TUNE INTO YOUR BODY ACCEPT ALL OF YO

CREATE A LIFE YOU LOVE IJK edition

DISCOVER YOUR MANTRA

Anchor 2024 with one guiding word

How to take care of your financial wellbeing

15-PAGE DOSSIER

MAKE TIME FOR KINDNESS

How to choose tiny acts of love and connection

Vogue Williams

'Bedtime rituals help keep me relaxed and calm'

EASE INTO THE NEW YEAR

- Why now is the perfect time to embrace nature's rhythm
- Resist the urge to upgrade and improve
- New ways to nourish yourself







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Welcome...

The turn of the new year is usually the time we think about a fresh start and stride ahead with aplomb, but it doesn't have to mean rushing to make resolutions. It can also be the perfect time of year to look inward, move slowly, and nourish your body and mind. And that's exactly what we've dedicated this month's dossier to – easing into the new year gently. On page 42, we're asking 'do you really need a new you?' – or can this year be the one we buck the trend for betterment and focus on fulfilment, instead?

Just as writer Yasmina Floyer discovers on page 22, I've also found that a single, guiding word can be much more powerful than ambitious goals for the coming months. It's a new-year ritual I've been practicing for a few years now, and something I've come to enjoy. Sometimes your word is screaming at you, waiting to burst into the new year, and sometimes your chosen mantra needs a little more coaxing. My intention for 2023 was to be less fearful, take more confident risks, and feel okay with good enough.

I was jostling between two words: gratitude and abundance, and so
I decided that I would take both with me into the year. Often, you
aren't able to see how your word is shaping up after a few weeks, which
is when traditional resolutions tend to wane. It is only when we reflect

back after several months that we can begin to see how the phrase is paving the way for possibility. I began 2023 in a role I'd been in for almost 13 years, but by February was facing redundancy – gratitude and abundance didn't seem like a strong choice at that point. But, come December, I was able to marvel in my achievements that would never have happened had I have stayed doing what I had been. I've been able to tick off all of my intentions for the year, and then some! If I could have written down a dream magazine to work for, it would have been *Psychologies*. I've been a reader for years and I'm so excited

to look after this fabulous brand for the next few months. I'm yet to settle on my word for 2024, but 'relax' keeps popping up in my mind. And that is what I wish for you, a relaxed start to the year, to unfurl slowly and move with the seasons, perhaps even landing on a word of your own. Happy New Year!

Holly Treacy, Acting editor

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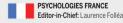
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The advice starts **RIGHT HERE!**



DR SULA WINDGASSEN

'Condensing resolutions into a single word gives us a clarity that multiple different resolutions don't,' says psychologist and psychotherapist Dr Sula Windgassen. 'We can build the mental habit of checking in with this word in our decision making, which brings us closer to our values.' Find out more on page 22.

DEBORAH BROWN

'Don't go all guns blazing into January with an intense diet or fitness regime,' says Trauma Release Exercise trainer Deborah Brown, Instead, orient to what makes you feel happy.' Joy is the way we get our bodies back into true balance - so that we look and feel good. Discover more on page 74.



RICHARD HAMMOND

'With things such as taking the train, eco-travel is much more enjoyable - you feel like you're already on your adventure when you get to the station,' says writer and videographer Richard Hammond, Learn how to lessen your impact on the planet and have holidays that really matter on page 90.

Our mission

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

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In the mood

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

COMPILED BY ALEX LLOYD



3 reads... for the fireside



When We Were Enemies by Emily Bleeker (Lake Union Publishing, £8.99).

A powerful story of two women, generations apart, and a family secret that threatens to come out.



Never Meant To Stay by Trisha Das (Amazon Crossing, £8.99).

A romantic comedy about family and finding the perfect match, set against the vibrant backdrop of Delhi.



Fiction Land by R R
Haywood (W F Howes,
£8.99). A delivery

driver finds himself inside a shadowy world occupied by characters from unfinished novels.



Healing sounds Songs that make your heart ache may ease physical pain,

scientists now believe.

Music that has an emotional hold over the listener can work as a painkiller, in what is known as the hypoalgesic effect.

A Université de Montréal study saw 63 participants interviewed about their musical tastes before a 'moderately painful' heated patch was applied to their skin.

Those who were hearing their favourite music reported a pain intensity ten points lower on a scale of 0 to 100, on average, than those who were suffering in silence.

The reduction was more noticeable with their preferred calming or moving tunes than energising and happy ones.



"There are so many great things about getting older. I don't think there are very many things I know now that I didn't when I was 16 - but there's a big difference between knowing something and realising it. Realising something takes 50 years"

Musician Chrissie Hynde



Make the move!

Just 22 minutes of brisk walking, jogging or housework can combat the negative effects of sitting at a desk all day.

A study by The Arctic University of Norway monitored nearly 12,000 people aged over 50 with activity trackers, and returned to check on their health five years later.

Those who spent at least 12 hours a day sitting down were more likely to die earlier – but the risk was eliminated by moving.



Origin story
Genes inherited from our ancestors that helped them

Genes inherited from our ancestors that helped them battle cold conditions could cause depression in modern humans. Scientists from Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona detected a mutated gene in some people's DNA, the origins of which stem from when early Homo sapiens mated with Denisovans. It made them more resilient to low temperatures by boosting the zinc transported to cells. But the variant has been linked to present-day mental health conditions, including anorexia and bipolar disorder.



Keep quiet

Keeping good news to yourself can boost your feelings of happiness, psychologists say.
Allowing yourself to have a positive secret, such as a pregnancy or engagement, was found to have an energising effect for however long you stayed schtum. But keeping negative secrets did the opposite, with a draining effect, according to a study in the Journal Of Personality And Social Psychology.

Do you know the nutrients you need to stay strong this winter?

Brits are less likely to understand which foods boost their immune system than their European neighbours, a poll by the Fruit Juice Science Centre has found.

While 84 per cent of us know vitamin C is key, only 32 per cent understood the importance of vitamin E, which is found in nuts and red peppers.

Nine per cent knew selenium from eggs and poultry can aid immunity, while just eight per cent were aware that folate from green veg can guard against bugs.

But French, German and Spanish participants in the 8,000-person survey scored better for knowledge.

More babies born at 22 weeks are living, after guidelines for doctors changed in 2019 to give them 'survival-focused care'. Now, 8.2% make it to hospital discharge, compared with just 2.5% previously.

A walk in the park

Cash-strapped singles are ditching the pub for the park, as the cost of dating rises. British people looking for love spend an average of £1,349 a year on their hunt, including app subscriptions, drinks and meals, a survey of 2,000 single adults by Chase bank has found. This has led to more daters opting for walks, bike rides, free museums, and even doing puzzles together for a purse-friendly way to check out a potential





Taking in deliveries and sharing your internet might be good neighbourly behaviour in the 21st century – but nothing beats a friendly greeting.

A poll of 2,000 people found it was the most treasured trait in a good neighbour, followed by keeping an eye on your house when you go away. Bringing in empty bins was another top quality, following by helping to jump-start a car, lending milk or sugar, and making a street WhatsApp group.

The survey by McCarthy Stone also found that 73 per cent of us think of our neighbours as friends – and 30 per cent counted them among their closest companions.

23% of Brits don't celebrate their birthday every year, with 31 seen as the 'official' age to stop having parties, a survey by Thortful has found.

WATCH, LOOK, LISTEN



WATCH Priscilla.
Sofia Coppola directs
this adaptation of
Priscilla Presley's

book about her controversial relationship with Elvis. In cinemas 5 January.



LOOK Gwen John: Art and Life in London and Paris, at The Holburne Museum,

Bath. Explore 40 years of the acclaimed portraitist's career in two pivotal cities. Until 14 April.



LISTEN Young Again with Kirsty Young. Celebrities including Jamie Oliver and

Jada Pinkett Smith look back and share the advice they would give their younger selves.

Viewpoint

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



A new type of me-time

I've had a subscription to *Psychologies* for years, and prior to being involved in a road traffic accident, I would regularly sit and read the whole magazine while listening to old vinyls and enjoying a glass of wine; it was my 'me-time'.

After the accident, however, I was unable to concentrate in the same way. I maintained my subscription, but the pile of magazines grew, and I felt for a time that I was letting myself down. I couldn't let them go, though; it would be like I was abandoning a piece of my former self. I now have to really pace myself with the magazine, but I think I love it more this way. I've learnt that regardless of how big the pile of magazines grows – how guilty I feel for not reading them – when I do get round to it, it gives me the slice of escapism that I need.

When I was reading the November issue, the interview with Trinny Woodall really stood out. She discussed issues with confidence and imposter syndrome, and it felt so empowering to read about how normal and common this is – it's about not letting the fear take over.

Thank you, *Psychologies*, for enabling me to rehabilitate and grow. *Rebecca*

A problem shared

I really benefited from your article 'Cancel culture' from the Coaching in Action section of the November issue. I'm going through a similar situation, having been 'cancelled' by my youngest son, and reading this helped me to feel less alone. On the problem page, you also had a letter written in by someone who wanted to create space from her in-laws. This was useful from the opposite perspective.

Thank you for continuing to spotlight challenging situations. *Caroline*



Confidence boost

After struggling with self-doubt from a disastrous job interview, it was a tonic to read Nova Cobban's '9 steps to rebuild confidence' (November issue). Cobban's guidance that some situations have the power to destroy self-trust in an otherwise confident person was timely and reassuring.

Understanding that waiting to feel more confident before taking action doesn't work, and

that confidence comes from giving it a go, is so empowering. Visualising a future version of yourself giving loving advice to the younger you is a pertinent reminder that the most important relationship any of us have in life is with ourself.

Thank you, *Psychologies*, for publishing the essential toolkit to reframe confidence and rebuild self-trust.

Sarah



Write for joy

I was inspired to write this poem after reading the question 'When did you last do something simply for the joy of it?' on one of the pages in the November issue. I used to love writing poems, and realised it had been so long since I'd written one, even though doing so fills me with the very confidence I seem to have lost somewhere along the way.

I hope you enjoy the poem, knowing that it was *Psychologies* magazine that helped me find my light to be able to write it.

Mahmuda Chowdhury

The Thought of You

The thought of you makes me feel less alone Your smile, your spirit, your heart Reach out to me across the space between I hear your words, and your light Pours forth and finds me, though we're apart Illuminating the embers of my soul That have lain too long in shadow I feel myself ignite I feel myself come home

The thought of you gives me strength to face myself Too long I have been afraid to look within Ashamed of what I would find But what I saw, I forgave myself for Because of the kindness in your eyes

The thought of you fills me with hope
I now know things can always change
I had come so far into my endgame
I'd lost the dream of ever knowing your face
But you found me here
Thank God you found me here
And held me in your embrace

The thought of you is Salvation The thought of you is Grace

We'd love to know what you think

Read an article in Psychologies that rings true? Get in touch and share your thoughts at letters@psychologies. co.uk!

PHOTO FAVOURITES

Paddy power!

I've been a subscriber (and lover!) of Psychologies magazine for several years now, but Jackee Holder's column has been particularly motivating for me this past year.

In 2021, I documented a selection of the walks I did with my dog for each month of the year, and I'm now proud to be able to say, after three years in the making, I've finally written and self-published it! Here is a picture of the book, titled Walking With



Paddy – it's available on Amazon in paperback or Kindle format.

Thank you for so many inspiring articles, which I'm sure helped to give me the motivation and confidence to give writing and self-publishing a go!

Jo Cullum-Fernandez



The simple things

I'm so glad I found your magazine six months ago. I had felt very lost, after my usual magazine no longer fit me or my lifestyle. I stumbled upon your magazine, and it's like every page relates to me in some way – so thank you!

I take daily sunrise photos to capture the beauty in the everyday, which helps ground me and reminds me to enjoy the simple things. This amazing sunrise took my breath away, and I'm glad I got to share it with my daughter, who now looks for sunrises daily with me. *Emma Catchpole*

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



Vogue Williams talks to *Psychologies* about her sleep essentials, setting the scene for good self-care, and why she loves being up with the lark

WORDS: ABI JACKSON

ost people would shudder at the thought of a 24-hour flight. But not Vogue Williams. 'It kind of freaks me out, but I'm also really excited about it, because I've been very busy, and I can't wait to just sit and read, watch mindless TV, and eat for hours on end.

'I honestly don't remember the last time that I did that,' says the Irish model-turned-media personality, podcast host, and influencer, who is also mum to three young children. Along with her husband – the former reality TV star and now-entrepreneur Spencer Matthews – Williams is a parent to Theodore, five, Gigi, three, and one-year-old Otto. The couple met in 2017 when they both signed up as contestants on Channel 4's winter sports show, *The Jump*.

'I used to when I was younger, obviously,' she adds, of the prospect of having a whole day sat

down by herself. 'But now I have kids, it's not the same – I'm still up early, even if I decide to have a few drinks the night before. So now this is going to feel like a [pre-children] hangover day – without the hangover. I feel like I'm 22 again, having nobody else to worry about, which is great!'

Putting a quick-witted, humorous spin on things is what has made Williams' podcast, *My Therapist Ghosted Me* – which Williams, 38, co-hosts with her friend, comedian Joanne McNally – such a hit. She's about to fly to Australia for a live tour of the show when we speak, hence the 24-hour flight.

But while she's looking forward to indulging in some high-altitude 'me-time', what she's less thrilled about is the impact it'll have on her sleep; Williams is fiercely devoted to her bedtime routine.

'I have a ritual before bed,' she asserts. 'I need to read a book for a little while before I go to sleep;



I like to have a pillow scent; I light a candle; I have a face mask, earplugs, white noise – there's a whole routine just for me to lay down and relax!'

On a normal day, she could be in bed by half eight or half nine, she says. 'And I'm up at six every day. But I'm such a morning person; my kids always wake early, and I just like being up with the start of day.'

The early-riser mentality has always been there, reflects Williams. 'I blame my stepdad,' she says, 'because he worked from a very young age, and he was really focused on us getting up and getting stuff done. As kids, we would be up at seven o'clock, even at the weekend. We'd be doing chores in the kitchen, and then we'd be off hanging out with our friends. And, by the time I was 16, I had a job. So I've always started the day early.'

Williams' first job was working in a local shop, a consequence of asking her mum if she could have some new clothes. 'She was like, "Yeah, of course you can." And then a little bit after, she was like, "I've got you a job in the shop up the road so you can pay for them yourself."

'But I loved it,' Williams reflects. 'I love that I worked around the area that I grew up in. I used to work in a local restaurant and pub. And I still know most of the girls who worked there. It was a really nice place to work. It definitely gave me my motivation and ambition.'

As well as *My Therapist Ghosted Me*, Williams also has a podcast with her husband (*Spencer & Vogue*). Social media is a big part of her work, too, these days, often collaborating with brands, including her ongoing ambassadorship with Yankee Candle – an extension of her lifelong obsession with candles!

'My house is filled with candles – I've always loved them. I love the cosiness. I think whenever you're just sitting down, it's nice to dim the lights and have a candle on. I've done that ever since having my own house,' she says. 'And I love my candles when I get in the bath – I'm very good to myself like that!'

It comes back to bringing ritualistic elements into her daily routine; relaxing doesn't come naturally for Williams, so she's learned how to craft it into day-to-day life in ways that work for her.

'I can't just sit down and chill. I have to set myself up, and fragrance is a really important part of that for me,' she says. She also notes that staying active is non-negotiable.

'I'm consistent with my weekly training – I feel like it really is good for my mind,' says Williams, who recently launched a fitness platform – Flexy Fit – with an app due in the new year. 'For me, it's just part of my day – like getting up and having



"I'm
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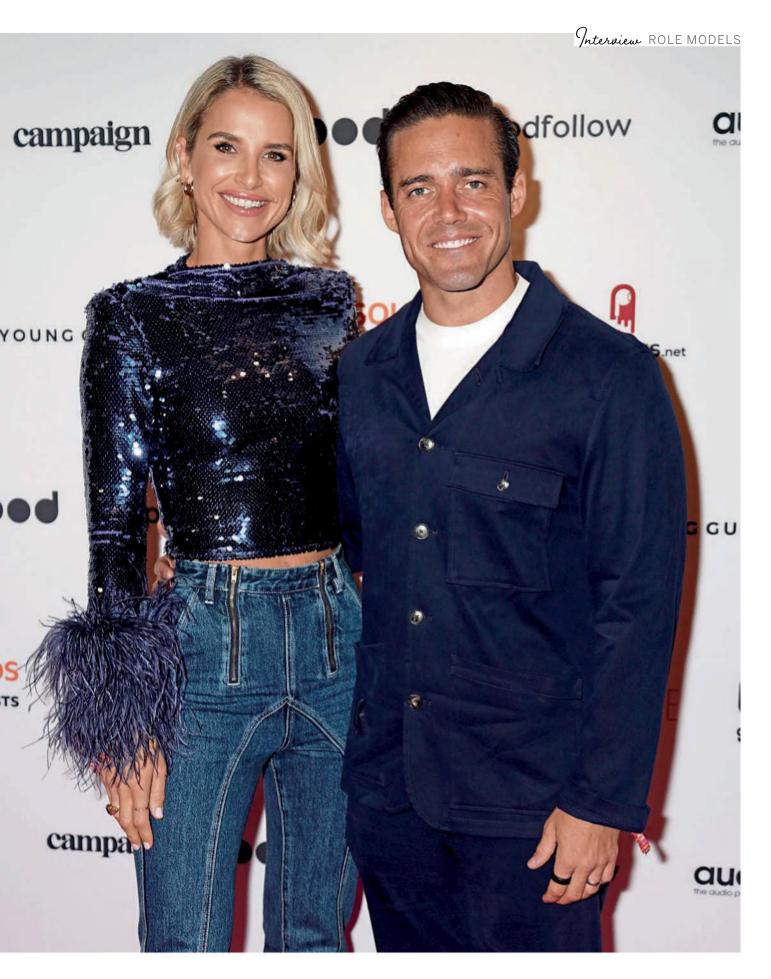
a shower. I plan out in advance when I'm going to train during the week – I look at my diary in advance, and just slot it in where I can. Being consistent and knowing that those are the days where I'll be working out is really helpful to me.'

