

OVERCOME A **DOPAMINE DEFICIT** AND FEEL GREAT!

CREATE A LIFE YOU LOVE

Compact UK edition

psychologies

Switch
off and
enjoy the
summer

WHY YOUR MIND
IS 'THE BEST
BIOHACKER
EVER'

**SLEEP MORE,
ARGUE LESS!**

The rise and rise of
the 'sleep divorce'

**FENDING OFF
THE BACK-TO-
SCHOOL BLUES**

Gardening for
the soul

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**WORK OUT WHAT
YOU REALLY WANT!**

- Discover the gap between the life you've built and the life you dream of
- Is true meaning your missing link?
- Tune in to what really makes you happy

Top TV medic

**Dr Zoe
Williams**

On how to boost your
mood and empower
yourself through
menopause

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AUGUST 2025





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Welcome...



Can you hear the bees buzzing? That's one of my favourite summer sounds, as I sit in the garden and hear them quietly hum around me. Of course, more often than not they're drowned out by squeals and shouts as a game of cricket is played out, or I have to duck for cover to avoid getting drenched by a water fight, but that's one of the joys of summer for me. I think the best thing is simply having the time to sit — yes, there's still work to be done, but there are definitely fewer emails than usual, plus there's no school run, meals are a more relaxed affair, and life moves at a slightly slower pace. That's the benefit of the summer lull, the time when the hard edges of life are softened for just a little while, as we all remember the simple beauty of just being. I'm waxing lyrical about this time partly in response to a beautiful piece on the joys of summer softness by Kate Townshend (page 22). I love that while she is so poetically gentle in her language, she is also staunch in her defence of vulnerability and the power of soft resilience. I'm also getting a lot of wonder from this month's dossier, which is encouraging you to use the peace and quiet to work out what really matters to you (page 47). Whether you read it perched on your sun lounger, margarita in hand, or you're relaxing at home in the garden, Kellie Gillespie-Wright excels in posing enlightening questions to help us identify what means the most to us, and work out the difference between the life we've built and the life we want (and how to start redressing the balance).

Plus we've got expert tips on how to speed up the wind-down process (page 44), change the narrative about the female experience (page 34), find out how our mental body image influences our physical body shape (page 82), and examine the theory of dopamine deficit and its role in mental health. Plus the inspiring Dr Zoe Williams shares why she's so keen to empower women with information and support to help us all thrive not just survive the menopause (page 14).

So now get a drink, put your feet up, and relax. Happy reading!

Sally xx

**Sally Saunders,
Editor-in-Chief**

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See page 46.

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With you
in mind



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Take our psychological test to help you identify your motivation and make a change that's right for you

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The advice starts RIGHT HERE!



CHLOE MARKHAM

'Softness isn't weakness — it's regulation. And that kind of presence changes everything: how we relate, how we create, and how we move through the world,' says nervous-system coach Chloe Markham. Embrace the power of softness and taking a gentler route forward on page 22.

JESSICA ZUCKER

'Storytelling creates communities that are supportive rather than combative, connected rather than secluded, and more empathetic for future generations of women,' explains psychologist and author Jessica Zucker. Read how she's trying to change the narrative on what it means to be female on page 34.



CHARLOTTE FOX WEBER

'Joy, curiosity, even a little fear, that's often the pull of something real,' says integrative psychotherapist Charlotte Fox Weber. 'Guilt, duty, or the buzz of performance, that's the pressure of someone else's story.' Discover how to identify what really matters to you in our dossier on page 49.



Our mission

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

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

In the mood

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

COMPILED BY ALEX LLOYD



IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Keep cool and carry on

'Coolness' is not just in the eye of the beholder — there is a universal language to achieving this social status.

Despite having differing cultural attitudes, a survey of 5,000 people across 13 countries including the USA, China and Nigeria found they agreed on six vital personality traits.

These were being extroverted, hedonistic, powerful, autonomous, open and adventurous.

Researchers from the Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez in Chile pinpointed the key components after also asking participants to explain what made a person not cool, good or not good.

'Everyone wants to be cool, or at least avoid the stigma of being uncool, and society needs cool people because they challenge norms, inspire change and advance culture,' says associate professor Todd Pezzuti, the study's co-lead.





Cheesy cause of nightmares

Eating cheese before bed really can give you nightmares, scientists have found.

Researchers asked 1,000 Canadian students about their sleep quality, eating habits and any perceived link between the two.

Participants who had lactose intolerance and experienced indigestion or stomach pain at night caused by dairy could find their dreams and the quality of their rest affected.

People who ate less healthily were also more likely to have negative dreams.

'These new findings imply that changing eating habits for people with some food sensitivities could alleviate nightmares,' says lead author Dr Tore Nielsen of Montreal University.

'They could also explain why people so often blame dairy for bad dreams.'

Help! I need somebody...

We all like to lend a helping hand, but it seems if you want to be lucky in love you might need to be asking more favours instead of handing them out. Researchers have found that asking someone for help can make you more attractive to them.

However, the effect was only seen when it was 'dependency-orientated' help-seeking, not 'autonomy-orientated' help-seeking that was requested. 'When we ask someone for help by having them solve a problem for us — dependency-oriented help-seeking, instead of just guiding us — we signal that we trust and want to rely on them,' says study co-author, Professor Xijing Wang, from City University of Hong Kong. So if you're not keen on playing damsel-in-distress, you might just need to find another way to connect.

"I've been quite outspoken in my time, but with age I've become more measured. I respect the power and impact of words. Talking in anger is a big mistake, which some politicians would do well to think about."

Singer Kim Wilde.

WATCH, LOOK, LISTEN



WATCH *Materialists.* Dakota Johnson plays a New York matchmaker torn between her

perfect pairing (Pedro Pascal) and her imperfect ex (Chris Evans). In cinemas 15 August.



LOOK *The Space Vault Exhibition* at Thinktank, Birmingham, shares one of the UK's largest

private collections of human spaceflight artefacts, over 12 themed displays. Until 31 December.



LISTEN *The Teen Commandments.* DJ Sara Cox and her best friend since

school, Clare Hamilton, share the highs, lows and laughs of raising five teens between them.

One in five British people take their own teabags when they go abroad on holiday, a poll by TUI River Cruises found.



Plant power!

Think of a vegetarian and you might imagine a pacifist with a social conscience.

But a new study says this stereotype is a myth, and while veggies might not be hungry for meat, they are hungry for power.

Dr John Nezlek of SWPS University in Warsaw surveyed nearly 3,800 people from Poland and the United States about their deepest convictions and values.

The vegetarians were consistently more likely to align with values linked to power, defined as the desire for control over people and resources.

They were also more likely to value personal success or achievement, whereas omnivores placed higher value on conformity, safety and security.

Dr Nezlek believes the mistaken impression stems from the fact the overwhelming majority of vegetarians are women.





IVF baby joy

The equivalent of almost one child in every school class in the UK is now born as a result of IVF, according to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.



Rising from the ashes

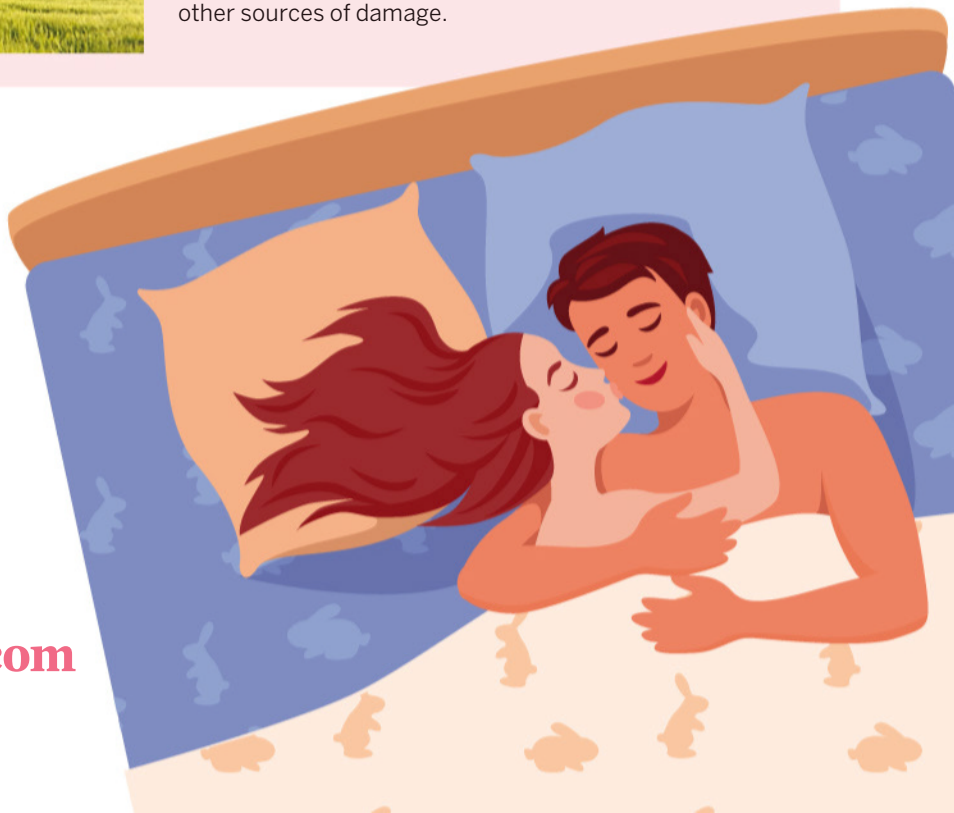
Britain's beleaguered ash trees are evolving to ward off a fungus that has ravaged their numbers for the last 13 years.

Up to 85 per cent of the species were predicted to be lost when ash dieback arrived in 2012, with the disease spreading to every corner of the country.

Now scientists say that woodlands are fighting back with a growing resistance to infection — but remaining and new trees will need protecting against grazing deer and other sources of damage.

70%

of people say they sleep better after a goodnight kiss, according to a survey by **MattressNextDay.com**





Anti-phone exam for schools

A new Smartphone Free School Rating has launched, so parents can see which schools have the strongest anti-phone policies.

There are three awards – gold, silver and bronze – to denote the strength of approach taken, with parents able to add their child's school to the website or schools can apply.

Led by headteachers, the project also hopes to empower staff to take a stronger stance on phone use, encouraging every school to hit gold by 2030.

Find out more at smartphonefreerating.org



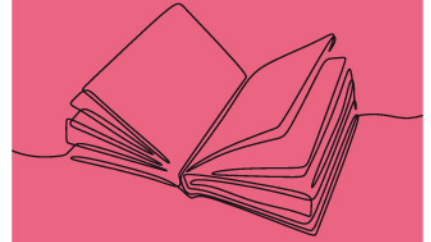
Trial leads to four-day week

Nearly 1,000 employees will keep a four-day week without losing any pay after a successful trial of this working pattern.

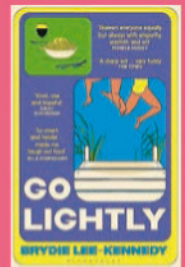
All 17 British businesses that tested the format for six months said they would continue with it or move to nine days a fortnight.

The pilot was organised by the 4 Day Week Foundation, which says the shift would be better for mental health, improve motivation and make recruitment and retention easier.

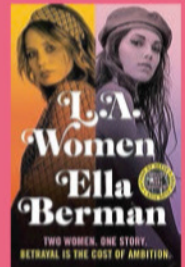
3 rocky relationship reads...



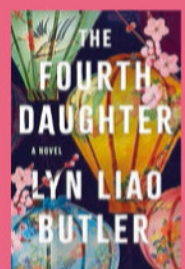
1 *Go Lightly* by Brydie Lee Kennedy (£9.99, Bloomsbury). A funny coming-of-age tale about a young bisexual woman finding her true self as she falls for two people at once.



2 *L.A. Women* by Ella Berman (£16.99, Aria). The complicated friendship between two ambitious female writers turns sour when one pens a book based on the other's life.



3 *The Fourth Daughter* by Lyn Liao Butler (£8.99, Lake Union). Troubled chef Liv leaves her stalling life in New York to help her Taiwanese grandmother find her missing child.



Viewpoint

We want to know what you loved reading in the magazine, write to letters@psychologies.co.uk, and send us your favourite pics too!

Shining a light on the loneliness epidemic

I just wanted to write and tell you that the Loneliness dossier in the June issue really hit home for me.

The quiz was particularly revealing, as I didn't realise there were so many different ways that a person can feel isolated.

It reminded me of a poem I wrote during lockdown when, at age 39, the enforced time at home allowed me to really examine my feelings, and try to face and let go of anxieties and insecurities I'd been holding on to for a long time.

Setting pen to paper, I never know quite where it will take me, or quite what it will reveal.

For me, various issues were highlighted, such as self worth and esteem, and feeling left behind by my peers, most of whom were married with children, while I am single and child free.

Feeling unconnected, not just to my authentic self, but to any kind

of community. Your quiz 'What kind of loneliness are you at risk of?' was similarly revelatory to me, and clarified that while I am still dealing with a certain degree of social and existential loneliness, the tips given in the 'Simple ways to build connections' are things I can really apply in my life.

So again I thank you, for shining a light on issues I'm sure many readers can identify with, and giving practical ideas to help us make small and significant changes for our own wellbeing, in order to enhance our joy and connection to each other.

This is the poem I wrote — I hope it can be of some help to others.

At the very least, by showing we all struggle, but by being open and reaching out, we can help each other through.

Thank you.

Mahmuda Chowdhury

Embracing life

Kellie Gillespie-Wright was spot on when she wrote about the importance of 'weak ties'. For people living alone through no choice of their own, these may provide the only human contact they have. Embracing each and every one that presents itself is a great starting point to a more fulfilling life.

Maggie Cobbett



The Search

*Oh beautiful light, where have you been?
How have I looked but have not seen?
I've been bleak of heart, shadowed of mind
I have felt abandoned, left behind*

*Oh the many ages of life I've seen!
The many different versions of myself
I've been
Longing to belong, longing to be found
Screaming aloud without making a sound
Now I've reached a plateau in this life
I'm living
How to go forth? How to end or begin?
My head is bowed as I search for the song
The song of myself, so I can carry on*

*I've been searching the earth for a place to rest,
And now that I have paused and taken
a breath*

*I see what I've been seeking is me
The person I want to be,
Happy in my skin
Strong and free*

*Although the life I imagined did not
materialise
With this gift of time I came to realise*

*Only so many days are mine
So many chances to give,
Only so many moments to shine
So many moments to live*

*A friendly word shared, a smile through
the grey
Is how we help each other through our days*

*My light now surrounds me
Shining forth from within,
Now I've finally found me
Together with you, I begin*

Discover a true paradise

*Visit Gran Canaria,
the new sanctuary of
wellbeing, where health
and beauty come together*



Gran Canaria is more than just a destination—it's a sensory experience. Its golden dunes, ancient forests, and eternal climate have made this Atlantic gem synonymous with paradise. But there's a new reason why the island is on everyone's lips: it has transformed into the mecca of conscious wellness, where health, beauty, and serenity coexist in perfect harmony.

Beyond its dreamlike landscapes, the island captivates with a vibrant offering of top-tier hospitals, cutting-edge aesthetic and dental clinics, wellness sanctuaries, and boutique hotels where body and soul find their balance. **Gran Canaria Spa, Wellness & Health** is much more than a promise of rest — it's a transformative journey toward absolute well-being.

Nourish yourself within to shine on the outside

True beauty is born from balance. An impeccable skincare routine or the most advanced aesthetic treatment alone isn't enough without holistic care for the body, mind, and soul. At **IKIGAI by Hospitales San Roque**, they understand this like no one else: here, caring for yourself isn't just about looking good — it's about feeling in harmony with who you truly are.

This exclusive space, located in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Maspalomas, redefines beauty through a deeply personalised, holistic approach.

Yes, you will leave looking more beautiful — more radiant — but what you truly take away is far more than firmer skin or perfectly sculpted lips: you will reconnect with your body and essence.

Aesthetic surgery with soul: enhancing you without losing yourself

Your time in Gran Canaria can be much more than simply sun, sea, and relaxation. It can also be the moment you've reserved just for yourself. In the heart of Las Palmas, **Kala by Hospital Perpetuo Socorro** is an oasis where aesthetic surgery doesn't chase artificial perfection but celebrates the authentic beauty already within you — sometimes all it takes is a subtle harmony to let it shine at its fullest.

Here, it's not about changing who you are, but about enhancing what makes you unique, supporting you with respect and care through a transformation born from the desire to look — and feel — your best. With a focus on elegance and naturalness, Kala's medical team works from attentive listening and extensive experience, guiding you with honesty and excellence.

Your smile, your signature: when dentistry becomes art

We know that a beautiful smile has the power to light up your face and transform everything around you. It's not just about aesthetics — it's about

confidence, expression, and authenticity. When we laugh freely and express ourselves passionately, we want a smile that matches that spirit. That's why, if you're seeking a truly transformative experience, **Centro Brånemark Las Palmas** is the place to go. Because having a healthy mouth is essential, but feeling confident in your smile is a small luxury that makes all the difference. Here they don't just restore functionality — they bring back the joy of smiling freely.

Technology, precision, and a smile that speaks for you

In Gran Canaria, self-care can be an essential part of your journey. And if there's one thing that never goes unnoticed, it's a confident, harmonious, and radiant smile. At **Clínica Dental Adalia**, excellence is evident from the very first moment: here, every treatment becomes a personalised experience where innovation, precision, and care go hand in hand. The care is warm and professional, and if you're coming from abroad, you'll benefit from specialised support for international patients designed to provide confidence and peace of mind at every step. Because at Clínica Adalia, they know dental health has no borders — but it can have the perfect island as its setting.

**Discover more at
grancanariawellness.com**





‘Approaching menopause has definitely given me motivation’

TV doctor Zoe Williams wants to help more women understand the changes menopause can bring, and make them feel empowered to face them with confidence

She may not be experiencing any menopause symptoms yet, but at 45, Dr Zoe Williams is making big changes so she's ready to tackle it head on.

