, will guide you towards which invitations to accept – or decline"



REWRITE...

your Christmas calendar

The festive party season is a major cause of burnout. But, this year, the stakes are even higher because we've grown accustomed to rarely leaving the house, never mind rocking around the Christmas tree all month long. So how do you pace your partying and say yes to a whirlwind of festive invitations without ending up exhausted and running on empty?

'When we tire ourselves out socially, it's often because of a lack of balance between our own needs and the needs of others,' says Michaela Thomas, a clinical psychologist and author of *The Lasting Connection* (Little, Brown, £14.99). 'Not being able to say no to invitations can stem from a lack of boundaries, perhaps due to a fear of letting other people down or worry about not being liked or fitting in, but it can also stem from a fear of missing out on all these wonderful events after a period of being socially starved.'

Many of us struggle to set boundaries because we don't check in with ourselves about what we need, according to Thomas. 'How do you know it's time to charge your phone if you don't check the battery status?' she says. 'Being mindfully aware of the early warning signs that you need downtime is key – are you irritable, snappy or tired without an obvious reason? You may be overloaded and need some downtime to recharge. If so, then it's appropriate to choose one of the social commitments you are juggling and set it down.'

Remember too that people pleasing doesn't

serve you or your friends. 'Kindness is key – you can face requests without passively saying yes and regretting it later, and without aggressively saying no and burning bridges with people,' adds Thomas. 'Between passive and aggressive lies assertive, where you kindly but firmly say that you won't be able to make it. Compassion for the other person's situation, balanced with compassion for your own situation, is helpful in guiding you towards which events to accept or decline, and how to do so with kindness.'

If you find yourself filling up the calendar and wishing you could make it stop, try asking yourself some important questions, Thomas suggests. 'How will you feel if you push yourself to go? How would the other person feel if you couldn't make it? How important is the social event? If your friend knew what you were going through, would they really judge you for cancelling? And, are you speaking to yourself as kindly as your friend would speak to you?'

If, from a Covid point of view, you aren't ready for the office Christmas party or other gatherings, it's especially important to respect your limitations. If you feel rusty from not having socialised for so long, Thomas recommends building up to a bigger event by going to a few smaller gatherings first. 'Little and often helps chip away at your fear and broadens your comfort zone, rather than going from nought to 100 in one social event,' she says.

thethomasconnection.co.uk





REWRITE... *your working life*

Between office Christmas bashes and boozy client catch-ups, it can be hard to find time to actually do your job at this time of year. Mounting pressure to wrap up projects for the holidays alongside endless social expectations can leave you feeling more frazzled than festive by the time you clock off for Christmas.

'Some people are like children at Christmas – excited about the opportunities for drinks, parties and long lunches – and very little work gets done,' says Catrin MacDonnell, an executive and business coach.

'But the work doesn't go away and someone has to pick up the pieces. On top of pressure to be the perfect party person – helping to keep it all fun and keep smiling during often dull and drunken conversations – you might be the Christmas elf at home too: shopping, planning and cooking. It's a huge

amount of extra pressure, with fewer hours to actually do your work and get stuff done. And what goes out of the window first? Self-care. Eating properly, drinking water and getting enough sleep don't happen as they should. No wonder we feel exhausted.'

But there is an antidote, according to MacDonnell. Remind yourself that you're not responsible for keeping everyone happy at work or enabling everyone to have a good time. 'If you're a people pleaser or a perfectionist, Christmas is tough,' she says. 'It's also hard for people who just don't like Christmas.'

Take time to think about changes you'd like to make at work and share your thoughts with a colleague or friend so you can hold each other accountable, MacDonnell advises. If you're feeling the festive fallout at work, you might agree that you won't say yes to every extra

task that comes your way. 'This might involve explaining that you're not able to take it on, delegating other tasks so that you can make space for it or setting a firm timescale and resolving not to toil over it for ever, trying to make it perfect,' she says. 'Whatever you decide, make it a rule and keep it front of mind. Some people find a mantra, such as "I don't have to rescue everyone", can be useful.'

It can help to think in advance about the things you want to avoid in December. 'Say no to picking up all the work while others are having a ball, and no to drinks and party invitations if they fill you with dread or will leave you worn out,' says MacDonnell. 'And say no to hangovers limit too – or do a deal with yourself and limit them – because waking up in a pit of self-loathing and exhaustion staring down a day's work really doesn't help!'

catrinmacdonnell.co.uk



***“Making time
for yourself
can equip
you to deal
with feelings
of festive
burnout when
they surface”***

REWRITE... *your soul*

Perhaps you don't really celebrate Christmas but find yourself getting dragged along with the crowd and want to step back this year. Or maybe you're longing for some quiet space to soak up the sanctity of the season, regardless of your specific beliefs. You don't have to be a fervent churchgoer to find your sense of spirituality awakened at this time of year and Advent can be a wonderfully peaceful period of mindfulness, if you choose to embrace it.

'As the year turns towards Christmas, we naturally begin to feel more festive because of changes in the weather, adverts we see on TV or even just the arrival of warming, spiced lattes on the menu at our local coffee shop,' says Rebecca Lockwood, a coach who specialises in NLP, hypnosis and positive psychology. 'These things have been anchored into our neurology so that we associate them with Christmas.'

If you find yourself seeking meaning in those moments, try paying close attention to the small things, such as the feel of cooler air in the winter months and spending time with people you love, says Lockwood. 'Tap into what's really important to you about Christmas.'

Making time for yourself can also equip you to deal with feelings of festive burnout when they surface. 'Give yourself time at least every few days to listen to yourself and your body,' advises Lockwood. 'Whether it's a steaming bubble bath to mull over your thoughts, or a moment over coffee in the morning, try to tap into how you feel,' she says.

'Honouring your feelings is always important. And if you feel something negative, instead of giving yourself statements in your head, try asking yourself a question to dig deeper. This will open up your mind to becoming more resourceful.'

rebeccalockwood.org.uk



6 simple steps to a less stressful festive season

1. DECIDE WHAT YOUR IDEAL CHRISTMAS LOOKS LIKE

Did you enjoy a more solitary Christmas last year and want to retain elements of that this year? Do you hate turkey and want to eat chicken nuggets and binge-watch 'Grey's Anatomy'? Whatever the ideal Christmas looks like for you, owning it in your own mind is the first step to achieving it, without judging yourself for your choices,' says Holly Matthews.

2. GIVE PEOPLE TIME TO ACCEPT AND ADJUST

'Let people know your new Christmas rules in advance,' advises Matthews. 'Dropping on everyone that you no longer buy presents or eat meat two days before Christmas is unlikely to go down well.'

3. WRITE DOWN YOUR DEFINITELY/ MAYBE LIST

'Preparing ahead of time can alleviate some festive anxiety and help you let go of trying to control what you can't,' says Matthews. 'Write two lists: what will definitely happen and what might happen. For example, I will definitely give Grandma that new scarf she wanted, and Uncle John may get a bit too tipsy at lunch.'

4. BREATHE THROUGH BURNOUT

'Close your eyes, focus on your breath and remind yourself that everyone is doing the best they can and that you don't have to allow other people's dramas into your space,' suggests Matthews. 'If anxiety shows up during the festivities, do some breathing exercises: breathe in for the count of four, hold for seven and breathe out for eight.'

5. FOLLOW THE PLAN, NOT THE MOOD

'This is a good mantra to help you find the courage to go to an event that you don't feel like going to, but which might be fun once you get there,' says Michaela Thomas. 'The anticipation of anxiety tied to an event is often worse than the experience of the event itself.'

6. REMEMBER TO REST AND DIGEST

'We all need rest for recovery, and we all need recovery after the past two years,' adds Thomas. 'Digesting isn't just about food – we have a lot of difficult, upsetting and challenging events to digest this year. Slowing down and taking it easy over the holiday season will help. Whenever stress builds up, take six slow and deep breaths over the course of one minute to activate your soothing system, or rest and digest mode.'

WHAT DO YOU MOST NEED TO RECLAIM THIS CHRISTMAS?

If you're determined to do Christmas differently this year, take our test to find out what changes you need to make to reconnect with the joy of the festive season

Circle the answers that most closely apply to you, then add up the symbols. Read the section (or sections) you circled most to find out what your ideal Christmas would look like this year.

1 You most relate to

- ♥ Carpe diem ☐
- ♦ Less is more ☐
- Be present ☐
- Be useful ☐

2 Your Christmas to-do list can make you feel a bit

- Stressed ☐
- ♥ Bored ☐
- ♦ Trapped ☐
- Panicked ☐

3 If Christmas was cancelled, you'd feel

- ♥ Liberated ☐
- Grateful ☐
- ♦ Relieved ☐
- A bit lost ☐

4 As a child, you were known for

- Being good ☐
- Always asking why ☐

- ♦ Doing things your own way ☐
- ♥ Being entertaining ☐

5 In an ideal world, Christmas would be less

- ♥ Traditional ☐
- ♦ Busy ☐
- Commercial ☐
- Pressured ☐

6 Which of these things do you least like feeling?

- Redundant ☐
- ♥ Stifled ☐
- ♦ Inauthentic ☐
- Unbalanced ☐

7 Other than time with loved ones at Christmas, you most treasure

- ♥ Sharing adventures and laughter ☐
- ♦ Moments of joy and wonder ☐
- Moments of meaning ☐
- Reconnecting with old friends ☐

8 When a group gets together, you're the one who

- Notices who's struggling ☐
- Makes it happen ☐
- ♥ Keeps the energy up ☐
- ♦ Cuts through the small talk ☐

9 When giving gifts, you go for

- ♥ Complete surprises ☐
- ♦ Small, but personal ☐
- Experiences ☐
- What people really want ☐

10 You'd like to start the new year feeling

- ♦ Centred ☐
- Grateful ☐
- Loved ☐
- ♥ Energised ☐

Turn the page to discover how to plot a new path through the holiday season



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What kind of celebration would fill your heart with joy?



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♥

Personalised

Even mavericks can find themselves bowing to traditions, and everything that goes with them, at this time of year. You may have given up on the idea of ever doing Christmas your way, because you can't imagine a way to make that happen without the disapproval of others. But the past couple of years have shown us that we can all survive and adapt when things are shaken up.

You may already have your perfect alternative Christmas planned in your head – whether that's packing a bag and escaping to another country, helping out at a homeless shelter or declining the family get-together and hosting friends at home. And all that really stands in the way of you putting those plans into action is giving yourself permission to do things your way. But sometimes your own disappointment or sense of frustration is easier to tolerate than other people's unhappiness. It's not just about wanting more fun, although you recognise that life is short. Is there a way to let your personality shine through in just a small way this Christmas – perhaps by offering to be the host and doing things differently? You may be surprised that others are just as hungry for change.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♦

Simplified

If you feel overwhelmed by the consumerism and consumption of the festive season, you may have secretly felt relieved last year when lockdown put a limit on the usual excesses. You understand the value of creating a time of joy and celebration in the depths of winter, but wonder how and when it all spiralled out of control and you got sucked into a Christmas period that serves up mainly expense and fatigue, emotionally and physically.

It's not easy admitting that all the traditional seasonal hoo-ha leaves you cold – no one wants to be seen as a Scrooge. But if you really don't want to start another year feeling financially stretched, out of balance and exhausted from all the excess, isn't it time to acknowledge those feelings and seek a simpler experience?

You may be aware that it's not just you that feels the impact of all the festive busyness, and that others around you are also overwhelmed by the pressure we have somehow come to accept as unavoidable at this time of year. Simplifying your Christmas starts with thinking about how you want to *feel* rather than what you want to *do*. In essence, a simpler Christmas is a more conscious Christmas, with time to savour moments of joy and connection. The first step is to share your feelings with loved ones – you might find you're not the only one who feels this way and craves a new way of doing things.



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ●

Soulful

When you're on a spiritual journey or seeking a sense of meaning in life, you might wonder whether we've got the focus on Christmas all wrong. Last year's disrupted festive season may have inspired you to create a Christmas with true meaning this year but, in the pre-season hype, it can be hard to hold on to what's important.

For many, the spirit of Christmas centres around love, kindness and compassion rather than consumption, so you may be seeking alternative ways to show people you care this year, other than spending or eating to excess. For others, it's a time for gratitude and reflection, and you don't have to wait until New Year to reflect, reconnect with your values and think forward to the year ahead.

