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Welcome...



In the past, I have been guilty of subscribing to an all-or-nothing mindset: exercising all the time, or not at all; nourishing myself, or neglecting myself; striving for success, or failing spectacularly. And with this harsh inner critic narrating my life, I'd often pass judgment on others, too. But when I read the phrase from Brené Brown, 'People are doing their best with the tools that they have,' it changed my entire outlook on life, and made me realise I needed a healthy serving of compassion (for myself and others). And that's exactly the overriding message of our wonderful March issue. We're opening the windows, blowing away the cobwebs, and spring-cleaning our mindset for the year ahead.

Over on page 14, our brilliant cover star, Ella Mills, is talking about progress over perfection; celebrating the little wins that can make a big difference to your life. Then flick to page 35, where this month's dossier is dedicated to finding your inner calm. The secret? It starts with being a little bit kinder to ourselves. In fact, expert Owen O'Kane tells us that self-compassion is our most powerful skill, while Dr Meg Arroll asks us to question how we feel when we're berating ourselves – I'm guessing not very calm or relaxed.

Ever wondered how all five of your senses could be contributing to your experience of life? It's an idea that writer Kellie Gillespie-Wright explores elsewhere in this month's issue, on page 72, delving into the notion that balancing our senses can lead to a more fulfilling life.

Finally, Fearne Cotton is also a fan of tapping into her senses to cope with overwhelm; turn to page 98 to discover her five hacks for sidestepping stress. Real life isn't linear; there's joy, heartbreak, and the odd curveball to swerve. We can't change the uncertainty of life, but I hope we can provide a few tools you can dip into in times of need.

Holly xx

Holly Treacy,
Acting editor

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The advice starts RIGHT HERE!



JULIA SAMUEL

Grief is messy and unpredictable, says psychotherapist Julia Samuel. As such, connection to others – through both listening and conversation – is invaluable. 'Talking about the person who's died can help someone mourn and incrementally face and adjust to the reality of their loss.' Discover how to find the right words, on page 22.

ANNA KATHARINA SCHAFFNER

'Many people find, in midlife, that their career achievements and possessions have not made them happier,' says burnout coach Anna Katharina Schaffner. 'It is when people leave the socially prescribed pathways and look inwards that change occurs.' Learn to step off the hedonic treadmill and find true fulfilment, on page 30.



CHARLES SPENCE

'Sensehacking is the name given to the deliberate use of our senses, and of sensory stimulation, to help improve our wellbeing,' says psychologist professor Charles Spence. 'Each of us has the sensory tools at our disposal to live healthier, happier, and more fulfilling lives.' Learn more on page 72.

Our mission

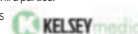
Psychologies' mission is to provide you with inspiration and advice to support you to improve your emotional wellbeing. We aim to help you boost your happiness and resilience and lower your stress and anxiety. We do this by providing simple, achievable steps to make small changes that can add up to a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

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

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In the mood

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

COMPILED BY ALEX LLOYD

Labour of love

Married women lose that loving feeling faster than their husbands do.

Researchers tracked the feelings of couples every 30 minutes for ten days, with participants ranging from two-year engagements to 20-year partnerships.

They identified the amount of love felt for partners over time and discovered that, after three years, women had 55 per cent less.

But the equivalent fall among men was only nine per cent.

The study, in *Psychological Science*, also found that women in longer relationships spent more time doing chores and cookery, while their partner spent more time relaxing and sleeping.

Experts say this could be why female feelings are weaker in long-term couples.

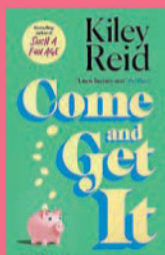
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3 reads... for the fireside



1 *Come And Get It* by Kiley Reid (Bloomsbury, £16.99). This book takes a razor-sharp look at how money makes the world go round, when two women form an unlikely relationship.



2 *The Expectant Detectives* by Kat Ailes (Bonnie Books, £9.99). *Motherland* meets *Midsomer Murders* in this mystery about mums-to-be investigating a killing at an antenatal class.

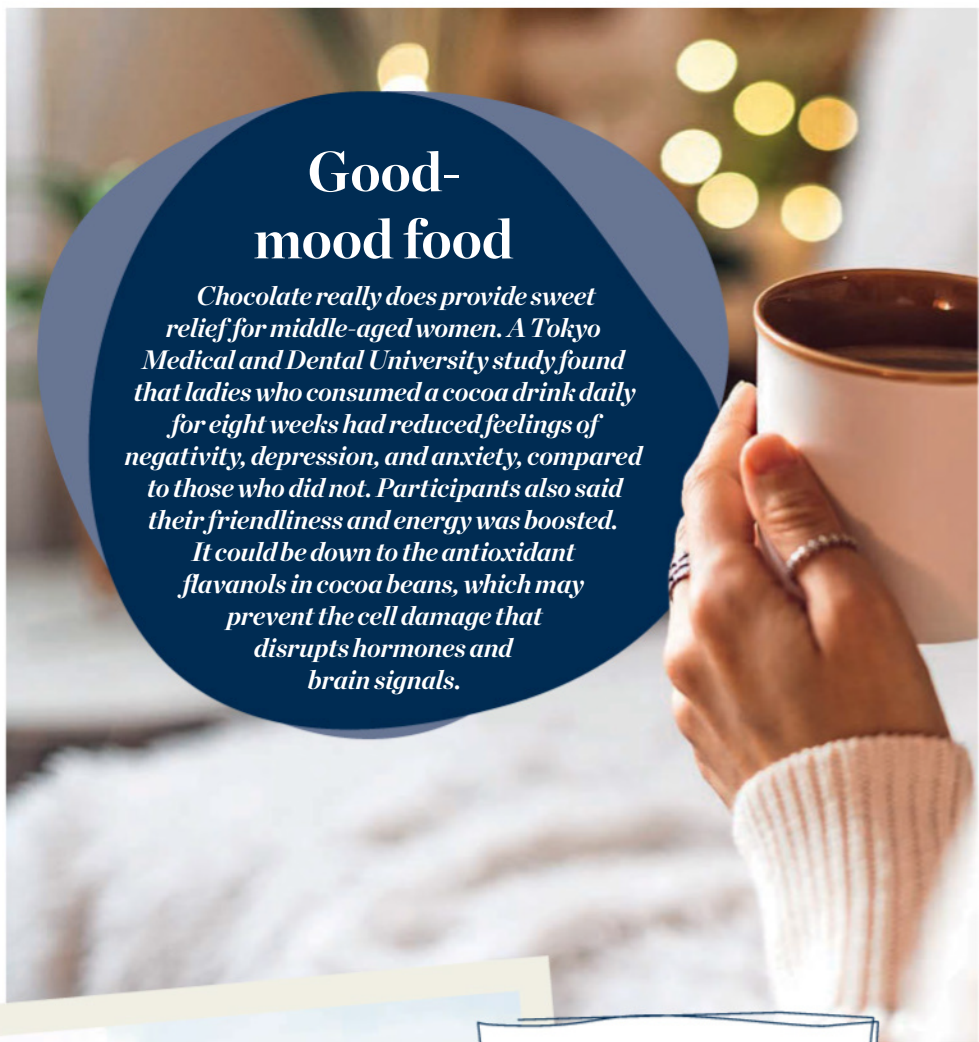


3 *The Real Deal* by Caitlin Devlin (Lake Union Publishing, £8.99). A former teen reality-show star comes back from obscurity for a well-paid reunion. Will the truth come out?



Good-mood food

Chocolate really does provide sweet relief for middle-aged women. A Tokyo Medical and Dental University study found that ladies who consumed a cocoa drink daily for eight weeks had reduced feelings of negativity, depression, and anxiety, compared to those who did not. Participants also said their friendliness and energy was boosted. It could be down to the antioxidant flavanols in cocoa beans, which may prevent the cell damage that disrupts hormones and brain signals.



Grow, eat, thrive

Having lessons in growing your own leads children to have lasting, healthy attitudes to food years later.

Researchers from George Washington University found that when primary school pupils were taught to grow, harvest, and prepare food, it had a long-term impact on behaviours.

As part of the study, researchers spoke to current and former students of a programme – and found alumni were more open to trying new foods than their peers and showed higher confidence in making good dietary choices.

"Unless you were there, you don't get it. There are choices that I made that people can say, 'Why did you do that?'. Well, you didn't walk in my shoes. Try to walk in my shoes and you'll find out"

Oscar-winning actress Jodie Foster

The global value of the secondhand resale market is expected to double to £275m by 2027, according to a report by thredUP.

Let your feelings out

Women are driving a rise in 'rage rooms' around Britain, where customers pay to release emotions by smashing up objects.

The practice started in Japan 15 years ago, and is seen as a healthy way to physically release difficult feelings such as anger and frustration.

Venues offer protective clothing, a fortified room, and a choice of items, including old TVs and crockery, which can be hit with bats and crowbars.

Gemma Whiddett, manager of Rage Rooms Norwich, says customers are predominantly female.

'Talking is all well and good, but sometimes you just need to get it out!' she says.

Set your sleep cycles

Body clocks are so powerful they can even drive your online searches, a new study has revealed. Scientists from the University of Surrey studied the times when people tended to look for certain information. This included sleep and health support, medication-related questions, and more general things, such as spas and taxis.

The researchers found that, for sleep and health, the daily peaks looking up terms such as insomnia and melatonin were more fixed than other topics – and even moved 'forward' with daylight savings in the spring. This reversed during the autumn, with the searches occurring later, hinting at a strong and robust internal clock driving health and sleep, rather than the 'social clock'.



Positive influence

So-called 'granfluencers' are taking social media by storm, with a quarter of users following people aged 59 to 77.

Baby boomers have an even bigger audience among millennials, with a third enjoying their content, and Snapchat being the most popular platform on which to follow them.

Eight in ten followers told a poll by Age Co that they found ageing influencers inspirational.

The hashtag #boomer had more than four billion viewers on TikTok last year, and the top five granfluencers on the platform earned an average of £300,000 each.

Anthony Jones of Age Co says: 'It's great to see social media is not just the domain of younger audiences.'



The popularity of pink cars has soared thanks to last year's Barbie movie, with searches for the colour up 155 per cent the day it was released, says AutoTrader.

WATCH, LOOK, LISTEN



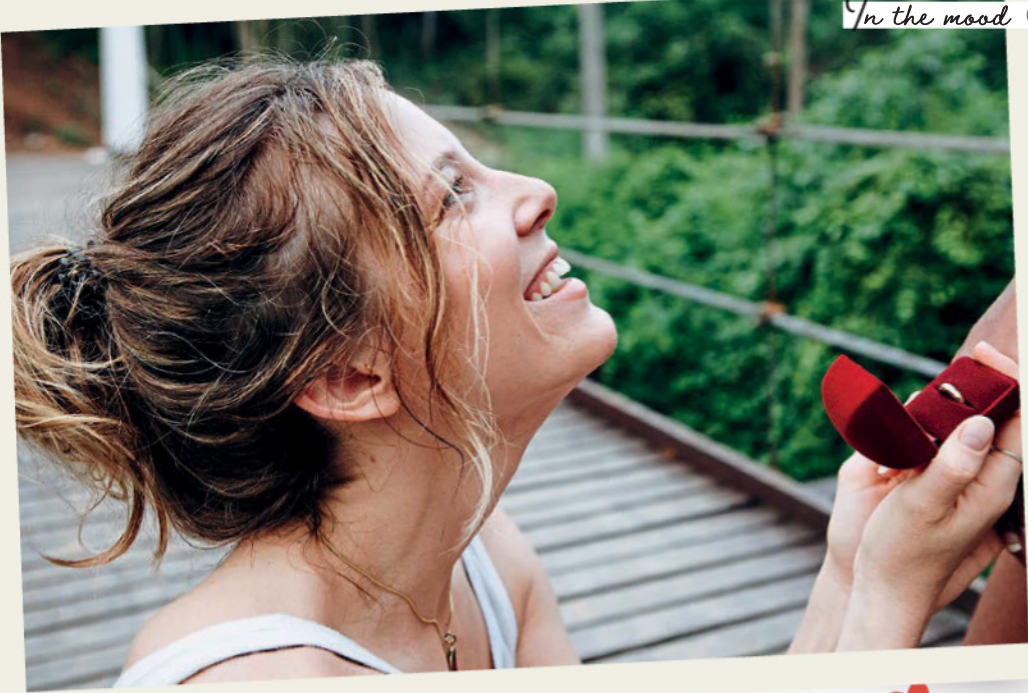
WATCH *Wicked Little Letters*. Women investigate when a town's residents begin to receive letters full of hilarious profanities. Olivia Colman stars. In cinemas 23 February.



LOOK William Blake's Universe at The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, delves into the Romantic painter and poet's art, and that of his peers. From 23 February to 19 May.



LISTEN *Walking The Dog With Emily Dean*. The broadcaster is joined by household names such as Tim Peake, Clare Balding and Bez, on a stroll with her shih tzu Raymond.



Leap of love

The chance only comes once every four years – so will you take a leap of faith and propose to your partner on Leap Day? The tradition of women turning the tables on male suitors on 29 February originated in Ireland, where it is known as Bachelor's Day or Ladies Privilege. The practice is based on a deal supposedly struck between Saint Bridget and Saint Patrick, after she complained women had to wait too long for an engagement.

Brighton is Britain's calmest city, with residents most likely to spend time in nature and practice self-care, according to research by Kalms herbal remedies.

A spike in self-safety kits

Self-testing kits could be given out to revellers as part of a clampdown on drink spiking.

The Home Office also plans to train door staff in spotting the signs, and run police crackdowns at key times.

Nearly 5,000 incidents of drink or needle spiking were reported to the police in the year to September 2022.

But the Government stopped short of making it a specific offence in law.



Viewpoint

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

Joy in small wins

I was reading some of your recent January features about New Year starts, treading old ground, when I stumbled upon one of your writers whose view felt somewhat more aligned with my own.

Why is it that somewhere along the way, someone decided that the wonderful warmth, excess, fun, twinkling lights, gifts, and company of December should be promptly followed by a period of cold, bleak, darkness and hard resolutions (usually involving some form of abstinence or pain)?

It is certainly useful to recognise that seasonal excess cannot continue without some short- or long-term consequences, but to meet the joy of one way of living with the puritanical hardship of another doesn't feel like such a sensible choice. At least this is the opinion that I am now forming.

Don't get me wrong, I've done it: 31 days of running every day on dark and cold football fields, with sleet falling sideways and ankle-deep puddles; the total

absence of anything fun, that kind of thing. But to hell with that! I am now moving into what I think is a slightly more sensible approach.

I want to do all the things that most people resolve: I will go for the odd run and walk, do a little to eat a bit better, and reduce the excesses of life – but not in a do-or-die fashion. And if steadily, during January, I am doing a little, and mentally preparing for even more opportunities as the daffodils break through the flat, dormant, cold ground of February, when 4.15pm darkness turns into 6pm chances to be out, just imagine my growing resolve.

There is joy in small wins, slight improvements, and not being so damned hard on ourselves.

I am not suggesting that there is always an excuse for a 'next week...' approach, but I think the instant switch from partying to overzealous, succeed-or-fail



resolution, at a time when those of us in the northern hemisphere are in something close to hibernation, is a poor concept.

Yesterday, I went for a bit of a run. It wasn't great, but I went for a bit of a run. I didn't succeed or fail. And maybe tomorrow I'll do another – and, after yesterday's, it could be a little bit better. Now there's a launch pad.

So I think improvement and targets are great, but factoring in real life can ease the burden and facilitate a steady, positive drive – maybe even with a smile – into spring. January is not a month to be cracked, got over, or achieved. There are 12 months in the year, and I resolve to live in them all.

Eóin McMahon

The gift of me-time

I have just read your magazine for the first time, after it was gifted to me, and I'm really excited. Keep doing the great work – I can't wait for next issue. Thank you!

Jasurbek Elomonov



PHOTO FAVOURITES

Spark curiosity

Inspired by your 'What's your word?' article, I indulged in spending time following your prompts and decided that my word of the year was 'curiosity'.

With curiosity, I endeavour to gently explore, learn, and understand the experiences and opportunities I have. This is perfectly aligned with who I am. As a mindfulness teacher, curiosity is a huge part of my personal mindfulness practice, and of the courses I teach.

When we are curious about something, especially something that's challenging, we move from bracing against it to approaching it gently, helping us to understand what's going on.



As a recovering perfectionist, having a focus on curiosity takes the pressure off needing everything to be perfect. That's not the point; the point is to notice what's here, and to learn and understand.

It will help me to bring more play and creativity into my life, something I started working on in 2023 and will carry on into 2024. I'm certain this will help me to live the life I want this year.

Kirsty



Taking time to rest and reset

After a year of life pressures and hard work in our family business, my husband and I flew away to Cape Verde for self-care, sunshine, soul-singing and simple pleasures (such as reading my favourite magazine from front to back). We both needed a reset, a rest, and reflection, and although we missed our family around Christmas, we found time to reconnect with each other, catch up on sleep, eat good food, and walk along the beach hand in hand. We've started 2024 with hope, fresh eyes, and so much appreciation.

Julia Gaudie

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



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





The only thing certain is uncertainty

Ella Mills talks to *Psychologies* about rejecting perfection, embracing realism, and why she's on a mission to make wellness relatable, accessible, and affordable for all

WORDS: PRUDENCE WADE/PA IMAGES; SOPHIA SPRING/PA; CLARE WINFIELD

Ella Mills – who created the Deliciously Ella plant-based food empire – gets why the stranger aspects of wellness tend to hit the headlines. ‘I completely understand that – I really do,’ says Mills, 32. ‘What’s interesting to talk about tends to be slightly weirder, wackier, or more out there – it’s fascinating.’

And, yet, she also appreciates that these wild stories don’t give wellness the best name – and that taking care of yourself doesn’t have to involve spending hundreds of pounds a month.

‘A lot of the conversation around wellness is focused on the niche; on the things that feel wildly out of reach, for all sorts of reasons – the financial impact, but also the practical implications of getting up at 3am every day and doing four hours of wellness before you sit at a desk or start a shift. That doesn’t feel relatable in any shape or form,’ says Mills.

Meanwhile, the simpler ways to take care of yourself aren’t quite as widely covered – and Mills realises that it’s harder for ‘a carrot, a lentil, or a chickpea’ to hit the headlines. But whether it’s eating one extra portion of veg a day or trying meat-free Mondays, it’s unbelievable the impact small changes can have, she believes.

Mills also advocates a move away from the ‘all-or-nothing’ mindset that seems to permeate the wellness industry. ‘It’s okay to go out and have pizza and a beer, and then the next day to batch cook a lentil bolognese for the week, or to just take your beef bolognese that you’ve made forever and do half lentils, upping the fibre and reducing the environmental impact,’ she adds. ‘It’s not going to have to mean eating kale from here on in. I think that’s too much of our association, and we need to shift that.’



“We often live with the idea that when life gets easy, then we’ll do the things we want to do. But life doesn’t work like that”

While meat substitutes and vegan cheeses don’t necessarily come cheap, the base elements of a plant-based diet can be significantly better for your bank balance: ‘Because, obviously, if you’re replacing your animal protein with something such as a lentil, that lentil is a lot cheaper.’

It’s been nine years since Mills exploded onto the public stage with her debut cookbook, *Deliciously Ella* (Hodder & Stoughton, £22), becoming the poster child for plant-based eating – and going on to become a bonafide brand, launching food products and restaurants.

And things have changed a lot since 2015, says Mills: ‘Now, we’re gently starting to shed some of the preconceptions that were there before – I remember when I first started cooking this way, people would look at me and they’d be like, “What will you eat? Are you some kind of alien?” And it was all very confusing – but, now, it’s become much more widely accepted, and there’s a realisation that you can have a meal that is filling, satisfying, that tastes really good, *and* is vegetable-based.’

And it’s not just the wider world that’s changed in that time – things are totally different for Mills herself, too. Since her first cookbook, she has married partner and *Deliciously Ella* CEO Matthew Mills, and had two children, Skye, now four, and May, three – and her latest book release, *Deliciously Ella: Health Made Simple* (Yellow Kite, £22), is her most ‘personal’ cookbook yet.

