

How to get pay-rise confident!

OCTOBER, 2025

124

PAGE BUMPER
ISSUE

Psychologies

You deserve to be happy

NEW LOOK

**ARE WE
REALLY
FRIENDS?**

OR ARE YOU JUST
USING ME?

8 rules for
talking to
your partner
about money

19-PAGE DOSSIER

Find out
what's *really*
keeping
you up at
night

Your Great Sleep Reset

Doctor Martha

On how
to break
up with
your
phone

PAGE 24

Compact UK edition



PLUS

The truth
about sex
addiction

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Welcome!



There's nothing like talking to a psychologist about using your phone too much to realise just how much you're using your phone. So after months of talking about it, I've bitten the bullet and I'm going dumb. Yes, I've hooked myself up with an old-school flip phone, and relegated the smartphone to the desk drawer for emergencies (like when I'm heading out to town for the day and really do need the internet and maps...) So far it's not driven me mad, but we'll see how it goes. We're unashamedly anti-tech this month, and all about letting go of the screens and living in the real world. So enjoy the feel of this lovely paper between your fingers and get stuck in! Happy reading!



Sally xx

Sally Saunders,
Psychologies Editor

Psychologies

October 2025

8 What's New

Enlightening facts, fascinating news stories, the latest in wellbeing, and much more

20 Your letters

Readers share their favourite snaps and what they've enjoyed in our recent issues

22 Life as I know it

Harriet Minter discovers what it's like to be queen of the castle

24 Dr Martha Deiros Collado

The psychologist shares how to free ourselves from our phones

30 Coaching in action

Kim Morgan helps her client come to terms with a tough decision

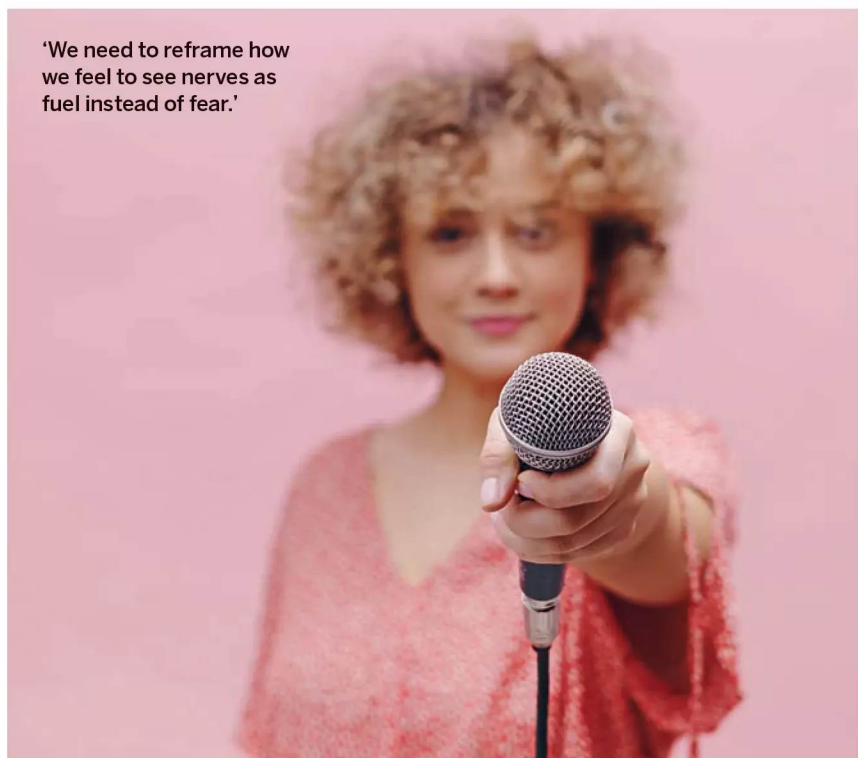
34 Feel the fear

Scaring is caring, decides Caroline Butterwick

40 You don't have to smile

We need to express ourselves truthfully, writes Kate Beckwith

'We need to reframe how we feel to see nerves as fuel instead of fear.'



Cover image: Jesse Jenkins

Read our experts, get the best advice



Dr Martha

On smartphones

'I see phones as a third person in a room. We need to be really aware, do we really want a third person there?' **p24**



Zoe Carroll

On feeling fearful

'What we call nerves is activation, it's your body gearing up perform your absolute best.' **p34**



Georgina Sturmer

On friendships

'Our friendships are not always going to be in perfect balance, but overall we want an equilibrium.' **p44**



Sara Jane Maxwell

On talking about money

'Start with questions around things like "How did your parents treat money when you were younger?"' **p90**



Dr Jo Phillips

On letting go

'If someone is stuck by always revisiting the past, they need to consider what purpose is this serving.' **p98**

44 Are we really friends, or are you just using me?

Stephanie Fitzgerald tackles a troubling relationship pattern

50 Do you need a power pause?

Barefoot Blogger Jayne Morris on why it's strong to take a break

54 Hidden signs of autism

With so many women undiagnosed, discover the signs to look out for

58 Get pay-rise confident!

All the help you need to ask for that pay rise — and get it!

64 You, write now

Jackee Holder encourages us to take a walk with our pen...

88 Coming up for air

Caro Giles discovers familiarity among the newness

90 8 rules for talking to your partner about money

No more worries about those tricky conversations, it's time to get real

94 The hidden cost of caring

The realities of homeschooling laid bare in this searing memoir piece

98 Is technology keeping us stuck in the past?

Forget fast forwarding to the future, is tech now making it too hard to break away from our own history?

102 The truth about sex addiction

Tackling the taboos behind the gossip and salacious rumour

108 Forget introvert and extrovert, could you be an 'otrovert'?

Are you happy to walk to the beat of your own drum?

114 Into the uni mindset

Help your teen make the most of life

116 Dr Alex George

How getting to grips with his diet has helped heal his mind

118 The joys of seasonal eating

Raymond Blanc shares his favourite veggie recipes

122 Everything changed when...

Lisa Snowdon on burnout

Discover what's keeping you up at night, and discover how to take action to sleep easy!



Your Great Sleep Reset

19 pages of insight, inspiration, and expert advice

70 The reset button

How sleep recalibrates the whole you

72 The emotional edge...

Why sleep shapes your mood and mindset

76 The deep brain cleanse

A dive into what really happens while you're asleep

80 Reclaiming rhythm

Why your body clock matters more than you think

82 Reset in real life

Small shifts that help everything work better

84 What stops you getting the sleep you need?

Find your focus

TEST

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the deals on page

62

Psychologies

You deserve to be happy

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Our mission

We believe you deserve to be happy. Our mission is to give you the inspiration and advice to improve your emotional wellbeing and lower your stress and anxiety. We do this by providing simple, achievable steps to the small changes that add up to a real difference.



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* What's new

And what's coming next

Don't be making any plans for that spare room just yet...

MORE
UNI NEWS
ON P.114



Flying the nest? Not so fast...

Almost a third of uni students are now opting to live at home rather than move away to study

It's an age-old ritual in late September: all the students packing up to be shipped off back to university. But it turns out that increasingly, home is where the heart is for undergraduates, with almost a third of 18-year-old freshers now living there during their degree.

Figures from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) found that 30 per cent of those starting university in 2024-25 chose not to move into student accommodation.

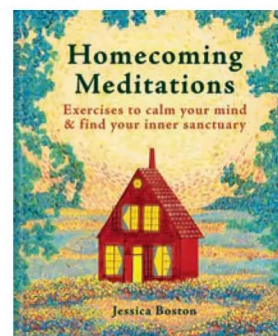
The trend is most common in London, where rents are high, and Scotland, which offers locals free tuition, with Glasgow Caledonian

University having the highest rate in the country at 45 per cent.

That compares with just 14 per cent of UK teens planning to live at home during their studies in 2007, a figure which rose to 21 per cent by 2015.

And back in 1984-85, only eight per cent of first-degree entrants chose this option.

UCAS chief executive Jo Saxton said that while an institution close to home might offer the best course, or be a necessary choice for carers, 'more needs to be done to ensure the cost of living doesn't become a limit on young people's ambition'.



Homecoming Meditations

An absolute joy from beginning to end, this beautiful book is a wonderful companion for introspection. The clever concept guides you to get to know yourself better through visualising yourself as a home. The gate represents your relationships with boundaries; the bedroom, compassion; the garden, your growth. The words and visualisations weave between practical somatic exercises, progressive relaxation techniques, future self-visualisations and subconscious transformation tools, to take you on a journey to better understand yourself.

Homecoming Meditations: Exercises to calm your mind & find your inner sanctuary by Jessica Boston (Godsfield, £18.99).

TRENDING RIGHT NOW

1 Matcha lattes

Rising Western appetite for the finely ground green tea powder, with its slower caffeine release, has sent prices soaring, as Japanese producers struggle to meet demand.



Going green? Our new favourite drinks order

2 Cecil Beaton's Fashionable World

This first exhibition dedicated solely to The King of Vogue's fashion and portrait photography opens at London's National Portrait Gallery on 9 October, featuring images of iconic stars like Marilyn Monroe.

3 Car-boot sales

Footfall at these second-hand markets was up by a quarter between 2021 and 2024, research by MWB Solutions has found. Cost of living pressures, a desire to be sustainable and the simple thrill of a bargain are thought to be driving it.

Don't stop!

***** Most mental health advice tends to add to your 'to do' list and rarely tells you to stop doing something harmful, research has found.

Psychologists reviewed eight studies containing experimental data, real-world Reddit advice and ChatGPT responses, as well as analysing hundreds of participants who gave tips to friends, strangers and themselves on how to ease harmful scenarios. They found a bias toward 'additions' in every context, with AI mirroring this.

'While well-meaning, it can unintentionally make mental health feel like an endless list of chores,' said senior author Dr Tom Barry of the University of Bath.

Advice often focuses on taking positive action, but is it all too much?

4 Blue Moon

This Broadway biopic sees Ethan Hawke putting in a star turn as troubled lyricist Lorenz Hart, struggling to save face amid the opening of Oklahoma! In cinemas 24 October.

5 Three-hour night

Couples are reclaiming their evenings — and their relationships — with this daily hack that sees them devote one hour to life admin and chores, one to phone-free connection, and one to solo relaxation, judgement free.

Could you do a whole hour without your phones?



THE KEY
A HAPPY
LIFE?

*What's new

And what's coming next

We've had The Pill since the Sixties, is it about time men had one too?

WILL THEY, WON'T THEY?

Would you give it a go?

Male pill 'shown to be safe' in early trials

First of a range of contraceptives for men through to longer-term testing

A potentially groundbreaking contraceptive pill for men has been shown to be safe in early-stage clinical trials.

The hormone-free drug, which is taken daily and works by temporarily decreasing sperm count, was tried out on 16 healthy male volunteers and found not to have any major side effects.

The testers were all aged 32-59 and had previously had vasectomies,

which meant there was no risk of permanent damage to their fertility.

The new method uses a chemical known as YCT-529 to target a specific receptor cell in the testes, blocking a vitamin A metabolite from binding to it and essentially preventing sperm from being created in the first place.

Previous animal studies with the compound found it was fully reversible, with mice able to father

offspring as normal after stopping the medication.

Drug developer YourChoice Therapeutics is now running further trials to assess the pill's safety over a longer period of time.

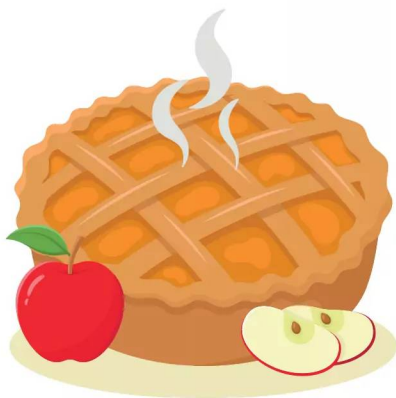
Other male contraceptives are also in development, including a hormone-based gel called NES/T that is absorbed into the skin and a hydrogel implant called Adam, that temporarily blocks the sperm ducts.



Get your shoes on!

Japanese walking — a simple exercise technique where you alternate between three minutes of brisk and three of slow-paced steps for 30 minutes — is taking TikTok by storm.

And a study by Vanderbilt University in Tennessee suggests this 'fad' could genuinely transform your health. Researchers found that fast walking for just 15 minutes daily can not only significantly improve heart health but boost cognitive abilities and reduce the risk of early death by 20 per cent.



Hot pud? Once in a blue moon

Two-thirds of British households eat a homemade hot pudding only once a month or less, according to English Heritage, despite 36% saying steamed puddings, fruit crumbles and pastry-baked pies or tarts as their favourites.

How to make happy habits

'Making intentional "happy habits" can be a great way to prioritise our wellbeing. This can be anything from making regular space for a favourite activity, to changing how we perceive the world around us,' says research psychologist Dr Emma Palmer-Cooper.

'At their core, habits are routine or automatic behaviours that have been learned. We can train ourselves to pick up happy habits to build resilience for when we need it, or to replace habits that are unhelpful.'

Here she shares four tips on how to create your own happy habits — grab a journal and pen, and let's begin...

1 BE CLEAR: 'First you need to understand what you want to achieve, so start with a clear goal and habit in mind,' says Dr Palmer-Cooper.

JOURNAL: Start by writing down your goal.

2 BE SPECIFIC: 'Have a specific behaviour or goal in mind that you can measure. This will make it easier to see your progress and provide continuous motivation.'

JOURNAL: What will you do to work towards your goal, and how will you measure it?

3 BE PRACTICAL: 'Set a specific time or space to build your habit, and make sure it is manageable. If you are committing to more "me" time, or doing more of something you love, start small and build up over time.'

JOURNAL: Write down when and how you will build your habit.

4 REWARD YOURSELF: 'Congratulate yourself every time you practise your habit.'

Whether it's a gold star, a pat on the back, or write it down, pause to notice the positives that come intentional positive habits.'

JOURNAL: Write down when you do manage to practise your habit, even when it's not perfect, and record too when and what makes it difficult.

If you're not sure where to start, Dr Palmer-Cooper has created the beautiful Happy Habits Box - a positive psychology toolbox using science-backed techniques to outline small but intentional habits that can improve positive outlook, discover new habits, build resilience and improve wellbeing.

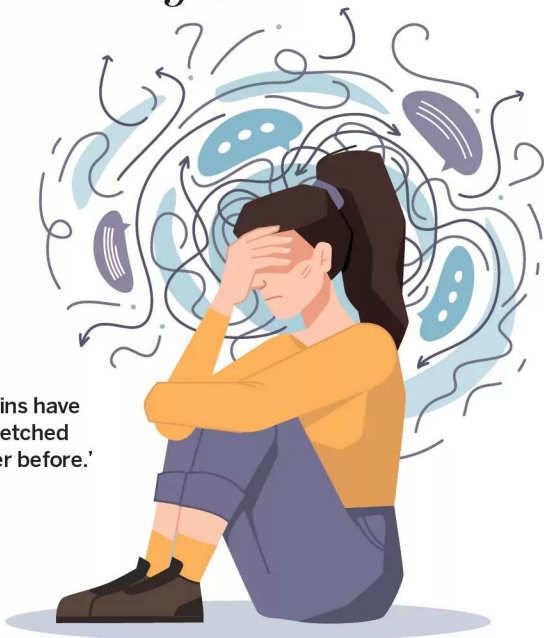
The Happy Habits Box by Dr Emma Palmer-Cooper, £15, emmapalmercooper.co.uk



*What's new

And what's coming next

'Our brains have been stretched like never before.'



SUNDAY-NIGHT BLUES

* Three in four weekday workers say they struggle with the 'Sunday Scaries', with weekend bliss over by 5.17pm and half admitting to anxiety, a poll by David Lloyd Clubs found.

68,000

The estimated number of tiny plastic particles humans can inhale daily. Measuring between 1 and 10 micrometers (one-seventh the thickness of a human hair) they are a greater threat to health because they can move through the body more easily.

Stress of the pandemic 'aged the brain'

Disruption, isolation and loneliness key, with men and older adults faring worst

A new study* has found that for all of us, living through the pandemic, even if we didn't contract Covid, could have sped up ageing in the brain. The large UK study found that stress, isolation, and upheaval of lockdowns may have had an impact, especially for older adults, men, and disadvantaged individuals, proving that the extent to which major life disruptions can affect our mental health.

'As someone who helped coordinate clinical trials on Covid-19 vaccines during the pandemic, I've seen the broader systemic effects this virus — and the circumstances around it — can have,' says Dr Harry Jarrett, head of science and research at Heights.

'Brain ageing isn't just about memory loss in older age — it impacts mood, energy levels, focus, sleep, and our ability to handle stress. Brain ageing affects ambition, mood, memory and how we connect with others. While we can't reverse the past, the good news is that the brain is adaptable — and there are

actionable steps we can take to support it. Prioritising high-quality sleep, managing stress, regular physical activity, and targeted nutrition are critical pillars for slowing brain ageing and restoring cognitive resilience. At a time when our brains have been stretched like never before, supportive supplementation can make a big difference — especially one grounded in science and transparency.'

He suggests 'omega-3 DHA, which forms structural components of the brain and supports cognitive function; riboflavin, vitamins B6 and B12 and folate, which reduce homocysteine levels linked to cognitive decline; and vitamin D for immune and mental health support — to support the brain's daily functions and health.' He also advises magnesium glycinate, 'which can cross the blood-brain, supporting cognitive performance and sleep regulation — helping to reduce stress and anxiety and regulate nervous system function, all of which are closely tied to brain health and ageing.'

Heights Vitals* supplement provides 20 essential nutrients including Omega 3 and multivitamins, and their Magnesium* supplement contains the high absorption form of magnesium glycinate. Heights.com, from £40.



Rich in vitamin C and vitamin D, it's the ideal winter warmer!



‘Sunshine in a Bowl’ soup

The perfect warming lunch to call on as the days get cooler and we all need a healthy boost!

Also known as Vitamin D Soup, this is a perfect blend of nutritious ingredients for the winter months, when sunlight is hard to come by. Let it introduce some sunshine and happiness into your kitchen.

Shiitake mushrooms are a natural source of vitamin D, crucial for immune function, bone health, and reducing the risk of autoimmune diseases. They also support energy production and nervous system function.

Carbs: 15g, Protein: 6.1g, Fibre: 9.4g

TIME: 30 MINUTES

Ingredients

- 500g (1lb 2oz) carrots, trimmed and roughly chopped
- Olive oil, for cooking
- 8 sage leaves
- 300g (10oz) shiitake mushrooms, roughly chopped
- 1 litre vegetable or chicken stock
- 1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tbsp English mustard
- 4 bay leaves
- 15g (½oz) thyme leaves
- ¼ tsp cayenne pepper, plus extra to serve
- 2 tbsp crème fraîche
- Zest of 1 orange plus 2 tbsp juice
- flaky sea salt

Method

Bring a large pan of water to the boil, add the carrots and cook for 5 minutes until al dente. Drain and set aside.

Heat a drizzle of olive oil in a small frying pan and fry the sage leaves for 1 minute on each side. Sprinkle with flaky sea salt, then remove from the pan and leave to cool.

Heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil in a large saucepan with a lid and cook the mushrooms on a high heat for 5 minutes.

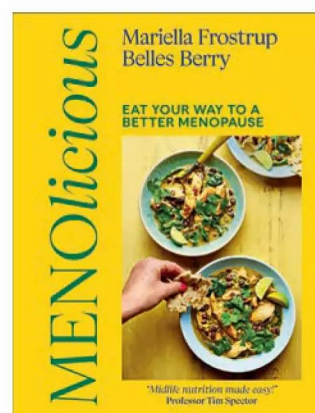
Add the stock, carrots, Worcestershire sauce, mustard, bay leaves, thyme, cayenne pepper, and ¼ teaspoon salt and simmer gently, lid on, for 10 minutes. Remove from the heat and leave to cool a little.

Remove the bay leaves and either transfer the soup to a blender or blitz the soup until smooth in the pan with a hand-held blender.

Return the soup to the pan (if needed) and reheat gently.

In a small bowl, mix the crème fraîche, orange zest, and orange juice.

Serve in individual warmed soup bowls, each with a swirl of the crème fraîche mixture, topped with the sage leaves and sprinkled with a little cayenne pepper.



Menolicious: Eat Your Way to a Better Menopause by Mariella Frostrup and Belles Berry. Published by DK RED, £22. Out now.

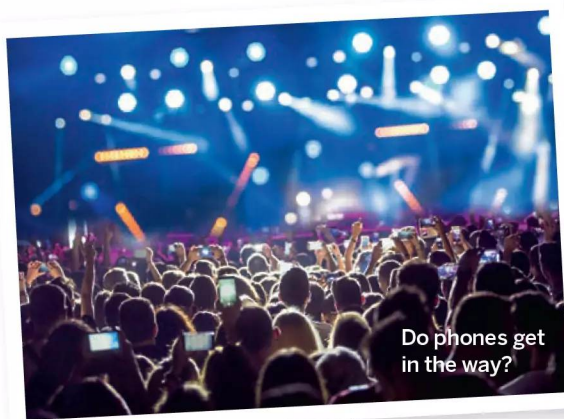
*What's new

And what's coming next

Enjoying a little of that Mediterranean flavour can keep you feeling younger longer

Eat happy

A new study found that a Mediterranean-style diet is linked to lower dementia risk, especially in people with high-risk Alzheimer's genes, showing diet changes may help offset genetic vulnerability when it comes to brain health.



Do phones get in the way?

No selfies, no problem

* Ravens are stepping back to a simpler time with the rise of 'no phone' club nights.

Amber's and Warehouse Project in Manchester are putting stickers over phone camera lenses, following in the steps of Fabric and FOLD in London, plus Pikes and Tomadachi in Ibiza.

Warehouse Project says the move is because 'We feel club culture is best enjoyed in the moment with your friends, and with your phone in your pocket.'

NO
PHONE
ZONE



Must read

The Glorious Dead by Justin Myers (£18.99, Renegade)

When celebrated playwright Laurie dies in dramatic fashion, his husband and best friend grapple with grief in different ways.

But how much did they truly know the man they loved — and will a rumoured unpublished memoir reveal truths they don't want to know? Gripping, darkly humorous and packed with unexpected twists, this tale is a raw observation of loss and human flaws.



Fly, Wild Swans by Jung Chang (£25, HarperCollins)

Her critically acclaimed 1991 bestseller told the brutal but epic story of China's 20th century through the lives of three generations of women in her family.

Now Jung Chang's long-awaited, stunning sequel to *Wild Swans* charts her path from arriving in the UK to study in 1978 and how the freedom it granted her came at the price of separation from her beloved mother.

Cover up, even in the cold

As temperatures fall it's still crucial to slap on the sunscreen to protect your skin

Autumn may be upon us, but that doesn't mean we can start skipping the SPF!

Hailed by many as the most important element of a skincare routine, a good SPF can prevent many skin issues, as well as protect delicate facial skin from the elements, even when it's not 30 degrees outside. For the cooler months, we love this award-winning light and sheer sunscreen, which melts into the skin like the silkiest of moisturisers. The non-poreblocking formula provides powerful broad-spectrum protection, whilst packing

in natural goodies like Elix-IR — a knotgrass extract protecting the skin against the damaging effects of infrared radiation and dermal fibres from sun damage, while increasing firmness and slowing down premature skin photoageing. Physavie is a plant extract clinically-proven to biologically reduce damage from infrared radiation and visible light, and protects human cells from the harmful effects of blue light, and Exo-P is a substance which forms a breathable shield over the skin, shielding it from the damaging effects of pollution.

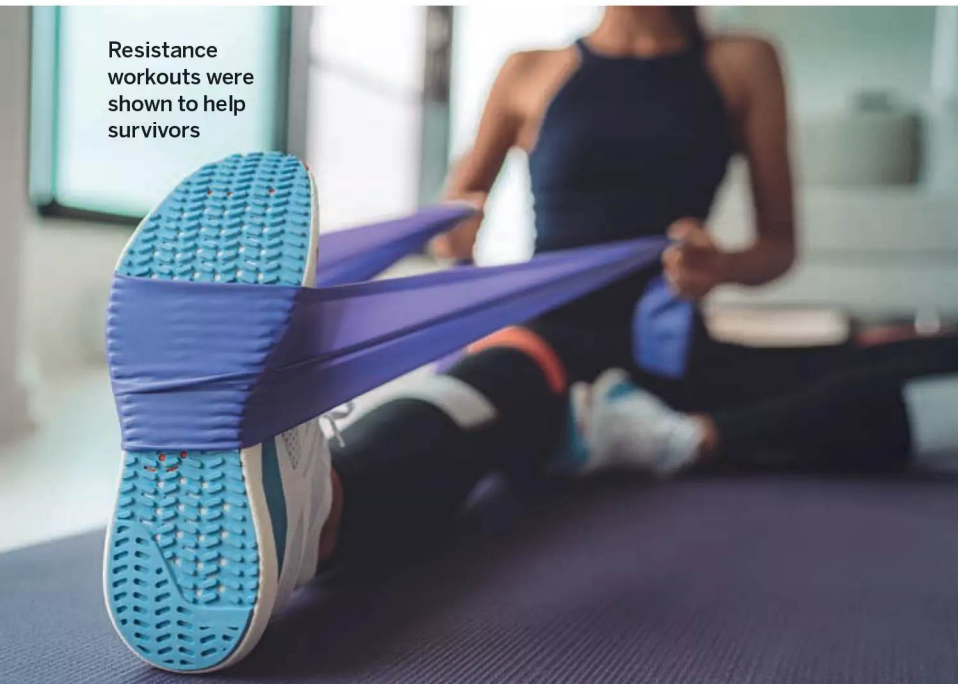


Sheer hydration
broad spectrum spf
30*, £45.50,
alumiermd.co.uk

*What's new

And what's coming next

Resistance workouts were shown to help survivors



Cancer resistance!

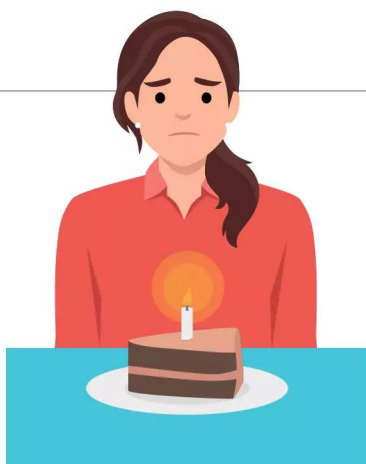
Exercise produces proteins to help reduce growth

An exciting new study has found that a single exercise session of just 30 minutes increased the levels of myokines, a protein produced by muscles which have anti-cancer effects, which could reduce cancer growth by 20 to 30%. The study found this effect when studying breast cancer survivors who did either resistance (weights or resistance band training) and high

intensity interval training, and the results were the same for each type of workout. The results show that whether you have never had cancer or you want to prevent recurrence, exercise is a powerful weapon against the disease, and that it could be an excellent addition to the standard care of cancer treatment.

One in ten

people say they celebrate their birthday alone or ignore it, while 27% don't expect a card or gifts from loved ones, a survey by thortful.com found.



What's the deal with... Gourmand Perfumes

'Gourmand' fragrances are all the rage in 2025, but what are they, and why should we care? These perfumes blends can be described as edible, dessert-like scents — think vanilla, coffee, honey. Some say the trend evokes emotional and nostalgic sensory responses — perhaps taking us back to our first Body Shop perfumes! But a more interesting idea perhaps, is that the trend is linked to the increase in people using weightloss jabs like Ozempic, which suppress appetite, with these fragrances being a way to enjoy the olfactory elements of food without eating it, tapping into the brain's reward pathways as a kind of 'pseudo-snacking'. But, whatever your taste, especially if you wear perfume every day, try to avoid fragrances with phthalates, a chemical used to increase the longevity of fragrances which not only impact the environment and waterways, but also disrupt hormonal health creating imbalances and even affecting fertility and perimenopause.

**Ylang Ylang
Espresso Eau
De Parfum,
£74 for 50ml,
Floral Street**



Tiramisu and coffee bean notes together create a scent for festive evenings and after dark. I love this perfume brand because they avoid phthalates, polycyclic and nitro musks, sulphates and parabens.



One potato, two potato...

Enjoy your mash but avoid the chips, says new study into the humble spud

They've been demonised by diet experts for decades, but new research has found the simple spud is healthier than previously thought – providing your prep them correctly.

Scientists from Harvard and the University of Cambridge monitored the diet and health of 205,000 people in the US over 40 years, during which time 22,000 of them developed diabetes.

Despite potatoes being almost entirely made of carbohydrates, they found that eating lots of mashed, boiled and baked potatoes did not increase the risk of type 2 diabetes.

However, consuming three portions of chips a week did increase the risk of being diagnosed by a fifth, with French fries particularly bad due to being an ultra-processed food.

Authors concluded that minimally processed potatoes could be part of a healthy and sustainable diet, thanks to their low environmental impact and nutrient make up, which included fibre, vitamin C and potassium.

They also had a lower diabetes risk than white rice, but were less healthy than opting for whole grains such as quinoa, brown rice or oats.

**FIND OUT
MORE ON
P.69**

Tick-tock! *It's sleep o'clock!*

A huge sleep study has identified that poor sleep behaviour attributed to more than 20% risk of contracting almost 100 different diseases. But the study also gave indicators as to how to decrease this risk: one of the most important factors was irregular bedtime. Going to sleep after 12:30am was linked to a 2.57-times higher risk of liver cirrhosis, for example. So, our health is not only linked to getting a decent night, but also to falling asleep at a consistent and healthy time. 'Our findings underscore the

overlooked importance of sleep regularity,' said senior author Prof. Shengfeng Wang. 'It's time we

broaden our definition of good sleep beyond just duration.'