Time to pause can get squeezed out at this time of year, so think about where you can find space for yourself, whether it's a walk on a crisp morning, a candlelit evening at home, or simply a solo coffee in a quiet cafe. It can take time to work out what a more soulful Christmas will look like for you but, in the meantime, holding in mind its importance is the first step to finding the spiritual nourishment that you need.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ■

Connected

For you, Christmas is all about spending time with the people you care about the most, especially if last Christmas made that difficult for your family and friends. You hate to think of anyone feeling alone at Christmas, so helping others connect is also important to you. You're often at the heart of social gatherings, working hard behind the scenes to make sure that everyone feels welcome and relaxed. You can set the bar high for yourself, so it may be disappointing that, despite all your efforts, you can't make everyone happy or enthusiastic about getting involved with your Christmas plans. And, when your focus is on being there for everyone else, you can lose sight of your own needs, so you often see in the new year physically and mentally exhausted.

Relationships are central to your life, but remind yourself that you also show that you care all year with the attention you give to your loved ones, and your enthusiasm for being with them in a meaningful way. Connections don't end with Christmas, so perhaps it's time to take the pressure off yourself to make it perfect for everyone around you. And don't forget that asking for help and getting people involved by delegating tasks is a great way to improve and nourish your important relationships. If you take a step back, you might find that others step up and your connection will grow stronger as a result.

“We’ve created a Christmas that’s perfect for us

Clare Veal, 46, a solicitor from Surrey, turned her back on the idealised big day – and that’s when the magic happened

WORDS: ALEX LLOYD

SITTING in the garden as the rain fell on Christmas Day in 2017, I felt far from festive. Despite weeks of planning, the day had been stressful rather than magical.

My sons, Fred, 12, and Arthur, eight, were overwhelmed by the stacks of gifts under the tree, and my husband, Baz, was stuck building toys and searching for batteries, while I slaved over turkey and the trimmings. When we sat down to dinner, the children refused to eat most of it, then started arguing. We couldn’t even go for a family walk because the weather was so miserable and, when I retreated outside for some peace, my thoughts turned to loved ones lost over the years. ‘I’m not doing this again,’ I told Baz later that evening. ‘Christmas is supposed to be fun.’

Within days, I’d found a solution. Instead of our traditional Christmas at home or with our extended families, I’d booked a holiday park for the following year. We would pay for it by scaling back on gifts and when we explained to the children that Father Christmas would only be able to deliver a stocking and one large present, they were too excited about the holiday to mind.

It was the right decision because Christmas 2018 was the best one we



“We spent the day at the pool and dined on pizza, and it felt as festive as anything we could have created at home!”



could remember. And beforehand, all I had to do was pack the suitcases and buy a few provisions.

We spent Christmas Day at the pool and bowling, and dined at an Italian restaurant. The boys were thrilled to eat their favourite food, pizza, for Christmas dinner!

It felt as festive as anything we could have created at home and everyone was happy. Best of all, we made lots of really special memories that the boys still talk about today.

We returned in 2019 and are booked in again for this year, after Covid cancelled our plans in 2020.

I’m so glad we broke free from the norm. It feels as if we’ve regained the spirit of Christmas by doing what works for us, and we’ve created our own new traditions instead.

Quality family time is so much more precious than any gift that Santa could bring.

Clare Veal runs Aubergine Legal, a commercial law consultancy; auberginelegal.co.uk

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CHRISTMAS SURVIVAL HEROES



Make time for yourself amid the festive mayhem. Shut the door, switch off your phone and savour an afternoon of soul-nourishing bliss

WORDS: HEIDI SCRIMGEOUR



HAPPIER SKIN

The drying effect of central heating and the reddening impact of the cold outdoors challenge your skin, so give it a boost with caring products

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Lavera organic all-round moisturising cream, £7.95, beautynaturals.com

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Find your balance

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Tisserand Aromatherapy Real Calm Discovery Kit, £15, tisserand.com

Reclaim peace and tranquillity with the Real Calm collection, featuring 100 per cent natural essential oils of lavender, bergamot and patchouli. The set contains Massage & Body Oil for soothing mind and body, Moodfix Mist for your home, plus a Pulse Point Roller Ball to pop in your handbag and use for instant comfort.



Lady Showbiz nail polish, £12, ladyshowbiz.com

Forget the dishes and pamper yourself with a manicure. Express Yourself is a vivid orange gel colour that's perfect for the party season – or feeling glam on the sofa if that's more your thing. It's cruelty-free and the brand donates 20 per cent of profits to charities in the UK.



3 saviours for VITALITY AND CALM

Give your health and immunity a boost when you're in demand

1 Simone Thomas The Biotin Hair Care Plan, £75, simonethomaswellness.com

The hair consultant, nutritionist and bioenergetics expert has developed a range of three food supplements to improve the condition of your hair, support your immune system and boost the friendly bacteria in your gut.



2 DermaQuest CBD Daily Elixir, £87, dermaquestinc.co.uk

Designed to ease stress and lift the spirits while promoting peace, this spearminty oil has an antidepressant-mimicking effect on the brain's receptors and neurotransmitters. Place a few drops under your tongue to help you relax.



3 Arbonne InnerCalm with ashwagandha and saffron, £45, arbonne.com

This vegan food supplement contains sustainably sourced ashwagandha (a powerful adaptogen) and saffron to quieten your mind and manage stress. It has a peach green tea flavour and contains no artificial colours, flavours or sweeteners.



Scentsational

Try these uplifting fragrances to get you in the mood for the festive season



Jane Scrivner Peace body oil, £33, janescrivner.com
 Splash this moisturising oil directly on your skin or drizzle a few drops into your bath for a calming and hydrating experience. It contains jojoba from Peru and coconut oils from Sri Lanka, along with frankincense resin from India, myrrh resin from Somalia, elemi gum from France and benzoin tincture and sweet orange peel from Mexico.



Boostology Volcanic potpourri, £39, boostology.co.uk

When you need a lift, add a few drops of essential oil to these natural lava and obsidian stones, which soak up the oil and slowly release the aroma into your room. It's long-lasting and reusable, and no part of it ever needs to be thrown away, which means kindness to the planet.

NEOM De-stress wellbeing fragrance, £40, neomorganics.com

This sustainably sourced fragrance is a warm, powerful and relaxing scent created to foster a sense of peace and wellness. Spritz it all over your body to help you unwind.



KEEP YOUR HEAD

In between last-minute wrapping and frantic potato peeling, these doses of serenity will restore your zen

The Positivity Pack by On the Mantel, £24.99, onthemantel.com

Take time to be inspired with this beautifully designed set of daily prompt cards. Themed around mental health and greater wellbeing, each one contains an uplifting motivational thought for the morning and beyond.



Love Up I Am Enough scented candle, £32, loveup.shop

Find a moment to focus on a positive affirmation. Light this candle at the end of a busy day to remind you of its important truth.

The Positively Awesome Journal, £11.99, stacieswift.com

Stacie Swift, an illustrator, author and mental health champion, lights up Instagram with her gorgeous artwork, and her journal is a joy. Packed with creative, colourful encouragement and self-care tips, it'll brighten every day.





RAISE A GLASS!

Make your Christmas tippie a drink with benefits

Raw Beauty Lab Vegan Collagen Superfood, £34.95, rawbeautylab.com

Morning after the night before? Pop a scoop of this collagen powder into your breakfast smoothie to give your tired skin a much-needed boost. It's 100 per cent plant-based and promises to transform you from the inside out.

Lilo Hard Seltzer, £2.50 each, lilodrinks.com

If you're looking to limit your blood sugar see-saw, enjoy a little festive fizz that's low in alcohol, light on calories and contains no sugar. A mix of sparkling water and distilled botanical spirits, this drink is available in two flavours: white grape and elderflower or cranberry and rosehip.



Mockingbird agave spirit, £22.99, mockingbirdspirit.com

Enjoy a guilt-free margarita with this Mexican agave alcohol-free spirit. It contains pure ashwaghandha, known for its health benefits, and tastes like tequila – minus the hangover.

CUDDLE UP

Take a break from the Christmas prep, curl up and relax with one of these tactile comforters

Recycled wool knee blanket, £45, tartanblanketco.com

Rest up with this sustainable, natural wool blanket by The Tartan Blanket Co. Its ethos, *colsie*, comes from the old Scots word for 'cosy' and embodies making time for the people and things that soothe the soul. The firm donates a percentage of every purchase to charity.



Personalised velvet cushion, £40, betsybenn.com

Put yourself first for once! Stake your claim on the best seat in the house with this strokably soft best friend for you and your sofa by Betsy Benn. Also available with song lyrics, favourite quotes or even your pet's paw prints.



Hand-knitted Fairtrade wrist warmers, £24, notjustashop.arts.ac.uk

Stay warm as you work from home with these wrist warmers from Not Just A Shop. They are made from wool and crafted by women in Nepal within a World Fair Trade Organisation-certified collective. They're lined with soft jersey material, so they're practical *and* cosy.





Join Ollie's army

**NOW
ONLINE!**

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

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

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

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

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

Licence to help

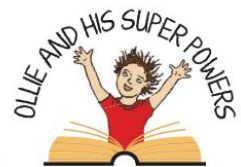
The Ollie School graduates are awarded a certified qualification in NLP and a licence to work as an Ollie coach. If helping children and their families to be more emotionally resilient appeals to you, contact us for a prospectus and let's talk about getting you with the programme.



Get in touch


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

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



Heart

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



*“I’ve learned that people
will forget what you
said, people will forget
what you did, but people
will never forget how
you made them feel”*

Maya Angelou

FAMILY MATTERS

It's a relationship that can span a lifetime – but it can be a bumpy ride. Rebecca Frank explores how we can enjoy time with our siblings, without rivalry rearing its ugly head



Expert advice



Philippa Perry is a psychotherapist, agony aunt for *The Observer* and author of *The Book You Wish Your Parents Had Read* (Penguin, £9.99)



Linda Blair is a clinical psychologist, writer and author of several books, including *Siblings* (Hodder & Stoughton, £12.99), linda Blair.co.uk

Whether we're heading to our parents for Christmas, or have invited the whole family to ours, chances are we'll spend more time than usual with our brothers and sisters in the coming weeks. And while the relationship you share with them is one that's likely to be underpinned by much love, it can also be fraught with difficulty.

When it comes to families, we tend to think a lot about our relationship with our parents and how it has shaped us, overlooking that with our siblings. Yet this unique relationship is equally formative, in both the way we relate to others and how we view ourselves. Conflict among adult siblings can cut deep, but putting our grievances behind us might be easier than we realise.

The way we relate to our siblings as adults usually reflects the relationships we formed as children. 'The adults in your life and your siblings form the first experience of being in a group of humans,' says the psychotherapist Philippa Perry. 'How that whole group functions and how the different people interact make a sort of blueprint in your mind of how these relationships work. And because such a way of interacting was and is normal for you, the way you relate to others as adults will be largely outside of your awareness.'

Linda Blair, a clinical psychologist, says that most sibling rivalry comes down to an innate competitiveness, which is perfectly normal – and largely out of our

control. 'Without you even knowing it, this competition has been there from the beginning, when you were fighting to get the best resources from your parents – attention, affection, food and warmth.' This primal need to jostle and prove yourself to be more important than your siblings heightens when, as adults, you're all back together – at times such as Christmas. 'We think we've left it behind because we're grown-ups, but the trouble is that when emotions are triggered – like they often are when we're all crowded in one place – we go back to square one.'

It's often said that we can choose our friends but not our family, and Perry is blunt about the fact that not all sibling relationships are equal: 'Some people are friends with their siblings, some are fond of them but have little in common with them and others find that being among their siblings brings up unpleasant feelings, so they try not to have too much to do with them,' she says. 'We like or dislike, choose or choose not to be friends with someone largely because of how we feel when we are with them.'

In a bigger family, Perry adds, it's highly likely that you'll have a sibling to whom you feel closer – but this doesn't mean you value the others any less. 'You can appreciate them for their different ways of being, different talents, different quirks and different ways of experiencing and looking at the world,' she explains. 'We need a variety of people in our lives.'

When a sibling relationship is harmonious, it can be the most special and unique bond, which is why experts believe it's worth working hard to repair any cracks. In her new podcast, *Siblings In Session*, Perry takes a pair of adult





siblings and unpicks their feelings towards each other, interviewing them separately before bringing them together at the end of the episode. It's a heartwarming and occasionally heartbreaking listen, and most people will relate to some of the emotions, dynamics and journeys experienced.