‘The first [cookbook] was like, “This is what healthy eating could look like,” and this one is, “And this is how you actually do it.” Because every year over the past decade my life has got busier and busier, with the business and now two small kids – I have literally no time ever, yet I need more energy than I’ve ever had. I’ve spent the past four years, ever since my first daughter was born, almost relearning how to do the job.’

Wellness on social media has an unrealistic veneer of perfection, but Mills wants everyone to know she still gets overwhelmed ‘all the time’ – particularly thinking of the period after her first daughter was born, when she would so often revert to having toast for dinner.





Deliciously Ella: Healthy Made Simple by Ella Mills (Yellow Kite, £22) is out now. Photography by Clare Winfield

She says: 'The business is very demanding. We have almost 100 staff at Deliciously Ella. We've just taken on our own manufacturing sites. We have our office, a restaurant, and a factory so we can produce all our own products. We've launched in the US, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, and Ireland – it's a really big outfit now. So there can be days you find yourself finalising a deal for the factory and there's a chickenpox outbreak at nursery, and you also need to find a shepherd's costume!'

Mills has realised that 'the only certainty is uncertainty' in life – so there's no point putting things off: 'We are stuck in this mindset of having to do it right and do it all. I think we often live with this [idea] that when life gets easy, we'll do the things we want to do: when my kids are at this life stage, I'll start exercising again – or when I get through this period at work that's super full-on, then I'll start cooking again and taking care of myself.'

'But the problem is, life doesn't work like that. You'll get through one busy period, then you'll go into the next one and it might be even more busy.'

Instead, Mills wants us to focus more on the easy wins – whether that's squeezing in two 15-minute at-home workouts a week, or batch cooking on a Sunday. 'It doesn't have to be perfect – it really doesn't – and it can be small,' she adds.

'Moving past the all-or-nothing mindset we're prone to is an impactful way of unlocking better health, because no one can do everything perfectly all the time. If you keep putting [things] off, waiting until life feels easy, it's likely to never happen.'

Taking the wheel

Driven crazy by the actions of others, Harriet Minter learns a bit about the motivation behind the madness...



Do you know what drives you? Recently, I've been studying the work of Carl

Jung as part of my therapist training, and I'm in a deep-dive into what motivates us as humans.

Jung argues that while we are all driven by the fundamental desire to feel safe, what makes us feel safe can vary. He comes up with a series of archetypes and their needs and behaviours, but it can be broken down on a very basic level to this...

Some of us like to be right. We want to know that we have the answer, that there is a piece of logic or knowledge out there that will unlock any problem, and then we make it our mission to find it.

Others want to be successful. They want to push towards a goal, and are terrified of letting anyone else take charge in case they

don't push as hard, or veer off in another direction.

Some people want to be seen. They want the spotlight to be shone fully on them, so everyone can see and admire their talents.

And, finally, some of us want to belong. I would argue that *all* of us want to belong, but Jung says that for some of us that desire goes deeper; it drives us towards people-pleasing and appeasement, so that we never have to fear the dislike of others.

Do you recognise yourself in any of these archetypes? I know that I have a strong need to be seen (there's a reason my face is on this column!), and I know that my fundamental fear is failure, so I always strive for success. But for someone who likes to know

a lot of stuff, I was surprised to realise I don't mind being wrong, nor am I that phased if someone doesn't like me. Neither of those things make me particularly happy, of course, but I can shake them off.

What I found really interesting, however, is when I started to notice these drivers in other people. Often, we find ourselves infuriated by someone because they are behaving in a way that seems like madness to us. Why would you agree to your boss's suggestion if you think it's going to fail? What point is there talking about an exciting new project if you can't answer questions on how it will actually work? However, when we start to understand what drives someone – what is the one thing they want above all others – then it becomes much easier to tolerate the madness. So, what drives you?

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Mind

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



***I am
willing to
be happy
now***

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS

Grief can be messy and chaotic, but the human connection of conversation can provide an invaluable anchor, and the stepping stones to a life after loss, discovers Annabel Chown

I'm so glad everything's going so well,' a friend said, right after I'd completed eight months of chemotherapy and radiotherapy for breast cancer. Years later, a few weeks after my sister died, another friend said, 'She was meant to go when she did.'

Both comments were well-intended, but left me feeling alienated. Because in the aftermath of cancer treatment, I was scared and low. And my younger sister was meant to be by my side forever, not die at 45. What I yearned for, in both instances, was to be asked how I was.

Julia Samuel, a psychotherapist and author of *Every Family Has A Story* (Penguin, £10.99), explains how our natural urge to want to fix things can lead to platitudes, for example, saying, 'I'm sure you'll be able to have another child,' to a friend who's just had a miscarriage. 'But the truth is,' says Samuel, 'some things *can't* be fixed. And what people need most is compassion. By saying, "Tell me how you feel," you give them space to express themselves, should they wish to. And simply being with someone and listening, with both your heart and

mind, is one of the most powerful – and underrated – aspects of communication.'

So, given the importance of being there for someone in their grief, why do we sometimes find ourselves frightened of doing so, or even resist showing up? On occasion, I've even

irrationally thought that if I get too close to someone's pain, I'll increase the risk of that same loss happening to me.

Cariad Lloyd, author of *You Are Not Alone* (Bloomsbury, £18.99) and creator of the podcast *Griefcast*, explains that this fear is hardwired into us: 'Millions of years ago, survival was our focus. If we discovered someone had died, our instinct was to stay away from those closest to them. Because, back then, death could be contagious. And we still carry with us that primeval instinct.'

Lloyd says it's natural to feel discomfort around people's suffering. 'Most of us are so ill-educated about grief. We're not taught how to deal with it in school; our parents don't usually discuss it. So don't put pressure on yourself to get it right. But do show up. And ground yourself before you speak, by pausing and taking a few breaths, so you feel safe in your own body.'

*"Our
natural
urge to want
to fix things
can sometimes
lead to
platitudes"*



IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Expert advice



Julia Samuel is a leading psychotherapist, with 30 years of experience in grief counselling. She is also author of the bestselling books Every Family Has A Story (Penguin, £10.99), This Too Shall Pass (Penguin, £9.99), and Grief Works (Penguin, £10.99). juliasamuel.co.uk



Cariad Lloyd is an actor, comedian, improviser, and the author of The Times bestseller You Are Not Alone (Bloomsbury, £18.99). She is also the creator and host of the award-winning podcast Griefcast. cariadlloyd.com

“It’s so important to check in with where someone’s at and what they need in the moment”



Samuel emphasises the importance of always acknowledging someone’s loss – and sooner rather than later. ‘If it’s not a close friend, all you have to say is, “I’m so sorry to hear about...”’. And make sure you mention, if it’s a death, the name of the person who died. Doing this by text or email has its place, not least because it can be very draining for the griever to have to speak to someone or see them. Although, if it’s one of your best friends, then you need to show up. Offer to go over with soup, or to take them out for a walk.’

Sometimes, we convince ourselves that it’s best not to mention someone’s loss, so we don’t upset them. But, as

Samuel says, ‘It’s not likely that they’ll have forgotten. And your silence is much more upsetting than hearing how sorry you are.’

Last spring, one of my closest friends lost his wife to cancer. He described running into one of her friends for the first time since her death, twice in one morning. Both times, she just said hello. Did she even know about his wife? He asked, and she did. ‘Her silence was so awkward,’ he told me. ‘Not least as this was someone who lived locally and that I’d continue to bump into.’

He also shared how, one evening, just days after his wife died, her parents were over for dinner with him and

his children. ‘We were all laughing – reminiscing about a family holiday – when the doorbell rang. Two of my wife’s friends were outside, sobbing. We found ourselves having to console them. After, we also felt embarrassed that they’d caught us laughing.’

Lloyd suggests we think of our role as being the supporting actor to the person who’s grieving. ‘They’re the lead,’ she says. ‘And the camera should be on them, not you. So, unless they’re in tears, save your own for when you’re not with them, so they don’t end up having to support you, instead.’

It’s also a good idea to remove any expectations of what someone’s grief



will look like, advises Lloyd. 'It might be laughter. Or numbness. Perhaps they're having a rare, good day, so ride that wave with them. Or a really bad one. In which case, ask if they want to talk, or would prefer distraction.'

Samuel describes grief as messy, chaotic and unpredictable. 'You can wake up in a surprisingly good mood. Or a surprisingly terrible one. And you can have different weathers throughout the day, even across an hour. Which is why it's so important to check in with where someone's at and what they need in the moment. And to do this for the long term, because most grief isn't short term.'

This is so true. Yet, we can easily forget. In the immediate aftermath of hearing about someone's loss or diagnosis, we might barely stop thinking about them. But, gradually, we return to our usual preoccupations, and might even assume they're over the worst. Even though, as I know from my sister's death, it's often only after the initial shock fades and the focus of a funeral is over, that the grieving process really begins.

'Reaching out on a death anniversary is also important,' says Lloyd. 'Put a reminder in your calendar. And I'd recommend saying something neutral like, "I hope today has been as okay as

can be expected.'" Because you can't assume it's going to be awful. Some years it might be, others not. But it's always nice to know that someone has remembered.'

Lloyd also suggests bringing the person who's died into conversations without it needing to be a heavy, grief-related chat. 'People are often longing to reminisce about their loved one. Ask questions about them. But ease your way in, and if you sense resistance, don't push them into it.'

Equally, as the one who's experienced a loss, it's important to set boundaries, and say no when something feels uncomfortable, advises Samuel. 'For example, if you're being asked questions that feel invasive, say, "I don't want to talk about this right now." Or, if someone's trying to persuade you to come to a dinner party they think will cheer you up, explain why you don't want to. This also shows, when you do say yes, that you actually mean it.'

Two days after his wife died, I called my friend. I was nervous: was it too soon, what would I say? He asked to meet for coffee the following day. We sat in a bustling café in London's King's Cross, and talked about everything from his final few days with his wife in the hospital, to suit-shopping for her funeral, to how I'd got a last-minute ticket to a Pretenders gig that weekend.

'I was surprised – and obviously pleased – to see you so soon after,' I said, later. 'But we did the same after your sister died,' he reminded me. A few days after her death, we'd met in a Marylebone café. And the presence of a dear friend, with whom I could discuss anything, and being part of the teeming life of my city in the cold aftermath of death, felt surprisingly right.

As Samuel says, 'Grief is lonely, so connection to others, through both listening and conversation, is invaluable. And talking about the person who's died can help someone mourn and incrementally face – and adjust to – the reality of their loss.'

'You can say to a friend, "I'm not going to know when you want to talk and when you don't. But I know I will always want to listen."'

Coaching in action

“Choosing to lead with love

In their final session together, the award-winning coach Kim Morgan battles with her insecurities, as her client, Marsha*, finds her own solutions



IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK. *NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED

Final session...

Torn between her desire to have a 'wild and wonderful retirement' and the needs of her family, Marsha was a client who had been struggling with a decision about whether to provide childcare for her grandchildren. I thought we had achieved a breakthrough in our previous session, when Marsha realised that there could be a 'win-win' situation for everyone, so I was looking forward to seeing her again. But, as soon as she arrived, I noticed she looked serious.

Marsha squirmed uneasily. 'Well, I've made a decision...' she said, 'but I'm not sure it's the one you wanted me to make.'

Marsha's comment stopped me in my tracks. My role as a coach is to support people to make their own decisions. Had I somehow pushed my own views or agenda onto Marsha? I couldn't dwell on this now – I regained my composure and reassured Marsha that if she was happy with her decision, then I was happy too!

She looked relieved. 'Phew, that's good. So, I've decided to look after my grandchildren full-time. That means every day after school, and in the school holidays, too. It feels like the right choice.'

'I'm pleased for you,' I said. 'What helped you reach your decision?'

'I saw someone on social media talking about values and cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is a feeling of discomfort and unease when you are doing something that is not in line with your values...' Marsha explained, continuing to tell me all about this topic, which I knew well.

I kept smiling and nodding, but inside I was screaming: 'So, social media gave Marsha what I didn't give her! Why hadn't I looked at values with Marsha before?' I zoned back into what Marsha was saying. She had completed an exercise about her values and discovered that 'family' had come above 'freedom and adventure' in her list of core values. 'I realised that I'd never be happy having a crazy, wild retirement if I hadn't supported my family to have the life they want. From that moment on, my decision was easy. I start looking after my grandchildren next week.'

I congratulated her: 'I'm so pleased that you've come to a decision that meets your values, Marsha,' I said.

I was picking up lots of signals from Marsha that she didn't need anything else from me, although we still had an hour left of our session – but I needed to check my reading of the situation.

'How would you like to use the rest of the time that we have together?' I asked.

Marsha looked uncomfortable. 'Would it be okay if we ended the session now? I've made my decision, so I got what I came for, thank you.'

As soon as Marsha left, I contacted my supervisor and asked for an 'emergency supervision session'. It is essential that coaches take time and space to reflect on their coaching work with a qualified coaching supervisor; supervision helps you gain objectivity and perspective on your own work, particularly in complex or difficult situations, or when the coaching work is triggering your own insecurities and unhelpful thoughts and behaviours.

'Tell me all the ways you are beating yourself up about this client,' my supervisor said.

I laughed, 'That's easy. I over-identified with her and assumed we had similar values. I fear that I coerced her into the idea of a wild and wonderful retirement, because that's what I want! I don't think I really listened to her. I let myself feel undermined by her finding the solution to her problem on social media, and I am beating myself up about letting my ego get in the way, and my need to be the "hero" in her story!'

'Is that all?' my supervisor asked, with a grin. She then asked me three important questions about my approach to helping Marsha: 'Did you need to? Did you want to? And were you available to?'

I thanked my supervisor for the challenge in her question. 'I needed and wanted to! But had I been more available to help, I would have listened more, assumed less, and I would have rejoiced in her finding her own solution to her dilemma (even it was on social media!).'

Leaving the supervision session, I was aware of the complex mix of thoughts, feelings, and associations that occur within us when we coach others. I remembered, too, just how important it is for coaches to regularly experience being helped themselves.

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



Work it out

Finding your core values

Values are the things that are important to us – they are the energy behind our goals. Our values are important because they influence the choices we make about how and where we invest our energy. If you put energy into something that does not meet your core beliefs, you will feel dissatisfied and frustrated.

Identifying your ideals is a lovely exercise to do that reconnects you with what is important to you in the way you live your life. When you know what your core values are, it is easier to make decisions about your work and personal life choices.

Take some time to stop and think about your standards. Write a list of all the values that are important to you. They might include:

Achievement
Integrity *Creativity*
Respect *Kindness*
Honesty **Stability**
Loyalty *Family*
Laughter

Peak experience for groups or teams

This is a lovely exercise to do with close friends, or with your team members.

Take it in turns to talk about a peak experience in your life – a moment when you felt happy and fulfilled. It doesn't have to be a major life event. It could just as easily be a memorable moment from everyday life.

It's lovely to see how people's faces light up and their energy lifts when they are talking about these moments.

Then, each identify which values were being met for you in your peak experiences, and how you could bring these values into your life more.

This exercise builds trust and rapport with your friends or team members, and helps you to understand one another more.

These are just ideas for starters.

It is important to find the values that matter to you!

Don't judge the words you come up with – values are very individual, and if something matters to you, it is important to include it in your list.

Now narrow the list down to the top five or ten ideals that will help to guide your choices in life.

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Step off the hedonic treadmill

Savour life's small pleasures instead of constantly searching for more, and forge a new path towards long-lasting fulfilment, writes Kellie Gillespie-Wright

Do you ever find yourself trapped in a perpetual cycle of desire and dissatisfaction, constantly chasing after the next big thing on the horizon, because you believe it will make your life better – only to find it makes no enduring difference? It's a cycle that can be exhausting and, ironically, deeply unsatisfying, and in the long term, can rob us of the joy available to us in this very moment – if we were just able to stop and appreciate it. This phenomenon, known as the hedonic treadmill, can leave us feeling exhausted, unfulfilled, and no happier than when we began our pursuit.

Our relentless quest for more – more money, more status, more *things* – can, paradoxically, lead us away from the very happiness we seek. The hedonic treadmill operates under the principle of hedonic adaptation, the idea that, no matter what happens to us, we tend to return to a personal baseline level of happiness. This adaptation can serve us well in times of adversity, allowing us to recover from hardship, but it also means that the positive effects of our achievements are short-lived.

'In a nutshell, the hedonic treadmill theory states that we adapt fairly quickly both to positive or negative life events, and that our happiness levels eventually return to our initial set point,' explains Dr Anna Katharina Schaffner, a burnout coach and author of *The Art Of Self-Improvement* (Yale University Press, £19.99). 'What that means is that certain achievements, successes, or objects we may long for may not have the power to raise our wellbeing levels in the long term, because we become used to them. They become our new normal.'

That's why, when we secure that promotion or buy the dream car, the joy we feel is temporary. We quickly get used to our new reality and start looking for the next step on the ladder.

For women, the pressures of the hedonic treadmill can be particularly intense. Society often imposes high standards regarding career success, family life, physical appearance, and social status. This relentless pursuit can contribute to chronic stress, anxiety, and a myriad of other health issues. Understanding



IMAGES SHUTTERSTOCK

Expert advice



Anna Katharina Schaffner is a cultural historian and burnout coach, and the author of *The Art of Self-Improvement: Ten Timeless Truths* (Yale University Press, £19.99). In her coaching practice, she specialises on working with the exhausted, and combines state-of-the-art and science-based coaching techniques with tried-and-tested ancient wisdom. annakschaffner.com



and acknowledging the effects of the hedonic treadmill is the first step towards mitigating its impact on our lives – starting with why it happens.

‘Psychologists argue about this question a lot,’ says Schaffner. ‘One theory is that when we are exposed to a particular stimuli over time, we cease to note them. That can be both good or bad ones. A new car or handbag, for example, is something that may generate positive emotions but, eventually, we just get used to them.’

‘At a deeper level, we could say that we often look for happiness in the wrong places,’ she continues. ‘Material possessions and work successes are not royal roads to happiness. If we lack them, we may feel distress, but if we have them, they don’t necessarily make us happier long term.’

The phenomenon is particularly pertinent in a world that glorifies material success, from the endless cycle of consumerism to the social media-fuelled comparison game, and this type of comparative living can become a source of anxiety.


‘We are much more influenced by social norms and expectations than we think,’ says Schaffner. ‘The philosopher René Girard coined the phrase “mimetic desire”. What he meant by this is that we often want what others have or want. Desire, understood in this way, is infectious. And much less personal and unique than we may think.’

‘We also have a strong tendency to compare ourselves to others,’ she continues. ‘More precisely, we tend to compare upwards: looking at people who have qualities or objects that we want to have. And this upward comparison is often unfair and unhelpful, and creates discontent. If we looked sideways, or lower, we would feel much more grateful for what we actually have.’

So how can we tell if we’re trapped on the hedonic treadmill?: ‘If you live in the future, always wanting more, planning next steps, dreaming about the next purchase and from which you expect happiness,’ says Schaffner. ‘A lack of gratitude for what we have and who we are, and what we have already achieved, can also be a sign of being caught up in the hedonic treadmill trap.’

Undoubtedly, one of the most effective antidotes to the hedonic treadmill is gratitude. By regularly acknowledging and appreciating what we have, we can find joy in our current circumstances rather than constantly seeking more. Keeping a gratitude journal or simply taking a moment each day to reflect on the positives can shift our focus and help us to savour the present. And by relishing the small pleasures in life, we can counter the tendency to always look for the next big thing.

Research into happiness suggests that it’s the pursuit of intrinsic goals – those that are meaningful in and of themselves, such as personal



*“By acknowledging
what we have, we can
find joy in our current
circumstances rather
than constantly
seeking more”*



▶▶ NEXT STEPS

Read *The How Of Happiness: A Practical Guide To Getting The Life You Want* by Sonja Lyubomirsky (Little, Brown, £10.99)

Watch *Hedonic Adaptation: Why Stuff Doesn't Make Us Happy* by Dr Robert Puff, on YouTube

Download the Gratitude Daily Bullet Journal app

growth and community involvement – that leads to more enduring satisfaction. Instead of chasing extrinsic rewards, focus on intrinsic desires that promote personal growth and wellbeing. Pursuits such as developing new skills and nurturing relationships can be more fulfilling in the long run. Try practicing mindful enjoyment by being fully immersed in the activities you relish. Learn to savour moments of joy in your daily life. Slow down, engage your senses, and appreciate the simple pleasures around you, whether it's enjoying a delicious meal or revelling in nature.