‘As a woman in my mid-40s myself, the time to start preparing for menopause is before it happens,’ says ITV’s *This Morning*’s resident TV doctor. ‘I think inevitably, I’m in perimenopause. I’m not having symptoms, but I know with certainty that at my age, my oestrogen levels are lower than they used to be. It’s imminent.’

‘Even as a doctor, I’ve gone through a stages of not having enough knowledge, being a bit oblivious, and being like “I’ll deal with that when I get to it”, all the way through to almost dreading it and having too much knowledge and [hearing] all the horror stories. Now I’m very much in a place of acceptance that this is going to happen and it’s not all doom and gloom.’

‘I think approaching menopause has definitely given me motivation. I feel informed, I feel empowered. But I do also feel that women, many women, are more fearful than they need to be.’

She has seen so many women go through her surgery (as a practising GP) that she is now keen to speak out about the challenges to support other women, especially around the subject of mental health.

‘So many women have come to me with mental-health symptoms which may or may not be as a result of reaching the menopause,’ she says. ‘Symptoms can affect their whole life and it can have a huge strain on their mental health in particular. Relationships are often impacted and sometimes they experience problems at work too. It can be very distressing if you don’t understand what’s happening to you.’

‘It’s so important that we provide more education and support, not only to the women who might be experiencing it first-hand, but also to their families, their employers, children, teachers and even healthcare professionals.’

‘There is a serious need for the topic of menopause to be widely discussed issue and we’re seeing more and more people talking about it nowadays which is great.’

‘As half of the population will go through the

menopause, it's likely to have an impact on most of us at some point.'

The way the menopause impacts us can vary, she explains. 'Often we find that women who have never experienced low mood before start to feel low, and that can be scary and confusing.'

'Around 25% of menopausal women consider changing jobs or leaving work at this time. We all need to be acknowledging that this is a huge waste and employers need to offer much more support for their menopausal workforce.'

Williams is also keen to take control of her own health, and encourages other women to help themselves going forward too.

'From our 30s onwards, we should be starting to think about [it]. If we [prepare] our bodies the best we can, then that's one of the best offences that we have against some of the negative consequences.'

'I've already started to make some lifestyle changes, and actually, it's given me some motivation to stick with certain lifestyle changes that I know are going to help me when I do reach menopause,' she says.



"Understanding you are not alone or going crazy is important"

Her personal focus now is 'definitely on building strength and maintaining flexibility', whereas before, 'I used to really love to go spinning and get those endorphins hits, but now I've shifted because I know what's better for me.'

Williams, an ambassador for menopause brand Issviva, still does cardio though. 'I love walking up a hill and getting a bit sweaty, I do a dance class once a week.'

'Whatever stage of the menopause you're at, exercise is undoubtedly beneficial, not only to your physical health, but your mental health too. If you haven't exercised for a while, I recommend starting with at least ten minutes a day of brisk walking (ensure your heart rate increases and you become slightly out of breath) and then introduce some strength training. If you can exercise outdoors, do so as this is proven to help improve your mood and help boost energy levels.'

A nutritious diet, that helps to curb blood sugar fluctuation, is understood to help manage common menopause symptoms, like hot flushes and weight gain, while also protecting your heart health, so Williams has also turned attention to her diet. 'As we're approaching menopause, it's really important to make sure we're getting enough calcium,' she adds. 'I try and eat fish more often, I usually have a salad during the week for lunch and chuck mixed seeds and mixed sprouts and a few nuts. It doesn't cost a lot of money but all the stuff I chuck in there, there's probably about 20 different plants.'

'I've shifted from trying to eat healthily and trying to minimise foods that are not so good for me to focusing on nutrient-dense foods that I really love. If you're entering your 40s and you find that you do have a bit more expendable cash than you had before, consider spending that on nourishing your body with good quality food, before anything else.'

'The number one killer of women is heart disease,' notes Williams. 'It's really important that women understand the link between menopause and heart health as women.'

'Women tend to get heart attacks about 10 years later than men, and one of the reasons for that is that the oestrogen that we have in our bodies prior to menopause actually protects the heart.'

Once we lose that at menopause, our heart starts to become susceptible.'

For women who don't take hormone replacement therapy (HRT), there will be an 'uptick' in the inflammatory state of the body: 'Which we know is not good for our health, it increases heart disease and type-2 diabetes,' Williams says.

'We can think of oestrogen as an anti-inflammatory chemical. Oestrogen is in every cell of our body, it's in every system of our body and whilst we have oestrogen circulating, it's providing an anti-inflammatory effect. So therefore, once we lose that oestrogen, the inflammatory state of our body is likely to turn in the direction of a pro-inflammatory, especially if we have lives where we're really under stress. The major things that increase the inflammatory state of our body are chronic stress, poor diets, physical inactivity, too much alcohol and smoking.'

The fall in oestrogen levels can also impact your romantic relationship – both outside and inside the bedroom. 'It's normal to feel irritable and have less patience with family and friends,' says Williams. 'Women often report feeling invisible to society and sometimes they even feel a sense of loss. These are all quite normal feelings but don't be afraid to tell people how you're feeling. There's nothing to be ashamed of.'

'Many women report extra strain on their relationships during the menopause and lack of sleep can exacerbate that,' she says. 'It's also very common that women experience vaginal dryness [during menopause]... as well as losing laxity and sexual pleasure.' (Issviva's Joylux device is designed to help naturally regenerate some of the tissue in this area and improve muscle tone to combat the symptoms).

But the most important thing you can do is simply to open up and talk, she explains. 'I find with my patients that when they understand what they're going through and they feel well-informed and "heard" they tend to manage their menopause experience in a much more positive light.'

'Understanding you are not alone or going crazy is important and there are some brilliant support groups out there. Talking and sharing is beneficial to your whole menopause journey.'

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Trust me, I'm a coach...

There's a lot more to making a connection with people than we might at first think, explains Harriet Minter



What creates trust? If you ask most people this they will probably name 'time' as the

number one factor. The more time we spend with someone, the more we feel a sense of connection and trust with them. However, if you ask any psychologists about trust, they'll tell you that time is overrated. In fact, we can gain and break someone's trust very quickly — often without really knowing why.

Recently, I've had a glut of new coaching clients and I'm always fascinated by how quickly they feel safe to trust me with their thoughts and feelings. When we sit down together for the first time I want to make them feel at ease and like I'm someone they can share their honest thoughts with, but I was never sure why I was able to do that, until this week.

Did you know there is actually a formula for trust? The 'Trust Equation' states that trust is built on $(C+R+I)/S$. Or in layman's terms, Credibility plus Reliability plus Intimacy divided by Self-Orientation. The first two are pretty self-explanatory. Intimacy and Self-Orientation are where it gets interesting for me.

Intimacy is all about how much connection we can create with the other person. We build this not through time but through really listening to them and seeing what they deeply care about. When you find what is important to someone, simply showing you've listened can build intimacy. We also build intimacy through our own self-disclosure and vulnerability.

And finally, all of this can be wiped out if we get our Self-orientation

wrong. Self-orientation refers to how much we care about ourselves in the conversation. If we put ourselves front and centre, making it clear we care most about what we can get out of this, then our Self-orientation is high and the trust is low. But when we really prioritise the other person, we lower our self-orientation and suddenly they're our priority. They feel it, and the trust is built.

When I read this for the first time so much became clear to me. Partly how sometimes it's easy for me to make a connection with someone new, and other times (when I'm wrapped up in my own needs and wants) it isn't! But mainly, why I trust the people that I do, because they are who they claim to be, they show up and they truly listen. Most of all, they're orientated towards me and when I do the same to them, I am graced with the best gift of all — a trusted friend.



IMAGE: MARK HARRISON. HAIR AND MAKE-UP: CAROLINE PIASECKI. STYLIST: KATE ANYA BARBOUR

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Mind

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***“Stop comparing
yourself to others.
You can be the most
beautiful rose, and
some jerk will still
say they prefer
daisies.”***

HALSEY

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK



SEEKING OUT *softness*

Can't we avoid the harsh realities for a while, and just bask in the sweetness of summer, pleads Kate Townshend

One of my favourite things about summer is its texture. You can walk out into air that feels like a caress rather than a bite. Everyone is slower and lazier, as pub gardens fill and hazy sunlight pours through windows. Even nature provides a gentler landing, with lush green grass and soft sand providing the textures of the season.

Okay, yes, I realise this is a rather rose-tinted view. I do know, really, that it's just as likely to be sunburn and crowds and sand in your sandwiches. But this idealised version — this dream of the perfect soft-focus summer — persists in my imagination. And on those magical days where real life does match the fantasy, I remember that part of the appeal is the softness of it all. In a world where everything often





feels hard; where we're constantly expected to push and fight and stay tough, the act of surrendering to the gentleness of just being for a while, allowing ourselves to rest and soften, can feel thrillingly subversive.

In fact, the more I think about it, the more I am convinced that softness has something to teach us beyond those hazy summer days. Because reflecting on some of the hardest times of my life, embracing softness has often helped me through. When simply getting up in the morning feels tough, a soft blanket and a gently-steeped cup of tea can provide a counterbalance that just about tips things from impossible to possible. And the trope of melting into a hot bath after a difficult day exists for a reason — letting the rigid structures of daily life dissolve into something softer and more fluid is wonderfully freeing.

I wonder if it's why I often crave the escape of wild swimming when I'm struggling. To be embraced by a river or the sea in the midst of life's woes is a genuine comfort. And it's an exercise that involves less pain and more gain for me precisely because of the yielding softness of the water.

Hard to understand?

It's funny because when life is tricky we are far more likely to be advised to toughen up than soften up. And the idea of being soft ourselves is often treated with a kind of disdain. Taking the 'soft option' or 'going soft' are explicitly framed as negative outcomes for instance.

'Softness is so misunderstood,' says spiritual psychotherapist Melissa Amos, who explains how often it is seen as synonymous with weakness or being a pushover with 'squishy boundaries'.

'When we are too hard we shut off part of our capacity for connection. Holding onto what is acceptable, how we should be, deflecting from our most vulnerable thoughts means we can't fully express ourselves — so we end up not showing up in our full capacity. By softening these barriers we allow for more of our true selves to come through. People understand us better, and in this day and age, people are seeking exactly that real, true connection.'

I find this take on softness encouraging because, if I'm honest, I perfectly fit the criteria for a 'soft' person: I cry often and easily. I'll be in the next

“Society is set up to be goal-focused, productivity-focused, and many of us are stuck in these hard places”

room — not just behind the sofa — during violent or scary TV shows. I am easily swayed to sympathy by a sad story or a beautiful sunset.

Popular opinion sees at least some of these things as rather pathetic, and when you're 'soft' like this, it's easy to feel ill-equipped for life.

But I'm slowly learning to appreciate these qualities rather than allowing the world to make me ashamed of them. In particular, Amos's suggestion that softness often goes hand in hand with connection really resonates with me.

Without softness I would surely have lost my way in the early days of motherhood, when learning to bend rather than break and to revel in the butterfly-wing softness of my physical connection with my baby was nothing short of miraculous. That softness, that give and take, those moments of just 'being', listening to my little boy's gentle breathing were, paradoxically, some of the times in my life I've felt the very strongest.

And who can argue with the wisdom of children's book *The Velveteen Rabbit*, reminding us that authenticity remains elusive if we prioritise sharp edges over the softness needed to love and be loved.

It's interesting that childhood is one time when we do value softness; when we are keen to metaphorically and literally swaddle them in delicate colours and textures and emotions. I wonder if this is because it is also a way of making



them feel safer in a fundamentally unsafe world. But if we want this for our children, can't we want it for ourselves, too?

'Society is set up to be goal-focused, productivity-focused, only-resting-when-we're-done-focused, and I've noticed so many of us are stuck in these hard places,' says Chloe Markham, a yoga teacher and nervous-system coach who is explicit about the link between softness and feeling safe. 'When our body feels safe, our breath softens, our muscles release, our voice becomes more melodic. And when we're regulated in this way, every process in our bodies is supported.'

'So, to me, softness isn't weakness — it's regulation. And that kind of presence changes everything: how we relate, how we create, and how we move through the world.'

Believing the daydream

It certainly feels true that part of my yearning towards softness is a yearning for a feeling of greater safety and comfort. But Markham raises the interesting point of what happens after we bring greater softness into our lives — and how this changes our impact on those around us too.

Softness is creative, because it isn't interested in imposing hard boundaries or rigid structures on us. That cliché of lying on your back on a summer's day gazing at the clouds and

daydreaming? Perhaps it exists because softness makes space for this dreaming to exist.

If so, this is good news for those of us who struggle with the 'toughen up' advice. I have a complex relationship with my 'softness' and sensitivity — but when I think about hardening up I worry about losing some of the crucial things that define me. Softness can be risky; it exposes us to hurt and ridicule — but it can also be creative and expansive and enriching on its own terms.

For me, those things are worth the risk.

Bending, not breaking

So how do we actively welcome softness into our lives? There is a simple physical element to it of course. It's why I light my candles and drink my tea and cocoon myself in the fluffiest of blankets. It's also, when possible, about carving out a little time for rest. We don't constantly have to be productive, or fill all our days with activities.

But perhaps most importantly, softness is about allowing ourselves to be open and vulnerable. These days you'll find me admitting I need some time out, wearing my tender heart on my sleeve and crying about how beautiful the moon can be out in the open. But don't mistake this softness for weakness. 'Blessed are the hearts that can bend; they shall never be broken,' wrote Albert Camus. I hope that my softness is equally protective.

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Ann-Marie, HCA Health Coach Graduate



After a sudden collapse at work in 2009, Ann-Marie Goodbody's life was turned upside down by a diagnosis of severe ME/CFS. Once a vibrant, fitness loving legal professional, she spent over a year bedridden, facing a long and complex journey of healing.

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Diploma in Health & Wellness Coaching, Ann-Marie has now launched her own health coaching business, using her story and training to support overstretched professionals to avoid burnout.

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Expert advice



Dr Amber Johnston is a practising clinical psychologist, specialising in clinical, health, pain management, and neuropsychology. As the founder and director of Healthy Mind Psychology, she leads a team of more than 25 doctoral-level psychologists, serving patients in London and across the UK.

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

COULD YOU HAVE A *dopamine* DEFICIT?

For a long time we've been focusing on dopamine detoxes, but do we need more, not less, of the d-word? And could a lack be the real culprit behind treatment-resistant depression, asks Emma Green

Dopamine has come into the spotlight in recent years, and it's not always been for good reasons. Our over reliance on our phones in general, and social media specifically, are causing imbalances, we're reliably informed: we get an easy buzz on our phone, and we struggle to do anything else useful, leading to the rise in popularity of dopamine detoxes, and the general vilification of dopamine. But what is the bigger picture behind this much-maligned hormone, and is it possible that the problem with our low moods is we're actually not getting enough of the stuff?

We need to take a little trip back in time to find out more. Dopamine is one of the four main mood-influencing hormones, along with serotonin, oxytocin and cortisol. Each fulfils a different role in the body and brain, and, understandably, have an impact on how we feel. The focus on hormones and mood has been around since the 1960s, when it was proposed that low levels of serotonin could cause depression-like symptoms (known as the 'serotonin hypothesis of depression'). Our understanding of the mood disorder has been increasingly shaped around the idea that if we increase the availability of serotonin in the brain, we can then relieve depression. As a result, since the late 1980s, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) have been the go-to drug of choice for treating depression. But while studies

have shown that SSRIs show some improvement in depressive symptoms amongst 40-60% of those who take them, there remains a significant proportion of people who report gaining little relief.

It's something I can attest to myself. I have been on and off SSRIs since I was diagnosed with depression during my first year of university. Although the origins of my depressive tendencies took root long before then, it was the culture shock of moving to London from rural Shropshire, and then having to deal with numerous personal problems going on back home, that saw me fall into a crippling depressive episode and subsequently led me to pay a visit to the GP's office about my mental health for the first time.

Since then, I have cycled through various types and doses of SSRIs, including citalopram, sertraline and fluoxetine, all to relatively little effect. Despite taking them for nearly 15 years, I have still dealt with frequent, debilitating episodes of depression. I have had days, sometimes weeks, in bed, with dirty cutlery and rubbish piling up all around me. I rarely showered or changed my clothes and relied on takeaways to feed myself.

There are many, many more out there like me. Numerous studies have demonstrated a lack of substantial evidence to prove that depression is caused by a serotonin deficiency, and a major review led by British professor and psychiatrist Joanna Moncrieff in 2022 concluded that the 'serotonin theory of depression' was completely groundless.

Yet over the last 25 years, research highlighting



the significance of another feel-good chemical in depression has remained largely ignored. You guessed it: dopamine. Countless studies have shown the impact of a lack of dopamine, such as triggering depressive-like behaviours in mice, to the extent that their motivation to eat becomes so low, that they eventually die of starvation.

So could a possible dopamine deficit be the reason why the focus on serotonin regulation has seemed to have had so little impact on my own depressive symptoms?

What's your flavour?

Dopamine is both a hormone and neurotransmitter — a chemical messenger in the brain that allows neurons to communicate with each other and regulate our mood. It plays a vital role in motivation and reward, and drives our behaviour towards things that we find gratifying, such as eating a good meal. 'Dopamine is about identifying goal-based behaviours, achievement and looking forward to things,' says Dr Amber Johnston, clinical psychologist and director of Healthy Mind Psychology. 'Serotonin is more about connection, contentment and emotional regulation.'

It is believed that low levels of these chemicals result in imbalances in the brain and can lead to the onset of mental health conditions, including depression. When we think of 'typical' depression, we might associate it with persistent sadness or suicidal ideation. This kind of depression is often described as 'emotional' and is usually characterised by low mood, excessive worry, guilt and feelings of worthlessness.

However, in some cases of depression, there may be more prominent issues regarding drive and motivation rather than melancholy.

'Dopamine-based depression is a little bit different to the emotional overwhelm or high levels of anxiety or self-criticism that we often find with more clinical depression — but that doesn't mean it is any less debilitating,' says Dr Amber. 'The difference is this lack of ability to pursue interest, pleasure and purpose the way we once used to, or the way we see others doing.'