It's why Perry urges anyone harbouring difficult feelings towards a sibling to brave a tough conversation. It might be painful but could also prove life-changing. 'Every sibling I spoke to assumed something about the other that turned out not to be true,' says Perry. 'I'm hoping that listening to the podcast will help people unpack their own misconceptions and enable them to get back on the same page and feel closer.'

Having those conversations and trying to put old grudges aside is always worth the effort, believes Blair, who is heartened to see how many siblings do grow closer in later life. 'Nobody shares this history with you in the whole world,' says Blair. 'If your relationship is damaged, I would work hard to repair it. Our whole identity is about what we did as well as what we're doing, and those shared memories are very precious.'

WE ARE FAMILY

We asked our experts to help us address some common sibling dilemmas...



I feel as if my siblings are always judging my parenting skills and comparing our children's achievements

This comes down to competition, explains Blair. 'The parenting stage can often unearth old feelings of rivalry,' she says. This can be especially felt around grandparents, when comparisons of time spent, effort made, childcare responsibilities and the like all push our buttons. 'When we're back in the presence of our parents – for example at Christmas – we revert to being children again.'

Blair says the key is to put logic before emotion and suggests writing down the things you admire about your siblings and reading through the list several times before you meet up, so these attributes are near the front of your mind. 'When you allow the emotions to subside and your logical brain to kick in, you'll be able to see things differently and won't let your siblings or parents push your buttons in the same way.'

“We lost our remaining parent recently and I’m concerned about our relationship without our parent to hold the family together”

‘Often, sibling relationships improve when parents aren’t around any more, and I see many siblings become much closer again in later life,’ says Blair. If you fell out around the time of the death of your parent, it can be hard, especially if your grievances centred around caring for the other parent. However, once the dust settles and emotions calm, it’s worth having a conversation with your sibling and explaining why you behaved the way you did and why you had problems with how they behaved. It might be that you both made assumptions about each other that weren’t actually true.



“When we get together as a family, it always blows up at some point between me and my siblings”

Gathering under one roof when we’re exhausted from all the preparation for Christmas and low in endorphins from the lack of daylight and exercise can create the perfect storm. Try the writing exercise, left, before you get together with your siblings, so you start with a positive frame of mind.

Blair says it’s also vital if you’re staying together that you have some space. ‘We know from research on animals that if you put people together in an overcrowded area they get aggressive. Everybody needs a place to which they can retreat.’ If there’s not much room inside, go for a walk or a few breaths of fresh air in the garden, and get the calming benefits of light and nature too.

It might reassure you to know that children who fought a lot are more likely to be close as adults. ‘Any strong emotions bond you closely,’ explains Blair.

“I’m the youngest child and feel as if I’m always treated like the baby and rarely taken seriously. Can we ever break out of the roles we’ve held since childhood?”

We tend to keep the roles formed as children, often by birth order and sometimes by the labels our parents gave us – and that’s fine if you are happy in that role.

The older child is often more serious and studious, and the youngest the cute, cared-for one – and both these roles can be advantageous. However, if you want to be seen differently, Perry says you can’t change other people, only yourself. ‘If you feel as if your siblings are stuck in how they see you, you’re probably also stuck in trying to persuade them differently. Try changing the way you behave around them. For example, if you continue to chase after them to show them that you’re a

grown-up, you’re keeping yourself in that pleading, youngest child position.’

Ask other people how they see you too. ‘It’s important to have more human mirrors than just our families to see a reflection of ourselves, so we have a fuller picture of who we are and how we can be experienced by others.’



▶▶ NEXT STEPS

Read *Birth Order* by Linda Blair (Little, Brown, £12.99) will help you better understand how your position in your family can affect your character.

Listen The touching and enlightening podcast *Siblings In Session*, with psychotherapist Philippa Perry, is available on Audible and takes you on an emotional journey with six pairs of siblings.

Watch *Little Women* is the heartwarming, Oscar-nominated film adaptation of Louisa May Alcott’s classic tale of four sisters, Jo, Meg, Amy and Beth, coming of age in 19th-century Massachusetts. Have the tissues ready!



psychologies inspiration

*“Christmas,
my child,
is love in
action”*

Dale Evans



How to talk to your kids about... Santa ... and other awkward Christmas conversations

Few times of year throw up as many tricky topics as Christmas, from whether you-know-who is real to why there's no PS5 under the tree. Heidi Scrimgeour, a mother of three, discovers how to tackle some challenging questions

Christmas seems to bring up some rather unnerving discussions in my house. I thought this might ease up as my children grew older, and once they were able to appreciate how heavily Santa relied upon my annual donations to the North Pole, but it turns out I was wrong.

In my experience at least, the awkward conversations you'd far rather wriggle out of don't suddenly disappear once the Santa debate has been cleared up. With young adults come thornier festive issues – can the new girlfriend come over for Christmas dinner, can we ditch the silly stocking stuff and hand over a bit more cash and, by the way, we're going out with our mates on

Christmas Eve this year. (I once heard myself shriek, 'But that's when we watch *Elf* together!' while brandishing a potato peeler in a not-altogether-festive fashion.)

The secret to navigating this part of parenting? Don't avoid difficult conversations. Avoidance rarely works well in life, and especially not with kids. By allowing – and even encouraging – them to ask us difficult questions now, we make it more likely that they'll come to us in the tricky moments of life that really matter.

To know that our children think of us as a soft place to land when life is hard makes this all worthwhile. So buckle up and prepare yourself for some open-hearted, candid Christmas chat, starting with the big one...

Expert advice



Ali Knowles is a therapist and founder of Ollie and his Super Powers. ollieandhissuperpowers.com



Natalie Costa is a children's confidence coach and founder of Power Thoughts. powerthoughts.co.uk



Is Santa real?

I panicked when my firstborn hit me with this. I'd already balled up the Easter Bunny question. (Let's just say I was pulled aside by the nursery teacher and made to solemnly swear I wouldn't wreck Christmas too.) Happily, I've since taken a smarter approach, turning tricky questions back to the kids.

'Parents often dive in with an answer to this most common Christmas question, but you can save yourself so many headaches if, instead, you ask your child "what" and "how" questions,' says the therapist Ali Knowles. 'Ask your child what *they* think about Santa. If they think he's real, it means they still want to believe. If so, go with it, and don't take away the magic prematurely. If they say they don't think he's real, ask why. Perhaps it's because someone at school said so. Then ask how that makes them feel.'

Your child may feel that they need to keep believing for your sake and, if that's the case, an honest conversation might make things easier for both of you.

Why didn't Santa bring what I asked for?

Sometimes, Christmas Day is an exercise in disappointment for little people. 'It can be incredibly frustrating to have your child upset or angry because they didn't get one gift they wanted,' says Natalie Costa, a children's confidence coach. 'Inside, you may be wondering if you're raising an ungrateful child, and you might want to point out how many toys they already have.' But instead of feeling upset, Costa recommends showing empathy and validating your child's feelings. This helps them feel heard.

'Recognise too that the emotional hub of your child's brain is far more developed than the logical, rational part, so the disappointment feels really big,' she says. 'Help your child develop some self-soothing tools to aid them when they're struggling with big feelings. Deep belly breathing, going for a walk or even scribbling out their anger on paper are simple ways to help them come back to calm. The more these techniques are practised in everyday life, the easier it will be for them to apply them when things feel really hard.'

"The emotional hub of their brain is far more developed than the logical part"



When are we putting up the Christmas tree?

'There are lots of practicalities to consider here, so it's a good time to chat about your family traditions and why they exist,' says Knowles. 'Ask your child what it means to them to put it up now. They might say they'd feel Christmassy, so you could talk about what else you could do together to create that feeling – without risking the tree drying out by mid-month!'



Can we go to Lapland like they do on YouTube?

This is about reframing realistic celebrations, and that starts with chatting to kids about the traditions that matter to your family. I've found it useful to explain to my daughter that the YouTube families she follows are actually at work when they're in Lapland making the rest of us feel like losers for not being able to afford a trip they haven't even paid for! Once she began to see behind the veneer, a hot chocolate and a Christmas movie seemed to deliver all the festive feels that she had once imagined could only ever be found in the Arctic Circle.



Is the Elf on the Shelf really watching me?

'All behaviour serves a purpose, which means there's a reason behind every question your child asks,' says Knowles. 'My question back would be "What would it matter if he was?". Don't give kids all the answers: let them work things out. Your child might express concern that the elf will see them being naughty. You can point out that if he is watching, he'll also notice all the good things they do too.'



Can I have a Christmas Eve box like my friends?

Try asking a child what's so special to them about a box that is usually filled with a DVD and new pyjamas. 'If the answer is that all their friends get one and they have nothing to talk about in the playground, that will open up a completely different conversation about their need to feel like they belong,' says Knowles. 'So many times we presume we know what a child is thinking and feeling based on our own experiences – and, if we're honest, on our own fears. But often it turns out that we couldn't be more wrong. It's rarely as deep and complicated with kids.'



Why do we eat Christmas dinner when I hate it?

'Don't get into the why question – you're only going to go in loops,' advises Knowles. 'Ask what bit of Christmas dinner they don't like, and agree not to dish that up for them. You could also talk about a beloved family member who loves sprouts and explain that we have some of these things at Christmas because other people enjoy them, thereby making Christmas dinner about choice and inclusion rather than strict food rules.'



Why can't I open every window on my Advent calendar on 1 December?

There are two schools of thought here. The first says this is the perfect opportunity to introduce kids to the idea of delayed gratification. The second says tell them to crack on – but recommend they do it stealthily by ripping off the back while no one is looking, in other words, make light and keep it fun!

'Ask what makes them want to open every window now,' says Knowles. 'If it's about the chocolate, you could suggest spending some pocket money on a bar of chocolate. But if it's about excitement, you could agree to opening all the doors now, then putting away the chocolates to be dished out daily.'

Is it really better to give than to receive?

This is a value I've tried to instil in my kids by encouraging them to buy Christmas gifts for each other. It backfired when my eldest bought an extravagant gift for his brother – who reciprocated with a pair of pants. Not even especially nice pants.

It's tempting to drive home the lesson that, despite what the TV adverts convey, Christmas isn't all about receiving. But unless you're prepared to referee Pantsgate, this is a dangerous game: 'Christmas is a brilliant opportunity to teach our children about the value of giving and the impact of kindness,' says Costa. 'Encourage your child to reflect on a time they received a gift. How did they feel? Point out that we can pass on those lovely feelings to others – and we get a happiness boost as well!'

'Encourage your child to think about different ways they can show kindness throughout the festive season. Write down a few of these ideas and make time to complete them throughout the festive period. Remember to talk about the "happiness boosts" they will receive while doing it,' she advises.

Should I spend some of my pocket money on presents?

You're never too young to start thinking of others... Great in theory, complicated in practice (see Pantsgate, above). 'Try creating a "giving wish list" as a new family tradition,' suggests Costa. Instead of thinking about what they want to receive, children can draw or write down gifts they'd like to give. This might mean spending some pocket money on small, thoughtful gifts, making a card or a homemade present or simply choosing toys they no longer use to donate to charity. What's important is not the amount of money spent, but the thoughtfulness that is behind the gift, and the positive impact it will have on others and themselves.'

"What's important is not the amount of money spent, but the thoughtfulness that is behind the gift"

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 mary@psychologies.co.uk, with 'Mary' in the subject line.

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

“How can I help my sister cut off her abusive ex?”

Q My younger sister has a dodgy boyfriend. It took us a while to realise as a family because we never saw her on her own, but we've since discovered she's been paying all their bills and that he physically attacked her. A few months ago, my brother and I helped her move out, and now she's staying with me, but I suspect she is meeting up with her ex again. How should I deal with the situation?

Sadly, this is a well-known pattern – both the fact that it's difficult for your sister to cut ties, and for you to understand. The first step is to recognise that this is beyond 'dodgy': it's abuse. The resources from charities such as Women's Aid or Refuge will help you see why.

It's tempting to talk as if the answer is simple ('why don't you just leave?') and that your sister is somehow to blame for not seeing that. But, unfortunately, this could just reinforce what she has heard from her partner ('I make the decisions because you're so stupid').