"I really covet not being conventional ... I'm not your conventional leading lady. I think that's my superpower."

Actress Ambika Mod.

*What's new

And what's coming next



Location, location, location?

Where you go on a date is less important than you might think, finds study

Agonising about where to go for a first date? The perfect location is less important than you might think — and there is a simple way to connect with someone wherever you are, if you really want to.

University of Georgia researchers randomly paired up 200 strangers in two different environments to see how the couples would connect.

One room had comfortable furniture, decorations and nice lighting, while the other had white

cement walls, old wooden chairs and junk lying about.

But those who met in the latter didn't let that kill the vibe.

'It might not be how comfortable the space and physical surroundings are, but really how comfortable you make this other person feel, said study author Daisi Brand.

The daters were given help, in the form of 36 questions to ask each other, ranging from 'what do you like to sing' to 'tell me about your

relationship with your mother', which helped participants connect in both the comfortable and uncomfortable spaces.

'I think the reason that we didn't find differences between these settings is because of the meaningful conversations that were happening in both spaces,' said Brand.

'Participants reported knowing that they weren't in an appealing setting, but they still felt close or romantically attracted to the other person.'



No faking it, fur sales fall

* Global fur production has dropped dramatically in a decade following a major shift in public opinion about animal welfare and fur for fashion.

Data from Humane World For Animals shows that the number of minks, foxes, chinchillas and raccoon dogs killed for their pelts fell from 140 million in 2014 to 20 million last year.

Even in China, the world's largest producer, the practice has declined by more than half since 2022, according to the Fur Free Alliance.

**HUGE DROP
IN LAST
DECADE**

The Science of Wellbeing: How to shake off a 'digital hangover'

Each month, Ali Roff Farrar explores the deep and mysterious realms of psychology and neuroscience, to help us understand and reach greater levels of wellbeing in body and mind...

Do you ever feel that restless, fidgety, impatient sense of fatigue after looking at a screen for a long time? Whether it's a full day in front of my laptop, a few lazy hours binging a vintage sitcom, or realising I've just lost 20 minutes of my life scrolling through Instagram, I've certainly had that feeling of agitation — of 'itchy bones' — after too much screen time. So, what really is this feeling, why does it happen and how can we get rid of it?

When we watch screens, fast-changing light, colour, sound, and information flood the brain, while the body itself, which is usually sitting still, is under-stimulated. This sensory mismatch between the brain and the body causes a disconnect — resulting in what we might call a 'digital hangover' and that feeling of fatigue and restlessness after long screen sessions. Experiencing a digital hangover feels pretty rubbish, but what's actually going on in the brain? Studies show that excessive use causes thinning of the brain's outermost layer, which is responsible for cognitive functions, such as decision-making and problem-solving. It also lowers grey matter volume — the brain tissue responsible for everything from movement to memory to emotions.

So how can we combat a digital hangover? The first step is

obviously to step away from the screen and...

Get 'tactile', to bring yourself and your sensory input channels back into your body — handle a textured or natural object like a pinecone, take a mindful sip of warm tea, or...

Try some Qi Gong — swaying arms with the breath, for example.

Go analogue and read a few pages of a book (or this magazine!), practice some slow handwriting or take a snail's pace walk around the garden to counter the fast-moving visual input from screens.

If you work at a screen, follow the 20-20-20 rule — look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes of the day.



And why not use your tech to support your brain too — set alarms to take a break or block excessive use.

I like to think of screens as sugar for our brains — they 'taste' good, but hold no nutritional value.

So yes, we can indulge a little, and enjoy our screens to an extent — but we also must make sure we nourish and feed our brains too, so spend time in nature, read books, meditate, social connection, create art, exercise: these are all wonderful 'cures' for that digital hangover.

*** If you want to take control of your digital life, turn to page 24 for advice on freeing yourself from your phone from psychologist Dr Martha, and find more helpful hints and tips throughout the mag!**



* Your Letters

On new seasons, new looks, and new directions



NOW
AND
THEN

Stand strong through the seasons

As I was looking through my camera reel, I came across two pictures in the same place in my local park, one taken in winter and the other in summer. I thought how different but beautiful they both looked. This made me think of Harriet Minter's article about our connection with the seasons which inspired some reflection.

When everything is going how we would like it to, we feel at our peak and full of life like a tree standing tall in full bloom at the height of summer. Just like that tree will eventually be exposed to the harsh winter elements, we too will inevitably encounter life's challenges leaving us

feeling weathered and worn down. As winter hits, the trees stand bare and the vibrant greens of the landscape which once glimmered under the summer sun turn into a sea of brown. However, they never seem less beautiful and there is no doubt the leaves will return and those greens will be vivid again come summer.

I think our own lives are very similar. Those seasons when we are feeling down and lost are no less beautiful or worthy. They are all part of our growth and shape who we will eventually become. Just like nature will inevitably bloom again, we must have faith that we will also rise again.
Emma Sandford

LOVING THE NEW LOOK!



I felt the need to write to say I really, really enjoyed September's magazine.

I really love the new glow-up look! I've been a reader for years and must say that this month's magazine is the most enjoyment I've had since probably the first *Psychologies* magazine I read.

It was full to the brim with everything that has been on my mind to the fullest extent. You included the whole lot, it's like you wrote it for me!!

Thanks so much to everyone who had input. A brilliant job done!

So looking forward to next month!!!
Lorraine Kelly

Write to us!

We want to know what you think, how you feel, and what you've seen!

Thanks for the inspiration!

Thank you for the *Find Your New Direction* dossier in the August 2025 issue of *Psychologies*.

A week after turning 40, I returned to university full-time to study a third degree, a vocational one. The course lasted two years and has now come to an end.

I am now at a crossroads, deciding on the next path to take. I want to move home, possibly to a new-to-me location. I hope to be successful in securing a fulfilling job. There are other areas of life I would like to change.

The dossier was just what I needed at this time. And I was surprised by the outcome of the quiz. What I thought I most needed to kickstart my life overhaul was not what the answers indicated. But patience is a skill I have required to develop for a long while.

Thank you for the insights *Psychologies* provides each month.

Johanne

Would you like to showcase your photographic talent in *Psychologies*? What moment has made you feel inspired, grateful or moved this month?

Capture it and tell us why, and we'll print our favourites. Share your photograph with us and explain its inspiration on Instagram

@psychologiesmagazine with the hashtag #PsychologiesPhoto, or email it to letters@psychologies.co.uk

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Celebrating World Menopause Awareness Month this October

* Life as I know it

With Harriet Minter

I'm the queen of the castle!

On creating an oasis of feminine peace in the cold, hard corporate world

“I'm writing this from a castle. I'm in bedroom in a turret and when I look out of my window I can see the lake that surrounds two thirds of the building. There are gargoyles on the walls and natural springs have been channelled into wells across the grounds. It's magical.

In the middle of this castle is a chapel. It's the size of a single bedroom, with gothic arches and stained glass windows built in. At the end is an altar the size of a sidetable, with candles waiting to be lit. The chapel is no longer used for its original purpose, it has been long since deconsecrated and today it's only tourists who stick their nose through the door, notice the architecture and then move onto the next room, who visit.

I was staying at the castle for a work event. A blue-chip, corporate, suited-and-booted event that felt a million miles away from the quiet, soft stillness of the chapel. I spend a lot of time in that corporate world. I quite enjoy it too. I'm lucky to work for good people, the topics I talk about are interesting and some days I truly believe I've shifted someone's life for the better. For years I hoped that I was changing the way we worked for good, now I understand

that I'm just another wave breaking itself against rocks that might erode but long after my time and I'm okay with that. The change will come eventually.

But this world is very masculine. It's structure and deadlines, KPIs and invoices. I'm here in this world for four days and today, halfway through, another woman offered me a chance to have a little respite from it.

'Let's gather some women in the chapel,' she said. 'Let's talk about the moon, celebrate the brilliant women we know and make that sacred space all about the feminine.'

I couldn't have been there quicker if she'd promised me a castle of my own.

We meditated, we burnt sage, we cried, we laughed, we sang and told stories. And it was made all the

'We meditated, we burnt sage, we cried, we laughed, we sang and told stories.'



better by this little space, ornately decorated with carvings of stars and flowers and lit by the glow of candles. In the middle of this very modern, masculine world we had found a little oasis of feminine peace, and we celebrated it.

In doing so I was reminded how sacred the sound of laughter is and how powerful women are when they come together. A blessing indeed.



HARRIET MINTER

Coach, writer and relationship therapist-in-training

After 15 years as a hard-nosed journalist, she now lives a softer, more woo-woo life with her dog, Blue.

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'We prioritise our phones over everything else'

Are you getting sick of losing hours of your life to your phone every day, even when you're trying hard not to? Psychologist and expert Dr Martha Deiros Collado is here to help us take back control...

After chatting with Dr Martha Deiros-Collado, it's hard to see the shiny glass rectangle 'that takes up so little space in our pocket but so much space in our minds' as anything but a dangerous interloper designed to distract and disrupt.

Because the good doctor is on a mission to untangle us from our phones and help us to learn how to live without being constantly attached at the hip (or hand).

A psychologist who specialises in working with children, she has been focusing on helping families unplug, thanks to her new book *The Smartphone Solution* (Thorsons, £16.99), and it's a project that can't come too soon, as a new study has just been released to show that giving smartphones to children too soon can damage their mental health *for the rest of their life*.


But Dr Martha's not just focused on the kids — she wants us all to be able to enjoy the freedom of not feeling the need to be

By **SALLY SAUNDERS**

constantly connected and 'always on'. 'I think adults and older adults grandparents are the worst at using smartphones, and I include myself in this 100%, but we are the worst because no one ever taught us how to use them,' she says. 'Kids are digital natives. They're born around technology and smartphones and the internet. But we weren't, and nobody said to us, "Oh, by the way, this is a healthy way of using it."' "

Now, after a decade of watching it encroach more and more on modern life, she's trying to help us take action. 'I say it's a wake up call, because I feel like we're being called to listen,' she says. 'And I am not somebody who's into fear mongering. I don't think fear is a very good position to be in when you're trying to make healthy decisions. But I think awareness is really important.'

The first thing she wants us to be aware >



'It's a wake-up call.
I feel we're being
called to listen.'

of is how our phones impact our relationships. 'I see phones as a third person in the room. They are disruptors of our connection, our relationships, our conversations, our sleep. They distract us and they disrupt us.'

'We need to be really aware. Do I want this third person here right now? Think, you go to a restaurant and somebody joins you, and then they put their phone on the table. I'm always like, "Is something more important going to happen on there? If that buzzes, is that more interesting than me?" I call it "technoference", the way technology interferes in our lives all the time.'

She believes it's more fundamental than simply poor table manners and interrupted conversations. 'I think it's odd that we've normalised that we all carry them. We hold them in our hands. I've seen people walking around, walking with their smartphone down the high street, and I think, one, that's unsafe, you're going to get mugged. But two, it's not a pet, or a child and you have to hold their hand the whole time — put it away!'

But she's keen to explain she doesn't blame us for our behaviour. 'It's not our fault, I feel this deeply, and it's not our fault because phones were created in a way that trains us to keep them close, to keep checking, "What's happening in here?"'

What's most important?

'I think of it as a door,' she goes on. 'Every time it buzzes, it's like a doorbell ringing in your house. And you can choose to either open the door or you can be like, leave me a message, you know, leave me a little reminder note. Sometimes, you know it's an important delivery. So you'll go and open the door because you know your package is coming.'

'But sometimes you can be like, "I don't know who that is, and if it's important, they'll leave me a note or they'll come back." That's what we should be doing with our phones.'

'But we don't. We seem to prioritise them over everything else that's happening to us. And I think that's a problem.'

Her own reliance on her phone was made clear to her by her young daughter. When she began writing the book, Dr Martha would purposefully leave the phone around the house, so as not to feel tied to it — and her little girl's reaction was an eye-opener.

'She would find it, and she'd come running to bring it to me, "Your phone, your phone", like it was super important.'

'And it broke my heart. I would say to her, "My phone's not important. It's okay. You can just leave it. Mummy doesn't need her phone right now," but the fact she felt like this is really important, it showed me, okay, we have a problem, all of us, but me included.'

Her daughter's behaviour was also enlightening in relation to technoference. 'I think being distracted by our phones is one thing with other adults, but also huge when it comes to our kids.'

'My six-year old is really into cartwheels at the moment, and always wants me to watch her. And sometimes I'll be like "Just a minute, just give me a minute."

'You know, we might be doing something important. You might be using your phone to distract, to work, to socialise, entertain yourself. I think all those things are okay. There are times for all those things to be okay, but you need to find the balance where you're also showing presence to your kid, and teaching them: "My phone is not more important than you," because I think we risk actually teaching our kids that phones are more important, that's what we're modelling.'

'You know, my daughter was trying to wear my mum's heels. She sticks her feet in mum's shoes, and walks around. We're all giggling. It's gorgeous. And I thought, that's such an analogy for smartphones. We're on them, so of course, they want them. So if we want our kids not to think of smartphones as the most important item that they must own, we need to prove that they're not the most important item that we own.'

One way she has identified of doing this is to remove the mystery and the magic that the

Dr Martha has been observing smartphone use in clinic for a decade

'I see phones as a third person in the room. They distract and disrupt us.'





secretive nature of the smartphone can conjure. 'We use smartphones in silence like we're reading a novel. So it looks really secretive. Well, actually, if I pick it up and say to my daughter, "Oh, the cleaner asked me to buy some wood polish. Let me add that into my shopping list."

'I've just brought reality into something that looks special, and I've connected with my child in a moment of utter disconnect.'

Another key aspect for her is where we keep our phones. 'If you feel like you spend too much time on your phone, and when you start scrolling, you lose track of time, and it's starting to irritate you, frustrate you, because you feel like you're wasting time, you're unhappy with your phone usage, then I think step one for me would be separating your phone from your person. You don't have to carry it on you all the time.

'You need to find a home for your phone that isn't on your body. So find somewhere where, when you walk into the house, you turn it into a routine the same way you might take off your shoes, put your bag and your coat like on a hook — put your phone somewhere too, don't just keep it in your pocket.'

Counterintuitively, she also advises turning up the volume. 'We shouldn't have our phones on silent all the time,' she says — as this can lead to us spending more time physically checking them. 'When we're at home, I believe they should be on loud. Switch it on, so you hear it like a doorbell. So when it rings, you know it's calling you. And you can make the decision. You know you're doing your baking, or bath-time. You've got your hands dirty. It rings, you might be like, "It can wait for a minute." You know it's fine. Get yourself sorted, then deal with it when it suits you.'

What suits you?

Her next advice is to have a detox and declutter. 'Lots of people do phone detoxes, but I prefer a notification detox,' she says. 'Switch all your notifications off.

'I did it for a week. It's hard, but one of the things you'll learn is, which apps do I really want to notify me because they're important, because I'm losing things that I need to know.

'You also find out which ones you don't need. So, I don't need an alert to tell me that something new has popped up, I'll check it myself. If it's social media, I'm going to check when I want to, when I've got capacity, when I'm interested, not when my phone tells to.'

DR MARTHA DEIROS COLLADO PORTFOLIO



'Once work is over you plug it in and leave it, and you're free! I literally breathe differently.'

Ask yourself, "How am I intentional with my phone," rather than the other way around, where I feel like it's got me, and I can't stop.

'If you're out with friends, and you're going to grab your phone, talk about it. Act like it's a third person that you are introducing into the conversation. Explain, "I need to check my

phone because my daughter felt unwell this morning and that could be school calling," or "I need to reply to this text message for whatever reason," but name it, because just the act of knowing that you have to say it might put you off unless it really is urgent.

'I think when we acknowledge the phone as an extra entity in our life, in our world, and especially when we're in social interaction with others, it means that we take accountability, and we stop, rather than just constantly checking it.

'It helps you realise "I do not need to look at my phone right now. I can just wait until we've paid and we've stepped out the restaurant if I want to check something."

She's been following her own advice for most of the year, and she says she's seen a huge difference. 'It makes you feel more in charge, more in control, but I've also realised that suddenly I have so much more space.

'You don't feel like your phone takes up space, because they're small little gadgets that fit in your pocket, but they take emotional space and physical space, with all the buzzing and over stimulation that we don't need.

'I know it's a bit different if you use your phone for work — I do too. But once work is over, once you plug it in and leave it, you're like, you're free. I literally breathe differently.

'The first week that we did it, me and my husband, we were both uncomfortable, but it's because it's different. And now we're like, "Oh, that feels lovely."

'We talk about mindfulness all the time. Well, we can't be mindful if we're constantly plugged into a digital screen. We need to have space, it's really important for us. We're not robots, we're humans, and we need that.'



The Smartphone Solution by Dr Martha Deiros Collado (Thorsons, £16.99) is out now

NAVIGATING PHONE USE WITH PARTNERS

Besides our own phone usage, many women report being frustrated by their partner being distracted by their phone. 'For some couples, it can feel like there's a third person in the marriage,' she says.

So how do we handle it?

'If your partner picks up their phone, try not to say "Oh, do you prefer your phone to me?"' She advises. 'As soon as you do that, you're entering a battleground. I believe in finding scripts that are gentler.

'It might be "Oh, looks like the phone's

just appeared on the table. And actually, I was really looking forward to spending time with you today, I was really hoping we could watch this together and make sure our phones don't interrupt the show, because this is my time with you, and I've been looking forward to this all day."

'So talk about how you feel, like, own it, own your feelings, rather than, you know, they always do that, yeah, and then offer a solution. So saying things like, "I'll take your phone and plug it in. I'll put it with mine."

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Feeling persistently low in energy? More of us are now waking up to a lack of magnesium – like 67-year old Ingrid Ord, a psychotherapist from Warwick.

'We moved into a new house and there was so much I wanted to do,' says Ingrid. 'But I was utterly exhausted. I was doing nothing, just the absolute basics. I felt desperate.'

Ingrid loves walking with her dogs – but the beautiful hilltop walk nearby felt out of reach. 'A small hill for most people – but for me it's quite a challenge.'

Then Ingrid read about a supplement called Magnesium+, developed by FutureYou Cambridge.

'I liked the science behind it, so I thought – let's try it for three months and see if there's any improvement.'

'Now I feel rejuvenated. I feel more physical energy so I can do a few things around the house. I can walk more, which is very

important for me. And I can get up to the top now and look at the incredible view.'

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Ingrid Ord stays active with support from FutureYou Cambridge.



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With Kim Morgan

‘Sometimes seedlings aren’t ready to be planted out’

Last time client Jill was convinced she wanted to leave her marriage, but was facing opposition from loved ones. What will she decide?

“From the moment Jill arrived for our coaching session, I could see she wasn’t okay. She looked washed out and sad. Even her trademark jingly jangly silver bangles were missing from her wrist.

She got straight to the point: ‘I know I left the last session full of courage and resolve but you don’t need to be a mind-reader to see where I am today. I’m still in the marriage and it looks like I will be for some time yet. My husband remains devastated. My in-laws remain furious with me and so do my children. My friends have abandoned me. I thought I could leave in the face of their anger and judgement, but my courage has left me.’

Jill sat quietly, deep in thought. ‘I knew what I wanted. I knew it so clearly. I wanted it so badly, but the guilt is too much for me. So, I’ve gone back on my decision.’

I said I was sorry that things had turned out this way and asked, ‘What does going back on your decision mean for you?’

Jill held her hands up in a gesture of despair. ‘I still want to leave. That hasn’t changed but I’m not strong enough. I’ve always put other people’s needs above mine. Why would I suddenly stop now? How did I even think I was going to be able to leave — just like that? I simply can’t.’

Jill had been beaten up emotionally by everyone around her and I was conscious that I didn’t want to be another voice of judgement. I braced myself for a backlash from Jill as I asked: ‘I’m wondering whether it is not that you can’t leave but more that you are choosing not to — for now?’

‘You’re right. It is a choice. I’m choosing not to act. I hate myself for it, but that’s what I’m doing.’

Jill seemed to be wilting before my eyes. I remembered how much she loved gardening, and I said, ‘Sometimes tender plants aren’t ready to be planted out straight away. They need shelter in the greenhouse until they are strong enough to withstand the



elements. Maybe you are in that phase right now, giving yourself protection and nourishment until you feel ready to grow.'

Jill forced a little smile. 'That makes sense,' she said quietly.

When I asked what she needed now, she said: 'Help. More help than I thought I needed. Somewhere to practise saying what I need and want. Somewhere to get braver. Maybe therapy. Maybe a group. Maybe something else. I think I need to do a lot of work on my self-esteem and assertiveness

before I can face the consequences of ending my marriage.'

I had noticed that Jill didn't mention wanting more coaching. That hurt a bit.

'Does this mean you've changed your mind about what you want?' I asked.

'No. I still want to leave. I just don't think I can. Not yet. Maybe never. If I don't, I'll die like my mum with an orange notebook of regrets. But today, I can't do it. I don't have the courage or the strength.'

That was where Jill left it. Not leaving the marriage but knowing what she wanted and not feeling able to make it happen.

That was also where Jill left the coaching session. When she thanked me, it felt cursory. I felt that I had let her down.



KIM MORGAN

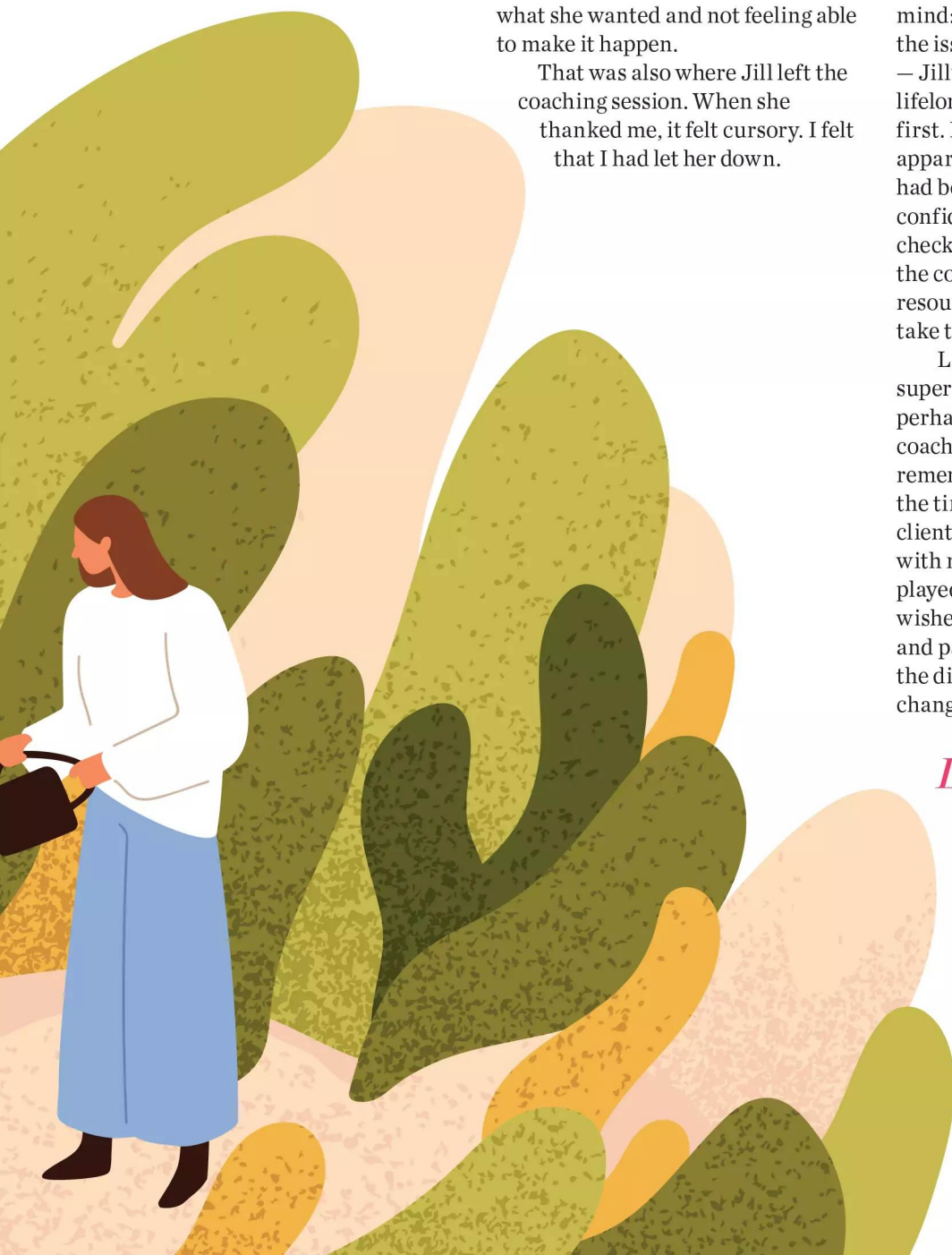
Award-winning and Master Certified Coach and author of *The Coach's Casebook* and *The Coach's Survival Guide*.

Kim, founder of Barefoot Coaching, has led the coaching field for over 30 years. A pioneer in coach training, coaching supervision and coaching for grief, she draws on her deep personal and professional insights in her work.

A coaching mantra came to my mind: 'The presenting issue is rarely the issue.' I had missed the real issue — Jill's lack of assertiveness and her lifelong pattern of putting others first. I had been carried away by her apparent readiness for change and had been swayed by her outward confidence. I had overlooked the checks I should have done with Jill: the costs of her decision, the resources and support she needed to take the action she wanted.

Later that week, my coaching supervisor reminded me that perhaps the greatest challenge of coaching is to care deeply while remembering that the choice, and the timing, always belong to the client. Her words didn't really cut it with me. I could see the part I had played in being swept along by Jill's wishes, and I resolved to slow down and pay closer attention in future to the difference between wanting change and being ready for it.

Does this resonate with you? Turn the page for Kim's exercises



* Coaching in action

Try these simple exercises

‘After You...’

It is easy to get into the habit of putting other people’s needs before our own, particularly if we have caring responsibilities. It can become so automatic that we don’t even realise we are doing it. However, the act of consistently putting yourself last can erode your self-esteem, leave you feeling resentful, exhausted, or unsure of who you really are and what you want.

To try this exercise, think of some situations in the past few weeks when you put someone else’s needs before your own.

- For each one, ask yourself:

What did it cost me? What did it give the other person? Was my sacrifice worth it for both of us?

- Imagine you had stood your ground and given your own needs equal weight. How does it feel to imagine that? What might have been the outcome?
- Be honest and name what gets in the way of you considering your needs too: guilt, fear of conflict, worrying about what others will think, or something else?
- Consider which other people in your life are affected by you putting others’ needs before your own?

Space, shelter and nourishment

Sometimes we know what we want, but we’re just not ready to act on it yet. Like a tender plant, we may need more time in the greenhouse, with space, shelter, and nourishment, before we are strong enough to be planted out in the world.

If you are facing a decision you are not ready to act on yet, here are some ways to restore your energy and build strength for when the time is right for you to blossom:

- **Appreciate the season you are in.** Acknowledge that you are making a conscious choice to stay where you are — for now.
- **Feed yourself.** Do more of the things which nourish and replenish you, with people who feed your soul and bring sunshine into your life.
- **Protect your roots.** Set small boundaries. Keep away from things which drain or deplete you. Remember all the strengths you have drawn on in your life to date.
- **Track your growth.** Keep a journal of moments when you do stand up for your needs, however small. These are signs of strengthening.
- **Find inspiration.** Spend time with people who have made a change and grown in the way you aspire to grow. Learn lessons from them about what they did to become stronger.

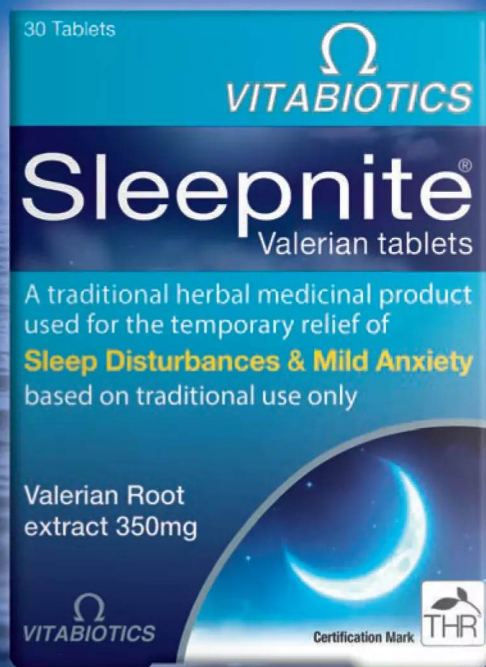


WORDS OF WISDOM

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation.”

Audre Lorde

Time to Dream



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FEEL THE FEAR

I gaze out the window as the countryside whizzes by in a green blur. Through my much-loved earphones, I listen to the album *Scarlet's Walk* by Tori Amos – music that has gotten me through much more difficult experiences than this, I remind myself. Because this – although nerve-wracking – is nothing compared to the challenges I have faced in life so far. Really, giving a talk to a room of strangers around my passion – careers in writing – is pretty straightforward stuff.

By **CAROLINE BUTTERWICK**

I've done public speaking before, I remind myself. I've done my prep (and have the notes with me). Maybe these nerves are because I'm feeling a little fragile – it's been a stressful year, marred with illness and disappointments and other things that have made me a little less sure of myself. Also, I know I get anxious before things like this, and today is no exception.