Although dopamine-based depression is not an official diagnosis or sub-type of depression, its fundamental feature — anhedonia, or the loss of pleasure — is a core part of the diagnostic criteria for the disorder. Common symptoms that we might see are lethargy, a general lack of zest or enjoyment for life, apathy, emotional blunting, poor attention, slowed-down cognitive function and reduced reward sensitivity.

My own experiences with depression have certainly reflected this. Although I have had bouts of 'melancholic' depression after sad or traumatic

events, many of my depressive episodes have seemingly come out of nowhere. It would often feel like all the colour had been drained from my life. Food tasted like cardboard, anything that usually brought me joy, like watching my favourite comfort shows, left me feeling even more empty and my only escape was to sleep excessively.

So is dopamine (or a lack of it) to blame? As science cannot yet accurately measure certain neurochemical levels in the brain, we can only rely on observable indicators that might pinpoint



a possible neurochemical deficiency. People with a dopamine deficiency often crave sugar and stimulants, as these can temporarily boost dopamine levels. They also tend to seek out unhealthy dopamine hits through addictive activities such as gambling, chronic social media use and impulsive spending.

A quick fix?

This certainly resonates with me. Even when I wasn't depressed, I seemed to unconsciously seek these out. In hindsight, my attraction to stimulants like caffeine and nicotine, junk food, avoidant men and buying myself shiny new things were my way of self-medicating. This was probably most evident when I was procuring off-prescription 'study drug' Modafinil as a desperate means to artificially motivate myself. Again, it's fairly common behaviour. Issues with substance abuse and addiction are often clear indicators of a dopamine deficiency, although it isn't clear whether low dopamine is the cause or result of addictive behaviour — or a combination of both.

Other disorders associated with dopamine deficiency include Parkinson's disease, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), schizophrenia, fibromyalgia and chronic pain.

I have recently come to realise that I might be neurodivergent — and it could be that low dopamine levels have played a role in my symptoms of both ADHD and depression.

What are other causes?

A dopamine imbalance can be triggered by an array of biological and environmental factors, including inflammation, chronic stress, hormonal shifts, poor diet, not enough Vitamin D and even certain medications that block dopamine activity. Dr Amber adds that an imbalance is not always necessarily caused by a depletion in dopamine, but rather a desensitisation to it.

'Our brains are always trying to create homeostasis and balance so if we're in an environment that's creating a lot of dopamine

within our system, the brain will start to expect it and therefore need more of it for normal dopamine regulation function.' She says that some behaviours mean we can risk overexerting our dopamine networks: 'We start to become desensitised and receive less pleasure from things that used to excite us.' So perhaps there was method in all that dopamine detox talk after all.

However, it is also possible to increase our dopamine levels. One way is through supplements and diet. L-tyrosine, L-phenylalanine, magnesium, omega-3 fatty acids and ginkgo biloba can all promote dopamine, either by supporting its production, enhancing its activity, or preventing its breakdown. Foods such as animal products, bananas and avocados can also provide the necessary building blocks for creating dopamine.

Other lifestyle changes that can boost dopamine include exercise, good sleep hygiene, listening to music, working towards goals, massage, getting out in nature and even cold-water plunges. 'Sometimes we need to do something even if we don't feel like doing it,' says Dr Amber. 'It's about eventually getting to a state

where we can find activities meaningful and purposeful again.'

What is the bigger picture?

She warns though, that treating depression isn't as simple as pinpointing a single neurochemical. 'Our systems just don't work that neatly. Medication can be a useful tool, but we need a more holistic understanding of what other factors might maintain or drive depression.'

Although I am still currently taking SSRIs, I feel like something has shifted in me. Since I started taking magnesium supplements just over two years ago, I have noticed a substantial improvement in my mood and productivity, and depressive episodes have been far less frequent. This also coincides with other dopamine-inducing lifestyle interventions that I have implemented, such as deliberately carving out time every day to work on personal projects that I find gratifying.

But most importantly, gaining insight into how dopamine plays a significant role in motivation and mood, especially when you're neurodivergent, has been utterly transformative for me. I now feel pity for the young woman who believed that she was inherently lazy and pathetic, and who struggled on in silence. I finally feel as if something inside of me has begun to heal.

"I now pity the young woman who thought she was just lazy and pathetic"

Let yourself grow!

Embrace the summer months to tend your inner garden and enjoy the healing and rejuvenation you can find there with a little help, writes Jackie Holder



This summer, my South London garden has been in full bloom: verdant, fragrant, and quietly instructive. As I water the bushy peony that hasn't

flowered since my friend Jacque

passed away, I find myself in quiet conversation with it. The peony is a cutting from her old front garden. For the first few years, it stayed green but dormant. One year it bloomed, unexpectedly and then, not again. I water it anyway.

Some things take precious time to flower again. Grief, unlike the seasons, doesn't follow a predictable rhythm. It can loop back on itself, pause unexpectedly, or bloom long after we thought it was done. Healing does its work underground. And just because we can't see the growth doesn't mean it isn't happening.

As I tend the garden, I notice how often its rhythms mirror my own. I've spent the summer moving hydrangeas from pots into soil, shifting them from one corner of the garden to another, trying to find that perfect spot of shade and sunlight. Some didn't like the pots. Others needed room to stretch their roots.

I didn't realise I was also re-potting myself. Over the summer I've found myself opening up to new possibilities in my personal life. It felt tentative at first, unfamiliar territory but at the same time expansive. Like giving myself permission to root in a different kind of soil. Repotting isn't always dramatic or public. Sometimes it's a quiet shift, giving yourself the time and patience to grow into a version of yourself you haven't yet met.

Moving plants felt like moving parts of myself, trying to find the setup that feels right again.

It makes me wonder: where in my life have I stayed in containers I've outgrown? Spaces that once felt nurturing but now feel cramped? Sometimes thriving requires relocation — physically, emotionally, even spiritually.

I see it again in the eucalyptus tree we thought we'd lost. It looked brittle and bone-dry after the



"We thought we were cutting it back, but we were really making space for its return"

long winter. I had given up on it. But after a firm pruning, something stirred. Little by little, mint-green shoots pushed up from the bottom and now there's a mini tree flourishing at its base. We thought we were cutting it back, but what we were really doing was making space for its return.

That lesson landed. I had recently let go of a book project I'd been nurturing for years. Something that once lit me up but had since weighed me down. I was wedded to an older version of me who believed I had to write this. Letting it go felt like failure at first, but soon I felt the unmistakable sensation of lightness. Relief. Like I had stopped forcing something. Like air had returned to the soil just like the earth I turnover for the plants in the pot.

And I realised: some endings are simply invitations to begin again. Pruning or letting go isn't punishment, in many cases it's a sign for preparation.

These garden lessons have made me more intentional about noticing small, often overlooked, details, even when I'm not in the garden. Because not all of us have access to outside space. But nature is still everywhere. It might be the plant on your kitchen counter, a stretch of grass near your home, or the tree you pass each morning.

One tool that helps me slow down is a journalling practice shared by naturalist John Muir Laws. It consists of three simple ways to connect more deeply with the world around you, and with yourself.

Start by observing the environment you are in. Settle in one spot and notice everything through your senses. Not just what you see, but what you hear, smell, or touch. Take notes. Be specific. What does the air feel like on your skin? What kind of birdcall can you hear? What is it like to touch the textures and surfaces around you?

Then choose one natural object — a leaf, a stone, a petal and sketch it. Slowly. Imperfectly. Not to get it 'right', but to see it. You don't need to be an artist. You just need to pay attention. This is the practice I find most helpful. It draws me out of distraction and back into presence.

The third practice is: stay curious. Let your journal be a space for not-knowing. For questions without answers. For noticing what you haven't given yourself time to think or notice.

This kind of journalling brings you into an intimate conversation not just with nature, but with yourself. The garden and nature becomes a teacher, not in words but in rhythm and energy. A leaf becomes a question. A patch of sunlight becomes a reminder. Even a plant pushing through concrete becomes a metaphor for your own quiet resilience when we sit still long enough to listen.

In my mind, nature journalling isn't just a creative practice, it feels more like soul tending. It reminds us that, like any garden, our inner lives need constant care. It's remembering that some parts bloom. Others go quiet. Some return, others don't. There's no shame in that. There's only life, unfolding, honestly, imperfectly, and always in motion.

So as you move through the rest of summer, I invite you to write with nature, observe with tenderness, and be curious about what's growing — both outside and within.

And if you're feeling ready to take this practice further, I'd love to welcome you back here next month as we celebrate the launch of The School of Journalling, which I'm proud to co-found. Until then, enjoy the final blooms of summer and keep tending to your inner garden.



Inner journal prompts

- What part of your life feels dormant but quietly alive beneath the surface?
- Is there a grief or emotion you've been holding quietly? What would it mean to tend to it with gentleness?
- Where do you feel root-bound or overgrown in your current routine?
- If you were to 'repot' yourself this month, where would you go and what would you leave behind?
- What are you doing out of habit, not out of desire or alignment?
- What have you quietly let go of recently — and what has that made space for?
- Describe something in your environment that is in transition. How might that mirror your own changes?
- Sketch or photograph a plant that's struggling or thriving. What do you notice about your own energy as you observe it?
- What would it look like to play a little more this season?
- What question has been quietly following you? Try writing it down and sitting with it, without rushing to answer.

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BREAKING THE silence

The power of storytelling can change how we view our reality — and it can even change that reality itself, writes psychologist Jessica Zucker

It's beyond time to normalise talking about the hard things in women's lives. The pressure to keep so many of our important experiences to ourselves prevents us from showing up as our fullest selves, in all of our vulnerability, complexity, and strength.

Our culture has taught us to be silent about the very things we need to be sharing: the messages we received about our voices and bodies as girls; depression and anxiety; breakups in intimate and platonic relationships; grief; shame; sexual harassment and abuse; the choice to become a mother; the choice to not become a mother; the pain of wanting to become a mother but having it not work out; and the struggles associated with caregiving, with ageing, with our changing bodies. Silence, stigma, shame, repeat. The act of openly discussing the genuine experiences of women, especially those that cultural norms deem unfit for public consumption, can be metamorphic.

So how do we take that initial step toward expressing ourselves authentically? How do we build a connection first to ourselves, and then to others, that allows us to acknowledge our collective joy and pain, and ultimately erase the taboos that hold women back?

As women know all too well (particularly those from further marginalised groups), changing cultural attitudes isn't as simple as deciding to ignore them. We may feel staunchly that the taboos against talking about miscarriage, our relationships with our bodies, or perfectionism are bullshit, but rarely does that mean we can simply pretend they don't exist. Opposing a culture that is

determined to reduce the many shades of women's experiences to just one hue is a daunting task.

The work of creating more empathy and authenticity in our lives and communities begins with telling our stories. Especially the hard ones.

Storytelling is undeniably powerful; it has been used throughout history to promote interpersonal change, bring people together, and build up communities. Over the course of our lifetimes, we'll spend about 40 percent of our conversational time telling stories. From the moment we are able to communicate, we are both storytellers (crafting narratives both real and fantastical to convey our thoughts and feelings and make sense of our experiences within the context of a social group) and story listeners (for example, bedtime stories teach us about how to move through the world, family traditions teach us about what our communities value, and recapping schoolyard drama to an empathetic parent helps us learn how to resolve conflict and navigate relationships with others). In essence, 'we are born into stories,' says Jody Koenig Kellas, PhD, who studies the individual and relational benefits of storytelling.

As we get older, the narratives we internalised as children begin to solidify while we simultaneously encounter new narratives. We hear stories about other cultures and religions, learn about history through stories told by whoever held the most power, and begin to internalise counter-narratives that prompt us to think in new ways. In this way, stories can be a manifestation of our relationships with ourselves and others, a way of placing



Expert advice



Jessica Zucker PhD is a psychologist specialising in reproductive health and author of the award-winning books *NORMALIZE IT: Upending the Silence, Stigma, and Shame That Shape Women's Lives* and *I HAD A MISCARRIAGE: A Memoir, a Movement*.
drjessicazucker.com



ourselves within a community. They can act as a living, breathing community member, with our words serving as an outstretched arm, an invitation to connect, a chance at having a relationship with someone else. In other words, storytelling is an integral part of how we view ourselves, our communities, and our world. We tell stories in ways both big and small. Even a rushed grocery list on the back of a stained, crumpled receipt tells a story — likely one of an overworked woman rushing out the door.

But while storytelling is an innate skill, it becomes harder to tap into as we begin to internalise the idea that the only stories people want to hear are those that match cultural expectations. Stories about motherhood 'should' be happy, stories about pregnancy loss 'should' be sad, and stories about sexual trauma 'shouldn't' be shared at all.

From my work counselling women as they navigate the complicated, deeply nuanced realities behind the one-note stories they are expected to tell, I know that many of them have a fundamental yearning to share their stories more authentically.

There are many reasons for this. Some women are raised in families that support authenticity and encourage talking about knotty emotions, and they want to continue this as they move through spaces as adults. Others have the opposite experience, and they're finally fed up with carrying the weight of silence. Many women recognise, either consciously or subconsciously, that when they do talk about the hard things, it helps. They're responding to observations that speaking our truths can lead to change. We see the proof in interactions big and small, from fostering deeper connections in our relationships when we

have the courage to get vulnerable, to the watershed change in workplace culture that's resulted from the #MeToo movement.

On an individual level, talking about the hard stuff is a proven way to make us feel better. There's a large body of research connecting storytelling and communication to wellbeing. According to Kellas, storytelling invites us 'to map narrative coherence onto circumstances that are messy and complex and chaotic. [...] We communicate to make sense of our lives. We may get catharsis, we may gain a sense of control over difficult circumstances, and we may get social support when we tell our stories.' In fact, when Kellas has asked women to share stories about the things they struggle with, the most common response from the other participants in the study has been 'I'm not alone. I'm not the only one.'

'If you think about a story, it is typically a sequential plot with a beginning, middle, and end. There are characters, emotions, and a point, moral, or lesson,' says Kellas. When we are invited to tell stories about difficult experiences, we essentially 'have to put this really chaotic, difficult thing — grief, trauma, or whatever's happening in your life — into story form, which puts us in a position to make sense of it through those narrative structures,' she explains.

Storytelling invites us 'to map narrative coherence onto circumstances that are messy and complex and chaotic.'

For example, a study that examined how digital storytelling helped mourners understand a loss found that when people could write, read, and talk about their grief, it was easier for them to organise their thoughts about their loss and their memories, helping them make sense of the loss and giving it some meaning and purpose.

Telling our stories can also help us process trauma. Narrative exposure therapy, for example, involves talking about a traumatic event in specific contextual detail with a trained therapist. As the patient tells their story in this way, literally setting the scene, it helps their brain anchor the traumatic memory to a specific moment in time, reducing contextual triggers as they move forward. It's a well-researched treatment for reducing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

While storytelling both affects and reflects our individual wellbeing, the benefits of sharing our stories with others can also extend much deeper, changing entire communities and our places in them. The communication of our stories is powerful. 'I consider the purpose of my work to be creating opportunities where people can

connect vulnerably over difficult stories,' Kellas says. 'Because otherwise, we're living in shame. We're living alone. We're just struggling.'

She adds: 'We live in a time — particularly with social media and societal pressures — where we think we need to put our best face forward. We have to show all the great ways in which we're being a working mother, or a friend, or a partner. But what we're not encouraged to do as much is to connect with other women and honour our vulnerabilities. It's okay to share the story of the failure events.' Research shows the potential for empathy and connection when we do this. When we see or hear a story, our brain activity begins to mirror that of the storyteller in a process known as neural coupling, a term coined in foundational

neuroscience research on the power of storytelling. This process promotes greater understanding and empathy, making it fundamental to building supportive communities. Storytelling helps shape shared norms, build trust, transfer knowledge, and foster emotional connections within our communities.

In other words, storytelling creates communities that are supportive rather than combative, connected rather than secluded, and more empathetic for future generations of women.

Perhaps most obviously, talking about a stressful or difficult situation can help change it via social support. Sharing

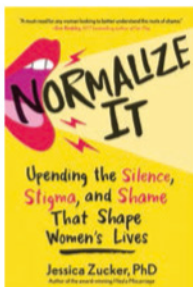
your burnout with your boss, for example, can potentially open the door to conversations about how to remedy your team's constant state of overwork. Sharing symptoms of anxiety with your doctor can hopefully help you receive the appropriate treatment. Sharing trauma with a trusted friend has the potential to facilitate a more compassionate bond.

In addition to the way stories impact our lives at the individual level and the community level, we also encounter 'master narratives' that shape cultural norms. It's clear that when we share our stories, things shift on individual and relational levels. Silence cedes to dialogue, shame evaporates in the presence of empathy. The trifecta of silence, stigma, and shame that dictates how women 'should' think, feel, and act begins to make way for a broad spectrum of new narratives.

That is how we ultimately change the master narratives that keep so many women from sharing their truths in the first place.

This power can be harnessed in all areas of women's lives. Our stories hold the key to creating a more equitable and honest reality for us all.

"When we share our stories, things shift"



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Gemma Bullivant

Coach and HR Consultant

What did you love about it?

"The teaching was superb; a great mix of internal tutors and visiting experts, and a great balance of theory and practical application. I appreciated the space to reflect, experiment and find my own style. Ten years on I still value the ongoing CPD and alumni support, which has helped me stay connected and continue developing well beyond the programme."



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Coaching in action



“The relationship has run its course”

Yoga-mad Jill feels like she's pulling against bike-obsessed Kevin — has their relationship run out of road?



Session One

Jill was a warm, expressive and confident woman. She had a youthful, 'boho' style and I was surprised when she said she was in her late 50s. I told her so and she looked pleased. In my work as a coach, I have learned that the first words people say are rarely without significance. So, I asked, 'Is your age relevant to your being here?'

Jill nodded. 'I guess so. I'm 57. I have been married to Kevin for 30 years — mostly happily, but things have changed.'

'I'm feeling increasingly lonely in my marriage. We exist alongside one another, but the emotional connection seems to have faded away over time.'