The main focus needs to be building confidence in your sister's ability to make decisions for herself, while making it clear that her ex is solely responsible for his behaviour. Could you try: 'If you're seeing this guy, I'd rather know about it. It seems dangerous to me if there's any secrecy about it and, as your sibling, I want you to be safe. You still have my

love and support.' What you aim to demonstrate is truly unconditional love, because she may currently believe that she's a broken person who doesn't deserve any better. She may still love this man and believe that he'll change (although that's possible, it takes a lot of effort and usually professional help).

Even if you get your head around these logical arguments and the fact that it could take several attempts before there's a complete break, there's still an emotional price to pay: it will be painful for your sister to lose this relationship, no matter what you think, and you are also bearing a lot of your own sadness and frustration. Building up your resources of information, and perhaps sharing your burden with a therapist, might help you with the patience and kindness your sister needs.

womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/women-leave

“She may believe that she's a broken person who doesn't deserve any better”



“I’m in debt and just thinking about money makes my heart race

Q I notice that whenever I think about money, I have weird physical reactions: I feel very hot or very cold, and my heart rate speeds up. My income dropped over lockdown, so I have some genuine financial concerns, and I know that I need to start talking about it more openly if I’m going to find solutions to the problem. However, I feel ashamed for having got into debt, and uncomfortable talking about it. What do you suggest as a way forward?

The physical reactions you are experiencing come from that part of our ancient brains that knows being separated from other people is a dangerous position. But you’ve already taken a first step by writing this down, which will connect you to some new people and resources.

I talked to Merel Kriegsman, a former opera singer and now women’s wealth adviser, who has also experienced living in debt. She says that financial distress limits our thinking: “The perfect connection that could lead to a job might be right in front of us, but we’re in such a state that we can’t see it,” says Kriegsman. She believes that step one is to acknowledge your feelings and share them by talking to a trusted friend (don’t ask for solutions just yet), or by writing them down in a private journal; have a look at Susan David’s work on

emotional agility to help you articulate your emotions. Step two is writing down a list of things that you can control, and those you can’t. For instance, a pandemic, lockdown or global financial decisions would be on the latter list.

Step three is self-forgiveness. It sounds as if you are struggling with ‘should’ – let’s acknowledge that the situation that has played out over recent times has been a should sandwich, and *no one* knew how to deal with it. I love the work of Kristin Neff or Tara Brach for teaching self-compassion. In Kriegsman’s words, ‘You can choose to say, “I’m just going to be radically kind towards myself.” It’s a great way to regain brain capacity.’

When you say you need to open up, remember it’s not necessary to replace the inner demons with some public form of

flagellation. While you are feeling tender and vulnerable, there’s a lot you can do by reading or being part of specific communities – Kriegsman hosts one such group on Facebook (see link, below). You could also read *Overcoming Underearning* by Barbara Stanny (Harper Business, £12.31), which I like because it talks about a richer life in terms of values, not just money. It may also help to talk to an older family member who’s been through financial ups and downs and can remind you to look at things from a wider perspective.

Feed your brain with stories of other people who have overcome challenges to remind yourself of possibility. It might just be that now is a perfect time to switch on a financial focus, which becomes part of your story in the future.

facebook.com/groups/317850062271216



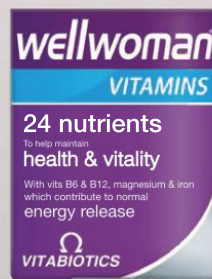
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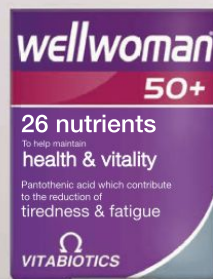
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Tess Daly



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*“Movement
is the song of
the body”*

Vanda Scaravelli

PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES



MINDFUL WELLNESS



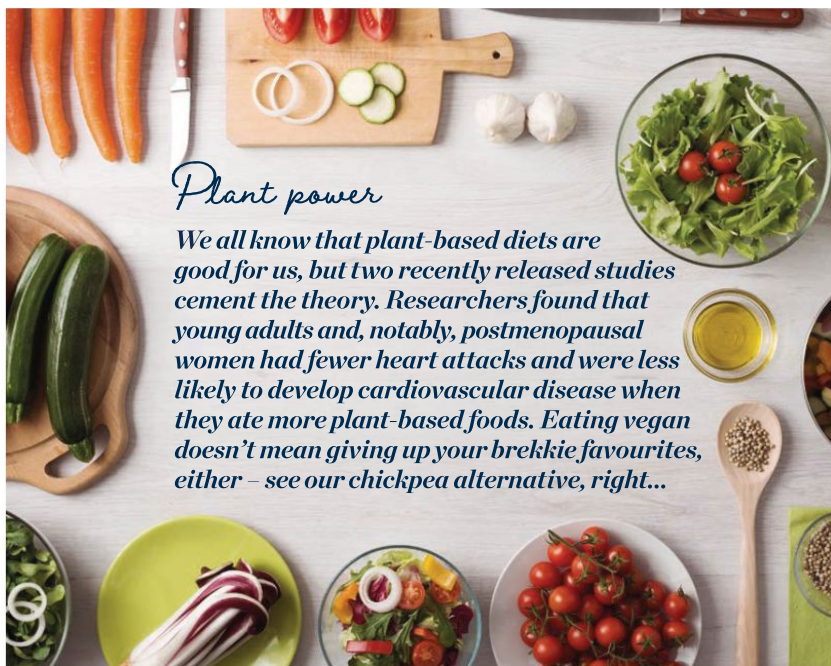
Our Acting Wellness Director, Elizabeth Bennett, shares new research, strategies and wisdom on all aspects of wellbeing, from activity and nourishment to meditation and conscious beauty

Eat well



Let's go nuts!

Give your heart a boost with a Christmas classic: new research from the American Heart Association has found that adults who ate half a cup of walnuts daily for two years lowered levels of low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol – that's the 'bad cholesterol' to you and me. Regularly eating walnuts, a rich source of omega-3 fatty acids, reduced the number of LDL particles, a predictor of heart disease. Once Christmas is over and your nut bowl is relegated to the cupboard, throw them on salads, pile them on porridge or munch as an on-the-go snack.



Plant power

We all know that plant-based diets are good for us, but two recently released studies cement the theory. Researchers found that young adults and, notably, postmenopausal women had fewer heart attacks and were less likely to develop cardiovascular disease when they ate more plant-based foods. Eating vegan doesn't mean giving up your brekkie favourites, either – see our chickpea alternative, right...



Chickpea omelette

'If you thought that egg-inspired dishes were off the menu on a vegan diet, think again. This omelette is made with chickpea flour, which is widely available from supermarkets. It's a brilliant egg substitute for vegans as it's rich in protein, fibre and iron,' says the author and nutritionist Anita Bean.

SERVES 1

- 60g chickpea flour
- ¼ tsp salt
- ½ tsp baking powder
- A pinch each of turmeric, paprika and nutritional yeast flakes
- 125ml plant milk (any type)
- A small handful of chopped fresh herbs (such as parsley, chives or basil) or 1 tsp dried mixed herbs
- 2 tsp olive oil
- 6 cherry tomatoes, halved
- A handful of baby spinach
- ½ small avocado, peeled, pitted and sliced
- A pinch of chilli flakes

- 1 Whisk together the chickpea flour, salt, baking powder, turmeric, paprika, yeast flakes and milk alternative, until smooth. Add the herbs, stir to combine, then leave to stand for a few minutes.
- 2 Meanwhile, make the filling: heat half the olive oil in a non-stick frying pan over a medium heat, add the tomatoes and cook for a few minutes. Add the spinach, then remove from the heat.
- 3 Wipe out the frying pan and heat the remaining oil over a medium heat. Pour in the batter and tip the pan so it spreads over the base. Cook gently until the top sets and bubbles appear on the surface. Spoon the filling on to one half of the omelette, then fold the other half over. Press down with the spatula to seal, and cook for another minute.
- 4 Slide the omelette on to a plate and serve with avocado and chilli flakes.

Extract from 'The Vegan Athlete's Cookbook: Protein-Rich Recipes To Train, Recover And Perform' by Anita Bean (Bloomsbury, £16.99)

PMS SOS

'Our lifestyle and diet can affect our menstrual cycle,' says Natasha Richardson, a medical herbalist and founder of Forage Botanicals. 'Stress can increase pain and PMS symptoms, and even delay our periods. Using nutrition, supplements and particular herbs, you can help ease the symptoms.' Try the following:

1 Heavy periods can cause iron deficiency and, conversely, iron deficiency can cause heavy periods, so it's vital that anyone with heavy flow supplements with iron each day. Try iron-rich Aunt Flo's drinking chocolate, £9.99.

foragebotanicals.co.uk



2 If you struggle with painful periods, turmeric and essential fatty acids from fish oils or evening primrose oil can help. Take daily as the effects build up over time.



3 If you feel bloated during your premenstrual phase, herbal teas such as peppermint or chamomile can help. Richardson recommends drinking two to three cups a day when suffering.



4 To avoid irritable outbursts, taking relaxing herbs such as passion flower, hawthorn or liquorice daily can help reduce cortisol levels (the stress hormone) and so reduce your PMS symptoms.



Sleep well



A mindful bath

Taking a warm bath before bed helps you sleep better, reducing your core body temperature, which signals to your brain that it's time to rest. Upgrade your dip and enjoy a meditative moment while you bathe with this soothing set from Fenix: use the essential

oil vegan soap bar, light the Breu Resin incense or burn the Palo Santo stick, and lie back and relax before climbing into bed.

Fenix Bath & Meditate set, £39, contentbeautywellbeing.com



Scented slumber

Spritz the combined essential oils of grounding amyris, sweet bergamot and calming lavender on to your pillows, PJs and sheets before bed with this lovely sleep spray. It's vegan and cruelty-free, and free from nasties such as petrolatum, sulphates, phthalates and parabens.

Oliverum Restful Sleep pillow mist, £25, thegreyworks.com



PROVEN: SHUT-EYE STOPS NIBBLING!

We've found another reason to crawl into bed early: the longer you sleep, the less likely you'll turn to the snack cupboard. The analysis of data of almost 20,000 American adults, conducted by Ohio State University, showed a link between not meeting sleep recommendations (seven hours or more) and eating more snacks.



Time your workout right

A regular exercise routine regulates the body's internal clock, meaning you sleep better. However, the timing of your workout has proven to be important too, with new research indicating that intense workouts before bed hinder rather than aid a good night's rest. Combining data

from 15 studies, researchers at Concordia University found that exercising in the two hours before bed contributed to a lower quality of sleep. If you prefer exercising in the evening, save intense activities for early on or choose slow and relaxing exercise, such as yoga, pre-bedtime.



Meditation + mindfulness

Reflect on 2021

The end of the year is naturally a time of reflection, and putting pen to paper via journaling is a great way to document it. 'Journaling at the end of the year is a lovely way to look back at any goals you set and see how they have changed or evolved. It's also a great way to honour your achievements and make space for new dreams,' says Aysha Bell, a transformational healer.



Here are some prompts to consider...

- What and whom are you most grateful for this year?
- Did you set any goals at the beginning of the year? If so, have you achieved them? Do you still want to achieve them?
- What are you most proud of this year?
- What have been your biggest challenges this year?
- What lessons from this year do you want to take into the next? **ayshabell.com**

A moment of silence

Amid the busy Christmas festivities, it can be hard to find a little peace. This lovely coconut wax candle prompts a quiet ritual. Uniting the elegant, woody notes of sandalwood and black pepper, the scent instils calm and prompts you to create a mindful pause point in the day.

Comfortable Silence candle, £42, herlum.co.uk



TAKE A BREATH

Feeling fraught? The breath is one of the most powerful tools we have to calm ourselves down. 'Lengthening the exhale slows down your breathing rate, which lowers your heart rate,' explains the breath work expert Yolanda Barker. 'When the heart rate slows, the body immediately shifts physiologically. The nervous system moves into a more relaxed state and your blood pressure drops and stress hormones lower. As the body and mind are connected, when the body relaxes, the mind also becomes calmer,' Barker adds.

Try this calming breath in times of stress...

- **Count to four as you inhale**
- **Count to eight as you exhale**
- **Repeat**
- **If you're feeling able, you can experiment with even longer, slower breath rates, such as inhaling for five and exhaling for 10**
- **Remember, don't force it – take your time**

Edited extract from 'The Breathing Revolution' by Yolanda Barker (Bloomsbury, £12.99)



Move well

Back to basics

Sustainable at its core, activewear brand Organic Basics only works with trusted, certified factory partners. It specialises in using planet-friendly materials, such as organic cotton, recycled wool and Tencel, a fully biodegradable and compostable alternative to nylon. Upgrade your winter workout wardrobe with its active leggings, tees and sports bras in rich berry shades.