Maybe you can relate: the nerves before the job interview, the choir performance, the unfamiliar social occasion. Or the worries we have when we're faced with big life choices: moving house, changing career, starting a relationship. Things we know are, almost certainly, for the best – or even very much desired – but still make us fearful.

On the train, I remind myself not only that I can do this, but that I enjoy doing this. I have chosen to do this talk, after all.

I am working hard to frame the feelings as excitement, and this, coach Zoé Carroll tells me when I speak to her later, is a helpful approach. 'When we feel something happening in our body, we think it's fear, but the exact same feeling in our body is also excitement,' she explains. 'It's what I like to call activation. Your body is simply gearing you up to be able to perform at your absolute best.'

'When we feel butterflies in our stomach, that's not necessarily us trying to run away,' she adds. 'That feeling is actually muscles going into slight tension and blood dropping into our legs so that we can physically run away or towards whatever it is that we're looking forward to. Our body's doing one thing, but our mind is often misreading it and saying, "I feel nervous, I feel afraid, therefore I shouldn't do the thing," rather than seeing it as, "I feel excited. Yes, this is a challenge, but I'm up for it. I'm ready, I'm capable. I actually choose this.'"

Psychologies


Meet the Experts



Zoé Carroll

A performance and wellbeing specialist who supports people to perform at their best in ways that enhance their confidence and wellbeing.

zoecarroll.com

A woman with curly hair, wearing a red top, holds a silver microphone towards the camera. The background is a solid light pink color.

'I couldn't just jump up to a microphone tomorrow and make a rousing speech, but why isn't it something I could aim for?'

'Fear is just information. By doing things that make us feel afraid we fill in the blanks so we know it's not as scary as we're thinking it might be.'

Carroll tells me how, when she's worked with sportspeople, she uses the phrase 'Here comes the nerves' rather than, 'Here comes the fear' — it's about reframing and seeing how we're feeling as fuel instead of fear. Of course, when we're feeling fearful, it can be tempting to stay in our comfort zone, saying to ourselves, 'Why did I sign up to do this?!' But so much good can come from feeling the fear and doing it anyway.

'It can remind us that we didn't die!' says Carroll. 'Our fear system thinks that everything is life and death — it's only got catastrophe or staying safe. Fear is just information, but if it's missing information, like if this is the first time you've done a presentation, or the first time you've gone to the gym in years, the fear is telling you there's a potential threat, there's a risk of embarrassment, there's a risk of failure.'

'By doing the things that make us feel like that, we fill in those blanks of information so we know that it's not as scary as we're thinking it might be, that our body is fearing that it might be.'

Each time we do something, we show ourselves we're capable. Even if it doesn't all go to plan — and let's face it, sometimes things don't — we realise that we did survive. We can grow from it.

So much of the good in my life has come from doing things that made me nervous beforehand. And I think that's likely true of many people. Going to university, striking up friendships as an adult, getting married, various jobs (even the ones I didn't particularly like at the time), travelling abroad with strangers, being a writer — these are all things that took a leap of faith.

I love the phrase, 'Do something that scares you a little every day'. It reminds me

that it's normal to be nervous: many of us don't admit to it, but it is, and that good can come from being brave.

Carroll recommends having your own markers for success, and holding onto why you want to do something in the first place. She gives the example of having recently taken part in a triathlon, and that her marker was not to hit a particular time, but to enjoy it — which makes it feel more manageable than having a set time to aim for.

I ask Carroll about how we can tell the difference between something that's manageable for us versus something that's 'too much'. I explain that, for me, speaking to a room of strangers is nerve-wracking, but within what I can do, but that speaking to a thousand people would definitely be too much. She disagrees. 'We can often think, "Well, this isn't for me." You know, I think you probably could speak on a stage in front of thousands of people,' she says.

Immediately, I want to say, 'But I couldn't.'

'What would be different between speaking to a thousand people than to a hundred people? What's the worst that could happen? How different would it really be? How much more preparation could you do? And could you do that preparation?'

I don't have a good answer for why I couldn't. It's a moment of realisation — maybe, actually, that is something I am capable of.

'What we think is too much of a stretch, often isn't,' Carroll reassures me.

Of course, there are things I'd need to do to get myself to that stage. I couldn't just jump up to a microphone tomorrow and deliver a rousing speech, but why isn't it something I could aim for? Carroll explains that it's useful to think about the steps we'd need to take to make it manageable for us. Increasingly, I'm

'What we think of as too much of a stretch, often isn't.'





learning when I'm 'ready' to do something that's a little out of my comfort zone versus when I might need some more time or support. As someone who has experience of mental ill health, including anxiety, I know I need to understand myself. It's very much not about putting yourself in situations that are going to cause you distress. Personally, I find reflecting on my experiences helps me make sense of what is and isn't doable for me. It's an ongoing process, so be kind to yourself.

On the train journey home, I had that post-talk glow — a buzz I get when I've spent two hours delivering a session that's gone well. I listen to another favourite album to unwind (*Ladies of the Canyon* by Joni Mitchell) while I watch the countryside roll past the window.

I'm relieved at how well it went, and, I'm wondering when I can give the next one...

MANAGING NERVES



When we're about to step onto a stage or log into an important meeting, as much as we try to frame our feelings as excitement or hold onto our values, we may still feel our heart race and that urge to wish it was all over and done with.

Carroll shares the following tips to help you feel better in the moment:

- Put your hands over your heart, and breathe gently. This, Carroll says, helps you to feel safe. If you like, add the words, 'I am safe.'
- 'Smile, because your nervous system is registering what's going on for you,' says Carroll. 'If

you look afraid, it will tell your body there's something to be afraid of, so it will generate the fear response.' And if you're speaking in public, a crowd will likely reflect that smile back at you, giving you a further boost.

● 'Remember that fear and anxiety are emotions that are related to the future, so they will peak before the event starts,' Carroll explains. Chances are, it's waiting for your name to be called that's the hardest part, and that once you're up there and in the flow, it becomes a lot easier. Remind yourself of this, and it may well make it easier to take that step forwards.

'Before you've even figured out why something feels off, your body already knows.'

'Because we have been taught to be agreeable, we might freeze. Half smile. Shrink.'



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YOU DON'T HAVE TO *smile*

Most of us were taught from a young age to be polite — to smile, to say thank you, to make others feel comfortable. But for many women, those small lessons carried a louder message: your needs come second.

If you've ever offered a polite smile when your body was saying no, or brushed off discomfort for the sake of keeping the peace — you're not alone. You were trained to do that.

As a psychodynamic psychotherapist, I see this conflict all the time: the inner tug between instinct and expectation. Between what we feel in our bodies and what we believe we're allowed to say out loud.

These small moments — a forced smile, a half-laugh, a silence when something crosses a line — are often rooted in deeper experiences of not being believed or safe to speak up. It happens in changing rooms, on trains, near building sites, in public parks, and at family gatherings. Anywhere — and often, when we are least prepared for it. Someone makes an inappropriate comment. A stranger insists on a hug. Someone reaches out to touch your child. And because we've been taught to be agreeable, we might freeze. Half-smile. Shrink.

That's not weakness. It's conditioning. And it is possible to unlearn this.

By **KATE BECKWITH**

The body knows first

Shame often creeps in when we're not received how we hoped. It disconnects us from ourselves. But the work of emotional growth lies in the ability to pause, stay present, and choose how to respond. And for women, that pause often begins in the body.

Our intuition isn't guesswork — it's data. The female brain is wired to pick up on micro-cues and subtle shifts in energy. The corpus callosum, the part of the brain that connects the left and right hemispheres, tends to be larger in women, facilitating faster communication between logical thought and emotional processing.

Women activate more brain regions involved in empathy and social awareness, giving us an edge in reading facial expressions, tone changes, and non-verbal signals. Before you've even figured out why something feels off, your body already knows. ➤



"Grief shakes our sense of how the world works. It challenges our belief that life is fair, predictable or within our control. As coaches, I believe we need to be ready to walk alongside people through all kinds of grief – not just bereavement, but the loss of identity, health, home, relationships, hopes and imagined futures."

Kim Morgan

Barefoot Coaching Founder, MCC, Supervisor, Author, Speaker, Certified Grief Educator and Grief Recovery Specialist

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YOU DON'T HAVE TO SMILE

So when you sense something is off, it probably is.

You don't need to explain it.

You don't need evidence.

You don't need to apologise.

Hormones also play a role. During certain phases of the menstrual cycle, levels of oxytocin and progesterone rise, sharpening sensitivity to emotional and social dynamics. This isn't overthinking — it's evolutionary intelligence. It helped our ancestors detect danger, respond to their infants' subtle needs, and read a room before a word was said.

Reclaiming what was lost

Reconnection happens through small, everyday acts. Saying no to unwanted touch. Not smiling when you don't feel like it. Refusing to give a hug just because it's expected. Protecting our own children from these expectations. Giving ourselves — and each other — permission not to perform.

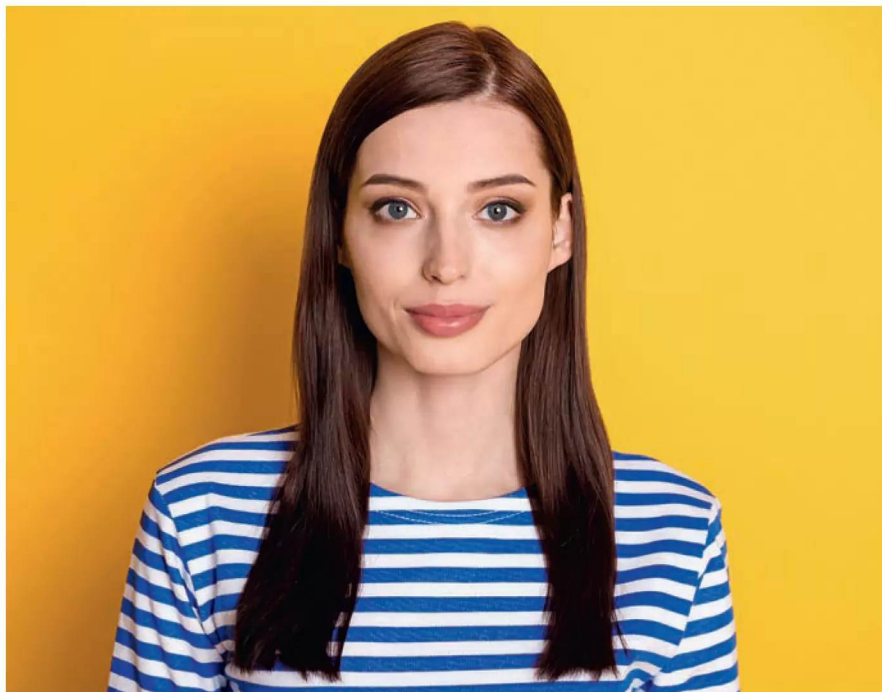
At my therapy practice, we've moved beyond the traditional four walls to create a space where children and young people reconnect with what they feel and need — in their bodies, not just their minds. With access to nature, movement, animals, and creative materials, they're supported to follow their instincts and make choices whilst we work therapeutically. This kind of freedom helps reverse what many of us learned early on: to override our bodies, ask permission, and prioritise compliance over intuition.

Emotional regulation and self-awareness begin with the body. When therapy includes movement and choice, it becomes a powerful intervention — helping clients shift from performance to presence, from smiling on cue to feeling for real. That choice is powerful. And we all deserve it.

Because when we create space to move, breathe, and be without pressure, we reconnect with the parts of ourselves that went quiet long ago. Parts that were taught to be nice. To comply. To not make a fuss. To smile.

Raising the next generation

Of course, this isn't just about girls. Boys and gender-diverse young people also grow up under pressure — told to toughen up, stay quiet, or play a certain role. Everyone deserves the chance to feel safe in their body, to trust their instincts, and to express who



they truly are. This is about raising confident, connected humans — whatever their gender.

That said, this piece focuses on the experience of women and girls because the history of how female bodies have been controlled, dismissed or objectified runs deep. Girls still grow up navigating a world where their appearance is too often prioritised over their voice.

We have work to do here. Let's be clear: the stakes are not just emotional. Every time a girl is taught to ignore her gut, we increase the risk of harm. For some, the price has been their safety. For others, it's been their lives. Our upbringing sets the blueprint for what we believe we deserve. Children who are taught about body safety, autonomy, and boundaries are more likely to say, 'No,' or 'That's not okay,' when something feels wrong.

But what if you weren't taught that? What if you're still learning to say no? That's okay. There's healing in doing things differently now. You might not have had the support you needed as a child, but you can give it to yourself now — and you can model it.

You don't have to smile.

You don't have to explain.

You don't have to make anyone else comfortable at the cost of your wellbeing.

This isn't just about raising strong girls. It's about reclaiming the strong women we already are.

'Reconnection happens through small acts: Saying no to unwanted touch. Not smiling when you don't feel like it.'

Psychologies

Meet the Experts



Kate Beckwith

is a pioneering psychotherapist, TEDx speaker and writer, dedicated to transforming how we support children and young people's mental health. Follow her on instagram to see how nature, movement, and choice are reshaping the way she supports children's emotional wellbeing.

@katesgardentherapy

DEEP SLEEP

What is it, and how do I improve it?

Ever wake up feeling as if you haven't slept? It could be you didn't get enough deep sleep — that leaves you restored in body and mind

Deep sleep is when your brain waves slow right down, your muscles relax and repair themselves along with tissues, and your immune system is given a reboot. Deep sleep is essential for growth, memory and waking up refreshed. But it is just one part of the picture. REM (rapid eye movement) sleep — the stage when you dream — is equally vital for emotional balance, learning and brain health. The two phases work together like night-shift teams: One helping to repair the body, the other assisting to refreshing the mind.

Deep sleep vs REM sleep

Deep sleep is the third stage of non-REM sleep, after drifting off (Stage 1) and light sleep (Stage 2). It makes up around a quarter of your total sleep time and it's when your body does its heavy lifting — repairing cells, building bone and muscle and releasing growth hormones. REM sleep follows about 90 minutes after you nod off. During REM, your heart

rate rises slightly, your breathing quickens, your muscles relax and vivid dreams take centre stage. This is when your brain strengthens connections, clears out waste, and processes emotional experiences. If you're running low on REM sleep, you may find yourself more irritable or emotionally fragile.

Why these stages matter

Deep sleep repairs, restores your energy and helps your brain turn short-term experiences into long-term memories. Meanwhile, REM sleep boosts creativity, supports brain development and helps you regulate emotions. So these stages help with both physical repair and mental clarity.

How to improve both stages

Regular exercise — from a brisk walk to a gym workout — encourages deeper, more restorative sleep and eases insomnia symptoms. Just avoid high-intensity activity before bed, as it

can make it harder to wind down due to increased endorphin levels.

Your sleep environment matters. Keep a regular bedtime and wake-up schedule to stabilise your internal clock. Darken the room, cool it down and ditch screentime, opting for relaxing music or a podcast instead.

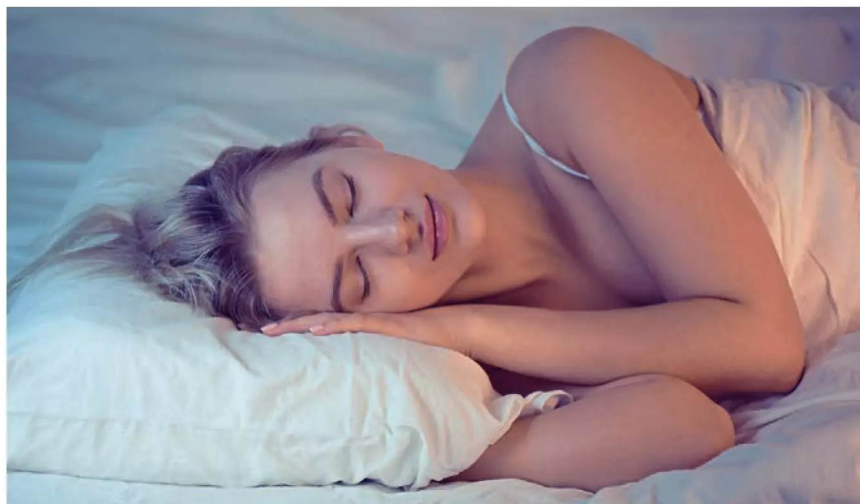
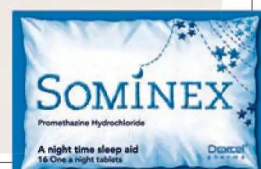
Coffee and other stimulants can rouse your central nervous system and keep you awake. If you're sensitive, switch to caffeine-free options after lunch to give your brain a better chance to power down.

Natural light helps regulate your circadian rhythm — your body's built-in sleep-wake cycle. It's important to spend time outside during the day. Like going to bed and waking up at the same time, it helps to keep your circadian rhythm healthy.

Track your sleep — noting when you went to bed, how quickly you drifted off and how refreshed you felt — can reveal surprising patterns and point to what's working.

SOMINEX HELPS TO RELIEVE OCCASIONAL SLEEPLESSNESS

If lifestyle changes and improving sleep hygiene isn't helping speak to your pharmacist for advice. Sominex is a night-time sleep aid for temporary disturbances of sleep pattern and is available without a prescription from pharmacies and online. It contains promethazine hydrochloride, an antihistamine which has a sedative effect that starts to work within 15-30 minutes. Always read the label.





ARE WE REALLY FRIENDS...

or am I just useful?

“Morning! I’m a bit busy now so will drop you a message later on and you can come over here, okay?” I looked first at the message, then around my kitchen which was spotless from the frantic tidying that we all succumb to when someone is coming over. I took in the flickering scented candle and the snacks I’d laid out. I considered the weekend plans I had rejigged in order to see this person who was now, ten minutes before they were due over, changing plans via WhatsApp. No, this wasn’t a date, this was a friend. And I was fed up.

By **STEPHANIE FITZGERALD**



To quote Jane Austen, ‘There is nothing I would not do for those who are really my friends.’ I highly value my friendships and try to be a good and supportive friend in return. This particular friend had called me in the week, panicking about a work project, and asking if I could help her that weekend. I had things booked in but, hearing her overwhelm, moved them around and arranged to spend a good few hours together, getting it sorted. Even though I had been more than happy to help her, I was not happy about the last-minute change of plans.

I felt grumpy about the assumption that I would disrupt the rest of my day and travel over to hers and as though my time and offer of help was being taken for granted. Rather than a friend doing a favour, I began to feel as though I was on the payroll, only without the

pay. I felt decidedly put-out and it made me question why. Was I being unreasonable? Was I overreacting? I realised that this wasn’t the first time I’d felt like this with her, and I knew that something was off. What was going on?

Georgina Sturmer, a counsellor specialising in helping women become more confident and resilient in their relationships, told me that I was describing the difference between a reciprocal friendship and a transactional one. ‘Ideally we want our friendships to be reciprocal,’ she advised.

‘Our friendships and relationships are not always going to be in perfect balance. There will be times when we need to support someone and times when we need someone to support us but, overall, we want an equilibrium. What you’re describing is when that balance is out of whack and the intangible

‘Our friendships are not always going to be in perfect balance.’



Psychologies

Meet the Experts



Georgina Sturmer

is a counsellor (MBACP) who specialises in working with women, supporting them to become more confident and resilient in their life and relationships.

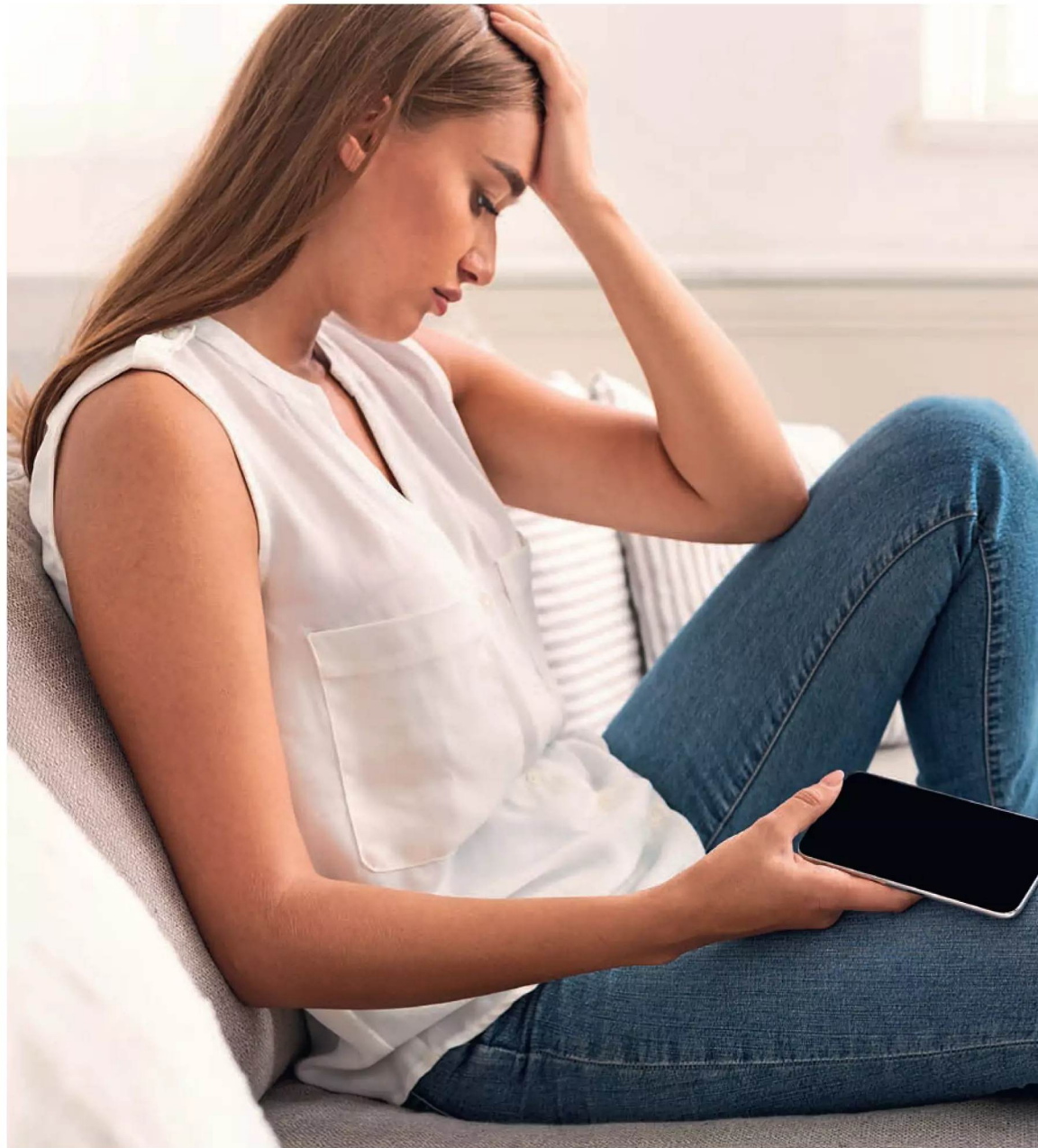
*She offers integrative attachment-based therapy, and is a lecturer in counselling.
georginasturmer.co.uk*



Michelle Minnikin

is a chartered psychologist, coach and author of Good Girl Deprogramming.

michelleminnikin.com



“friendship energy” has been removed from the equation and instead it feels like a product or service that you might pay someone for.’

Whilst we were talking, I recognised that this ‘service’ dynamic was definitely present. This was a friend who asked if I was going somewhere, but only when she needed a lift. A friend who messaged to see how I was, then snuck in a favour request before I had a chance to reply. Things definitely used to feel very reciprocal, but that seemed to have changed in recent months and it left me feeling uncomfortable. Were we even friends anymore, or was I just useful?

It can be easy for friendships to slip into ‘usefulness mode’ unnoticed and hard to break

away from. Sturmer told me that, for many of us, we define ourselves by how we behave in friendships e.g. being the useful one or the organised one. This is an idea echoed by psychologist and coach, Michelle Minnikin.

‘We, and women in particular, are trained from birth to be helpful and kind and this means our self-worth can become tied up in how useful we are.’ Minnikin explained how this ingrained belief system can sometimes mask early cues or intuition that tell us we’re being taken advantage of, meaning we can easily ignore or gloss over the warning signs. ‘As soon as resentment pops up then that is a red flag. Our emotions are signals... if we are around someone and feeling resentful, then

‘Women in particular are trained from birth to be helpful and kind and this means our self-worth can become tied up in how useful we are.’

that is a sign our boundaries are getting squished and something needs to shift.’

Tuning into our instincts feels key here. Sturmer advised listening to my gut and asked: ‘How do you feel when you think about that person? How do you feel when the phone rings and you see their name flash up? If you roll your eyes and think “here we go again,” then that tells you a lot about how you are feeling about their behaviour.’

We can be so busy and reactive, automatically saying yes to favours or demands on our time, that we forget to check whether we actually *want* to do something.

Sturmer also offers a gentle challenge that the issue may not be with our friends, but with ourselves. ‘What if you’re the problem? We often feel stuck in these friendships where we are giving and giving and seemingly everyone else is taking, but perhaps people might like to do us a favour in return, we just haven’t given them the opportunity. What if our friends would love to help us, but never get the chance?’

Time for an experiment!

It felt uncomfortable to challenge my friend to see if she would be willing to help me out in return, but Minnikin reframed it as testing a hypothesis, not the friendship. ‘If you have a hypothesis that you are being used as a friend, then treat it as a mini-experiment,’ she advised. ‘Become curious about the friendship and ask for a little favour, just a small request for help or support. If they say yes, then you have evidence that they are willing to be reciprocal. If they’re not willing to support you, then that’s also data for your hypothesis and you can use that to decide how you want to move forward.’

In terms of next steps, having a

discussion with friends about their behaviour or the friendship dynamic can feel awkward, no matter how close you are. Sturmer’s advice is to ‘see if you can communicate about it honestly and openly. Highlight what’s been going on and don’t be frightened of the conversation.’ She reminded me that although the thought of talking something through may feel challenging, if we feel unable to say no or are feeling used, we’re already uncomfortable. We may as well deal with the situation and see if we can resolve it.

Both experts recommended establishing and maintaining what Sturmer described as ‘healthy, grown-up, adult boundaries’ to avoid feeling taken advantage of. Minnikin reminded me: ‘We teach other people how to treat us, so if we have zero boundaries, then people will get used to us having zero boundaries and take advantage.’

I recognised my own lack of boundaries. I had said yes when it wasn’t the best timing for me, then resented it. My friend hadn’t asked me to change my plans, clean my house or provide snacks, these were my decisions and it wasn’t right to be grumpy with her about them. However, I also knew that the favours were often one-way and that needed to change or we’d need to talk it over.

I replied to my friend, explained that I wasn’t free for the rest of the day so couldn’t help her and it was fine. She got her work project sorted with her manager, which was probably a better outcome. Now that I’m more mindful of the dynamic, I am holding better boundaries and the favour requests have slowed down. I feel as though we are back to doing fun things together as friends and I no longer just feel useful. It’s been a positive shift and one which has hopefully preserved our friendship for the long term. ■

‘How do you feel when the phone rings and you see their name flash up?’

Do you need a **POWER PAUSE?**

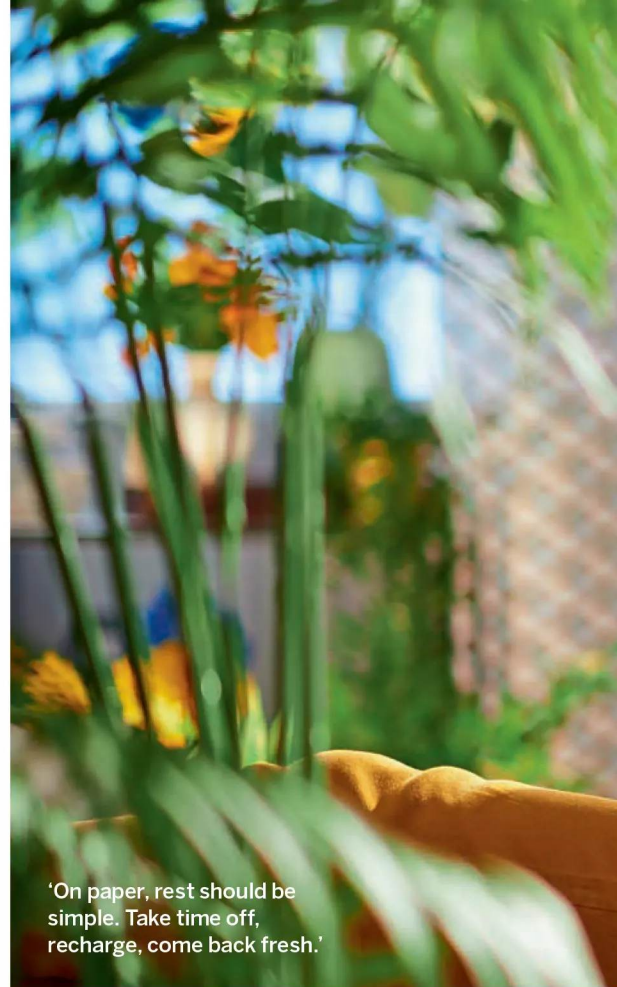
As women, we are told to push. Long before childbirth and in almost everything we do. As a result, we tell ourselves to ‘lean in’, ‘hustle’ and ‘keep going’, as we power on through the relentless, back-to-back demands of our daily lives. As we push harder, we sleep less, hoping that somehow our fatigued bodies and foggy minds will catch up. We are so scared to stop.