'We have different interests and different friends. Our conversations are functional and superficial. With luck, I may have another 30 years of life left, and I don't want to live it like this. I hoped you could help me think through my options.'

I thanked Jill for her honesty, and I asked whether she had talked to Kevin about how she was feeling.

Jill threw her hands in the air and her silver bangles jangled in unison. 'I have tried to! He won't engage in the conversation. He says he is fine, and "we" are fine and there is nothing to discuss. That's why I am here. I need someone to help me think about what I want to do.'

I reassured Jill that this was a safe space for her to hear herself thinking out loud and to be heard, supported and gently challenged. I reminded Jill that my role is to hold up a metaphorical mirror, so she can hear and see her own thoughts, words and feelings reflected.

Jill added, 'Hopefully, I won't just see where I am but where I can go next — so here goes!'

I listened while Jill told me the story of their relationship.

'I feel lonely, confused and frustrated. I don't know if we have slowly drifted apart or whether there was ever any real connection between us.'

'I'm interested in art, yoga, gardening and environmental issues. Kevin is just obsessed with cycling. He spends hours with a group of friends on long bike rides. It's all he talks about and thinks about, along with his latest time-trial results and what he eats and drinks to keep fit. I've wondered if we drifted apart because of the menopause, being retired or the kids leaving home, but I think we

have simply grown in different directions, and the relationship has now run its course.'

Jill stopped speaking and suddenly looked very thoughtful. I waited. 'I just saw and heard myself in the mirror,' she said. 'I said the relationship has run its course.'

'Did that surprise you?' I asked.

'It surprised me, made me sad, scared, and most of all — it excited me,' Jill replied. 'I haven't really dared to say that before, not even to myself, but when I said the relationship had run its course, it

felt true, and I experienced a sense of hope for the first time in a long while.'

I was wondering where to go next. As a coach, there's always a part of me that wonders whether I've created the right conditions for my clients to have these kinds of realisations. I reminded myself that coaching is not about providing answers but about offering the space for clients to discover them for themselves. Even so, it's hard not to feel the weight of that responsibility in moments like these.

I hadn't expected Jill to vocalise that her relationship had run its course. So, bearing in mind a coaching mantra 'the client has the answers, the coach has the questions', I asked Jill, 'What would you like to do now in this coaching session, with the insights and feelings you are experiencing?'

Jill looked a bit stunned. 'If it's okay with you, I would like to sit here with you while I write some thoughts and reflections about what just happened. Would you be okay simply sitting with me while I do that?'

I sat beside Jill while she wrote furiously in her big sketchbook until the end of our session. As she left, she thanked me again for being her mirror. 'Thank you for just letting me sit with everything without trying to fix it. I look forward to our next session.' Jill's words reassured and reminded me that being present and allowing space for reflection is often one of the most powerful things a coach can do.

"I haven't dared to say that before, not even to myself"

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

Relationship review

This exercise invites you to reflect on key aspects of your relationship such as communication, values, growth, and emotional connection. It can help you understand what is working well, what might need attention, and what long-term hopes you have for your relationship.

1 How often do I feel truly happy in this relationship compared with the times I feel unhappy?

2 In what ways do I feel safe in this relationship?

3 How comfortable do I feel being my authentic self with my partner, and what parts of myself do I not show in this relationship?

4 How clearly do I communicate my needs and concerns to my partner, and how do they respond?

5 How closely aligned are our core values and life goals, and in what ways do we differ?

6 In what ways am I growing and evolving as an individual within my relationship?

7 What do I think my close friends and family would say about my relationship?

8 How do my partner and I deal with difficulties in our relationship?

9 What one change each could my partner and I make to improve our relationship?

10 What are my long-term hopes for our relationship?

WORDS OF WISDOM

"Staying, when you know you need to leave, is not a kindness to anyone. Least of all yourself. But leaving, when everything in you wants to find a reason to stay, requires more kindness than you can possibly imagine."

Jeanette LeBlanc

Decisions, decisions

This is a simple exercise which can help you explore possible outcomes when you are facing or making a decision:

- What is the decision you are facing now?
Write it down in a couple of sentences.
- What would be the possible outcomes (both positive and negative) if you chose option A?
- What would be the possible outcomes (both positive and negative) if you chose option B?
- What if you decide to wait or do nothing?
How would that be for you? What would that mean for you?

Reflect on your responses

How do each of these possible scenarios make you feel?

Use your intuition

After exploring the scenarios, which choice resonates with you the most, not just logically but emotionally?

Time to reflect

You don't need to act on your responses. They are designed to give you insight into the different possibilities and how each decision aligns with your values and emotions. The goal is to help you feel more confident in your choices, knowing that you have considered both the potential rewards and the risks.



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AND...

relax!

Switching off can be harder than it sounds — if you find it tough to unwind on holiday, try these therapist-endorsed tips to let yourself go, writes Sara Keenan

Whether it's work commitments, family duties, or our mind is just elsewhere — for many of us, transitioning from a busy day-to-day life to sudden holiday mode can take time to adjust. But there's nothing worse than finding you've finally relaxed and then it's time to head home!

Senior psychotherapist Dr Michael Swift, who works with people who experience anxiety and stress, says that

we have 'forgotten what a holiday is meant to be'. 'We often consider that a holiday is a time when you mentally, emotionally and physically rest,' he says.

'However, when people tend to go on holidays now, that isn't the case and it is often spent trying to cram lots of things in. The other challenge for a lot of people is being able to switch from work or parental mode, into holiday mode,' Swift says. 'I often speak with my clients and I explain it's like driving a car 100 miles per

hour and then very harshly slamming on the brakes. The body and brain don't have a lot of time to make that switch. Therefore, it's important we try to make that transition a little easier.'

Here, Dr Swift and therapist Joanne Saulter share tips on how to properly unwind and de-stress during those well-needed holiday breaks.

Physically slow yourself down

Swift explains that when you're quite stressed, the brain activates the sympathetic nervous system, also known as being in fight or flight. 'This may make your heart beat a little faster and your breathing a little more shallow,' he says. 'Therefore, one of the things I always recommend people do is to actually physically slow themselves down. Whether that's getting on holiday and taking a slower walk, or eating your food a little bit more intentionally — by actually physically slowing your body and brain

down, it can make that transition easier.' He says this also is important in terms of work, and recommends setting a middle ground to check emails or work calls at specific times, if needed. 'You want to ideally get rid of as much work and technology as possible as that can also help you properly slow down.'

Don't put pressure on yourself

'A lot of people feel they have to go away and do 10 things in a day to feel like they've really optimised their holiday,' Swift says. 'What I often recommend people do is aim to enjoy just a few things per day while you're on holiday. Take the pressure off and be able to enjoy the time properly.'

Help to self-regulate

Saulter says: 'Ask yourself how you are going to self-regulate. The impact of life at home can be extremely fast, so slowing down is really important.

'However, it can be hard to do. If you take the travelling part of a holiday for example, everyone is going fast around the airport and you're not necessarily slowing down. Sometimes there can also be a feeling of pressure that you have to relax now and it can take a bit of time to adapt to this.

'I would advise taking plenty of time the first couple of days on holidays to properly rest, slow the nervous system down and regulate.'

Know your values

'This is a time to understand what you want to get out of holiday,' Saulter says. 'It may be that you want a little break from social media or you want to focus on the family. This means you need to know what boundaries you are putting in place to ensure the time is actually enjoyed. It may be that you are going to separate yourself from your phone, for example. It's about really starting to think and knowing about what you're going to be doing on holiday, so you get the quality time that everyone needs.'

Catch up on sleep

'A large proportion of us accrue large sleep deprivation through our day-to-day lives,' Swift explains. 'The fact that quite a lot of us are very fatigued and tired means that a holiday is an opportunity to try and reduce some of that sleep deprivation.

'Making sure you can have a lie-in where possible on holiday will help. Also be aware that if you are drinking alcohol to be somewhat moderate, as it will actually make your sleep worse. If you are trying to get away, relax and refresh, drinking a lot will impact on your sleep and will often mean you come back feeling a little bit more tired.'

Do things you don't usually do

'Doing activities that you don't usually do in your day-to-day life can be great for your brain to break away from the autopilot and the consistent part of the routine that it's used to,' Swift adds. 'Be creative, learn a new language, try a new activity: this will give you a lot of opportunity to relax and also grow your confidence and self-esteem.'





Hello!

We're definitely not anti-ageing in this magazine: we

celebrate life, experience and everything that comes with it on every page. But that doesn't necessarily mean we want all of that experience to show on our face! That's why we love this month's subscriber gift: Jurlique's Purely Age-Defying Firming Face Oil (worth £52!). This luxurious treatment oil will help your skin feel hydrated and luminous, thanks to its blend of botanical extracts. Pair that with a subscription to your favourite magazine and you'll feel rejuvenated inside and out. After all, Psychologies is the ideal tool to help you prioritise looking after yourself, packed full of inspiring yet simple ways to bring about small improvements in your life that make a big difference to how you feel. Featuring leading authors, experts and therapists, it's sure to help you feel calmer, happier and more relaxed.

Sally x

Editor-in-Chief,
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FIND YOUR NEW DIRECTION

Work out what you really, really want to do with your life, from finding meaning and joy to taking action, writes Kellie Gillespie-Wright

THE LIFE YOU'VE BUILT

VERSUS

the life you want

When summer is in full swing, the tempo changes. The days are longer, the pace softens, and the usual daily rush fades into the background. Life feels a little lighter, and there's room to breathe and gather your thoughts. Sometimes, that's when a different kind of thinking starts to surface — thoughts that usually get drowned out by the hustle and bustle of the day-to-day, but are always there, niggling away at the back of your mind.

Maybe you're reading this on holiday, or you're barefoot in the garden with a drink in hand. The to-do list is out of sight and your time is your own. And in that calm, questions begin to rise: what do I really want from this life? Am I where I want to be? What's next?

Not the urgent kind of 'what next?' that pushes us through busy days, chasing the next task or milestone, but something quieter. A moment of honesty: does the life I've built still fit? Are the things I'm chasing truly mine?

We talk a lot about goals, plans, and success. But often, what we're really circling is something deeper: who am I, and what is my purpose?

Purpose isn't always a bold mission or perfect career fit. Sometimes it's quieter, more responsive, more personal. But it's easy to confuse what's meaningful with what's merely acceptable: the job that looks good but leaves you flat, the relationship that seems solid but doesn't quite satisfy you, or the role that once made sense but now feels like it belongs to someone else.

'Sometimes what we think we want is just the

most socially acceptable version of what we're actually aching for,' says Charlotte Fox Weber, psychotherapist and author of *What We Want* (Wildfire, £20). And often, what we think we want isn't really ours. It's been shaped by fear, comparison, or other people's expectations.

Psychologists call it introjection, the early, subtle absorption of other people's values until they feel like your own. But you don't need the terminology to know the feeling: that slow drift away from yourself, the life that ticks every box and looks fine on paper but still feels incomplete.

'You've probably felt it,' Fox Weber adds. 'That question that keeps returning in quieter moments: "Is this really what I want?"'

Emma Hackett sees it all the time. As a coach who works with people at crossroads such as career changes or life transitions, she's familiar with that ache. 'When someone's life isn't aligned with who they really are, they eventually feel disconnected,' she says. 'They might have the success they were taught to want, but not the sense of meaning they're quietly craving.' Often she traces the roots





*Expert
advice*



Emma Hackett is an accredited coach who works with individuals and leaders in organisations to feel good, function better and flourish in their lives and careers. emmahackett.co.uk



Saori Okada is a registered coach, author, and founder of Mogami 最上 Wellness which offers an authentic Japanese perspective on holistic wellbeing. mogamiwellness.com



Charlotte Fox Weber is an integrative psychotherapist and the author of What We Want (Wildfire, £20). charlottefoxweber.co.uk



of misalignment back to early life, when we absorb expectations before we're old enough to question them. Spoken or not, they shape us. And as Fox Weber points out, the classics show up everywhere. "Be productive. Be impressive. Be selfless, but also self-actualised. Have a calling, a mortgage, and a perfectly balanced life."

"Then there are the quieter scripts: 'Be the good one, the dependable one, the one who never asks for too much.' These are roles we play so automatically, we forget they're performances."

Hackett agrees: 'We absorb expectations early, often before we're old enough to question them. Even when they're unspoken, they shape us. And years later, we find ourselves living out choices we didn't even realise we made.'

That's why getting clear on your values isn't just a self-help exercise. It's a return to yourself. A way to remember what felt true before the noise, before the expectations, before you started editing your wants to fit the world.

Of course, clarity is only the beginning. 'Identifying authentic values is relatively straight-forward,' Hackett says. 'But honouring those values and living in line with them to find the fulfilment we seek is not always easy.'

It can also feel daunting, especially if you're not sure what change might look like. Hackett suggests starting with a vision, no matter how rough.

'If you had a magic wand and everything was just as you wanted, what would your life look and feel like?' she asks. 'Often this is enough to give you the energy to move towards the future of your choosing.'

If it's not, she suggests turning toward what's getting in the way. Gently, without judgment, explore the barriers. The fears, the old beliefs, the stories you've inherited about what's possible or allowed. Sometimes the problem isn't confusion. It's fear dressed up as doubt. You might already know what you want, but the risks feel too big, the path too uncertain, the change too costly. So you stay still. Not because you don't care, but because moving forward feels unsafe. Naming those fears doesn't make them disappear, but it

makes them visible. And that's the first step in loosening their grip.

As you do this work, something deeper starts to emerge. A way of navigating life that's based less on what you've been told and more on what you feel.

"To live meaningfully now means being awake to what actually moves you," Fox Weber says. "Not what you were told should move you. Not what looks good on paper. Not what scores the most likes. It means paying attention to your inner life with the same seriousness we often reserve for career goals or other people's approval."

That kind of presence doesn't come from perfection. It comes from attention. From slowing down enough to notice what lifts you and what

wears you out. Where you feel most alive, and where you shut down. The goal isn't to judge or fix. It's to see clearly. Because that's where clarity begins.

'Start with what you feel, not what you think you should do,' Fox Weber continues. 'Where are you numb? Where are you secretly bitter, or oddly envious? Those are clues. Track what energises you and what depletes you, without judgement. Before we fix, we need to see. And there's something about the longer daylight hours that makes now a powerful time to start paying attention.'

She suggests beginning with what doesn't sit right. 'Pay attention to your

ambivalence,' she says. 'If something "should" feel fulfilling but leaves you drained, that's a sign. Ask: "does this want feel like a pull or a pressure?"'

From there, notice the emotional texture of your wants. 'Joy, curiosity, even a little fear, that's often the pull of something real,' she continues. 'Guilt, duty, or the buzz of performance? That's the pressure of someone else's story.'

That's what this dossier is here for, to make space for the underlying questions that so often get drowned out by noise, obligation, and routine.

It invites you to look gently and honestly at the life you've built and ask whether it still fits. You don't need all the answers to begin. You just need a little space, a little honesty, and the willingness to follow what feels true. To notice what you truly want, and start adjusting your path toward it. That's where change begins.

***"Start
with what
you feel,
not what
you think
you should
do"***



IS MEANING THE MISSING LINK?

Why purposeful lives make us happier,
and how to begin living one

Once you start wondering whether the life you're living is truly yours, another question soon follows. If not this, then what? What would feel real? What would feel like mine?

We're often taught to look for answers in plans or outcomes: a better job, a clearer path, a new five-year strategy. But most of the time, what we're really searching for isn't a roadmap. It's a feeling. Not the adrenaline high of achievement or the comfort of stability. What we're after, often without realising it, is meaning.

And not just any meaning. A kind of meaning that makes us feel more fully alive.

Saori Okada, founder of Mogami 最上 Wellness, draws on Japanese traditions and mindfulness to help people reconnect with what matters most. Central to her work is the concept of *ikigai*, an idea deeply rooted in Japanese culture.

'*Ikigai* (生き甲斐) means "a reason to live", a sense that life is worth living,' Okada explains.

'And it's not something to chase or achieve, but something to notice in the flow of daily life, found in connection, curiosity, contribution, or simple joy.'

This quiet, everyday sense of purpose has been widely studied. 'Research across Japan suggests that people who live with a sense of *ikigai* report greater wellbeing, stronger social connection, and even lower mortality risk,' Okada says. 'It's a key part of how many Japanese people speak about vitality and longevity, not as something grand, but rooted in purposefulness in everyday life. *Ikigai* isn't about pursuing happiness, it's about tending to what makes life feel meaningful, which in turn fosters a more sustainable sense of wellbeing.'

That meaning, she explains, is not fixed, it grows and shifts as we do. 'At its core, *ikigai* is the sense that your life holds value,' she adds. 'If we look at the word itself, *iki* means "to live" and *gai* means "worth". That sense of worth may take many forms and evolve over time.'

Emma Hackett sees ikigai as a useful starting point for reconnecting with purpose. 'Ikigai is a powerful tool to uncover purpose and meaning.

'If you're feeling disconnected from meaning, try asking yourself "What do you love?" and "What are you good at?" Ponder these questions. Take your time and allow the answers to bubble to the surface. When you have some answers, look at how you can be intentional about incorporating more of them into your life.'

While the popular ikigai framework can be helpful, Okada believes its deeper meaning is often lost in translation. She explains that the often-shared Venn diagram, citing what you love, what you're good at, what the world needs and what you can get paid for, is a Western invention, originally created by Spanish astrologer Andrés Zuzunaga and later popularised in a blog post by business coach Marc Winn. It can reduce ikigai to something transactional or career-focused. 'In contrast, ikigai is inwardly felt, a quiet sense of aliveness and meaning that can exist beyond what is paid or praised,' she says.

Okada describes ikigai as 'personal and intimate, often shaped by our relationships, rituals, and ways of being,' and adds that 'unlike purpose narratives that focus on career or external success, ikigai recognises that meaning comes holistically from our lives. While for some it may be related to their professional lives, it can also come from small, seemingly ordinary things like a morning walk, caring for a pet, or creating something by hand. Ikigai doesn't demand that you be extraordinary,' she says. 'It invites you to be present to what energises and brings you joy, and brings dignity to the everyday.'