Active leggings, £75,
and workout bra, £60,
uk.organicbasics.com



1.4%

That's the percentage of entire body fat that can be burned through strength training alone, say researchers from the University of New South Wales – a similar amount to how much we might lose through cardio exercise. Turns out strength training isn't just for building muscle – it can blitz body fat too.

3 yoga poses for: DIGESTION

If festive overindulgence has brought on indigestion, try these yoga moves before raiding the medicine cabinet, says Hannah Barrett, a yoga teacher. They give a gentle massage to your organs, creating calm and helping keep your digestive system on track.

1 Supine twist (supta matsyendrasana):

Exhale as you hug your right knee into your chest, then slowly lower it to the left side. Hold for five breaths, then repeat on the other side. This pose reduces bloating and constipation and supports digestion.



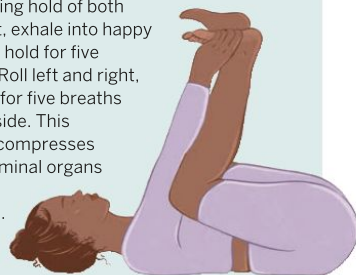
2 Reclined butterfly (supta baddha konasana):

Release into reclined butterfly for 10-15 breaths. Rub the belly, clockwise, as you focus on the breath. This will help activate the parasympathetic nervous system, while gently massaging the abdomen.



3 Happy baby (ananda balasana):

Taking hold of both feet, exhale into happy baby and hold for five breaths. Roll left and right, and hold for five breaths on each side. This position compresses the abdominal organs and aids digestion.



Look well, naturally

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH... probiotic skincare?

Whether it's a bottle of kombucha or a gut-health supplement, it's likely you'll have heard about the benefits of including probiotics in your diet. But putting them on your face? Less so! However, thanks to a growing body of research about the skin barrier, a new breed of beauty products are offering just this.

Much like they prevent problems in the stomach, topical products containing probiotics are known to calm the skin by harnessing good bacteria and balancing the skin's microbiome to improve its barrier. And a happy skin barrier equals healthier skin; think

regulated oil production, so fewer spots, improved hydration for more glow and a better chance at

fighting free radicals, a major cause of fine lines and dullness. Try Gallinée's cleansing bar, £13,

an ultra-gentle face cleanser, or Aurelia's Cell Revitalise day moisturiser, £32, a hydrating cream packed with skin-loving probiotics.

gallinee.com;
aurelialondon.com



Scrummy for the body

Weleda's Skin Food is deserving of its cult title: the moisturiser, with its deeply nourishing yet all-natural properties, has been winning fans since 1926.

Now, Skin Food body lotion has arrived. Offering intensive, long-lasting moisture and immediate comfort to dry or stressed-out skin, it's the perfect addition to your winter skin arsenal – and one kind of festive feasting with which can all get on board!

Weleda Skin Food body lotion, £14.95, weleda.co.uk



THIS IS WHY...

hair is frizzier in winter

"When you step from the cold outdoors into central-heated buildings, the moisture content in the air changes.

This causes the protein bonds within the hair to expand and contract – messing up whatever hairstyle you left the house with! This can happen numerous times throughout the day, depending on how often you go outside"

Anabel Kingsley, trichologist and brand president at Philip Kingsley

Prevent winter frizz by using products that form a barrier between your hair and the atmosphere. Philip Kingsley Bond Builder Restructuring Pre-Shampoo Treatment, £28, helps repair broken bonds and strengthen existing ones. Add Finishing Touch Polishing Serum, £22.50, to shield your hair from humidity in the air: philipkingsley.co.uk



FEELGOOD FESTIVE FEASTING

(without the fallout)

You can eat well, feel well and be well, while still enjoying your favourite foods, writes integrative health coach Rosie Underwood

No matter where you live in the world or your religious beliefs, this time of year isn't just about tradition and family, it's also about celebrating with food – lots of it! End-of-year feasting has been popular for millennia and, as our larders creek under the weight of our festive favourites, it can seem nigh on impossible to stick to healthy habits. And on one hand, why should we? After all, it's a time to let ourselves off the hook, celebrate togetherness, take stock of the year that's been and enjoy time with loved ones without guilt over what we consume.

However, it doesn't take an expert to tell you that too much eating and drinking – and the impact that overindulgence has on your body – can bring fluctuations in emotions and shifts in behaviour that can exacerbate the pressures of the season.

But it is possible to feel good and nourish ourselves over the festive season without a side portion of setting tensions at boiling point along with the spuds and inducing a cheese coma at 4pm on 25 December.

If you want to embrace comfort, joy and peace to all men as well as yourself, setting realistic intentions before the holidays is a solid start. Try journalling about how you want to feel. When I think about it, I hope to feel happy, fulfilled and energised. I want to spend as much time as possible feeling vital and living in my most healthy body and mind with the people I love, eating the foods we enjoy. Our



"I want to feel happy and vital ... in my most healthy body and mind"

choices are going to be far more effective if we have a clear idea of our emotional and physical health goals, rather than a vague notion of how we might reach some unobtainable concept of food perfection.

Understand the impact of food on your emotions

If we begin our festivities by eating foods that spike our sugar levels, we're likely to be emotionally charged early, then feel sluggish and downbeat as the day progresses. The key is to realise that not everything we eat during our celebrations should be something to feel guilty about. And it's not just about what we eat – how and when we eat certain foods can affect how they make us feel. The combination of particular food groups and even the order in which we eat the ingredients in our meals can have a huge effect on blood-sugar levels.

'High blood-sugar levels can be toxic for the body, so it releases a surge of the hormone insulin. One of insulin's many functions is to tell the body to pack away excess energy for later use, storing it as fat, which is dangerous for healthy body function,' explains Tabitha Roth, a nutritional therapist.

So what's the solution? On a meal-by-meal basis, start with protein or fibre and you'll enjoy your sweet treats a whole lot more. 'Having a few olives or crudités with hummus before tucking into mince pies or your selection box can significantly reduce their blood-sugar impact,' says Roth.

Expert advice



Tabitha Roth is a nutritional therapist at *Bodyism*. bodyism.co.uk; thefunctionalwellness.com



Tipper Lewis is a naturopath and nutritionist at Neal's Yard Remedies. nealsyardremedies.com



And what about party food? 'Reach for a handful of nuts before you go for a glass of bubbles,' Roth advises. On the protein and fibre front, on the big day, balance your main meal and treats by having a protein-rich breakfast, such as smoked salmon and scrambled eggs or avocado tempeh. This will yield less of a blood-sugar spike – and fewer spiky tempers!

Stick with tradition

The foods we usually eat at Christmas are healthy and sustainable. Turkey is a high-protein, low-fat meat and roast potatoes don't cause too much of a blood-sugar spike compared to other spuds, such as mash, due to their lower glycaemic index. The rest of the festive plate offers a chance to ramp up our minerals and antioxidants by way of humble, everyday veggies.

'Broccoli contains a smorgasbord of protective antioxidants, such as carotenoids and vitamin C,' says the nutritionist Tipper Lewis. 'Cabbage may not be as trendy as kale, but that doesn't mean we should neglect it. Its bitter taste stimulates our gastric juices, helping us digest our food better, while the sulphur in cabbage is beneficial for our skin and gut.'

Love them or hate them, Brussels sprouts are my best friends on Christmas Day because they help the liver with the detoxing process (bye-bye hangover), and the humble pea is a versatile powerhouse of nutrients, protein and minerals. Carrots are high in vitamin A, which is brilliant for eyes, skin and hair, and parsnips are full of immune-boosting vitamin C, which is also great for boosting the immune system. Consider the following when shopping for your main festive meal:

Use nature's glorious palette. Christmastime is resplendent with hues that brighten midwinter, and it's the colourful seasonal fruits and vegetables packed full of phytonutrients that you should embrace. 'Aim to incorporate a rainbow of colour, which will help you get a broad spectrum of nutrients, vitamins and minerals – and this is surprisingly easy at Christmas,' says Roth. 'These nutrients give traditional Christmas foods, such as carrots, beetroot, cranberries, carrots and oranges their colour, and they're all abundant at this time of year. The varying colours of our foods play different roles and bring different benefits, so eat as many as possible.'

Buy food that is locally produced. In general, the fresher the food, the more packed it is with nutrients. The minute a fruit or vegetable is picked or pulled from the earth, its plant cells begin to shrink and its nutrients diminish. Most of the produce you find at your local farmer's market or farm shop will have been picked within the past 24 hours, when at its most ripe and delicious, whereas supermarket produce is processed and grown with its shelf life as a priority. Ripe produce gives us the highest nutritional value, you'll be supporting a local business and reducing your carbon footprint. It's an all-round win!

GIVE YOURSELF FULL PERMISSION TO EAT THE FOOD YOU WANT

We've had another year of restriction, so let's not make nourishing our bodies about limiting satisfaction. Sometimes the moment calls for a tasty treat, and that's fine. Who doesn't love the clink of a crystal glass, a hot mince pie or a crunchy biscuit?

It's important not to restrict or ban any food – that type of thinking only makes us want it more. Relish the treats you choose, but eat them mindfully. Focus on the treat, instead of wolfing down handfuls of sweets mindlessly while watching your Christmas specials. Savour the pleasure and be in the moment.



“Have roast potatoes on Boxing Day – they contain tryptophan, which soothes nerves if you feel stressed after the big day”

Cook to protect the nutrients in your food.

All vegetables are a great source of fibre, which is superb for gut health, but how we cook our vegetables makes a big difference to their nutritional value.

‘To maximise nutrients and antioxidants, steam vegetables lightly and quickly,’ says Lewis. ‘The leftover water will have grabbed precious nutrients, so a top tip is to add it to your gravy as stock. To get the best out of potatoes, leave the skins on because many of the key nutrients are removed by peeling. It’s also a good idea to have roast potatoes on Boxing Day – they contain tryptophan, an amino acid that helps soothe nerves if you’re feeling stressed after the big day,’ she says.

Enjoy a tippie if you like

We may associate Christmas with an excess of alcohol and aim to steer clear, but certain drinks are considered helpful to the system. ‘In medieval times, a small drink containing aromatic herbs to stimulate and support digestion would have been enjoyed after the main meal,’ explains Lewis. Is that a green light to a glass of warming mulled wine? ‘Yes, if you make your own,’ she says. ‘Include ginger, star anise, cinnamon, orange peel, cardamom and cloves, and add milk thistle seeds for extra support.’

I alternate every alcoholic drink with water, and start with a bottle of maple water, which helps metabolise alcohol. Try to finish your evening with a glass of coconut water for maximum hydration and, if you can’t get hold of these special flavours, ensure you get a few glasses of the regular stuff to keep your body ticking over well.

Bon appétit!

After the year we’ve had, I’ll be diving (mindfully, of course) into my mother’s roast with all the trimmings, but with my good intentions set, I won’t need to ‘undo’ anything in January or punish myself for having a wonderfully festive time with those I love. Food is comfort, joy, tradition, celebration, nourishment, love, connection and so much more... Use it to give back to your body, to love yourself, energise and fuel yourself and all will be merry and bright. You deserve it.

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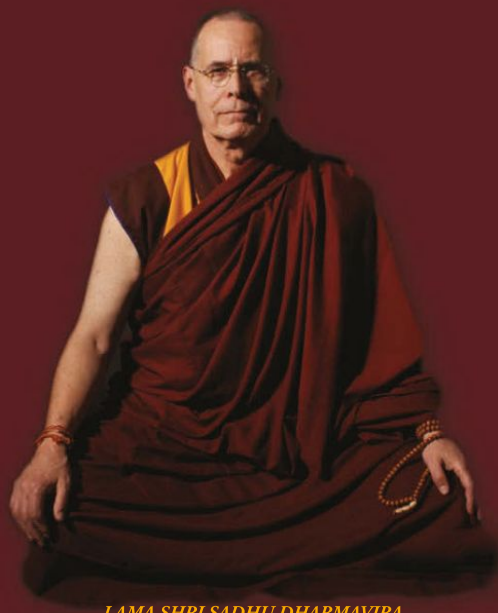
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Good mood food

HEARTY & HEALTHFUL ROSEMARY

A mainstay of warming winter dishes and delicious seasonal fare, now is the time to indulge in this wholesome herb and reap its many benefits – including a better memory

With its rich, woody flavour, rosemary adds depth to the humble Sunday lunch, elevating crispy spuds and roast meats to transform them into something special, while filling the kitchen with its gorgeous fragrance.