In a new column, we highlight some of the best ideas being shared on the Barefoot Coaching blogs on psychologies.co.uk. We will select interesting pieces published by Barefoot alumni to bring you fresh coaching insights. This month, meet burnout coach Jayne Morris

But no more. Across the UK, an increasing number of professional women are giving themselves permission to pause. Some are choosing to take a step back by changing roles, others by reducing hours, or even taking a temporary break — and not just to have babies. They aren’t downshifting because they are downgrading, they are downshifting as a strategic move to support them in levelling up.

They are taking a power pause

Unlike burnout, which can creep up on us like quicksand and enforce crisis career breaks that often come at huge career cost,



‘On paper, rest should be simple. Take time off, recharge, come back fresh.’

By **JAYNE MORRIS**

a power pause is intentional. It is a conscious choice to step away for a few months to rest, reset and return stronger.

I’ve seen the devastating consequences when people ignore the warning signs of an impending burnout for too long. Yet I’ve also witnessed how powerful it can be when someone presses pause on their own terms.

Why pausing feels so hard

Our relationship with rest is in need of a rebrand. We are taught from a young age to ‘work hard’ and ‘do our best’. As a result, rest has taken a back seat and been seen as an indulgence we can’t afford. Productivity has become currency. If we aren’t being busy all of the time, we feel like we are wasting time, or that others will perceive us as weak.

On paper, rest should be simple. Take time off, recharge, come back fresh. Yet in reality, our cultural conditioning makes this deeply counterintuitive.

We have convinced ourselves that constant exhaustion is just how it is for everyone. We’ve normalised ‘pushing

“Training to become a Health & Wellness Coach has completely changed my life, career and my own health.”

After spending 15 years in a high-pressure corporate marketing role with heavy responsibilities, Amanda suffered with high levels of stress and anxiety, rushing through life at 110mph with heart palpitations becoming the norm. Realising that her career no longer aligned with her values and seeing other women facing similar challenges, she set out on a mission to find and become a part of a solution.

“Discovering Health Coaching, has changed my life!”

“Studying with HCA gave me the confidence, knowledge, and importantly the tools to think about a different way to engage with people on the topic of health and wellbeing - particularly on the side of sustainable behaviour change. I graduated earlier

this year and am now in my dream job working for a company specialising in workplace wellbeing. I spend most days designing and delivering group coaching programmes for amazing companies like Nando's, universities and businesses in the US! Not only that, I've turned my own health around using learnings from the course, and after years feeling stressed and anxious, I've never felt better.”



Amanda, HCA Health Coach Graduate

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through'. But it isn't normal. It isn't natural. It isn't sustainable.

Research shows that ongoing stress impacts every system in the body. It impairs focus, memory and decision making. We find it harder to connect to our intuition, creativity and the clarity of thought that helps us make decisions. Our hormones are disrupted, impacting on our emotional regulation. Physically we experience all kinds of signs and symptoms of strain, indicating that our immunity is weakening and our cardiovascular system is struggling.

Put bluntly: not resting as a result of pushing on is far more dangerous than stopping.

Burnout vs. Power Pause

Burnout isn't a badge of honour. It's the body's emergency brake. When exhaustion extends into total collapse, the recovery time becomes an unknown quantity that can stretch into months or years, ruining both careers and confidence.

A power pause, on the other hand, is a proactive strategy for self-leadership. It is a game changer. Instead of waiting until collapse, you actively choose to pause. You

give yourself time to rest and recalibrate instead of taking things to the edge. The result? A rebalanced relationship with your work that brings vitality and longevity back to your body and your career.

Many of my clients who've taken power pauses return with refuelled passion, purpose, creativity and confidence. Far from damaging their careers, these breaks protect and up-level them.

What a Power Pause can look like

A power pause doesn't need to mean quitting your job or disappearing indefinitely. It could be:

- A one- to six-month sabbatical, negotiated with your employer.
- A career break between roles, intentionally carved out before your next step.
- An unpaid leave of absence, framed as a reset rather than a resignation.
- A planned pause to focus on wellbeing, study, or caregiving without abandoning your professional identity.

The common thread? Choice. A pause made on your terms, rather than one that's come due to collapse.

Psychologies

Meet the Experts



Jayne Morris

Is the UK's leading burnout coach. Her best-selling book, *Burnout to Brilliance: Strategies for Sustainable Success*, weaves together insights from nearly two decades as the UK's leading executive burnout coach.

Her new programme, *Burnout to Brilliance*, begins on September 23. [Balanceology.uk](https://www.balanceology.uk)

What is a Health & Wellness Coach?

Health Coaching is an extremely powerful process to reverse and prevent lifestyle-related chronic diseases. It involves working with people to help them re-model their life and create a whole new set of lifestyle habits that can lead to positive changes in diet, sleep, energy levels, exercise routines, stress reduction, time management, pain relief, life satisfaction and overall wellbeing.

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coaching offers promising avenues in various settings, including private practice, with doctors, chiropractors, psychologists, at health centres and clinics, within the corporate sector and at wellness retreats. It can also be the perfect additional skill set for those already working in healthcare, fitness, or nutrition.

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10 tips for negotiating a Power Pause

If your contract doesn't mention sabbaticals, don't be discouraged. Many of my clients have successfully created bespoke agreements with their employers. Here's how:

1 Lead with value. Frame your request as an investment in long-term productivity, creativity, and retention.

2 Choose your timing. Align the conversation with business cycles, propose it for a period directly after a project milestone or during a quieter season.

3 Do your research. Even if sabbaticals aren't official, there may be other examples of them that you can find within your company or sector.

4 Present solutions. Offer handover plans, temporary cover options, or phased transitions. Make it easy to say yes.

5 Suggest flexibility. Propose trial arrangements, reduced hours, or hybrid models as stepping stones towards your extended break.

6 Link to loyalty. Emphasise that taking a break in the near future increases your commitment and reduces risk of attrition further down the line.


7 Highlight innovation. Position rest as an enabler of fresh thinking, resilience, and problem-solving.

8 Negotiate openly. Be prepared to compromise in terms of unpaid leave, reduced salary, or different structures that may emerge.

9 Protect your pause. Make it clear this is true time away, not a disguised work-from-home stint. You'll need to have clear boundaries for your break to be worthwhile.

10 Plan your return. Map out reintegration, showing foresight and commitment to continuity.

Employers are increasingly recognising that burnout is far costlier than a temporary absence. A power pause can help prevent absenteeism, presenteeism and leavism. Framing your pause as a strategic decision for mutual benefit can be remarkably persuasive.

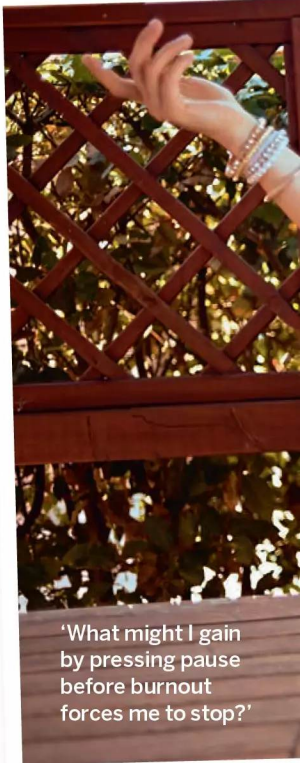


'A power pause is not absence, it's presence. It's choosing sustainability over self-sacrifice.'

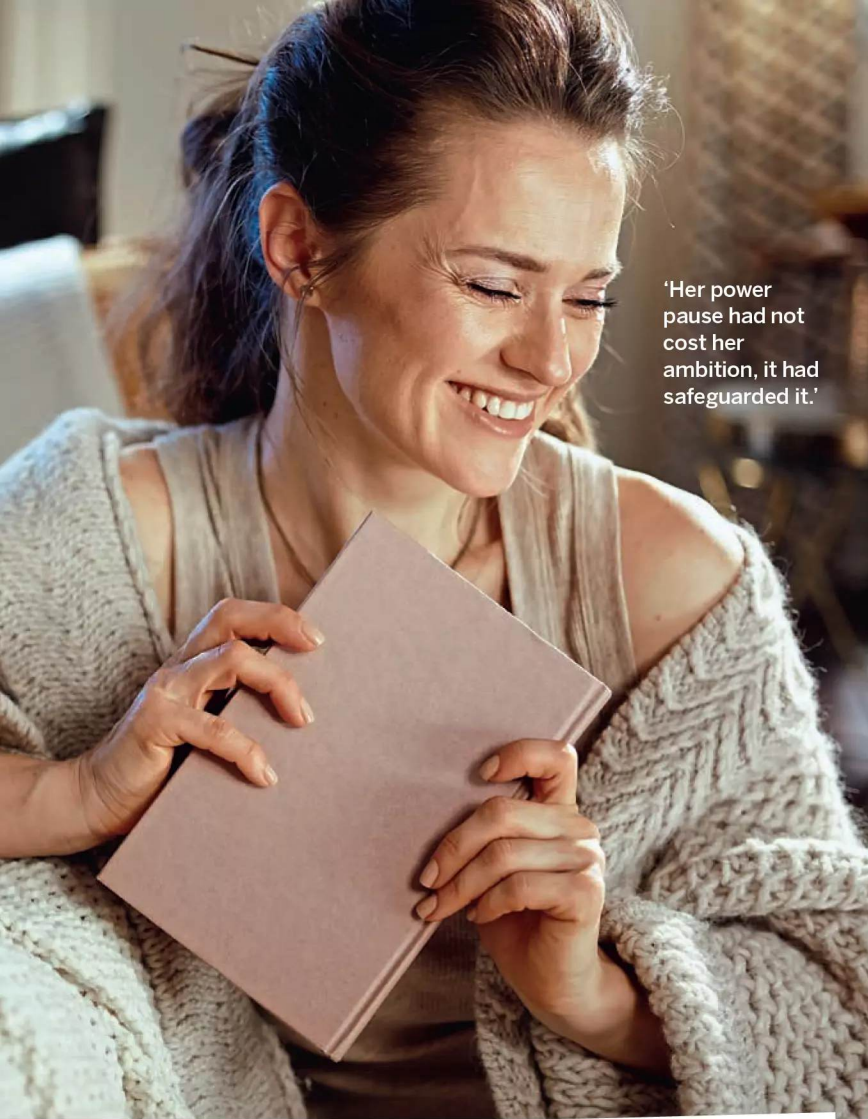
The hidden gifts of pressing pause

When Hannah, a high-achieving architect working for an international firm, took a power pause, it challenged her tremendously to trust her body and give herself the break that she so deeply needed. Since a young age she had approached everything in life at 100 miles per hour, striving to exceed the expectations of all around her. Working in a very male-dominated profession, she felt additional pressure to prove herself and be a role model for younger women coming into the business.

Hannah had become preoccupied with how best she could position herself for the next promotion: she was thinking about it night and day. After a series of weeks of not sleeping properly, it occurred to her that in overthinking things, she was hampering her own success. Out of the blue she also happened to receive some shocking news about a family member tragically passing away due to a heart attack brought on by



'What might I gain by pressing pause before burnout forces me to stop?'



'Her power pause had not cost her ambition, it had safeguarded it.'

stress. In that moment she became aware of a quiet inner voice suggesting she should stop. She courageously listened. The next day she spoke to her department head and successfully negotiated a three-month break. Shortly afterwards she reached out to me for coaching support.

In our work together we explored her inner drivers and uncovered the deep-rooted beliefs that had fuelled her relentless pace, helping her reframe success in a way that honoured both her wellbeing and her ambition. As a result, Hannah was able to return to work with a renewed approach, as well as a healthier relationship with rest, boundaries, and balance. What began as the most difficult decision of her career became the very thing that allowed her to thrive in it. When she returned, she did so with new clarity and resilience. Within a year, she was promoted from senior associate to equity partner, a move she credits not to driving harder, but to pausing long enough to realign her approach. Her power pause had not cost her ambition, it had safeguarded it.

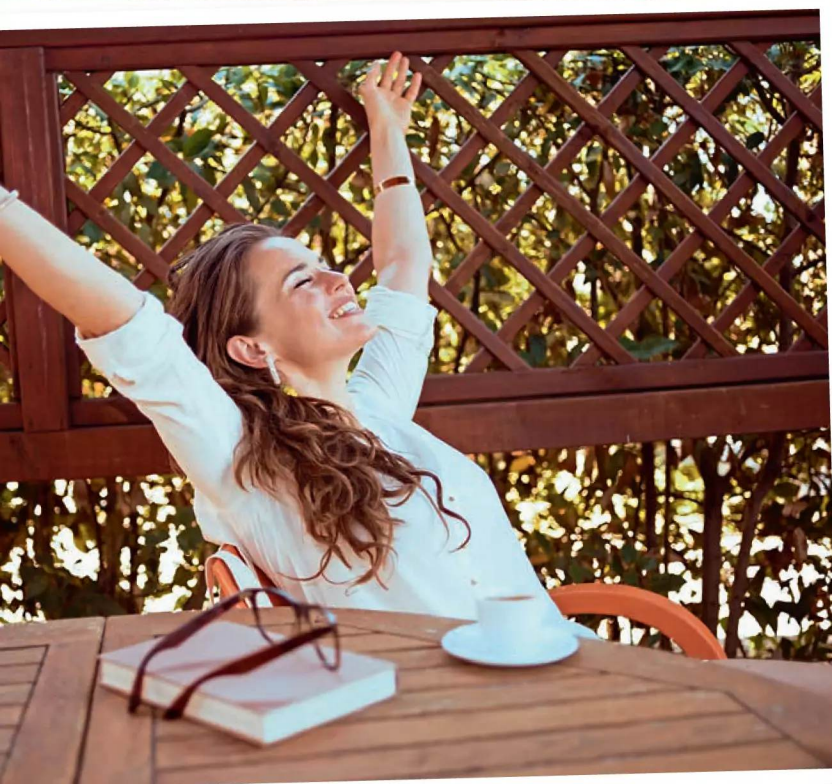
Giving yourself permission

Although we may need the buy in from someone else in order to take a power pause, we first need to fully believe in the idea for ourselves. Not just believe it will benefit us, but also believe that we are worth it. Often the hardest step of all is to honour ourselves. Saying yes to ourselves and putting our own needs first can feel very uncomfortable when we are used to self-sacrificing, but it is imperative in burnout prevention. So, if you've been teetering on the edge for too long, ask yourself 'what might I gain by pressing pause before burnout forces me to stop?'

A power pause is not absence, it's presence. It's choosing sustainability over self-sacrifice.

Burnout to Brilliance

A power pause is not about stepping away from ambition, it's about stepping into it more sustainably. When we give ourselves permission to stop, we signal to our nervous system that it is safe to rest and create the conditions to thrive, both personally and professionally. ■



HIDDEN SIGNS OF *autism*

I remember the first time I heard about autism. It was the 80s, and Dustin Hoffman was huge. Then he did *Rain Man*. It took the world — or at least our corner of the world — by storm. Every adult I knew was talking about it, stopping in the street, in the supermarket. It meant something.

Now, yes, I know Hoffman's character here was in fact an autistic savant, and this is very different from your typical autistic person. But it was the first I, my parents, their friends, and probably many people in the UK had ever heard of the condition.

Fast forward a few years, and I remember a friend explaining more to me. Picture the scene: you ask someone to post a letter for you. It's got the address on, and a stamp — you're just asking them to pop it in the post box down the road on their way to get milk. They return four hours later, having caught two buses across town (and back) to hand deliver the letter to the house in question. It hadn't crossed your mind that they would go

By **ANNE FLETCHER**

to those lengths, it was surely obvious that you simply meant to put it in the post box, instead of delivering it themselves? Obvious to you, yes, but not necessarily to them.

It's a mistake few people make in real life, and one you've probably never encountered. Unless their condition is particularly impactful, then many women, in particular, will learn how to mask it. They likely never get to the stage of trekking across town to hand-deliver the letter, learning



instead at an early age what is meant by 'posting', and many other terms.

And so they may manage in society, struggle on, getting by, without the condition ever coming to light. Indeed, the most recent figures show that most autistic people over the age of 40 in the UK are living without an official diagnosis. Researchers at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience at King's College London analysed research on UK healthcare data from 2018 and estimated that among autistic adults aged 40 to 59, 91% of men and 79% of women have not received a formal diagnosis. This number increased even more in the older age groups: 96% of men and 97% of women with autism over 60 are thought to be undiagnosed. In contrast, they estimated that the rate of undiagnosed autism for 20 to 39-year-olds is 52%, and 23% for those under 19.

People with autism can think much more literally than neurotypical people

Tim Nicholls, assistant director of policy, research and strategy at the National Autistic Society, said: 'This research clearly shows what we already know and hear about every day — there are high numbers of undiagnosed autistic adults and going through life without a diagnosis has a major impact on many aspects of their lives.'

'Autism assessments can be the first step to understanding people's needs and a diagnosis can be life-changing and, in some cases, lifesaving.'

So what do we need to look out for, Dustin Hoffman and unexpected posting trips aside? While every autistic person is different, common signs of the condition include difficulty in understanding social rules and sensory sensitivities.

To better understand how autism may present later in life, Dr Lisa Williams, clinical psychologist and founder of The Autism Service, has shared seven subtle signs of autism that often go unnoticed in adults over 40...

1 Reliance on structure and predictability

'Older autistic adults who have remained undiagnosed for much of their lives often fall into a set routine, which can make them feel more comfortable and in control,' explains Williams. 'Reliance on this can become more noticeable with age, as unexpected changes and disruptions to this routine can trigger stress and anxiety.'

'Signs of a reliance on routine can include extensive planning ahead, sticking to daily habits, and feeling unsettled by spontaneous or sudden changes in plans.'

2 Having specific and obsessive interests

'It's not uncommon for anyone with autism to develop deep interests in particular

'A diagnosis can be life-changing, or even lifesaving.'

HIDDEN SIGNS OF AUTISM

subjects or hobbies, but this can be especially the case for older adults,' says Williams. 'This can appear to be a lifelong passion, but if it dominates their free time and tends to be something they talk about almost obsessively, it could be a sign that the person falls somewhere on the autistic spectrum.'

3 Sensory sensitivities

'Heightened sensitivity to key sensory sources like light, noise, smells and textures can persist into later years for autistic adults,' notes Williams. 'Noticeable discomfort in crowded and loud environments or with particular fabrics might indicate sensory processing differences typical of autism.'

4 Struggles with change

'Change can be especially challenging for older adults who may have undiagnosed autism,' highlights Williams. 'Moving house, starting a new job or adapting to new technology can draw out natural anxieties about a lack of predictability and familiarity. Consistent signs of this can be a hallmark of autism.'

5 Difficulty in understanding social rules

'Unwritten social norms, such as eye contact, small talk, respect for personal space, body language and understanding subtle humour, as just a few examples, can be more difficult to understand for older adults with autism,' says Williams. 'People with autism often think differently from neurotypical people and can interpret things much more literally or struggle to pick up on subtle social cues.'

'This may result in feeling out of step in social settings or needing extra time to process interactions, even with years of life experience.'

6 Struggles in romantic relationships

'Adults with autism may experience challenges in forming or maintaining romantic relationships,' says Williams. 'This can include difficulty expressing or interpreting affection, discomfort with physical intimacy, or preferring

independence over cohabitation. They often thrive in relationships with partners who are understanding of their needs, communicate openly, and are willing to adapt to their preferred ways of connecting.'

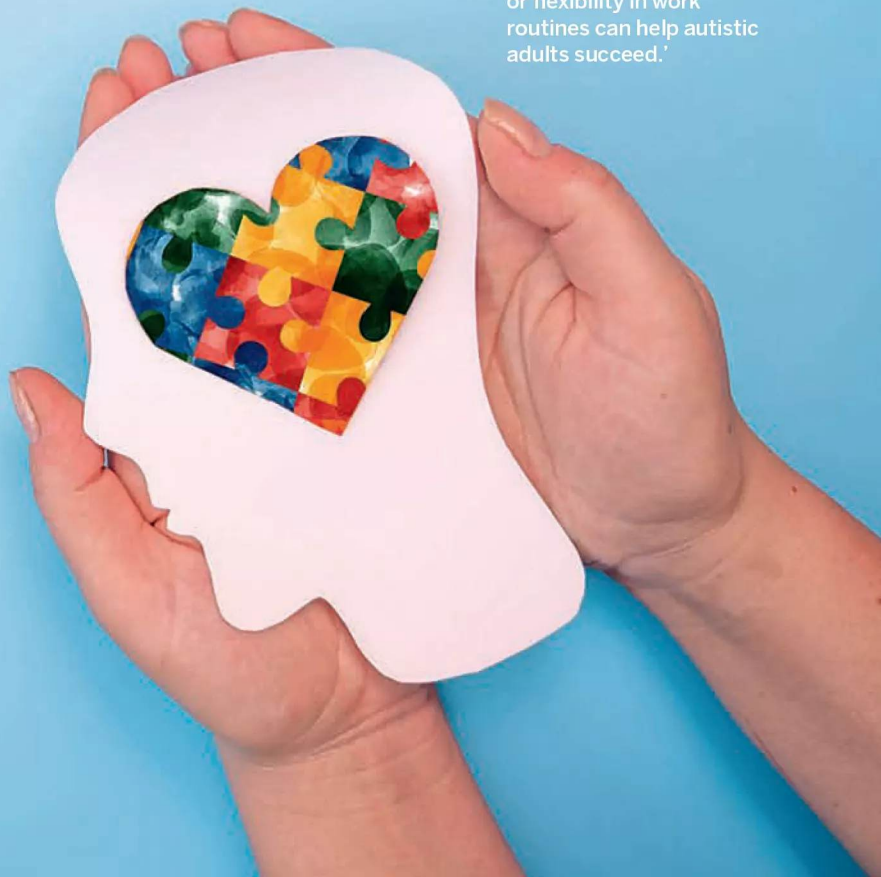
7 Integration difficulties in the workplace

'While many autistic adults excel in specific roles or tasks, they may struggle with aspects of workplace integration, such as adapting to frequent changes, navigating office politics, or participating in group meetings that feel overwhelming,' says Williams.

'However, supportive managers who provide reasonable adjustments, like clear communication or flexibility in work routines, can help them succeed. Without this understanding, autistic employees may face unnecessary stress, conflict, or even unfair disciplinary action.'

For more information about autism diagnosis and assessments, visit the National Autistic Society's website at autism.org.uk.

'Clear communication or flexibility in work routines can help autistic adults succeed.'





HOW TO TALK YOURSELF INTO A *pay rise*



'Speak clearly and calmly. Present your case: why you believe a raise is justified.'

An old colleague of mine was absolutely amazing when it came to salary negotiations. She'd set her stall out, go in all guns blazing, and a few minutes later she'd come out with a few extra thousand in her pay packet. I watched her do it more than once, desperately trying to pick up tips on how to manage the process... It never worked.

By **ANNE FLETCHER**

But if, like me, and many other women, you would rather go to the dentist for some serious root-canal work than ask for a rise, all is not lost. Here we've spoken to three experts to find out when, how and what to ask for in salary negotiations — so you can feel confident asking for what you deserve.

'Understanding how to ask for a pay rise is such an important skill,' says life-direction coach Jessica Silva. 'As a coach, it is something I often work with my clients on. And having been a senior manager in corporate, I have also been on the receiving end of such requests and seen how some people make it impossible to say no, and others miss the mark completely.'

'For women in particular, asking for a pay rise often brings up self-doubt,' says self-development expert Sarah Farmer. It's true. The latest stats say that a third of women don't have the confidence to ask for a rise, compared to only a fifth of men. So how do we help ourselves become 'pay-rise confident'? Before you fire off that meeting request to your manager, there are a few steps you need to follow...

Do your research

'Find out what people in similar roles are earning, both inside and outside your company,' says Silva. 'Sites like Glassdoor or industry-specific salary surveys can be helpful. Understanding your market value gives you confidence going into the conversation, helps set realistic expectations, and arms you with evidence.'

'Don't forget non-salary benefits: flexible working, job title, training opportunities, or extra holiday might also matter to you. If your ideal salary isn't possible, know in advance what else you'd consider a win. This gives you more tools to play with in the negotiation process.'

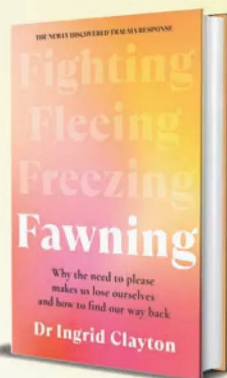
Build currency

'You have to work on building your performance currency AND relationship currency at work,' says business psychologist and executive coach KK Harris. 'Quite often, people get caught up in the "doing" — their performance currency. They're just working, >

Fawning

DISCOVER THE FOURTH TRAUMA RESPONSE AND HOW TO HEAL

Do you avoid conflict?
Do you care for others at your own expense?
Do you people-please?



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not as I see them"
Pablo Picasso

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TALK YOURSELF INTO A PAY RISE

‘Don’t apologise, or minimise your request. This isn’t a favour.’

working, working. But they’ve not built a network, they don’t have friends or advocates in the office, so they don’t have any relationship currency. This means nobody’s talking or thinking about you when you’re not in the room. You’re playing yourself small by not making an impression.

‘If your performance currency is not high, and you haven’t formed any workplace relationships, that manager you’re asking for a pay rise is going to say no. But if your performance currency speaks for itself, and you’ve got other people advocating for you and celebrating you, you’re probably going to be one of the lucky ones.’

Depending on your personality, that kind of behaviour can feel challenging, agrees Farmer, but there are ways round it. ‘Many women find that asking for a pay rise can feel uncomfortable; confidence gaps and imposter syndrome often creep in. However, it’s essential to remember that this is not just about self-belief; it’s also about strategy.’

‘The best approach is to make sure a pay rise is never a surprise. Use your mid-year or end-of-year reviews to clarify what you expect and deserve and what you need to deliver for the answer to be “yes”. Get this agreement written down. That way, you know the goalposts and it won’t get forgotten or misconstrued over time.’

‘In the months leading up to the conversation, don’t assume your work speaks for itself; it rarely does. Too many women under-communicate their wins. Make sure decision-makers consistently hear about the value you’re adding and that you’ve achieved the agreed targets. This primes their brains so that, when you ask, it feels like the obvious outcome.’

Prepare and practice

‘Don’t wing it,’ advises Silva. ‘Emotional discomfort and wanting to get the conversation over with quickly is one of the most common things that will stop you from

being successful in your endeavour. Practise what you want to say, ideally with a friend roleplaying your manager. Try out different ways of asking. Rehearsing the key points out loud helps reduce anxiety and stops you rushing and missing your key points.

‘And don’t apologise or minimise your request. This isn’t a favour; it’s a fair, professional conversation. Think about how your manager prefers to communicate and tailor your approach accordingly.’

Now you’re feeling prepared, it is time to book that meeting — and make it clear what you want to discuss, so they’re not caught off guard. ‘This gives them time to gather relevant information, making a “yes” more likely,’ says Silva. ‘Springing the discussion on them might sound tempting, but it’s unlikely to get the result you want.’

Manage the moment.

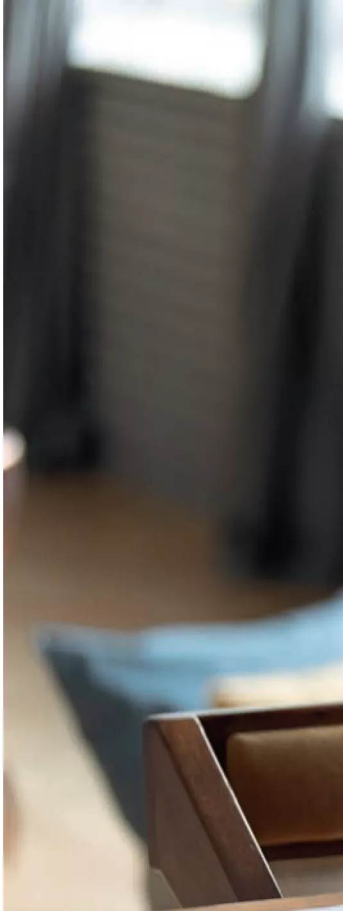
‘Before the meeting, take a few deep breaths to settle your nerves,’ says Silva. ‘Speak clearly and calmly. Present your case: why you believe a raise is justified, and what similar roles are paid. If you’re asking for significantly more, use a slightly higher figure as a starting point (also known as an anchor) to give room for negotiation.’

‘Once you’ve made your case, stop talking. Silence can feel uncomfortable, but resist the urge to fill the space. Give your manager the opportunity to respond. You will learn much more by really listening to their answer than if you are planning your next argument.’

Have a courageous conversation

Harris agrees that if you’ve done your preparation thoroughly, you can go in confidently and ask for what you deserve. ‘Tell them exactly what pay rise you want. Bring up your last performance review. Prove that you’re on track and delivering. Then, ask if it’s in the budget.’

‘Whatever the conversation, you’re going to have to be courageous. Conversations about



‘Building self-belief is as important as hitting targets.’



money are some of the scariest conversations we have — but they're usually only scary because most people haven't done their research. Things like the annually reported gender and race pay gaps — have you looked into it? Does it apply to you or your workplace?

'Without the knowledge, you go in fearful. Come with a number supported by research and you'll be bolder. Mental leverage comes with knowing your value.'