And try to seek experiences over things. While material possessions can quickly become part of the scenery, adventures can foster lasting happiness. The memories we create, the personal growth we encounter, and the connections we make with others through shared experiences are not as susceptible to hedonic adaptation.

Strong social connections are a cornerstone of psychological wellbeing. Investing time and energy in building relationships can provide a deeper sense of fulfilment than chasing status symbols. You could also try adopting a growth mindset and embracing challenges as opportunities for personal development. This can make you more resilient to the ups and downs of life, and reduce the temptation to compare your success to others'. Limiting your exposure to social comparison triggers is also a step in the right direction, because social media can often fuel the hedonic treadmill.

'It is important to remember that what many of us think of as well-trodden paths towards greater happiness are, in fact, not,' says Schaffner. 'The cultural imperative to steadily rise in our careers, to earn even more money, and to increase convenience and luxury are narratives that we should assess more critically. Many people find, in midlife, that their career achievements and possessions have not made them happier. They wonder, what's next? Why don't I feel fulfilled? And it is at that point, when people leave the socially prescribed pathways and look inwards, that transformation occurs. We need to understand what our own unique needs and desires are, and then we need to develop the courage to say no to the social scripts that no longer serve us.'

Ultimately, it's a matter of balance. There's no need to eliminate hedonistic pleasures from your life entirely, because living is about savouring life's joys, while also accepting its hurdles and understanding that happiness isn't a permanent state, but rather an ever-changing experience.

'We can only lose if we expect to be happy all the time,' says Schaffner. 'Instead, aim for equanimity, for contentedness, for living a life that feels valuable and meaningful, and one with purpose.'

From start to finish

Bookend your day with a daily practice of slowing down and taking stock, and discover the benefits, urges Jackee Holder

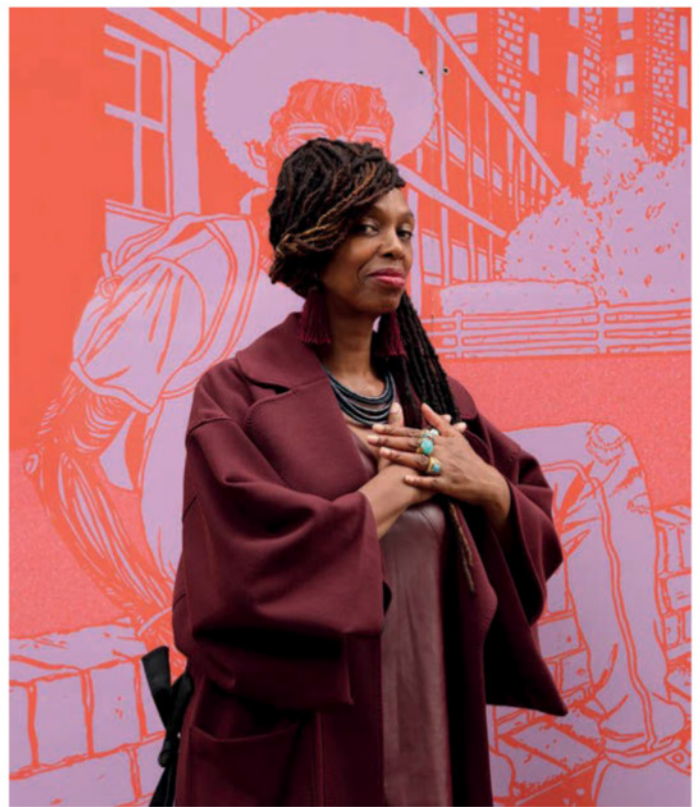
“The fast pace of the working day, accompanied by speed and haste to get things done, doesn't leave much space for slowing down in the week. I've always been a morning person, and the morning is when I do most of my journaling. Having curated in excess of 100 journals – and more than 10,000 hours (and counting) spent on the page – you could say I am an addicted morning journal writer. Almost every entry in my 100 and more journals has been deposited at the start of the day.

This month, I want to leave you with two very simple journaling practices that can be carried out in the morning and in the evening, which introduces a daily practice of slowing down, and is the best alternative I know to scrolling on social media. That's what I love about journaling: its immediacy, its flexibility, and the fact that it is inexpensive yet carries a range of health and psychological benefits. Here's a quick reminder of some of those benefits: when participants wrote about a traumatic event for 15–20 minutes over four to five consecutive days, there were physical and psychological improvements. This included an improved immune system, less visits to the doctor, better sleep, decreased rumination, and a more optimistic outlook. A study by Cambridge University found that journaling helps improve wellbeing after traumatic and stressful events.

This practice is to ask yourself a set of questions for five minutes in the morning and then a second set of questions for five minutes or more in the evening. Morning journaling has been shown to help set you up for the day, to clarify your thinking, and encourage you to enter your day with a more level head. Repeating the same questions for the week allows your thinking to deepen over time. An old African proverb reminds us that repetition is the mother skill – when applied on a regular basis, repetition inches us forward. Repeatedly asking yourself the same question gets you closer to the heart of your answer.

It's really simple. You'll need a minimum of at least five minutes every morning. Choose a prompt or two to work with from this list of morning cues created by high performance coach Brendon Burchard:

- One thing I can get excited about today is...



- I'll complete this day proud of my efforts if I make sure I...
- A situation that might stress me out today is...
- The most important thing I should be doing today is...

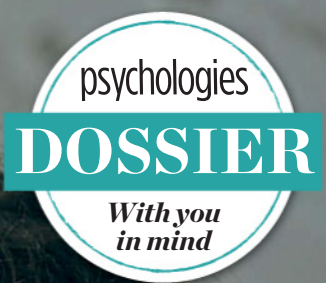
I found it useful to answer all the prompts, and found that it not only focused my thoughts, but solved problems I was holding and generated ideas I hadn't given space to.

For the evening, try these evening prompts by the award-winning podcast host Dr Rangan Chatterjee:

- What was a situation or task I handled well today?
- What was one thing I learnt or was struck by today?
- One example of a moment of appreciation from my day is...
- I could have made my day even better if I'd have...

Studies have confirmed that when we journal in the evening it improves the quality of our sleep and provides a source of release for worries that could keep us awake at night. If you are falling into bed exhausted from your day, then how about journaling at the end of your workday, creating a smoother, more conscious transition between work and home? In a study conducted by Harvard Business School, participants who journalled at the end of the day had a 25 per cent increase in performance than those who didn't. I often find I can spend a good couple of hours as I make dinner swiping through Netflix and Amazon Prime. That space in your evening might just be the perfect spot to give over to 10 minutes of journaling, instead.

Adopting a morning and evening journaling practice will give you more control over your day. As editor Amber Tucker reminded us in a mindful journaling article, 'Writing mindfully can loosen the grip of sticky emotions by bringing them out of the dark.' But please don't take my word for it; get yourself a notebook – it doesn't have to be anything fancy – try it out for seven days, and see for yourself. jackeeholder.com; [@jackeeholderinspires](https://twitter.com/jackeeholderinspires)



FIND YOUR INNER CALM

With self-compassion and kindness, you can tap into true contentment and silence your everyday stressors, discovers Rebecca Frank...

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Expert advice



*Owen O'Kane is a psychotherapist, speaker, and the author of three books, including **How To Be Your Own Therapist** (HarperCollins, £9.99). A former NHS mental health lead, he now runs his own private practice. owenokane.com*



*Dr Meg Arroll is a solution-focused psychologist specialising in health and wellness. She is the author of **Tiny Traumas** (HarperCollins, £16.99). drmegarroll.com*



*Gabrielle Treanor is a coach, writer, author of **The 1% Wellness Experiment** (Headline, £12.99), and host of the **Pressing Pause** podcast. She helps overdoing, overthinking women to feel calmer and happier. gabrielletreanor.com*



‘I am doing the best I can and that is enough.’ This is my mantra, which I repeat to myself every morning when I wake up, and whenever something doesn’t go according to plan during my day, or I start to give myself a hard time. Why? Because whenever I speak to experts about how to achieve a calmer and more contented state of mind (and who doesn’t want that?), the subject of self-compassion always comes up. It seems many of us really are our own worst enemies. In fact, neuroscientists say that about 60–75 per cent of our thoughts can be critical in nature.

You know how it goes. I might berate myself for forgetting something or saying the wrong thing, or having failed to meet my own measure of success in some way. Or it might be a response to the way someone else has behaved towards me. ‘What have I done to offend that person?’ demands my self-doubting voice. But, now, my compassionate voice retaliates: ‘They were probably just having their own bad day. And it doesn’t matter if they don’t like me anyway. I’m doing my best, and that is good enough.’ In challenging that negative voice whenever it pipes up, I’m already feeling less stressed and more at peace with who I am and what I can’t change.

So, if your New Year’s resolutions (like so many others’) have fallen by the wayside, and you’re feeling like a failure, I’d strongly recommend that you forget about them and set just one intention, which is simply to be kinder to yourself. ‘From a compassionate centre, you will be able to deal with emotions such as anxiety or sadness or anger better, and resolve whatever the

issue is more quickly,’ says speaker and psychotherapist Owen O’Kane.

Flipping kindness and compassion onto yourself might feel a bit uncomfortable, especially if you’re used to putting everyone else before yourself. But coach Gabrielle Treanor says this need to keep everyone happy and not rock the boat, which many women feel, fuels people-pleasing and perfectionism. ‘It’s a way of thinking that we often learn from a young age, from our families, school, media, and society, which causes us to strive to be what we think everyone wants us to be. In the process, we abandon our values, our nature, ourselves,’ she explains. When we recognise this is at the root of our stress and overwhelm, Treanor says we can challenge it and get to know our true nature and values, recognise what we are and are not responsible for, and create and honour our own boundaries. ‘In these ways, we can build calm into our lives from the ground up – it’s a lot easier to feel calm when we aren’t trying to take responsibility for everyone and everything.’

How to be happy in yourself

The four steps to contentment that every therapist wants you to know

Self-compassion is your most powerful skill. ‘If I could give people one tool for emotional wellbeing, it would be self-compassion,’ says Owen O’Kane. It’s so important, he explains, ‘because you can try all of the self-help techniques in the book, but if you haven’t learned to treat yourself and talk to yourself in a way that’s compassionate and kind, they don’t come with any substance.’

Compassion isn’t just about kind words, it must include action, says O’Kane. Which means asking yourself, ‘How am I going to look after myself, which people am I going to surround myself with, and what choices am I going to make to serve me well?’ If you think that sounds difficult, O’Kane insists it shouldn’t have to be. ‘You are kind and compassionate with your kids and your friends and family, so you already have the skills to behave that way with yourself.’

To understand how self-criticism can affect you, psychologist Dr Meg Arroll suggests trying this mental exercise: ‘Imagine you’ve made a mistake – a very small one, but your partner or boss is yelling at you. Really shouting and chastising you for something that was relatively minor. How do you feel? Is your heart racing and pounding, tummy tight, and breath shallow? This stress response is the opposite of the rest-and-digest calm state, and for many people, this is what happens in their minds all day, every day.’ By being more compassionate with yourself, Dr Arroll says you’re less likely to trigger the innate stress response and, instead, remain in a calm physiological state.

Emotions are messengers – don’t ignore them

Throughout any day, we will experience many different emotions – but we tend to latch onto the positive ones and try to push down or ignore the emotions we perceive to be negative. ‘We all want to feel happy, content, satisfied and loved,’ says O’Kane, ‘but the other emotions that weave in and out, such as sadness, disappointment, fear and anger, are also powerful and helpful.’ He advises trying to become the observer of your emotions, listening to what they’re trying to tell you. When you feel a strong emotion, pause, catch a breath, and pull back momentarily: ‘That way, you’re giving yourself the option of thinking, “I’m going down this route and what does this mean? What is this emotion communicating to me? Is it trying to slow me down, or make me re-evaluate or look at something from a different perspective?”’

Dr Arroll agrees: ‘When we become comfortable with the wide range of human emotions, we’re much more likely to allow unsettling ones to pass and not become overwhelming,’ she says.

Happiness isn’t dependent on success

How many times have you thought, ‘I’ll be happy when I have more money, a better job, a bigger house...’ and so on. Dr Meg Arroll calls this The Wheel of Striv(f)e. ‘While we strive for all these accomplishments, working our backsides off, we’re running on a perpetual, never-ending, exhausting hamster wheel of strife. This is not to say that goals





psychologies

DOSSIER

*With you
in mind*



are unimportant; rather, the fallacy is that we can have it all if we just work harder and earn more money, and these are the things that make us happy.' Because guess what happens when you get that job, earn more money, buy a bigger house? You move straight onto the next thing, so happiness remains this ever-elusive goal, and you never feel like you're quite good enough.

This constant striving and need to make everything perfect can lead to emotional burnout, signs of which include feelings of overwhelm, irritability, forgetfulness, poor sleep, and feeling over-emotional about things that once wouldn't have affected you. 'To get through this, it's beneficial to do some work around the concept that you are enough,' says Dr Arroll. Think about ways you can remind yourself of this every day, perhaps repeating it to yourself out loud as a mantra, using it as your password, or having Post-it notes in your car or somewhere you will be reminded of it on a regular basis. 'Striving for perfectionism eats up so much cognitive energy, making it nigh-on impossible to learn from mistakes and build psychological immunity. We can aim to be at our best without having to be *the* best.'

Most of your worries won't happen

How many times have you lain awake at night worrying about something that either never happened or was nowhere near as bad as you imagined it would be? Worrying about the future is very normal and natural, but it can lead to chronic stress if it's not kept under control.

'We're hardwired to worry about the future in order to protect ourselves from harm, but we need to teach the brain that most perceived threats are just that – perceived – and not life threatening,' says Dr Arroll. Worry and rumination trigger the stress response – our minds and bodies don't know the difference between a present threat and a perceived threat and, as such, thinking about the past and future negatively can activate the fight-or-flight or freeze stress response. 'If you're experiencing stress or anxiety, it can help to ask yourself, "Where do I find myself most – in the past, present, or future?"'

To challenge unhelpful thoughts, Dr Arroll recommends following the three-step ASK process:

- **A is for Accurate:** Is this thought accurate? If so, what's the hard evidence for this conclusion? We often make assumptions that are not an accurate picture of the world.
- **S is for Sensible:** Is this thought sensible? Anxious thoughts stem from the fear that jumps to worst-case-scenarios in a misguided effort to keep us safe. However, because these thoughts are based on fear, they are often illogical.
- **K is for Kind:** Is this thought kind? If not, what function does this way of thinking serve?

Trauma doesn't always have a capital T

Dr Meg Arroll talks about tiny traumas, or 'tiny Ts', as 'small mental cuts and scrapes' that can build and cause niggling sparks of anxiety or fatigue, and a lack of confidence, if we don't deal with them. We're taught to 'keep calm and carry on', something that Gabrielle Treanor calls 'good-girl conditioning'.

'None of us get through life unscathed,' warns Dr Arroll, who explains that these tiny Ts can be linked to all kinds of things, from early relationships with our parents to our experiences at school and in the workplace, or with previous partners. These smaller yet not insignificant scrapes and bruises help provide us with coping strategies for more significant events in the future, but it's helpful to be aware of them and how they might be affecting our behaviour.

'Often, we'll berate ourselves for our perceived failures, wrongdoings and rejections, but by learning to see them as necessary to build our psychological immunity, we can let go of negative feelings towards ourselves.' Through a three-step process of awareness, acceptance and action, Dr Arroll says we can 'unravel the links, nurture a sense of acceptance so that we no longer battle against ourselves, and then take action to move forward. Once these associations are replaced with more helpful patterns, we tend to be much calmer and less reactive.'

"This constant striving and need to make everything perfect can lead to emotional burnout"



Your stress-less plan

Introduce keep-calm touchpoints into your day, by taking time out to stop and press pause

According to Owen O’Kane most of our bad days are caused by an emotional response to an event, rather than the event itself, and if we take simple steps throughout the day to calm our stress response, we’ll feel more in control and less reactive when things don’t go according to plan. ‘These little microinjections can make the most enormous difference,’ he says. ‘Things might still annoy you, but you’ll feel calmer, and more able to understand why you’ve been triggered and how you can get back to a point of stability.’

When you wake up

Instead of rolling out of bed and crash-landing into your day, take a few moments to check where you’re at. O’Kane likens it to getting in your car and doing your safety checks. ‘It’s a vital part of setting out on your day.’

● Ask yourself, where am I today? How am I feeling physically and emotionally? Once you have a sense of where you are, you can think about what you can do to make your day better or more manageable. You’re not trying to fix your problems or engage with your thoughts; you’re simply

scanning your mind and body to see what’s going on. This helicopter view will give you masses of information about yourself that you might not have noticed if you’d got up and gone straight into sorting out the kids, making breakfast, checking your emails, or scrolling the news. If you’re feeling overloaded, you have the chance to look at your diary and see if you can take something out or ask for support. If you’re feeling low, you could send a message to a friend to see if they’re free for a coffee or a chat, which will make you feel better.



Early afternoon

It's time to reassess, says O'Kane. 'By lunchtime, someone will have annoyed you – maybe they pulled out in their car, turned up late for a meeting, or wound you up with an email or comment.' Understand why you've been triggered and what that's about, and how you can get back to a point of stability. 'Things don't generally turn out as we expect, and we need to try to work with life as it is, rather than what we think it should be. A bad day can be transformed instantly if we pause to review it.'

- Go for a walk. It's easy to fall into the trap of keeping going until you're exhausted, but if you take regular breaks, you're more likely to stay alert and emotionally stable. Even a short walk in green space will help reduce anxiety, lower blood pressure, and make you feel more grounded for the rest of the day.

- Review your day so far. While you're outside, think about any tricky moments you've had – how did you respond, what negative thinking patterns were present, and what underlying thought patterns might have triggered those feelings? Challenge those beliefs by examining whether your assumptions are true or not, and how you might respond differently.

- Consider kindness. When we struggle, it's natural to turn in on ourselves, but if we can flip this by doing something to help or show

compassion towards others, it will break patterns of introspection and increase our sense of wellbeing. Think about how you can make a difference to someone's day, taking inspiration from what would brighten *your* day, and how and when you can make it happen.

The end of the day

It's easy for the stresses of the day to become the stresses of the night. 'Many people roll into bed and don't switch off,' says O'Kane. 'How many times have you ruminated on your day for hours while trying to sleep? Or got up and out of bed because you forgot to defrost the chicken, or logged into your email because you forgot to reply to someone?' Spend three minutes before bedtime in a restful place (that's not your actual bed) to dump the stresses of your day, so that you can enjoy more restful sleep.

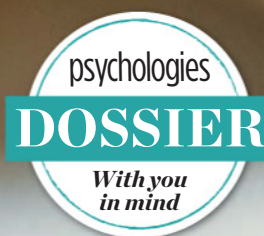
- Try journalling. Write down any events that have upset or angered you in the day – notice how you interpret what happened and any thinking traps you might have fallen into. Try writing down a more helpful, alternative interpretation.

- Ask yourself, 'What did life teach me today?' Try to pinpoint the moments when you felt strong emotions. Pause and let the answers come to you. Lessons can be signposts to tweaks and changes that you need to make, or can be positive reminders of the things you feel grateful for.

- Set an intention for the day. With your eyes closed, set yourself up to three intentions for the day ahead. Gear your intentions towards what matters to you and makes you feel genuinely happy and at peace, rather than materialistic desires.

- Think of three aspects of your life that you feel grateful for. When we step into gratitude mode, our brain will naturally start to produce more feelgood chemicals, and it will improve your mood and reduce anxiety quickly.