Williams says she's 'always been really active' but now considers it an essential part of self-care, too – especially as, being someone who doesn't 'really sit still very much', she often needs to be mindful of spinning too many plates, to avoid hitting burnout.

'To be honest, I'm super-conscious of that, because I do tend to get anxious sometimes, so it's something I really try to keep on top of.'

And if she does sense the stress spiking? 'I just take a chill day,' says Williams. 'Spenny is really good if I'm like, "I can't do this; can you do that?" We're a team at home – and I think that's really important.'

Vogue Williams is an ambassador for Yankee Candle; vankeecandle.co.uk



Let it be

Harriet Minter buckles in for another year of highs and lows, but vows to enjoy the ride regardless

I don't know how 2023 was for you, but for me the word that would best sum it up would be 'frustrating'. I'd spent the year

be 'frustrating'. I'd spent the year before resting and restoring, after a stressful couple of years, so I'd bounced into 2023 looking for change and adventure. I got both of those. And I should have been more careful what I wished for.

This year has contained floods, parasites and pestilence, and that's just in *my* life, let alone the wider world. So I'm entering 2024 battered and feeling a bit helpless. I'm sorry, that isn't the cheery New Year message you're looking for, is it? But I also think it's helpful to acknowledge this sometimes. To admit we don't know where we're going or what we're trying to achieve; to admit that when faced with the problems of the world, we feel small and rather ineffective.

If you're also feeling like you should be madly making New Year's resolutions or jumping on the 'new year, new me' bandwagon, but you just can't find the strength, perhaps it will be helpful to know that you're not alone. And that, if more than 40 years on this earth has taught me anything, this feeling will pass – but only if you give it due care and attention

When we feel a bit rundown and overwhelmed, it can be tempting to fight against it. We see weakness not as something to accept but something to prove wrong – there's a lot of judgment around it. But what happens when we remove that judgment? Then, we can transform weakness from

something that has to be fought against into something that just is.

If I have one New Year's resolution for 2024, it's to try to find this sort of acceptance with all feelings. Rather than telling myself I have to get over it, when I'm sad, my aim is to just notice the sadness and be with it until it passes. Likewise, rather than questioning happiness or waiting for the other shoe to drop, I want to be able to just luxuriate in it.

According to the neuroscientist Dr Jill Bolte Taylor, most feelings only last about 90 seconds – just 90 fleeting seconds. So we might as well just be with them and see what's there. Because when we sit with our feelings and admit to them – as I have while writing this column – we find that they move through us. And, just like that, a new feeling takes the old feeling's place.



IMAGE: MARK HARRISON, HAIR AND MAKE-UP: CAROLINE PIASECKI STYLIST: KATE ANYA BARBOUR Secure your space today: www.wearelightbox.co.uk/forest-therapy-practitioner

LIGHT BOX LEADERSHIP

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Sarah, 2022 Graduate

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'I came into it at the beginning wanting to put it as part of the business but I think I've found so much more out of it to be honest. Been really powerful for me personally; physically and mentally, it's kept me in a good place."

Dave, 2022 Graduate

"To deepen ones own sense of nature connection and to facilitate this for others can be potentially life-changing."

Katie, 2022 Graduate

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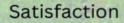




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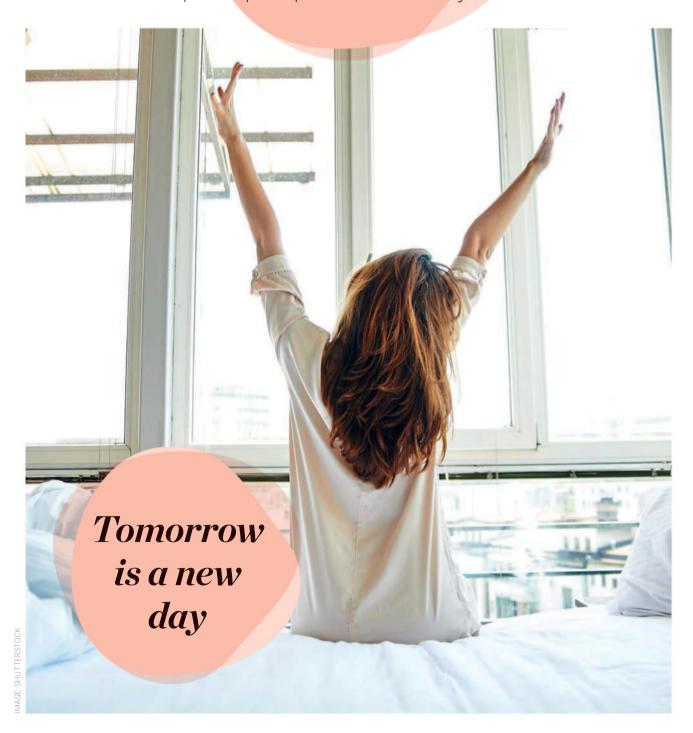








Inspiration to boost your happiness and confidence, plus simple steps to overcome anxiety and stress





here's nothing I love more than the promise held in a brand-new notebook; the infinite possibilities yawning before me in a multitude of blank pages. And the start of a new year is no different. For years I would spend the languid days between Christmas and New Year's Eve conjuring visions of a future self, allowing my mind to be filled with scenarios I wanted to find myself in during the coming months. Then I would commit these visions to action in a list of resolutions. The only

problem was that I never actually achieved anything. The resolutions outlined my desires: to learn another language; to get up early to exercise; to write a book... but year after year, this list became just a greatest hits of items I repeatedly failed to accomplish. Rather than being a motivating force, my resolutions were just another thing I felt I was failing at, and I would find myself forgetting about them entirely come Easter. By the time the following New Year's Eve rolled round, I would mindlessly recycle the previous

year's resolutions, whilst being reminded of what I *hadn't* done – not exactly the mindset I wanted to head into a fresh year with.

I'm not the only one who struggles to stick to New Year's resolutions. Health psychologist and psychotherapist Dr Sula Windgassen explains that many factors can influence how hard we find making a change to our behaviour. 'New Year is a funny period, which we consider to be a new slate; a chance to do things we ought to have been doing all along but haven't quite



managed to. We may assume this "clean slate" perception is enough to adopt the changes we wish to make, but the reality is that all the barriers to our resolutions that were there before, may well still exist.'

These may be practical barriers, or psychological ones, such as having an all-or-nothing approach to things. I'm certainly guilty of giving up on something when I haven't executed it to perfect standards or kept up consistency, a thought process that resonates with Dr Windgassen: 'The

"The reality is that all the barriers to our resolutions that were there before, may well still exist"

tendency to want to give something 100 per cent, otherwise we consider it not good enough, is an extremely demotivating mindset. When you don't meet that standard, you feel like you've failed, and this comes with a negative emotional experience, which reinforces your aversion rather than your motivation to do it. This is one of the biggest reasons new habits die hard.'

A few years ago, a friend suggested I ditch my rigid list of goals in favour of a practice she was introduced to by writer Susannah Conway, of adopting



Expert advice



Susannah Conway is an author and a teacher. Through her books and online courses, she is committed to helping people access their creative joy, and nurture a deeper, kinder relationship with themselves. susannahconway.com



Dr Sula Windgassen is a psychologist and psychotherapist with a special interest in how psychological approaches can improve physical symptom experience. Her reflective newsletter covers all things mind and body, and can be found via her Instagram:

@the_health_psychologist_



a single word that represents what you wish to focus your energy on in the coming year. Having done this practice for a few years now, what I've noticed is that selecting a word that supports my core values encourages me to make decisions that I otherwise wouldn't have.

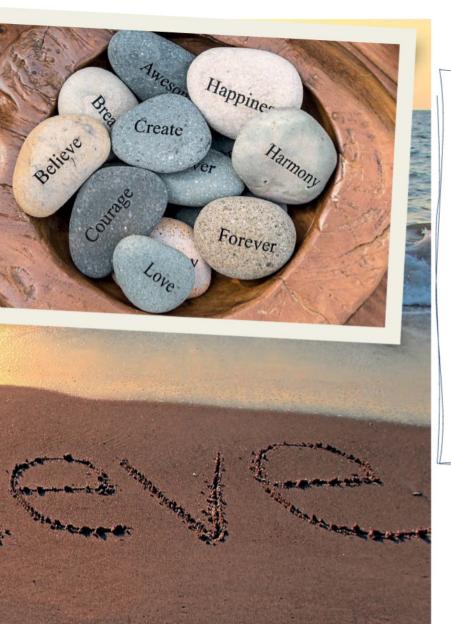
'Condensing resolutions into a single word gives us a clarity that multiple different resolutions don't. We can build the mental habit of checking in with this word in our decision making, which brings us closer to our values,' Dr Windgassen tells me. 'It also gives flexibility, which can reduce the likelihood of feeling that we are falling below a standard we have set for ourselves. When we come back to one

central focus, we reduce the competing attentional demands in our brains, providing more room for planning in place of decision making and problem solving. In short, we ready ourselves for action rather than thinking.'

The year in which my word was 'courage', I was invited onto BBC Radio to speak about a feature I had written relating to intersectional feminism and workplace bias – topics I care deeply about. In previous years, this would have been an easy 'no'. My introversion and anxiety would not have permitted me to see this opportunity as anything other than terrifying, and I would have declined, as I had done many other exciting but scary opportunities. When I reflected on my word, 'courage',

however, I felt empowered to accept. Being on radio was nerve-wracking, but I was surprised to find that I loved it. My word helped me realise that I was more capable of doing scary things than I had previously thought.

Like me, writer Susannah Conway has never been able to keep a New Year's resolution, which she also finds to be restrictive: 'You either keep them (do the thing) or don't (don't do the thing), and that's not inspiring, especially for me as a neurodivergent person — no wonder I never kept them!' she reflects. 'Choosing a word feels more expansive. Some years, I've lived and breathed my word and it's been constantly top of mind; other years, the word's been forgotten by March.



And that's perfect! It's not a strict practice, it's flexible. If I want a new word in the summer, I can choose one. If I want a phrase instead of a word, or three words, or no words, no problem. I get to create my own life. That said, I love this practice and haven't missed a year, yet.'

Having started blogging in 2006, Conway was inspired to begin this practice following conversations she had with others like her, who were passionate about creativity and personal development. She chose her first word for the year towards the end of 2008. 'I had no idea it would be the start of something I'm still doing now. The following year, I launched my first course and my word — 'visible' — turned out to be exactly the right one to support and inspire me as I built the foundations of my business.'

"We can build the mental habit of checking in with this word in our decision making"

Discover your word of the year:

1 Reflect on the past 12 months. How are you feeling as you look ahead? 2 Reflect on what's coming in the new year. Big events, hopes, plans, fears. Check in with how you feel about these. 3 Now ask yourself: what do I need more of? What do I need less of? Write down any words that come to mind. 4 Look back over your words. One of them might be 'the one', or may lead to other words that inspire you. 5 When considering what you need - for example, I'd like to have more time in 2024 – rather than choosing 'time' as your word, ask yourself: how would I feel if I had more time next year? Maybe your word could be 'spacious' or 'freedom' or even 'play'. 6 Finally, trust that you can't do this

exercise wrong - you can always

choose another word!

In the same way that a word for the year is guided by our values, making our resolutions more value-driven might afford us with a better chance of sticking to them, since they create a knock-on effect on how good we feel when doing them. My word for the year feels like an anchor rather than an imperative. It encourages me to reflect on what I need most going forwards. There are always parts of the year when I feel like I am not living in the spirit of my word; struggling with crippling anxiety the year my word was 'grow', feeling detached from a project I have longed to do when my word has been 'connect'. But rather than feeling as though I have failed, my word has helped me to reframe these moments and guide me towards finding a way forwards that I previously wouldn't have taken.

Each word comes with its own challenges, though having done this practice for a few years now, I see the challenges are part of the journey. The year my word was 'grow' was the year I finally sought help for my anxiety, rather than struggling on my own. Sitting with the discomfort of the detachment I felt enabled me to reconnect with my project, where before I would have pushed it away. I haven't yet settled on a word for 2024, but I know that I'll enjoy those days before the new year choosing one that is just right.



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"I have loved everything about this course and made so many friends along the way. The practice launch model works and as soon as I graduated I had 10 clients! I have finally found a career where I feel such a strong sense of purpose and helping people improve their health, and seeing the measurable results is life-changing for them, and us"

Debi. HCA Health Coach



"I loved the course and transformed my own health and vitality too; when I graduated I had 13 clients already and now I also run 12-Week Group Coaching Programmes Empowering Mums called 'The Powerof Now'. I love it. I would highly recommend HCA."

Candace. HCA Health Coach





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"My practice is fully booked with one to one clients, running mindful eating groups and corporate events; I get most of my clients through talks, collaborations and referrals. It's been such a rewarding journey and has completely changed my life. There are so many opportunities and different areas available to you, I have just branched out into running retreats. If you love health and wellness and really want to make a difference in this world, this is for you!"

Zena. HCA Health Coach

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Family ties In their first session together, the award-winning coach Kim Morgan helps her client Marsha* weigh up a sense of duty and the cost to her own desires

Session one...

arsha had been a delegate on a group coaching course I had run about making the most of retirement. At that time, Marsha had just retired from a long career as an HR professional. She was a vivacious and adventurous woman who wanted the next years of her life to be her 'golden years'. By the end of the course, she

had made many exciting plans for her future, including travel, study, painting, writing, wild-water swimming and charity work.

Some months later, I received an email from her, asking if she could have some one-to-one coaching with me. She was conflicted about something, and needed a sounding board.

We met for our first coaching session the following week. 'I need some help with a decision,' she said. 'I want some time to think without other people's opinions clouding my thoughts.'

I assured Marsha I would do my best to provide a safe space for her.

'I knew you would,' she said.
'That's why I'm here. I loved the retirement course. I left feeling so

fired up about my newfound freedom and plans.' Marsha paused before speaking again.

'But I think those plans have been scuppered! My daughter has asked me if I will look after my grandchildren before and after school, and in the holidays, for the foreseeable future. She and her partner are struggling to pay for childcare, and neither of them wants to step off the career ladder.'

Marsha looked at me and shrugged. 'I mean, what am I supposed to say? *No*?'

'Is "No" what you want to say?' I asked.

'If I'm honest, and being selfish, then, yes! I want to say that this is *my* time now. I'm in my 60s, and I don't know how many years I have ahead of me. I've worked hard all my life – I've been a parent; done the potty training, the school runs, the homework, and I don't want to do it again. I want to dance into my retirement and do all the things

I've waited decades to do. I want to enjoy my grandchildren as a doting grandma! I don't want to parent them, which will totally change my relationship with them. I want to say to my daughter, "Why did you have to put me in a position where I can't say no?"

I asked Marsha, 'Where is that response coming from – your head, your heart, or your gut?'

Marsha didn't hesitate: 'My heart, without doubt!' I asked, 'What is your head saying?'

'My head is still saying I don't want to do it. I've made plans, and *my* life matters, too. It's also saying that there may be another solution or a

> compromise to be found. Perhaps neither of us can have everything we want, but perhaps we can both have some of it.'

'And what is your gut saying?' I prompted.

Marsha exhaled deeply. 'Wow. My gut is shouting don't do it! Life is short and I need to make the most of it. But it's also saying there will be big emotional fallout from this. My gut is saying I will be judged by others: people will think I am selfish.'

Marsha slumped back in the chair, looked at me and shrugged. 'Do you see my predicament? I either deny myself or my daughter.'

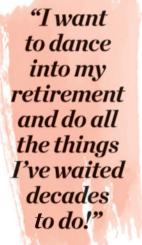
As the session was about to end, I decided to be honest with Marsha. 'I think maybe you are

"mind-reading" other people's reactions. Why not let your daughter know how conflicted you feel?'

Marsha agreed to think about it. As she was about to leave the room, she turned and said, 'They are not other people's judgments! They are my own. For all my wild talk, I don't know if I have the courage to put myself first.'

It was, what we call in the coaching profession, 'a door-handle moment', a last-minute revelation. I looked forward to picking this up with Marsha next time, but for now it would have to wait.

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





Work it out

Use 'head', 'heart', and 'gut' thinking when you are facing a big decision. The head is the rational brain, which involves analysis, weighing up pros and cons, and looking at the facts when making decisions. The heart is the emotional brain, which approaches problems through our feelings. The gut is the intuitive brain, which approaches decisions based on instinctive responses.

It is important to listen to all of them. Effective and thoughtful decisions usually involve a good balance of all three – enotional understanding, intuitive insights, and logical analysis. When contemplating a decision, write down your answers to these three questions:

- What does my head say?
- What does my heart say?
- What does my gut say?

You can also ask trusted friends for their thoughts and advice. Don't act on any of the responses immediately. Spend some time picturing yourself having made the decision, and noticing how that feels. Taking time to sleep on your decision can provide clarity and perspective, and allow your mind to process your head, heart, and gut responses before making your choice.

Decisions, decisions!

Think of something that you are considering doing and go through the following questions to explore the potential consequences of this decision. Write down your answers to each of the questions. Write the first thought which comes into your head; don't dismiss anything, even if you don't like what you are thinking:

- Will doing this keep the good things about my current situation?
- Are there any good reasons not to do this?
- How will doing this affect my friends, family, sense of self, and my lifestyle?
- What will doing this get me? What is the main reason I want to do it?
- What will doing this cost me
 financially or otherwise?
- What support will I need if I do this, and who will be able to provide that support?
- If I say yes to this, what am I saying no to?
- If I say no to this, what am I saying yes to?
- Is my decision coming from wisdom and courage, or from fear and doubt?
- What advice would I give to someone else if they were facing this decision?