Be constructive and open

'Stay calm and professional,' says Silva. 'If you feel flustered, have a strategy to stay grounded like lightly pressing your thumb and finger together or touching your hand to your leg. Ask open questions to keep the conversation going. If the full raise isn't possible, explore other options that would be valuable to you. Your manager may want to offer something, help them help you. Also, be patient, they may not

have the authority to say "yes" immediately and need to advocate for you with HR or senior management after the meeting.'

And if you're not successful this time, keep on pushing, says Harris. 'There are budgets, timelines, things that businesses might need to organise and adhere to — but don't give up. Ask for an estimated timeline. Then, immediately drop a calendar invite to your manager to schedule your next review. This is your life, and your career. Be persistent.'

If being so overt about your intentions feels difficult, don't worry, it's challenging for most of us. But Farmer also shares it's important to look inwards at why you're finding it hard. 'Do you genuinely believe you deserve the increase?' she asks. 'If your inner voice says "I'm not ready" or "I'm not good enough," it will affect how you set yourself up for success and ask for what you want. Building self-belief is as important as hitting targets.'

JESSICA SILVA'S TOP 5 THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- Don't make threats like 'I'll leave if I don't get it.' Most people don't respond well to this.
- Use evidence, not just opinion: performance reviews, feedback from colleagues, or recent achievements all help your case.
- If it's off-cycle, be clear why now is the right

- time to raise it and what you've done recently.
- If the answer is 'not now', ask what you need to do to get a raise in future and when the next conversation can be.
- Keep the tone friendly, positive, and professional. Remind them how valuable you are. Make it easy for them to advocate for you.

Psychologies

Meet the Experts



Jessica Silva

A life direction coach and founder of The Restless and Jessica Silva Coaching, helping people create their own definition of success

Therestless.co



KK Harris

A business psychologist and executive coach at Talking Talent, where she helps organisations accelerate advancement for under-represented talent.



Sarah Farmer

An imposter-syndrome expert, best-selling author, and leadership trainer. She is the founder of Bright & Brilliant leadership coaching and a self-development expert

brightandbrilliant.com



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Sally Editor-in-Chief,
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With Jackee Holder

Walking With Your Pen

A soulful journaling practice that helps you find clarity, shift perspective, and reconnect with yourself, one turn at a time

“The sunshine in London has meant long walks across the urban sprawl of the city. I’ve been visiting the great oak in Brockwell Park, following the ancient Thames Path in South London, and rediscovering my own neighbourhood by foot. I love walking as much as I love writing, and I’ve come to realise the two have a lot in common. Walking isn’t just about getting from one place to another. It’s about moving with intention, with curiosity, with openness to what the path might reveal.

We can take pilgrimages in our own backyards without even knowing it. Outer journeys toward places in our environment that hold meaning for us. Writing, too, can become a kind of pilgrimage. It has its own twists and turns, its own pauses and surprises, and often brings revelations when we least expect them. This is why I want to share a practice with you this month, one that brings the wisdom of walking into the space of writing. A way of journeying on the page when you can’t step outside into a physical labyrinth.

This practice is analogue, deliberately inviting you to move away from digital speed and back to pen on paper. Writing by hand slows us down in a world that constantly pushes us forward. It creates a breathing space, a way to step back from the immediacy of AI and screens, and instead access the quieter, deeper intelligence of your own mind.

I originally created Writing the Labyrinth journaling practice in 2010, inspired by labyrinths I’d walked across the UK and the US. I can still picture the red earth and white stones of a desert labyrinth in Arizona, the fold-out canvas labyrinth in a Hampstead Heath church, and the grassy one overlooking the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey. Each one offered a different kind of clarity, but they all reminded me of this: a labyrinth is not a maze. It isn’t designed to trick or trap you. It’s a single winding path that leads you inward, to the centre, and then guides you back out again. You cannot get lost whilst walking or writing a labyrinth.

For centuries, people have walked

labyrinths to steady themselves, to work through challenges, to gain perspective. In modern times this ancient practice has found its way into hospitals, prisons, churches, and community spaces as a therapeutic tool. A landscape labyrinth was opened in an NHS Trust so staff and patients could benefit from a space to pause, reflect, and be guided by their own thoughts and intuitions.

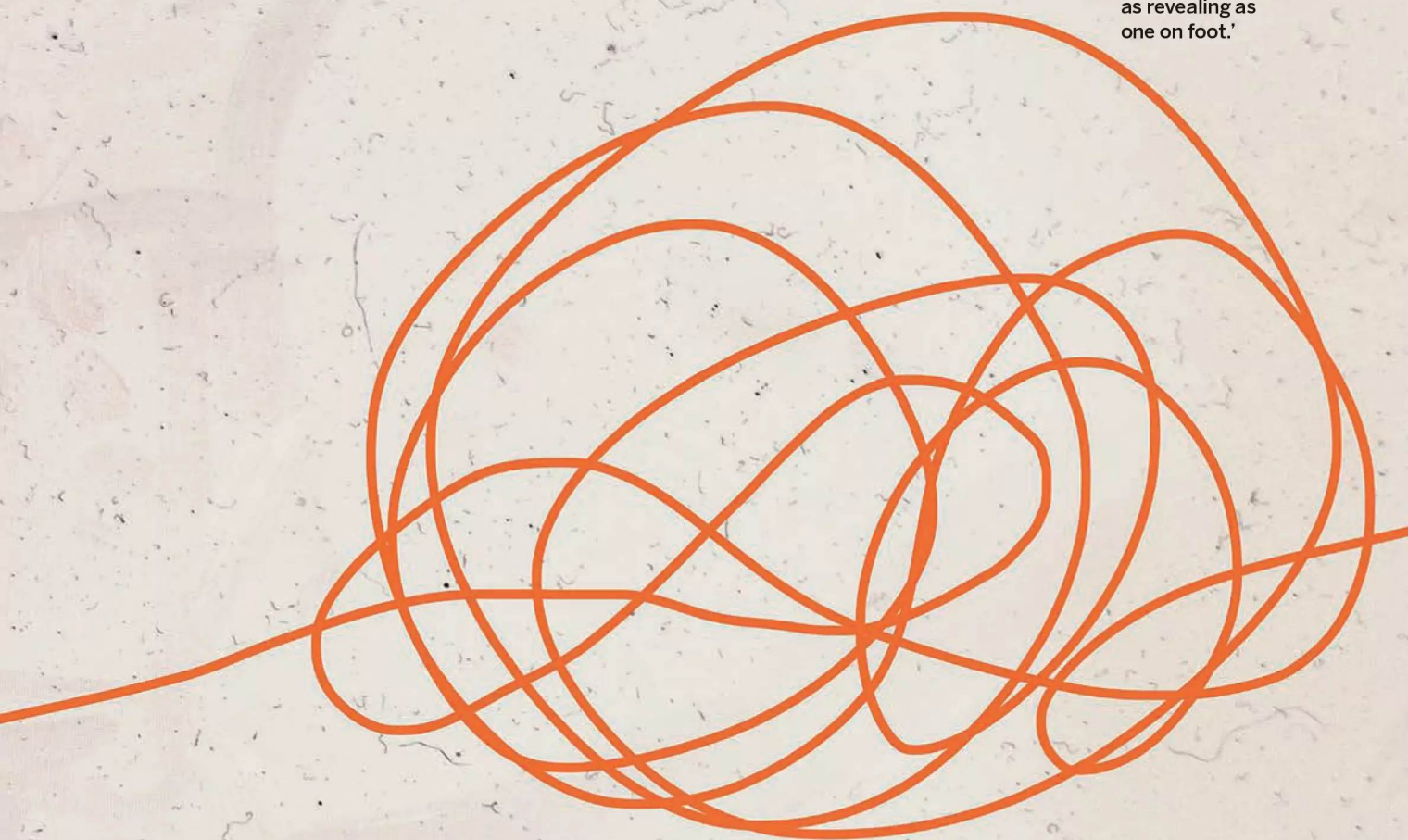
Writing through the labyrinth on paper works in much the same way. Instead of walking with your feet, you walk with your pen. So how do you begin?

You have two options. You can either download and print a copy of the Writing the Labyrinth pages from my website as shown on the following



‘I’ve seen participants surprised by what emerges: new insights, fresh perspectives, a sense of release.’

'Take your time:
You'll find the
journey on the
page can be just
as revealing as
one on foot.'



page (visit JackeeHolder.com), or you can create one in your notebook.

If you're drawing your own, don't worry about it being perfect. Simply take a blank page and start sketching a spiral or circular path, letting it wind its way towards a centre. Keep it loose and playful. The lines don't need to be symmetrical, the beauty lies in the process, not in the precision. Even a wobbly, uneven labyrinth still works beautifully.

Another way to try this, if you don't feel like drawing, is to let your writing itself form the labyrinth. Begin your sentences at the edge of the page and let them spiral slowly inward, twisting and turning until you reach the middle. When you're ready to 'walk out,' turn to a fresh page and

write your way back outwards again. However you approach it, the invitation is the same: to move across the page in a way that mirrors the winding path of a labyrinth. Feel free to get creative, add arrows, doodles, or little markers if you lose your way. Fill the corners and edges of the page with stray thoughts. Take your time. You'll find the journey on the page can be just as revealing as one on foot.

It's worth saying here that some people feel resistance at the start. The non-linear approach can feel strange, like giving up control, like not knowing what comes next. Some even dismiss it as 'childlike'. But again and again I've seen participants surprised by what emerges: new insights, fresh perspectives, a sense of release.



**JACKEE
HOLDER**

*is a coach,
author, interfaith
minister and
co-founder
of The School
Of Journaling.*

Known for her soulful and practical approach she weaves together creativity, the natural world and the power of the written word to support emotional clarity and personal transformation. Jackee's work appears at the intersection of journaling, wellbeing, and embodied wisdom.

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* You, Write Now

With Jackee Holder

If you'd like to use my version, the Labyrinth PDF from my website contains two versions for you to complete: one for writing in and one for writing out.

- Set aside around 30 minutes where you won't be disturbed.
- Bring a pen (coloured pens can help differentiate between the two practices) and your printed labyrinth pages.
- Think of a question, challenge, or theme you'd like to bring into the labyrinth.

Before you place pen to paper, take a moment to pause. Breathe in slowly. Let your shoulders drop. Exhale, and give yourself permission to step into this journey.

Writing In

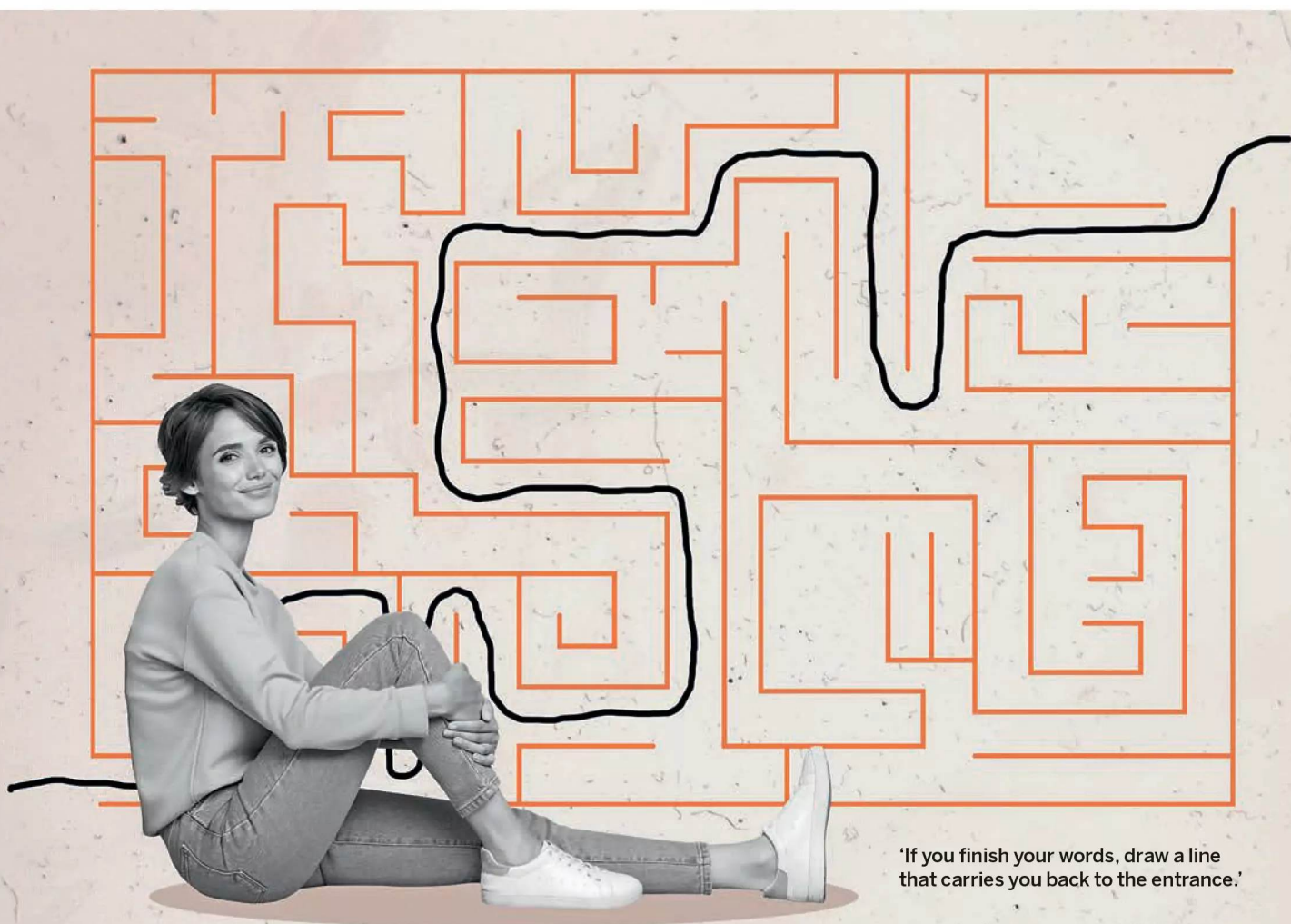
- Begin at the entrance of the first labyrinth (Writing In). As you follow the path, write your thoughts, feelings, and reflections directly onto the page.
- Describe the issue and how you feel about it. How is it affecting you? How is it affecting others?
- Don't worry if your handwriting feels awkward at first. In workshops I've seen participants tilt and turn the page to follow the path until suddenly the rhythm takes over. Just keep going. The pen, like your feet, will find its flow.
- If you run out of words before you reach the centre, simply draw a line to carry you there. Imagine yourself

walking inwards as you draw. Pause if you need to, just as you might when walking.

Journal prompts for writing in:

- What am I carrying with me right now?
- What feels heavy, unresolved, or uncertain?
- What am I leaving behind as I walk this path?
- What am I noticing or becoming aware of?

Reaching the centre on the page is like reaching the centre of a physical labyrinth. It's a natural place to pause, take a deep breath and close your eyes. Embrace a moment to take stock before moving outward again. Notice what may have shifted in you.



'If you finish your words, draw a line that carries you back to the entrance.'

- How does your body feel?
- Where are your thoughts now compared to when you started?
- What has softened or lifted?
- What do you know now that was not known at the start?

I like to hold this practice as something close to sacred. In group settings, the silence as participants write into the labyrinth often feels charged, almost luminous. I remember one workshop where we built a physical labyrinth from string, stones, shells, and crystals. At the centre, we invited women to take a moment, to sit and write, then carry a single rose with them on the way out. That sense of ritual, writing as a form of meaning-making was one of the inspirations behind this practice.

Shifting emotions

On my morning walks, I often begin in one weather and end in another: Sun gives way to clouds, or drizzle brightens into light. Our emotions can shift in the same way. You may not feel the same at the centre as you did at the entrance. Before you move onto the second labyrinth, try a simple breathing practice: inhale deeply for four counts, hold for four, exhale for six. Repeat a few times to create space before starting the outward journey.

In group courses, participants will often complete both labyrinths in one sitting, moving seamlessly from writing in to writing out. Working individually, some clients prefer to pause between the two, giving themselves space to let their reflections settle before returning for the outward journey. Both approaches work, it's about listening to what you need.

Writing Out

When you're ready, turn to your second labyrinth. This time you begin in the centre and move outward. Start at the centre and write along the path as it leads you back to the labyrinth entrance. The focus now is on what has shifted: What insights, possibilities, or new perspectives are emerging? If you finish your words

before the path ends, draw a line that carries you out back to the entrance. Here are some journal prompts for writing out:

- What insights have surfaced?
- What new possibilities do I see?
- How can I shift my focus from the problem to the solution?
- Where do I see my future self as it relates to this problem?
- If my future self could give me one piece of advice what would it be?
- What small actions could I take now?

If you run out of space, continue in your notebook or in the margins of the labyrinth itself. In one workshop a participant filled up all the space around the labyrinth with her additional thoughts and reflections, so much was revealed to her during the practice.

When you've finished, take three deep breaths to acknowledge the journey you've just taken. Then set a timer for ten minutes and freewrite about the whole experience. You might reflect on:

- How is this journalling practice different from my usual journalling?

- What clarity have I gained?
- What will I carry forward?

This practice isn't about polished writing or instant answers. Sometimes the labyrinth offers clarity right away; other times, it takes several journeys before insights emerge. What matters is the space it creates, a pause from the noise of the outside world, a way to meet yourself with curiosity, compassion and creativity.

Again and again, I've seen this simple tool help people move from confusion to clarity, from heaviness to lightness, from stuckness to possibility. The labyrinth reminds us that the way forward is not always straight, but it is always guiding us somewhere meaningful. And that's why it's such a powerful journalling prompt, because every twist, every turn, and every pause has something to teach us if we are willing to walk it, on foot or with pen in hand. As Rev. Mike Gartland puts it: 'The journey to the centre of the labyrinth is symbolic of remembering and reconnecting with the whole of ourselves in a compassionate and accepting way.' ■



'Each labyrinth has its own twists and turns, its own pauses and surprises.'

'Meet yourself with curiosity, compassion and creativity.'

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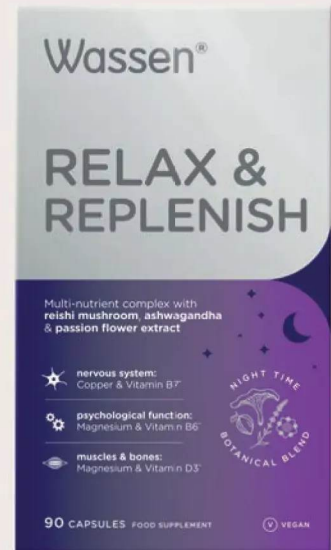
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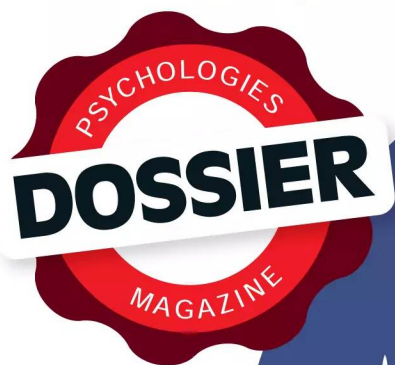
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The Reset Button

*How sleep recalibrates
the whole you*

'Far from a passive break, sleep is one of the busiest shifts your body ever works.'



From the outside, sleep looks simple: eyes closed, body still. But inside, your body and brain are working overtime, running a highly coordinated programme of repair and recalibration. While you're sleeping, immune cells are patrolling your bloodstream, repairing microscopic damage and reinforcing your defences for the day ahead. Your brain sorts

through the day's mental load, deciding which memories to preserve, which to discard, and softening the emotional edges that might otherwise keep you on high alert. Hormones shift into night mode, lowering cortisol, raising melatonin, and releasing growth hormone so your body can aid cellular rebuilding and support muscle recovery.

Even your metabolism takes its cues from sleep, fine-tuning blood sugar regulation and appetite control so you start the next day balanced. Meanwhile, your internal clock checks its bearings, keeping everything from digestion to energy cycles running in harmony.

Far from being a passive break, sleep is one of the busiest, most restorative shifts your body will ever work.

Sleep specialist and founder of The Insomnia Clinic Kathryn Pinkham explains: 'Sleep is an active process where the brain and body do essential "housekeeping". During deep (slow-wave) sleep, we repair tissues and restore energy, while REM sleep processes emotions, consolidates memories and helps us make sense of the day's events.'

In fact, sleep recalibrates everything from your cardiovascular health to your emotional resilience. The repair processes that take place help muscles recover, allow blood vessels to relax and mend, lower blood pressure to ease strain on the heart, and reset insulin sensitivity to stabilise blood sugar for the next day.

But this recalibration depends on

more than simply spending hours in bed. It needs both quality and rhythm. When sleep is light, broken, or irregular, the processes that restore you are left unfinished. The brain may only partially consolidate memories, hormonal cycles may remain unsettled, and physical repair can be cut short. Without these

complete resets, your body's systems start to drift out of sync. You may still get through the day, but underneath, the effort to keep everything functioning smoothly is greater, and the cracks begin to show.

When sleep runs deep and steady, the benefits are far-reaching. Every system in your body gets the chance to recover fully. Hormones peak at the right time to drive repair, the cardiovascular system uses the drop in blood pressure to relieve strain, and the brain clears away the day's waste. Energy builds instead of drains,

mood steadies, digestion runs smoothly, and the mind feels sharper. When that depth and consistency are missing, the effects ripple through every part of you.

We'll explore how rest repairs the mind, supports resilience, clears the brain, aligns the body, and how you can harness those benefits every night. Because when sleep works the way it should, so do you.

Psychologies *Meet the Experts*



Kathryn Pinkham

Founder of The Insomnia Clinic, the UK's largest specialist service for insomnia. She has over a decade of experience helping thousands improve their sleep through cognitive behavioural therapy

'Without these resets, your body starts to drift out of sync'

The emotional edge

How sleep shapes your mood and mindset

We've all had those days that just feel harder to handle, and often, they follow a rough night's sleep. With insufficient rest, small problems suddenly feel overwhelming. You second-guess yourself more easily, your patience runs low, and your thoughts can turn inward and be unkind. It's not just a bad mood or a stressful day. It's the emotional toll of a tired brain trying to cope without enough sleep.

Sleep shapes how we feel, think and connect. It influences our mood, memory, confidence, and even how we interpret social signals. When we're sleep-deprived, the brain becomes more reactive, more prone to negativity, and less able to regulate emotions.

Dr Allie Hare, consultant in sleep and Co-President of the British Sleep Society explains: 'The brain's threat-detection and emotion-processing centre is more active, and the part of the brain responsible for reasoning, decision-making, and self-control is lost, so we are more reactive and quick to anger.' This is why things feel more personal, harder to let go, and why our inner voice can become unusually harsh when we're tired.

This shift doesn't just affect us internally. It alters how we see the world and how we relate to others. Even one poor night's sleep can subtly distort our emotional lens.


Professor Caroline Horton, a chartered psychologist and

Professor of Sleep and Cognition at Lincoln Bishop University, has spent the past two decades researching how sleep, dreaming, memory, and emotion are deeply intertwined. 'After a single night of reduced sleep, we tend to interpret neutral stimuli as if it's threatening to us,' she says. 'Our moods can be flat, and low-level anxiety is common.'

She adds that sleep loss also makes us more likely to misread expressions, which can create feelings of social isolation at the very time we most need connection.

Over time, these emotional changes can take root. What starts as a few rough days after poor sleep can quietly grow into something more persistent. Professor Horton explains, 'Even a small reduction in deep sleep increases anxiety levels the next day,' and if that cycle continues, your mind can start to get stuck in a constant state of stress. 'Insomnia is commonly co-existent with anxiety and depression,' she says. In other words, what begins as a tired week can quietly snowball into chronic burnout or ongoing emotional imbalance.

The relationship between sleep and emotion works in both directions. Poor sleep can heighten emotional reactivity, while difficult emotions during the day can make it harder to fall or stay asleep. Stress, worry or low mood can keep the



'Optimism and self-esteem have been found to correlate with sleep duration.'

'Some people notice their self-criticism becomes harsher after a poor night, or they feel less patient and compassionate.'



Psychologies
Meet the Experts



Dr Allie Hare

A consultant in sleep medicine, Co-President of the British Sleep Society, and Co-Founder of Grace Sleep, the world's leading holistic sleep clinic. Based at Royal Brompton and Harefield Hospitals in London, she specialises in conditions such as insomnia, sleep apnoea, restless legs syndrome, and parasomnias.

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mind alert at night, preventing the brain from fully downshifting. With continued disruption, this creates a feedback loop where emotional strain disrupts sleep, and poor sleep makes emotions even harder to manage.

Sleep itself is designed to help us process what we have carried through the day. 'Sleep provides the context in which emotional memories can be processed and regulated,' Professor Horton explains.

REM sleep (rapid eye movement sleep, the stage associated with vivid dreaming and heightened brain activity) in particular plays a key role in helping you regulate your emotions, helping your brain sort, solve and stabilise. When cut short, the emotional load we went to bed with often lingers into the next day, unprocessed and amplified.

And this processing doesn't just influence how you feel; it can also shape how you see yourself. According to Professor Horton, 'Optimism and self-esteem have been found to correlate with sleep duration. People who are well-slept also tend to rate themselves more positively and are rated more positively by others.'

Sleep loss can even change the tone of your inner voice. 'Some people notice their self-criticism becomes harsher,' says Kathryn Pinkham, 'or they feel less patient and compassionate, both with themselves and others.'

When sleep continues to fall short, those internal shifts start to move from subtle changes in mood to more noticeable changes in behaviour and control. As Dr Hare explains, the striatum (a region of the brain linked to reward processing and impulsivity) becomes hyperactive when we're sleep-deprived, which can lead to mood swings and emotional instability. You might feel emotionally flat one moment, overly

'People often report feeling less resilient after a poor night.'





reactive the next, caught in negative thoughts, and sensing your confidence slowly eroding.

Pinkham sees this often in her work. 'People often report feeling less resilient after a poor night, and over time, this can chip away at confidence.'

But it's not always about how long you sleep. Sometimes the hours are there, but the depth is not. The brain hasn't run its full cycle. The nervous system hasn't downshifted. The dreams were cut short. And the stress you hoped to sleep off is still there when you wake up.

Yet the steps towards better sleep are often simpler than we think. Establishing a regular bedtime, reducing evening stimulation, and introducing calming rituals all signal to your mind and body it's safe to unwind.

Pinkham advises simplicity: 'You don't need a long routine before bed, rather just the things you relate to bed. For example, washing your face, cleaning your teeth and reading for 10 minutes can be enough to signal to your brain that it is bedtime. If we engage in long routines with baths, sleepy teas, yoga, then you are actually adding too much pressure to sleep.'

Dr Hare suggests small adjustments such as dimming lights, limiting screen time, or journalling thoughts to ease the transition to sleep.

Professor Horton emphasises managing emotional stress earlier in the day. 'Emotional concerns require consideration during the day well before sleep, with there being at least half an hour of relaxation time before trying to get to sleep.' She also

highlights research on mental offloading, 'A recent experiment identified that people get to sleep more quickly when writing down the tasks they have to do the following day before sleep.'

Pinkham recommends

dedicating a short daily window to confront emotional concerns directly. 'One tool I often recommend is to set aside a 15-minute window each day purely for writing down what's on your mind. By writing them down, you're effectively telling your mind, "I hear you."

'Instead of ignoring or distracting yourself, you're giving your thoughts attention at a specific, contained time. Then, when you go to bed at night, your brain tends to be quieter. You're more able to notice passing thoughts without getting caught up in them, because you've already listened

earlier in the day.'

This simple habit does more than clear your head before bed. It reshapes the emotional state you bring into sleep. By giving your thoughts time and space during the day, you ease the load your mind carries at night. That's not only about drifting off more easily. It's also about protecting the emotional foundation that sleep restores every night. Sleep is more than recovery. It is the bedrock of how you think, connect, and respond to life. And when that foundation is strong, you are too.

Psychologies *Meet the Experts*



Professor Caroline Horton

Professor of Sleep and Cognition at Lincoln Bishop University, where she also directs the DrEAMSLab. Caroline is a chartered psychologist and is Trustee of the British Sleep Society

The deep brain cleanse

A dive into what really happens while you're asleep

Falling asleep might feel like switching off, but it marks the start of the night shift for your brain, and it's one of its busiest and most important times. While your body rests, your brain goes into maintenance mode. It clears waste, sorts memories, regulates emotions, and quietly restores your ability to think, feel and function the next day. What looks like mere rest from the outside is, in fact, a critical window for deep repair and reorganisation within.

One of your brain's most vital overnight jobs is housekeeping. All day long, it works hard to keep you thinking, responding, remembering and reacting.

In the process, it produces waste, a natural by-product. This includes proteins, harmless in small amounts but increasingly harmful if allowed to build up.

A build-up has been linked with neurodegenerative conditions such

as Alzheimer's disease, where these proteins form plaques that disrupt normal brain function.

To manage this, the brain relies on a specialised cleaning network that literally washes away waste, moving it through channels between brain cells. This system is far more active during deep sleep than when you are awake.

This surge in activity happens during deep, slow-wave sleep. If your sleep is short, shallow or broken, the clean-up never finishes.

Over time, that can lead to mental sluggishness, brain fog, memory lapses and poor concentration.

But sleep's work goes far beyond cleaning. It also reshapes and strengthens memory.

As you sleep, your brain replays important information and experiences from the

day. This is memory consolidation, the process of sorting and transferring information from short-term to long-term storage.

It is how you make sense of what you have learned, how you keep what matters and let go of what does not.

Recent neuroscience shows that sleep helps reset synaptic strength. It trims away unused connections and strengthens the ones you do use.