8 ways to feel calmer quickly



To access calm speedily, you need to activate your parasympathetic nervous system. 'This tells our brains and body that we're not in immediate danger and can come out of survival mode, which lowers heart rate and blood pressure, and relaxes the muscles,' says Gabrielle Treanor. Try these simple techniques when you want to switch off the stress response in an instant...

PERFECT YOUR POSTURE

Simply changing your posture and body language can directly impact how you feel. If you want to feel calm and confident, practise looking like you are – open chested, head up, back straight. When we're stressed or worried, we tend to hunch and make ourselves smaller, which constricts our breathing, making us feel more panicked.

WRITE IT DOWN

A journal is one of the easiest ways to improve self-awareness, because you can look back at what you were feeling at a certain time, in your own words, and notice the things you've worried about, and reflect on how they turned out. The simple act of writing it down also helps to stop rumination, leaving you feeling calmer.

FEEL ALL THE FEELS

Try making a playlist of songs that make you feel a whole range of emotions – from happiness and excitement to sadness and longing. 'Use these different songs to help you become more comfortable with the array of emotions that you feel, so that when they come up at other times, you're less uncomfortable with them,' says Dr Meg Arroll.

EXHALE YOUR WORRIES

This easy breathing exercise will make you feel calmer after just a few breaths. First, notice where you can feel your breath most clearly enter and leave your body – it could be your nose, your chest, or your stomach. Focus on that place and try to breathe a little more deeply into that spot, and to slow it down. 'When we're tense, we breathe using only the top of our lungs, and when we're scared, we can gulp in air, so make sure you're fully exhaling as well as inhaling,' says Treanor. If it helps you to focus, you can breathe in for a count of four and breathe out to a count of six. As you breathe, try visualising that you're inhaling calm and exhaling worry.



LET NOSTALGIA SOOTHE YOU

The things that remind you of times when you've felt safe and happy can help bring you back to a calmer place again. Dr Arroll recommends playing music, looking at photos, seeking out smells, or reading an old diary. You can also practise making a memory in the moment by noticing as many details, emotions and sensations as you can while you're experiencing something.

Go to your happy place

Picture in your mind a place that represents beauty and peace. Experience everything you can about this place (the colours, sounds, and smells), and enjoy the tranquillity it brings you. Choose a word that you associate with this safe place – maybe 'calm' or 'joy' or 'peace', or something else of your choice. Say the word out loud a few times. Finally, tap each thigh alternately with your hands in a slow rhythm for about 20–30 seconds. 'This is a technique called bilateral stimulation,' says Owen O'Kane. 'Your imagination has gone to a calm place and your chosen word reinforces that. The act of tapping is a further physical reinforcer, which sends a message to your brain that you don't need to be in "threat mode" any more. The tapping rhythm creates a sense of ease and facilitates the grounded feeling.'

Scroll through your senses

'When you focus your attention on something real and in the moment, it brings you out of the thoughts that are spinning through your head when you're overwhelmed,' says Treanor. To do this, scroll through your senses by naming (out loud or silently to yourself) one thing you can see, one thing you can hear, and one thing you can touch, feel, and taste. Do this again and keep scrolling through your senses, naming one thing at a time.

MAKE A COMPLIMENTS JAR

Every time someone gives you a compliment, jot it down on a piece of paper and pop it in a jar. 'You could also write down qualities you like about yourself, or ask a loved one what they value in you,' says Dr Arroll. 'Think about minor achievements, too – finishing a piece of work, tackling a difficult conversation.' When you're having a tough day, close your eyes and grab a compliment to brighten your mood and build your confidence.

WHAT KIND OF CALM DO YOU REALLY NEED?

There's more to calm than rest and relaxation – take our test to find the lifestyle tweaks that will really make a difference for you

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 what aspect of your life is undermining your calm

1 You love feeling like you're

- ♥ Learning and growing.....☐
- ♦ Balanced and well☐
- Safe, calm and grounded☐
- Truly connected with others☐

2 You usually feel calmer after

- ♥ Reading something inspirational.....☐
- Having a tidy or declutter☐
- ♦ Going for a walk☐
- A good conversation☐

3 You often crave calm when you've lost

- ♦ Touch with what you really need...☐
- Your sense of safety and security☐
- A grip on your inner critic☐
- ♥ Your sense of purpose.....☐

4 You'd most like to improve your

- Perspective☐
- Self-belief☐

- ♥ Focus.....☐
- ♦ Lifestyle.....☐

5 You feel unsettled when you've spent too long

- Overthinking☐
- ♥ Doing routine tasks☐
- ♦ Sitting at a screen☐
- In the same room.....☐

6 You feel at your best when you know you're

- ♥ Making a difference☐
- ♦ Looking after yourself.....☐
- Grounded and coping☐
- Loved and approved of☐

7 Right now, you'd most appreciate

- ♥ An inspirational workshop or retreat.....☐
- ♦ A massage or energy treatment...☐
- Spending time somewhere beautiful☐
- Quality time with a loved one☐

8 You know you're out of balance when you feel

- ♦ Tired all the time
- Like no one's really listening to you☐
- ♥ Convinced you need a change.....☐
- Like you want to run away☐

9 In low moments, you can feel

- ♥ A bit lost.....☐
- ♦ Weak and vulnerable.....☐
- Unsettled☐
- Misunderstood☐

10 You'd most appreciate being thought of as

- ♦ Strong.....☐
- Grounded☐
- Open☐
- ♥ Aware☐

Turn the page to discover your personal barriers to calm





What sort of calm are you seeking?



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♥

Spiritual

If your core values revolve around finding meaning in life, losing touch with a sense of purpose can result in spiritual turbulence. It's easy to misinterpret an existential crisis as just dissatisfaction with the status quo, leaving you questioning whether your work, home life, or relationships are right for you. Of course, being proactive and open to change will help if you've got in rut, but you know that superficial changes will only serve as a temporary distraction. It may be that you've been craving a deeper calm for a while but, whatever you try, it never seems to last. You may already know from experience that your default mode is unease whenever you're unsure if you're on the right path.

Spiritual calm can come in all guises and it may take a tried-and-tested approach to find what soothes your soul. Start by taking time to reflect on your core values, and how you can bring your mindset and behaviour more in line with them. Your natural curiosity will keep you open to seeking new ideas, but don't overlook simple changes. Aiming to treat everyone you come into contact with with kindness, respect and a lack of judgment, increasing the deep listening you do, and filtering out gossip from your conversations, can be a surprisingly deep source of spiritual calm.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♦

Physical

We know the mind and body work in tandem, but if you tend to live in your head and get caught up in your thinking, unnoticed physical tension may be your biggest barrier to calm. Your body might be doing its best to let you know that life is out of balance through aches and pains, niggly illnesses, or lack of energy. If this sounds familiar, it may be that the deeper calm you crave will only come by paying attention to your body.

You may already know that physical movement is your most effective prescription for calm, but that doesn't stop it slipping down your list of priorities. There's a reason Buddhist teachers tell us to attend to the body before we attend to the mind – it's not just your physical health that's impacted when you neglect your body and live your life with your shoulders permanently locked around your ears. It's time to think of daily physical activity, such as a lunchtime walk somewhere green, as non-negotiable. Then add some mindful movement – for example, yoga – to soothe your body from the inside out. And when you don't have the space or time to get moving, breathing exercises are a powerful way to invite yourself to let go of tension and remember what it feels like to be truly calm.



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ●

Environmental

The calm we crave is always harder to access if we don't feel content in our physical environment. While it's not always possible to choose where we live, you can give some thought to what changes to your environment may be under your control, such as decluttering if needed, or introducing more light and greenery. And don't forget that environmental cues come through all of our senses, so it's not just the visual impact of where you spend time that influences how easy it is to access a place of calm. Often, we're not even aware of the effort we're putting in to filter out background music, as we don't register when we're craving silence. Aroma can also play a part – selecting and choosing essential oils to burn at the end of the day not only helps soothe the nervous system, it's a way of showing yourself that you are worth taking care of.

Beyond the home, spending time outdoors in a green space is a fast-track route to calm – the human brain responds positively to green environments, and just walking among trees can soothe the nervous system. And when uncertainty or feeling directionless is undermining your calm, the wonder of the natural environment may provide the mental reset you need to get a new perspective on stress and worries.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ■

Relational

Meaningful connections help us feel like we belong, and it's impossible to feel calm when we're dealing with conflict or just feeling overlooked. Right now, you may be missing the quality of connections you need to sustain enough emotional resilience and support a calmer frame of mind. Sometimes, relational disconnect can creep up unnoticed, if the demands of daily life reduce your interactions with your loved ones to transactional exchanges of information. Investing in your current relationships by increasing the quality of your attention is a simple way to create more moments of calm in the day – giving someone your full attention can also create an anchor for a jittery mind, and soothe the nervous system.

In the longer term, making new connections with supportive, uplifting individuals may also help, accessing the deep calm that comes from feeling truly accepted and understood. But, for others, the calm they crave can only come from changing their relationship with themselves. It's hard to feel relaxed and comfortable in your own skin when you have an inner narrative that is attacking or undermining, however subtle it may be. Working on your self-compassion could be the key to unlocking a deeper sense of calm for you – is it time to start talking to yourself as kindly as you do to others?



Join Ollie's army

**NOW
ONLINE!**

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

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

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

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

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

Licence to help

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

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@ollieandhissuperpowers.com. The Ollie School is waiting to hear from you!



I Heart



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



***I enjoy
the little
things in my
relationship***

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK



Coming up for air

A fine line

When bits of the world feel broken, it's okay to admit we don't always feel grateful, reveals Caro Giles



There's a chance that this month's column could be slightly controversial. I am aware that those of you who

read this magazine do so because you are reflective and interested in mental health and human connection. Me too! But, recently, I have been struggling with my love-hate relationship with gratitude, that buzz word that embodies mindfulness and, if I admit it, the calm demeanour I frequently crave.

Psychologists have long agreed that the act of feeling grateful boosts

happiness and encourages better physical and psychological health. Focusing on what we are grateful for can veer us away from negative emotions and thought patterns. I know all of this – but I still find it hard to get my head around the concept.

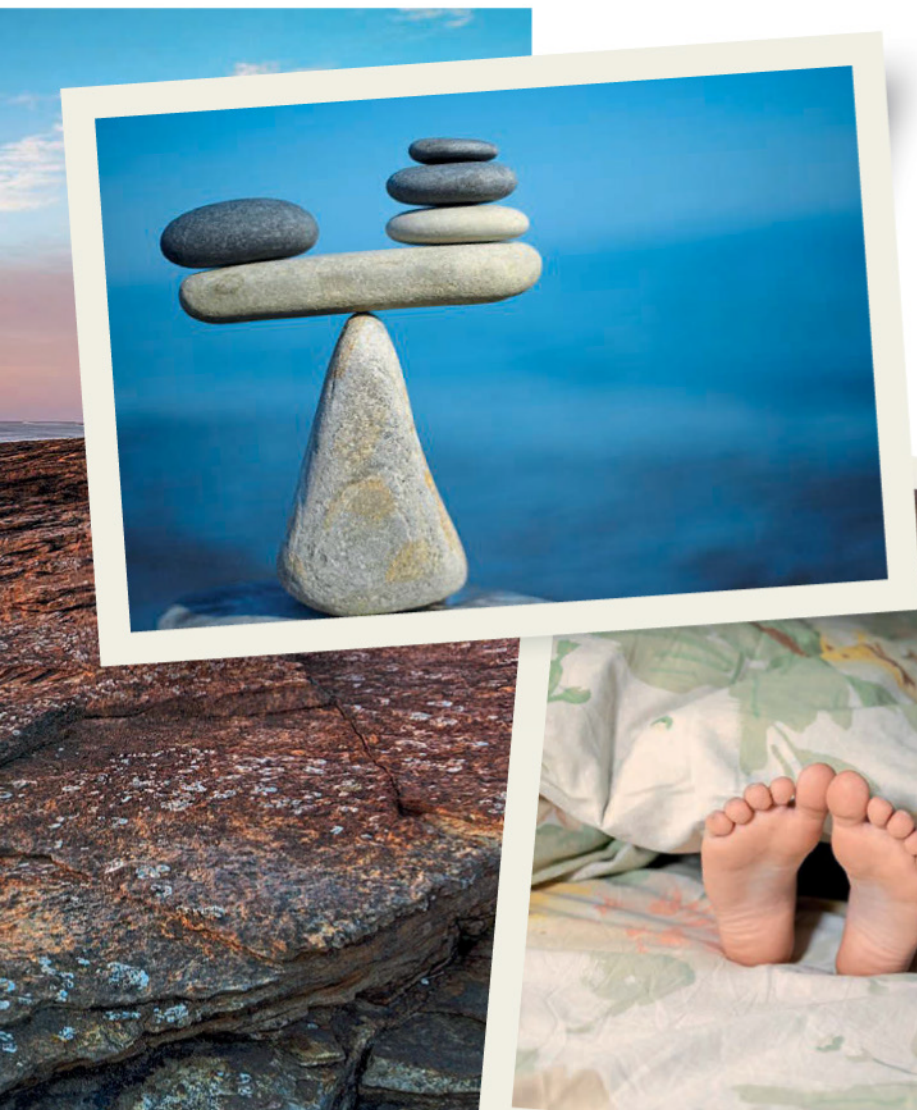
I understand the importance of being grateful: recently, I have been grateful more than ever that my children and I can go to bed at night and not worry that our home will be bombed while we sleep. When I go to the beach and see the sun reflected in glossy sand, I feel gratitude that I live in such a beautiful part of the world. And when I return from a run, face glowing and legs

aching in a good way, I am endlessly grateful for my health and the way my body carries me through life. I guess all of this means that I recognise gratitude, and that I practice it. Perhaps not as intentionally and as frequently as I could, but I acknowledge how lucky I am and try to make the most of my 'one wild and precious life'.

But I believe there might be a flip side to gratitude, and I'd love to hear your thoughts on this, too: there are times when I feel that the expectation of gratitude forces me to swallow down strong feelings that are already hard to express, times when I want to stamp my foot and declare that things are

"Sometimes, the expectation of gratitude forces me to swallow down strong feelings"

*“There is a thin line
between gratitude
and settling for
less than I should”*



just not good enough. Although I doubtlessly live a privileged life, I can't help but feel that it could be improved by well-funded services, by being listened to, and by more kindness. I have been told so many times over the past few years that this is just how it is, but that is lazy, and I have to believe that we can do better.

On a recent trip to a city, I noticed the huge number of people sitting in damp sleeping bags on the streets. Should I have felt grateful that my children and I were wearing warm coats and had enough money to buy a sandwich for lunch? I guess I did feel that. But mainly I felt angry and sad that homelessness is so rife in a country that is full of empty second homes.

More than two years have passed since one of my daughters has been able to attend school. Since then, I have had no support for her learning. So while I am

grateful that I live in a country where, in theory, education is available to all, I am furious and exhausted that my own child has been left to fend for herself.

I read a post on Instagram last week about why we must strive to achieve equity, so that people have access to the same opportunities, before we can expect to achieve equality. This simple concept really struck me, and I think it lies at the heart of why I struggle with the concept of gratitude. Like many women, I have been conditioned to acquiesce and to keep others happy. I have worked hard over the past few years, with the help of many therapy sessions, to try to reduce my people-pleasing tendencies and assert myself. As a result, for me there is a thin line between gratitude and settling for less than I should.

So what should I do about it?

As I type this now, I am thinking about all of the hurdles I need to leap this week, the arguments I will inevitably have, and the unfairness I will encounter. But I am breathing in and breathing out, and my youngest daughter is sitting on a chair next to me, singing to our cat. Somewhere beyond the rooftops the tide is coming in and going out underneath a milky sky, and I can smell the candle flickering on my desk. I am grateful for all of these things, really I am. And I suppose life is all about balance; I need to pick my battles carefully – a constant state of anger isn't good for anyone. But that is not to say that I should completely quell the fire in my belly. Gratitude should not mean settling for less.

Looking for a new career with more purpose?

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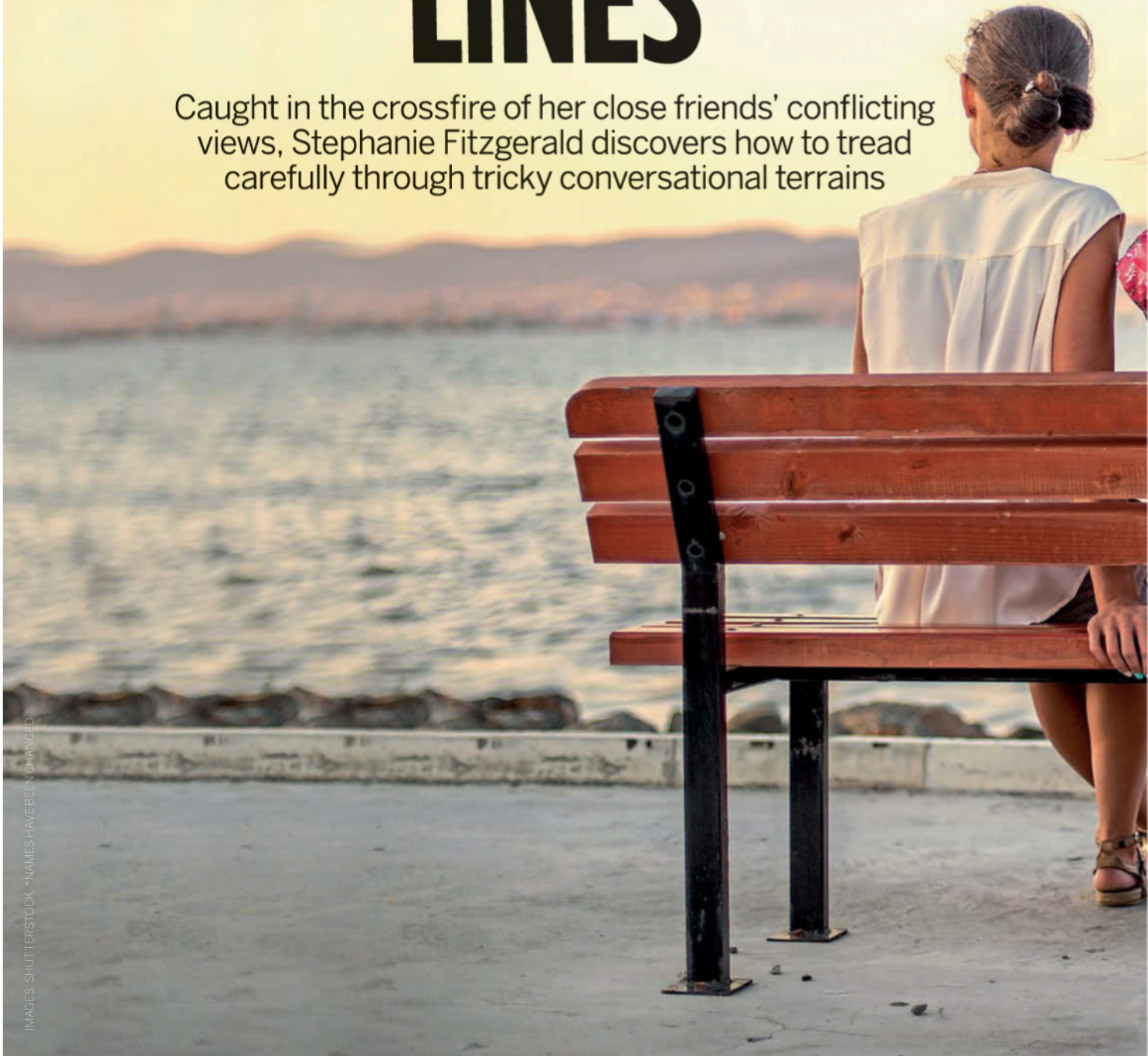
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BEHIND FRENNEMY LINES

Caught in the crossfire of her close friends' conflicting views, Stephanie Fitzgerald discovers how to tread carefully through tricky conversational terrains



IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK * NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED

Picture the scene. Two of my closest friends are coming over for dinner. The table is laid, the playlist is on, the prosecco is in the fridge. So far, so good. Corrine* arrives first, a little flushed, explaining that she's come straight from the gym and has brought her appetite with her. Corrine upped her fitness game last spring, and our friendship group has been really supportive: we've celebrated every Personal Best, and reacted with strong-arm emojis for every #gymspiration post shared.