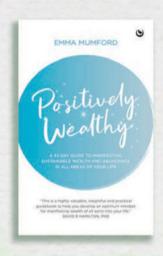
Read through your answers. How much clearer are you about your decision?

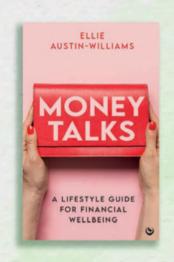
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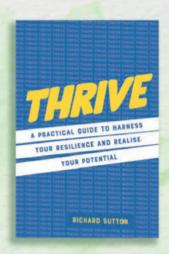
"Decision is the spark that ignites action. Until a decision is made, nothing happens"

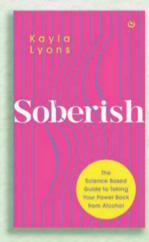
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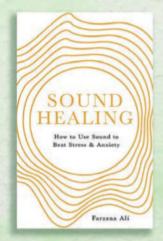
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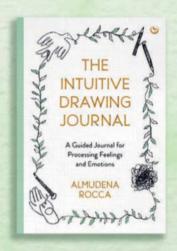


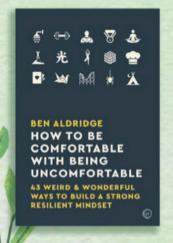




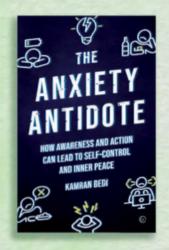


















Begin again

A new year is the perfect time to pause, reflect, and embrace the shared ritual of letting hopes for the future take flight, writes Kate Townshend

here is one time of year, every year, guaranteed to find me with tears in my eyes and a lump in my throat. Not because of any great grief or disaster for the most part – but because it's a moment where I inevitably find myself contemplating the course of my life, and most importantly, the people who are travelling along with me.

When I hear those oh-so characteristic bongs from Big Ben each 31 December, as one year trips over into the next, I feel time slipping through my fingers in a way that is far more visceral and tangible than in the normal course of my life. I am reminded that my time here is limited; I am reminded of the importance, however clichéd, of making the most of it.

That said, I know that if you're 'cool' these days then you're supposed to think New Year's Eve is tacky, overdone, and expensive. You're supposed to ignore it completely, if at all

possible, declaring that you hardly need some arbitrary calendar date to give you permission for a fresh start. Thus, in bars up and down the country, people gather on New Year's Eve to moan about the overblown drinks prices and the even more overblown expectations. The hardcore objectors

even get to boast about having gone to bed before midnight, because 'who can be bothered, really?'

But hiked prices and terrible TV aside, I still love New Year's Eve. I think those people ignoring it completely might well be missing out. And not just because the cold and dark of winter absolutely needs some of these bright moments to get us through.

In fact, the string of New Year's Eves across my life seem directly connected to one another – regardless of whether I've spent them in restaurants or at parties or cuddled up under a blanket on the sofa at home. It's as if New Year's Eve is its own realm; like a magical circle has been drawn around this brief respite to reflect and contemplate and be thankful.

I suppose what I'm trying to say is that the location matters less than the symbolism. There's power in the sense that we're banishing the mistakes and problems of the past. I have waved off poor decisions, bad

boyfriends and terrible jobs on 31 December. I have toasted the end of difficult periods alongside friends feeling similarly glad to see the back of any given year. And this symbolic drawing of lines really does seem to help when it comes to moving on from things that might otherwise continue to hold us back.

"There's power in the sense that we're banishing the mistakes and problems of the past"





In some ways, it's also a moment to shout the fact of our continued survival into the wind. Despite Brexit, Covid, the terrifying state of the world in general, and a host of more personal challenges, New Year's Eve is a time to be glad we're still here and enduring. It's a celebration of our collective resilience, despite all the losses that are also part of being human. And there's power, too, in the idea of a clean slate – of the chance to be wiser, healthier and happier in the year to come.

Setting goals for the year ahead is much maligned, but on one New Year's Eve many years ago now, my friends and I went around in a circle talking about the things we might hope to achieve in the coming months. Setting those

intentions felt significant and meaningful – almost like casting a spell on the future – a net to catch the things we wanted to see more of.

Transformation coach and author of You Only Live Once (John Murray Press, £14.99), Noor Hibbert, suggests that this isn't just about giving us the chance to set these intents or aims – it might actually give us a better chance of achieving them, too.

'When we set out intentions as a collective, we are holding each other accountable. Sharing our goals with friends, family, or online communities adds a layer of responsibility, motivating us to follow through on our aims and commitments. And it has been shown that accountability leads to a higher

chance of success,' she says. And, yes, maybe it is an arbitrary moment in time to consider such a new beginning or contemplate such new challenges, but the reminder that it's never too late to do things differently is an important one. Sharing that moment with lots of other people contemplating their own changes only magnifies its meaning.

'These rituals create a sense of unity and connection among people, transcending borders and differences,' agrees Hibbert. 'Knowing that countless others are making resolutions alongside us fosters a feeling of togetherness and a sense of shared purpose.'

I think it's this idea of connection, especially, that explains why I also find New Year's Eve – particularly that



midnight moment – so moving. It makes me acutely conscious of the network of bonds tying me to the people I love – and to humanity in general. No matter where I am or what I'm doing, as well as kisses and hugs for the loved ones I'm with, I always make a point of texting my mum and my sister. I want to carry those bonds with me into the new year. As Hibbert puts it, 'One of our basic needs is a feeling of love and connection, and times like New Year's Eve fulfil that need at an unconscious level.'

Maybe this is why a joined-hands rendition of *Auld Lang Syne* is also an important part of New Year's Eve for many people – an explicit acknowledgement of our reliance on each other and a nod of remembrance

to the friends and loved ones we can't be with – for whatever reason.

Because, in the end, New Year's Eve is a ritual - and I think we could all do with a little more ritual in our lives when it comes to making meaning. In fact, in embracing all the symbolism of New Year's, I've also started to embrace symbolism and ritual at other times of the year, too. In recent years, I've taken to marking out the summer solstice often with a river or sea swim at sunrise. Making a point of noticing this turning point with my own little ritual somehow seems to stop the feeling that life is passing me by. It makes me actively reflect. It makes me actively grateful. And although we're not religious, my husband and I recently chose to have a

naming ceremony for our baby boy in place of a christening or similar. We wanted to mark our gratitude for the gift of his little life and to deliberately illuminate the beautiful community of friends and family who we hope will continue to support him as he grows up.

So even if the commercialism of New Year's Eve puts you off, I'd urge anybody to give the idea of a moment to wave goodbye to the old and hello to the new a second chance. You don't have to go the whole hog(manay!), or the parties or the fizz – unless you want to, that is. But knowing that you're part of a whole host of other people thinking about how to make the coming year better? That's a really rather lovely way to mark the passing of time.





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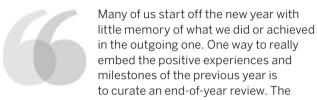
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Write and reflect

Tap into renewed positivity and use the power of the pen to pick out and appreciate the best bits of your year, writes Jackee Holder



selection of prompts below has been borrowed from a list generated by US psychotherapist Margaret Robinson. I've found them to be an excellent writing tool to ensure that journalling does not become a repetitive loop of rumination and worry but, instead, a way of demonstrating how writing down your responses can move your self-reflection towards concrete, practical actions. Try this series of prompts for a laser-focused new-year review:

- Where were you this time last year? The key to mining this prompt is to get specific with your reflections. Ask yourself what happened this time last year that was wonderful and meaningful. What was unexpected, harmful, or worse? When were you at your best, and what were you doing then? When were you at your worst, and what were you doing then? Highlight the key moments in your year that respond to this collection of prompts. The elixir in mining these end-of-year questions lies in tracking the details, the patterns, the seasonal changes and triggers. As you work through them, note how you are feeling, and what you are noticing and discovering about yourself.
- Why are you doing what you are doing? What's your purpose? These questions are often luminous at the start of the year. Your end-of-year review will give you space to check in on how well you have lived out your purpose over the past year. How well have your values been expressed? How well have you kept on track with living out your values? What are the principles you will focus on this year, and how will you put them into action? I was unexpectedly surprised when I reviewed my year, which brought home how my value of kindness had been played out in abundance in numerous ways over the months. Had I not completed the review in writing, these acts would have been easily overlooked and forgotten.
- Finally, try this batch of prompts to synthesise your takeaways. What have you learnt? What do you



still need to learn? What is the overarching lesson or big takeaway? Set aside five minutes and write a letter to yourself where you give wise counsel and encouragement on how best to approach the year ahead. What will you commit to? Name how each action will play out in real time when turned into practical, concrete steps.

Remember, you can ease yourself into the start of the year by carving out small pockets of time to work through the prompts. Journal before you start your day, at your desk at work, in a coffee shop, or just before bed. You don't need to write for hours to gain benefits and insight.

When I applied them in my own journalling I unravelled a very sad time last year, as we mourned the tragic death of my older sister. But by going deeper in my responses to the prompts, I also remembered the happiest moments too. One specific remembering was where I went off in the summer on a self-led writing retreat for two weeks, and how soul-satisfying that time with myself and my writing was. It also rekindled a memory from the outgoing year I hold close to my heart: the experience of my 90-year-old mother's trip to London from overseas, visiting her tribe, and how much love and grace my mother's presence bestowed on our family.

Think of your end-of-year review as your own personal writing ritual, allowing you to make sense of the past and make space for a more glorious future. I'll leave you with a final thought for the new year:

• What are your wildest, most daring dreams? Remember, writing changes lives, and lives can be changed and transformed by writing. Become the curator of your best life. jackeeholder.com; @jackeeholderinspires



Mirror nature's slow unfurling and tiptoe gently into January – it's a time to recharge, replenish, and dare to dream, writes Annabel Chown





ne January, a decade ago now, I kick-started the new year with a 21-day raw-food cleanse. I'd heard a wellness guru extol its many benefits: improved skin and digestion, sky-high energy levels, and weight loss.

For three weeks, I lugged salad, green juice and dehydrated mushroom and almond burgers to work. Sometimes, between meetings, I ate lunch on a damp bench in the London drizzle, shivering. I'd watch people stream into warm cafés, and I'd fantasise about poached eggs on buttery toast and hot, sweet, milky tea.

When it was over, I was grumpy and exhausted, my digestion sluggish. And, thanks to all the avocados, nuts and dates I'd consumed, I hadn't lost a single pound. Not one.

It was a good lesson in the value of turning inwards, and listening to what's right for us, rather than blindly following what someone else swears by. It also led me to question whether January is even the right

time to start something new. In the northern hemisphere, January is typically cold, dark and gloomy. December's sparkling lights, carols, and festivities have vanished, and spring is still but a distant dream. Plus, Christmas itself, with its frenetic preparations, and the intensity of family gatherings, can leave us feeling drained.

So, nowadays, I treat January as a prelude to the year instead. A time to take inspiration from the natural world, still deep in hiber nation, rather than being lured into pounding a treadmill after work, under the glare of fluorescent lights. Now, the cold and darkness are an invitation to go slow and replenish. I cook soup, take Epsom salts baths laced with essential oils,

and often get into bed at 8pm with a hot-water bottle and a good novel.

And I use January to reflect on what I want to bring into my life during the rest of the year. Ideas bubble up. Yet I question whether I'll ever have the get-up-and-go to take action. Surely, I'll want to be cossetted under the warmth of my duvet forever?

I forget that we, like the natural world, are cyclical. We're meant to have quiet, fallow periods where we lie low and recharge, and ones where we're fizzing with focus and inspiration. Can we trust this ebb and flow and remember that, even when our outer world is quiet, dreams are being conjured up in the depths of our psyche, just as seeds are germinating beneath the surface of the winter soil?

For the Celts, early February signified the first murmurings of spring. They celebrated with the ancient festival of Imbolc, on 1 February, the midpoint between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. With the air softer, the days longer, and the first crocuses bursting through the earth, I sense a shift within myself, too. And I know I'm ready to begin my year.





is the headline we're fed, January after January. So, it's easy to be seduced into believing it's time to upgrade to a new, improved version of ourselves.

In the past, my list of resolutions has included: go to the gym four times a week; lose a stone; find a boyfriend; learn to speak fluent German. All while working 60 hours a week. Not surprisingly, I regularly reach the

achieved a single goal on my list.

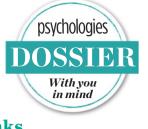
Selina Barker, a career and life design coach, and creator of the guided journal Goodbye 2023, Hello 2024 (Project Love, £16.95), says, 'There is something beautiful about a new year. It's a fresh chapter in the story of our life, and a great opportunity to honour the end of one year and welcome in the next.'

'But,' she continues, 'New Year's resolutions are often quite generic and don't involve much self-reflection. You

on people's lists. Plus, they're often entwined with perfectionism and the belief we're not good enough as we are.'

I ask Barker how we can use the clean slate of a new year in a more nourishing way. 'For a start, it's helpful to reframe our language,' she says. 'I prefer the word intention to resolution. It's softer. and doesn't necessarily involve a fixed goal or outcome. It might be that you want to bring more of a certain quality into your life, such as playfulness.'





Give thanks

'We can also be very impatient to move onto the next thing,' says Barker, 'and fail to acknowledge and give ourselves praise for qualities such as courage we may have harnessed to get us through a tough year. Doing so is an act of self-love and part of developing a kind, respectful relationship with ourselves.'

Barker recommends we also write down the most important lessons we learnt from 2023, along with everyone, and everything, we're grateful for. 'When we ground ourselves in gratitude, we approach life from a place of abundance, rather than one of lack. This makes us more likely to believe in, and go for, our dreams.'

Dr Tara Swart, a neuroscientist and author of the bestselling book *The Source: Open Your Mind, Change Your Life* (Ebury, £13.99), emphasises the importance of choosing goals we feel magnetically pulled towards by our head, heart and gut, rather than ones we think we ought to be pursuing because that's what society tells us to. 'A classic example,' she says, 'is the pressure many women in their 30s feel to meet someone and have a child. That path isn't for everyone.'

Follow your bliss

Find ways of pursuing your dreams that feel as pleasurable as possible, Barker adds. 'Otherwise, you're likely to give up. If you're looking for a partner, but loathe online dating, the odds are you're not going to have a great experience with it, which might reinforce the belief there's no one out there for you. Instead, find activities you enjoy where you might meet someone, such as at a walking club.'

As Barker says, deep down we all want to feel fulfilled and connected, rather than be on a never-ending mission to better ourselves. 'Ask yourself what ingredients you can add into your life to support you feeling joyful and alive. A new year is an invitation to fill your life with as many of these as possible.'

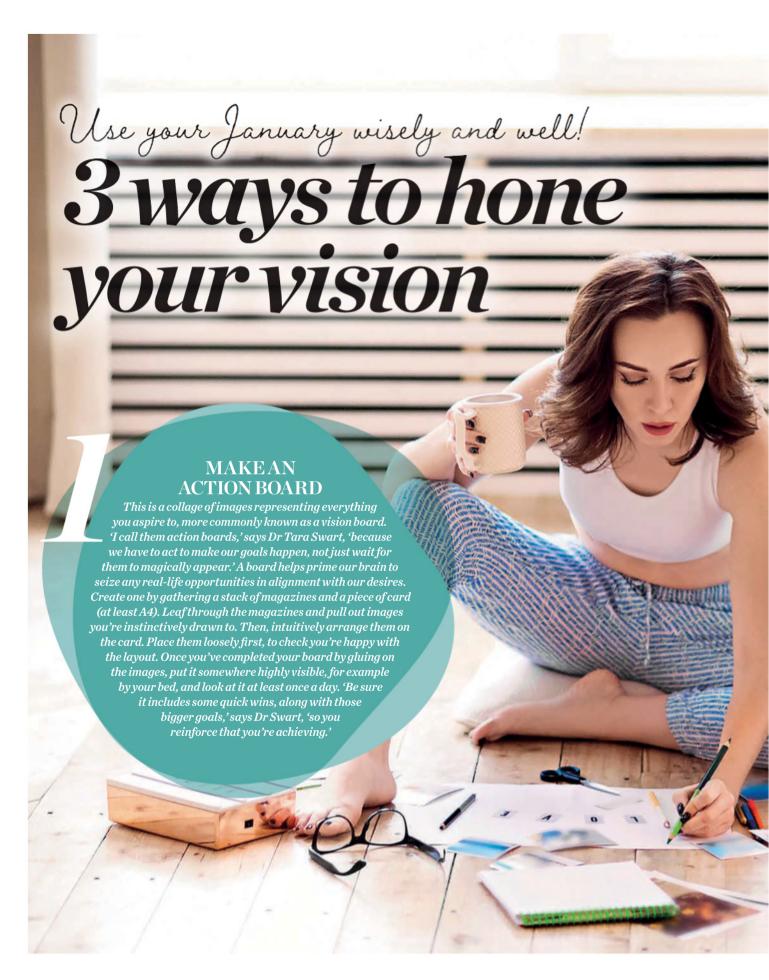
Write it down

To discover what we want our 2024 to be about, Barker recommends journalling. 'This helps us get closer to ourselves,' she says. 'First, go back over 2023. Write down a list of what happened: your milestones, challenges, the things that went well, and the ones that didn't. It can be helpful to do this with your calendar beside you, to remind you of what you *actually* did.'

Reflecting on the past year informs us of what we need from the one ahead.

'For example,' she says, 'it was only when I looked back over my 2022 that I realised what a draining year it had been. Which is how I chose "Fill my cup" as my intention for 2023.'

When I journalled about my own 2022, a year I'd assumed was a bit of a nonentity, I found it empowering to realise several small shifts had, in fact, happened. Had I not put pen to paper, I'd have overlooked this. Doing so helped me step into 2023 with greater trust and optimism.