That sense of dignity begins with a shift in attention. 'Start by turning inward and slowing down,' Okada says. 'Society, marketing, and social media often make us question whether we really know ourselves, but we do. We spend the most time with ourselves, and somewhere inside, we already know what brings us to life.'

'I recommend finding an environment that helps you hear that voice again, whether it's stepping into nature, taking a break from digital noise, or working with a coach or therapist to reconnect with your inner knowing.'

A gentle place to start is by asking yourself: 'If no one were watching, and there was nothing you had to do, how would you choose to spend your time?' It's not about finding the perfect answer. It's about noticing what feels natural, nourishing, or energising, and allowing this answer to guide your next step towards your ikigai.

This isn't a new idea in psychology. Researchers have long distinguished between fleeting happiness and the deeper kind of wellbeing that comes from meaning and purpose, what psychologists call eudaemonic wellbeing. Study after study has shown that people who feel their lives have purpose tend to be more resilient, less lonely, and more satisfied overall.

Charlotte Fox Weber sees this in her work every day. 'Purpose gives emotional pain somewhere to go,' she says. 'It turns suffering into meaning. It doesn't erase hardship, but it gives it shape, direction, even dignity. Without purpose, distress can feel like chaos. With it, there's a through-line, a why.'


That 'why' doesn't have to be grand or permanent. In fact, Fox Weber says, it rarely is. 'I gently disrupt the idea that purpose has to be profound or perfect. You don't need a five-year plan. You need a direction that feels alive.'

'Purpose can be episodic. Seasonal. Sometimes it's parenting. Sometimes it's starting a community garden. Sometimes it's surviving grief with grace. The thread is meaning, not performance.'

Yet despite this flexibility, many of us struggle with the idea that purpose should be clear and fixed. Hackett frequently meets clients who experience what she calls 'purpose anxiety,' the feeling that you're failing at life because you haven't yet figured it all out.

'Clients believe they should have a purpose but don't, and feel they're squandering their life without one,' she says. 'My take on purpose is that it's already within us and always has been.'

This is where ikigai offers not only clarity but kindness. 'The pressure to find "the one thing" or to make it career-defining can be a major barrier,' Okada says. 'Ikigai doesn't work like that. It's not a treasure you uncover but a relationship you nurture, one that evolves and responds to the shape of your daily life.'



*"Dare to
name your
longings, your
contradictions"*



This shift from fixing life to listening to it is key, but even if you feel stuck, there are ways forward. Fox Weber says: 'Outgrowing is painful, but it's also a creative threshold. You don't need to know what's next to begin. Get curious. Do something uncharacteristic. Let yourself be bad at something again.'

You don't have to name your purpose to live it. You only have to notice when you feel most yourself. That aliveness is the clue. That spark is the invitation and what matters is not the size of your impact, but the truth of your direction.

This is how you start to live a purpose-centred life, not by forcing it but by noticing what draws you in. Not by defining one permanent calling, but by recognising when you feel most on purpose,

when your body feels alive, your heart engaged, your spirit genuine.

Fox Weber calls this emotional honesty. 'It means daring to name your longings, contradictions, and the inconvenient truths you've been avoiding. There's dignity in that. And freedom.'

Happiness is a worthy goal. But it *isn't* the goal. It's what happens when you live with meaning, connection, and self-respect. What truly makes us happy isn't just pleasure. It's the sense that we matter. That our life is part of something worthwhile.

So let go of the chase, allow yourself to wonder, to want, and let that voice inside you, the one that lights up when something feels right, take up more space.

THE JOY COMPASS

*Listening to what
lights you up*

We tend to think of joy as something big: a milestone, a celebration. But often, it slips in quietly. Maybe it's sunlight on your skin, an ice cream on a hot day, or a song you forgot you loved playing at just the right moment. Maybe it's the sound of someone you love laughing beside you, or your own laughter catching you off guard — forgetting, for a moment, to perform, strive, or solve. You're simply present, and something inside you says: 'This is it. More of this, please.'

That moment might pass quickly, but its message is powerful. Joy, especially the grounding, honest kind, is not just a pleasant bonus when life is going well. It's a kind of inner intelligence. A quiet signal, a subtle compass.

For years, emotions were seen as unreliable, indulgent at best and distracting at worst. But psychology now recognises them as data, not noise. And of all the core emotions, joy may be one of the most trustworthy guides we have to who we really are.

'Joy is intelligence,' says Charlotte Fox Weber.


'It tells you what's alive in you. It shows you where you're attuned, not just excited, but connected, in flow.'

Emma Hackett echoes that. 'Joy is one of the five core emotions and comes with an unmistakable energy. It can be mild, like an inner smile, or a radiant energy that looks and feels like the sun coming out.' She adds, 'When coaching a client, I look for their energy. When their eyes shine, they become animated, and their face lights up — it's a powerful signal for me to keep exploring the topic that brings them joy.'

This is where joy becomes more than a feeling. It becomes a tool. A method for noticing what aligns, what energises, what matters.

'Recognising when joy is present and what it feels like in the body is a good place to start,' says Hackett. 'And using joy as an emotional messenger lets you know you're on the right track, and can be a useful tool when making decisions.'

But listening to joy isn't something we're taught.



We're trained to listen to logic, to expectation, to pressure. Joy can seem like a luxury, a distraction, or an indulgent pleasure, but in essence, it is none of these things.

That's why Fox Weber draws an important distinction between fleeting pleasure and deeper joy. 'Pleasure is often about relief or escape, joy is about resonance. One quiet way to tell: does this feeling expand you, or leave you emptier? Joy feels like connection, to self, to others, to time. Even when it's subtle, it lingers. It's the difference between an ice-cream headache and a warm breeze through your whole system.'

Hackett adds: 'Pleasure comes from the senses: something looks, smells, sounds, tastes or feels good.'

'Joy is a core emotion, and while it is felt in the body, joy is much more than the body.'

But tuning into that joy isn't always easy. 'Enjoyment doesn't always come easily,' says Fox Weber. 'It requires presence, permission, and the willingness to soften. For many of us, that's harder than we'd like to admit.'

It's even harder when you're out of sync with it. 'All human beings have an inbuilt negativity bias,' Hackett explains. 'We are hard-wired to look for negative things that may harm us. In a modern world focused on productivity, achievement and "more is better", joy doesn't often get a look in. When life feels challenging, hard work or overwhelming, that's a sure sign that a moment of joy might provide some balance.'

The good news is you can rebuild your relationship with joy.

'Enjoyment is a skill as much as a sensation, and it's one many of us forget to practise,' says Fox Weber. 'Especially if you're used to striving or scanning for what could go wrong, feeling good

might feel suspicious at first. But it's worth pursuing. Joy likes sunlight. Give it some.'

'Start small,' she adds. 'Notice what brings micro-joy. A good line in a book, or the urge to dance or make something.'

'Keep a joy log, because noticing joy trains the brain to tune in instead of tuning out. Over time, it becomes a compass again.'

Hackett encourages asking gentle questions. 'Ask yourself what brings you joy, but, to be honest, many people don't know how to answer that. So ask, "What makes you happy?" "When do you laugh?" "What do you look forward to?" "What is fun for you?"'

'These questions are doorways to connect with a deeper sense of joy. Another question is, "How can I make this day more joyful?" The answer is often coffee or a hug.'

If joy still feels unreachable, Hackett recommends exploring with your senses.

'Go to a park or forest. Switch your phone off and get present. Listen to the birds singing. Feel the sun on your face. Look at the colour of the leaves. Touch the bark. Take some deep breaths and notice how the place makes you feel.'

'Practising gratitude also helps,' she adds. 'Make a mental or written note of three things you're grateful for. This has been proven to overcome the brain's negativity bias and help you look for the good in every day.'

Over time, these small shifts in attention make a difference, and this is how joy begins to return, not through grand gestures, but in small moments of presence — when something shifts inside you, a flicker of curiosity appears, and a sense of ease you'd nearly forgotten begins to surface.

Pay attention to those moments because they are invitations and you just need to start saying yes to those invitations. Yes to what feels good, what brings lightness, what sparks even the smallest sense of joy and each small yes moves you closer to what feels real — to what feels like yours.

So let joy guide you like a compass. Follow what feels right, explore what draws you in, and trust that each step will reveal something true, because that's how your next chapter begins.

THE POWER OF SMALL EXPERIMENTS

You've done the reflecting. You've asked the big questions: what matters, what's next, what feels like mine. But even the clearest insights can start to circle back on themselves, leaving you unsure what to do next. That's when it helps to remember something important: you don't need perfect clarity to take a step. Often, it's the stepping that brings the clarity.

Because clarity rarely comes first. It doesn't arrive with a tidy plan or guaranteed outcome. More often, it emerges after you've taken a step, tried something, tested the waters. Insight gathers through movement, not stillness. You move, then you understand. Not the other way around. Clarity shows up when something stirs an energy or uncovers a truth you hadn't realised was there.

This is where purpose shifts from something abstract to something real, not because you've figured everything out, but because you've allowed yourself to experiment, and that's exactly the point. Emma Hackett explains: 'Action generates emotional data. It shows you how something feels in your body, not just in theory. And it gives you information you can trust.'

Building on that, Charlotte Fox Weber adds: 'We imagine we'll find clarity before we act, but often it's the action that teaches us what we care about. You have to try the thing, inhabit it, stumble through it, to know if it fits. Summer is for trial runs, less pressure, more play.'

You don't have to dive into anything big. Try a small experiment. Cook something new. Open a random writing prompt. Join a free online workshop.

Embrace the 'Try and See' approach. Drawn from behavioural science and coaching psychology, it is as simple as it sounds: try something, see how it feels. You're not making a life decision, just gathering information and giving experience the chance to teach you what insight can't.

You could go back to something you loved at age ten. Drawing, a dance class, or simply stargazing. Not because it will lead somewhere specific, but because it might wake up something you've lost touch with.

"Look for what makes you smile, that's a spark worth following"

You might take yourself on a curiosity date. Spend an hour somewhere that intrigues you — a bookshop, a park, an art supply shop. No expectations, just see what draws you in.

Try shifting your focus for the week, instead of setting a goal, pick a theme — choose a word like lightness, curiosity, or courage. Let it guide small daily choices, and see what feels different.

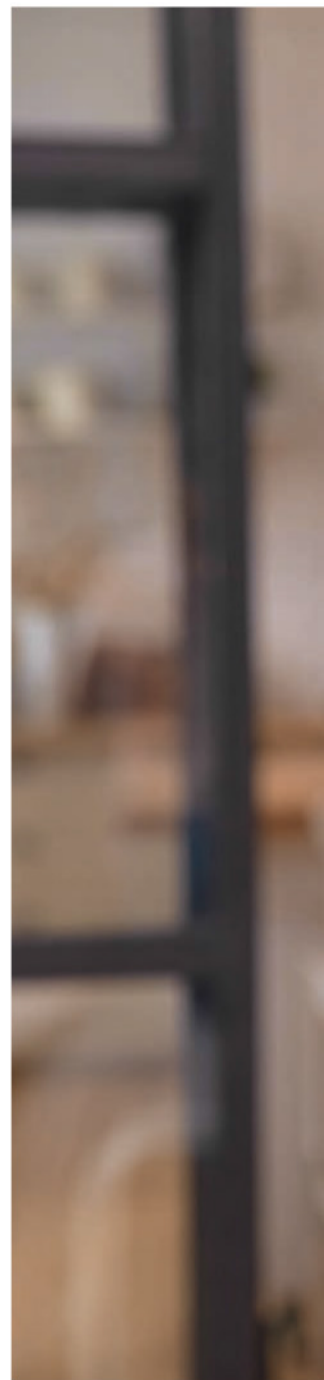
Still unsure where to start? Set a five-minute timer and write a 'Wouldn't it be cool if...' list. Let it be playful and uncensored. Look

for what makes you smile because that's a spark worth following.

Or talk to someone who chose a different path. Ask how they made their decision, what made it feel right, how they knew. Let their story open up what you thought was possible.

If you're not ready to act yet, try starting with a question. 'This might sound simple but asking yourself "What do I want?" or "What do I need?" can help with clarity and momentum,' says Hackett.

But even when the questions are clear, fear can still hold us back.





Hackett acknowledges the hesitation that often accompanies trying something new. 'The mind is hard-wired to protect us and keep us safe and may come up with a stream of thoughts that create barriers to trying something new. Just knowing that this is what the mind does can help you choose whether to listen to these thoughts.'

'You don't need certainty to begin,' she continues. 'You don't even need confidence. You just need a willingness to move.'

And once you do, something shifts.

Fox Weber adds: 'People start to surprise themselves. They stop being so rigid or self-protective. It's like opening a window in a stuffy

room. Possibility rushes in. And crucially, they stop waiting for permission.'

And it's from there that clarity starts to take shape.

Working out what you really want doesn't happen all at once. It begins by paying attention to what feels good, what feels honest, what brings you to life. It's not about finding a single answer, but about following a direction — one that reveals itself through small steps and ongoing experiments.

Purpose, happiness, and wellbeing live there, not in perfection, but in the patterns that keep drawing you back. You don't need to have it all figured out. You just need enough space to take the next step. ➡

WHAT MINDSET WILL HELP YOU FIND A NEW DIRECTION?

The key to lasting and meaningful change is connecting with your personal intrinsic motivation. Take our test to find yours

Tick the answers that most closely apply to you, then add up the symbols. Read the section, or sections, you ticked most, to find out what is holding you back from making a change

1 You would most benefit from certainty about

- ♥ How things will work out.....☐
- ◆ What to say yes to☐
- What people think of you☐
- What really matters.....☐

2 Generally the prospect of changing your life feels

- Inspiring if it's done for the right reasons☐
- ♥ Comfortable as it's something you do regularly.....☐
- ◆ Much-needed and also overwhelming.....☐
- Appealing but also a bit self-indulgent.....☐

3 When thinking about the day ahead, you tend to focus on what

- ♥ Most needs doing☐
- Other people might be doing.....☐
- ◆ Would make you feel okay.....☐
- You'd really like to be doing.....☐

4 If you were asked which character trait most held you back, you'd say

- ♥ Self-criticism.....☐

- ◆ Self-indulgence.....☐
- Self-sabotage☐
- Self-doubt☐

5 Your usual approach to major tasks is to

- ♥ Spend too long planning before getting started.....☐
- ◆ Put off getting started if you don't feel up to it☐
- Ask other people's opinions before doing anything.....☐
- Focus on what you think is most important.....☐

6 People often assume that you

- Never feel low☐
- ♥ Like being busy☐
- ◆ Are self-sufficient☐
- Have got life sorted☐

7 You feel most motivated when you

- ♥ Have a clear plan and deadline☐
- ◆ Are nearly finished something important.....☐
- Are contributing to a group or community☐
- Feel that what you're doing matters☐

8 Your best outcome from changing your life would be feeling like you had more

- Boundaries☐
- Direction.....☐
- ♥ Flexibility☐
- ◆ Resilience.....☐

9 You're most likely to keep up with life changes if the benefits

- ♥ Make you better at what you're already doing.....☐
- ◆ Consistently outweigh the effort....☐
- Are noticed and appreciated by others.....☐
- Wake you up and help you live more consciously☐

10 In general your life feels better when you have a sense of

- Meaning☐
- ♥ Achievement.....☐
- ◆ Momentum☐
- Progress☐

Turn the page to find out what will help you sort out your life





What do you most need to kickstart your life overhaul?



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♥

Purpose

When you're conscientious and usually efficient at getting things done, sorting out your life can easily become just a series of tasks to add to your list. You tend to jump in and get started, but try pausing first and really thinking about what you want your life to look like. Structure and step-by-step goals are key to creating momentum, but do you at times wonder if you're heading in the right direction? The most worthwhile and lasting changes are those that come from your personal values, so reflecting on what you really want is a key part of the process. It's time to set goals that align with who you are, not just what is expected of you. If you can, resist the urge to seek inspiration by comparing yourself to others, and focus instead on your personal motivation for change. Major life overhauls can be hugely appealing to those of us who are systematic thinkers, but sometimes only minor tweaks are needed. Create space to ask deeper questions so you can truly target your energy and appetite for change into what will benefit you most. For you, the most transformative life sort-out may be less about making plans, and more about appreciating what's already here and good in your life, and living with that in mind.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♦

Patience

When you've been operating on an empty tank for some time, you can start to wonder if you're just lazy or uncommitted. But if you find yourself resisting making any decisions or putting anything into action, however much you tell yourself that things need to change, it may be that you're depleted. When you're exhausted — whether that's physically, mentally, emotionally or spiritually — you won't find motivation by giving yourself a hard time, or comparing yourself to others. You need self-compassion and acceptance, and a willingness to acknowledge your own needs and limitations. Rather than focusing on what you're not achieving, give yourself credit for simply functioning on days you're not at your best. From there you're in a position to work out what's possible. It's logical to think you need to wait to feel motivated to start your life sort-out, but often momentum comes with action. Structure and goals will help, but what's key is the right mindset, and being okay with doing things your way — however long that might take. Think small steps, taken slowly, with plenty of time, space and flexibility to reconnect with your natural spark. For you, motivation comes from the heart rather than the head and when you stop fighting with yourself for struggling, you may discover that your energy naturally revives.