As Corrine is telling me all about her latest progress, Hayley* arrives, grimacing in pain. Hayley explains that she couldn't find a parking space close by and so had to walk from the top of the road. Hayley struggles with back and knee pain, which is getting steadily worse. Pouring out wine and sympathy, I help Hayley get comfortable and then turn around to go and check on dinner.

But when I return, I notice that things are a little tense. Hayley is watching as Corrine engages in the sharp intakes of breath of someone who wants to say something, but isn't quite sure how to. After a few minutes of this awkward non-talking, Hayley says, 'Oh, for goodness sake Corrine, spit it out!' And so she does: Corrine lets rip with a torrent of unwanted advice about Hayley's weight, telling her that her back and knee pain are due to increased weight gain, and that Hayley's approach to diet, exercise and health is damaging her. Corrine doesn't stop talking for nearly ten minutes, by which time Hayley's glass is empty and her rage overflowing.

It's fair to say that Hayley and Corrine sit in different camps. Since upping her fitness focus, Corrine is borderline evangelical about all things nutrition and exercise. Hayley, by contrast, celebrates a bigger frame, and delights in what she calls 'a life of indulgence'. Hayley disparages



Expert advice



Niamh McMahon is a nutritional therapist and an experienced health and wellbeing specialist. She is passionate about nutritional health and empowering people with the knowledge to make positive changes to their lives.

“We are all allowed to hold our different views; it’s important that there is space for diversity within our friendships”

conversations about making oneself physically smaller, and declares them insulting. She believes in body-positivity, and that all bodies have their own choices to make. This separation of views has never been an issue. Until now. Two of my besties, sat next to one another, and yet miles apart.

So how do we approach tricky subjects such as nutrition and exercise with friends? Indeed, should we be approaching them at all? ‘It’s really difficult,’ confirms Niamh McMahon, a nutritional therapist and health and wellbeing specialist. ‘You have to ensure that the conversation is welcome; there needs to be an agreement that there is going to be an open conversation. Having a very direct approach is going to be abrasive – even the gentlest of questions or observations can be met with defensiveness.’

Like Corrine, when we are passionate about something and have acquired a lot of knowledge, we want to share it, particularly if we think it could help someone. However, McMahon advises caution in viewing nutrition and exercise through such a narrow lens. ‘It’s very complex,’ she reminds me. ‘There is never just one solution. It infuriates me when you hear, “Oh, just reduce your calorie intake and increase your activity,” because there could be multifaceted reasons why that won’t work for someone. These include genetics, environment, upbringing, limited access to certain foods, or a lack of knowledge around foods and their impacts.’

So not only is this conversation challenging, then, but we also have to consider whether we should be having it at all. Corrine and Hayley came to my house for a relaxing dinner, and no one was prepared for the conversation that unfolded. I do believe Corrine’s heart was in the right place; she was sharing information because she cares about Hayley and wants to help reduce her pain. McMahon acknowledges that sometimes these conversations are hardest when we’re approaching someone we love and care about. Her advice? ‘Trying to say it without judgment is key. You have to pull back and verbalise it differently. I would express my concern and love, and approach the situation with curiosity and openness. This means





it comes across as a caring conversation and not as an attack. It's really hard when you care about someone, because you want to be direct and 'fix' it, but it's far better to approach it gently.'

Even if someone is interested in a sensitive topic and wants to know more, it is advisable to hang back and get more details of what they want to know, McMahon confirms: 'I only give advice when asked for it, and then I'm very careful in how I broach the conversation and introduce certain ideas.'

When we are approaching challenging or dividing topics in friendship groups, it's important to be open to listening to each other and not simply jumping in with our views. Reducing a nuanced, emotive and complex topic to simple 'advice' disregards the efforts and engagement that people have already made, and they're bound to feel angry. Although you may see things clearly from your perspective, it is important to remember that this is just *your* view. There may be many elements that are underpinning someone's beliefs, and even the closest of friends won't be privy to all the details.

We are all allowed to hold our different views, and it's important that there is space for diversity and change within our friendship groups. It is a waste of energy to judge someone or to try and change them or their opinions. Accepting differences within your friendship groups is key. If you sit so far away from another's viewpoint that you cannot see their perspective, then it's okay to acknowledge that and agree to leave the conversation alone.

As McMahon advises: 'Don't be afraid to be direct. Agree to take the contentious topics off the table and ask, "What are the things we enjoy doing together?" and focus on those instead. You don't have to agree with people, but you also don't have to vocalise your disagreement. Put your energy into building on common ground.'

Marie Kondo, the Japanese decluttering guru, writes in *The Life-Changing Magic Of Tidying* (Ebury, £13.99) about her feelings of frustration when others were messy. Eventually, Kondo realised that the solution lay, not in putting our energy into changing others, but in focusing on ourselves. McMahon wraps up our conversation with similar advice: when you really want to change someone else, focus on yourself. 'When you work on you, it can have an impact on those around you, even if you don't say anything. If your energy is up – if you are feeling positive and you reflect that – then others might be attracted to your way of thinking.'

So how did we repair our friendship trio? We focused on enjoyment. We looked at what we liked doing together and put our energy into that, instead. Much as Kondo focuses on sparking joy, we navigated our challenges by focusing on fun. After all, great enjoyment is a marker of a great friendship.

Q&A

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



*Dr Martha Deiros Collado is a psychologist with more than 20 years of clinical and academic experience. She is the author of *How To Be The Grown-Up* (Transworld, £16.99).*

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

“Why does she feel the need to pass comment?”

Q My mother criticises my appearance all the time, by asking me questions such as, ‘Is that how you’re wearing your eyeliner now?’ I’m not a young teenager – I’m a 44-year-old woman – and I find comments on my appearance irritating and humiliating. Any time I pick her up on it, she gets offended, and asks me why she isn’t allowed to ask me a question. She tells me I am too ‘sensitive’, and that it’s unkind that my assumption is that she is criticising me. Perhaps I *am* sensitive to her words, but how do I get her to stop making comments on the way I look?

I totally understand why you would feel irritated in these interactions with your mother. You deserve to have freedom and respect for the decisions and choices you make about your appearance. This was also true when you were a teenager, and your comment on this makes me think that the interaction of your mother criticising you over your appearance is part of a long-standing pattern between the two of you.

When mothers criticise their daughters, particularly on appearance, there are often multiple layers to this. A criticism can be a doorway into trying to make a statement or offering an opinion that she hopes you would ask her for. Perhaps your mother sees in you a reflection of herself, and witnessing your appearance as different to how she looked when she

was your age is difficult. Perhaps her criticisms are her way of trying to control others’ perception of you (for example, if you look a certain way, others will find you more attractive in her eyes, and this may also, in her view, influence how others perceive *her* as your mother). Perhaps she struggles with letting go of the control she used to have over your appearance when you were younger. And, to add to all of this, perhaps your mother has some ingrained beliefs about ‘how’ a woman of your age ‘should’ look, and thinks she is being supportive or helpful by guiding you towards those ideals.

I cannot stop your mother making comments on your appearance, but what I can share are ways you can respond to your mother in these situations:

- Whenever your mother comments on your appearance, use your confident

voice to assert your choice with a response such as, ‘Yes, this is how I look/what I am wearing. I love it,’ and then swiftly move on to another topic.

- Reflect back the criticism and get curious with her, saying, for example, ‘Hmm... it sounds like you want to say something about my eyeliner. What is it that you want to say, Mum?’

- Set a clear boundary and let your mother know you want to hear her opinion, but your body, face, and appearance are out of bounds.

- Ignore the question and move on – sometimes easier said than done!

These interactions are common between mothers and daughters, and there isn’t a ‘perfect’ way of handling it. You may have to try a few things and see what works. As a daughter who sometimes receives similar critiques, I am sending you much love.

“When’s the right time to start putting boundaries in place?”

Q My child is 15 months old and very physically active, often touching and running towards things that are unsafe. They are also demanding a lot more of my time when it comes to playing or being held. When is it appropriate to start saying ‘no’ to a child?

Welcome to parenting a toddler! I say this with love and warmth, as I find toddlerhood one of the most incredible phases; watching a child’s wonder at the world is mesmerising. But, as your toddler goes on explorative adventures to make sense of the world, they need boundaries to stay safe. Boundaries are not selfish, mean or harsh, they are loving ways of teaching children rules about what they can and cannot do. I believe most parents begin to set boundaries from birth, but you may not have seen it from this perspective

before now – things such as offering them a rattle but not letting them play with small toys for risk of choking, or allowing them to crawl with minimal supervision but not down the stairs. Both of these are physical boundaries you might have set to keep a baby safe.

As they begin to transform into a child, you may have to introduce more and different boundaries, including social rules of interaction, and you may notice yourself using more language alongside your actions. Make sure you are clear about setting a boundary, rather than a ‘request’. For example: ‘Please don’t jump on the sofa’ is a request. You can say it as many times as you like, but your child may carry on jumping until you turn this into a boundary. This would sound more like, ‘I can’t let you jump on the sofa,’ while picking up your child and putting them on the floor. Then say, ‘You can jump on the floor like this,’ jumping along with them.

Boundaries will get you off your feet to set and repeat rules many times a day. And this is all part of how you teach a child to interact with the world, and others, safely. To guide you in thinking about how and when to set boundaries, here are a few questions to ask yourself:

- 1** Is my toddler safe to explore, or are they at risk of hurting someone or something?
- 2** When can I be flexible with this limit (for example, are there times when I can say ‘yes’ due to time, money, or practical reasons?)
- 3** Is this a boundary influenced by others or my fear of how others will perceive me or my child?

Think about what really matters to you. Boundaries are important, but too many can get in the way of your toddler trying new things. Boundaries differ from family to family, and it’s okay for this to be a bit messy while you figure out what works for you and your child.



IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

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Anna Williamson

Spring-clean your relationship

Ah, spring; you can smell it in the air – literally. The season of waking up from hibernation, warmer temperatures, and a renewed sense of energy. As nature sheds its winter coat and embraces a vibrant transformation, why not take a cue and breathe new life into you and your relationship?

In the same way you might declutter your home during spring, now is the perfect time to ditch the winter sluggishness, declutter, and refresh your connection with yourself, and – if you have one – with your partner. If you're sprucing up your love life, you might also choose to take inspiration from the March hare – who's excitable antics coined the phrase 'as mad as a March Hare' – and embrace renewed sexual energy (whether you take it as far as the hare and embark on a season of breeding is entirely up to you!).

First up, clear out any conversation cobwebs. Effective communication is the foundation of a healthy relationship, and there's no better time than right now to sweep away any lingering words that have gone unsaid that may have accumulated during the winter months. It's time to step up, recognise what needs to be done, and schedule a heartfelt conversation with your partner, sharing your thoughts,

feelings and needs openly. Ensure that you are both actively listening and expressing yourselves in a constructive manner, and – most importantly – being respectful. A clean slate of communication sets the stage for a blossoming connection.

Next, weed out any resentment. Bitterness can be like a persistent vine, subtly growing and affecting the health of your relationship. So identify and uproot any lingering resentment and, crucially, deal with it. Talk about past grievances, forgive, and commit to moving forward together. By letting go of negativity, you create space for new growth.

Sow seeds of quality time. In the hustle and bustle of everyday life, trying to be all things to all people, it's easy to neglect one-on-one time with your partner. Schedule regular date nights, weekend getaways, or even simple walks after work and picnics in the park. Proper

uninterrupted time together fosters intimacy and connection, allowing your relationship to flourish.

Spruce up intimacy. As nature starts to emerge from the cold and drab, why not add some vibrancy to your sex life? Spice things up by trying new experiences together, exploring each other's fantasies, or simply expressing affection in different ways, such as just cuddling and kissing more. A fresh and invigorated intimate connection can rekindle the spark and give your relationship a renewed sense of passion.

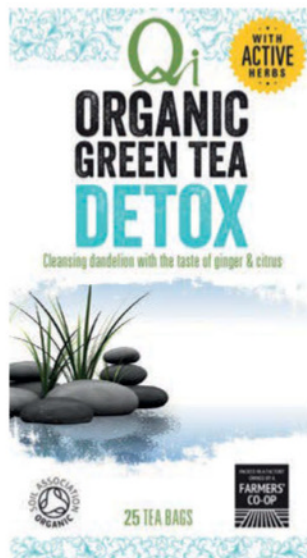
Organise goals. Spring is a season of growth and renewal, making it an excellent time to revisit and organise your own, alongside shared goals as a couple. Reflect on your individual dreams, and find ways to align them with your partner's. By nurturing a shared vision for the future, you'll strengthen your bond as a couple, as well as continuing to expand your own goals and sense of purpose, which is the key to a healthy and happy life.

Just as nature undergoes a rejuvenation during spring, you and your relationship can experience a fresh start and new beginnings too. Take advantage of this season of growth to be your best self and to pour your energy, effort and love into not only yourself, but to the relationships that matter.



Reset & recharge

Give your body and mind the fuel they need to take on the day!



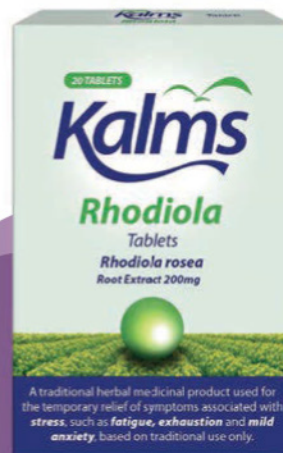
Qi Teas

Time for a reboot? Feel renewed and rejuvenated with Qi Teas – fresh, tasty and 100 per cent natural green tea. Qi Teas Organic Detox Green Tea has a light, delicate and refreshing taste. The herbal blend includes cleansing dandelion root and milk thistle, combined with the refreshing taste of lemon and orange, and helps to restore the balance and harmony of your body. This organic Detox Green Tea is an ideal kick-start to your day, and can be enjoyed as part of a healthy lifestyle. **Available for £2.99 from qi-teas.co.uk**



VIRIDIAN

For natural skincare, choose Repair 5 Serum from Viridian, made using pure and organic ingredients. A trial by Viridian found 98 per cent of people who used Repair 5 Serum reported significant improvements in the appearance of their skin. Easily absorbed, the serum features a blend of botanical oils, and avoids synthetic fragrances. Cruelty-free skincare. **Available for £19.55 from viridian-nutrition.com**



Kalms

In a recent survey by Kalms of 2,011 Brits, more than half of all women surveyed (54 per cent) reported having felt stressed and low in energy in the past 12 months. Kalms Rhodiola is a traditional herbal remedy used for the relief of symptoms associated with stress, such as fatigue and exhaustion. Exclusively based on traditional use only. Contains rhodiola root. Always read the label.

Available for £9.99 from amazon.co.uk

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Revive your senses with Plouf Alpine Forest Body Wash, formulated to instantly uplift and take you on a sensory journey to the lush heights of the Swiss forests. Notes of scented pine and moss meet woody and earthy tones, creating the perfect blend for a refreshing and energising shower experience. Packaged in a bottle crafted from sugarcane, Plouf takes steps towards reducing environmental impact.

Available for £22 from weareplouf.com



Body



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

***My positive
thoughts
create my
healthy body***

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK





MINDFUL WELLNESS



Psychologies wellness director – mindfulness expert and yoga teacher Ali Roff Farrar – shares advice, ideas, and the latest research on everything from nutrition and skincare to mental wellbeing

Customise your skincare routine to suit your cycle

GP and functional medicine and hormone doctor Sohère Roked explains how to tailor your skincare regime to sync with your menstrual cycle, for optimal skin health...

The menstruation cycle is divided into menstruation, followed by the follicular phase, ovulation, and finally, the luteal phase. The phases of the cycle are the same for all women, but the length in time of each phase can vary.

● **Menstrual phase** Loss of oestrogen and progesterone during the menstrual phase can influence skin's dryness; this is a good time to be moisturising well or to use hydrating facial oils. Gentler

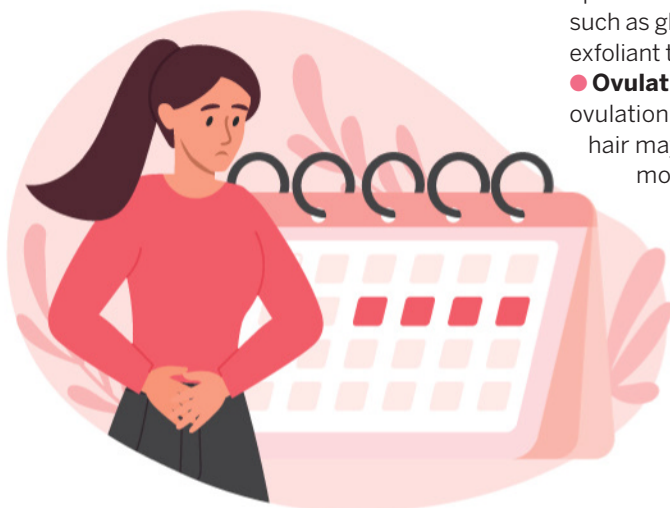
ingredients at this time are helpful for supporting the skin barrier.

● **Follicular phase** Oestrogen rises during the follicular phase, which can be beneficial and hydrating for the skin, and women often report that their skin looks best at this phase of the cycle. This is the time to have facial treatments such as peels, whereas pre-menstruation or during menstruation individuals should opt for more calming facials. Using AHAs such as glycolic acid can be a good exfoliant to stop pores getting clogged.

● **Ovulation and luteal phases** During ovulation and the luteal phase, skin and hair may feel oilier, and skin can be more sensitive than usual. In the luteal phase (which is two weeks to ten days before a period), some women experience rosacea and redness, or more acne around the lower face. This is a good time to choose calming products or those without active ingredients.

Words for wellbeing

Research* has found that poetry can have a 'demonstrable positive impact' on wellbeing and general mental health symptoms during adverse times, including grief. The study found that people who wrote, shared and talked about poetry in order to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic experienced a decrease in feelings of loneliness or isolation, and reported reduced feelings of anxiety and depression.



*ANTHONY CALESHU, RORY WATERMAN, SAM KEMP: 'POETRY AND COVID-19: THE BENEFIT OF POETRY AND THE POETRYANDCOVIDARCHIVE.COM WEBSITE TO MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING', JOURNAL OF POETRY THERAPY, 2023

Eat well



Oven-baked carrots with garam masala, mint, coriander, lime and yoghurt

Carrots are a go-to veg, and this recipe brings out their sweetness by adding spices and cooking them slowly so the sugars caramelize and the juices amalgamate. You can do this with other root vegetables, too, such as beetroot and parsnips – give them a try and serve paired with your favourite meats

You will need: a sealable freezer bag

Serves 2

- 1 tsp garam masala
- 1 tsp toasted cumin seeds
- 1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- A pinch of flaked sea salt
- 250g medium carrots, trimmed
- 10g toasted and chopped cashew nuts, to serve

For the dressing:

- 150g natural yoghurt
- 5g mint leaves, finely chopped
- 5g coriander leaves, finely chopped
- Zest and juice of 1 lime

1 Make a paste in a small bowl by combining the garam masala, cumin seeds, olive oil and salt. Transfer to a sealable freezer bag, add the whole carrots, and massage the paste all over to evenly coat. Leave for 3 hours to marinate.

2 Mix together all the ingredients for the dressing and leave in the fridge until needed.

3 Preheat the oven to 200°C/180°C fan/gas mark 6. Place the carrots in a roasting tray and cook in the

oven until tender and golden brown, around 30–45 minutes. Remove from the oven and place the carrots on a serving plate. Spoon over the dressing and top with the toasted cashew nuts to serve.

*Extracted from
Eat To Your
Heart's Content
by Sat Bains
(Kyle Books, £26)*



Body care

What's the deal with... teff?

Teff is a great grain, high in iron and low in phytic acid (which inhibits absorption of iron), and with amino-acid composition (the molecules which form proteins) comparable to that of an egg. Teff is also high in fibre and resistant starch; it promotes a healthy gut microbiome; and is a good source of minerals, including copper, phosphorus, calcium and manganese. Research* has found that regular consumption of teff as part of a balanced diet can contribute to active recovery for athletes, and provide essential support for optimal performance.