4 ways to nourish yourself

I have way more mental and physical energy to pursue my dreams when I'm grounded and well rested. When I'm exhausted and depleted, I stumble through my day, attending to only the bare essentials. 'Taking care of your body and mind – by getting enough sleep, whole foods and movement – sets a foundation in place,' says Dr Swart, 'from which you have far greater capacity and energy to build your bigger dreams and projects.'

1. REST

Try Yoga Nidra, a guided supine meditation, also known as 'yogic deep sleep', which eases you into complete mental and physical relaxation. For me, just 20 minutes in the middle of my day is a gamechanger, especially if I haven't had enough sleep. There are lots of free practices online. My favourite is Richard Miller's iRest, available on YouTube.

2. WALK

Take a 35-minute walk, ideally before 8am. Exposure to bright light first thing improves our mood and increases our energy, as does movement. This is especially important in winter, when lower light levels mean our bodies produce more melatonin (which makes us feel sleepier), as well as less serotonin, a mood enhancer.

3. COOK

Visit a farmers' market and see what you're drawn to – perhaps the orange globes of pumpkins, or the deep green, crinkly leaves of kale. If you're not sure what to cook with your purchases, follow your intuition, or search online (or the index of your cookbooks) for ideas. As you cook, savour the process; be it the feel of your knife sliding through potatoes, the aroma of sautéing sage, or the sight of dark-purple raw beetroot transformed into a ruby-red soup.

4. CONNECT

Friendship is fundamental to our physical and mental wellbeing. Connect, via phone or in person, with those friends who are your cheerleaders; the ones who believe in you and are rooting for you to realise your dreams. And dare to share these with them.

Dream big, ACT SMALL

Forget about the finish line and inch slowly forwards to the future, celebrating each step along the path

s humans, we have a unique and magical ability to dream things up, and turn those dreams into reality,' says Selina Barker. Yet, while we might have a clear vision, transforming it into concrete form isn't always straightforward. We might begin by pursuing our dream with a burst of energy and enthusiasm, only to grind to a halt a few weeks later – partly because our pace is unsustainable, but also because, as a culture, we're results-hungry. We forget that gestation can take time.

Both Barker and Dr Tara Swart emphasise the importance of not overwhelming ourselves, and choosing a maximum of three things to focus on at any one time, and setting out to do these for three-month stretches, rather than a whole year.

Dr Swart recommends we make small changes in our habits, in support of a big dream. 'Say you want to get pregnant. Start by creating some micro-habits. For example, take a daily fertility supplement, or cut back on partying and get more rest, so you can put your body in an optimum state for

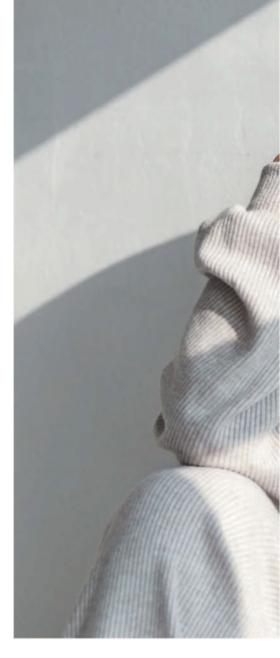
conception. Once you've created two or three of these, then add a couple more.'

Even with the best intentions, most of us will, at some point, slip up in the process of building a habit. Which can leave us despondent, and feeling like we've failed ourselves.

'While our brains have neuroplasticity, it's important to understand how this works,' says Dr Swart. 'A huge amount of physical work goes on in our brain when we try to change a habit. Neurons are literally connecting up with one another and creating new pathways. It can feel like a real struggle, and often we do have to start over again and again. But eventually you reach a tipping point, when the new pathway is strong enough to become habit. So don't give up when the going gets tough. Understand this is part of the process.'

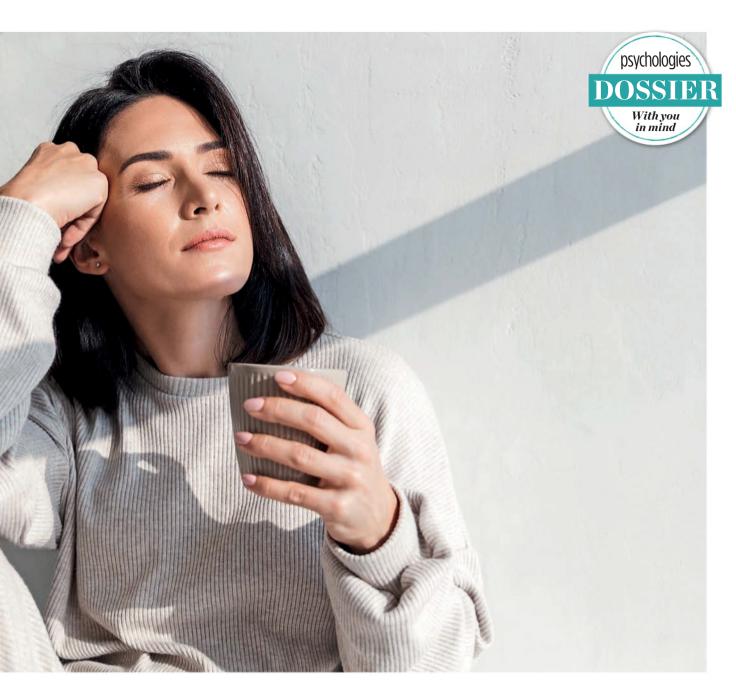
So how long does it typically take to change a habit? 'It very much depends on what you're trying to change,' says Dr Swart. 'Something like trying to drink more water can usually be achieved in a couple of weeks. But something such as regulating your emotions might take several months, even a year.'

"Remember to praise yourself for any wins, however small"



When we falter, it's easy to berate ourselves. But, as Dr Swart says, our language impacts our brain. 'If you're constantly telling yourself you're not worthy and can't stick to anything, your brain will believe that story. Conversely, by speaking kindly to yourself – as you would to your best friend or sister – and saying, "You're capable; I trust you can do this," you're reinforcing that narrative. And remember to praise yourself for any wins, however small.'

Dr Swart also recommends using accountability to help build new habits. 'There are many ways you can do this,' she says. 'For example, sign up for a



language class with weekly homework, go running with a friend each week, or join a writers' group.'

'Even just voicing what you're going to do, and having a monthly check-in call with a good friend, can be really powerful,' adds Barker.

While turning some dreams – such as taking up swimming or painting – into reality are largely within our control, others (finding a new job or meeting a partner) are less so. What about when we reach the end of a year and something we've longed for is still just a vision, despite our best efforts?

'Having dreams you try your hardest to make happen, yet don't, is part of the journey,' says Barker. 'It's tough, though. You need to grieve, rather than shut down and become resentful. And once you've taken a breather and licked your wounds, you might be ready to come back to it.'

While we might desire a dream to come to fruition over the 365 days it takes the earth to orbit the sun, it's worth remembering that everything has its own timeline. Which is sometimes far slower and more circuitous than the one our impatient minds crave.

I began each new year of my 30s single, hoping to meet a partner.
By the time I turned 39, I was close to giving up. Then, on a freezing night,

12 days into January, I went to meet a man I'd been messaging via the dating website I'd been a member of for almost three years.

'The odds are this'll come to nothing,' I said to my mum, as we chatted by phone on my walk from the Tube to the bar we'd arranged to meet in. Little did I know that, waiting in its dimly lit interior, was my future husband.

When I find impatience simmering in me, I turn to these words by the poet John O'Donohue: 'The beauty of nature insists on taking its time. Everything is prepared. Nothing is rushed. The rhythm of emergence is a gradual slow beat always inching its way forward.'

Align with the year's cycles

Embrace the ebb and flow of the year, and determine to pursue your passions even when conditions aren't perfect

ach year has its seasons, as do our lives. 'What we need to feel good in February is different to what we need in June,' says Barker. 'Our commitments also change over the year. Which is why I suggest people check in with themselves every quarter – at the end of March, June, September and December – and see what they want to focus on for the next three months.'

During swathes of 2024, you might find yourself steeped in a particular season of your life, be it early motherhood, a new career, or grieving the loss of a loved one. All of which take up huge reserves of time and energy. Or your year might have its ebb and flow, where certain months require your attention to be focused on one particular thing.

August is when I'm a full-time parent to my young son. As much as I adore him, I found the first year doing this frustrating, and craved time alone at my desk, writing. This summer past, I decided to surrender to it, and embrace the rhythm of days with my son. We ambled around

London, enjoying the Tate Modern, Borough Market, a narrowboat trip along the canal, and bagels on Brick Lane. And when September arrived, I seized my new-found time with both hands, recognising how precious it was.

Penny Wincer is the author of Tender: The Imperfect Art Of Caring (Hodder & Stoughton, £9.99). She is also a single mother to two children, one of whom is autistic and has learning difficulties. Previously a photographer, she changed career to become a writer and non-fiction book coach. 'I needed to work from home, rather than be constantly away on shoots,' she says, 'in order to be there for my son, whose needs increased as he got older. Writing was something I'd always done.'

In spite of the many constraints on her time, Wincer has built a successful career doing something she loves. I ask her how we can create time for what matters to us, even when there's not much going spare.

'First, look at how you actually spend your time,' she says. 'Log it for at least a couple of days, and ideally a week or two. Break down your 24 hours into 15-minute increments and write down everything you do. Be really honest with yourself, even if you feel uncomfortable about something, such as how much TV you watch. Once you're aware of how you use your time, you can discern between what's negotiable and non-negotiable. Then, ask yourself what's important to you right now. How do you want to invest any negotiable pockets of time?'

Wincer emphasises paying ourselves first. As I know too well, it can be easy to squander an hour catching up on emails, then not get round to the thing I really want to do, like writing a blog post. 'Imagine filling a glass jar with rocks and sand,' she says. 'The rocks represent what's most important to you, the sand what's least. If you put the sand in first, the rocks won't fit. But put the rocks in first, and the sand can slip in around them.'

When I logged my time, I noticed how, each evening, I spent some of it mindlessly scrolling on my phone. This wasn't valuable to me, whereas daily movement is. To make space





for it, I had to ditch my scrolling and go to bed earlier, so I could carve out 30 minutes in the mornings before my son was up, and when my energy levels are high. Some days I only end up with 10 minutes spare, and it's easy to think I won't bother. But I've learnt that even a couple of sun salutations shift my mood.

Rather than abandon small slivers of time, look to fill them with what matters – whether it's drawing a quick sketch, meditating, or scribbling down a few lines of a story. And, remember, along with weaving something beautiful and meaningful into our lives, they will have a cumulative effect.

'Create appointments with yourself,' says Wincer, 'and treat them with the same respect you would a work meeting. And if you live with others, tell them that what you're doing is important and they're not to disturb you; sometimes even our partners don't realise what things mean to us.'

While there's value in cultivating a degree of discipline, as Wincer reminds me, it's not our most powerful driver. 'People are always saying, "You must be so disciplined". But the reason I get so much done is because I choose things that bring me joy. Which, in turn, generates discipline.

'And if you're resisting doing the things you want to do,' she adds, 'it's worth asking yourself why. The stories we tell ourselves are often personal as well as cultural. But they're just stories. Remember, no one except you is going to give you permission to do what you love.'

Giving ourselves this permission is true self-care; something that's often relegated to soaking in a bubble bath or getting a pedicure. Can we keep showing up for ourselves and our dreams even when the conditions aren't ideal? As we step into 2024, let's channel our determination not into the harshness of unnecessary reinvention, but into loving ourselves enough to keep walking towards what we truly long for.



psychologies.co.uk test

WHAT WILL HELP YOU GROW THIS YEAR?

If you know unrealistic resolutions don't work for you, take our test to identify the simple mindset tweak you need, instead, to feel your best this year

Tick the answers that most closely apply to you, then add up the symbols. Read the section, or sections, you ticked most, to find out how to start the year right

1 Your usual resolutions are about	5 Next year, you'd like to feel less	♦ Making a to-do list
♥ Working on your weak spots	Responsible	Asking what everyone else
◆ Doing something meaningful□	• Stuck	is doing
● Finding a sense of direction	◆ Fragmented	■ Not having time to make them!□
■ Making more time for yourself□	♥ Disappointed	
		9 You'd like to overcome your
2 A life well-lived means	6 In moments of clarity, you	tendency to
◆ Making the most of every day □	know you	♥ Self-criticise
■ Taking every opportunity□	♥ Expect too much	◆ Overthink
■ Being a good person	◆ Worry too much	Procrastinate
♥ Being your best self	Miss too much	■ Take over
3,	■ Take on too much	
3 In low moments, you feel		10 Next year will be a success
♥ Weary	7 People tell you that you need to	if by the end you feel
♦ Worried	◆ Give yourself a break	◆ Calmer and stronger
● Wound up	• Treat yourself	■ Like you know yourself□
■ Worn out	Look after yourself	Like you've enjoyed life
	♥ Be less hard on yourself	▼ More content with what
4 You'd like daily life to feel more	•	you have
♥ Satisfying	8 Your usual way of making	
◆ Calm	resolutions is	Turn the page to find
● Inspiring	▼ Researching courses you	the key to making the
Uplifting	could do	most of this year





What mindset will best support you this year?



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♥

Grateful

You may be aware that there is much to appreciate about your life – and that you've put a lot of effort into getting to this point – so it can be frustrating when your default mindset is stuck on discontent. Those with high standards often worry that getting too complacent will mean they no longer have the motivation to grow. You may be itching to make plans for the coming year but, before you do, try focusing on adopting a grateful mindset instead.

A daily gratitude practice is about giving more mental airtime to what is going well, or aspects of your life that bring you joy, and it can be one of the most powerful antidotes to the mind's natural negativity bias. It's also about assessing what really brings meaning, ensuring that any future plans are a continuation of what's gone before, and building on your strengths, talents and hard work. As a bonus, you might find that your mood lifts, as a regular gratitude practice helps build resilience against challenges and setbacks. It doesn't need to be an onerous task - try scribbling in a gratitude journal once a day, downloading a gratitude app, setting up a gratitude-sharing group with trusted friends, or simply mentally running through a gratitude list last thing at night.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ◆

Grounded

If you've spent most of the past year feeling overwhelmed, the only New Year's resolution you should be making is to feel more grounded. What you need most right now is breathing space. When life feels out of control and feeling uneasy has become your default emotional state, it's clear something has to change. But the first and most important step is giving yourself a chance to rest and recuperate. Sometimes we don't even notice when we've been running on empty and operating in survival mode until we're low and exhausted. And when you've reached this place, it's hard to find clarity about what really matters to you.

It may be that you've been hooked on change in the past or the feeling that you need to do and be 'more' before you can feel like you've made the most of your life. But the key for you now is to ground yourself by shifting your focus from 'doing' to 'being'. Aiming for a grounded mindset starts with taking as long as you need as the new year begins to recover and rebuild your resilience. Put planning on hold and simply focus on being present, noticing what is going on inside and around you. When the time is right, the path ahead will reveal itself.





IF YOU SCORED MAINLY

Open

When life is generally ticking along okay, but a part of you yearns for something more, don't put yourself under pressure or give yourself a hard time if you're unsure about what exactly it is that you really want. In our eagerness to make change happen, we often skip the most important stage: understanding where we are right now and where we want to be. Your key mindset shift for the year ahead is letting go of the urge to plan and feel in control and, instead, being present and curious, and – above all – open to opportunities and trying new things, or just doing things differently.

It might take courage to let go of your normal list of goals and resolutions, but remind yourself that this is not about doing nothing – it's about discovery. Can you step into observer mode and treat the coming year as a series of experiments into what feeds your soul and what depletes it? Don't be surprised to find that what makes you happiest is something that's already present in your life – it's easy to overlook what's under our noses when life is filled with busyness. Openness always starts from a place of calm. Devote enough time to pause and relax every day, then watch as your natural curiosity, clarity and compassion returns.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY

Lighter

When you're naturally conscientious, the weight of your responsibilities can creep up unnoticed until it weighs heavy on your shoulders and impacts your mood and wellbeing. But stepping up and getting stuck in can become such second nature that you may not be aware of how often you voluntarily add to your load. You may have always been happiest to put others first or get involved with a cause you believe in. But a sure sign you've taken on too much is finding yourself fantasising about running away, or simply giving everything up and starting from scratch. This year, you have one resolution to make, and that's to live lighter. Adopting a lighter mindset can take a conscious effort to switch the lens through which you view both yourself and others.

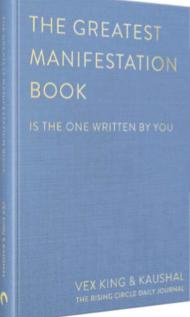
It might take a leap of faith to trust that you will still be loved and valued if you put yourself first for a while. It's also about letting others step up and show you what they're capable of. A lighter mindset means allowing space for laughter and for your natural sense of humour, too. Although you may worry that people will judge you for taking a step back, deep down you know you only need permission from one person to change your life: yourself.

Embrace the new year

Commit to better self-care for mind, body and soul in 2024, with our round-up of the best health-giving buys

PAN **MACMILLAN**

Explore the transformative power of manifestation with The Greatest Manifestation Book (£22, Bluebird), from bestselling author Vex King and social media star Kaushal. In this beautiful, cloth-bound journal, daily activities, affirmations, and gratitude prompts are thoughtfully designed to help you combat self-doubt, set meaningful goals, and live your best life.