'Rosemary has a lovely, warming quality, without being hot like ginger or cayenne, which makes it ideal in the winter months,' says Alison Cullen, a nutritionist. 'It might look primitive, but rosemary is loaded with vitamins and minerals, and packs a potent punch when it comes to health benefits for both mind and body.'

Antioxidant powerhouse

'Historically, rosemary was used to preserve foods, specifically meat, due to its substantial antioxidant effect,' explains Cullen. 'These days, we understand these antioxidant properties work wonders for our bodies too, helping prevent damage to our cells caused by free radicals. Rosemary's anti-inflammatory compounds also give our immune system a much-needed boost, and help improve circulation, which is imperative during the cold winter period.'

Memory enhancer

It's fair to say that keeping our mind and memory sharp is high on the health agenda for many of us – enter the modest rosemary shrub! 'Studies have found it may help significantly with keeping your brain young and improving cognitive function and short-term memory, which is all the more reason to incorporate rosemary into your daily diet,' says Cullen.

avogel.co.uk



Rosemary is a member of the mint family, along with a number of other herbs and shrubs, including oregano, basil, lavender and thyme.

SIMPLE SWAPS

Pick rosemary over pepper, says Cullen. 'I love black pepper, sprinkle it generously over many dishes and can wax lyrical about its benefits, but rosemary makes a great swap if you want to mix things up and give food a festive twist. Grind up dried rosemary sprigs until they're really fine (like ground black peppercorns), then sprinkle over pasta, soups and even fruit. You can also add rosemary to good-quality olive oil and use it as a dip for fresh bread.'



ON A ROLL!

'These parsnip and rosemary rolls are deliciously warming straight from the oven, and they make perfect party food,' says Cullen.

- 220g parsnip, coarsely grated
- 275g spelt flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1 tbsp finely chopped rosemary
- 1 tsp sea salt

- 2 beaten eggs
- 2 tbsp soya, rice or oat milk

Mix everything together to form a rough dough, then split into 6-8 rolls. Drizzle with olive oil and slash the tops with a sharp knife before placing in the oven at 200°C, 180°C fan, gas mark 6. Cook for 25-30 minutes until golden.

PULL UP A CHAIR!

Gather family and friends
and make special memories
around the festive table this
year with Nadiya Hussain's
fast, fuss-free dishes for a
feast you'll always remember





Coronation aubergine

Serves 4-6

Aubergines often feature as a side dish when served at a table for dinner, but not here. We are taking this delicious aubergine, coating it with flavour, frying till tender and then drizzling over the simplest coronation dressing. It's like dinner at my mum's collided with my lunches at school to create this beauty.

For the aubergine:

- 225ml olive oil
- 3 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 small onion, grated
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 large aubergines, sliced into 1cm thick slices (about 600g)

For the dressing:

- 200g Greek yoghurt
- 2 tsp curry powder
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 tbsp mango chutney, finely chopped
- 2 tbsp whole milk

To serve:

- A small handful of crispy fried onions
- A small handful of raisins
- A small handful of fresh coriander, thinly sliced

1 Start by putting the oil in a bowl with the minced garlic, onion, paprika and salt. Mix really well and set aside with a pastry brush.

2 Pop the aubergines on to a tray (they can overlap, that's fine). Take the oil mixture and brush the aubergine slices

generously with the oil on both sides till you have finished all the mixture. Set aside.

3 Put one large or two small (if you have them) griddle pan(s) on to a medium heat. Griddle the aubergine in batches on both sides (they take approximately 2 minutes on each side). You will know they are ready when the flesh looks saturated, less spongy and softer. Pop on to a plate, overlapping, ready to serve.

4 Make the dressing by combining the yoghurt, curry powder, garlic, salt and mango chutney and giving it all a really good mix. Add a few tablespoons of whole milk to loosen the mixture just a little.

5 Drizzle the dressing all over the top of the aubergine, saving the rest to serve on the side. Sprinkle with fried onions, raisins and coriander to serve.



Salsa verde side of salmon

Serves 6-8

This is a wonderful centre-of-the-table type of dish, a whole side of salmon baked with a punchy salsa verde. It's served with onion wedges cooked gently in a medley of simple flavoursome miso and ghee, and the crispy salmon skin crumbled on top. Nothing wasted, everything used, and stunning to look at and eat.

For the onions:

- 6 onions, peeled and halved, intact at the root
- 2 tbsp ghee, melted
- 3 tbsp miso paste
- ½ tsp salt

For the crispy skin:

- 1.5kg side of salmon, scaled and pin-boned (ask your fishmonger to separate the flesh and skin for you)
- 2 tbsp cornflour
- 1 tbsp paprika

- ½ tsp salt

For the salsa verde:

- 100g ghee (no need to melt it as it will be whizzed in the food processor)
- 2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 95g tin of sardines, in oil
- 40g capers
- 3 cloves of garlic
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 x 30g packs of fresh parsley
- 100g panko breadcrumbs

1 Start by preheating the oven to 200°C, 180°C fan, gas mark 6. Have a roasting dish big enough to lay the salmon in comfortably and another flat tray to lay the skin on. Line both with baking paper.

2 Add the onions to the roasting dish, drizzle over the ghee, add the miso paste and salt, and get your hands in there to give it a good mix. Lay the onions flat-side down.

3 Pat the skin dry and cut the salmon in half. In a bowl, mix the cornflour, paprika

and salt. Coat the cornflour mix over the skin until it is coated all over. Lay flat on the prepared baking tray.

4 Pop the onions in the oven on the middle shelf and the skin just below. Leave in for 20 minutes while you prep the salsa. Make sure to flip the skin over halfway through cooking so it crisps up evenly.

5 To make the salsa verde, put the ghee, vinegar, sardines and their oil, capers, garlic, salt, parsley and breadcrumbs into a food processor and whizz till well combined. Take out the tray with the onions, move the onions over to the sides and place the salmon in the centre. Take the salsa verde and spread it over until all the salmon top is covered.

6 Bake in the oven for another 30-35 minutes. After 20 minutes, take the crispy skin out and leave to cool. As soon as the salmon is ready, serve it on a platter with the onions. Crumble the crispy skin all over and it is ready to eat.

Lemon syllabub

Serves 4

The simplest of all recipes, this set-custard-slash-mousse pot is creamy, zesty and entirely foolproof. Using very few ingredients, the syllabub is infused with thyme and set with lemon juice. Simply serve with sponge fingers and a good cup of coffee.

- 150g raspberries
- 1 tsp rose extract
- A sprig of fresh lemon thyme, leaves picked
- 300ml double cream
- 50g caster sugar

- 1 lemon, zest and juice
- Sponge fingers, to serve

1 Have four serving glasses or jam jars ready. Mix the raspberries with the rose extract and lemon thyme leaves and mash a little to break up. Divide the mixture into the four glasses.

2 Add the cream and sugar to a mixing bowl and whip to soft peaks. Add the lemon zest and juice and fold through. Spoon on top of the raspberries. Ideally, chill for an hour before serving, but you can eat it straight away! Serve with sponge fingers.



'Nadiya's Fast Flavours' (Penguin Michael Joseph, £22) is out now

STUCK FOR FRESH IDEAS OF WHAT TO BUY FOR YOUR LOVED ONES THIS YEAR?

Active living



The ultimate Christmas treat

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Visit Shop.kelsey.co.uk/PSYGIFT



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Every horse rider needs a little boost in winter

Dark winter days can challenge even the most dedicated rider. Why not give your favourite rider a boost this Christmas with a pair of warm winter riding socks and a subscription to Your Horse, the magazine that inspires its readers to enjoy every single second that they spend in the saddle.

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Everyone needs a little me-time

We all know how important it is to live a healthy lifestyle, so why not gift your loved one a helping hand? Top Santé is packed full of life-enhancing tips and advice on health, fitness, food and beauty. Plus our Christmas offer also includes a candle from Scented worth £16.95.

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Got a fisherman friend?

Sea Angler is the perfect companion for every sea fishing enthusiast. As well as receiving 13 issues of the UK's best-selling fishing mag, we've thrown in Shore Fishing Special Edition and a Sea Angler beanie hat to complete the gift - what a catch!

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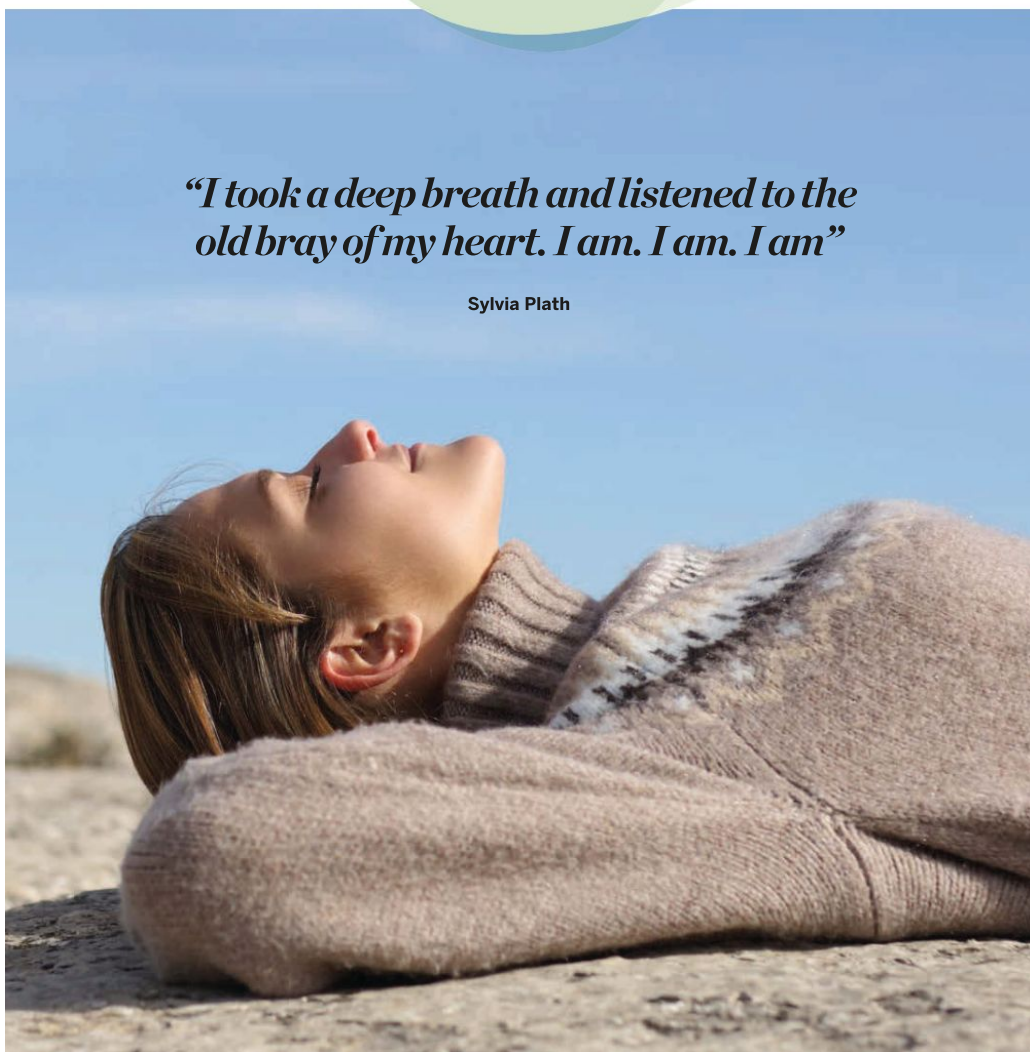
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***“I took a deep breath and listened to the
old bray of my heart. I am. I am. I am”***

Sylvia Plath



PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES



For some of us, choosing presents can make the holiday season feel like hard work. Hazel Davis discovers what might be behind her gift-giving paralysis

Present TENSE

‘Are you all finished?’ asked a friend on one of my WhatsApp groups. ‘I’ve only got the stocking fillers to sort,’ replies one. ‘Tree presents done,’ says another. ‘All wrapped!’ trills a third. I remain silent. There is not a single present in my house. Don’t get me wrong, it’s not the money, the effort, nor the planning that is behind the lack of gifts, it’s the decision-making.