The Teff Creations Company's range of Superblend Bites are a great health-conscious snack, with each one containing less sugar, fewer carbs, more protein, and more fibre than a banana – making it a perfect on-the-go snack.

TTCC Superblend Bites, £30 for a box of 12 packs, teff.me

80%

of the carotenes in carrots are called beta-carotene, and are often referred to as provitamin A, which our gut converts into vitamin A. Studies have shown that when we cook carrots with extra-virgin olive oil we can increase the amount of beta-carotene our body can absorb. In addition to their association with eye health, carotenoids may also aid cardiovascular health**.

Sleep sense

'Around a third of Brits suffer from insomnia,' says Mani Norland from The School of Health. 'To improve sleep, go to bed and wake up at the same time each day, aiming for eight to nine hours' sleep. Avoid caffeine after noon, and large meals at night, and don't drink liquids in the three hours before bed – especially alcohol! Smoking and vaping can also disrupt sleep.'

'Put down devices two hours prior to bedtime, and exercise at least three hours in advance. Dim the lights an hour before bed, and keep baths warm, not hot, and your bedroom cool.'

'Finally, if you do find yourself awake for more than 30 minutes, get up and do something relaxing – the anxiety of not being able to sleep can make it harder still!' schoolofhealth.com

3 easy meditation techniques for overthinkers

BY ALI ROFF FARRAR

1 The question I love this simple question from Eckhart Tolle, author of *The Power Of Now* (Hodder & Stoughton, £12.99) to help you get out of your head when you're in overthinking mode or finding it difficult to quieten your mind. Simply close your eyes, take a breath, and ask yourself: 'I wonder what I'll think about next?' The results are nothing short of amazing.

2 The body scan A really simple but powerful mindfulness meditation. Lie down, get comfortable, and bring your awareness to your toes. What sensations are there? Get curious about temperature, touch, tingling, pain, softness – all of it. Keep scanning in a curious and interested way up each body part until you reach the crown of your head. Try not to get into the stories about the sensations – just focus on your senses.

3 The candle gaze Perfect for the end of winter, this is an easy one. Set a timer, light a candle, and simply sit and gaze at the flame. Your mind will wander; that's okay. Just keep guiding your awareness back to the flame and concentrate on it until the time is up.

Unity Yoga Buckwheat Natural Yoga Meditation Cushion, £59, thepositive.co



The Four Ways To Wellbeing by Nicola Elliott (Penguin, £16.99)

The Neom De-Stress essential oil blend has to be my all-time favourite wellbeing scent – and now there's a brilliant book to accompany it! The Neom brand has taken over the wellbeing world since its launch in 2005, and in this insightful new read, founder Nicola Elliott shares the Neom 'way', explaining the ethos and wisdom behind its four pillars (or four ways to wellbeing): less stress, better sleep, boosted mood, and more energy. A must-read for Neom fans, or anyone interested in holistic wellness.



*BECKET AL. 'MICRONUTRIENTS AND ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE: A REVIEW'. FOOD AND CHEMICAL TOXICOLOGY 2021. **SOURCE: EAT TO YOUR HEART'S CONTENT BY SAT BAINS (KYLE BOOKS, £26). TANITA LENNIS, AHUJI DAS-FRIEBEL, NICOLE K Y TANG, ADAM N SANBORN, SAKARI LEMOLA, HENRIK SINGMANN, DIETER WOLKE, ADRIAN VON MUHLENEN, ANUREAD. 'THE INFLUENCE OF SLEEP ON SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING: AN EXPERIENCE SAMPLING STUDY'. EMOTION, 2023.

Bit of a stretch

STARTING SOMEWHERE

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



Perfectionism can hold you back. Most of the time, there's nothing wrong with not performing to your maximum; gift-wrapping, fridge-contents organisation, Wordle. There are, of course, occasions when it's time to knuckle down and give it your

best shot; job interviews, driving tests.

I used to believe that if I wasn't going to excel at something, it wasn't worth doing. It was a belief that yielded minimal results, few risks, and fewer chances to fail, learn, and grow. These days, relentless parenting, housework, and life demands have seen to it that my chances to overthink are minimal. I'm now far more comfortable with being average rather than veering between extremes.

Pre-kids, I had way more time for the pursuit of wellness. I spent hours moving and teaching in a bright, airy studio with essential-oil diffusers, fairy lights, and macrame hanging plants. It all contributed to a version of myself that no longer exists; a calmer, stronger, more limber one. Since then, I've birthed and raised two babies, reduced my teaching hours, watched as my free time evaporated, and cursed as that studio shut down.

And through it all, I've held onto an unhelpful idea that if I don't return to my former 'level' of physicality, I've failed. As though being able to do push-ups off your knees is some indication of efficacy as a human. As though your #gains are what you'll really be remembered for. Recently, leaning more towards the couch end of couch to 5K, I just haven't had

the time or inclination to get back to that standard. Or any standard. Cue feeling stiff, unenergised, and unmotivated.

This month, however, I've got over myself and back into the saddle, via Yoga With Adrienne, Kit Rich, and other YouTube fitness folk. It's not super aesthetic – my living room has limited space with all the toy detritus littering the floor, my mat has been battered and Biro'd on by the kids' antics, and I'm yet to crack more than three full push-ups. But you know what? I'm feeling better. Freer in my **body**, clearer in my **mind**. It might not be perfect, but it's good enough.





SenseHACKING

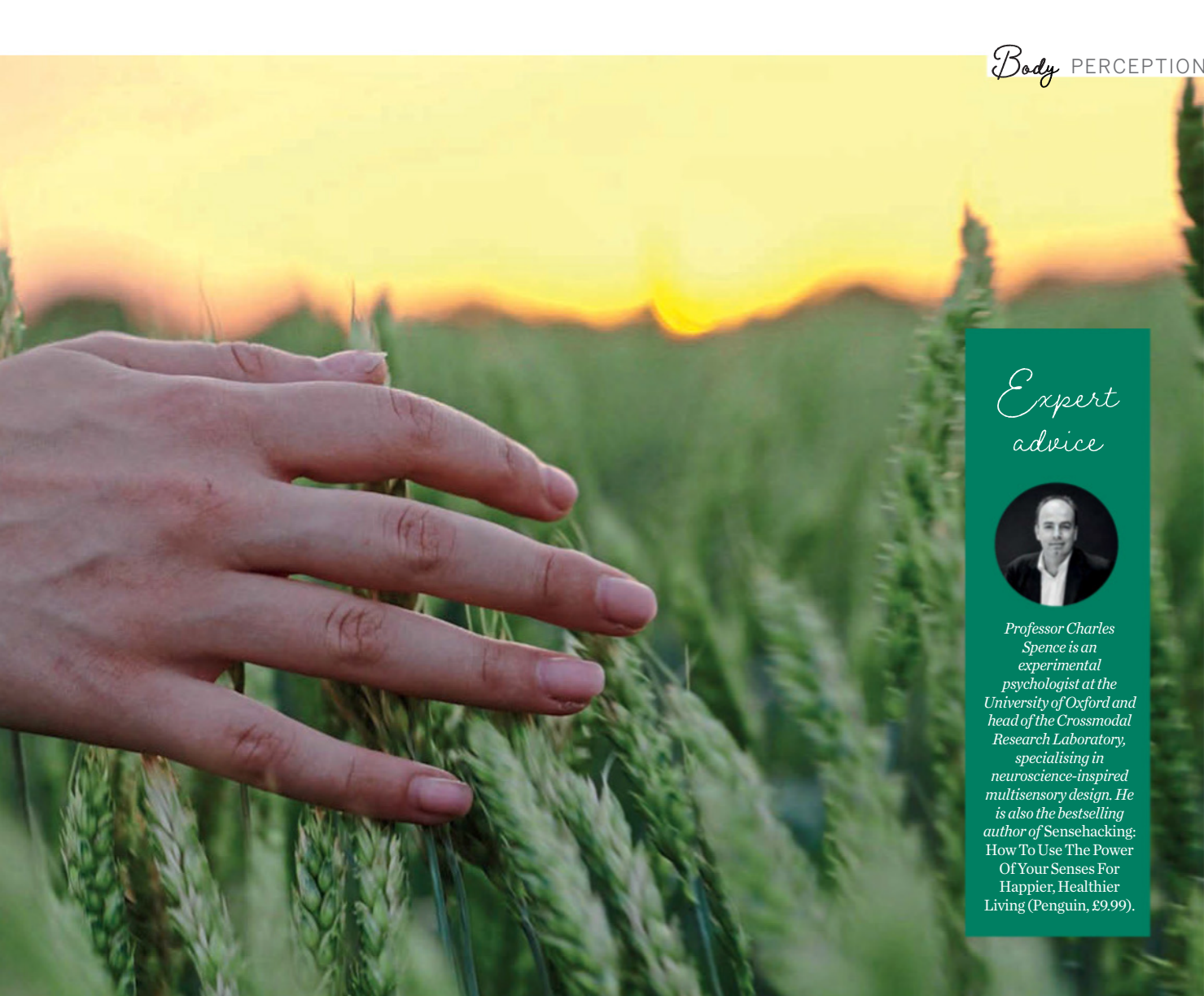
Could understanding how your senses interact, and taking steps to bring them into balance, be the key to better wellbeing? Kellie Gillespie-Wright explores...

Here's a thought: absolutely everything that we have ever learnt, thought, or felt came to us via one or more of our five senses, directly impacting our perception of the world around us and changing how we think and feel.

But did you know that your senses not only perceive the external world,

they also metabolise and digest those inputs into your mind/body system, so that whatever enters your ears, eyes or nose, or touches your skin and tongue, becomes a part of you and influences your health and happiness? As with food, the 'sense impressions' you ingest can have either a nourishing or harmful effect, so it's important to be aware and

selective about the information that you allow into your sense organs. Of course, we can't control the constant stream of sensory data that surrounds us, but what if we could manipulate it to relieve stress, lower blood pressure, improve sleep patterns, and even reduce chronic pain? Sensehacking is a new concept that is taking the



Expert advice



Professor Charles Spence is an experimental psychologist at the University of Oxford and head of the Crossmodal Research Laboratory, specialising in neuroscience-inspired multisensory design. He is also the bestselling author of Sensehacking: How To Use The Power Of Your Senses For Happier, Healthier Living (Penguin, £9.99).

academic world by storm, but what exactly is it, why is it so important, and how can we use it in our everyday lives?

Spearheaded by the pioneering research of Oxford University's experimental psychologist professor Charles Spence, sensehacking is poised to revolutionise the way we understand and enhance our wellbeing.

'Sensehacking is the name given to the deliberate use of our senses, and of sensory stimulation, in order to help improve our social, cognitive, and emotional wellbeing,' says Spence, who has long been fascinated by the way our senses intermingle to create our experience of the world. His groundbreaking work reveals how our brains meld what we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell into a cohesive whole that affects our wellbeing 24/7.

'We are often unaware of the multisensory atmospheres that surrounds us,' says Spence. 'The colour of the walls, the brightness of the lighting, and background noise or scent can all too easily fade into the backdrop of our experience. But that doesn't mean that our senses aren't all the time processing those environmental sensory cues, and that they have an impact, be it positive, or – more often – negative, on our social, cognitive, and emotional wellbeing.'

Sensehacking is rooted in the belief that different sensory inputs trigger different responses in the brain, which in turn affect our mood, thoughts, and behaviour. It draws inspiration from biohacking, mindfulness, and perceptual psychology. It can help to think of it as a 'sensory diet', a deliberate and curated selection of sensory experiences

designed to nourish the mind, just like healthy food nourishes the body. And in much the same way that we become what we eat, we also become what we perceive – making sensehacking a crucial aspect of self-care.

'We can all use music, soundscapes, scents, and colours to become more productive, to relax and sleep better, and to improve perception,' says Spence. 'But the first step is to recognise just how much influence the multisensory atmospheres in which we live, work, play, and sleep have on us. Just because you are not aware of sound, doesn't mean it's not there, going to your brain and affecting you.'

So what part does each sense play in our day-to-day lives, and how can we begin to tweak their inputs to our advantage? Aromatherapy is a prime





example of sensehacking with smell. Studies have long shown that peppermint and lemongrass will energise us, while rosemary and cinnamon fight fatigue. Releasing a sweet smell, such as vanilla, has even been shown to help people cope with pain.

Even how youthful or attractive you look is partly determined by your smell or choice of scent. Subtle floral scents will make you seem younger, while warm, woody, earthy aromas will make you seem more authoritative.

You can even harness the power of neuro-associative conditioning through smell by choosing an aroma that you enjoy and inhaling it deeply whenever you are experiencing a pleasant mental or emotional state, such as happiness or calm. Eventually, your mind/body system will begin to associate the odour with that emotion or feeling, and the scent will become an anchor for that enhanced state of wellbeing.

Smell also affects flavour, which is perhaps the most multisensory of our everyday experiences. It's said that the first taste is always with the eyes, and as much as 80–90 per cent of flavour is olfactory. All of our senses can affect the taste of food: high-pitched sounds enhance sweetness and low-pitched sounds intensify bitterness; blue light will make you eat less; and even your table setting can affect the way your food tastes: 'Food tastes ten per cent better if you use a tablecloth, but you'll

***"The
more
we train
and
educate
our
senses,
the more
we stand
to gain
from
life"***

also eat 50 per cent more of it,' says Spence. And if you want to hack a sweet tooth, try eating from a white plate, because tests found that it will taste 10 per cent sweeter and 15 per cent more flavourful than eating from a black plate.

But colour can do much more than trick our taste buds. Different hues, shades, and tones can influence our emotions, evoke certain feelings, or create specific atmospheres. Think calming blues and energising reds, stimulating oranges and restorative greens, and you're off to a great start – but next-level sensehacking is all about light management.

You could begin by controlling the lighting in your environment to align with your circadian rhythms, by using a bright light during the day and dim, warm light in the evenings. 'Mimicking the blue of dawn by means of coloured interior lighting can provide a surprisingly effective means of enhancing people's alertness and cognitive performance,' says Spence.

Unfortunately, it's much harder to control the ambient noise that surrounds you, but music can play a pivotal role in sensehacking. Music and natural soundscapes can alter your neural pathways, influencing mood and focus, so you could try creating an 'audio apothecary', with different playlists dedicated to the mood



NEXT STEPS

Read

Sensehacking by Charles Spence (Penguin, £9.99)

Listen to the *Hacking Happiness* podcast by DOSE

Download The Zensory app, to focus, relax, and recalibrate

you want to evoke. And if you want to really dig down into some serious sensehacking, then natural sounds, such as flowing water, birdsong or rainfall, have been linked to feelings of relaxation and increased focus – try playing a nature soundtrack, or even white noise, whilst you're working, to boost your productivity.

Touch is the first of our senses to develop but is perhaps the most neglected, and many of us are suffering from touch hunger. 'We have ignored the skin for too long,' says Spence. 'Nevertheless, the latest developments in social, cognitive and affective neuroscience are increasingly highlighting the profoundly beneficial effects of stroking the skin.'

Interpersonal touch can help us relax, sleep better, alleviate pain, and fight off infection, so indulge in an aromatherapy massage – not only is it subjectively pleasurable, it can also release oxytocin and lower stress levels.

Another way to 'hack' into touch is by taking a cold shower, which can boost your endorphins and dopamine levels. Or, if you prefer warm baths, getting into the tub (ideally at a temperature of 40–42.5 centigrade) about 90 minutes before bed, will help you sleep better.

While hacking each sense individually can have measurable effects, it is important to recognise that human perception is multisensory and sensehacking works best when approached holistically. 'It's all about getting the sensory balance right,' says Spence.

He calls this balancing act 'sensism', and it's all about understanding how your senses interact. 'In order to hack them most effectively, we first need to recognise that our senses do not work independently but talk to each other all the time, and sensehacking is built on the growing awareness of just how connected our senses are, and how fundamental the right balance of sensory information is to our health, productivity, and wellbeing,' he says. And because our brains find it hard to deal with sensory incongruence, it's important to make sure all of your senses are working in harmony, creating a powerful multiplier effect that can improve your everyday life with a little bit of canny effort.

'Think about which aspects of your environment you can change: which paint colour will help promote sleep (blue), which scent will suppress your appetite (peppermint),' says Spence. 'The more we train and educate our senses, the more we stand to gain from life,' he continues, 'and by avoiding sensory overload, sensory imbalance, and sensory conflict, every one of us has the sensory tools at our disposal to live healthier, happier, and more fulfilling lives.'

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Amazing”



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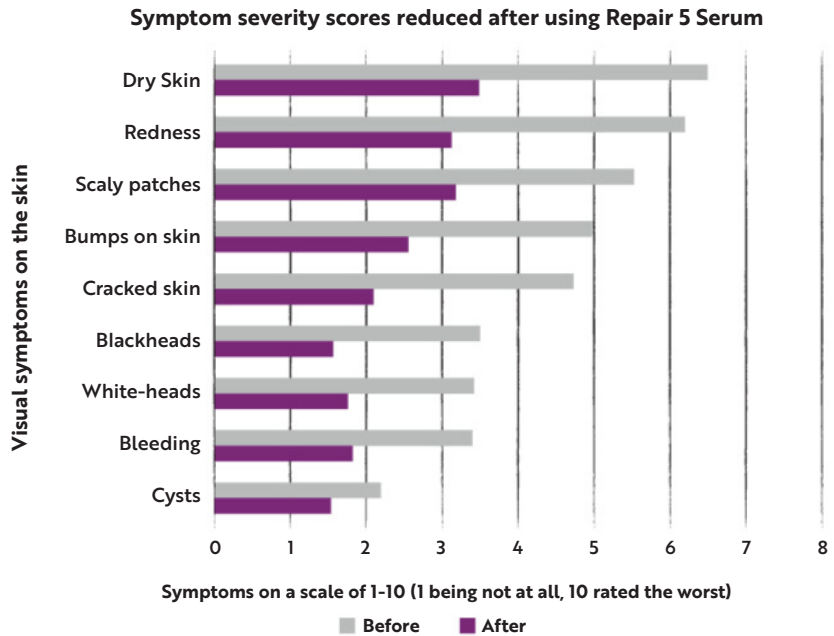
98% Noticed Visible Skin Improvements

Living with skin issues and dry skin can take its toll on confidence and impact every area of people's lives. Skin symptoms can occur for a variety of reasons and affect any part of the body.

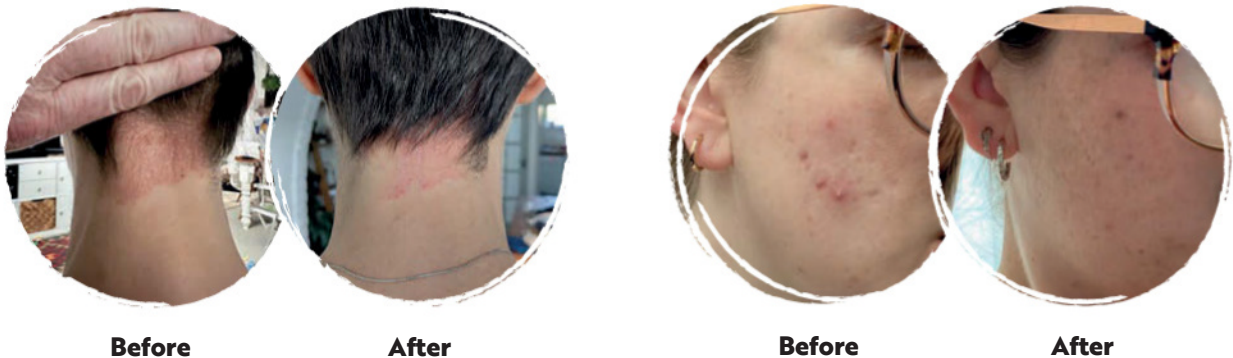
A study by ethical brand Viridian using their Organic Repair 5 Serum found that 98% of people who used the product reported significant improvements in the appearance of their skin.