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ●

Permission

When you're naturally attuned to others' needs, moods and expectations, your own life sort-out can get indefinitely side-lined. The world needs more people like you but if you're ignoring a nagging sense that changes are overdue, it's time to give yourself permission to put yourself top of your list. It might mean rethinking some of the responsibilities you've taken on, potentially ruffling feathers in the process. It won't feel easy if you are hyper-sensitive to disappointing or upsetting others. But think of it as an experiment to explore how different your life might look if your dreams and aspirations had the same quality of attention and concern you give to others. Remember, even the kindest, most generous and self-less individuals are not immune to feeling resentment or frustration if they feel taken for granted. It's time to challenge the belief that your value depends on being indispensable. If it helps, imagine how much more you could give if you were also giving to yourself, and you felt you had enough time and energy for your own personal development. Permission to prioritise your life sort-out has to come from you, but that doesn't have to mean doing this on your own — it's time to allow yourself to ask for help and be supported.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ■

Peace

For you, a successful life sort-out means focusing on your why before you start to work out how. Don't dismiss any resistance you feel as lack of motivation — it may be that you know you're at a time of major transition and are seeking more than simply a change in daily routine. But when you long for a clearer sense of purpose or spiritual connection it can be hard to know where to start. What looks like procrastination can be a part of an essential process of questioning and reflecting. Bear in mind that any time of transition can be challenging so give yourself permission to tread water for a while. Rather than going round in circles trying to work everything out, allow yourself time to be in flux. The clarity you seek won't come from planning or goal-setting but from courage and willingness to push your boundaries. You may have already come to the conclusion that achieving for its own sake does not bring you fulfilment. Rather than struggling to stick to a structured plan, seek out opportunities to connect with awe and beauty, and time with others drawn to big-picture thinking. It's time to take your own path rather than following the crowd. Right now your life doesn't need a better plan — it needs a clearer why.



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in children's emotional wellbeing

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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.

Learn with flexibility

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 find out more.

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Heart



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



***“I could never
in a hundred
summers get
tired of this”***

SUSAN BRANCH

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK



Coming up for air

Something on the horizon...

It's never easy when there is beauty in the distance but you can't quite reach it yet, writes Caro Giles

“In the month since I wrote my last column, where I described my summer of uncertainty, life has been turbulent and exhausting. Against a brutal and devastating global backdrop, my own little world has been harsh and unrelenting. I spend my days seeking respite from the storm, but shelter is hard to find and I am frequently overwhelmed by the onslaught of obstacles being hurled into my path.

This morning, a gentle drizzle taps the plastic roof of my utility room as I pour boiling water onto a tea bag in my favourite mug. After I have driven one

daughter to the bus stop at 7am, I take a mug of tea back up to my bedroom for half an hour, before another daughter must be woken up. I like these stolen moments when no one needs me, when the day is still full of promise and I can feel hopeful. Mostly, in the last couple months, the promise has been forlorn, and my efforts to try and build a brave new life for me and the girls seem futile. Yet I still try to wake with hope in my heart and imagine that one day soon our dreams will become a reality.

The sky is a patchwork of broken clouds, last week's heatwave chased away by rain and a fresh breeze. Everything is as green as it will ever be, though I have noticed a few leaves turning brown and curling in on

themselves. It happens earlier each year, as the seasons stretch beyond recognition into a worrying new normal.

On the school run I kiss the top of my youngest daughter's head and watch her walk into the playground. Back in my car, I lean my head back against the seat as a friend knocks on the window. I wind it down and stare up into her smiling face.

This friend mothers on her own too, understands the weight of holding all the balls and willing them not to drop to the floor. We dive straight into a conversation, no small talk, and I like how it feels possible that micro exchanges like these could change the world. We talk about the challenges we face as single parents, people who are unkind, entrenched systems that make life harder

“It is funny to think of those creatures so close but we cannot see them: the undiscovered can sometimes be wonderful”



than it needs to be. This is mothering as resistance, caring as a mighty unpaid force. Together we hold each other up and are all the stronger for it.

It is not easy to avoid the backdrop of current affairs at the moment — turn on the radio and quickly switch it off again, scroll past blurred out videos with trigger warnings, avert eyes from the newspaper stand outside the petrol station — there’s a rough edge to life that is difficult to ignore. It doesn’t seem right to carry on living as normal while the world implodes. When I walk along the path above the beach later that day with my quietest daughter, I do so in the knowledge that this a freedom not afforded to everyone. The weight of my own worries is huge, but there is also

a lightness, a guilty relief, as I watch my child run into the distance. She occasionally turns to wave and check that I am still following, then races away once more.

As I walk through ferns on a grass track that will take me to the beach, I see a woman, older than me, smoking a cigarette as she sits on a log. Her dog wanders around sniffing pebbles and the tide is slowly ebbing away from the drag of high-tide seaweed. The sea is the colour of pewter, barely a ripple despite the light wind. It seems ominous to me, and I know that if my littlest child was here she would not wade in far, scared of what might be hiding beneath the surface.

Fear of the unknown is not uncommon.

I am wrestling with it right now. It would be nice to have a contingency plan for every possible twist or turn. But life isn’t like that. Amongst all of the challenges that keep me awake at night, I also know that I must squeeze every last drop from this wild and precious life. I am lucky to have choices to consider, even if they often feel limited and hard to reach.

A few miles away on the horizon, a tiny island is surrounded by puffins and seals. I point it out to my daughter, comment on how funny it is to think of all those creatures so close, yet we cannot see them: the undiscovered can sometimes be wonderful. We rarely know what awaits us when we leap into the unknown but, if we don’t take the leap, we will never find out...

The most wonderful time of the year?

In a few weeks most kids will be going back to school, or even starting at a new one. It can be an exciting time, but also an anxious one, so how can we help, asks Lisa Salmon

When we're enjoying the long, lazy sunny days of early August, school — and all its accompanying worries and drama — can feel a wonderfully long way away. But as the weeks tick by and September approaches apace, even the most carefree children can find themselves fretting about the new school year ahead. They might be worrying about making friends, coping with schoolwork or exams, or simply saying goodbye to the freedom of the summer holidays: whatever the reason, taking the time to work through it with them is the first step to helping make this a fun time rather than a stressful one. 'The time off might have eased academic pressure or provided a break from difficult situations children are facing at school,' says Stevie Goulding from young people's mental-health charity, YoungMinds. 'It can be quite common for a child to be anxious about going back to school, but there are some signs to look out. Trust your instincts, and reach out for help if you need it.'

So, what are the signs to look out for, and what can parents and carers do to help?

1 Reassure them their feelings are normal 'It's very normal for children to feel anxious about going back or starting school,' says British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) accredited psychotherapist Heidi Soholt. 'Anxiety is often triggered by the prospect of change, and children are just as vulnerable to this as adults are.'

'It can be helpful to reassure your child that their feelings are normal and understandable, given the changes involved in transitioning from summer holiday to school routines and schedules.'

2 Explain their feelings will soon change Soholt adds: 'Anxiety is about the unknown and will usually settle once a child becomes more familiar with school. It may be helpful to explain this to your child, perhaps using your own examples of how anxiety can build and then drop away after getting used to a new situation.'

3 Tell them even their teachers might feel anxious The fact that even teachers can feel a bit nervous about the start of a new term may help put their feelings into perspective. 'Your child may find this comforting to know,' says Soholt. 'Reassure your child that everyone experiences this, and that although anxiety can feel unpleasant, it isn't harmful or a sign that they won't manage.'

4 Look out for physical symptoms 'Worry and anxiety can show up in different ways,' says psychotherapist Anna Mathur, author of *The Good Decision Diary: Your daily guide to making better decisions, more of the time* (published August 7 by Penguin Life, £16.99). 'In children, much like adults, anxiety can show itself through tummy aches, disrupted nights, unrelated worries or irritability. A child might not be able to verbalise exactly what they're worried about, but their body and behaviour may be sharing the message instead. Change and newness are mental and physiological stressors, even if the change is positive and long-awaited.'

5 Assure them you have faith in them Soholt says parents should make it clear they have confidence in their child's abilities,





Expert advice



Stevie Goulding is senior manager for parents and carers services at young people's mental-health charity, YoungMinds. youngminds.org.uk



Anna Mathur is a psychotherapist and author of *The Good Decision Diary* (Penguin Life, £16.99), out August 7. annamathur.com



Heidi Sohlt is a British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) accredited psychotherapist. hsoholt.com



"Maybe plan playdates so things don't feel so new"

and reassure them they have lots of support: 'Remind them of times they've coped in the past, and that feeling anxious is okay and part of being human.'

6 Be aware their feelings may change Mathur points out that feelings come and go, and don't always make sense. 'Excitement might roll into worry, which might roll into questions about the school routine,' she says. 'Try to withhold any "should" statements, such as "you should feel excited to meet new friends", which may shut down your child's line of communication. Feelings will change and shift as time moves towards September.'

7 Get them involved in back-to-school prep Soholt says apprehension linked to change can be helped by involving your child in preparations before the start of school, such as packing their school bag, getting their uniform ready, meeting friends, and exploring routes to school.

8 Start the school routine early Getting your child into a regular routine of sleeping, waking and eating at regular times at least a week before the start of school can also help them (and you!) cope with the transition, says Soholt.

9 Share your own experiences When you're doing something with your child, talk light-heartedly about feelings and change, suggests Mathur. 'Perhaps share some gentle insights into your own school experiences and talk about the differing emotions you felt, paving the way for them to talk about their own feelings.'

10 Ask what will help them feel less anxious It can be tempting for parents to go into 'fixing' mode, offering advice and solutions. But asking your child what they think would be helpful may be the best idea, says Soholt. 'Asking a child for their opinion can



empower them by giving them a sense of control over the situation,' she explains.

11 Help them build familiarity Help orientate them with all the back-to-school 'newness' by letting things become familiar before term starts. Perhaps leave a new school jumper in full view so they can get used to it, let them start wearing their school socks early, especially if physical feelings affect them. 'Maybe you take walks near their school, tracing the new school run, or plan some playdates so friends don't feel so new — this is a nice way to add some familiarity,' says Mathur.

12 Ask if there's anything specific they're worried about Soholt says it may be helpful to explore whether your child's worries are related to anything specific, such as bullying or coping with learning, and whether support needs to be put in place. 'It can be useful to draw up an

action plan with your child, based on what is and isn't within their control to change,' she suggests. 'Issues such as bullying or learning problems can be alleviated by working with schools to put in appropriate support.'

13 Talk about the positives Helping your child identify aspects of school they find more positive could help them, says Soholt. 'Fostering a more nuanced perception of school will help your child manage their anxiety.'

14 Think about seeking help if it carries on If your child's anxieties persist beyond a normal 'settling in' period, and interfere with their ability to socialise or learn, it could be helpful to contact a professional trained in supporting children with anxiety. Soholt says: 'Therapeutic interventions such as play therapy can be effective in helping children process, understand and cope with anxiety.'

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a person’s physical,
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mental states.”***

CAROLINE MYSS

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK



MINDFUL WELLBEING



Ali Roff Farrar shares expert advice, ideas, stats and the newest research on all things wellbeing this summer, including six ways to stop intrusive thoughts in their tracks, three perspective shifting journal prompts for late summer, a couple of brilliant reasons why we should eat MORE and what the real deal is with weight-loss jabs...

Stuck in a spiral?

How to interrupt anxious thinking in as little as half a minute, with Nicci Roscoe, holistic health expert and author of *Micro Meditation: Moments of calm for a happier, healthier life*, (CICO Books, £14.99).

Nicci says: 'When life feels chaotic and your mind won't stop racing, you don't need a long break to feel better. My Micro Meditation techniques are designed to interrupt stress and anxious thoughts in 30 seconds to two minutes.'

1 Start with the breath that slows time: inhale slowly for 4, hold for 2, exhale for 6. Repeat three times. This simple pattern soothes your nervous system and tells your body that it's safe to relax.

2 For hands-on calm, I love Play-doh meditation. Keep Play-doh nearby and take a minute to squeeze, roll, and shape it. Focusing on the texture shifts your mind out of stress and into the present moment.

3 A two-minute un-busy walk can also work wonders. Step outside with no phone, no agenda. Notice colours, smells, sounds. Movement and mindfulness together help reset your energy.

4 When emotions run high, use the anchor technique. Press your thumb and forefinger together and recall a calm memory; lying in the sun, hugging someone you love. Over time, this technique becomes a shortcut to peace.

5 If your thoughts are all over the place, box them up. Close your eyes and visualise putting each worry into a tiny box and placing it on a shelf. Come back to them one at a time.

6 And for situations that drain your energy, turn the picture grey. Visualise it in full colour, then drain it to black and white, and blur it out. It helps take the emotional charge out of your stress.

Not a fan of the usual rubbery yoga mats?

Hailed as 'bullet-proof', these eco-friendly, tightly woven yoga blankets are handmade, machine washable and made from 100% recycled cotton. They're designed not to trap sand or dirt, be lightweight and easy to travel with — and even double up as a picnic blanket, accent wall hanging or throw when you're not mountain-posing on them!

Póvoa Yoga Blanket -
Blue Ocean, Suusco
www.suusco.com £54.99





5-minute hummus, 3 ways

There's nothing quite like homemade hummus, and this version is not only quick and easy, but also far more affordable than store-bought options. But what I love most is its versatility, which is why I had to bring you not just one, but three delicious variations. Try the jalapeño and coriander version when you're craving a kick of spice and fresh herbs; the roasted red pepper version for a smoky depth and subtle sweetness; or stick with the timeless classic — it never disappoints. Each one is perfect for dipping with fresh veggies, pitta or crackers; spreading on sandwiches or even loading onto potatoes.

SERVES 10
PREP 5 MINUTES

Ingredients:

- 1 x 400g can chickpeas, drained
- 50g tahini
- juice of 1 large lemon
- 50ml extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for topping
- 1tsp ground cumin
- 1 garlic clove
- 1tsp sea salt, or to taste
- 1–2 ice cubes
- za'atar, to serve (optional)

For jalapeño & coriander:

- 2tbsp roughly chopped coriander
- 3 spring onions, roughly chopped
- 50g sliced jalapeños
- chilli oil, to serve (optional)

For roasted red pepper:

- 140g jarred, roasted red peppers
- 1tsp smoked paprika, plus extra to serve
- ½tsp onion granules

Method:

- 1 In a high-powered blender (for a smoother dip) or food processor (for a bit of texture), add the chickpeas, tahini, lemon juice, olive oil, cumin, garlic and salt. If making a flavoured variation, add the additional ingredients listed for those now too.
- 2 Blend on full power for 30–60 seconds, then pause to scrape down the sides with a flat spatula, bringing any lumpy bits back into the mix.
- 3 Place the lid back on, but this time without the lid cap, and start blending again. While the machine is running, feed the ice cubes through the opening. The addition of ice cubes helps to create a light, creamy texture and also thins the mixture. Blend for an additional 30 seconds to fully incorporate the ice. If at this point the hummus is still too thick for your liking, gradually add cold water, a tablespoon at a time, until you achieve your desired consistency.
- 4 Have a final taste and adjust the seasoning if necessary. More often than not, I give it an extra pinch of salt and squeeze of lemon juice.
- 5 If you've made plain hummus, serve it with an extra drizzle of olive oil and a sprinkle of za'atar. If you've made the jalapeño and coriander hummus, you can serve it with a drizzle of chilli oil on top. If you've made the roasted red pepper hummus, you can serve it with a little extra olive oil and a pinch of smoked paprika.

Substitutions:

No chickpeas? Try using cannellini or butter beans instead.

Future you:

Place in an airtight container, storing in the fridge for up to 7 days.

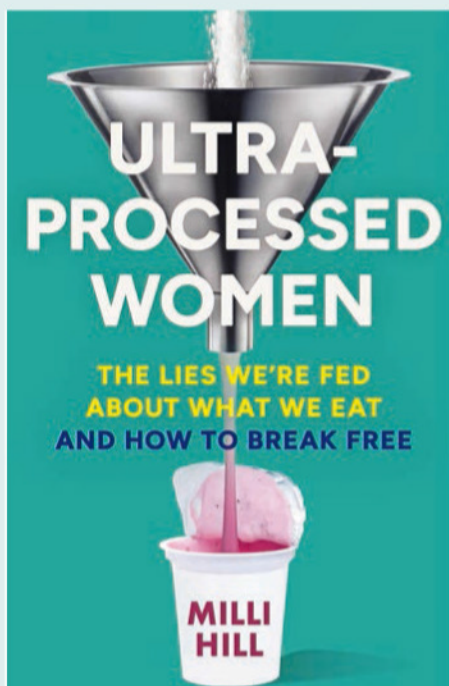
Healthyish: All the goodness with none of the fuss by Emma Petersen (Pavilion).
Image: Lizzie Mayson.



Know your stuff

Understanding UPFs

It's been hard to miss the furore over ultra-processed foods (UPFs) over the last couple of years, but what hasn't always been shown is that the impact can be even higher for women than men — links have been found between UPFs and worse menopause symptoms, a 50% higher risk of depression in middle-age women, an increased risk of developing and dying from female cancers, a higher risk of problems in pregnancy and an increased risk of dementia and Alzheimer's. But before you give up food altogether, if the constant warnings of ultra-processed lifestyles are giving you a headache, Milli Hill's clear, no-nonsense *Ultra-Processed Women* (HQ, £16.99) is packed with cutting-edge research, and is an absolute must read for anyone wanting to take back control of their body and their diet, without needing a doctorate in chemistry.



Ultra-Processed Women: The Lies We're Fed About What We Eat And How To Break Free
by Milli Hill (HQ, £16.99)

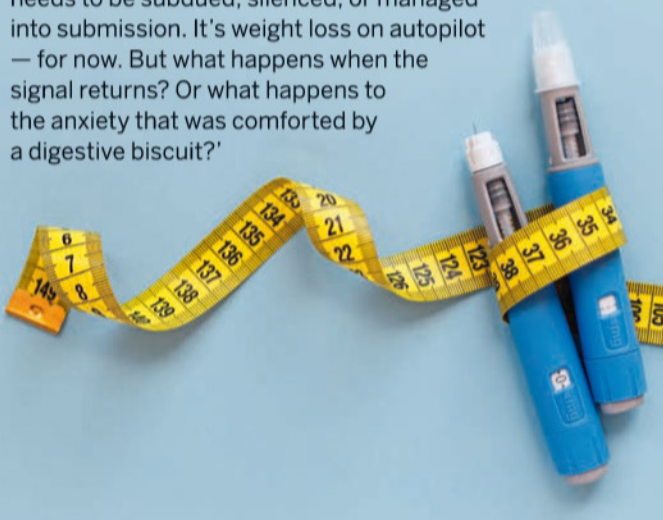
It's all good

Embossed on the front with the uplifting phrase 'see the good' and personalised with your initials, you can choose from two stylish colour options of this beautiful Gratitude Journal; blush pink and navy or lilac grey and burgundy. **£28.95,** marthabrook.com.