That pruning makes memories clearer and thinking sharper.

Professor Caroline Horton explains that as you drift off and external stimuli fade, your brain begins replaying emotionally charged and meaningful memories. 'Our brains activate a series of prior experiences, emotions and thoughts in rapid succession and simultaneously,' she says. This means essential memories are reinforced while less important details are discarded.

Deep sleep also works with the immune system. Growth hormones and cytokines are released to help repair tissue and fight inflammation. This immune activity supports the brain's own clean-up crew, helping to maintain its internal environment, reduce

Psychologies

Meet the Experts



Dr Victoria Revell

Associate Professor in Translational Sleep and Circadian Physiology at the University of Surrey, with over 20 years of experience in human sleep and circadian research. She explores the impact of light exposure and timing on sleep.

'People who remember their dreams often report them having some insight into their personal lives.'

stress on cells and protect long-term cognitive health.

Alongside these physical processes, emotional processing takes centre stage during REM sleep.

And then there are dreams, mysterious, often surreal, but potentially purposeful. Evidence suggests dreams help the brain rehearse challenges, process unresolved emotions, and even solve problems we are not consciously working on. You might wake with a new insight, a fresh perspective, or simply feel lighter.

Professor Horton describes this as the brain's overnight reorganisation at work.

'People who remember their dreams often report them having some insight into their personal lives.'

Studies have even found that participants who thought about a problem before bed would often dream a solution.

Sleep fuels creativity in a similar way. 'Lots of evidence shows that REM sleep leads to heightened problem solving, reasoning, insight and creativity,' says Professor Horton.

Dr Hare adds that sleep helps you go beyond obvious answers. 'Creative insight is thought to be facilitated by sleep. The brain makes non-obvious, creative, remote associations amongst memory elements more readily during rapid eye movement (REM) sleep and dreaming than either in wake or NREM (non-rapid eye movement)



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sleep.’ These creative leaps might be hard to access when you are awake, but sleep sets the stage for those ‘aha’ moments.

When this stage is cut short, the effects ripple across everything the brain is meant to do overnight. Waste builds up. Memories fade. Emotions simmer instead of settling. Your thoughts scatter, and it becomes harder to stay calm, focused and clear-headed.

As Dr Hare puts it, ‘Missing just a single night of sleep results in memory, mood, and attentional impairments the next day.’

So you see, sleep is never just about closing your eyes and drifting off. It’s overnight maintenance for the most complex system in your body. When sleep runs its full course, your brain has a chance to flush out waste, file memories, defuse emotion and spark fresh ideas. It’s a window of time when clutter gets cleared and clarity takes shape.

Interruptions, even the small ones, can block this reset. When that happens, your mind feels foggy not because you’re tired but because your brain didn’t get the chance to restore itself. Give it that chance. Keep your sleep routine steady. Make space for stillness. Protect the quiet hours that let your brain clean house.

Because every night, while you sleep, your brain is working to help you think smarter, feel clearer, and wake up ready for whatever life has in store for you.

Of all the ways you could think about to take care of yourself, trying to allow yourself the time and space to get a good night’s rest is one of the most powerful things you can do. Read on to discover how to get in touch with your body clock to help you reset your rhythm, and find out some simple tips and techniques to help you make the most of the sleep you do get.



Looking for creative solutions?
Your brain might find them for
you when you're asleep!



Reclaiming Rhythm

Why your body clock matters more than you think

You've ticked all the boxes. Eight hours in bed, lights out on time, no caffeine since lunchtime, but you still wake foggy, feel wired at night, crave food at the wrong times or just feel out of sync. Sometimes the problem isn't how much sleep you get but when you get it, because your body runs on rhythm and timing matters.

Every cell in your body keeps time. From your liver and lungs to your brain, each organ follows a daily rhythm. These internal cycles, known as circadian rhythms, help regulate when different systems in your body activate or power down across the day. That's why you often feel alert at certain times and sluggish at others — your body is running on a schedule you might not even notice.

Dr Victoria Revell, Associate Professor in Translational Sleep and Circadian Physiology at the University of Surrey, explains, these 'are 24-hour rhythms in nearly all aspects of our behaviour and physiology.

The most obvious is our sleep/wake cycle, but most bodily functions, metabolism, muscle activity, lung performance, [and] cognitive skills also follow this cycle.'

At the helm is a type of master clock in the brain's hypothalamus. It takes light signals from your eyes and uses them to synchronise every system in your body with the outside world. You've probably felt this in action, when morning light

triggers alertness, raises cortisol, increases blood pressure and activates digestion. Evening darkness has the opposite effect: melatonin rises, the heart rate slows, body temperature falls, and your body starts preparing for rest.

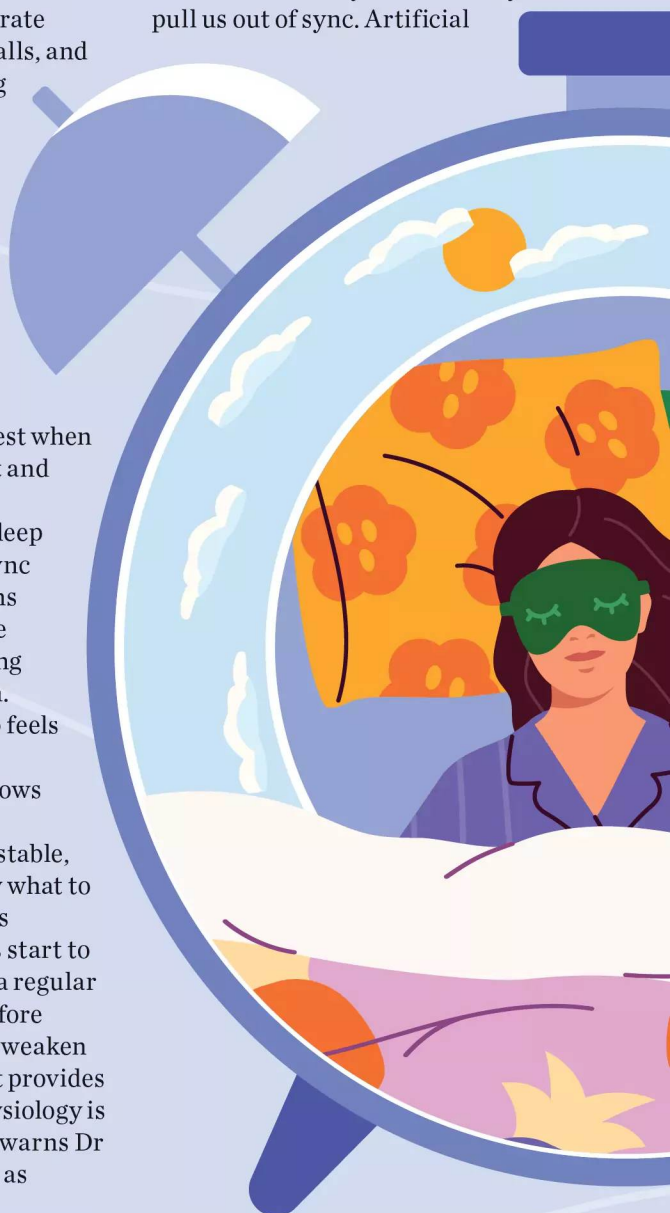
'Having an internal clock allows our body to anticipate and prepare in advance for predictable events,' says Dr Revell. 'It also allows our physiology and behaviour to be aligned with our 24-hour day, so that our systems operate at their best when we are awake, and can rest and recover overnight.'

Lisa Artis, from The Sleep Charity, adds, 'Living in sync with your body clock means aligning daily routines like waking, eating, and sleeping with your internal rhythm. When you're in sync, sleep feels restorative, mornings feel manageable, and energy flows throughout the day.'

When your rhythm is stable, your body knows precisely what to do and when. But when it is disrupted, these processes start to misfire. 'If you don't keep a regular pattern of sleep, and therefore exposure to light, this can weaken our clock and the signals it provides to the body so that our physiology is not operating maximally,' warns Dr Revell. You might notice it as

grogginess in the morning, energy dips at odd hours, or trouble falling asleep at your usual time.

Modern lifestyles constantly pull us out of sync. Artificial



light extends the day far beyond sunset. Screen exposure delays melatonin release. Shift work, travel, long hours and irregular schedules confuse the brain's sense of time. Even staying up late and sleeping in on weekends, known as 'social jet lag', can affect your mood, metabolism and immune function.

'Some of the biggest rhythm-disruptors are hiding in plain sight,' says Artis. 'Bright lights and screens in the evening trick your brain into thinking it's daytime, delaying sleep. Skipping meals or eating late at night can throw off your internal cues. Inconsistent bed and wake times, even on weekends, can

confuse your circadian rhythm.'

Reclaiming rhythm starts with consistency. 'If we keep a regular sleep/wake cycle and are exposed to a strong light/dark cycle, then our clock will provide robust signals to our body,' she says.

You can start restoring that rhythm with just a few intentional changes. Small, steady shifts can have a surprisingly big impact.

'Start by getting 10–15 minutes of daylight each morning,' says Artis. 'Maintain consistent wake-up times, even on weekends, and develop anchor habits, like regular breakfast or wind-down routines before bed.'

And, be strategic with caffeine. Have it before 1pm and avoid it later in the day to prevent delays in melatonin release. Meal timing matters too. Finish dinner at least two to three hours before bed, and when adjusting to a new schedule, shift meals gradually to help reset internal clocks.

Light cues are also powerful tools. If you're stuck indoors during the day, sit near a window or use a light-box in the morning. Naps, if needed, should stay under 30 minutes and end before 3 pm. Finally, set a wind-down reminder about an hour before bed to help you ease into rest.

And why does all this matter? Because, as Artis puts it, 'Modern life, packed with screens, long working hours, and 24/7 availability,

often pushes us to override our body's natural needs. While we can get by in the short term, chronic circadian disruption has been linked to a range of health issues, from depression and anxiety to metabolic conditions, immune dysfunction, and even higher risk of heart disease.

'Reclaiming rhythm isn't about going backwards, it's about designing a life that respects our biology,' she says. 'When we understand our body clock and work with it, not against it, we set ourselves up for better health, clearer thinking, and more resilient wellbeing.'

And remember, it's not about getting it perfect but finding patterns you can keep.

You cannot always control your schedule, but you can anchor your day with regular times to wake, eat, move, and rest.

Your body works best when it knows what is coming next, and these anchors give it the clarity it needs to keep every system running in harmony, and when you move in step with your own biology, mornings feel brighter, nights feel calmer, and that foggy, out-of-sync feeling will soon start to fade.

Psychologies *Meet the Experts*



Lisa Artis

Deputy CEO of The Sleep Charity, leading strategic initiatives to promote the importance of healthy sleep. A member of the British Sleep Society.

'Having an internal clock allows our body to prepare.'

'Some of the biggest rhythm disruptors are hiding in plain sight.'

YOUR GREAT SLEEP RESET

Reset in Real Life

Small shifts that help everything work better

Better sleep doesn't come from a complete life overhaul. It starts with small, intentional changes that shape the conditions around your rest and bring your emotions, thoughts, and body back into sync.

These simple, science-backed shifts work like reset buttons. Each one helps your body settle, your mind slow, and your nervous system release tension. Stack a few together and you'll start to notice the difference.

Get sunlight before 10am — without the sunnies

Morning sunlight strongly anchors your internal body clock, signalling the start of the day and naturally elevating cortisol levels at the appropriate time. But if you wear your sunglasses the light doesn't hit the receptors as well. So try to have 10–15 minutes outside, without sunglasses, and you'll enjoy a significant boost in your energy levels and mood.

Drop the late-night snacks

Whether it's a late supper or a late-night pantry raid, eating keeps your digestive system busy when your body should be winding down. This delays melatonin release, disrupts deep sleep, and can cause discomfort

or blood sugar swings that fragment rest. Giving digestion a break lets your body shift fully into recovery mode.

Breathe out for longer than you breathe in

Slow, extended breaths trigger your body's natural relaxation response. 'Long exhales stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, telling the body it is safe and helping reduce stress hormones like adrenaline,' says Dr Allie Hare. Just a few minutes of this can move you from alertness to ease.

Move your body gently

Gentle movement helps release daily tension and supports sleep by lowering stress hormones. Simple activities like walking, stretching, or gentle swaying can be particularly beneficial in the afternoon or early evening, reducing restlessness and mental fatigue as the day winds down.

Write down your worries

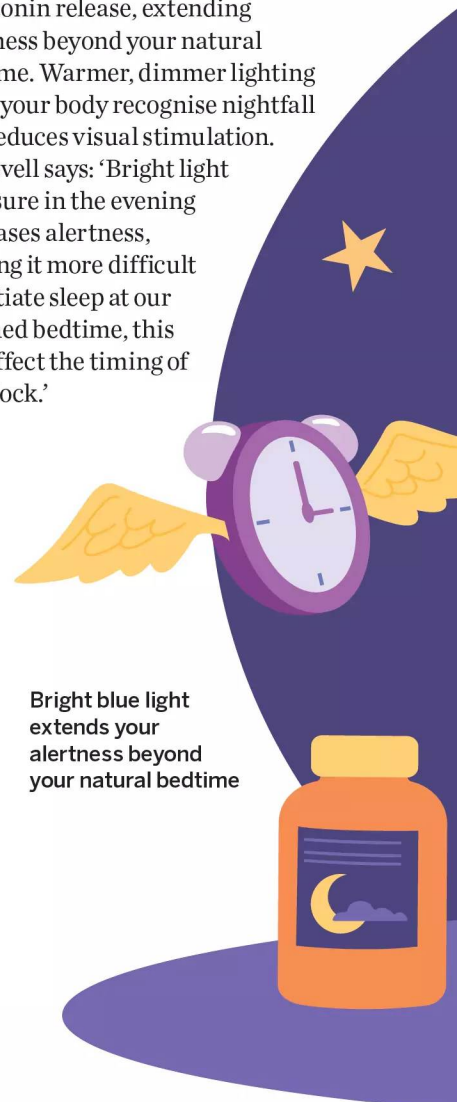
Racing thoughts at bedtime are often unresolved concerns carried from the day. Spending just a few minutes writing them down offloads these thoughts onto paper. Kathryn Pinkham says: 'Setting aside time to write down worries is therapeutic, it quiets the mind at bedtime by giving

thoughts a place outside your head.' Even brief notes of tasks or worries can free your mind, making it easier to drift off.

Warm light after sunset

Bright, blue-tinted light delays melatonin release, extending alertness beyond your natural bedtime. Warmer, dimmer lighting helps your body recognise nightfall and reduces visual stimulation. Dr Revell says: 'Bright light exposure in the evening increases alertness, making it more difficult to initiate sleep at our planned bedtime, this can affect the timing of our clock.'

'Short, familiar routines before bed signal to the brain that it's time to sleep, helping the body let go.'



Bright blue light extends your alertness beyond your natural bedtime

Create a five-minute transition ritual

Your body can't sleep instantly, it needs clear signals. Pinkham says: 'Short, familiar routines before bed signal to the brain that it is time to sleep, helping the body let go.' Simple, repeated actions like washing your face, putting on pyjamas, reading briefly, or dimming the lights create familiarity. Familiarity fosters safety, helping your body relax into sleep.

Give yourself a morning

The way you start your day shapes everything that follows. Taking five quiet minutes before engaging with your phone, tasks, or external demands helps ground your nervous system. Lisa Artis says: 'Taking a few quiet moments before you start your day helps calm the nervous system and sets a positive tone.' Light stretching, stillness, a calming drink, or a few deep breaths by an open window can shift your day's rhythm.

None of these steps alone is a magic fix, but together they create the conditions for the kind of sleep that restores the whole you. With the right rhythm and the right kind of rest, you can rebuild the energy, balance, and resilience that carry you through each day. And when your nights properly restore you, your days will carry you further.



What stops you getting the sleep you need?

Circle the answers that most closely apply to you, then add up the symbols. Read the section, or sections, you circled most, to find your personal sleep reset focus

1 Your better sleep resolutions usually involve

- ♥ Sticking to a consistent bed time
- ♦ Winding down properly before bed
- ♣ Cramming less into your evenings
- ♠ Journalling your worries before trying to sleep

2 You're most likely to lose sleep over

- ♠ Life decisions you need to make
- ♥ Thinking about what you want from life
- ♦ Feeling overwhelmed by all your responsibilities
- ♣ Excitement over new possibilities

3 Your typical evening involves

- ♠ Your current passion or project
- ♠ Distracting yourself from the worries of the day
- ♥ Somehow always eating far too late
- ♦ Juggling more than one commitment

4 You sleep best when you have

- ♥ Time away from daily life
- ♦ Managed to go to a yoga class
- ♣ A great book to get you to bed early
- ♠ Got through something you were dreading

5 Your sleep history can be summed up as

- ♥ Swings and roundabouts
- ♦ Bit of a rollercoaster
- ♣ A merry go round
- ♠ Downward slope

6 If you wake up really early, you

- ♥ Get up and start the day
- ♦ Make a mental to do list
- ♣ Read till you fall back asleep
- ♠ Get sucked into worrying

7 You'd most like your sleep to be more

- ♥ Reliable
- ♦ Easy
- ♣ Energising
- ♠ Calming

8 Your sleep weak spot is

- ♠ Losing track of time and staying up too late
- ♠ Not letting go of something upsetting
- ♥ Letting yourself have a nap too late
- ♦ Starting something too late in the day

9 In an ideal world you'd

- ♠ Get by on only a few hours' sleep
- ♠ Sleep all night without waking
- ♥ Never have to set an alarm
- ♦ Master the art of power naps

10 Better sleep would help you feel more

- ♦ In control
- ♠ Resilient
- ♠ Calm
- ♥ Focused

Turn the page to find your sleep personality





Get ready to find out who you are, and what to do next!

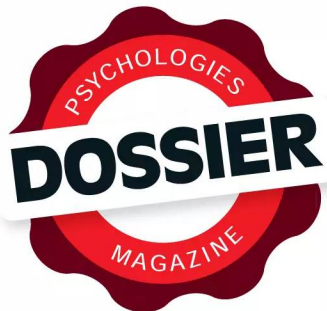
If you scored mainly  you are

The **ROUTINE RESISTER**

Sometimes it's our day times that can have the most impact on our nights. Your body thrives on consistency, and that means more than just sticking to a regular bedtime. Some sleep disruptions are obvious — staying up late to catch up on tasks or winding down with wine. But did you know that sleep can also be impacted by irregular meal and exercise times? Your circadian rhythm needs predictable cues to function optimally, and when your daily routine varies wildly, your internal clock becomes confused. Even if you've been a good sleeper, it may be that you've become more sensitive to disruption as you've got older. Start with curiosity about the roots of your resistance to sticking to a daily routine. If you associate it with being stuck in a rut, try instead thinking of routine as a support for your adventures and creativity. Start small by choosing a realistic bedtime and then work backwards, and ideally factor in several hours between your last meal, exercise or work session and your bedtime. In the day, try to stick to consistent meal times and a cut-off time for caffeinated and alcoholic drinks. It doesn't mean you can't ever be flexible but right now, your priority is creating enough structure to get your sleep cycle back in rhythm.

Your next steps

- 1** Set a phone alarm 30 minutes before your bedtime as your wind-down reminder.
- 2** Get out into daylight as soon as you can when you wake up, even if it's just a 10 minute walk, to reset your body clock.



Find out what you need to sleep better and you'll be raring to go!



If you scored mainly  you are

The **OVER SCHEDULER**

When you end the day mentally running through everything you didn't manage to do, you're subconsciously sending yourself the message that you haven't earned your downtime, including quality sleep. An overscheduled day impacts on sleep in multiple ways, whether it's physical tension from hunching over a computer, emotional residue from not meeting your own expectations, or the jangled, fragmented feeling that can come from juggling multiple roles. Your body is literally holding onto the day, and without conscious release, sleep will remain elusive. Quick fixes like wine or mindless scrolling only make the problem worse. Focus on physically letting go of tension instead with a warm bath, gentle yoga or an evening walk. Then consider what helps you mentally let go — perhaps it's reading or watching something distracting but light-hearted. In the longer term, take a look at your expectations about what it's possible to achieve during the day. Sleep disruption is often a red flag that you're overloaded and it's time for a break. In the short-term, focus on adding mini relaxation moments throughout the day, regulating your nervous system as the day progresses so you don't end up wired when it's time to wind down. Making space for this might mean first thinking what commitments you can let go of — think, 'is this worth sabotaging my sleep for?'

Your next steps

- 1** When you've finished your working day, write a realistic plan for the following day so you can mentally let it go.
- 2** Create an evening ritual like changing clothes, washing your face or doing five minutes of deep breathing to start your wind down.

If you scored mainly  you are

The **MAXIMISER**

You know that life feels better if you make choices that support optimal physical and emotional health, and are often the first one to encourage others to put themselves first and make time for self-care. But do you think the rules don't apply to you and you should be able to thrive and cope even when you're running on empty? When you're naturally curious and feel excited by life's possibilities, your emotional energy can carry you through and make the demands of the day feel possible. But in the longer term, you have limits just like everyone else. Don't be lulled into a sense of false security by your past levels of resilience and energy reserves — burnout can creep up on you, or show up in niggly illnesses you can't seem to shake off. If you've always thought of sleep as a bit of a waste of time, try reframing it as the foundation you need to make the most of every day. Your sleep reset starts with boundary-setting during waking hours. It's hard to say no to opportunities you find exciting but remind yourself that you don't need to do everything at once. Consider what genuinely needs your attention versus what you're doing from habit or obligation, too. Quality sleep isn't a luxury to enjoy 'some day' — it's the foundation that makes everything else possible.

Your next steps

- 1** Protect your energy levels by identifying three things you can delegate, decline or delay.
- 2** Treat your bedroom as sacred space by decluttering and making it a digital-free zone.

If you scored mainly  you are

The **OVERTHINKER**

If you're prone to ruminating over the past or catastrophising about the future, you might find you go through periods when your mind won't switch off enough for you get to the quality of sleep you need. Even when you drop off easily, you might find it hard to resist overthinking if you wake in the middle of the night. There are lots of upsides to having an analytical mind and being able to imagine every possibility, not least that the ability to reflect on and learn from your own past patterns and choices. But when the balance tips and your thinking feels out of control, it starts to undermine your peace of mind, and your sleep in the process. Your sleep reset is about creating space for both deep rest and conscious reflection — but at appropriate times. Remember, the clarity you seek often comes after rest, not during sleepless nights. Night time is a chance for the brain to process what's happened during the day, but this can't happen without good quality sleep. Awareness is the first step: when you notice you've been sucked down an overthinking rabbit hole, acknowledge it by mentally labelling it 'thinking', then bring your attention back to the here and now, focus on your breathing and ground yourself in the present.

Your next steps

- 1** To shift an overthinking habit, designate 15 minutes in the early evening as 'worry time', then use that as a reason to resist overthinking during the day by saying you'll park it until then.
- 2** Keep a bedside notebook for any thoughts that keep you awake at night, promising yourself you'll address them in daylight when your problem-solving brain works better.

* Coming up for air

With Caro Giles

Can I finally stand still?

In a new city, in a new life, Caro Giles wonders if she has at last found home

“The light is the first thing I notice. In Northumberland the skies were endless and full of potential. Even on the days when I felt trapped in its wilderness I could imagine a wider world across the sea, because the sky was so changeable. One moment powder blue, the next hung with a stubborn sea fret that concealed stony coves and seals bobbing their heads above the waves.

Now I am in the city. The kids and I have moved to a flat at the very bottom of a huge tenement building. We walk down steps to reach our front door, and from the living room we can watch legs striding along the pavement above us. The air is muted and we are tucked away from the rest of the world, although our home is right in the heart of the action. Our footsteps echo on the wooden floorboards as we tread ourselves into this strange new space.

Long thick curtains cover the blinds in my bedroom, and no oystercatchers fly above my roof,

which is four floors above me. But still I seek the light.

A candle burns beneath my mirror, illuminating the glass holder pink and turning the air sugary and sweet. In my old room, sunlight would flood the sheets on my bed, and our cat would claim her place on the old wicker chair, bathe in the warmth. This new bedroom stays dark until the sun moves across the sky and dapples patterns on the wall. Instead, each morning I stand and lift my eyes to the tops of the trees, watch the leaves gently shake in the breeze. Each day, a few more leaves scatter onto the grass of the communal garden, a warning that soon the light will be a precious commodity and the trees will become slick skeletons.

There is an other-worldly roughness to this city that has become my new home. When I explore the streets I find turrets and stained-glass windows. The name of the city means ‘The Dear Green Place’, and I like that when I climb to the top of my nearest park I can see hills in the distance. It

“I’ve always lived with itchy feet, been chasing the next adventure until I am dizzy.”



feels good to be so close to other people, but also to know that there is a promise of a different type of wilderness beyond the buildings.

I have spent my whole life seeking a home. It occurs to me now, just after my 48th birthday, that home is almost certainly not a place, but the people I spend my days with. My children are my home. The man I love is my home. I am desperate for permanence but I am learning that nothing is forever. We only have today. I’ve always lived with itchy feet, been chasing the next adventure until I am dizzy. Just for a while I would like the world to stop spinning so that I can catch my breath. Perhaps this new life is a lesson in grounding. Maybe these days



'I am surrounded by familiarity amongst the strangeness.'

will be the ones where I learn to stand still. Breathe.

On Friday night a friend visits me for a chat and a cup of tea. We sit on my bed and I am surrounded by familiarity amongst the strangeness: perfume bottles, earrings in a pot, dresses in colourful fabrics hanging from a rail. This bedroom already feels like my own. After my friend has left I check on the children, who are either colouring in the living room or watching TV cross-legged on beds. I touch the tops of their heads, stand in doorways and marvel at the newness of them living with me here in the city.

I am proud of their bravery, the way they have let me take them by their hands and lead them into a

whole new existence. It's a huge responsibility of course, and this Friday night is perhaps the first time I have sat quietly and considered the enormity of what we have all done.

My candle flickers and I lie still on my bed, clutching a hot water bottle to my chest. A friend sends me a message asking me if I have considered magnesium to soothe my nervous system. 'Make sure you stop,' she types. 'Lie still and watch the trees.' The curtains are closed, but I know the trees are out there, watching over us all. I pick up my book, open it and dive in. Floorboards creak outside in the hallway and the boiler softly whistles. I still don't know these noises well, but I can cling to the

sound of my own breath, quietly in and out, in and out. I have longed to return to a city for such a long time. And now, at last, I am here.



CARO GILES

is an author. She writes about life on the edge, particularly exploring themes around her life as a single parent and carer.

In 2021 she won the inaugural BBC Countryfile New Writer Award. Her new book, *Unschool* (Little Toller, £20), is a searing memoir about raising her children outside the traditional education system.





EIGHT RULES FOR TALKING TO YOUR PARTNER ABOUT MONEY

Like many, I grew up with the idea that we just don't talk about money, an opinion often delivered with a very disapproving look. That sharing how much you earn, or how much you spent on something, or what your ambitions are, just isn't the done thing.

But money is a key part of our lives — everything from how much we bring in, to what we spend it on, and any debts we have.

'We just seem to have this understanding that it's rude to talk about money, and you never ask anybody else any questions,' says Sara Jane Maxwell, a certified professional financial coach and founder of Wealth Coach, who regularly supports couples. She explains that we can feel like everyone else is doing really well, when actually there may be anything from inheritance to debt that's helped your friend pay for that dream holiday you keep seeing photos of.

Maxwell says this lack of openness can then add to our sense of shame if our life doesn't add up this way. 'People tend to really heavily label themselves, and then they feel like they can't share, because they're going to get found out.'

Feeling this way can make it harder to talk honestly about money with our partner. 'When

By **CAROLINE BUTTERWICK**

people carry shame about decisions, it makes them less likely to share with their partner information that they hold pretty deeply around money,' Maxwell explains. 'And of course, when two people mash together and form a relationship, they've generally got totally different attitudes to risk, totally different family backgrounds and understanding of things.'

But being able to talk about money with our partner can be incredibly important. Financial difficulties can lead to conflict in relationships, and being able to build trust about the topic can help you navigate any financial challenges with fairness and honesty.

Recognising how difficult it can be, Maxwell shares some of her key tips for talking to your partner about money. ➤

TALKING ABOUT MONEY

Self-reflection

1 First, we need to think about our own relationship with money. ‘Sometimes, if I have a couple who have been together for a long time, they’ll really talk about each other’s issues, but not be as quick to talk about their own,’ says Maxwell.

Our backgrounds can shape our attitude to money (our ‘money mindset’) so much. For example, you may be very keen on saving, which is generally seen as positive. However, it may stem from a place of insecurity, which means you find it hard to justify spending on ‘nice’ things for yourself, as well as feeling frustrated when your partner has a different approach. Realising all this can help you recognise your own beliefs and behaviours around finances and how this influences the way you communicate about money.

Understanding each other’s communication preferences

2 We all like to communicate in different ways, and understanding this within a relationship can help make conversations about important topics easier.

‘Try asking, “How is our communication right now?”’ says Maxwell. ‘And try to work on that before you go into any of the heavier details.’ She gives the example of saying ‘I find it challenging when you speak to me about money first thing in the morning, because I feel like when I’ve just woken up, it stresses me out for the day. I’d love it if we could find a time that works for both of us.’ This is about communicating your needs and being open, using an ‘I’ statement so it isn’t accusatory.