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- Approx 50% reduction across 9 visible skin symptoms including skin redness and dryness
- 82% would continue to use the Organic Repair 5 Serum
- 9-in-10 testers said that Organic Repair 5 Serum was easy to use
- 9-in-10 people would recommend Viridian to others



Visual appearance changes from the [Organic Repair 5 Serum](#) study:



Formulated by Viridian experts, based on human clinical evidence, [Organic Repair 5 Serum](#) is made from pure and natural ingredients – black seed, flaxseed, lavender, chamomile and safflower. Black seed oil is rich in active compounds. The addition of safflower helps to fight against skin dryness, this luxurious skin oil can be applied all over the body as required.

"It was **easy and pleasant to use**, and surprisingly seemed to improve the appearance of my skin noticeably."

"I am so happy to have found **something that really works.**"
"My skin feels **so much better.**"

Love your leftovers

Shop smart, spend less, and cook and eat sustainably with these delicious fridge-clearing dishes, taken from chef Rosie Sykes' *Every Last Bite*

Easy as pie

A homemade pie is very cheering but can be a bit time-consuming. This version is quicker but no less showstopping!

Serves 4

- 400–500g block puff pastry (not ready-rolled)
- 50g plain flour, plus extra for dusting
- ½ tbsp light olive oil
- 240g smoked back bacon, cut into 2cm strips
- 50g butter
- 3 leeks, trimmed and sliced, using as much of the green as you can, then washed
- 400g broccoli, broken into bite-size florets, stalk trimmed and chopped, too
- 1 egg, beaten
- Poppy or sesame seeds, or some dried thyme
- 1 tbsp Dijon or wholegrain mustard
- 450ml milk
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 Preheat the oven to 240°C/220°C fan/gas mark 9 and, at the same time, heat a baking sheet. Roll the pastry out on a floured surface to about 2cm thick. You should end up with a square roughly 25cm. Cut into four squares and leave to rest in the fridge, either on a large baking tray or layered with kitchen foil or baking paper.
2 While the pastry is resting, start on the filling. In a medium saucepan with a lid, heat the oil over a medium heat and fry the bacon. When cooked, lift out with a slotted spoon and set

aside. Add the butter and leeks with a good pinch of salt to the pan, and cook with a lid on for 10–12 minutes, stirring occasionally.

3 In the meantime, bring a saucepan of salted water to the boil and cook the broccoli for 3–5 minutes. Once tender, drain and refresh under cold running water, then set aside with the bacon. Now bring the pastry squares out of the fridge and brush with the egg. Scatter over the seeds or thyme, then place them on the preheated baking sheet and bake for 10–15 minutes, until well puffed up and golden.

4 When the leeks are tender, scatter over the flour and stir it in. Cook for a few minutes until the mixture turns biscuity in colour, then add the mustard and stir that in, too. Gradually add the milk, stirring between additions to get a smooth sauce. Once all the milk has been added, bring to a simmer and cook, stirring now and again, until you have a thick sauce. Add the broccoli and bacon, and check the seasoning. Take off the heat and set aside with a lid on, while you finish the pie 'shells'.

5 Remove the golden squares from the oven and leave for a few minutes until they are cool enough to handle. Split in half horizontally. If the centres are still doughy, you can return the pie bases to the oven for a few minutes to crisp up. When they are ready, transfer the bases to four hot plates, spoon on the broccoli and bacon filling, and pop the pie tops on. Serve with roasted root vegetables or greens.





Baked stuffed flat mushrooms

What an easy supper, and the place to use up rice and any vegetables you have knocking around

Serves 4

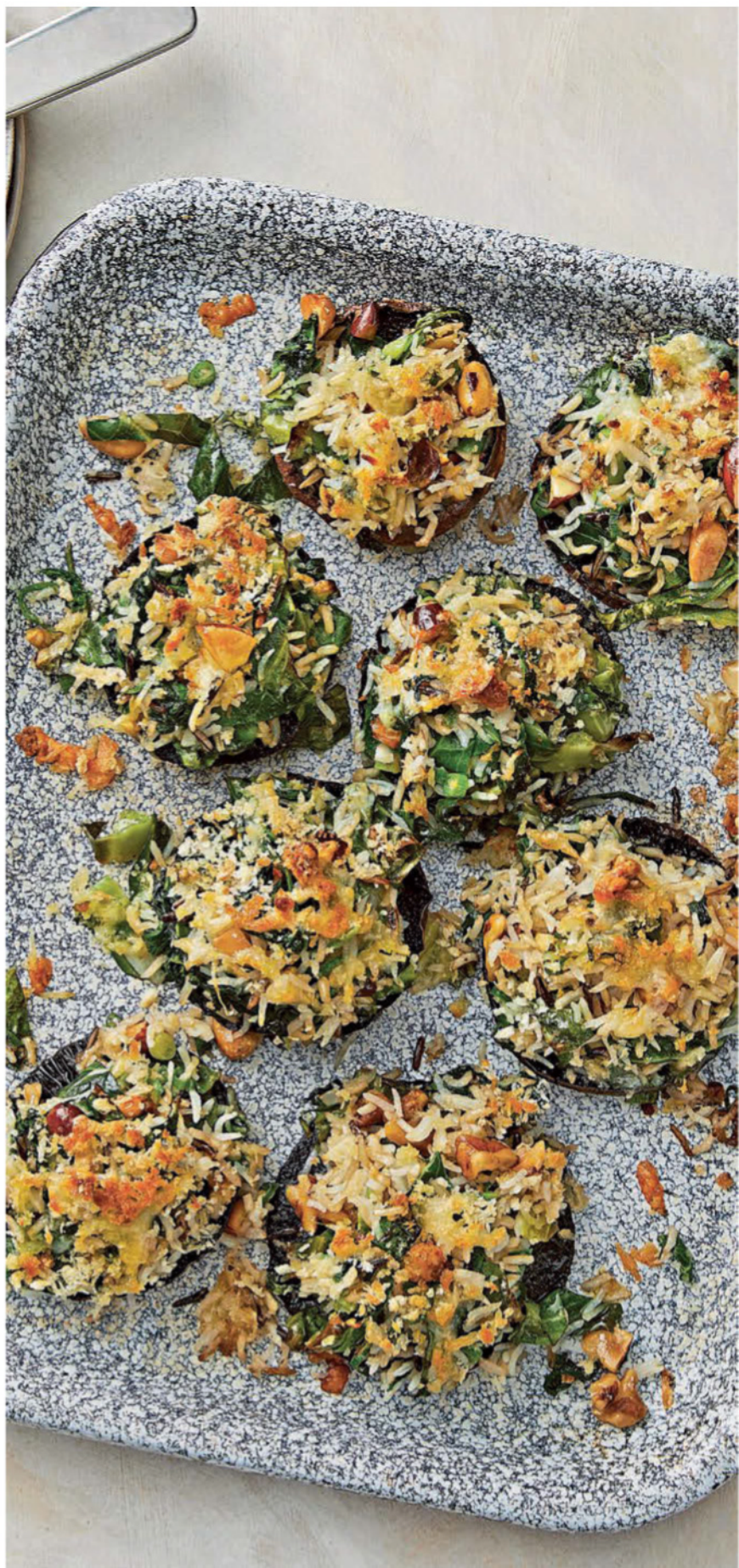
- 30g nuts of your choice
- 3 tbsp light olive oil
- 8 flat mushrooms, peeled and stalks removed (save any trimmings for a stock)
- 400g cooked basmati and wild rice
- 4 spring onions, trimmed as little as possible and sliced
- Up to 400g leftover cooked greens
- 2 large garlic cloves, crushed or finely grated
- 40g finely grated cheese of your choice
- 15g breadcrumbs (fresh, if you have the wherewithal to make them, or panko breadcrumbs are fine, too)
- 90g butter, melted
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 Preheat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/gas mark 4. At the same time, heat a roasting pan in which you have scattered the nuts, to toast gently. Start by toasting for 3 minutes, then continue in short bursts. Most nuts have a high fat content and catch very quickly – in commercial kitchens, chefs are renowned for setting three timers and still managing to burn nuts! – so watch with care. Doing them in a heating oven is good, as they brown gently while the heat is gradually rising. Once golden, tip them out of the roasting pan and set aside.

2 Drizzle 1½ tbsp of the oil into the roasting pan and add the mushrooms, with the gills facing up. Drizzle over the remaining oil and add a good dose of salt and pepper. Leave to cook in the oven for about 15 minutes, while you make the filling.

3 Put the cooked rice, spring onions, greens, garlic, and 30g of the cheese into the bowl with the nuts, and stir the whole lot about. Give it a taste, and season accordingly.

4 After 15 minutes the mushrooms should be soft, so divide the filling mixture between them and scatter over the crumbs. Pour over the melted butter and scatter with the remaining cheese. Return to the oven for 20 minutes, or until the stuffing mix is piping hot. Serve immediately with a side vegetable such as peas, and some bread for mopping up the juices.





Stuffed bread

These very simple breads can be cooked in a frying pan (skillet), or in the oven, freeing you up to do other things.

If you feel like serving something alongside, opt for some chutney, to cut through the cheesy goodness, and some sort of salad. This recipe came about from having a glut of courgettes and, just to be super non-wasteful, uses the liquid from the courgettes, too. If you are using any other kind of leftover raw or cooked vegetable, just use one-third water to yoghurt for the dough

Serves 4

- 2 large courgettes, about 380g trimmed weight, coarsely grated
- 1 large red onion, finely sliced
- 150g plain yoghurt
- 360g self-raising flour, plus extra for dusting
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed or finely grated
- 1 red chilli, deseeded and finely diced
- 150g coarsely grated cheese of your choice

- 1 tbsp light olive oil
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 To glean the liquid from your vegetables, put the courgettes and onion into a large bowl, add a generous dose of salt, and toss together. Now put them in a colander, sit it over the bowl, and press down to extract the liquid. Cover the courgettes and onions with a clean cloth, then weigh down with a bowl of water or some cans. Leave to drip away for an hour or so. You should be left with 100ml of liquid or a little less – measure it and top up to 200ml with water, then to 350ml with yoghurt.

2 Put the flour into a large bowl, make a well in the centre, add most of the liquid, and start mixing. If it's not coming together, add the rest of the liquid and bring together as a shaggy dough. Turn out onto a floured surface and knead until smooth. The old adage 'the wetter, the better' stands true, but do add more flour if it's too

sticky to work with. Divide into four portions, roll into balls, and keep covered on a floured tray. Mix the courgettes and onions with the garlic, chilli and cheese, and season to taste.

3 Preheat the oven to 230°C/210°C fan/gas mark 8 and, at the same time, heat two large baking trays.

4 Using your hands or a rolling pin, shape each ball into a circle, about 1cm thick, and put a quarter of the filling into the centre. Gently gather the edges of the dough into the middle to completely cover the filling, and pinch to seal very well. Flip over onto some flour, then flour your hands and carefully press out into a flat disc, about 2.5cm deep. Don't worry if little holes appear or if there is a little seepage, or if the top is thinner than the bottom.

5 Drizzle some oil onto the preheated baking trays and put the breads on. Drizzle each with some more oil and bake for 25–30 minutes, until golden. Leave to stand for a couple of minutes, then serve with a chutney and salad of your choice.



Extracted from *Every Last Bite* by Rosie Sykes
(Quadrille, £18.99).
Photography © Patricia Niven

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IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Buy into the **BENEFITS** with retail therapy

Purchase with the planet in mind and double down on the dopamine hit of your shopper's high, says Katie Wright





Expert advice



Dr Carolyn Mair is a behavioural psychologist and business consultant, working with fashion brands to build and sustain strong, positive relationships and ethical processes across their systems, functions and customers. She is the author of *The Psychology Of Fashion* (Taylor & Francis, £12.99). psychology.fashion

Switching half of the clothes in our wardrobes to pre-loved could collectively prevent carbon emissions equivalent to those produced by 261,000 flights from London to Greece, the charity Oxfam has recently suggested. So, what's the enduring allure of buying brand-new clothes, when we know it's worse for the environment?

Well, there's a reason we refer to shopping as 'retail therapy'. Whether it's a going-out top grabbed on your lunch break, or a designer bag you've had your eye on for months, fashion acquisitions have the power to lift your mood, thanks to the chemical dopamine.

'Dopamine is known as the reward agent,' said cognitive psychologist and business consultant Dr Carolyn Mair, author of *The Psychology Of Fashion* (Taylor & Francis, £12.99). 'We produce more dopamine when we're on the hunt for something that's going to give us a positive outcome or make the situation we're in easier to bear.'

'It can become an addiction, certainly, because the same neurotransmitters and same behaviours are involved,' she says.

And buying an outfit provides more of a thrill than loading up a supermarket trolley, because it satisfies our desire to fit in.

'There's a fundamental psychological drive to want to belong to communities – and part of the way we do that is through the way we dress,' says Mair, who worked with Oxfam for the launch of its Second Hand September campaign.

But this can be a double-edged sword: 'Fashion can do wonders for us in terms of highlighting or concealing parts of our bodies that we love or don't love so much,' Mair says. 'But it can also be quite damaging when we feel that we have to join in with other people's ideas of what's fashionable.'

Peer pressure can have a powerful effect, as can boredom. 'We get bored

with what we have, and we're also very influenced by fashion trends, celebrities, social media, and so on,' says Mair. Even, that is, when we know the fashion industry is hugely detrimental to the environment in terms of carbon emissions and adding to landfill.

The vast majority of people already know the negative impact, says Mair, and yet fast-fashion brands continue to churn out millions of items a year – and consumers continue to lap them up.

Instead of telling people to quit clothes shopping altogether, however, Mair suggests asking yourself: 'How can I get pleasure from fashion by not buying brand new, but by buying something else?'

To make more sustainable choices, start with 'shopping your wardrobe'. 'You can make something you already

have feel new by upcycling it or changing it a little bit, if you're creative. Or swap with friends, so it's new to you.'

Hunting on sites such as Vinted, eBay or Depop is a great way of finding treasures, giving you the double dopamine hit of buying something *and* saving money, she adds.

And if the proceeds are going to a good cause, you'll get an extra altruistic boost:

"We know the fashion industry is hugely detrimental to the environment"

'We know from positive psychology that one of the best ways to feel good about ourselves is to do good for someone else,' says Mair. 'Whenever we buy secondhand from a charity shop, we know that our money is also going towards worthy work.'

Mair is a big fan of rental sites such as HURR Collective, Hirestreet and By Rotation, too, which offer premium pieces to hire for a fraction of their retail price. 'Rental sites are great, particularly for special occasions when we might think, "I need to buy something new," because that's the social norm,' she says. 'Rental is a great way to keep an item of clothing in use for longer.' And that's one look that will never go out of fashion.

GOOD VIBRATIONS

In this month's column, musician James Sills explores how the simple act of humming can help us to not only enhance our singing, but to improve focus and combat stress



As a singing leader, I often include simple humming exercises at the start of my workshops and rehearsals, starting with a single sustained note and then moving onto a five-note scale. The musical benefits of this are well-documented: it helps to warm up the voice in a safe way that doesn't exert too much pressure on the vocal folds. It can also help improve a sense of pitch and resonance, so that the voice will sound clearer. As vocal expert Dr Gillyanne Kayes, co-author of *This Is A Voice* (Wellcome Collection, £9.99), explains: 'When we hum, we

maximise our internal sense of hearing. It allows you to 'hear' your own pitch inside your head before you let it out into the world. So, humming helps you build your own internal auditory map of pitch and melody.'


When working with large groups, I notice that a humming exercise can quickly change the energy in the room, bringing a tangible sense of calm, unity, and focus. It's really powerful, so much so that people often single it out as a favourite moment of my workshops. Try it for yourself at home: listen to *Lean On Me* by Bill Withers and hum along to the introduction. Or put on *Mmm Mmm Mmm* by Crash Test Dummies and hum to the chorus. How do you feel?

Understanding why humming has such a powerful effect on us could be explained by looking at the vagus nerve. In recent years, there has been much written about the vagus nerve. It's the longest nerve in our body,



Listen to Dr Ayan Panja's podcast, *Saving Lives In Slow Motion*, in which he explores the many health benefits of singing. The episode is entitled *Singing – The Healthy Hobby?*, and was released in July 2022.

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



running from the brain to the gut, and stimulating this nerve can help improve our health, as it's an important part of our rest-and-digest system. Practices such as meditation, yoga and cold-water therapy can help stimulate the vagus nerve, improving our 'vagal tone' and our ability to deal with stress. And because it passes directly behind our vocal folds, we stimulate the vagus nerve through humming and singing, which has powerful and profound health impacts. In his podcast, *Saving Lives In Slow Motion*, Dr Ayan Panja makes this link and says that, 'Vagus nerve stimulation from singing has a wealth of effects, including reducing feelings of stress.'

The idea of using humming to improve focus and combat stress has a long and ancient history. In yoga, the practice of Bhramari Pranayama – or 'bee breathing' – which involves a long sustained hum, has been

Try some Bhramari Pranayama breathing for yourself – there are lots of YouTube tutorials to get your started.

practised for thousands of years. Indeed, a pilot study from 2023 found a strong correlation between this technique and stress reduction. It concluded that 'a regular daily humming routine can help enhance the parasympathetic nervous system and slow down sympathetic activation.' Also, the chanting of the sound 'om' – a cornerstone of much meditative and yogic practice – ends with a sustained hum and is linked to mental clarity. A study published in the *International Journal Of Yoga* in 2010 stated that, 'The om chant is said to bring on a state of devoid effort and focusing, and is characterised by blissful awareness.'

So, it seems like humming is about – as The Beach Boys sung – picking up good vibrations, both from yourself but also from others, too. As Dr Gillyanne Kayes explains: 'All sound is vibration, and we feel those vibrations in the air spaces of the body – even in the air pockets of our bones.' If you've ever hugged or leaned against someone while they're humming, you can feel these vibrations in their back or chest. Find someone to hug and try it – good vibrations, indeed!

Appropriately enough, this month's song for Sing With *Psychologies* is *Good Vibrations* by The Beach Boys – find the full details in the box below.

Join James for Sing With *Psychologies* to help you harness the power of humming. This month's song is *Good Vibrations* by The Beach Boys, and the session takes place at 1pm on Friday 22 March. Sign up by scanning the QR code or by following this link: bit.ly/3vspSwO





Sometimes, a trip down memory lane can lead you right to the door of today, discovers Lucy Diamond

We're all leading such busy lives nowadays that it's easy to lose track of time. Weeks, months and whole seasons can drift by amidst a blur of to-do lists. 'Must catch up,' we say to each other, thinking, 'I'll just get through this particularly busy spell, and then I'll have more time for everyone and everything.' And yet the calendar keeps on spinning, with work issues, family palavers, finances, and all the rest of it to juggle. It's not a huge surprise that so many of us feel that we're on a treadmill, running as fast as we can but getting precisely nowhere.

I've found that, sometimes, it's only when you force the clock back momentarily by revisiting a place that was once deeply important to you, that the treadmill actually judders to a halt. Last year, two friends and I spent a weekend in Leeds, where we had all been students together more than

30 years ago. Having first marvelled over the changes to the city centre (there certainly wasn't a Harvey Nicks there in our day), we then went to the street where we'd all been put in a house together as first-years. Walking up the road, I had the uncanny sensation that the past had suddenly rushed right up to collide with the present, and that if I whipped my head around fast enough, I might catch a glimpse of the pony-tailed younger me there too. How could it be that I was now in my 50s, and no longer the 18-year-old who had walked this road before me?

Revisiting our former home also made us revisit our own selves as we'd been back then. Standing there in our 50s, with ten children between us, careers and husbands, having lived in multiple cities and countries, it was as if the calendar had spun back to the late 1980s, when we were young and fresh-faced, and embarking on this

new chapter of student life together. We reminisced about awful crushes and old hairstyles, but also how this had been the time when we'd really begun figuring life out: navigating friendships and relationships, and trying to strike the balance between going to lectures and going to gigs. Not always succeeding in either. Our own children are now at an age where they are the ones leaving home, but the years melted away for us in that moment.