Omega 3 is probably the single most important supplement you can take. Research shows that

a diet rich in a high-quality omega 3 may protect the brain from aging. Paradox Omega 3, 6 & 9 Fish Oil capsules bring together the well-documented health benefits of both the Mediterranean and Arctic diets in one stabilised high-strength omega supplement, to maintain a healthy brain and boost general wellbeing. £9.99, paradoxomegaoils.com

FOR TEENAGE

HRI HERBAL MEDICINE

HRi

This unique formulation for spots and acne has been tailored to the life stage of teens, with live cultures for gut health, and B vitamins for hormone balance and energy. HRI Teen Skin contains 26 premium ingredients, with and specialist skin formula in one. £13.50, available at Superdrug and Amazon

BETTERYOU

BetterYou's Vitamin D + K2 Daily Oral Spray is an optimumstrength vitamin D supplement, delivering 3000 IU of vitamin D alongside 75ug of vitamin K2, to support a healthy immune system, healthy bones, and blood clotting. Offering a fast,



effective and convenient alternative to tablets and capsules, the easy-to-use spray delivers both vitamins directly to the bloodstream, via the inner cheek, for enhanced absorption. Certified vegetarian, palm oil, and palm oil derivative free, the tasty pill-free supplement is contained in 100 per cent recyclable, planet-friendly packaging. £10.95, betteryou.com

Paradox





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



TOUTH THE



A new year brings with it resolutions, an opportunity to start afresh.
After weeks of consumption and a house full of wrapping paper and

and a house full of wrapping paper and mince pies, I breathe out a contented sigh when it is all cleared away and rooms are stripped back. I love Christmas as a space in the year to hunker down and jump off the hamster wheel, but I am becoming more and more uncomfortable with its impact upon the planet, and aware of the privileges I have that others don't.

The past year has been another one of draining battles with broken systems, a poorly child, and frustration that I am not able to work more. But it has been one of gentle determination and fierce love, and that is what I will take with me into the next year. I want to remember: conversations I have had with my daughters around the dinner table; our little grey tabby cat draped around a child's neck; the white wings of a barn owl; my mermaid striding across a stage on legs that are now strong enough to take her wherever she wants to go; a room full of people listening to words I have written, and knowing that those words mean

something to them; closing the chapter on one home and beginning to a build a new one; the view from my loft of a distant strip of sea; a bright crescent moon hanging outside my window.

It can feel helpful to use the turn of the year as an opportunity to reset and refocus. The word resolution can be defined as something settled or resolved, a decision to do or (importantly) not to do something. Resolution implies completion, and the older I get, and the more unfinished I feel, the more I wonder whether this concept works for me. If I have learned anything over the past few years, it is that life is messy. Perhaps the hardest

"Resolution implies completion, but the older 7 get, the more unfinished 7 feel"



lesson I have learned is that sometimes we only need to sit quietly and trust that life will happen, just as the tide will disappear and then return.

It is easy to feel helpless at the moment, crushed by Government inaction on the climate crisis, and sickened by worsening conflict across the globe. I often think that my own worries about my children, work, health, and finances are insignificant compared to the state of the wider world. But I also know that each of us are connected - I'm reminded of this by the grief I feel at the loss of a species, or a baby thousands of miles away in a war zone. I know we are connected because every year I wait for the pink-footed geese to arrive from Iceland and the barnacle geese to arrive from The Arctic, and every year they come. I know we are connected because I listen to my daughters asking questions about children on the other side of the world, and I search for ways to give them hope.

Our society is obsessed by measurement and achievement, desperate for visible signs of growth. Living a life that can sometimes feel close to the edge has forced me to reconsider 'achievement': in our house, where two of my children have experienced periods of chronic illness, achievement is measured in health. Right now, I want to feel that it is enough that we are quietly thriving in our own way, but I'd be lying if I didn't admit that I feel the pressure to be more shiny and bold. I'm frustrated that I expect more of myself than I do of my family or my friends, that it is still hard for me to recognise that I am enough. The problem with New Year's resolutions is that they can compound this feeling, when what I really want is for someone to kindly tell me to slow down.

The huge problems facing our world today have been fuelled by a human craving for more, a desire for growth. Whilst it is certainly true that I want to continue to learn and evolve, I think perhaps it is time I stopped thinking that I need to be more, do more. Maybe I am finally starting to realise that the act of just being, with a gentle awareness of all that goes on around me, is quite enough. I have used a lot of energy trying to understand other people's negative behaviours, when perhaps all I needed was to stand still and match them with kindness. So much to learn - but for now the world keeps turning. This year, I won't subscribe to the definition of resolution that implies completion: I am a work in progress.



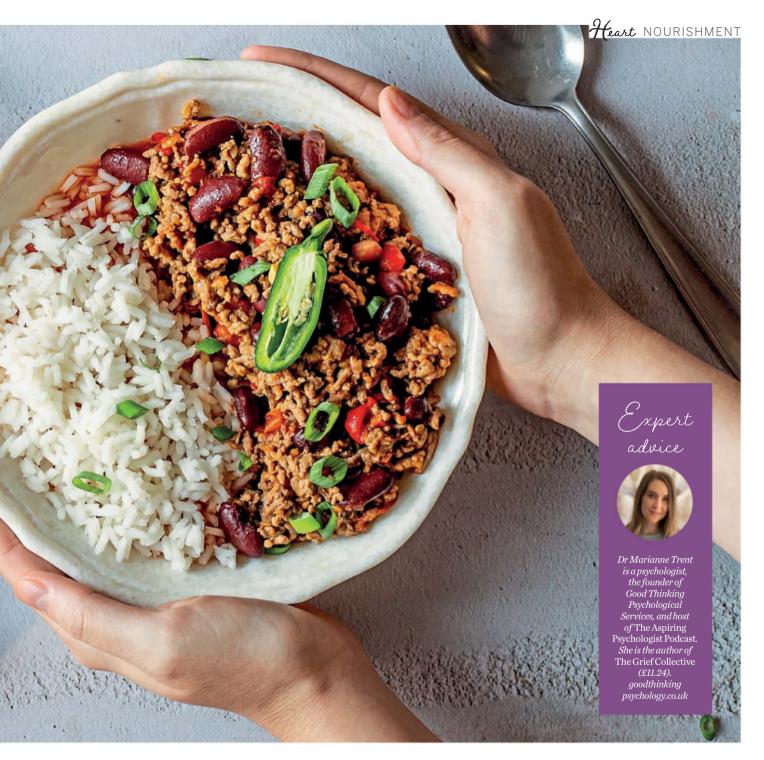
onfession: I have a love/hate relationship with feeding my family. I love the satisfaction that fizzes through me when I watch my children lick their plates clean after a favourite meal. But I hate the monotony of weekly meal planning for a family of five, especially now that my food budget goes less far than it once did. Having been a parent for more than 18 years, I feel I've exhausted almost every avenue I can think of

when it comes to creating nutritious, inexpensive meals that the whole family – two of whom are vegetarians, just to keep me on my toes – will enjoy.

But, recently, torn between the urge to nurture my family with a nourishing meal and the compulsion to spend time on the sofa with a book instead of in the kitchen, I asked my 17-year-old son what he'd like for dinner. As a committed carnivore, he's always campaigning for more meat on the

menu. But I think he'd also happily live on ham sandwiches and Pot Noodles, so specific meal requests are rare, especially when he can see I'm looking for permission not to cook.

On this occasion, however, he responded without hesitation. 'Chilli con carne, please, Mum.' I don't know what prompted this – perhaps I had made chilli the week before, after a period of it falling out of my meal repertoire, and he was keen to reprise



the red-meat feast. But, inwardly, I sighed. Chopping onions and shopping for kidney beans were not the tasks I had in mind for the afternoon ahead. And so I dithered. I contemplated talking my way out of fulfilling this request.

I don't recall what changed my mind. Or how I felt as those moments on the sofa slipped away from me. I only know that, later, when I handed my son a warming bowl of homemade chilli, his response turned that small

transaction into something that left a lasting deposit in my soul.

Too corny? Perhaps. An onlooker certainly might have thought this was just a bowl of food, produced on demand to feed a hungry son. In fact, it was a gesture rich with meaning. There was nothing special about the food itself – a basic recipe and simple home cooking – but as he ate and conveyed his thanks, I felt a deep satisfaction swell within me that's not

always easy to locate in the hectic years of raising teens. It can sometimes be a thankless task. Conversation may be scarce, and connection can seem lost. But food, even when prepared and offered somewhat reluctantly, can become a sort of language that helps to restore a little of what life takes away during the hustle and bustle of family life.

I ask Dr Marianne Trent, a clinical psychologist and author of *The Grief Collective* (£11.24), why this is so. 'Our







"What a privilege it is to have the means to make something that helps a person feel loved"

desires not to cook at all, or just to do something quick and simple, can have a variety of root causes, from tiredness to a need to retreat, and more,' she explains. 'But sometimes, when we least expect it, we can experience what systemic therapy describes as a "magic moment" – something that helps us shift our perspective or our connection to a situation.'

'A common precursor to this is when someone offers us a viewpoint or option we weren't previously contemplating, and then something marvellous happens as a result,' she continues. 'When we shut down all other options, instead, we take the risk of making our lives that little bit less magical as a result.'

I can't even remember what my son said or how the conversation unfurled between us, but I know that the moment afforded me a precious lesson: always make the chilli. I want to caveat that with 'if you can', to make space for all the times when dishing up something to satisfy a loved one's whims isn't possible; some days you iust can't make the chilli, and there's no shame in that. Please don't take from this a heavy sense of obligation - that would be to miss the point. There are no tickets for a guilt trip on offer here. It's just that I think we often overlook the impact that something as simple as a bowl of chilli, delivered at the right moment, can have. On another day, when appetites were different, perhaps that meal would have passed by without leaving any trace in my memory.

But, that day, I was reminded what a privilege it is to have the means to make something that helps a person feel loved and fed – not just physically, but in every sense of the word. And, of course, it doesn't have to be a meal. It could be an unexpected gift.

A thoughtful note. Even a text prepared slowly, created like a bowl of homemade chilli, rather than tossed hurriedly at someone like a fast-food order. These small gestures can become, by some inexplicable process that I don't think physics can explain, a nourishment that satiates someone's quiet hunger.

Within the scope of your talents and capabilities lies the means to bestow a blessing on the ones you love. Strangers too, if you feel so inclined. Perhaps consider this the gentlest of reminders. Don't wait to be asked. Resist the temptation to share your gifts only in designated ways or seasons. Ask the equivalent of 'What would you like for dinner?' and throw yourself, headlong, into fulfilling whatever the request is that returns to you. Watch out, too, for the times you rob yourself of the opportunity to be a nourishment. A whole afternoon on the sofa with a book would not have imprinted itself on me like that batch of chilli did.

Note that this isn't an encouragement to door-mattery; the world doesn't need more handmaids who lose themselves in the service of other family members. I'm just saying that, sometimes, in saying no or not opening ourselves up to the inconvenient requests of others, we risk robbing ourselves of the chance to give something that will give back to us more than it costs us to create. And this, I think, is the truth behind the confusing adage that it's better to give than to receive.

If, as you read this, a scenario comes to mind where you have the chance to make the chilli – even if the task itself is one you might happily avoid – my best advice is to open the recipe book. Chop the onions. Shop for the kidney beans. Whenever you get the chance, if you can, always make the chill.

Our agony aunt, Dr Martha, offers a different perspective on your problems

How can I lighten the gift-buying load?

Before we were married, I used to buy my own gifts and cards for my husband's family, both at Christmas and on birthdays. Now, we get presents that are from both of us, but my husband doesn't help me or get involved. The whole load of gifting for my husband's family (and my own!) now lands on me. I'd like to share the responsibility in a way that feels more fair. What might that look like? How do other couples navigate present-buying?

Gifting shows another person that you are thinking of them or want to celebrate them, and when there is good give and take, a thoughtful gift can be part of expressing appreciation for another person. Some sociologists have argued that we only give gifts to those we want to have a relationship with. However, gifting is also loaded with pressure. It creates a 'debt balance', so when we offer a gift to someone, there is an expectation that this needs to be reciprocated in the future.

I wonder if you have had an open and curious conversation with your husband about gift-giving for his family. Some things you may want to consider talking about include:

 How he feels about you taking charge of gifts for his family. Does he feel grateful, or relieved? Is it something he happily avoids, or

does he think you enjoy it and doesn't want to interfere?

- What would happen if you decided to stop? Would he willingly take over? Would this put an end to the gifting between you all, and, if so, who would be most upset about this - if anyone?
- Does your husband show appreciation towards his family on their birthdays in ways that don't necessitate getting them gifts?
- How would your husband's family react if they found out the gifts were all from you? How would your husband feel about them knowing this?

Understanding your husband's thoughts and feelings in this way can open up new possibilities about how to share the load of gifting across the year, or find a solution that works for both of you. Perhaps you can agree who buys what for whom, or book in a day in Deiros Collado is a psychologist with more than 20 vears of clinical and academic experience, and is *the author of* How To Be The Ğrown-Up (Transworld, £16.99).

Dr Martha

Got a question for Dr Martha? Email letters@psychologies. co.uk, with 'Martha life' in the subject line.

the diary where you can go shopping together, or discuss with your extended family about a different set of rules around gifting (for example, some families will not do gifts on birthdays, but instead splash out on a fancy meal or experience together once a year). There isn't a one-size-fits-all ideal

- find what works for you.

If we think of gifts as a symbolic communication of our connection to another, it may help you to remember that the gifts you buy and choose for your husband's family say a lot about the relationship you have with them. This may or may not be something you want to change, and it's worth thinking about. Your husband's family may not be aware that the presents they get on their birthday are from you, but having someone as thoughtful as you is a true gift in any family.



Do I need to parent my 'only child' in a different way?

I have an only child, and people often comment about them being at risk of becoming spoiled, selfish, or unable to socialise. I have never wanted any more children, but now I'm worrving about how I can make sure I am raising my child in the right way.

Firstly, I want to say I am deeply sorry that anyone would make comments about your choices as a parent. These ideas about 'who' your child may be are projections of the person's anxieties and discomfort, and are woefully ignorant.

Negative perceptions about only children can be traced back to 1850 in the UK, with problems believed to originate in the home, where they supposedly experienced too little contact with other children, leading them to be 'over-indulged'. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the concern was that only children spent too much time with adults, making them 'spoilt'.

Recent research has dispelled these myths, however, and shown there are no significant differences between children who have siblings and those who don't, when it comes to sociability, generosity, and confidence. In fact, some studies report that only children may be more confident, emotionally resilient, and have a better quality of life. But these findings cannot be separated from the context of most of this research taking place within middle-class families. What we can say with clarity is that only children are much more like other children (who have siblings) than they are different.

The truth is, it's not the number of siblings a child has that shapes them into the adult they become. It is their connection and relationship with their parents that has the greatest influence on their development. So, if you want to raise your child well, keep focusing on the relationship you are building with them, and get curious about who they are, why they do what they do, and what they are trying to communicate and express. Learn to accept your mistakes as a parent and offer your child repair when you get things wrong. Parenting is messy, and raising your child right is going to look different for everyone, but at the core of everything you do is love for your child. Love, however, is imperfect, so let go of the pressure to get it 'right' or to parent your child differently because they don't have siblings and, instead, enjoy the parenting journey with them.

The stereotypes about only children may sadly persist while the social and cultural expectations of our society are to have more than one child. I often remind myself that it is a privilege to have a child, and there is no amount of love or attention that can spoil a child to become selfish, lonely, or bossy. So love your child as hard as you want, because that will only strengthen their connection with you, which will hopefully be maintained throughout their childhood and adult years, too.



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ello

The start of the year can sometimes feel like it's already lost its shine off the back of the Christmas sparkle - but the perfect way to sprinkle a little

joy into your month? A subscription to your favourite magazine! And what better month than January to kick off 2024 with a dose of inspiration, encouragement and support? Psychologies is packed full of creative yet simple ways to bring about small changes that will make a big difference. We provide the tools for you to do the work: expect cutting-edge authors, experts and therapists, as well as real-life reader experiences. The best part about a subscription? It's hassle-free! Meaning you can enjoy your much-loved features and discover new ideas without leaving your house. That's a great way to start the year. Acting editor,

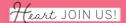
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anna Williamson

Refresh or restart?

he start of the year brings with it a renewed sense of purpose for the 12 months ahead, not least when it comes to our relationships – and not just with a significant other. It's a time to reset our aspirations, and after the gluttony of Christmas, is often accompanied by a commitment to turn the spotlight inwards and show our mince-pie-filled selves some love (I speak for myself here!).

I slightly raise my eyebrows at New Year's resolutions, however – I believe that goal-setting should be tangible, realistic, and approached with the long game in mind (typically, nearly 50 per cent of people quit their resolutions by the end of January!). But, that said, this early part of the year is a key time to commit to working on yourself and on your relationship – if you're in one.

In recent years, January has been given the rather sombre title of 'unofficial break-up month', with 11 December also cited as a key date for couples to part ways. The aftermath here often plays out over the following weeks, becoming a defining factor of New Year. There are no definitive reasons behind this, but it is largely assumed that leaving one year behind and entering a new one comes with wanting to make necessary changes, to avoid limping into the next year saddled with the 'same old issues'.

If you're among those who have found themselves unexpectedly single this New Year, and you're feeling in emotional limbo, then my heart goes out to you. Remember that time really

does heal; it's essential to 'grieve' the loss of a relationship, and it's important to go at your own pace, and take baby steps in the right direction. A word to the wise: if you are finding social media unhelpful during this period of transition (people can be very nosy about personal situations), consider limiting your use of it at this time, or coming off it altogether. In addition, pay good attention to your self-care with regards to nutrition, exercise, and maintaining a positive mindset (this is key to good mental and emotional health). And take the opportunity of the extra downtime that comes at this time of year to book in joyful things to do with the people you care about.

If you've made it through the testing Christmas period intact as part of a couple, however, it's an important time to really focus on you and your partner, to safeguard your relationship for the year ahead – and, one would hope, indefinitely.