What's the deal with... weight-loss jabs?

We've all heard about the new weight-loss injections. They come with multiple brand names, but the generic one is semaglutide, a prescription medication originally developed for type-2 diabetes, which can improve blood-sugar control and may reduce heart-disease risk. The drug is also now widely used for weight loss due to its effect on appetite and metabolism, where it is touted as a miracle drug for 'weightloss without the work'. However, it doesn't come without a cost. Users have reported a string of side effects, especially when first starting or increasing dosage, and some also report mental-health effects, including mood changes and increased anxiety. Daniel O'Shaughnessy, a functional nutritionist, breathwork practitioner, author and wellness coach shares an interesting view: '[Semaglutide] is being pushed as a miracle fix for weight loss, but what we're really seeing is hunger being framed as a flaw. A normal biological signal is now treated like a problem to override. The issue isn't the tool itself but the mindset behind it: that the body needs to be subdued, silenced, or managed into submission. It's weight loss on autopilot — for now. But what happens when the signal returns? Or what happens to the anxiety that was comforted by a digestive biscuit?'



More isn't always more when it comes to sleep

The image of tossing and turning in bed when you've got something on your mind is well known, and there is a clear association between sleep disorders and mood — nine out of ten of people with depression report problems with sleep. However, while it's usually lack of sleep that we worry about, researchers in a new study at the University of Texas (San Antonio) note that long-sleepers were also more likely to show impaired cognitive performance*, and the effects are increased for those with depression. So, while many of us might long for a lie-in, how many hours of shut-eye should we aim for? The Global Council on Brain Health recommends 7 to 8 hours per night for best brain health.

*ALZHEIMER'S & DEMENTIA, 2025



10%

The amount of time we overestimate we have spent doing arduous exercise — yes that's right, it's not just you who questions the timer on the treadmill! This 'time warp' effect wasn't experienced when people took part in competitive exercise however, so if you struggle to stay motivated, perhaps it's time to ditch the treadmill and join a local sports club!



Mum's the word

A new study** has looked into whether it's true that women talk more than men, and made an interesting discovery. When looking at different age groups they found no significant gender differences for words spoken per day for age groups 10 to 17 (adolescents), 18 to 24 (emerging adults) or 65 and over (older adulthood). However, they did find that women between the ages of 25 and 65 (early and middle adulthood) spoke on average around 3,000 more words per day than men in the same age group. Why? The researchers say because early and middle adulthood covers the time when we raise children, and that these 3,000 extra words are connected to speaking more to children. Another interesting discovery was that people are becoming less talkative in general, with the average number of words spoken per day decreasing by about 300 words per year. Between 2005 and 2018, the average number of words spoken per day fell from about 16,000 to about 13,000. Social media, text messaging, email and working from home are all likely causes of our diminishing word count.

**JOURNAL OF PERSONALITY AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY, 2025

"If you have good thoughts, they will shine out of your face like sunbeams and you will always look lovely."

ROALD DAHL

Taste the rainbow

What do tea, berries, dark chocolate, and apples all have in common? They are all high in flavonoids — which is important why, I hear you ask. Well, new research from Queen's University Belfast* has found that consuming foods rich in flavonoids could lower the risk of developing serious health conditions such as type-2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and neurological disease, giving us the potential to live longer. But the key isn't just to pick a food high in flavonoids and tuck in — the secret to longer life is in increasing the diversity of flavonoids within your diet and maintaining a wide range of high flavanoid foods. Flavonoids are found in plant-based foods — high flavonoid foods include blueberries, strawberries, oranges, grapes, and even red wine!



Running on empty

Want to avoid injury on those bike rides, summer morning runs or circuit classes? The key is to fuel them properly! A new study** from the University of South Australia found that female runners who consumed less calories and who specifically had a lower fat and fibre intake, had a higher risk of injury. The researchers found that a low-fibre diet also increased the likelihood of bone stress injuries. If you are consistently suffering injuries, the evidence indicates you could benefit by upping your calories by 450, your fat by 20 grams and your fibre by three grams (as injured runners were found to be lacking these amounts compared to those who remained injury free). Interestingly, the study found that the amount of protein, carbohydrates, alcohol, and calcium consumed did not influence injury risk.



Expert advice: Three perspective-shifting journal prompts for late summer, by Ali Roff Farrar

1 What inner harvest am I beginning to gather, and how can I give thanks for or celebrate what I've sown and grown this year?

Lammas or Lughnasadh day, celebrated around August 1, marks the first harvest. It's a time of gratitude, reflection, and preparation for the season ahead, and invites us to reflect on any goals or 'seeds of intention' you planted earlier in the year, and what is now beginning to ripen. This can be emotional growth, creative work, relationships, career wins, or healing. Let it be a moment to honour both your effort and what the fruits of your labour mirrors back to you. Remember, you don't have to boast huge watermelons to see growth — even tiny grapes contribute to the most delicious wine.

2 Where do I feel a spark of desire, passion, or possibility — and how can I give it space to grow?

Don't panic! There's ample time to act on what inspires you. How can you guide yourself towards intentional choices or creative expression while the days are long and energy is high?

3 What do I need to release or gently let fade as the season begins to soften toward late summer?

Everything has a cycle. Use this to explore habits, thoughts, or energies that feel like they've run their course this year.



Kimchi at home!

'Fermented foods like sauerkraut, kimchi, kefir, yoghurt, and miso are packed with beneficial bacteria that promote gut health. These foods introduce live bacteria that assist in maintaining a balanced microbiome while supporting digestion and even immune function,' says Dr Nichola Ludlam-Raine, a UK-Registered Dietitian. 'Fermented foods are gut-friendly, delicious, and a great way to preserve seasonal vegetables!' Here's how to make kimchi at home:

- Wash and chop carrots, cabbage, radish, or cucumbers and place them in your container.
- Make a brine with 20 to 50 grams of salt per litre of water (or use vinegar). Alternatively, the classic ratio for pickling is 1 part vinegar, 0.5 parts water, 0.25 parts sugar, and 0.125 parts salt.
- Add the brine to your veggies, ensuring they are fully covered to aid the preservation process (Brabantia's Tasty+ Fermentation Kit has an adjustable disk to help keep foods submerged, see below).
- Close the lid and leave at room temperature for 5-10 days (longer for stronger flavours). For maximum fermentation benefits, wait 21 days before enjoying!

DIY Kimchi kit

Brabantia's Tasty+ Fermentation Kit makes it easy to ferment foods like pickles and kimchi at home. The transparent design makes it easy to track your progress, the adjustable disk keeps the veggies submerged in brine, and the stackable, space-efficient container ensures a compact design that won't clutter your kitchen counter.

£14.95, brabantia.com

Combat the crash

Did you know your body's natural hormonal shifts can dip in the late afternoon, leading to the notorious 4pm sugar crash? Instead of a choccie bar, you could try reaching for a cup of tea made from this loose-leaf herbal tea blend, that can help to regulate blood-sugar levels with Ceylon Cinnamon bark, and comes packed with other benefits too. It combats fatigue, heaviness, and bloating triggered by hormonal fluctuations during phases of the menstrual cycle by promoting hormone equilibrium with Vitamin B6; it enhances mood and sleep with Ashwaganda; and relieves bloating with ginger and Dandelion root.



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Ben Azadi, aka
'The Health Detective',
is a best-selling author,
keynote speaker
and podcast host
helping people get
metabolically healthy

Our thoughts have a direct influence on our health and longevity. Psychiatrists estimate that the average person has 60,000 thoughts every day. They also determined that 90% of those thoughts are the same thoughts from the day before, and 85% of those thoughts are negative. Motivational speaker and author Zig Ziglar called this 'stinkin' thinkin'. I believe if your thinkin' is stinkin', your health is shrinking!

In the book *Biology of Belief*, cell biologist Dr Bruce Lipton made the case that thoughts are a frequency, and this frequency has the ability to penetrate your cell membrane and communicate

with your DNA nucleus. If the thought is negative, the protein produced by your DNA is inflammatory. This shortens your telomeres and damages your DNA, leading to a shortened lifespan. If the thought is positive, the communication signal sent to your DNA produces anti-inflammatory proteins, which lengthen your telomeres and protect your DNA, extending your lifespan.

If you have 60,000 thoughts per day, then you have 60,000 opportunities to place your entire body in a healing state, every single day. This is the greatest health biohack you will ever learn.

A poor self-image causes weight-loss resistance

Allow me to share an idea that every human being should learn. Dr Maxwell Maltz, author of *Psycho-Cybernetics*, said in the 1960s that this was the greatest physiological discovery of his generation: Self-image directly influences our success. Let's say you have the self-image that you are overweight, and you make the decision to go on a diet and instantly move into action. You start to lose weight because you're cutting calories and possibly exercising more, but something happens a few weeks in: you find the weight you've lost returns. If you go on a diet without altering your self-image, any weight loss will be temporary. Because self-image is a cybernetic instrument, it measures the deviation from the set goal and immediately corrects course.

The autopilot system in an aeroplane is a prime example of how a cybernetic instrument operates. Imagine a plane taking off from Chicago with the destination set for Paris, France. Once the autopilot is engaged, it continuously monitors and adjusts the plane's course to ensure it stays on track to reach Paris. The pilot could, in theory, relax with the passengers, knowing the autopilot will correct any deviations from the intended path. Similarly, when someone has a self-image of being overweight, their internal cybernetic instrument — or subconscious mind — works to keep them aligned with that self-image.

Even if they attempt to change their habits, they may find themselves gravitating back to unhealthy foods, like donuts and cookies, as their mind seeks to maintain the status quo of their overweight identity. Just as the autopilot course-corrects a plane, their self-image steers them back to behaviours that reinforce their existing beliefs about themselves. The weight that was lost is now found. To be successful, that



person needs to change their self-image (paradigm) and release the weight. As Joel Barker says in *Paradigms: The Business of Discovering the Future*, 'To be able to shape your future, you have to be willing and able to change your paradigm.'

How to change a paradigm

America's greatest prosperity teacher, Bob Proctor, explains that paradigms are a multitude of habits that guide every move you make. They affect the way you eat, the way you walk, even the way you talk. They govern your communication, your work habits, your successes, and your failures. There are only two ways to change the paradigm: an emotional impact or repetition.

Nine times out of ten an emotional impact will be a negative experience. For example, back in 2008 when I was going through a devastating breakup, feeling depressed and suicidal, it was enough of an emotional impact to change my paradigm. Eventually this resulted in me transforming my health. Another example of an emotional impact is a crisis like cancer or a serious car accident, when people are confronted with their mortality. Often this changes the way they think about themselves and their outlook on life. Again, it's usually a negative experience and not the ideal route.

Since significant emotional impacts are unpredictable, I strongly recommend using repetition, the second way to change a paradigm. Repetition is exposing yourself to a new idea over and over again. The point of this is not to memorise information, but rather to impress the idea or image into your subconscious or emotional mind enough times that it replaces the old idea or paradigm that resides there.

Affirmations are a great way to reinforce the new self-image. One way is to read the following affirmation each morning and before bed, when the subconscious mind is most impressionable: 'I am so happy and grateful now that I am at my perfect weight. I am looking good, and I am feeling great. The perfect health I seek is now seeking me. I remove any blockages between us.'

The power of the mind

My client Claire is a powerful example of how mindset can shape our reality. In 2020, she was hospitalised with severe Covid, facing life-threatening complications, as her lungs failed and her oxygen levels plummeted. She endured several near-death experiences but eventually mustered the strength to pull

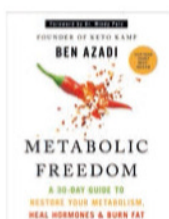


through. After spending over a month in the hospital, Claire was released with a new lease on life. However, she was still over 40 pounds overweight and dealing with prediabetes, high blood pressure, and lingering long-Covid symptoms that triggered multiple autoimmune conditions.

Claire often referred to herself as a 'Covid survivor'. I encouraged her to shift her perspective by writing down an affirmation, declaring herself a 'Covid thriver' instead of merely a survivor.

With this new self-image, she began making significant progress. Though she occasionally struggled with self-sabotage — her internal cybernetic instrument trying to course-correct to her old self-image — she used her affirmation as an anchor to break the cycle.

Over time, Claire reversed her prediabetes and high blood pressure. After years of relying on an oxygen tank nightly and while travelling, she recently received the green light to stop using it, as her lungs had recovered to optimal function. Her new self-image is one of someone who is thriving, not just surviving, and she continues to work on her health, inspiring her friends and family along the way. This transformation shows how powerful a positive self-image can be when you fully embrace it.



Metabolic Freedom: A 30-Day Guide to Restore Your Metabolism, Heal Hormones & Burn Fat, by Ben Azadi (Hay House, £24.99) is out now.



HOW LAUGHTER HELPS YOUR WELLBEING

Dr Norman Cousins was renowned for his pioneering work on the healing power of laughter. Diagnosed with a severe and painful condition called ankylosing spondylitis in the 1960s, Cousins was given a grim prognosis with little chance of recovery. However, he developed a unique approach to his treatment, emphasising the therapeutic benefits of laughter and a positive attitude.

Cousins found that watching comedic films like the Marx Brothers' movies and *Candid Camera* episodes significantly reduced his pain and improved his overall health. His regimen of 'laugh therapy' included regular doses of humour, which he documented in his influential book *Anatomy of an Illness*.

Cousins' experiences and subsequent research demonstrated that laughter could trigger the release of endorphins, the body's natural

painkillers, and reduce stress hormones. This, in turn, enhanced immune function and promoted relaxation. His work has inspired further studies on the impact of humour and laughter on health, highlighting its potential to alleviate pain, improve cardiovascular health, and enhance emotional wellbeing. Overall, Cousins' contributions have significantly shaped our understanding of the mind-body connection and the role of positive emotions in healing, making laughter an essential component of holistic health practices.

Incorporating laughter into daily routines may offer surprising benefits for metabolic health. Research has shown that participating in a structured laughter programme can lead to measurable improvements in body composition, including reductions in body weight, BMI, and

abdominal circumference. These effects are likely due to laughter's ability to reduce stress, a known contributor to metabolic dysfunction. Laughter has also been found to mimic the physiological benefits of moderate exercise by improving heart rate and muscle relaxation, further enhancing its potential to support metabolic health.

Regular bouts of laughter can decrease levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which is often elevated in individuals with metabolic syndrome. By reducing cortisol and other stress-related biomarkers, laughter not only promotes a positive mental state but also contributes to a healthier metabolic profile. These findings suggest that incorporating more humour and laughter into your life could be a simple yet effective strategy to support metabolic health and overall wellbeing.



DO YOU NEED A *sleep divorce?*

The recent heatwaves have made sleep harder than ever, but if you're lying next to a snorer it can feel like you're fighting a losing battle. Could separate beds be the key to a good night's sleep, asks Camilla Foster



In today's wellness-focused world, where sleep is recognised as a crucial pillar of good health, 'sleep divorces' — by which partners choose to sleep in separate beds or even bedrooms — are becoming increasingly popular. This trend has been embraced by several celebrities, including comedian Katherine Ryan. On a recent episode of her podcast, *What's My Age Again?* Ryan chatted with her guest, columnist and author Bryony Gordon, about sleeping arrangements, and Gordon shared: 'I like my sleep. I think sharing a bed with your husband is overrated.'

When asked by Gordon if she shared a bed with her husband herself, Ryan said: 'I would. But he snores. He does sweat in his sleep sometimes. I prefer to sleep alone, but I would be willing to do it. But we have very small children who still wake through the night and I sleep in their room like the dog on *Peter Pan*.'

So how many couples are really opting for a sleep divorce, and are separate beds really the key to a good night's sleep?

'Good-quality sleep is crucial for both physical and mental wellbeing, increasing energy levels, improving mood, and promoting better overall health,' says Dr Hana Patel, NHS GP and resident sleep expert at Time4Sleep.

'A sleep divorce can help couples to address potential sleep disruptions such as snoring or restlessness.

'If you are finding that sleeping with your partner is causing you to experience chronic lack of sleep, and you find that your health and wellbeing are suffering as a result, it may be time to consider it.'

Snoring is the number one disruption for getting a good night's sleep, according to research by the National Bed Federation.

A survey conducted by The Sleep Council in 2009 found that less than one couple in 10 (7%) had separate beds, whereas the most recent figures suggest anything from one in six to one in four long-term couples sleep separately, suggesting the rate has more than doubled in the past 15 years.

'Research also found that 38% of men and 36% of women quoted snoring as the number one reason for a sleep divorce,' says Dr Ryan Cheong, an ear, nose and throat consultant and sleep surgeon at Cleveland Clinic London.

However, other factors can also disrupt co-sleeping. 'If your bed partner is fidgeting or moving around, or if you have different sleeping

patterns, these factors can potentially disrupt the quality of sleep,' notes Cheong.

'Also, if your partner has very strong, different preferences for their sleeping environment, like temperature, light exposure, mattress comfort or material, then that can be an issue as well.'

Is there any research that suggests the opposite — that we actually sleep better next to someone else?

'Research suggests that there's a 10% increase in rapid-eye-movement sleep [which is beneficial for brain function and emotional health] when we're co-sleeping,' explains Cheong. 'The discussions about why this might be the case stems from the social aspect of human evolution, that we tend to be quite social creatures in nature, and having a partner, and in this case a bed partner, gives us the sense of security.'

So what can we do to improve our shared sleep environment if we're keen to remain together

in the same bed? 'Ensure that you are having good discussions about your sleeping schedules and are optimising your sleeping environment,' advises Cheong. 'Make sure that the room is as dark as possible, for example.

'Lower temperatures can also help with having a good night's sleep. So, be mindful of the temperatures, the material of the mattress, the material of the blanket, and the preferences of your bed partner.'

If you've always slept together, of course, the idea might be hard to suggest: what would be a good way to

bring up the idea of a sleep divorce to a partner?