Reconnecting with my past had brought a new layer of perspective to my present self, I reflected, getting the train home later that day. I found myself thinking fondly of that younger, more impulsive, fun-loving me, who'd said 'Why not?' and got stuck in, and decided I would try to channel her when getting bogged down in all the day-to-day mundanities of middle age.

It was obviously something of a year for return visits to special places



I Remember Paris
by Lucy Diamond
(Quercus, £16.99)
is out now

because, a few months later, in summer, my husband and I took the Eurostar to Paris, just the two of us, to celebrate having been together for 25 years. It was the mirror image of a trip we'd taken there soon after we became a couple, in fact – a surprise weekend away, organised by my boyfriend (as he'd been then), who'd spent a year living in Paris as part of his degree, and spoke fluent French (you can see why I married him). In my memory, the sun shone the entire time, and we walked miles every day as he took me around the sights, stopping, of course, at a few brasseries, where we sat and watched the world go by. Now here we were again, 25 years later, having got married and had three children in the intervening years. We took cheesy selfies to send to the kids, and I was struck all over again by the apparent compression of time. Sitting there, we were inhabiting that exact same space of the 20-something couple we'd once been, and in retracing our steps in this way, it brought home all the many experiences we'd gone through together since. I will always

love travelling to new cities, but returning to this very spot felt like it was cementing a bond between us.

Of course, life can't always be a holiday. In reality, the responsibilities and demands of the average week take their toll on us all. And yet reconnecting with your old self is an opportunity to take stock, in terms of seeing just how far you have come since you were living that particular life. Going back can also provide a chance to reset and re-contextualise an experience or time that might have been difficult, allowing you to look back with hindsight (and compassion) and say, 'That was hard for me then, but I made it,' words which are enormously powerful. You can end up with a liberating sense of closure – and possibly an alternative perspective, if new information has come to light in the meantime.

It was with this last idea in mind that I wrote my new novel, *I Remember Paris* (Quercus, £16.99). One of the main characters, Jess, is a 40-something journalist and single mum, who has come to Paris to interview a legendary artist, now approaching 80, who was


groundbreaking in her day. It's a full-circle experience for Jess being back in the city, having spent a formative post-university period there; a time she has never quite got over – partly thanks to handsome Georges, with whom she had a wonderful fling, but also because she had a close friend there, Pascale, who vanished under mysterious circumstances. Jess and Pascale worked as chambermaids in a glitzy hotel, and Jess has been haunted ever since by the fact that she could possibly have prevented her friend's disappearance. Returning to Paris, she finds herself wondering if she might, at last, get some answers.

I find it fascinating, imagining both myself and my fictional characters as pages of a book; layer upon layer of fleeting experiences that form a whole person. I've found it rewarding to flick back through the pages of my own life as a means of revisiting my past self – and, without giving any spoilers, Jess finds her return trip to Paris surprising in more ways than one. I'm already wondering which part of my life I should revisit next. How about you?

A full-page background image showing the back of a woman in a tan coat and dark skirt, holding hands with a man in a tan jacket. They are standing outdoors at sunset, with a warm, golden glow from the sun behind them. The scene is romantic and intimate.

Learning to love

Liat Yakir reveals the seven simple steps you need to take to safeguard your romantic relationship and help build an unbreakable bond



Love must be one of the most complex and confusing feelings in the human experience. It is an integral part of our existence, and we remain preoccupied with it throughout our lives – from cradle to grave, from our prehistoric origins to these digital times.

When we find the one, or at least the one who is better than anyone who came along before, it's time to realise that, from this moment, biology and the wiring in our brains are working against us. Our genes do not encourage us to love for life, but to attract diversity. As evolved social mammals, we have every evolutionary reason to fail to form a lifelong, sexually monogamous relationship. This is because, in conditions of abundance, monogamy does not present a significant genetic survival advantage. Therefore, exchanging rings, signing the marriage register, and making vows are all very nice, but there is no guarantee that love will prevail. The sexual saturation effect will kick in sooner or later, and the excitement will fade. And if that's not enough, pregnancy, births, and raising children are not particularly compatible with marital libido. So, then, what can be done?

In order to preserve love under these conditions, we need to create a relationship rich in oxytocin and not give up for a moment on the creation of the ingredients from which love is made. Professor Ruth Feldman from Bar-Ilan University followed new couples from the beginning of their relationship for more than a year, periodically measuring the level of oxytocin in their blood. She measured the increase in the level of oxytocin while the subjects looked at pictures or videos of their partners. Thinking about our partner, or seeing images of them, immediately causes the release of oxytocin into the blood – if we still love them, of course. Feldman saw that, for couples whose oxytocin levels remained high six months into their relationship, their chances of staying together until the end of the year were better, while for couples whose oxytocin level was lower when looking at pictures of their partner, the chances of breaking up were higher. Oxytocin is the stuff of which partnerships are made. It's a good exercise to look at a picture of your partner and notice which emotions arise. If positive feelings of affection and warmth ensue, this is of course a sign of love, but if negative feelings of stress, pressure or distress arise, it may be time to go for counselling or even consider a breakup.

Emotions drive our behaviour, and if those emotions are negative, the state of the relationship may worsen – and there is no reason for us to be unhappy with each other. Oxytocin, the love hormone, is what connects us and turns us from strangers into lovers. At the end of the falling-in-



love phase (which can last from six hours to two years, but on average lasts a year), two things can happen: a decline in excitement and increased distancing until the couple part, or a stable bond of friendship and trust. To continue to maintain a stable bond of true friendship and trust in real life, after those butterflies in the stomach have gone quiet and worries and obligations build up, you mustn't stop creating oxytocin. Oxytocin is the glue that creates the bond, and without it, the bond will be broken. Remember that, since there are no family ties between you – you don't share genes and haven't grown up together – your relationship depends even more on the love hormone that you produce during your life together. Here's a prescription to help preserve it...

Hold hands

When you hold hands, oxytocin is released, and coordination ensues in the breathing rate, heart rate, and patterns of brain activity that contribute to pain reduction and relaxation. Hold hands, especially when one of you is stressed or in pain. I recommended hand-holding with your fingers intertwined, this being the best grip for showing passion and mutual attraction.

Take time to touch

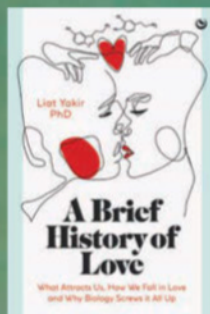
Stroke each other's hair, face, hands, arms and shoulder blades. You should touch while talking, when you meet, when you eat together, when you casually get up from the table, and certainly when you get into bed at the end of the day and on waking. There are not enough words to emphasise the power of a warm hug to reduce tension, strengthen your relationship, and increase confidence in it. Just as we are willing to reach out to a dog or cat when they need to be petted, so, too, does a human need to be touched. Hugs are just as important. I recommend you hug for at least 20 seconds, morning and evening. Oxytocin is released after a long hug, just like it is when we are babies. A hug evokes positive feelings of presence, comfort, security, and reciprocity. It is good for mental and physical health, activates the vagus nerve (for relaxation), and strengthens bonds.

Smile and laugh together

While smiling, muscles in the corners of our mouth and ears are put to work, sending a message to the brain to release serotonin, which improves the mood and induces relaxation. Smiling and laughing also activate the mirror neurons, and will make your partner smile and laugh automatically, even if they are stressed or angry. There is nothing like smiling and laughing to reduce tension and end fights. We also bond more with those who

Look deeply into your partner's eyes

Do this while talking, when naked, during sex, and when you want to know how your partner feels, for at least 30 seconds. The eyes are a window to the emotional brain, and looking into them causes an immediate release of oxytocin and the activation of the vagus nerve, the relaxation system. Eye contact is important for increasing empathy, synchronising brainwaves, and for a sense of closeness.



Extracted from
A Brief History
Of Love by Liat Yakir
(Watkins Media,
£16.99), out now

make us laugh and smile, since laughter releases oxytocin and also boosts activity in the memory areas of the brain by 30 per cent.

Listen to each other

We all need to be seen and listened to with empathy, without judgment, and without being offered advice. The people who listen to us and with whom we can share what we are going through are the people with whom we bond, thanks to the oxytocin that is released during heartfelt and empathic conversations. If we are able to share regularly with each other what we are going through, while listening to each other, we will become good friends and our libido will also increase. It is vulnerability and empathy that creates intimacy, especially in women. When we allow ourselves to be vulnerable, we also encourage the other party to be vulnerable, creating a strong sense of intimacy. But when we feel that we cannot truly share what we are going through, and even hide these experiences, this can be a sign of a deterioration in a relationship, which may, of course, also harm intimacy and sex. It is impossible to separate these things; hence the importance of practising active listening, especially in this age of inattention. Ask your partner how they feel, what are they going through, and how their day was. Remember to give them your full attention, make eye contact, focus on what your partner is saying, nod, and make small comments. Do not judge, do not criticise, and do not give advice. Listening is not the same as agreeing; you can listen fully to your partner's point of view without agreeing with it. Each of us has an entire emotional world that our partner is not necessarily a part of. When we allow our partner a glimpse into our inner emotional world, this creates deep connections and attachment.

Put on some music and dance

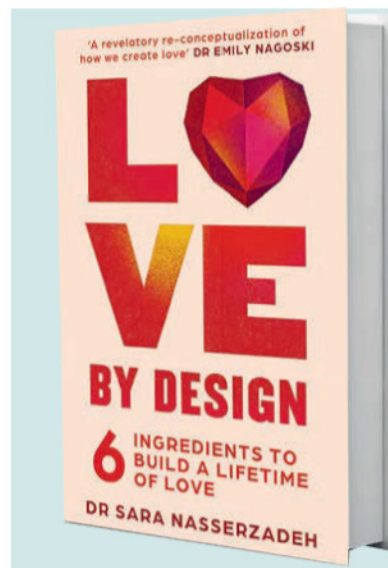
Music causes the release of oxytocin, so when enjoying music together, we connect and bond, especially when it's music we both love, and which evokes pleasant memories. The music that releases the most oxytocin is the music we heard when we were young, around the age of 16, when the level of oxytocin being released is at its highest. In addition to listening to music from our teens, it's very important to dance. When we dance, making eye contact and touching while moving to the music, the brain releases a huge dose of oxytocin, and our movements synchronise. When a couple dances, they form a wordless connection, reducing tension and creating contact that is full of warmth and love. Synchronisation in the body will also affect synchronisation in the mind.

Share five compliments a day

Compliments trigger a release of oxytocin. They miraculously improve relationships, and contribute to closeness and generosity. We all want to be appreciated, especially by our partners. It's important to maintain a ratio of five compliments and positive statements for every criticism. Because we have a natural tendency toward negativity, focusing on what is bad instead of good, it's vital to remember the importance of kind words.

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

Love By Design by Dr Sara Nasserzadeh

(HarperCollins, £16.99)

We all live to find love, but what if building a lifelong relationship based purely on a feeling isn't the key to success?

Dr Sara Nasserzadeh believes we've been sold an ideal that isn't making most of us happy, and that we need to foster foundations that aren't just the first flushes of passion.

Instead, the sexual psychotherapist advocates for practising 'emergent love', which has six ingredients – attraction, respect, trust, compassion, commitment, and loving – on an ongoing basis.

Her advice on how to nurture these feels wise, rational and – most importantly – achievable, allowing you to give your heart a break, rather than just *heartbreak*.

Sleep Reset by Natalie Pennicotte-Collier

(Ebury, £16.99)

Most of us are well-versed in the tenets of good sleep hygiene. But Natalie Pennicotte-Collier knows overcoming insomnia is not that simple; as one of Britain's top sleep coaches, she's transformed lives devoid of the rest essential to thrive, having overcome this personally.

In her scientifically proven five-week 'reset method', she covers everything from breathwork and visualisation to gut health, to help you dial down sleep anxiety and boost your mental wellbeing.

The book is packed with finer details, positive tips and, crucially, an underlying understanding of how hard it can be.



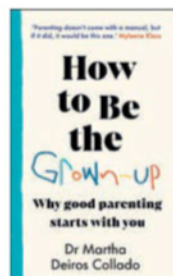
How To Be The Grown-Up by Dr Martha Deiros Collado

(Transworld, £16.99)

Having a baby makes you a parent – but you only really become one as your child grows. And it won't always come naturally, which is why you need Dr Deiros Collado and her wise advice.

As she admits herself, this book contains no new knowledge. But what it *does* do is focus on how you can be the best mother or father, by ditching tired family scripts, respecting your child for who and where they are, and controlling your own behaviour.

Whether you need advice on supporting their emotions or teaching healthy attitudes to food and consent, her gentle style will give you the confidence that you need.

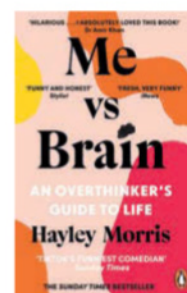


Me Vs Brain: An Overthinker's Guide To Life by Hayley Morris

(Cornerstone, £10.99)

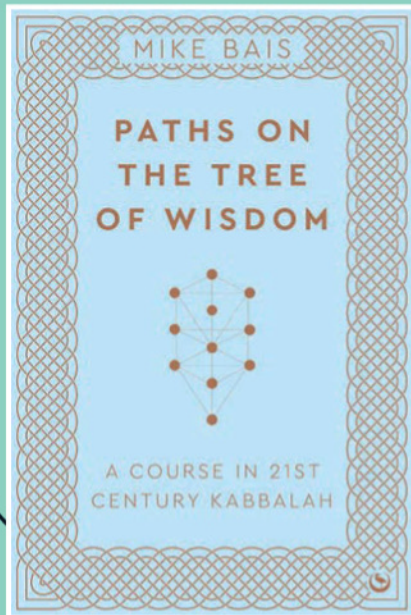
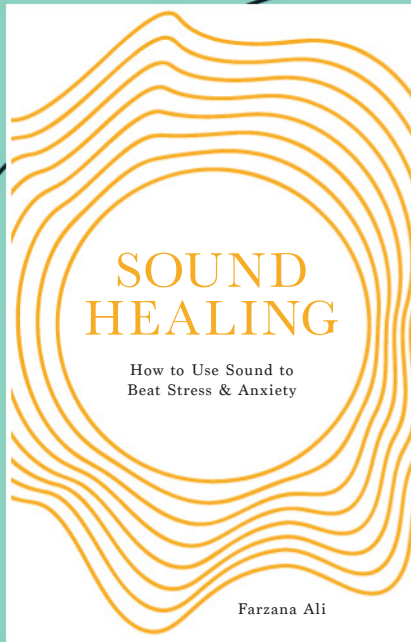
For anyone who has ever experienced panic attacks, anxiety, and the odd intrusive thought, this book is for you. In it, Hayley Morris brilliantly describes what it's like to be a chronic overthinker, with wit, charm, and relatability.

When your own intrusive thoughts are filling you with shame and worry, Morris is on hand to reassure you that it's 'remarkably normal' to think this way. She'll have you nodding along to shared stories, laughing out loud in solidarity, and feeling like you've been given permission to accept your quirky inner thoughts.





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Fearne's five little things...

...to help with overwhelm

1 When I feel overwhelmed, I'll go for a walk. Trainers on, gentle music in my headphones, and I walk. There is something about the forward motion of a walk that feels like you are moving emotional baggage on.

2 I've recently become very interested in sound therapy, and have found it so cathartic. Either during a workout or just alone in my home, I use sound to move on tension in my body. I either shout or groan loudly on an exhale, and let anger, stress, and pent-up anxiety out of my body.

It's also incredible for your throat. I have had throat issues due to stress over the years, which have shown up as a tightened throat and, at its worst, a throat cyst, which is not ideal in my job, so I use this technique regularly. You may feel self-conscious at first, but when you get into the swing of it and feel the benefits, there will be no holding you back. You don't need to overanalyse the emotions that arise: just let out the sound. Sound is energy, so you are quite literally helping stuck energy to move on. RAAAR!

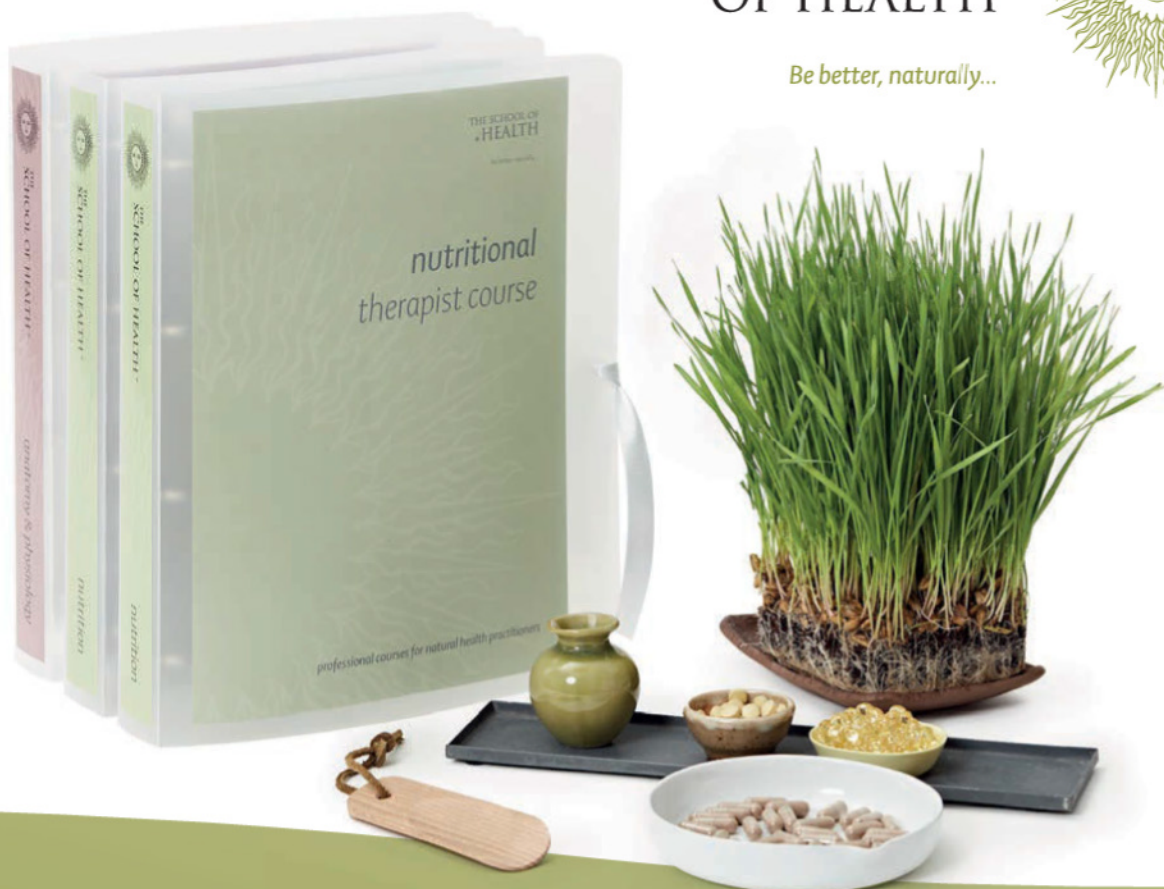


3 Shaking your body is another amazing way to release stress. Animals do this after they have experienced something stressful. There is no right way to do it; just shake your whole body, either all at once or concentrate on areas where you feel you might need to release tension. Do it to music or just in silence.

4 Give yourself a hug. This is technically a yoga move, and probably my favourite one. Wrap your arms around yourself and hold your own body. Not only does it feel like a nice stretch, but, also, your body signals to your brain that you are safe. When you need a good hug, don't forget about giving yourself one.

5 Breathe. It's obvious, and something we do all day, but I always find if I concentrate on my breath, my body reacts well. My heart stops racing, my muscles feel less tense, and my thoughts slow down. You can count your breaths if that helps you focus – or imagine your lungs filling up and then deflating again. There are loads of lovely breathwork practices on our Happy Place app you might want to try.

Always breathe before you react to stress. Notice how much you are taking on. If you need to let someone down for your own wellbeing, then be honest with them. If they are a good mate, they will understand. If you can delegate or leave less important demands until later down the line to give yourself a breather, then you'll find tiny pockets within your day to practise any of the above.



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