Plan to strengthen your relationship and put strategies in place to ensure it is prioritised. From spending more time together, to making a commitment to being more honest and open, there are plenty of things you can come up with together to ensure your relationship is robust for at least the next 12 months. Here's how:

- Make time to date. One of the most common things to peter out in a relationship is dating. Just because you are in a couple, it doesn't mean that you can't enjoy the thrill and excitement of dates. Whether it's a day activity or a romantic evening out, make a commitment once a month, or whatever feels reasonable, to find ways to enjoy each other's company. Why not take turns to surprise the other with the date of choice?
- Step up intimacy. Being intimate isn't all about sex in fact, that's only a small part of being romantically, physically, and emotionally intimate. Holding hands, a stolen kiss on the cheek as you walk past each other, a cuddle on the couch first thing in the morning... think of ways that you can show your partner you love, care, and are attracted to them and then put them into action!
- Say thank you. It really is such a simple word, but it can have a very positive impact. Don't underestimate the power and importance of a smile and showing gratitude, even for the smallest of things. It will make your partner feel appreciated and valued, which in turn boosts their own feelings of happiness and positivity.

New Year is a new opportunity. So, whatever your situation, go grab it with both hands and make the very best of it. I'm wishing you all a peaceful and prosperous 2024!







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

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

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

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

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

Licence to help

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

contact Ollie School for a prospectus and to talk about getting with the programme.

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



Get in touch

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







TOUTH THE POST



MINDFUL WELLNESS



Psychologies wellness director – mindfulness expert and yoga teacher Ali Roff Farrar – shares expert advice and holistic ideas for an inspiring new year...

Mindful routine

Struggling to fit meditation into your day? Set up your new year meditation goals with these tips from personal growth expert Vishen Lakhiani, who shares six steps to incorporate meditation into your daily routine. Based on his own practice, The 6 Phase Meditation, he says: 'Meditation is simpler than many believe – all you need is yourself, somewhere comfortable to sit, and 20 minutes.' Ready? Let's start at the beginning...

- Approach with fresh eyes Throw away what you thought you knew about meditation. Dive in as if it's your first time.
- Choose the ideal time
 Timing isn't just a detail; it's
 a fundamental part of your
 meditation practice. 'I like
 mornings,' says Lakhiani,
 'as it sets a tone of calm and
 intention, not just for yourself,
 but those you interact with
 throughout your day.'
- Communicate your meditation needs to others It's a good idea to let whoever you live with know when

and where you'll be practicing meditation, and politely ask them not to disturb you.

- Choose a place to practice 'My personal preference is to sit upright in bed as soon as I rise,' says Lakhiani. 'Whatever you choose, make sure your spine remains straight and relaxed, and your head is unrestricted. If you lie down, you might drift into sleep.'
- **Movement** Don't suffer through any form of discomfort during meditation in the name of doing it 'properly'. Feel free to move when you need to.
- When your thoughts wander... The 6 Phase Meditation is a gift for minds that wander unlike other practices, it doesn't discourage thinking, but channels it to benefit overall wellbeing. It's not just about clearing the mind, but transforming thoughts into actions.

Access The 6 Phase Meditation on the Mindvalley app, or listen to The 6 Phase Guided Meditation for free on the Mindvalley Youtube channel

Fresh start

'We often welcome in the New Year with a hangover for company,' says Mani Norland from The School of Health. 'Try a soothing ginger-lemon detox tea, then rehydrate with coconut water for electrolytes and antioxidants. Milk thistle is good for liver support, while homeopathic nux vomica is a great hangover remedy, and is also useful after rich foods. Meanwhile, lycopodium and carbo veg are indispensable for bloating and general internal rioting! To beat the January blues, indulge in sunlight exposure for mood-lifting vitamin D, or consider a supplement. Then give your serotonin levels a lift with a little dark chocolate!' schoolofhealth.com

"The new year stands before us, like a chapter in a book, waiting to be written"

Melody Beattie



Turmeric and chilli kimchi

This is just one of many variations of the South Korean phenomenon kimchi. Take a spoonful or two, every day, with your main meal to improve digestion. It's worth making plenty at once – just remember to use it up within two months

MAKES 300-400G

- 1.2 litres cold water
- 60g sea salt
- 600g green cabbage, cut into thick strips
- 8 carrots, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 20g fresh ginger
- 4 garlic cloves
- 4 small whole red chillies
- 1 tsp turmeric powder
- ½ tsp chilli powder
- *I* Make a brine by mixing the water and salt, and stir well.

2 Put the cabbage and carrots in a pickle press if you have one, and cover with the brine. To keep it submerged, screw the lid down just a little. Allow to soak for a few hours, or overnight. If you don't have a pickle press, put the vegetables in a bowl and weigh them down by resting a plate on top.
3 Meanwhile, finely chop the ginger and garlic. Drain the soaked veg, reserving the brine. Mix them with the spices and add the chillies.

4 Put this mixture back into the pickle press or bowl and add enough brine to rise over the veg once you press them down. Screw the lid as much as you can, or, if using a plate, put something heavy on top of it. The vegetables must be submerged in the brine the entire time during fermentation.
5 Check every two days and remove any foam or mould spots that might appear on the surface of the brine, which is totally normal. Allow to ferment for at least one week – the best taste develops after four weeks. When the veg is done, transfer into

jars, cover with brine, and keep in the fridge.

Extracted from Fermented Foods For Everyday Eating (Ryland Peters & Small, £14.99)





Do you dare to go dry?

Looking for better sleep, brighter skin and improved mood? 'Research shows that taking a month off alcohol leads to reduced blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes risk, as well as lower cancer-related proteins in the blood,' says Dr Richard Piper, CEO of Alcohol Change UK. Here are his tips for having a successful Dry January:

- Write down your 'why' Think about how drinking makes you feel and what you're looking forward to most from staying sober, such as losing weight, reducing anxiety, or saving money. Write down your reasons to stay motivated.
- Make a plan Decide beforehand what you're going to do to get through any upcoming events or emotional states that would normally have you reaching for a drink. Whether it's sticking to alcohol-free alternatives or practicing what you'll say if you're offered a drink, make sure you have a plan in place.
- Encourage friends and family to join you This can be a great motivator and help to keep you all on track. Even if no one wants to take part, it's important to have a support network in place people who won't pressure you into drinking, and to encourage you if things feel tricky.
- Treat yourself Many of us use alcohol as our go-to way to have fun, de-stress or treat ourselves. This is a great opportunity to break the association. Instead, have or do something else you enjoy.
- Download the Try Dry app.

Sixty-seven per cent of people who use Alcohol Change UK's free tools, such as the Try Dry app, have a completely alcohol-free month, (compared to 33 per cent who try to go dry on their own during January). Those who take part also have significantly improved wellbeing and lower alcohol health risks six months later. Backed by behavioural science, Try Dry helps you to track your units, calories and money saved, and much more! Visit alcoholchange.org.uk



Matural touch



And, breathe...

During winter, when buildings are tightly sealed to keep the heat inside, indoor air quality can deteriorate, especially if there are indoor sources of pollution (including the use of certain cleaning products, cooking, burning candles, and smoking indoors). If not properly ventilated, these factors can significantly impact our indoor air quality. So why does it matter? A 2016 study* found that poor indoor air quality had a significant negative effect on cognitive performance, including decision-making, strategic thinking, and crisis response. Conversely, improved air quality can have a positive influence on cognitive abilities. Try giving your indoor air a 'morning shower' by opening the windows for a few minutes to allow fresh air in, and place a snake plant, known for its air-purifying skillset, in your high-traffic rooms.

of people say they feel happier, and 21 per cent feel more peaceful, whilst listening to birdsong**. It's a great way to connect to nature, and studies have found that spending just two hours in nature per week is associated with higher levels of wellbeing[†]. Learn the different sounds coming from your garden at chirps. pure-audio.com. Pure audio is giving away a bird house with each sale of its waterproof Woodland outdoor speaker, as well as donating all profits until the end of the year to the Woodland Trust.

Ditch the 'good girl' act...

Have you tried all your life, with or without success, to be 'good'? To please everyone, to be perfect, to never fail, to put others, always, above yourself? But to what detriment? Our mental health: relationships: power? 'If we're busy worrying about the length of our hair or



how likeable we are, we're not going to pose much threat to the status quo,' writes Rebecca Seal in her new book Be Bad, Better: How Not Trying So Hard Will Set You Free. Within this exciting idea, she invites us to ditch the 'new year, new you' resolutions and, instead, embrace our 'bad bits', and consider how they can have a positive effect in our lives. Covering ideas from how laziness can improve your relationships, to why your body is, and has always been, absolutely fine, to why it's helpful to feel angry, this is an antidote for anyone feeling burnt out from trying to always 'do better'.

Be Bad, Better: How Not Trying So Hard Will Set You Free by Rebecca Seal (Profile Books, £14.99)

We love these yummy little immunity gummies with echinacea, propolis and vitamin D3. They're so tasty, taking vitamins will never feel like a chore again! Zohi Immunity, £16, zohi.co.uk





By the book

A study by Sage Publishing has found that people who spent 20 minutes a day writing about their best possible future self increased their sense of wellbeing (lasting three weeks after the journalling exercise). Five months later, the participants also demonstrated decreased health issues and illness! Red & Pink Diary, £15, oliverbonas.com

Bit of a stretch

HEALTHY HABITS

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



January is a blank page, fizzing with potential to be 2024's thrilling first chapter. For the less caffeinated, it's an opportunity to reset and start again. Last year transpired in unintended atrophy, so this year, I want to prioritise getting stronger; a bit more tone,

a bit more resilience – mentally as well as physically. But I have to accept that despite an ongoing quest for quick-fixes, habits aren't formed overnight. Studies show it can take months for a new behaviour to become ingrained. Last year's strategy of scribbling '3x workout a week' on my to-do list proved fruitless, with an ongoing refrain of 'but there's not enough time!' whenever it failed to materialise.

Despite spending hours a week teaching Pilates, I don't do it myself. Demonstrations in class are short-lived and decreasingly impressive, so it's time to practice what I preach. Aside from mechanical benefits, such as better joint mobility, strength and flexibility, the mental ones are just as appealing. I've missed the calm and groundedness that results from an improved mind-body



connection. Pilates is a smart way of moving, adaptable and modifiable to suit everyone; it can be rehabilitative or fiery, to suit the needs and mood.

As for time, pockets of it do exist. It's not appealing but not impossible to prise myself out of bed 30 minutes earlier than usual and hit the mat. All it would take is a little more willpower and a little less phone scrolling at night. By spring, it might even be a habit. And who isn't a better person when they feel good in themselves? Better at what they do, better at being nice to themselves and those around? It might not be instant, but by sticking with it, the effort is far outweighed by the reward.





ALL OVER YOUR BODY

Greta Solomon explores how our bodies tell the stories of our lives, and finds that accepting how we feel helps us accept how we look

n holiday with my daughter last summer, in the resort's splash pool, it struck me: the shapes, curves, and sinews of the women around me spoke volumes. They told of late nights with babies; surgeries; work worries; and high-impact gym sessions. They spoke of striving and stagnation; indulgence and restriction; and the traumas – big and small – that our bodies pack away because our lives can't hold them.

Yet, who hasn't wished for lean legs, or delicate ankles, or upper arms without a hint of wobble? So many of us wish for the ideal, when research has shown that our bodies are ours for a reason.

In fact, according to Dr Ken Dychtwald, author of the much-celebrated book Bodymind (TarcherPerigee, £12.99), your emotions and personality can affect how weight is distributed in the body. Because the body and mind are so intricately linked, emotions can get stored in your muscles, which eventually affects your body structure.

In essence, your history and personality are written all over your body.

For many of us, that's where the rub begins, because who we want to be is not who our bodies say we are. The good news is that psychoeducation – arming yourself with in-depth knowledge about body and mind wellbeing – can help you break free from body judgment.

Eating your feelings

'Stress changes the nervous system, which can affect the metabolism.

So, it can influence your body shape and weight distribution,' explains

Trauma Release Exercise (TRE) trainer Deborah Brown. It can help to think of the body as a protective shield, trying to keep you safe. It interprets chronic stress (which happens over an extended period) as danger, and so it keeps producing cortisol. This causes the body to release more glucose, so that you have the energy to gear up for a fight, or run away.

The problem is that life's dangers
- whether it's a bullying boss, a tricky



WHAT IS YOUR BODY TRYING TO TELL YOU?

Dr Dychtwald observed many people who underwent Rolfing (a therapy that involves extremely deep massage using the knuckles) and found that people were literally carrying around emotional baggage. For example, he found that when people were massaged in their upper back, they tended to release a lot of anger. Here's the lowdown on what he found

Overall body shape

If you have a bigger lower half, you tend to be a 'feeling' type of person, who is more grounded and homely. In contrast, if your upper half is bigger, you tend to be more expressive, social, and outgoing – someone who takes quick action.

Shoulders

Your shoulders carry the burdens and stresses of life. Rounded shoulders can indicate that you are taking on too many responsibilities, while raised shoulders are associated with fear.

Arms

The arms are associated with your ability to reach out and take hold of life. So, if your arms are weak, or flabby, you may feel a sense of powerlessness in your relationships. Muscular arms can indicate a lack of sensitivity, while tight arms may signal an inability to easily focus.

Legs

Muscly legs can show that you've been 'holding on' and have become rigid in your ways. While if your legs are untoned, you may have trouble initiating action.
Slim, tight legs are associated with 'go-getting' energy.



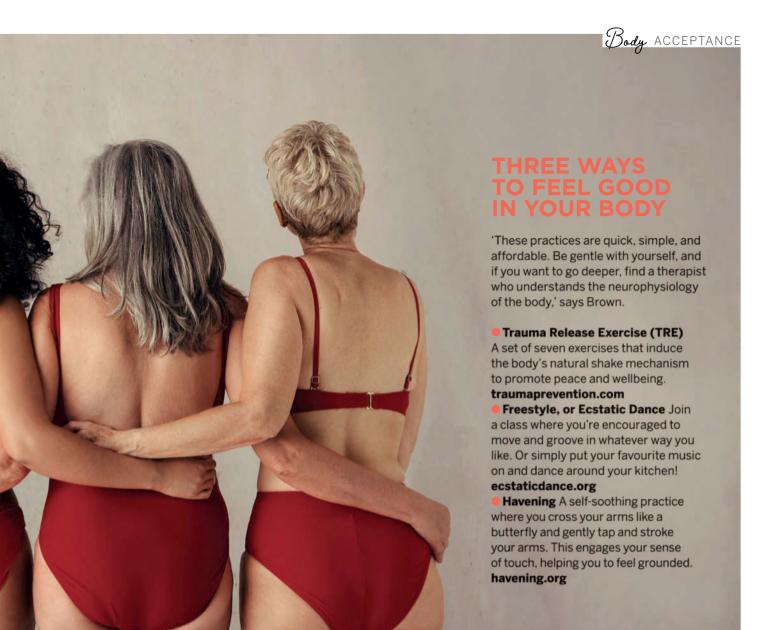
neighbour, a financial crisis, or a loss – can't be released by a quick sprint, or a fist fight. Often, you can't escape the difficult situation, and so the body keeps releasing glucose, which gets stored as fat – frequently around the abdomen.

'Cortisol also affects ghrelin (known as the hunger hormone), which increases your appetite. At the same time, it can make you less sensitive to another hormone called leptin, which is responsible for making you feel full,' says Brown. That's when the pull of the biscuit tin can take over.

'When you have chronic stress or trauma, willpower becomes void,'

explains Brown. 'People think there's something wrong with them because they can't stick to a diet or exercise plan. But the parts of the brain and body involved in the stress response aren't rational, or logical.'

These subconscious happenings become a merry-go-round of mind and body reactions. 'When you're feeling frustrated, irritated, or angry, that's your nervous system's fight response in action. In contrast, flight is more about anxiety, panic, hypervigilance, and the feeling that something is wrong. On top of these states, there's often the freeze



response, where you feel depressed, or disconnected from yourself or from the world,' she adds.

Tuning into yourself

Acceptance is the first step in honouring the stories your body tells. This can be easier said than done when you can use Photoshop and social media filters to smooth out the edges. But seeing your body in terms of flaws to be erased disconnects you from your resilience, your fighting spirit, and the things that make you unique. 'Focusing only on how you look becomes a mask that stops you from truly being who you are,' says Brown.

So, take some quiet time to really acknowledge how it feels to be in your skin. Grab a notebook and a pen and ask yourself these questions: are you feeling lightheaded and full of nervous energy? Or disgruntled and resentful? Or stagnant, heavy, and unable to move? What could these emotions be trying to tell you? Finally, who or what in your environment is preventing you from being able to relax?

Take it easy

'Don't go all guns blazing into January with an intense diet or fitness regime,' says Brown. 'Instead, orient to what you love, and what makes you feel happy and alive. The key is to switch off the body's stress response, so that you can create new possibilities in your life.'

For Brown, there's a well-worn healing path where she sees clients gently move through depression, anger, anxiety and sadness. That's when the body starts to soften and re-orient from coping to connection. She says: 'When you start to tap into your emotions, and work through them, you get more access to things like joy, happiness, and just feeling content.' And joy is the way we get our bodies back into true balance – so that we feel good and look good.

Meals in minutes

Filled with healthy good intentions for the year ahead? Get a helping hand with speedy suppers from Madeleine Olivia – plant-based, full of goodness, and ready to serve in less than half an hour!

Sesame, ginger and mint noodle salad

'This dressing is so moreish that I love to pour it over many different dishes. You can even substitute the tahini for peanut butter for a satay flavour, or leave it out entirely (along with the water) if you aren't keen.'

SERVES 2–3 Ready in 20 mins

- 150-200g soba or udon noodles
- ¼ red cabbage
- •1 carrot
- •1 cucumber
- 2 spring onions, sliced
- Sprig of mint, chopped
- Handful of coriander, chopped
- 2 tbsp sesame seeds

For the dressing:

- 3 tbsp hulled tahini
- 2 tbsp water

- 1 tbsp soy sauce (or tamari for a gluten-free option)
- •1 tsp maple syrup
- 2 tsp toasted sesame oil
- Thumb-sized piece of fresh ginger root, finely chopped or minced
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped
- Grated zest and juice of 1 lime
- Pinch of chilli flakes

I Cook the noodles in a large saucepan of boiling water for 8–10 minutes, then drain and rinse under cold running water. Set aside. 2 Meanwhile, thinly slice the cabbage and create ribbons with the carrot and cucumber using a vegetable peeler (or use a grater if you're feeling lazy). Add all the vegetables, herbs and sesame seeds to a large salad bowl with the noodles, and mix.