'As long as the discussion and the request is coming from a place of respect, love and understanding, then it's more likely to be received well by your bed partner when the subject is brought up,' says Cheong.

Patel agrees, adding: 'If you think that a sleep divorce may be beneficial, discuss the idea with your partner and try testing it out for a short period of time to see if it works for you.

'Whilst some may assume that a sleep divorce hinders bedroom intimacy between couples, in fact, it can significantly enhance intimacy and the overall quality of a couple's sex life, particularly for those in long-term relationships. This is because increased energy levels and improved mood from better sleep are important factors in encouraging a healthy libido.'

Sounds like that could keep everyone happy!

"Better energy levels and mood are important for a healthy libido"

Making veggies the star of the show

BY LAUREN TAYLOR

When the weather's hot you don't always want a traditional meal, so here we're sharing Jesse Jenkins' (from social-media sensation ADIP — Another Day in Paradise) favourite vegetable-based recipes, inspired by flavours from Mexico, Korea and Guatemala



Smashed cucumber caesar

'When the process of breaking something creates unformed beauty, it is incredibly satisfying. If it also has a practical function, I'm sold,' says Jenkins. 'The jagged texture of the cucumber here creates more surface area to grab onto sauce and toppings. I learned the technique while making oi muchim, a Korean spicy cucumber salad, and have used it ever since. This version goes full Caesar and it's totally delicious.'

SERVES: 4

Ingredients

- 3 cucumbers, washed
- 3tbsp panko breadcrumbs
- 1tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, bashed (skin on)
- 4 thyme sprigs
- Grated zest of 1 lemon

- Handful of chives, thinly sliced
- Handful of parsley, finely chopped
- Salt and pepper

For the dressing:

- 4-6 tinned anchovy fillets in oil, crushed to a paste
- 25g Parmesan cheese, grated with microplane grater
- 1 egg yolk
- 15g Dijon mustard
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 1tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1tsp Tabasco
- 100ml extra virgin olive oil

Method

1 Smash the whole cucumbers using the flat side of a large knife until they start to break down, then roughly chop them into uneven, large bite-sized pieces. Put them in a colander over a bowl with a good pinch

of salt, mix well and set aside for 15-20 minutes.

2 Meanwhile, toast the breadcrumbs in the olive oil in a frying pan with the garlic cloves and thyme till golden brown. Remove from the heat and season with salt and the lemon zest while hot, then set aside.

3 You can make the dressing in the same way as you would a mayonnaise, putting all the ingredients other than the oil into a bowl and mixing well, then slowly streaming in all the oil, whisking constantly throughout. Otherwise, blend all the ingredients at once in a blender (I often blend it). Check for seasoning.

4 Drain the cucumbers, then add them to the dressing with half the herbs. Mix well, then finish with the toasted breadcrumbs and the rest of the herbs.



Miso-glazed courgette

'Nasu dengaku – miso-glazed aubergine – is one of my favourite dishes, and I've adapted the Japanese recipe for courgettes,' says Jenkins. 'Achieving the perfect aubergine dish usually involves deep-frying, resulting in a confit-like texture inside, which is wonderful but too indulgent for me, at least for regular consumption.'

'This technique for cooking courgettes yields a similarly tender texture without the need for deep-frying. The miso glaze, traditionally made with mirin, sake and sugar, can be simplified using honey and miso for a delicious outcome. It's a great sharing dish, but we often have it in individual portions with steamed rice and carrot and ginger-dressed salad.'

SERVES: 2 AS A MAIN, 4 AS A SIDE

Ingredients

- 2 courgettes
- Neutral oil (I use rapeseed), for pan-frying
- 1tbsp white miso paste (or to taste)
- 1tbsp honey (or to taste)
- White sesame seeds
- Squeeze of lemon juice
- Salt
- Spring onions, trimmed and chopped, to serve

Method

1 Halve the courgettes lengthways and score each half in a crisscross pattern — you want the flavour to be able to get in there, so cut about halfway through. Season them with salt, rubbing it into the cuts thoroughly, then place them cut side down on a paper towel for 30 minutes — this will extract excess water, helping them tenderise without falling apart when cooked.

2 Dry the courgettes thoroughly and heat a few tablespoons of oil in a frying pan over a high heat. Add the courgettes to the pan cut-side down and fry for 5-10 minutes, until golden, then flip and baste them with the oil for a few more minutes, so they cook through evenly. Transfer to a wire rack or paper towel to drain, then place the courgettes cut-side up on a baking tray.

3 Preheat the oven to 220°C/200°C Fan/Gas 7.

4 Whisk the miso paste, honey and a splash of water in a bowl until smooth and spreadable. Taste for seasoning, adjusting to your preference based on the saltiness of the miso, then spread a thin layer of the miso glaze over the cut side of the courgettes and sprinkle some sesame seeds on top. Bake for 7-10 minutes, ensuring the sesame seeds don't burn, until the glaze has caramelised.

5 Mix a little lemon juice into the remaining miso glaze. Spread it on a plate, place the courgettes on top, and garnish with chopped spring onions. Enjoy!



Kimchi pasta puttanesca

'I often make this with tinned tuna and anchovies, but it's great without them. Kimchi is another funky, briny flavour that happily sits alongside the capers and olives,' says Jenkins. 'Almost all the intense flavour comes from vegetables (technically fruits, if you want to be annoying) that have been cooked or prepared in a way that homes in on their best qualities and makes them shine.'

SERVES: 4

Ingredients

- 4tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 500g cherry tomatoes
- 1 white onion, thinly sliced
- 4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 6 tinned anchovy fillets in oil

- 1tsp dried red chilli flakes
- 2tbsp pitted olives (Italian black olives or whatever you prefer)
- 2tbsp capers, drained
- 300g roughly-cut kimchi, plus 1tbsp brine
- 1tbsp white wine vinegar
- Pinch of caster sugar
- 100g tinned tuna in spring water, drained
- 300-400g spaghetti

To serve (optional)

- Handful of parsley, roughly chopped
- Lemon juice, to taste

Method

1 Heat the oil in a large saucepan over a medium-high heat, then add the

tomatoes and onion and cook for 7-10 minutes, or until you can pop the tomatoes with the back of your spoon. Add the garlic and anchovy and cook for a couple of minutes until fragrant, using the back of your spoon or a fork to break down the anchovy into the sauce. 2 Add the chilli flakes, olives, capers, kimchi and brine, vinegar, sugar and tuna and cook for 2 minutes, then turn off the heat. You just want the last additions to be warmed through but not lose their bright, briny flavour.

3 Cook the spaghetti in a large pot of seasoned boiling water till al dente, then mix it through the sauce with a little of the pasta cooking water. You can add some parsley and fresh lemon juice before serving.



From Cooking With Vegetables by Jesse Jenkins (Bluebird, £28) photography by Jesse Jenkins, available now.

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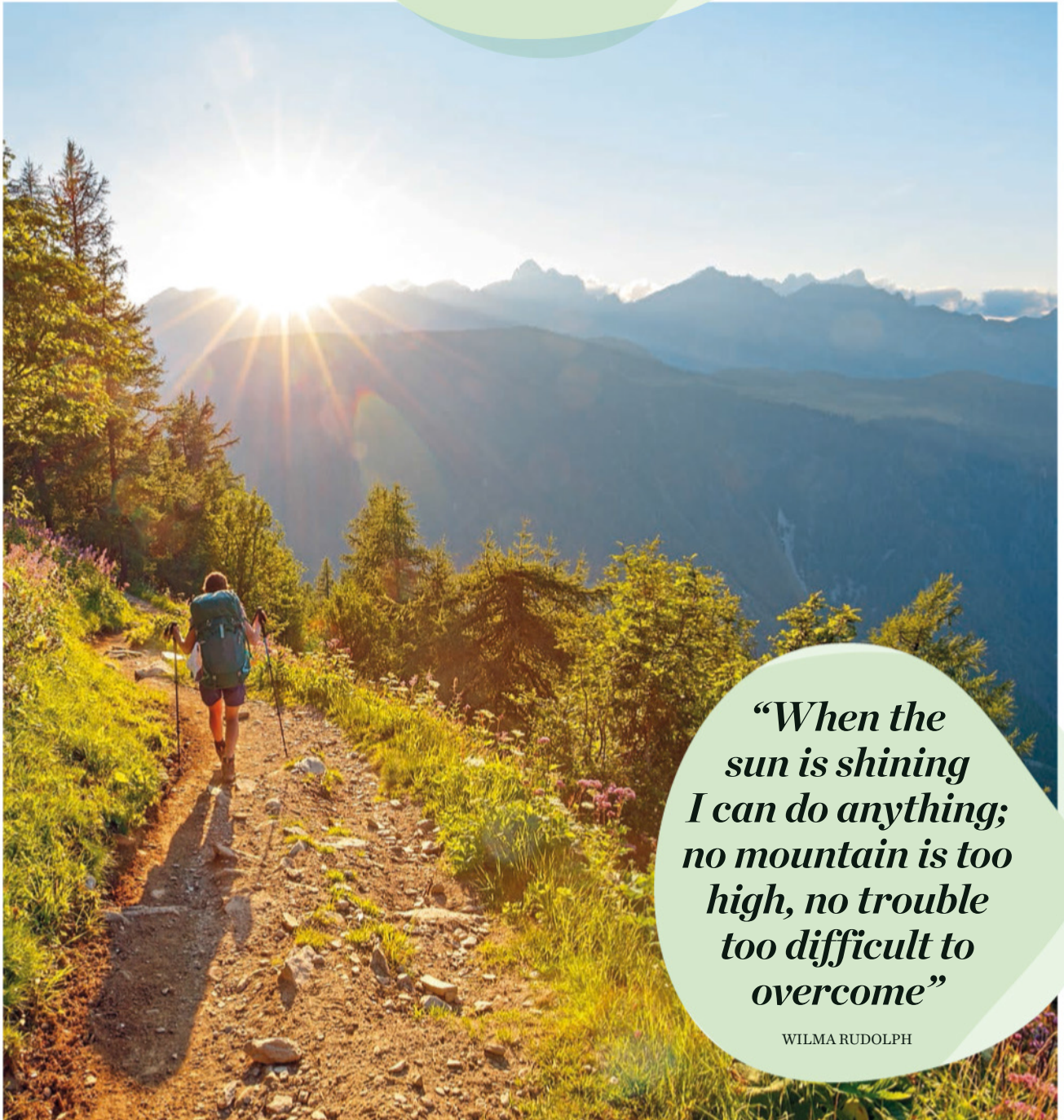


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***“When the
sun is shining
I can do anything;
no mountain is too
high, no trouble
too difficult to
overcome”***

WILMA RUDOLPH

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK



WHY DO WE WANT TO GO OFF THE
beaten track?

From dilapidated cottages to the site of a notorious nuclear disaster, what is behind the longing to seek out abandoned places, asks Katie Scott

On holiday a few years ago, I drove past an old, abandoned farm house. There was a gangly sapling growing, pushing through a chipped and faded blue window pane to reach the brighter blue of the sky. I stopped. I couldn't help it. I've always been intrigued by these places.

Part of it is imagining what it would be like to bring life to them again — to restore those broken panes, protect the interior again from the elements by fixing the failing roof and bring laughter to where there is just a broken chair and piles of leaves.

Part of it, though, is also a fascination with the lives that have been lived there. In the garden, I found broken pieces of tiles. They were thick with the mortar that had once held them in place, probably somewhere where they were admired. The colours — greens and reds — had faded but were still beautiful. Someone had taken time to choose them and then display them. Now, like the house, they were broken and discarded. Where were those people now? How long ago did they leave and why? And how long would it be before the plant growing through that window became a tree and slowly sent





branches through the roof, and spread to fill the empty space inside?

Communities around the world have created websites sharing their experiences of exploring these spaces. When I lived in Hong Kong, one group posted almost weekly videos of sites that had been often hastily left. There were old colonial buildings whose occupants had moved to shiny glass skyscrapers in the city's modern districts. Paperwork had been left in now disorganised piles; posters on the wall lay out the stringent rules of the day and there were even tea cups still stained with the last brew they held for a sleepy worker. Others were homes that had been abandoned because something bad had happened within their walls. The Hong Kongese even publish lists of these places, damning them as 'haunted houses' that no one should now live in. They just slowly rot.

Now living back in the UK, I have found similar websites and realised that there are thousands of people in this country sharing details of abandoned properties they have explored. They trade pictures or videos but always with the emphasis that it can be dangerous — and it's often legally precarious too.

The Urban Explorer curates one such site with his images of everything from a disused naval fuel bunker to a slowly disintegrating 18th-century manor. In an email to me, he explains his role as one of documentarian. 'It's really important to document all kinds of history and a place shouldn't be forgotten just because it's empty and no longer used,' he writes. 'I get so many emails and comments from people who lived, worked or spent prolonged periods of time in the places I document



and they're always thankful. No one thinks to take photos of a hospital ward when it's working, so when that place is no longer accessible or even completely gone, it's the photos that remain.'

He shares that he visited a former mental hospital which still housed medical samples. He spent hours photographing everything he could find. But, he recounts: 'The next time I visited, the entire building was gone, contents and all, bulldozed in to the ground and piled into surrounding skips.'

Lee Penz, the admin of Urbexplorer.net, argues that these places say a lot about how we live as a society. He explains: 'I often see buildings abandoned while still in good shape — it's sad, because they could be repurposed, especially with housing costs rising everywhere. These places show how easily buildings can be abandoned, reminding us to look after our history, consider



“Formal access would strip away the sense of discovery that makes the experience so rewarding”



new uses, and curb wasteful habits.’ In her book, *Islands of Abandonment*, Cal Flynn documents places that have been abandoned, but often because they mark brutal points in human history. She describes standing in front of a stained-glass scene in a café near the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. This frieze shows the seasons as four beautiful women but sections have been broken — ‘spilling their gemstones across the floor’ — since the place was hastily left. She moves back outside and her dosimeter sounds a warning. This is a dangerous place for people but nature has moved back in despite the contamination. Lynx, boar, deer, elk and beavers have all returned and, like many other blighted places like it, there is life flourishing where people cannot be anymore.

These are places that had suffered the worst of human impulses but they now offer hope at a time when we continue to destroy so much around us.

But these spaces are not museums. Flynn visits places that are dangerous — a patch of land in a forest in France where canisters of poisonous gases were buried after the end of the Second World War or the shoreline of the Arthur Kill, a tidal strait carrying the polluted waters of the Passaic River to the sea and where the mud holds industrial toxic waste.

For both Penz and The Urban Explorer, there is also the argument that these places can only be shared by the few, otherwise they will often be vandalised.

Penz says: ‘While I don’t believe someone should be punished for simply exploring or photographing, these places get ruined once they become widely known. Turning some of them into museums makes sense in rare cases, but for most, formal access would strip away the sense of discovery that makes the experience so rewarding.’

'Turning 50 is not the closing of a chapter, it's the opening of a new one'

Actress Emilia Fox explains why she's 'full of energy and possibility' and plans for the second half of her life

Emilia Fox saw turning 50 as a significant milestone in her life — but not a scary one.

The actress, who's starred in the crime drama *Silent Witness* for 21 years, is as busy with work as ever. She is happily 'sandwiched' between a teenage daughter and ageing parents, yet is full of energy and says she's looking forward to the next half of her life.

'Do you know what's lovely about turning 50?' she asks. 'It's seen in a very different way to what it was, and people are really recognising that it's a time when we still want to be busy — we have the choice.'

'I think people do see 50 as a significant milestone in life — my goodness, we're lucky if we get to 50 and feel healthy and fit and well. I think 50 is a great time to reflect on what's happened in the first half of your life and what you'd like the second half to look like — I remember really thinking about that on my 50th birthday.'

'Turning 50 is not like the closing of a chapter, it's the opening of a new one, which is full of energy and possibility, and I think that's a really positive message.'

'Work-wise, it seems to be really busy, and I feel very lucky to be working at this time, because people are celebrating and writing for women of all ages now, and life experience seems to be more interesting to write about and see on screen or on stage.'

'And that seems to be recognised in a different way to, say, my mum's generation — she's an actress [Joanna



David], and it's been much harder for her getting older in the business.'

Fox is currently filming the 29th series of *Silent Witness* 'which I can't quite believe', she admits, co-presents the BBC crime documentary series *In the Footsteps of Killers*, has just recorded an Audible *Crime Scenes* series and appeared in the film *Legend Has It*. She will also start filming a new series of the crime TV show *Signora Volpe* in Rome this autumn.

'My life is full, and I really love it,' she declares. 'I feel busy, and when I'm busy, I feel like I've got more energy. I don't feel like slowing down, I feel very happy, and I have a clarity about being 50 and knowing what I want to do. Actually, being 50 has created more opportunities.'

She says she's been very lucky to have had a steady role in *Silent Witness* for 21 years, because acting is such a 'precarious profession', and she admits: '*Silent Witness* was my dream

job. I was brought up on the crime genre, reading Agatha Christie and Sherlock Holmes and watching *Inspector Morse*. I absolutely loved it from childhood, and then being asked to be in *Silent Witness* was like the dream job come true.'

She loves playing Nikki, of course, and says: 'She's seen me through life's ups and downs, she's been like a friend. She's always been there, and the show has always been a joy to come back to.'

There are similarities between herself and Nikki, she says, not least because they both love their work, are

passionate, and will go the extra mile to do their best. But there are clear differences too. Fox lives with her 14-year-old daughter Rose and her partner Jonathan Stadlen. 'When I go home, I'm a mum to Rose, and Nikki doesn't have children, so I can separate my life from my work quite easily, as much as I enjoy being intertwined with Nikki too.'

She's 'very close' to her daughter, she says, explaining fondly: 'We have great chats, whether that's about school life or friends or relationships, and it's really fun seeing that bit of life with her and through her eyes.'

'Certainly, when you're in the sandwich years, which I am now, with a teenage daughter and my parents getting older, you're being pulled in one direction, where you're looking to bring up a young woman, but you're also looking at the future and what that holds and whether you're prepared for it.'

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