Don’t start big

3 Particularly if you’re in a new relationship, or you and your partner aren’t used to talking to each other about money, going in and asking ‘big’ questions about finances can make it harder. ‘But you can start with some of the smaller

questions around things like, “How did your parents treat money when you were younger?”’ says Maxwell.

Understand their money mindset

4 Having a non-judgemental conversation about what may have influenced your partner’s – and your own – approach to money can help your relationship. ‘You can understand them so much better when you appreciate that some of these beliefs have been handed to them because of patterns they’ve seen or experiences that they’ve had,’ says Maxwell.

‘It’s far easier to give somebody a bit of space with something if, say, you feel like your partner is really tight with money, and you just wish they were more generous. If you found out that in their past, their parents had been bankrupt, or something significant had happened, it would make it so much easier for you to understand why they like to make sure they have savings. There’s just something in being able to understand what feeds into each other’s patterns of behaviour, so that you’re coming from support rather than judgement.’

Recognise your shared goals

5 While you and your partner may have different ideas around money, it can be useful to think about what the real purpose is of being able to communicate with each other about finances.

‘If you focus on the goal and the outcome, what could that then lead to?’ Maxwell says. ‘To give an example, it could be: “If we work on this, and we get our finances the way that we want them to be, and we pay down the debt, it might mean that next year we can go on that holiday that we really want to go on”, or “It would feel fantastic to be able to go into a new year with savings instead of debt.” What’s the wish, the reason, why you want to do this work together? That’s a starting point.’



‘Try setting a regular “money date” with your partner.’

UNDERSTANDING FINANCIAL ABUSE IN RELATIONSHIPS



It’s important to acknowledge that financial abuse can happen in relationships. This can include things like a partner controlling how you spend your money or how you access your accounts. There’s information on financial abuse,

including what it may look like and ways to stay safe, at moneyhelper.org.uk. If you don’t feel safe talking to your partner about money or are concerned about their behaviour, please look into the advice or seek support in a way that’s safe for you.



‘Try really hard not to judge... because with judgement you’ll just remain stuck’

6 Set ‘Money Dates’
Maxwell suggests the idea of setting a regular ‘money date’ to talk about money with your partner. She recommends deciding on a time together, and trying to be quite specific and making a habit of it — say, the first Sunday of the month at 3pm. These sessions don’t need to be too long — starting with around 15–20 minutes can be enough. She recommends prioritising each time by picking something to get done together, congratulating each other, and doing something fun so you start to create the habit in a way that feels good.

Beforehand, it can help to ask yourself what’s on your mind, what’s stressing you out at the moment, and how this would look in a perfect world. ‘Then there’s that real sharing and listening to each other, because your desires are probably not always going to be the same. There is going to need to be a level of compromise,’ she says.

Money dates can include things like checking in and discussing your current situation, setting goals together, or tackling things that need doing together — like cancelling those unneeded subscriptions that

have crept up, or finding a better savings account. Don’t try to tackle everything at once — agree what you’ll do in each session.

7 Try not to judge
‘Try really hard not to judge each other and not to judge yourself, because with judgement just comes remaining stuck,’ says Maxwell. ‘It’s about trying to work with curiosity. It’s trying to look at the past and asking, “How do I learn from it?” It’s helping each other to change in a positive way that’s going to lead to some really good outcomes for both of you.’

8 Celebrate each other
When conversations about money feel inherently heavy, we can forget to celebrate our wins. Maxwell recommends asking yourselves as a couple how you would like to celebrate your progress. That could involve asking each other how you would like to be congratulated when something goes well — whether it’s around things like telling friends about it, or simply some kind words of acknowledgement that recognise what you’ve both achieved. ■

Psychologies

Meet the Experts



Sara Jane Maxwell

Sara Jane Maxwell is a certified financial coach and founder of Wealth Coach. She empowers individuals, couples, groups and organisations to find joy and growth in connecting to their money and future. She runs ‘Couples Talk Money’ coaching sessions designed specifically for couples

wealth-coach.co.uk


THE HIDDEN COST OF *caring*

It's been raining for days. I fantasise about floating away. We all agree that this wet week feels like the longest week ever. I'm counting down the hours until I can escape to Glasgow and be with Joe, and shut the mother away in a box. All week my two little ones, Tess and Emmie, have been as changeable as the sea, sitting at a piano singing Taylor Swift songs one moment, and brimming with worries the next.

By **CARO GILES**

Tess has managed her hours at school well, but she is weepy and small and tells me she is worried about not being with me at the weekend. Just before we head out to circus school, Emmie flings a book at Tess and furrows her brow. This often happens on a Thursday, the night before she must spend the weekend in another house, with a different parent. Emmie doesn't know how to express her anxiety. Her words fail her, so her panic becomes hands and feet that lash out and hurt the person she loves the most.

At last, after unravelling the panic, the hitting and the loving, we are sitting in the car. I am so tired my bones are aching and when I look in the rearview mirror my eyes stare out helplessly from a grey face. Tess and Emmie are sitting in the back, friends once more, although Emmie can't speak and her shoulders are hunched around her ears. I think to myself for the thousandth time how much I wish I could take away her crippling anxiety, and that perhaps my own anxiety is in part an absorption of hers. I turn the key, start the engine, and talk in a sing-song voice, 'You can hang upside down,' because



'Society doesn't value carers, so we struggle to carve out identities for ourselves beyond the daily act of caring.'



earlier today she told me that was what she wanted to do more than anything else, hang upside down. When I asked her why, she told me it was because she liked seeing the world upside down. Maybe it makes more sense to her from that angle.

Always the mothers

In the hall at the high school, the scene is calm and I am grateful. Soft music is playing and there are less children than usual, maybe five others with their mothers. They are all mothers. Always the mothers.

The girls shed shoes and I peel Emmie from my waist. She gestures to the long mirror, where she wants to do handstands. I walk over with her, trailing Tess, and they scamper onto the mat and crawl their legs up the mirror. I stand by slightly awkwardly, glance at my reflection. I made an effort when I got dressed this morning because I was recording a video conversation and didn't

want my appearance to reflect how frazzled I really felt. Over the last few months I've noticed my eyes become a little hollowed out, smudged and sunken. There are crows feet when I smile. I don't want to care how I look, but of course I do. I'm wearing a floral dress that skims my calves and black Doc Marten's, a denim jacket and a fur one shrugged over the top because it's cold tonight. Also it looks good. My hair needs attention, though. The blonde is growing out and there are kinks near the roots where I tied it back earlier.

It occurs to me that I'm dressing up as the woman I want to be, and I'm immediately ashamed that I am not on my knees on the mat encouraging the girls. In these situations, I often feel different to the other adults in the room. I used to get it when the kids were babies too, at baby groups or social gatherings with other parents. Back then, I felt like I'd lost the rule book that explained how to be a mother, as if that role was entirely

Psychologies


Meet the Experts



Caro Giles

is an author. She writes about life on the edge, particularly exploring themes around her life as a single parent and carer. Her new book, *Unschooled*, is out now.





'I wonder how I'm supposed to hold the whole wide world and still weave a life for me.'

separate for me. Of course a mother is just a person who has a child, an extension of the woman. But the process of becoming a mother crept up on me in such a way that it took me a while to realise that my own sense of self was becoming buried. It is something to do with the way society views mothers that adds so brutally to the disintegration.

There is the disappearing behind the pram or the sling, the mother fading into the background — not just because she is pale and exhausted, somehow hollow but full all at once, packed with milk as hormones race around her body, but also the result of centuries of conditioning that makes it so hard for women to be seen beyond the maternal. I realise now that this feeling is common to most new mothers, and it is why those months can, strangely, be such lonely times.

Weaving a foundation

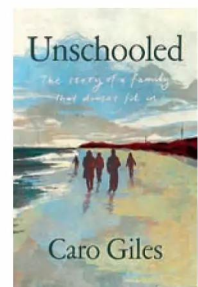
The otherness I feel as a carer is slightly different to this, and it's uncomfortable. It's

not that I don't realise that anyone can be a carer, and it's not that I don't love caring for my daughters: I don't resent my life. Most of the time I think it's a huge privilege to be responsible for raising my children, and every day — even on the bad days (perhaps especially on the bad days) — they teach me something about myself or about the world that I wouldn't have learned if they weren't the beautiful people that they are. But I still feel like I don't belong.


Society doesn't value carers, and so we struggle to carve out identities for ourselves beyond the daily act of caring. As I look at my reflection in the long mirror in the school gym, I wonder how I'm expected to hold the whole wide world and somehow still weave a life for me.

Or maybe I'm missing the point, and the caring and the fighting and the advocating is the foundation of the life I am meant to weave. This is what I decide in that room while my children dangle upside down. After

'The process of becoming a mother crept up on me in such a way that it took me a while to realise that my own sense of self was becoming buried.'



Unschoolled by Caro Giles (*Little Toller, £20*) is out now



I've taken my boots off, I observe the other mothers and wonder if they feel other. I watch the dancers gently creating a space where these children can feel free, pull my notebook from my bag and start writing. And even though I am tired and tearful and I want to magic someone through the door who will fold me into their arms and never let me go, I scribble notes — images and feelings and stray thoughts — because maybe the caring is the point, and I am lucky to have a voice I can use and a pen I can write with, and maybe these children are my children because I can learn from them and together we can help other people understand.

Emmie stands next to me, fresh from her upside-down adventures. There are shouts and squeaks and lights and this room doesn't smell like home and I can tell, even though her eyes are hidden behind her sunglasses, that Emmie is overwhelmed. Justin, the teacher with the multicolour hoop asks her a question and her head

my knee, still full of worry about the coming weekend. I am pathetically grateful that I'm able to leave the children for a couple of nights with their dad, but sometimes I wonder if it is worth all the reassuring and fretting, and wish that I had children who managed transitions more easily. Sometimes I dare to dream what it would be like to co-parent effectively. But I'm as selfish as the next human, and I would fight until my body was battered and broken for the hours that belong only to me.

Alone in the crowd

Two other mothers are standing near me, and we introduce ourselves and our children. We start to talk about educational provision, and at first it's reassuring to use language that we are all familiar with, not to have to explain acronyms or emphasise the challenges of securing funding for our kids. But then they ask me where the girls go to school and I have to tell them there is no

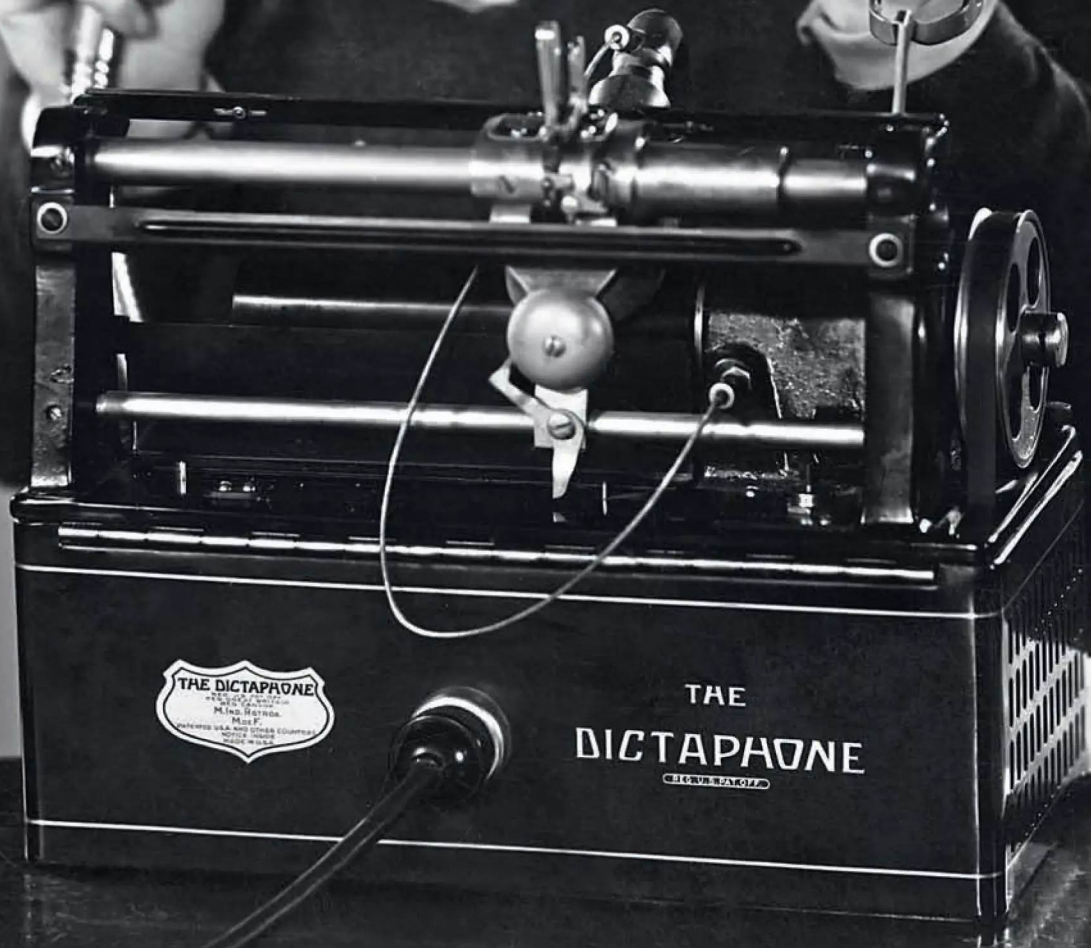
'Sometimes I dare to dream what it would be like to co-parent effectively, but I'm as selfish as the next human, and I would fight until my body was battered and broken for the hours that belong only to me'

twitches almost imperceptibly towards his voice then back to me. I explain that she is confused: 'Please give her a closed question so she only has to indicate yes or no.' He does even better than that: he tells her exactly what he is going to do and immediately removes the pressure of a decision. Emmie's shoulders drop and my heart clenches a little bit. I love it when someone understands my children — being heard and understood is sometimes more effective than medicine.

Emmie swings in the red fabric cocoon for a bit while Tess snuggles tearfully into

school for two of my children. Their eyes are blank. There is an awkward silence and they look at me expectantly, needing me to fill in the gaps. Suddenly, they don't understand my existence anymore. Their children have extra support in mainstream schools or a place within specialist provision. I start to ramble on about my children not managing the classroom environment, then grow tired of the sound of my own voice and trail off. How, when there are so many thousands of people in the same position as me, is it possible to feel so alone? ■

'On our phones we are constantly being pinged with images of the (sometimes very distant) past.'





IS TECHNOLOGY KEEPING US STUCK IN THE PAST?

Back in the day, if you had a horrible boss, or a relationship that ended on a sour note, you could process the situation and move on. You never had to hear from, or about, that person ever again. But no more. Technology has broken the notion of a past. We can stay connected with, and follow the lives of, people who should have exited our orbit many moons ago.

Don't get me wrong, being able to reconnect with an old friend who you have lost touch with can be amazing. But getting a follow request from the school bully who has conveniently forgotten that they made your life hell? Less so.

When we think of technology, we generally think of the future. Exciting new developments stretching our abilities and capabilities beyond that which we could ever have imagined. In a world of rapid AI development, we see technology as paving the way and directing our future paths. But is it actually keeping us stuck in the past?

With everyone carrying a smartphone and with it the ability to document every moment of our lives, we can struggle to disentangle ourselves from our histories and move forwards. We are constantly being pinged with stories and montages, showing us snapshots of the (sometimes very distant)

By **STEPHANIE FITZGERALD**

past. These can serve as lovely reminders of happy times, but can also confront us with an ex, and subsequent emotions that we weren't ready or prepared to face.

I spoke with clinical psychologist and EMDR consultant Dr Jo Phillips, and asked her about the impact that this blast-from-the-past technology is having on our mood and mental state.

'It's so important for us to be grounded in the now, in the present moment,' she said. 'Anxiety or worry comes from thinking about things that have happened in the past, or catastrophising about things that could happen in the future. Being present and grounded in the now, is where we get the quality of life, the calm, and the joy. If we're constantly being dragged back, we're being taken out of that space.'

'If someone is being held back or is stuck by revisiting the past, then they need to consider what purpose is this serving? Is it blocking them moving forward?'

This really resonates with me. It only takes a glance at our phones or the ping of a notification to drag us away from the situation we are in and take our brain to somewhere else entirely. Part of the problem is control. 'There is a difference between when you invite it in and when you don't,' says Phillips. 'Technology can intrude on your day and derail you, especially if you haven't invited the past in and you're not in the right headspace for it to land.'

Anxiety and hypervigilance

We also discussed the underlying sense of unease that can come with knowing that memories or photos can arise at any given moment, which can give us a feeling of anxiety or hypervigilance around our phones, even if we're not fully aware of it. 'Technology doesn't allow us any sense of control,' says Phillips.

Of course, this isn't just about us being surprised by our phones and them catching us unawares. Sometimes we keep ourselves stuck in the past by deliberately searching out old connections, relationships, friends we no longer see. Technology gives us unprecedented access to the past and it can be hard to resist.

We can all succumb to a little nosiness and want to scratch that 'I wonder what they are up to?' itch. I asked Phillips when this might tip over into something more problematic and what we should be aware of. 'If someone is being held back or stuck by revisiting the past, then they need to consider what purpose this is serving. In what ways is this blocking them from moving forwards with their own life? If they noticed that they were very preoccupied by the past, thoughts of a person or event popping into their mind,

and derailing their day as they lost time to scrolling, then that would need addressing.'

Grief and healing

It isn't just notifications and pushes from the past that are concerning, as technology is finding new ways to keep us 'connected'. We are seeing the rise of 'griefbots', which utilise AI to mimic the speech, behaviours and personality of someone who has died. The AI is trained on past message and email exchanges plus photo and video footage.


The intention is to keep a connection with someone who is no longer alive and, whilst being able to ask a question or get advice from someone you wish was still here may sound appealing, the reality is that they may do far more harm than good.

I spoke with Dr Marianne Trent, Clinical Psychologist and author of *The Grief Collective*, to understand how griefbots may be disrupting the natural grieving process. 'What we know about grief and what we know about adjusting to and processing traumas is that, ultimately, we do need to be able to assimilate this into our lives, and we need to be able to accept that somebody has died,' she said.

Muddying the waters

Griefbots then, with their continual interaction, may prevent us from moving forwards through the natural stages of grief and keep us stuck. The anthropomorphising of technology and the potential to form confusing attachments with algorithms could further muddy the already complex waters of grief.

'It can be a real roadblock, the very idea that you give yourself permission to move forwards,' said Trent. This is an idea that



'Ask yourself, would I benefit more from speaking with a close friend or family member to process this, rather than spending two hours scrolling?'



griefbots could further complicate and an example of when we would benefit from professional support over the latest tech. She continued: 'You don't have to enter therapy feeling "ready" and as though you want to "move on". There is no pressure. But if you are feeling distressed, then therapy can help find a way to reduce the distress and make space for other, happier memories and emotions, not just the spiky ones.'

When it comes to disentangling ourselves from the pull of technology, Trent guides us to check in on our mood with compassion. 'When you're scrolling or viewing a memory that has been pushed to you, check in on

yourself. Ask yourself, "How am I feeling? Would I benefit more in this moment from speaking with a close friend, a family member or a therapist to process this, rather than spending two hours scrolling?"'

The talk of compassion struck a chord. It is the missing piece of the technological puzzle. Our apps and phones will ping and push regardless of the mood we are in and what we are able to face on that day. A check in of how we are using technology can offer us a refresh in our relationship with it. Ultimately, it is essential to protect ourselves and regain a sense of control so that we are choosing what to revisit and when to leave the past in the past. ■

Psychologies

Meet the Experts



Dr Jo Phillips

is a clinical psychologist and EMDR consultant. She is the founder of *Nurture Now*, a gentle space to nourish self-care habits and inspire joy.

She wrote *The Intentional Growth Book*, a guided journal for flourishing in daily life.

nurture-now.co.uk



Dr Marianne Trent

is a clinical psychologist and author of *The Grief Collective*.

goodthinkingpsychology.co.uk

THE TRUTH ABOUT SEX ADDICTION

The first time I encountered the term ‘sex addiction’ was during the 90s as teenager flicking through gossip magazines that detailed the latest celebrity who was struggling with it. Sex addiction was — and continues to be — seen as scandalous, a source of gossip. Addiction to my mind meant drugs or alcohol, so I was surprised by the thought that sex could also be an addiction.

By **YASMINA FLOYER**

The truth is that sex addiction is not officially recognised as a medical diagnosis, even today. With opinion on the subject mixed, I catch up with Silva Neves, an award-winning psychosexual and relationship psychotherapist, trauma psychotherapist and the author of books including *Compulsive Sexual Behaviours*, *A Psycho-Sexual Treatment Guide for Clinicians* (Routledge, £29.99).

He tells me that debate surrounding whether sex addiction is a genuine addiction has been ongoing since the term landed into clinical discourse in the early 80’s. ‘It has been especially heavily critiqued in the last 20 years as our knowledge of sexology has grown, and the debate is mostly about moral and religious biases vs evidence-based science,’ Neves says. He explains that with

‘One of the main features of people feeling “out of control” is called “moral incongruence”, which means it’s not what people think they “should” do.’

all the research that has been conducted in this field so far, there isn’t any clear scientific evidence that ‘sex addiction’ exists. Despite this, there are still numerous clinicians that promote ‘sex addiction’.

Shame and stigma

The term ‘addiction’ itself is not only reductive, then, but it also creates a stigma that breeds shame, which is a moral based judgement rather than a clinical one. Given that broadly speaking, sex is still perceived as taboo, it means that shameful connotations relating to sexual behaviours that some may be struggling with are extremely diminishing, and may inhibit those who need support from seeking it. It is no surprise then when Neves says that some of the prominent therapists who promote treatment for sex addiction also tend to have religious and moral biases.

But in a world that claims you can become addicted to almost anything, it is important to understand what an addiction actually is. Neves says the addiction field notoriously diagnose pretty much anything as an addiction because it is their primary lens. ‘Shopping addiction, internet addiction, cheese addiction, caffeine addiction, and so on, yet none of these have been scientifically validated as addictive.’

Indeed, addiction is a clinical disorder with strict standards of measurement, which is why it is important that we understand the distinction between an addiction and a compulsion. ‘To put it in simple terms, an addiction is a disease affecting neurological functioning. A compulsion is a coping strategy to soothe unpleasant emotions,’ Neves explains.

‘People who start taking drugs or drinking alcohol may well start those as a coping strategy to soothe unpleasant emotions, but because those substances

cannot be sustained by the brain, it has to adapt to those substances. When the addiction takes hold neurologically, it becomes an independent disorder, which means that people who are addicted to those substances need to be carefully helped in coming off this dependency. A compulsion, however, stays as a coping strategy and does not become a neurological impairment.’

‘From the sexology lens, the idea that sex is addictive doesn’t make any scientific sense,’ he says. ‘Scientifically, it is known that we cannot be addicted to an innate primary drive. As humans we develop a natural sex drive (primary), but we don’t develop a natural gambling drive or cocaine drive.’

In this way, gambling, cocaine, and other secondary reward drives are not the same as sex or anything involving sexual activities, including watching porn and masturbating. ‘The body of research on pornography has not found any causation, meaning that, as far as we know scientifically, porn does not cause mental or sexual health problems.’

‘Feeling out of control’

Since many therapists (and the media) tend to confuse causation and correlation, this has led to much misinformation about porn or so-called ‘porn addiction’.

‘Applying an addiction treatment to primary drive behaviours not only doesn’t work, but it can actually cause significant harm,’ Neves explains. ‘One of the main features of people feeling “out of control” with sexual behaviours and porn watching is what is called “moral incongruence”, which means people have sexual behaviours that do not align with what they think they “should” do. It means that shame is the hallmark of people who feel “out of control” with their sexual behaviours, yet shame is often not considered in sex addiction assessments.’

This is such an important distinction to

Psychologies

Meet the Experts



Silva Neves

Silva Neves is an award-winning, UKCP-registered psychosexual and relationship psychotherapist, and a trauma psychotherapist. He is the author of three books: *Compulsive Sexual Behaviours*, *A Psycho-Sexual Treatment Guide for Clinicians*; *Sexology: The Basics*; and *Sexual Diversity*. He is on the editorial board of the international journal *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*.
www.silvaneves.co.uk

TRUTH ABOUT SEX ADDICTION

highlight, since the way that we may feel about something, especially when our attitudes are partly informed by upbringing and social conditioning, may not necessarily reflect the reality of the situation. What this means is that just because we may feel shame surrounding something doesn't necessarily mean that we are right to do so.

Compulsive or completely normal?

Neves describes that the more moral incongruence people feel, the more they are likely to feel out of control. But 'feeling' and 'being' out of control are not the same thing, and what one perceives problematic is subjective and depends on the person's moral congruence. He shares that a major problem with the 'sex addiction' narrative is that it unduly pathologises sexual behaviours that are outside of heteronormative and mononormative (the norms of monogamy) behaviours. 'Typically, people who have fetishes, kinks, are polyamorous, choose to be sex workers, who enjoy watching porn a lot, who go to sex clubs frequently, and people with a high sex drive could be diagnosed as a "sex addict" when those behaviours could be completely harmless, and even meaningfully normative for those in the queer community for example.'

So, how can we tell when sexual behaviour becomes compulsive?

'The most important sign to look out for is when the sexual behaviour or watching porn causes significant impairment in someone's life — which is not the same as feeling guilty for doing those behaviours. We are talking about not being able to manage life as a result of those repetitive sexual behaviours. Someone who watches porn all night long, for example, then doesn't turn up to work the next day because they can't get up, potentially damaging their career.'

Other features of compulsive behaviour include the fact that it must be happening on

a repetitive basis, not just an occasional porn binge, or if someone spends more money that they can't afford paying for sex in a repetitive manner, resulting in major debts.

'It is not about the number of times people watch porn, or how many people they have sex with. It is about the significant impairment.' If someone feels bad and believes they are out of control with their porn watching or sexual behaviours due to external judgement, however, this does not make it a compulsion, since those feelings can be linked to misplaced shame.

As someone who lives with OCD, I wonder if there are conditions that can complicate treatment of or indeed trigger compulsive sexual behaviours?

'Yes. Compulsive sexual behaviours are a repetitive coping strategy to a chronic stress. The chronic stress can be anything from one hating your job, or significant financial stress, or feeling too much of the daily grind without much joy. The body of research points to compulsive sexual behaviours being a symptom to depression, as a means to "self-medicate".'

Self-soothing behaviours

Neves goes on to tell me that this form of self-soothing via sexual compulsive behaviours can also present in those experiencing post-traumatic stress, since for many people, sexual behaviours may be the only resource they have to manage these disturbances.

'For this reason it is very important not to go for an abstinence-based addiction method to treat compulsive sexual behaviours, because abstinence could be taking away the one resource people have to mitigate their depression or post-trauma stress symptoms, which means that it can make people worse as full-blown depression or PTSD can emerge as a result.'

By working in a way that recognises

'It's not about the number of times people watch porn, or how many people they have sex with. It's about impairment.'



BEHAVIOUR

‘The goal is not to make someone monogamous if they aren’t — or vanilla.’

Sexologists seek to find out what’s going on underneath the surface

compulsive sex behaviours agnostic of any negative social stigma and shame requires treatments for compulsive sexual behaviours to be based on ‘sexology’, which Neves defines as an understanding the sexual behaviours, including what is normative, and being informed by sexual diversity knowledge including being kink-informed.

This inclusive outlook fosters a sex-positive approach and enables a treatment that integrates multiple therapeutic modalities because the source of underlying disturbances the compulsive sexual behaviours are attempting to soothe can be very diverse.

‘I help people explore their erotic mind, not to find the problems but to examine what their turn-ons are, their sexual pleasures and so on. The chances are the behaviours they exhibit may be compulsive, but they may also match their turn-ons.’

This is why Neves highlights the importance of erotic awareness, so as not to make people’s turn-ons part of the problem.

‘Erotic awareness is a great antidote to compulsive sexual behaviours, as often people report that they don’t know why they do what they do, which signals unawareness.

‘Once we have a pretty good idea of what their erotic mind is made of, we don’t attempt to change it because the goal of the treatment of compulsive sexual behaviours is to stop the compulsion, not to make someone monogamous if there aren’t — or vanilla.’

The goal then becomes helping people to reconstruct a life and a sense of self with better erotic and relational awareness so that they can have a fantastic, diverse sex life that fits with who they genuinely are and keep thriving in their intimate relationships.

Moving away from the reductive lens of addiction to a more inclusive and sex-positive approach made possible through knowledge of sexology, enables practitioners such as Neves to honour the erotic mind. It’s an intention that is, thankfully, a million miles away from the salacious clickbait about sex addiction that persists to this day. ■



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The image shows two overlapping covers of Psychologies magazine for October 2025. The background is a light blue with white snowflake patterns. A large, shiny gold bow is tied around the middle of the two covers. A white circular price tag with a red and white striped ribbon is attached to the bow, displaying the price 'JUST £24.99*'. The magazine covers feature the following headlines and details:

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 - Emergency conflict resolution p.46
 - September, 2025
 - Psychologies
 - You deserve to be happy
 - NEW
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 - OUR CURSIVE THOUGHTS
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 - How to get pay-rise confident!
 - OCTOBER, 2025
 - Psychologies
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 - 124 PAGE BUMPER ISSUE
 - NEW LOOK
 - Doctor Martha
 - On how to break up with your phone
 - PAGE 24
 - ARE WE REALLY FRIENDS? OR ARE YOU JUST USING ME?
 - 8 rules for talking to your partner about money
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*'You do not borrow
your dignity from
external sources, you
own it. You live as
your true self.'*

'Free from the gravity of
the group, you are free to
think whatever you like.'