The thing is, I’ll spend an inordinate amount of time searching for presents online. I trawl eBay and Etsy, agonising about quality control and originality. I buy canvases with the intention of creating original art. I seek out cool and rare recordings for a friend who loves vintage electronic music. Has even one of these thoughtful objects or projects come to fruition? No.

It’s not just Christmas that brings on the issue, it’s a problem I face all year. Here’s what usually happens in the run-up to a friend’s birthday: I put the date on my calendar and I think about it. I think about it some more... I think about it a lot. ‘I won’t get something in haste,’ I think, ‘I’ll do my research this time and get something nobody else has thought of, something really, truly special.’ I might go into town and browse in a few vintage shops. I can spend hours in a card shop looking for the right one. I seldom find it because there’s seldom the right card.

Frequently, it’s got to the eleventh hour and I’ve resorted to online vouchers in desperation, offering a pathetic ‘I thought you’d prefer to choose something you want’ explanation that nobody believes. I’ve sent flowers at the last minute – the most expensive, next-day option, worrying about the size of the bunch and whether they look hastily chosen, because they certainly have been.

Ask any of my good friends and they’ll probably say something along these lines: ‘Hazel is generous and fun to be around. She’s always willing to help in a crisis. She’s a good listener. What’s the best present she ever got me? Um...’

And now – oh my giddy aunt! – it’s Christmas. My partner ordered *Dandy* and *Beano* annuals for the children in September in case of shipping problems. He is generally terrific at buying gifts. He regularly comes home from the shops with a book he thinks I’d like (every one a winner). He goes online and researches good-quality slippers. He gets things imported from New Zealand and all sorts! Caring, thoughtful and perfect. I can’t compete.

Now please don’t misinterpret the situation – my gift-giving conundrum is nothing to do with being tight. All my friends will tell you how giving I am. I always pay for meals and I’m a brilliant hostess.

Is the problem that I am terrified of obligation, or being appropriate for the occasion? Maybe it’s one of the many reasons I have never, and will never, have a wedding, although I am married. Actually, I spurn Pancake Day, Easter and Valentine’s Day, and I hate bank holidays. I’d probably forego Christmas



Expert advice



Rhian Kivits is a relationship expert and author.
rhiankivits.com



Hazel Harrison is a clinical psychologist and director at Think Avellana.
thinkavellana.com

entirely if it weren’t for all the lovely food and singing.

Is it that I fear rejection? What if my present is rubbish? What if my friend can’t *believe* I think they would like an anthology of short stories by Raymond Carver? Or a hand-knitted beret made out of 100 per cent merino wool? I mean, who wears a beret nowadays? Perhaps it’s better to get them nothing at all rather than something that makes them question my choice in gifts and, as a result, our friendship.

Rhian Kivits, a relationship expert, says my misgivings, for want of a better word, could be tied up with my childhood. ‘Some of us have parents who taught us to see giving presents as a way to reward each other and show love and appreciation,’ she explains. ‘Others may have had avoidant parents who may not have taught us to value emotional expression, which can make us feel as if giving and receiving gifts is awkward and embarrassing.’

She adds: ‘We may have had family members who didn’t know how to show gratitude and pleasure, or siblings who didn’t want to play along when it came to gift exchange. All these scenarios can contribute to discomfort about giving and receiving, including anxiety about the element of surprise in exchanging presents, driving us to either anxiously pay attention to it or avoid it completely.’

This rings true for me. Not that my parents were mean, but the value they placed on emotional expression left something to be desired. Sincerity was something to be mocked and showing someone you cared was risky. It's not difficult to see how my gift issues might be related to this. My mother would often buy presents as a job lot, regardless of recipients and, while I wasn't clear on a better alternative, I knew it wasn't necessarily a good way to go about things.

Conversely, Kivits says: 'We may have childhood memories of being lavished with everything we could possibly desire. In adulthood, this can motivate us to bestow generous gifts upon our friends and family, because that's how we believe it should be. When we've been set up in childhood to expect lavish gifts, or even to be able to state what we would like and trust that's exactly what we'll get, we're likely to find ourselves taking this attitude into our adult lives.'

What is worth bearing in mind, says Kivits, is that: 'We can easily fail to see that other people's behaviour is usually more about them than us, which is why drama over gift exchange is often blown out of proportion and family members or couples find themselves crying over the Christmas turkey.'

'It's a cliché, but it really is the thought that counts,' says Hazel Harrison, a psychologist. 'When we overthink things and put on the pressure, it starts to become a metaphor.' She says it's time for me to think about how I feel when people are going out of their way for me. I am reminded of a gift that my friend, Alex, gave me. He learned how to play *Happy Birthday* on the guitar and sent me a video. I cried. For his birthday, I decided I was going to do something equally special. I thought about it a lot... Except Alex's birthday came and went, as birthdays often do with me. So, what Alex got was a text saying 'happy birthday'. It was the best I could do. No really, it was.

His video was funny, daft and touching and it's one of my most memorable birthday gifts, along with a video of a friend's one-year-old singing to me and the hand-painted pebble from a Scottish holiday that has pride of place on my desk and in my heart.

'How we feel when people are kind and doing something special for us is the key to giving gifts,' says Harrison. 'When giving, it's important to shift into that compassionate perspective. It doesn't have to be the world's most wonderful gift, it's about someone thinking about you and wanting to celebrate with you. Could the gift be an experience? Could it be about giving your precious time to someone?'

The experts are right. I really need to stop overdramatising matters and thinking about trying to track down the perfect gift, and appreciate the fact that, right now, many of us are more bothered about seeing the person than receiving the present, and many of my loved ones might just appreciate a nice lunch or half an hour of my time. Right, where's the diary? January is going to be a good month!

TAKE THE ANGST OUT OF SELECTING THE PERFECT GIFT

Ask your recipients what they would like, advises Rhian Kivits. This immediately reduces worry about making the wrong choice.

Supply gift receipts with your presents so people can exchange them if they wish. You don't have to be part of that process, but you can trust that they'll be happy with the gift they get in the end.

Agree a mutually affordable budget with those with whom you are exchanging gifts. This will alleviate the concern that you'll spend too much or too little, and create a sense of equality in the exchange.

Let go of the need to compete with others and don't get caught up in comparison. You don't have to be the one who buys the most expensive or biggest gift. Remember, it's the thought that counts.

Don't focus on your recipient's reaction to your gift if it's not quite what you expected. That's about them, not you. If you've chosen a gift with good intentions, trust that you have done your best.

Don't let your anxiety about giving gifts take the joy out of Christmas. Focus on other aspects of the holiday that make it pleasurable and fun: The food, the time off work, the relaxation and quality moments with friends and family are all reasons to love the festive season. Gifts are just one aspect of the whole.



"My friend learned how to play 'Happy Birthday' on the guitar and sent me a video. I cried... For his birthday, I sent him a text"



WORK IN PROGRESS

How do I assert myself and get my voice heard?

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

"If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself"

Henry Ford

Q I recently started a new job at a company where a lot of change is occurring. Another manager, who is on the same level as me and started a month before me, is pushing my buttons. When she runs our joint meetings, she speaks on my behalf – to the extent that some of my team now ask her for answers to their questions. What can I do about this power struggle?

My mediator colleagues say that conflict often arises when we assume that another person is deliberately doing something to provoke us. But while some people seek out confrontation, most don't. For example, we might see a brief email as rude, when it was simply that the person wanted to let us know something quickly.

A first step could be to help this colleague become aware of the impact on you and your team (see box, right). However, avoid talking about a 'power struggle' until you know more about her intentions.

In Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits Of Highly Effective People* (Simon & Schuster, £16.99), step one is to be proactive and focus on what you can control. Step two is to 'start with the end in mind'. Given that you are on the same level, and possibly reporting to the same person, it's likely that you and this colleague have similar aims.

One way to start a dialogue could be to say: 'I'm hoping to achieve such-and-such with my team, and I wonder what I can do to help you reach your goals too.' If you feel generous, add 'especially since you've been here longer than me'.

Your initial objective is to get her talking about her perspective and enquire with genuine curiosity how she sees the situation. You are

looking for insight into what her underlying interests might be. This is not just fact-finding because the conversation will build trust and cooperation. It's helpful to be aware of predictable emotional concerns that people have in negotiations: the need to feel appreciated, rather than demeaned, to be treated as a colleague and not an adversary, and to feel respected.

This is an opportunity to practise your listening skills, which will stand you in great stead with your team. The key test: let your colleague do most of the talking. Ask: What impact is the situation having on us and others? What do you think needs to happen next?

Another key skill is the ability to summarise: 'It sounds to me from what you've said that x is important to you. Is that correct?' During this conversation you'll probably notice that what appears obvious to you might not be right for her. If you agree some overall results that you both want, you can start looking for win-win solutions. It's 'how can we make the cake bigger for both of us?' rather than arguing about the size of your slice.

Remember, your team are paying attention to your words and actions. What would you like them to say about you when the going gets tough?

franklincovey.com/the-7-habits

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 mary@psychologies.co.uk with 'Mary life' or 'Mary work' in the subject line



Feedback with a listening ear

Opening up an honest conversation is essential and will give you an insight into your colleague's motivations and methods, while allowing her to see the impact her actions are having on you and your team.

WHY?

Most of us want to know what we are getting right, as well as wrong. It's difficult to judge the impact that our actions have on other people, so well-considered feedback can improve situations significantly. However, bear in mind that the wrong kind can make matters worse.

WHEN?

Offer feedback as close to the relevant time as possible. Positive and fair feedback is OK in a team setting, but negative feedback is better handled one to one.

WHAT?

Focus on behaviour or actions that others can see, and the person can do something about. For example, say: 'When you stood with your arms folded across your chest, I felt anxious.' Offer a mixture of what you saw, and how it made you feel. Do not say, for instance: 'You were angry.' You don't know what the other person was feeling, even if your guess is correct!

TRY THIS...

Use this essential feedback checklist:

Situation Anchor the feedback in a specific time and place.

Behaviour Name the actions, without judgment or interpretation.

Impact Share your feelings and thoughts, and any behaviour you saw in other people as a result of your colleague's actions.

FURTHER READING

Be The Boss Everyone Wants To Work For: A Guide For New Leaders by William Gentry (co-published with the Center For Creative Leadership and Berrett-Koehler Publishers, £16.99)

Baby, it's **COLD OUTSIDE**

... But there are plenty of mood-boosting gains from being out and about

From foraging for nature's bounty in the forest to stargazing under snugly blankets in the garden, there are so many ways to enjoy the magic of the outdoors with your loved ones this Christmas. The fun shouldn't stop when the mercury drops!

'Positive emotional experiences create opportunities for us to broaden our thinking and creativity, and to deepen our reserves and resilience,' says Becky Morrison, a happiness coach and author. 'Happiness and positive emotions almost always stem from time spent outdoors interacting with nature. It could be as simple as a few minutes absorbing the daylight and immersing yourself in the beauty of the landscape, or something more involved, such as hiking. Whatever your activity of choice, time outdoors doesn't stop being meaningful and beneficial just because the seasons change.'

So, say goodbye to dozing off in front of repeats of *Gavin & Stacey*, cocoon yourself in your cosiest winter woollies and get out there with family and friends to make glorious Christmas memories.

untanglehappiness.com

Get your skates on

You know Christmas is around the corner when outdoor ice rinks, complete with twinkly lights and mulled wine stands, start popping up across the country. Whether you're like Bambi on ice or fancy yourself as the next Jayne Torvill, why not give it a go? The benefits of ice skating are plentiful: as well as improved joint flexibility and balance, the rush of endorphins from physical activity is guaranteed to help reduce stress over last-minute preparations and brighten your mood for the days ahead.



Look at the night sky

Stargazing is one of the best ways to connect with nature and allow your mind to think big picture and gain perspective. What's more, winter is one of the best seasons to appreciate the stars – darker nights allow for better visibility, and shorter days mean you can get started much earlier so the whole family can get involved. Make it an occasion by brewing a pot of cocoa, taking out some rugs and blankets, and gathering everyone together for a soothing evening beneath the skies. Not as clued up as Brian Cox? There are an abundance of apps and tutorials to guide you through your stargazing adventure.