3 Whisk all the dressing ingredients together in a small bowl until combined. Drizzle over the salad ingredients and stir to coat. Serve cold straightaway, or leave in the refrigerator for up to five days.



Spinach and butter bean soup

'This hearty soup is the perfect meal on a cold day, or when you're in need of something comforting. Creamy beans paired with colourful spinach are a wholesome combination. Packed with protein, fibre and iron, this soup is also extra nutritious. Plus, it's superflexible, as you can swap the butter beans for cannellini, borlotti or chickpeas, add a tin of tomatoes and tomato purée with a teaspoon of smoked paprika, or zing it up with a splash of Tabasco.'

SERVES 4 Ready in 20 mins

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 1 leek, finely chopped
- 2 celery stalks, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, grated
- Handful of thyme, leaves picked
- 2 × 400g tins of butter beans, drained and rinsed
- 250g young spinach, or use frozen
- 2 tbsp nutritional yeast
- Grated zest and juice of 1 lemon
- 1.2 litres vegetable stock
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Warm crusty bread, to serve
- Pinch of chilli flakes or splash of Tabasco sauce, to serve (optional)

A Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan, add the chopped onion, leek and celery, and cook over a medium heat for 5–10 minutes until softened. Add the garlic and thyme leaves, and cook for another minute.

2 Add the butter beans to the pan along with the spinach, nutritional yeast, lemon juice and zest, and vegetable stock, then season to taste. Bring to the boil, then remove the pan from the heat.

3 Serve sprinkled with red chilli flakes or Tabasco sauce (if using),



and enjoy with warm crusty bread.



15-minute stir-fry noodles

'Stir-fries can be as simple as you like, and adapted in so many ways to match what you have to hand, or what you're craving that day. I've added some lazy and time-friendly hacks to make this recipe even simpler.'

SERVES 2 Ready in 15 mins

- 400g block of extra-firm tofu
- 200g mushrooms
- 300g kale, broccoli, pak choi or cabbage
- 1 red chilli
- 3 garlic cloves
- Thumb-sized piece of fresh ginger root
- 2 bunches of noodles
- 1 tbsp olive or coconut oil
- 1 tbsp maple syrup (or use

agave syrup, brown sugar or other sweetener)

- 1 tbsp dark soy sauce
- 1 tbsp light soy sauce
- Grated zest and juice of 1 lemon or lime
- Sesame seeds, to serve (optional)
- Toasted sesame oil, to serve (optional)
- Handful of chopped coriander leaves, to serve (optional)

I Cube the tofu into bite-sized chunks, chop all the veg, finely chop the chilli, and mince the garlic and ginger. (I use a garlic press to mince garlic straight into the pan, to make it extra quick.)

2 Put the noodles in a saucepan of boiling water to cook, bring back to a boil and reduce to a simmer (about 5–8 minutes, depending

on the noodles). When the noodles are ready, set aside a ladleful of water, then rinse the noodles under cold running water.

3 Meanwhile, in a large frying pan or wok, add the oil, garlic, ginger and chilli and fry over a high heat for a couple of minutes (adding the oil and garlic at the same time stops it from burning as easily).

4 Next, add the tofu and vegetables and fry for another 5 minutes. Now everything's cooked, pour in the maple syrup (or sweetener of your choice), soy sauces, lemon or lime zest and juice, and stir together.
5 Add the noodles to the pan, along with the reserved noodle water, and toss everything together.
Serve with an optional topping of sesame seeds, a drizzle of sesame oil, and a sprinkling of coriander.

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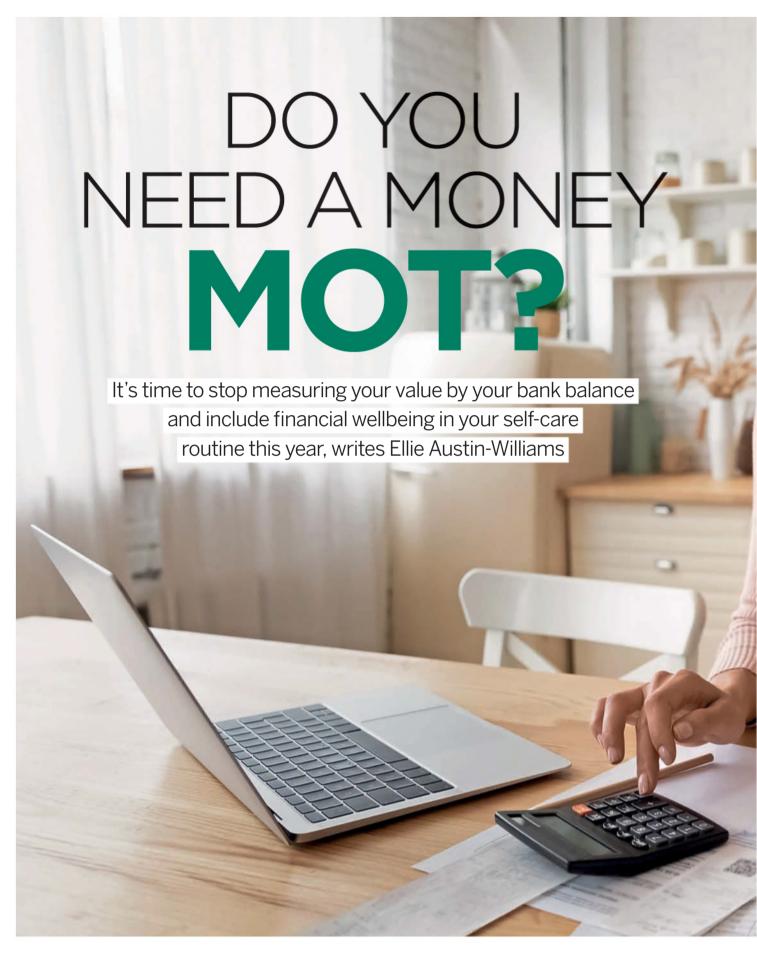


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feeling stressed about money every day, financial wellbeing has a knock-on effect on the mental health of millions of adults, causing more worry than work, health and family matters do.

It's clear we're heading for a financial wellbeing crisis, yet for too long the approach to financial wellness has centred on budgeting tips and savings hacks, rather than digging deeper into the root of the issue. After all, if we could budget our way out of poverty then we'd surely be living in a completely different world? The truth is that money isn't just practical, but emotional and political, too. Diving headfirst into the conversation about financial wellbeing requires us to take off our blinkers, set aside our assumptions or biases, and look at the way that both we as individuals and the society we live in address the topics of money, wealth and privilege. Only when we look at our everyday interactions, our gut feelings, and our deep-rooted beliefs about money can we start to understand what financial wellbeing truly means for each one of us, and how we can get closer to improving our own unique relationship with money.

Let's talk about privilege

Privilege manifests itself in many different forms, and when it comes to money, the way privilege impacts our experiences, opportunities and challenges can be vast. In the so-called race of life, financial privilege can serve as a 10-second head start for hitting other financial goals, such as getting on the housing ladder. Although the role of privilege means that equality of opportunity is sometimes a distant dream, by acknowledging our own economic privilege, we can be more aware of the ways in which we have benefited from our circumstances, and try to level the playing field.

Privilege is too often considered to be a dirty word, and many conversations about privilege descend into a defence of how much effort people have put into achieving their goals, without the acknowledgement of how privilege can help provide a platform for us all to flourish. While it's true that financial privilege alone is no guarantee of happiness, there are plenty of studies that show that the combination of economic privilege and effort can lead to outcomes that those without an equal level of privilege may struggle to achieve. Only once we have an awareness of the cards we've been dealt that have influenced where we are today, can we start to lift up others.

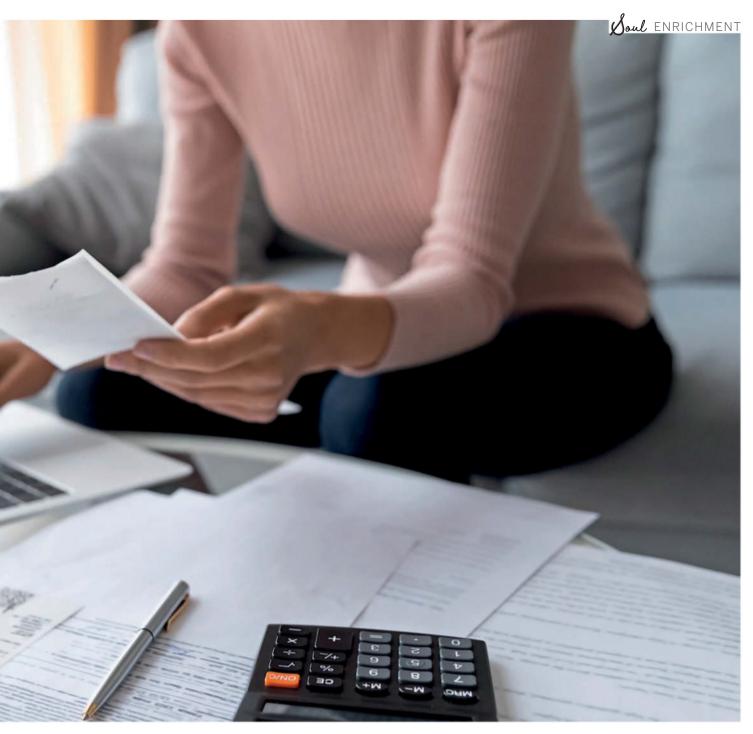
Finding your 'rich' life

At the root of taking steps toward improving your financial wellbeing, there is one question that I believe underpins everything else: what do you want your life to look like, truly? It's a question



that frequently evades us, as we get swept along in the checklist of milestones that society expects us to meet. Even when we step away from the well-trodden path, there are often ideas embedded in our brains from a young age about what our life should look like. It's only when we really tune in to ourselves and understand what matters to us and what motivates us, that we can start to piece together a picture of our own 'rich' life.

The term 'rich' tends to evoke an image of a life of luxury, yet the word itself has layers of deeper meaning. Collins Dictionary defines a rich life as 'one that is interesting because it is full of



different events and activities', with no mention of wealth or material resources. So I challenge you to ask yourself: what does my 'rich' life look like?

Financial wellbeing is intrinsically linked to our idea of a rich life; one of the core jigsaw pieces in the financial wellbeing puzzle involves separating our own value from our bank balance. When you have a clear idea of what your own rich life looks like, you'll have a north star to guide you when it comes to difficult decisions relating to your work and lifestyle. Without clarity on your values, it can become all too easy to find yourself sacrificing financial wellbeing in pursuit of 'traditional' riches.



Money Talks: A Lifestyle Guide For Financial Wellbeing by Ellie Austin-Williams (Watkins Media, £12.99) is out on 2 January Understanding your own 'why' is not easy, though; much like the lack of practical financial education at school, there's a gaping hole in the education system around helping individuals really connect to their passions and purpose. Increasingly, this lack of support early on manifests itself later in life, with more and more adults today seeking meaning and fulfilment in their life and in work. Wherever you are in your journey toward building better financial wellbeing, taking steps towards improving it can open the door to a life full of purpose that brings you joy and lights you up.

SING FOR YOUR LIFE!

SING FOR THE SAKE OF IT!

In this month's column, musician James Sills encourages us to reframe the singing experience, to help us to harness the benefits



want to sing like the birds sing, not worrying about who hears or what they think,' declared the Sufi mystic Rumi. And even though he was writing way back in the 13th century, his perspective on singing represents how many of us still feel in the 21st century: that singing is performative, and something we either get 'right' or 'wrong.'

This mindset is the reason many people stop singing altogether in adulthood, fearing judgment or ridicule – something that is reinforced and amplified by TV competitions such as *The X Factor*. Our identity is bound up in our voice – it's our auditory DNA – so it's not surprising that many people choose to remain silent and not open up their voice (and, by extension, themselves) to criticism.

As a passionate advocate for the wellbeing benefits of singing, this mindset is something I regularly encounter in my workshops, especially when working with groups of adults who haven't sung since childhood, or when running team-building sessions with corporate groups.

To overcome this barrier, and to help people really harness the mental and physical health benefits of singing, I encourage a reframe of the singing experience, thinking of it as a process rather than a product. Something to be enjoyed in the moment, and not dependent on any external validation or outcome. Or, to quote a cliché, it's about the journey and not the destination.

Therefore, to fully experience the wellbeing benefits of singing,

Book your
FREE place at
Sing With *Psychologies* via
bit.ly/46amW4F, or by scanning the
QR code below. The session takes
place on Friday 26 January at 1pm,
and the song this month is *I'll Be There* by The Jackson 5.



Looking for a choir or singing group to join this January? The Natural Voice Network (NVN) is a collective of song leaders with the shared philosophy that singing is everyone's birthright, regardless of musical experience or ability. Find your local NVN group at naturalvoice.net/

James Sills is the author of *Do Sing* (The Do Book Co, £8.99), and founder of The Sofa Singers; thesofasingers.com. Find out more about James at james-sills.com, or follow him on social media @jsillsmusic

I encourage you to think of singing as atelic activity. This is a phrase coined by the Greek philosopher Aristotle to describe activities that we do for their own sake, because we enjoy them and they bring us fulfilment. This is in contrast to telic activities, which are goal orientated and thus give rise to the possibility of judgment and failure (as well as success).

This is something that Tom Vanderbilt, author of Beginners:
The Joy And Transformative Power
Of Lifelong Learning (Atlantic Books, £9.99), understands deeply. He asks:
'What if we don't want to become virtuoso musicians or renowned artists?
What if we only want to dabble in these things, to see if they might subtly change our outlook on the world or even, as we

try to learn them, change us? What if we just want to enjoy them?'

In relation to singing, author and psychotherapist Philippa Perry writes of her experience with her local community choir: 'I didn't make great improvements in my singing, but I loved being part of a joint effort, and I made some good friends.'

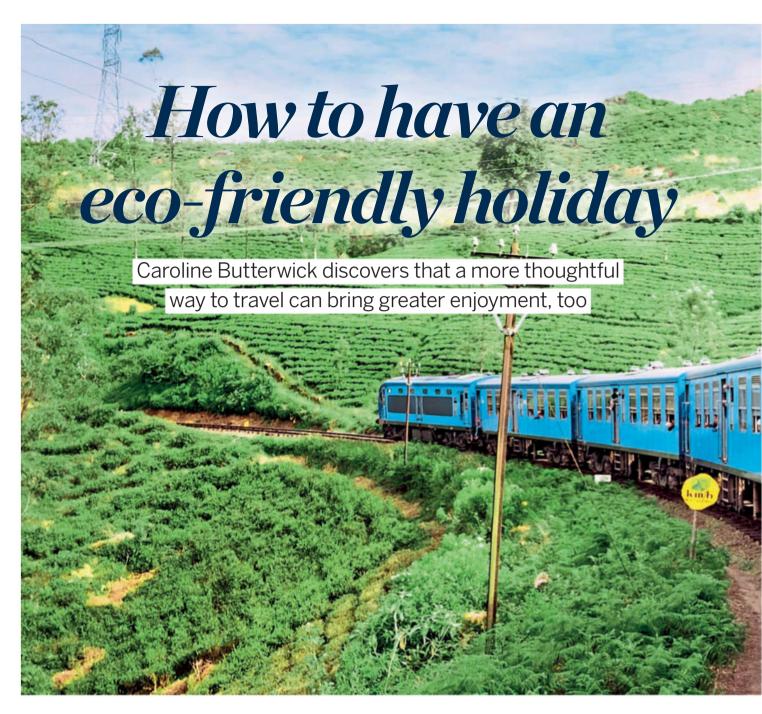
What Perry highlights here is the fact that many of the benefits of the group-singing experience, such as feeling connected and part of something bigger than one's self, are not dependent on musical outcomes, either individually or collectively.

If you're thinking of joining a local choir or singing group this January, remember that there are lots of different options out there. Some groups will be more performance orientated, whereas some groups will be more holistic in their approach. As Kate Valentine, founder of the Singing Mamas network, explains: 'Somehow, singing has become all about performing for other people rather than enjoying it for ourselves. When we sing as a group for our wellbeing, it stops being about the sound of individual voices and it becomes a collective experience.'

If you're not ready to sing in public yet, or simply want to get energised on a Friday afternoon, then why not join me at the next Sing With *Psychologies* session? It takes place online on Friday 26 January at 1pm, and we'll be singing *I'll Be There* by The Jackson 5. I really hope you'll be there, too!

Want to find out more about the health benefits of singing? Download the *Just One Thing – Sing* podcast from Dr Michael Mosley, available through the BBC website or from wherever you listen to your podcasts.





ith the wind whipping my hair, I place my hands on the rough rock and scramble up. My husband, Gary, and I have been walking for more than an hour, the trail getting steadily steeper. And then we reach the summit of Loughrigg Fell, and, catching our breath, gaze at the panorama: the craggy summits of other mountains, the sight of Windermere – England's largest lake – a sliver of silver cradled in the green below. But what seems particularly amazing is to think we got here today, this beautiful

place that feels on top of the world, without the need to drive.

Many of us are now making a concerted effort be more eco-friendly, and if you've set yourself a New Year's resolution to reduce your environmental impact, travel plays a vital part. Richard Hammond runs the website Green Traveller, sharing the benefits and joys of eco-friendly travel. 'Thinking about doing more recycling, commuting less to work, or walking the kids to school are all part of the decisions we're making nowadays,' he explains.

And green travel, Hammond says, is an increasingly key part of conscious living.

My conversation with Hammond takes place just before our visit to the Lake District. He talks compellingly about green travel being a mindset. 'The way to position green travel is that it's actually a better experience,' he tells me. 'With things such as taking the train, it's much more enjoyable – you feel like you're already on your adventure when you get to the station.'