FORGET INTROVERT AND EXTROVERT, COULD YOU BE AN 'otrovert'?

Most people find it hard to imagine what it feels like to have no group loyalty: to not feel any particular affinity to your nationality, ethnicity, religion, or to your chosen profession, a particular sports team, or your alma mater. These group affiliations form partly because local cultures are diverse, and even small differences can be enough to bind people together — or set them apart.

By **RAMI KAMINSKI MD**

From an early age, children worldwide are conditioned to identify with one group or another. That cultural conditioning almost always conveys the values of the parents or caregivers, turning what are clearly random circumstances of one's birth into their destiny. This process is so deeply ingrained in our society that identifying with a group is not seen as optional.

But not everyone feels this way.

An 'otrovert' is the term I use for those who do not feel the obligation to merge their identities with others and who remain unaffiliated with any group, as we all were initially, when we entered this world.

Being unable to adopt a group identity can have social consequences in a culture that is designed for joining. However, it can also be quite advantageous. When you don't belong to any group, you are not subject to the >



TO BE AN OTROVERT

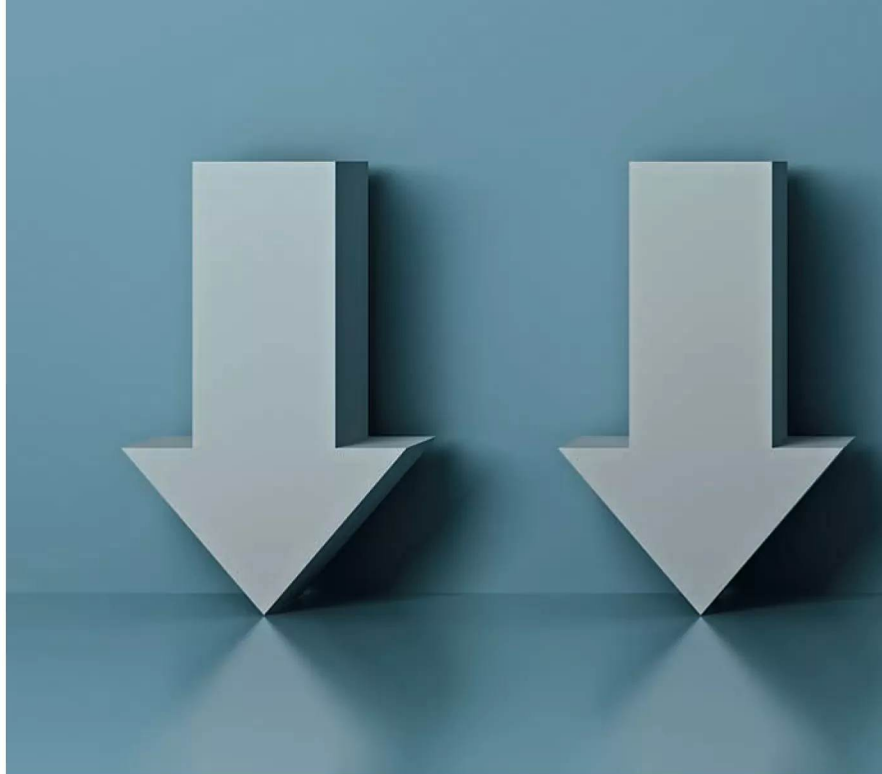
group's implicit rules, or swayed by the group's influence. This confers upon the non-joiner two beneficial traits: originality and emotional independence.

Being outside the hive, so to speak, allows you to think and create freely: to come up with unique ideas and make unique contributions, untainted by groupthink or by ideas that have come before. Able to distinguish between the gravitational pull of the group consensus and your own inner, personal centre of gravity, you are free to think whatever you want and to be flexible when situations change, without fear of subverting collective notions about what makes an idea 'good'.

Given that one cannot be cast out of a group to which they don't belong, you have no fear of social rejection. You don't seek external validation, nor do you rely on others for emotional support. You don't feel the need to convince anyone of anything, least of all, your own worth. You do not borrow your dignity from external sources; you own it. You always live as your true self.

Our communal society often conflates belonging with connection. However, while it is true that people who struggle to connect might find it hard to achieve a sense of belonging, the reverse is not true. In fact, without the noise of popular culture, gossip, family conflicts, or political tribes (all disinteresting to otroverts), you are free to focus on deepening bonds with the people you feel genuinely close to.

Otroverts are not anti-social; they are very friendly, connect deeply with individuals, and are good partners. They are not tribal, so they do not judge others based on kinship or shared values. They flow independently. They can be contrarian and sometimes even revolutionary, but their behaviour is not rule-breaking. Their minds are simply rebellious, and refuse to accept the majority opinion as authority.



I believe that independent thinkers who are not emotionally dependent on any group can see the fanaticism of a hive mind long before most people do.

But since they are not, almost by definition, involved in political parties or movements, religious or ethnic communities, or even social media, their voices are rarely heard.

'I am alone in the midst of these happy, reasonable voices.'

THE CORE QUALITIES OF OTROVERTS

There are many nuances to the otrovert personality, but the following are the fundamental qualities that all otroverts share — and how they manifest in daily life.

Lack of a communal impulse

Otroverts are not natural joiners

● They always prefer to get together with a friend one-on-one rather than in a group. When they have to attend communal gatherings, they are the person standing off to the side, deep in conversation with another person; they never 'work the room'.

● They are not likely to throw themselves

'Otroverts are soloists who cannot play in an orchestra.'



birthday parties and generally avoid group celebrations of any kind.

- They would rather do school projects or work assignments individually than in a group (even if that means taking on more work).
- They dislike organized activities and would much rather vacation solo, even in a remote, unfamiliar destination, than go on a group trip.
- They prefer sports and activities where they can compete individually (tennis, golf, running, hiking, etc.) rather than sports where they have to play on a team (football, netball, etc.).
- They have trouble being relaxed and themselves in public, no matter how common the situation. They can engage in small talk without awkwardness but are easily bored by it and find even banal interactions (like talking to a supermarket checkout worker or exchanging pleasantries with a neighbour) secretly irritating.
- They are uncomfortable in groups and in crowded places such as lifts or queues where small talk tends to break out to pass the time.

Otroverts are soloists who cannot play in an orchestra. They are fiercely independent, happy to sit on the sidelines, and neither need nor tolerate codependency. The writer Rudyard Kipling encapsulated this way of thinking when he wrote, 'The individual has always had to struggle to keep from being overwhelmed by the tribe. If you try it, you

will be lonely often and sometimes frightened. But no price is too high to pay for the privilege of owning yourself.'

Always an observer, never a true participant.

Otroverts secretly feel like outsiders in any group, regardless of its members.

- They never truly feel a connection to the group itself or its shared identity, even if they connect individually with everyone in it.
- They don't like mixing people from different realms of life, even if those people know each other. For example, they would be uncomfortable bringing a spouse to an office party, where they would be responsible for integrating their partner into the group experience.
- They don't feel an affinity with a particular sports team, an alma mater, or a company they work for. These things aren't part of their identity in the way they are for most people.

Otroverts are forever nonparticipants; they are mere observers, watching the social dance. A communal person will go on a cruise and form new bonds with strangers who become friends by the time the ship has docked again. But an otrovert will return feeling more alone than ever.

The great writer and existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre was well acquainted with this feeling, which he articulated perfectly in his first novel, *Nausea*: 'I am alone in the midst of these happy, reasonable voices.'



TO BE AN OTROVERT

Nonconforming

Otroverts don't just march to the beat of their own drum; they march to the beat of another instrument altogether.

- They prefer to stand out than to fit in.
- They like what they like and are not interested in popular culture. They have no interest in seeing that movie that everyone is raving about or dying to see, or dressing the way everyone else dresses (unless those things are aligned with their existing personal style or interests).
- They can be confident and charming in large gatherings when they have an assigned role or task — such as host, keynote speaker, or DJ — that visibly sets them apart.

David Foster Wallace, another one of my favourite otrovert writers, perfectly expressed the otrovert's disdain for activities others seem to enjoy in his first novel, *The Broom of the System*, when he observed, 'Modern party-dance is simply writhing to suggestive music. It is ridiculous, silly to watch and excruciatingly embarrassing to perform. It is ridiculous, and yet absolutely everyone does it, so that it is the person who does not want to do the ridiculous thing who feels out of place and uncomfortable and self-conscious...in a word, ridiculous. Right out of Kafka: the person who does not want to do the ridiculous thing is the person who is ridiculous.'

Independent, original thinking.

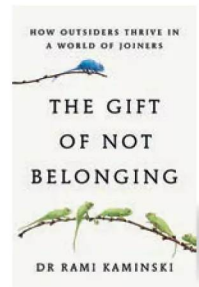
Otroverts reject the hive mind. They don't think in the way the group collectively thinks and don't care about what the group collectively cares about. They are in touch with who they are.

- They stand by their opinions and convictions. If asked to weigh in on something at work, they aren't swayed by the opinions their colleagues have expressed.
- They do not ask for advice about how to live but readily accept advice from experts in subjects that they have no expertise in (lawyers, plumbers, etc.).
- They are specialists rather than generalists, with interests and skills that run narrow but deep. For example, when asked a question that falls outside my area of expertise, I often joke that it falls under the 80 percent of things I am bad at. But I like to think that I am not just good, but excellent, at the remaining 20 percent of things.

Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is, of course, a seminal feminist text. But I see it also as a book that could only have been written by an otrovert who experienced daily life entirely liberated from the shared ideologies or opinions that a society tries to impose on all of its members. As she wrote in defiance, 'Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind.'

Left-handed people can live comfortably in a right-handed world as long as they are left alone to be who they are; forcing them to use their right hand merely creates unnecessary discomfort and difficulty. Similarly, giving otroverts the space to be who they are will allow them to feel increasingly comfortable, especially in adulthood, when the pressure to belong lessens.

Once otroverts are free from the pressures of well-meaning individuals urging them to join activities in which they have no interest, solitude becomes an opportunity for freedom, for embracing a sense of self independent of others, for allowing self-acceptance to blossom. No matter what this time alone is spent on, all that matters is that it be attuned to the needs and desires of each otrovert. This liberation from dependency on others' opinions opens up the possibility of a bespoke, self-determined life trajectory that brings contentment. ■



The Gift of Not Belonging by Dr Rami Kaminski (Scribe, £14.99).

'They stand by their opinions and convictions.'





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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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The Ollie therapeutic model has been successfully trialled with the NHS, demonstrating its commitment to improving children's emotional wellbeing across the UK.



Get in touch

Get in touch to train to become an Ollie Coach, find a coach in your area, or book an event. Use the QR code below to visit the website, or email info@ollieandhissuperpowers.com



INTO THE *uni mindset*

As thousands fly the nest and head off to university, many parents will be anxious about how their kids will cope with living alone as well as studying. After all, when a new study showed that a quarter of uni-aged kids can't even boil an egg, it looks like they've got reason to worry!

So to help both new students and their parents, sixth form and university teachers Dr Jo Phillips and Martin Griffin have teamed up to share advice on how new students can make the most of their time in further education by adjusting to university study, campus life and independent living and learning.

Griffin says: 'As parents of a teenager, we appreciate the anxiety that comes when a young person is about to go to university — it's normal to wonder how on earth they'll cope with the demands of this new way of life. While trying to stay strong for their sake, you feel the heartache of supporting them from a distance, knowing that university is not quite the same carefree experience it once was.'

Phillips adds: 'We love teaching teenagers, but they aren't always well-informed and prepared for the university experience.'

Don't just wait for instructions

Griffin says it's important for young people to be proactive when they're at university, rather than just waiting to be told what to do. He says: 'It's worth reminding your teenager that

By **LISA SALMON**

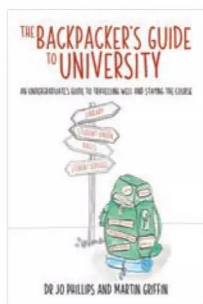
university is a journey that can be travelled in different ways. We use the metaphor of backpacker versus tourist — backpackers are explorers, with a bias towards action, whereas tourists wait for instruction or entertainment.

'To get the most out of university, students need to try and be as "backpacker" as possible, as the way to successfully navigate higher education is to nurture a mindset of enthusiasm for embracing rich new experiences.'

Tackle impostor syndrome

It's easy to see why teens starting at university may feel like everyone apart from themselves knows what they're doing, without taking a step back to realise that although others may look like they've got it sussed, in reality they're all in the same unsteady boat, even if they hide it well.

'Everyone experiences impostor syndrome,' explains Phillips. 'We've all



The Backpacker's Guide to University by Dr Jo Phillips and Martin Griffin (Crown House Publishing, £14.99)



had that feeling that we don't belong or aren't matching up to our peers, and new undergraduates can be especially susceptible to this. She points out that sometimes this feeling can turn into negative self-talk about not belonging, but says parents can help by encouraging them to reflect on their strengths by writing a list of their achievements before they go to university.

'After their first month, suggest they make another list of the things they've learned,' she advises. 'What do they understand now that they didn't 30 days ago? This is a powerful tool to build confidence.'

Timetabling

University offers a new level of independence, but time often needs managing, so Phillips suggests parents encourage their new students to create a timetable outlining how their academic, social and home lives can mesh together.

'Scheduling is something all adults have grown used to, and what seems obvious to us might not be to a fledgling student,' she

points out. 'Introduce your undergraduate to the idea of the timetable – the university provides some structure, but it's on the individual student to sit down and plan the rest. 'Giving them a heads-up about scheduling reduces the shock when they first realise they'll need to steer their own ship.'

Stress the importance of re-routing

It's not just travel that sometimes needs re-routing, it's day-to-day life too. Phillips explains: 'Undergraduates with the backpacker mindset get used to adapting, and when a problem occurs on their planned route, they switch paths.'

For example, she says a lecturer might be off campus on the day your teen wanted to see them, a deadline might change unexpectedly, or written feedback on an essay might not seem clear.

She advises: 'Be upfront with your child and emphasise how well-equipped they are to solve small problems and re-route. Persistence takes practice.'

*'We've
all had
that
feeling
that we
don't
belong.'*

DR ALEX GEORGE:

'If a food makes you feel bad, that's your body telling you something'

After weighing over 20st and struggling with grief and depression two and a half years ago, Dr Alex George says his 'diet was poor', he wasn't exercising and was 'consuming too much alcohol and processed foods'.

The TV doctor, who was launched into the public eye appearing on *Love Island* in 2018, says: 'I made a change at that time though to remove things that were harmful for me. I stopped drinking for one and then I started putting things in my body that were helpful to my health, such as having a diverse diet that included proteins, carbohydrates, nutrients and plants.'

'When I started fuelling my body like that, everything changed. That's not to say that what you eat can fix all of your problems or that by eating certain plants your depression goes away, but as part of broader health changes, it's powerful.'

George, who previously was an NHS A&E doctor, says when he started out at medical school, he had 'nowhere near the level of appreciation' he should have for the benefits of gut health on mental health.

'The gut is often referred now to as the second brain and there is this idea that so much of our nervous system, mental wellbeing or lack of wellbeing can be affected by or influenced by our gut,' he says. 'For example, the building

By **SARA KEENAN**

blocks for serotonin — one of our key mood hormones — is synthesised in the gut, and an inflamed gut or poor gut health can implicate and impact our serotonin and the way our mind operates.'

When it comes to his current diet, George says that through having his podcast 'The Stompcast', he has interviewed people in the nutrition and dietitian space that have helped him develop his understanding. 'It goes back to the quite core basic concepts that can easily be lost,' he says. 'What we should be trying to do is find healthy ways to get sources of protein from lean meats — if you don't eat meat then sources that are vegetarian but high in protein like nuts or seeds. We also need to be making sure we get fats into our diet as they are really important for the immune system too, especially healthy fats. Then we need carbohydrates to fuel our brain and our body as it is vital to things we want to do. So I make sure I get all of those everyday.'



Dr Alex George says that since he improved his gut health, he has enjoyed a huge boost to his mental health

He explains that when it comes to improving wellbeing, it's a compounding effect that we should be looking for, not for one single change to fuel everything: 'You want small changes that on their own, have very small effects, but when combined with five or six other changes, have this huge overall compounding benefit,' he explains.

'For example, I stopped drinking alcohol, started eating better, fuelled my body and also started moving it.

'I also started taking care of my mind: I got help and started therapy. As my diet changed, I lost weight, was able to exercise more and started feeling better.'

He isn't looking for perfection though. 'This mindset makes people feel like they are chasing something that can't be done,' he says, admitting that his own diet isn't perfect all of the time.

'It's very difficult to do and it can cause all sorts of issues,' he reflects. 'You have to also be able to live and enjoy your life, so I look at my

diet to be [around] 80 percent the way I want and that feels like a good place for me.'

He adds: 'Broadly it is about looking at your plate and [asking], "Is it colourful? Or is it a beige plate?" If all your plates and all your meals look beige, then that's often a sign that perhaps we aren't having diversity in our food. If you can try and eat 30 plants a week then that's a brilliant start.'

Another issue that has been in the spotlight in the last year is 'trying to avoid ultra processed foods as much as possible', he adds. 'It is impossible to avoid ultra processed food in its entirety, but what we want to do is try and eat as little of it as we can.'

Lastly, he adds that food should be fuel and people should be careful that it doesn't turn into a chore. 'I enjoy foods that taste good, but you want to also feel good afterwards. It's actually a good way of looking at it — if you eat something that makes you feel bad afterwards, that's an indication your body's telling you something.' ■

PHOTO: LUCY NORTH/PA

The joys of seasonal eating

Raymond Blanc explains how everyone thought he was 'weird' when he introduced a vegetarian menu 40 years ago, and why he still loves veg

By **LAUREN TAYLOR**

If anyone can be credited for popularising the idea of a restaurant 'kitchen garden' it's Raymond Blanc. The French chef opened world-famous Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons 41 years ago with expansive grounds — and the concept of 'garden to plate' was born.

Now, with 250 different organic varieties of fruit and veg growing and 27 acres in total, the gardens aren't just crucial for the two-Michelin star Oxfordshire restaurant and hotel, but for him personally too.

'The first thing I do often is to have a lovely walk, try to gather the day together,' Blanc says. 'I go to the Japanese Tea House Garden [one of 12 individual gardens at Le Manoir] when I'm really highly stressed.'

'The garden plays a huge role at Le Manoir — and in my life'.

King Charles even once spent 'three hours in the battering rain' walking around the grounds of the 15th-century manor house, after Blanc had joked to the then Prince during a visit to his Highgrove estate that the royal gardens were 'not quite as magnificent' as Le Manoir's.

The prolific chef, who has been a mainstay on cooking and food shows during his career, has always championed the humble veg. Even

when it opened in 1984, Le Manoir had a vegetarian menu, which seemed almost outrageous at the time — 'Everyone was looking at me as if I was weird', Blanc says.

'Vegetables can produce the most extraordinary dishes, which are tasty, which are healthy as well,' the 75-year-old says. 'The health factor is important, as we know we are the nation who has diabetes, strokes, heart attacks and so on.'

Importantly, 'vegetables are mostly inexpensive, unless you buy truffles', he quips. But seasonality is everything, and it's taken very seriously by Blanc. The sheer volume of food the UK imports 'is quite incredible and sad', he notes.

'Seasonality, for me, means so much, because if it's seasonal, it's close to home. That means you don't

import your food from millions of miles away. Then that food which is imported is full of pesticides, fertiliser, fungicide.

'When you fly all these vegetables across the world, these strawberries, which have been grown thousands of miles away, don't have any flavour, no taste, and cost you more than triple, maybe.' Strawberry season is worth waiting for, he says. Plus, 'If you buy locally and you wait for that season, there's a glut of it, and once there's a glut of it, the price comes down. And the flavour is 10 times better.'

'I think it makes a great deal of sense to grow your own food if you can. Of course, I fully understand that we live in a world where we have very little time. [But] if you can't grow your own food, then shop seasonally.'

Raymond's tips for creating a kitchen garden

1 'Do raised beds to start with, because it's a good way to get acquainted. You don't need a large space. You can start doing it outside on your windowsill.'

2 'Have a good compost as well: good earth will provide some good nutrients.'

3 'Get acquainted with seasonality, with different varieties and so on.'

4 'Start with herbs, such as dragon rosemary — it's very easy. Little seeds are a miracle of their own. That little seed will grow into a beautiful carrot, or beautiful herb.'

5 'Next try spinach, peas, runner beans, things that grow fast. [Do] what's easy to grow and then you get to learn, and you get hooked. Gardening is extraordinary.'

A full-page photograph of a middle-aged man with grey hair and a beard, smiling and looking off to the side. He is wearing a dark green jacket over a plaid shirt and a black V-neck sweater. He is holding four green apples in his hands. The background is a soft-focus garden with green foliage and sunlight filtering through the leaves.

*“The garden
plays a huge role at
Le Manoir – and
in my life”.*

Potager casserole

Embrace veg in this hearty feast

'An ode to Le Manoir's famous vegetable garden. This vegetarian casserole can be turned into a feast, served with bowls of cheese, crème fraîche, sundried tomatoes and, of course, a loaf of good-quality bread,' says Blanc. 'The pistou sauce takes only a few minutes to make and can be stirred into the casserole or served in a bowl on the side so that your guests can help themselves.'

Ingredients

- 1 small onion
- 1 large garlic clove
- 160g new potatoes
- 1 small leek
- 1 large carrot
- 1 stick of celery
- 60g fine green beans
- 120g frozen broad beans or peas
- 1tbsp olive oil
- 1 bay leaf
- Sea salt and ground white pepper
- 700ml boiling water
- 4 jarred artichoke hearts
- 1 tin (400g) cannellini beans or white haricot beans

For the pistou

- A bunch of basil
- 2 garlic cloves
- 100ml extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 pinches of sea salt flakes
- A pinch of ground black pepper

To serve

- 10g chervil

Method:

1 Make the pistou: Coarsely chop the basil. Chop the garlic to a purée. Bring a medium-sized saucepan of water to the boil, and meanwhile half-fill a medium-sized bowl with iced water. Plunge the basil into the pan of boiling water and blanch for 30 seconds. Remove and refresh in the



PREP: 10 minutes
COOK: 20 minutes
SERVES: 4

cold water, and then drain. With a stick blender or in a food processor, blend the blanched basil with the extra-virgin olive oil, chopped garlic, salt and pepper to a purée.

2 To prepare, dice the onion. Crush the garlic to a purée. Quarter the potatoes. Remove and discard the two outer layers of the leek, halve it lengthways, coarsely chop and wash. Halve the carrot lengthways and coarsely chop it. Coarsely chop the celery. Coarsely chop the green beans (about two centimetres). Place the frozen broad beans (or peas) in a small bowl and cover with water straight from a boiled kettle.

3 In a large saucepan or casserole dish over a medium heat, heat the olive oil and add the onion, garlic and

bay leaf, along with salt and pepper. Cook for three minutes.

4 Add the potatoes, leek, carrot, celery and green beans. Stir and continue to sweat the vegetables for a further three minutes.

5 Pour in the boiling water and simmer for 12-14 minutes. Test the vegetables are cooked by simply tasting. Adjust the seasoning.

6 Remove the pan from the heat and add the artichoke hearts and cannellini beans (or haricot beans). Drain the broad beans (or peas) and add these to the pan. Chop the chervil and add it. If using pistou, now is the time to add it – to your taste – and stir it into the casserole. If necessary, reheat the casserole, divide it into four shallow bowls and serve.

Basque-style cheesecake

It's easier to make than you think, says the chef

'This is the very best cheesecake I have ever tasted,' says Blanc. 'A dessert much loved in the Basque Country (which straddles the border of France and northern Spain), it is so good that we put it on the menu at Brasserie Blanc.'

'I have served the cheesecake with stewed blackberries, but it may be accompanied by any seasonal fruits or good-quality shop-bought preserves, such as cherries in Kirsch.'

'I like to make this cheesecake a day in advance so that after being baked in the oven it has plenty of time to chill in the fridge. It is not a great challenge to make, but it is certainly a dessert for that celebratory occasion. Our guests describe it as "a showstopper".'

Ingredients

For the cheesecake:

- 1tsp unsalted butter, softened, for greasing the tin
- 1 lemon, for zesting
- 550g cream cheese
- 175g caster sugar
- 4 eggs (preferably organic or free-range)
- 250ml double cream
- 4tsp vanilla bean paste
- 20g cornflour

Method

1 Preheat the oven to 220°C/200°C fan/gas 7 (here, it is best — but not essential — to use the fan-assisted oven).

2 Use your fingertips to rub the soft butter around the inside of a springform cake ring (or mousse ring) with a diameter of 20 centimetres so that the greaseproof paper will stick to it. Now line the inside of the ring with a large sheet of greaseproof paper, making sure it fits neatly into

all the edges and the base of the ring. Place the lined ring on a baking tray and keep aside.

3 Zest the lemon and keep the zest to one side. In a large bowl, whisk together the cream cheese and caster sugar until smooth. Add the eggs and whisk again to an even consistency. Next, pour in the double cream, add the vanilla and lemon zest and sift in the cornflour. Whisk again, ensuring there are no lumps in the mixture. Pour this mixture into the prepared tin.

4 Bake for 25 to 30 minutes on the middle shelf of the oven until the top has that distinctive dark sheen of traditional Basque cheesecake. Halfway through cooking — and depending on your oven — you might need to turn the cheesecake 180 degrees so that it is evenly browned. (Chris's photograph is a good guide to what the cheesecake top should look like.) The sides of the cheesecake should be slightly firm and the centre should have a gentle wobble.

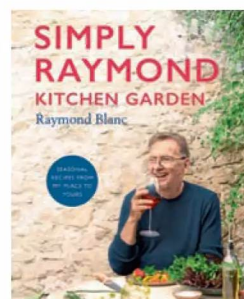
5 Remove the cheesecake from the oven and set it to one side to cool (it will continue to cook as it cools). Place the cooled cheesecake in the fridge for at least half a day or overnight to firm up.

6 To serve, remove the springform cake or mousse ring and gently peel back the baking paper. Serve slices of the cheesecake with lightly stewed blackberries, if you wish, or a fruit preserve of your choice.



PREP: 15 minutes
COOK: 25-30 minutes
SERVES: 8

IMAGES: CHRIS TERRY



Simply Raymond Kitchen Garden, by Raymond Blanc is published by Headline Home, priced £26.

* Everything changed when... *'I experienced burnout'*

Lisa Snowdon

The model and TV presenter on how she swapped her phone addiction for forest bathing and board games!

TV presenter Lisa Snowdon says she felt 'out of control' and 'massively over-emotional' when she experienced burnout at the end of last year.

'I had too many tabs open on my brain,' says the 53-year-old, a regular on ITV's *This Morning*. 'Everything got on top of me, I was trying to do too much and saying yes to too many things. I wasn't listening to my body. I felt over-emotional, burnt out.'

The changing season, the build-up to Christmas and the end of the year made her feel 'you've just got to push, push, push — and I didn't have any push left'.

Going on a 10-day digital detox retreat in Majorca helped to break the cycle — and face her reliance on her phone. 'It was really quite tricky for a few days, then totally liberating.'

'It's almost like a constant battle,' she says of her relationship with her phone. 'Somebody will email me, I'll then check all my other apps and things like that. It's a sort of addiction.'

'I needed to leave the country, I needed to give my phone to somebody or lock it in a safe in a resort somewhere.'

'I completely switched off, which is great, but then you have to come back home and you have to get back into real life and try not to always just check your phone.'

'My mental health gets really impacted when I'm just staring at the phone a lot, when I'm going from app to app to app to app, you just get that ping of notification...'

'I don't have clarity of thought, I feel a bit snappy. I notice my stress



Snowdon says she is on a 'journey of feeling calm, nurturing myself and knowing what I need.'

response in my shoulders, and I'm not able to deal with stuff as well.'

This year she has tried to cut back significantly on using it — particularly at night. 'The hour or two before bed and in the morning, I don't reach for my phone for at least half an hour. I think we need to wake up slowly and let the brain wake up, rather than bombarding it immediately. It's on silent all the time, I don't have notifications that come up, so I need to physically go on the apps to check it.'

Now she's on a 'journey of feeling calm, nurturing myself and knowing what I need — rather than doing stuff for everybody and not honouring myself'.

Snowdon, who hosts the podcast

We're Not Getting Any Younger with Andy Goldstein, consciously tries to carve out moments of reset in her day.

'It's having those moments where I'm cooking or I've got a good book. I think it's making a nice space in your home, whether it's having a few houseplants, lovely neutral, calming colours, a comfortable chair where you can hunker down and have a moment with a cup of tea and a book. It's really calming to the nervous system.'

'If you've ever been completely overwhelmed and you're on your phone too much, and then you just have maybe an hour or two, and you go out for a walk, or you sit and you do some breath work or some meditation. You can actually just change that chemistry in your brain quite quickly.'

She meditates every day. 'I like to do it first thing in the morning, even if it's just five minutes of breathwork. And I like being out in nature — that's like a walking meditation, like forest bathing [the Japanese practice of immersing yourself in trees to improve wellbeing].'

'I love to look at trees, and I love to touch them and honour them — even though I know that sounds a bit "woo woo"! Just looking at the dappled light, feeling the air on your skin, and being more aware of what's going on around you.'

These days she embraces quieter hobbies at home with fiancé George Smart — 'playing board games, playing cards, I love cooking, I love gardening. I like those calming, quiet hobbies and my body likes it too. My mind certainly likes it.'

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