WORDS: LARISSA CHAPMAN PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES, SHUTTERSTOCK

Have fun foraging

Winter is a peaceful time to forage for health-boosting ingredients, and the act of seeking them out can provide hours of outdoor treasure hunting. It's the kind of thing many of us did when we were children, so why not invite your parents along for a bit of nostalgia? It surely won't take long for them to start reminiscing about that time Dad fell in the blackberry bush!

Christmas isn't a traditional time to forage, so you may need to get a bit creative, but there are still plenty of nature's wonders to unearth. 'Hedgerows depleted of leaves at this time of year offer up hawthorn berries, sloes and rose hips,' says the nutritional therapist Belinda Blake. 'These colourful berries contain vitamins and polyphenols, which offer valuable immune support at a time when we need it most. And remember, even in the depths of winter, there are still fresh greens to be had. Stinging nettle stems make an excellent addition to winter soups, and nettle is a super-tonic when it comes to the nervous system, as it eases stress and treats fatigue and exhaustion.'

ion.ac.uk

DECK THE GARDEN

Don't worry, we're not talking about laying a patio! Rather, how to create a winter wonderland in your outside space. After all, why should the living room have all the fun? There are loads of outdoor lights and decorations available to buy, and the act of decorating is a great way to get the whole family out of the house and into the fresh air. Lights and Christmas decorations evoke feelings of joy and can awaken happy memories of Christmases past. Atmospheric, and a mood booster!

Watch the wildlife

The pared-back landscape at this time of year provides the perfect backdrop for spotting active animals in a magnificent setting. If you're with a larger family group, make a list, split into teams and see how many you can tick off. If you're very competitive, you might want to take photos to make sure no one cheats!

Some of the main contenders to look out for include starling murmurations, robins, green woodpeckers, foxes, red squirrels and owls. What you see will vary depending on where you are in the country. To find out more, visit: nationaltrust.org.uk/lists/winter-wildlife-to-spot

Enjoy forest bathing

Feeling full after all that feasting? Instead of slumping on the sofa in front of the Queen's speech, why not gather the troops and take a stroll in the woods to enjoy the Japanese practice of shinrin-yoku – which basically means to immerse yourself in nature, under a canopy of trees in particular, by using all your senses.

'A few focused minutes of "nature bathing" can feel the same as closing down all the tabs on a computer and giving yourself a reboot,' say the founders of The Limitless CEO, Ali Mortimer and Emma Forrester. It will mean you're all ready to enjoy the rest of the day – Trivial Pursuit, anyone?

rise.forthelimitlessceo.com

EXPRESS YOURSELVES

Unleash your creative side and get arty out in the elements. From dramatic icicles to rustic leaves, winter gives us so much to play with. Set yourself a challenge and see what you and your loved ones can create. Whether it's a snow sculpture, patterns in the frost or a pine cone tower, the most inventive piece wins!



GO OUT IN YOUR SLIPPERS

Take the comfort of the indoors outside with Keen's hybrid slip-on, dubbed the outdoor slipper. With a fleece lining and adjustable drawstring, the durable Women's Howser III Slide, £54.99, will keep your toes cosy when you're pottering around the garden or taking a stroll around the block. keenfootwear.com



You're more than halfway to healing

Approach conflict situations with the power of the pen and discover fresh possibilities and a brand-new perspective, writes Jackee Holder



For the past three years, I've been dealing with a challenging personal dilemma that caused a great deal of stress. When the issue first presented itself, I found myself reacting to the story from the place of being a victim.

But it wasn't long before I realised how unhelpful my response was and decided to change track. I turned to a rule I had learned way back when I first trained as a coach – the 51 per cent rule.

Originating from the work of the coach and writer Angus McLeod, the 51 per cent rule can be applied when you find yourself in a conflict situation or where you feel strongly that you are in the right and someone else is not. The rule works on the premise that whatever the given challenge, your starting point becomes you taking 51 per cent responsibility for the problem. This often stops people in their tracks and gets them to start thinking differently in the moment.

For this exercise, it's important to set aside time to respond to the prompts using pen and paper. Why, I hear you ask?

Because we're hardwired to rely on the rational mind to think, which often bypasses so much of the sensory data you activate when using pen and paper. The benefits are far more effective when you approach this exercise using expressive writing. Often, your thinking keeps taking you back to your past perspectives and the same choices and decisions you have already made. Give this approach a try instead:

- Start by writing the question out in full at the top of the page in your notebook or journal: What is my 51 per cent ownership of this situation/issue/ongoing conflict?
- Set the timer for five minutes and write without editing or censoring. Read over the writing and highlight anything that stands out or makes you think. What do you notice?
- What are your notes prompting you to say or do that would bring about a more positive or better outcome for everyone?

Slowing down the pace using writing provides a fertile space to self-reflect, so your thoughts have more of a chance to see new possibilities or gravitate towards solutions you had shut yourself off from. You might even find yourself taking a new



view on the person or situation. My advice when approaching this exercise is to be honest in your reflections – it's the only way of getting a really tangible payoff.

By allowing the writing to illuminate where you take responsibility, you can acknowledge and accept your new awareness without beating yourself up. Your journal is your private space and what you write does not necessarily need to be shared with others in its entirety. Instead, hold on to the power and potential that this shift in the weight of responsibility has on shaping the quality of the decisions and choices you make going forward. Remember, we never know the full story until we have walked in somebody else's shoes.

jackeeholder.com; @jackeeholderinspires

Books

This month I recommend the transformative **How To Have Meaningful Conversations** by Sarah Rozenhuter (Watkins, £12.99), which provides a seven-step plan to honest and open communication.



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nourishskinrange.com



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psychologies promotion

Your Questions in Mind... to help and inspire

Q I've had both the flu & the covid vaccines but still worry about getting sick & feeling run down. Are there any natural remedies which can help?

A) Colder weather, less sunlight and spending more time indoors can lead to falling ill more often as well as feeling drained and fatigued. There are a number of ingredients shown to help support the immune system including bee propolis, elderberry & olive leaf which have natural antiviral & antibiotic properties &

are found in Bee prepared immune formula along with other immune supporting nutrients. For energy- bee pollen, ginseng, rose hips & vitamins B12 & B6 are helpful and can be found in Bee energised energy & focus supplement along with organic spirulina and more. Capsule contents of both may be opened into juices & they may be taken together. Find in Holland & Barrett, Ocado & online.



Q I am looking for ideas of small thoughtful gifts to give this Christmas which are both meaningful and useful and can be posted.

A) Friendinabox offers thoughtfully curated gifts in an eye-catching blue box which fits through most letterboxes. As well as our normal selection of gifts, we have a range of Christmas themed boxes. You can write a letter of unlimited length, which is a nice way to update friends and family with all your news. Popular

Christmas boxes are: Christmas Eve, The Night Before Christmas, Hygge, Pamper, Be Kind to Yourself, Gin & Chocolate. Our boxes make perfect Secret Santa gifts or thank you gifts for teachers, colleagues and employees. You can opt for a "Please Save Me for Christmas Eve" or "Please Save Me for Christmas" sticker. We offer vegan versions for most of our boxes.

Prices start from just £12.

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



Q I am looking for a unique birthday present for my best friend. Any ideas?

A) Potter and Mooch is a small, family run business offering a range of beautifully handmade gifts, jewellery and homeware. If you are looking for something special and a little different from the 'norm' then look no further. Delivery is just £2.95 and arrives within

1-2 days in the UK. Head over to their website where you can browse the stock, order online or even over the phone.

www.potterandmooch.co.uk

01903 331744

Use code PSYCHOLOGIES for 10% off your first order

Featured product is 925 sterling silver with Swarovski cream pearls £24



Q Since starting back to work after furlough I've been suffering from really bad anxiety. I was wondering if there was anything natural I could take to help me manage rather than having to go to the doctors?

A) Flower Essences can really help in these sorts of situations and are very safe and easy to use and incredibly effective.

Lots of people have been finding Saskia's Calm and Confident blend very useful to help with the anxiety they are suffering since after

lockdown as it is designed to help you feel safe and able to manage whilst giving your confidence a boost.

I would suggest taking it twice a day for a good week or two, and as your anxiety subsides, take it as and when needed.

It is available directly from www.saskiasfloweressences.com and costs £12+£3.70 P&P



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How to be happier

We've teamed up with the wonderful clinical psychologist Emma Hepburn, aka The Psychology Mum, to help you bring more bliss into your life

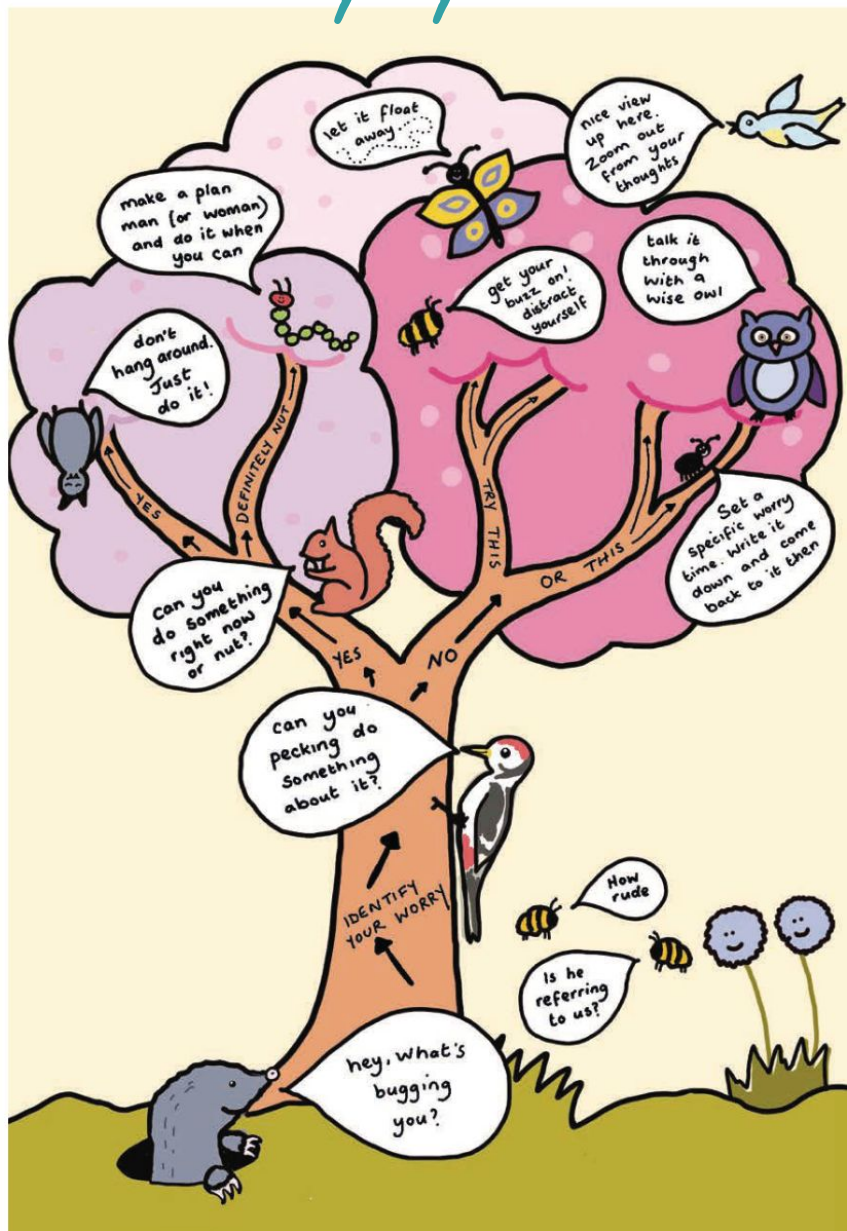
Often uncertainty feels like a threat, which means the brain tries to resolve and understand the unknown in an attempt to create certainty. This can result in us filling the unknown gaps unhelpfully, predicting the worse-case scenario, or seeking certainty in places we will never find it – such as googling the answers, finding out more and more information (like watching the news endlessly during the pandemic) or seeking reassurance. While these actions may provide short-term reassurance, in the longer term they can make us feel worse because we never deal with the uncertainty itself.

Categorising your thoughts around uncertainty can help you decide how to deal with it, and the exercise opposite is designed to help with this. Use the pathway up the tree to identify your worries and find solutions for how you can deal with them.

Follow Emma Hepburn on Instagram @thepsychologymum for more inspiration



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





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