I think of this as the train takes me from Crewe to Oxenholme, then a 19-minute train to Windermere, the



green hills of the Northwest unfurling as I gaze softly out of the window. We take a short bus journey to get to our hotel, Ambleside Manor (amblesidemanor.co.uk). As I put the kettle on in our room with its view of the fells, Gary tells me how much nicer the journey was compared to being stuck behind the wheel of the car for hours. We were able to relax with a coffee and a book each, rather than fretting about bad drivers or traffic jams. It definitely feels like a much calmer start to our holiday.

We're staying in the town of Ambleside – somewhere we've been before, so I'm curious how we find having a greener approach. Cumbria is working to become the first net-zero carbon county in the UK by 2037, and in a place so popular with tourists, reducing our impact as visitors seems crucial. Visit Lake District (visitlakedistrict.com) is highlighting how to go car-free when visiting the National Park, something that's obviously great in terms of reducing emissions as well as lessening traffic. And, as I think of Hammond's advice around seeing green travel as something that can enhance our

holidays, I'm wondering how exactly leaving the car behind is making a difference to our experience.

Fortified by the hotel's hearty veggie full-English breakfast (Ambleside Manor is fully vegetarian, with lots of vegan options, too, such as delicious scrambled tofu), we stroll into the town centre, with its streets of Victorian slate buildings, their windows glowing warmly with lights from B&Bs, shops and cosy cafés. We catch the 599 bus to Grasmere, braving the autumn chill to sit on the open-top deck, enthralled by the brilliant views as we snake past the lakes.





We've driven this way before, but it's Gary's first experience of being able to take in the scenery properly. 'It's beautiful, and I feel so much more relaxed,' he smiles. Instead of the stress of hunting for a parking space in the popular village of Grasmere, we simply step off the bus and wander to our favourite place, Faeryland (faeryland.co.uk), a lakeside tearoom away from the bustle. We find a picnic bench, where we sip home-blended tea and listen to the stream and the quacking of ducks, and watch the rowing boats bobbing on the lake. It feels peaceful, having gotten here so easily and hassle-free, and it highlights how straightforward it can be to find beautiful places without having to drive.

How we reach and get around destinations is a key concern for eco-conscious travel. Jumping on the Eurostar from London to Paris, for example, emits 2.4kg of carbon dioxide per person, compared with 66kg for flying – a huge difference. There's no doubting it: using buses and trains to get around the UK and Europe is a much more sustainable – and enjoyable – way to travel.

But what about those journeys that aren't possible without flying? 'It's about being less casual with flying,' says Hammond. If you do have to fly, he suggests balancing it up with several subsequent holidays much closer to home. If you fly to somewhere like the USA, make the journey count: rather than flying across the Atlantic each year, could you tick off a few places on your bucket list in one go?

Your choice of accommodation is also important. Hammond cites checking for things like whether a hotel uses renewable energy, serves local or organic food, encourages visitors to reduce their energy use, and whether the building fits into the local landscape and hasn't involved habitat destruction. Look out for the little things, too: Ambleside Manor provides homemade biscuits in a glass jar, and rather than individual plastic sachets, they have jugs of milk – including vegan alternatives – in communal fridges, reducing waste.

'The whole thing about greener travel is helping to make the destinations better places to live in, as well as to visit,' Hammond says. 'If you use local restaurants and bars, and buy local food, you're automatically putting money into the economy. That can only be a good thing for the destination.' In Ambleside, with this in mind, we're keen to try out local businesses, and have a lovely dinner at Fellinis (zeffirellis. com/food-drink/fellinis). It's rare to find



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places like this that offer vegetarian fine dining (not a veggie burger in sight), with crisp arancini, portobello mushroom stuffed with rich jackfruit tagine, and a chocolate lava cake that's the very definition of comfort. With a menu that changes with the seasons, restaurants like this are reducing their impact, while still offering good food in a relaxed, sophisticated environment.

What you do while on holiday matters as well. 'You can look for low-impact activities,' explains Hammond, who recommends walking or cycling around your destination - it's eco-friendly, while also being a great way to get to know a place and to speak to local people. One of my highlights of our Ambleside trip is taking the Windermere Lake Cruise (windermere-lakecruises.co.uk). It's a perfect way of seeing the landscape - including Loughrigg Fell - from a different angle. The boat stops off at various points around the 10.5-mile-long lake, making it another good way to explore without a car. We hop off at the town of Bowness-on-Windermere for a late lunch, then make the short bus journey to Windermere train station for our return home, feeling rejuvenated - and inspired for our next car-free trip.

I had worried that we'd feel restricted without a car, but we found the opposite: we had the freedom to enjoy the scenery, to feel immersed in the stunning landscape of the Lake District. It made us explore in a different way, one that felt more in tune with nature.

After taking in the views from the summit of Loughrigg Fell, we descended a different path, back to Ambleside. There's something so rewarding about having started the walk in Grasmere and then using our feet to bring us back to our hotel. No need to return to the place we parked, no worrying about parking tickets running out, or the traffic, just the flexibility to move ourselves lightly through the world. This trip has changed how I view travel. As Hammond says, it's about shifting mindset, and now I really understand. Being an eco-traveller is so important in our world today: we can lessen our impact on the planet and have holidays that really matter.

GETTING THERE

Caroline Butterwick travelled as a guest of Visit Lake District (visitlakedistrict.com). Train travel provided by Avanti West Coast (avantiwestcoast.co.uk) and Northern Rail (northernrailway.co.uk); bus travel by Stagecoach (stagecoachbus.com)





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- Limiting beliefs holding you back?
- Difficult people or situations affecting your confidence?
- Want to improve your porfessional skills?



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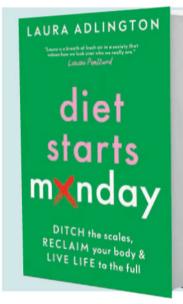




The words

We're with CS Lewis, who said, 'You can never get a cup of tea large enough or a book long enough to suit me.' Alex Lloyd provides the inspiration...





Book of the month

Diet Starts Monday by Laura Adlington

(Headline, £20)

When she won a spot on *The Great British*Bake Off, Laura Adlington was terrified about the reaction from viewers – not towards

her cakes, but towards her body. She'd been put on her first diet aged eight, and spent years convinced happiness would follow if she could 'simply' lose weight.

Part memoir, part exploration of diet culture and toxic stereotypes, Adlington writes frankly about her binge-eating struggles, learning to play the 'good fatty', and why she cancelled gastric surgery to work on accepting herself instead.

There's a lot to unpack, but she does it with intelligence, relatability and, most importantly, compassion.

30 Steps To Finding Yourself by Sally Hope

(Octopus, £12.99)

The best friend you'll ever have is yourself – but who is she, really?

Recovery coach Sally Hope wants to help you answer this vital question, so you can enjoy a happier mindset and healthier relationships.

Her approach takes you through the process in bite-sized chunks, from the genes that shape you, to your life experiences, with practical exercises and down-to-earth explanations.

Hidden within her gentle prompts are professional techniques, drawn

from CBT and other therapies.

This is an enlightening read for anyone who's ever felt lost under the weight of responsibility and expectation.



Unshrinking: How To Fight Fatphobia by Kate Manne (Penguin, £22)

She might be a leading feminist philosopher, but Kate Manne admits that her wings have been clipped by the years of size discrimination that she has faced.

Now, the academic has turned her lens on this subject close to her heart, investigating how anti-fatness has a devastating impact on the life chances of people who are physically bigger, to the detriment of all.

Manne calls it a vital social justice issue, as damaging as racism, sexism

and ableism, and it's hard to disagree. Her words will make you feel shame for your prejudices, and anger at how fatphobia has harmed the minds and bodies of so many.



This Book May Save Your Life by Dr Karan Rajan (Cornerstone, £18.99)

Surgery is a serious business, but Dr Karan Rajan is determined to save lives with a smile. The NHS doctor has a knack for demystifying the human body, using no-nonsense explanations and humour to help us understand it.

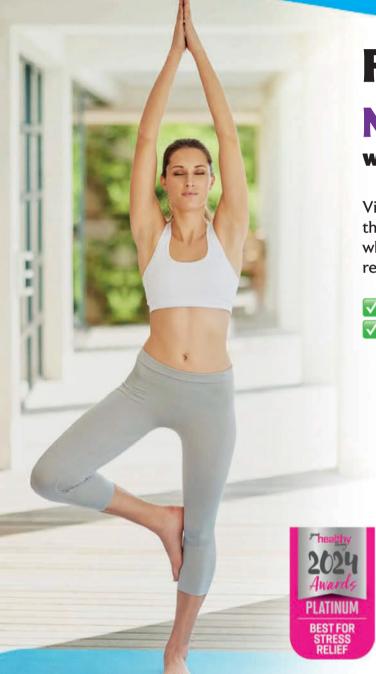
After starting out using social media videos to debunk misinformation and smash taboos, he's turned his snappy style to print. The result is a fun, fascinating, and fact-filled tour from head to toe, with nothing off-limits,

as he delves into topics like taste, genitals and death.

His passion for the workings of our 'meat suit' is infectious – you'll learn more than you ever did in your biology GCSE!



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How to be happier

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

A Toolkit For Your Emotions: 45 Ways To Feel Better by Dr EmmaHepburn (Greenfinch, £14.99) is out now



nxiety is different things to different people, but many of us will have experienced some version of it. Anxiety – and its friends worry and fear – are common emotions that vary in intensity, frequency, and duration. We may think anxiety gets in the way of life, but it is designed to be helpful – to spot a threat and prepare you for action; to drive you towards or away from things that arise along your rollercoaster route. Anxiety can help highlight when things are going wrong.

Anxiety is associated with the flight-fight-freeze response: our body getting us ready for action based on our brain's predictions, so it can deliver the correct energy and bodily resources. Your brain triggers signals that release the hormones cortisol and adrenaline, engaging your sympathetic nervous system. This is the bodily response that can sometimes result in the feelings associated with anxiety: glucose is released into your blood stream and fat is broken down to give you energy; breathing increases to get more oxygen in your body; your heart beats faster to pump blood more quickly; your pupils dilate; your senses sharpen; muscles tense. All this gets your body ready to respond to whatever action is required, and your brain prioritises its functions accordingly. This means it deprioritises other functions: it inhibits digestion, more complex thinking, and saliva production (dry mouth, anyone?), and even narrows your visual field. While these types of body responses may result in a label of anxiety, they are not just about fear, but about enabling you to live your day-to-day life effectively and use your energy to meet your needs.

Sometimes, though, our predictions are out of kilter with our needs. The resulting revving up of our body systems

The Anxiety Eracks off jump 1 can't mindfulness breathing cuddle a bath or heditati Like a - will Criend

can be detrimental to our health. Our brain can over-predict threat for many reasons. We might be living through a stressful situation, so are already on high alert. If we've experienced past trauma related to a situation, our brain is likely to respond in the same way when faced with a similar circumstance. Even minor similarities in the incoming data can set off a huge bodily response. It might seem

out of context, but your brain is telling you that, based on past experience, you need to get ready for action.

Which routes can you use from the illustration above to get through anxiety, and give your brain-and-body response somewhere helpful to go? Notice the signs you are stuck in a loop-the-loop and think about what could help you move through it.



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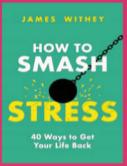
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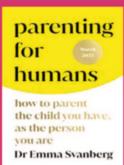
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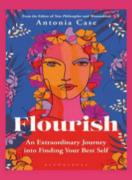
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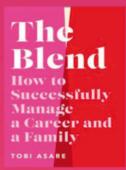






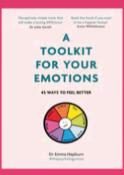


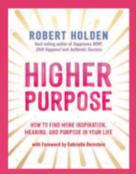


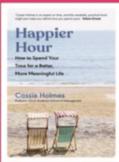


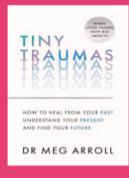


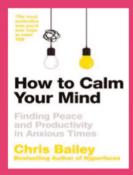


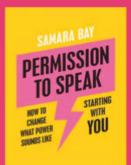












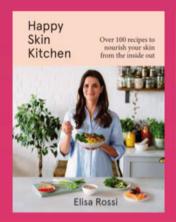




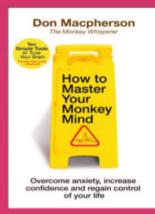
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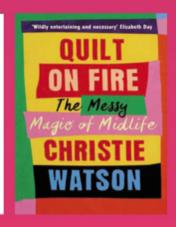


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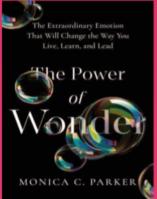


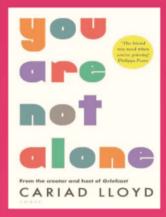


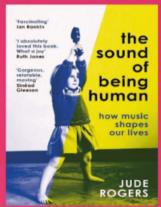




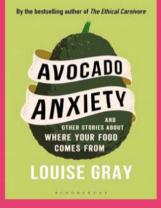


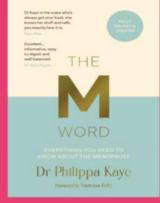


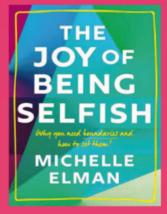










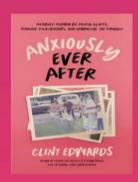


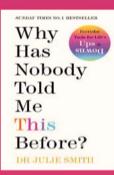


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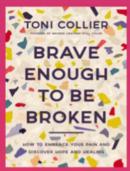
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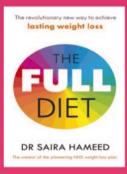


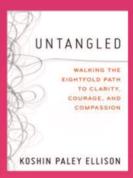










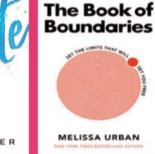


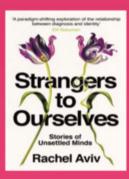


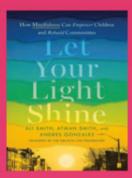


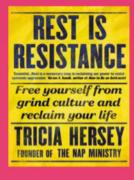


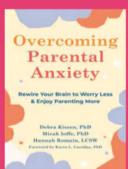


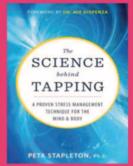














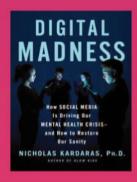


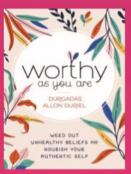


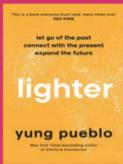
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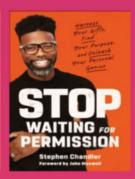


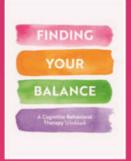
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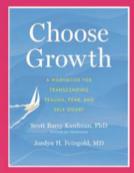


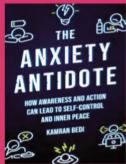


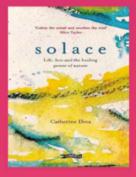


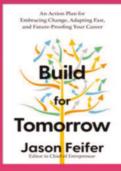


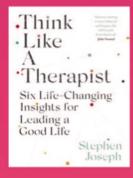


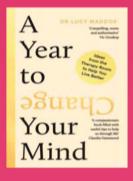


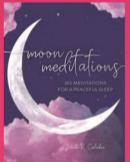


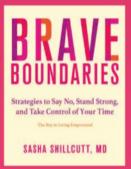


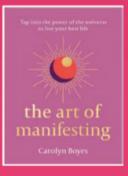


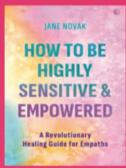






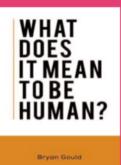


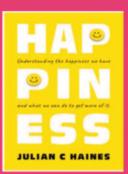


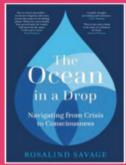










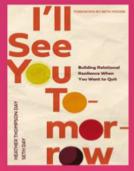


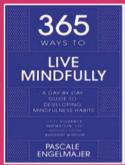


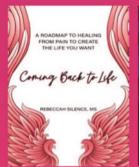
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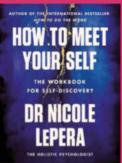


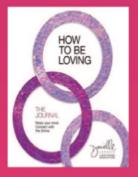
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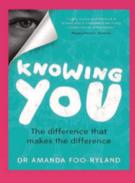


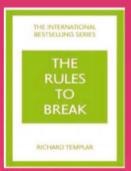




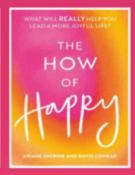


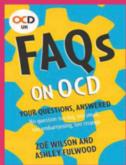








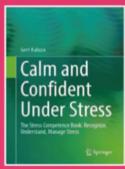




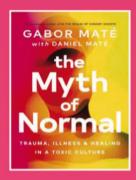


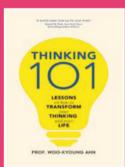


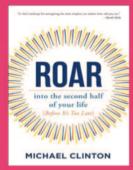


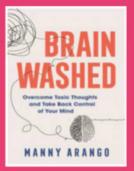


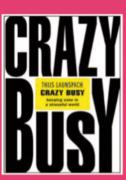










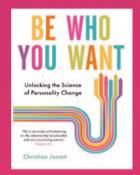




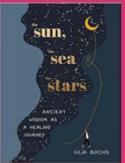
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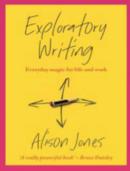
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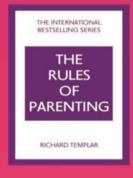


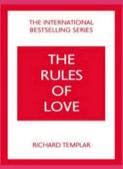




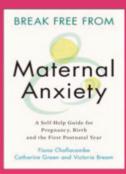








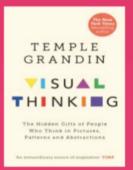








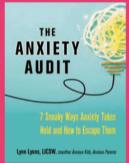




















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