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in the **moment**

WELLNESS • MINDFULNESS • HAPPINESS

ISSUE 36 MARCH 2020

Let go of *stress*

Why your body's hidden stress signals hold the key to calm



**Dr Rangan
Chatterjee's**
stress solutions

THE SECRET TO GLOWING SKIN?

Work with your
hormonal cycle

LIFE LESSONS

Why 'difficult' women
make **great role models**

How to deal with
fairweather friends

Don't let doubt crush your
career dreams

22 PAGE

SLEEP SPECIAL

* Tackle insomnia

* Why a nightcap is a no-no

* Mindful dreaming

* 13 better
bedtime rituals



Take SOMETIME

Ricola herbal sweets are the perfect way to
enjoy a moment of calm in a busy day

From crowded commutes to never-ending to-do lists, life can feel pretty hectic. That's why it's important to take little moments for yourself throughout the day, for the wellbeing of both your mind and body. Even something as simple as making a cup of tea, taking a deep breath or enjoying a Ricola herbal sweet can give you a moment of blissful calm.

As a Swiss herb specialist, Ricola naturally understands the power of plants to cultivate wellness. That's why each delicious sweet includes a unique blend of 13 herbs, such as mallow and thyme, all naturally grown in fresh mountain air and cultivated without fertilisers or pesticides. Produced with ethical principles and free from sugar, artificial flavours or colours, discover for yourself how Ricola sweets can help you achieve that wonderful feeling of wellbeing.



Available in an award-winning range of sugar-free flavours including mellow Elderflower and zesty LemonMint, Ricola sugar-free sweets can be found in the confectionery aisle in selected **Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Morrisons, Holland & Barrett** and **WHSmith** stores, as well as online at **ricola.com** and **ocado.com**

For herbal wellbeing tips, visit [ricola.com](https://www.ricola.com) or [@Ricola_UK](https://www.instagram.com/Ricola_UK) on Instagram



*Breathe in,
breathe out*

When you are in need of a moment of calm, try these quick and easy calming breathing tips.

1 Stand or sit in a place and position that is comfortable for you.

2 Place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly.

3 Relax your shoulders down.

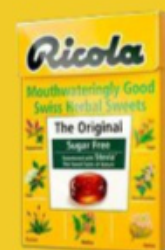
4 As you take a deep breath in, aim to expand your belly rather than your chest.

5 Breathe out through your mouth. Relax your jaw and shoulders.

6 Take a deep breath in again, focusing on pushing out your belly, keeping your chest flat and keeping everything nice and relaxed.

7 Keep going for a few more breaths and notice how different you feel in body and mind.

Ricola



Let's sleep on it...



Sleep. It's a source of anxiety for so many of us. Am I getting enough? Should I be going to bed earlier? How can I switch off my busy mind when my thoughts are keeping me awake? This issue, we address all of these questions and more in our 22-page Sleep Well Special, packed with expert advice and practical exercises to help you fall asleep easier and wake up feeling properly refreshed.

I read recently that humans are the only mammal known to willingly delay sleep. Our modern culture is in many ways geared towards exactly this. Netflix, social media, the pressure to be 'on call' all the time... Is this a good thing? We probably all agree that it's not. As a parent, it's made me question the message I give to my children, because if the idea of 'staying up late' is always promoted as a treat (tired kids the next day is definitely not a treat) then the flipside to this is that going to bed is a chore, or that early to bed means they are missing out on something. That's not to say I never let my children stay up, but it has certainly made me conscious of the need to balance this with the message that going to bed when you are tired is A Really Good Thing. And that goes for me too!

I hope you find plenty of helpful tips and ideas in all of our features this month. Do get in touch and let us know your thoughts, and if there are any topics you'd like us to cover we'd love to hear from you. Connect with us on Facebook or Instagram @inthemomentmag.

Kirstie

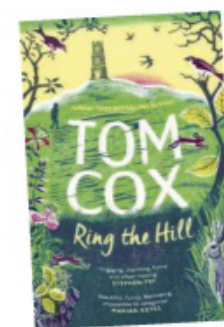
Kirstie Duhig, Editor

This month *I am...*



Listening to...

Gentle, inspiring, touching – this podcast is so insightful. MoMA curator Paola Antonelli's beautiful story is my favourite episode so far.



Reading...

I love this book! It's about walking in nature. And up hills. And quite a lot of other stuff. It's warm, uplifting and making me laugh. (Unbound, £16.99)



Relaxing with...

A few drops of this gorgeous aromatherapy body oil massaged into tired limbs is my bedtime treat.

£16.95 weleda.co.uk



Cover illustration Alexandra Kern @zandraart

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How to SLEEP WELL

22 page special

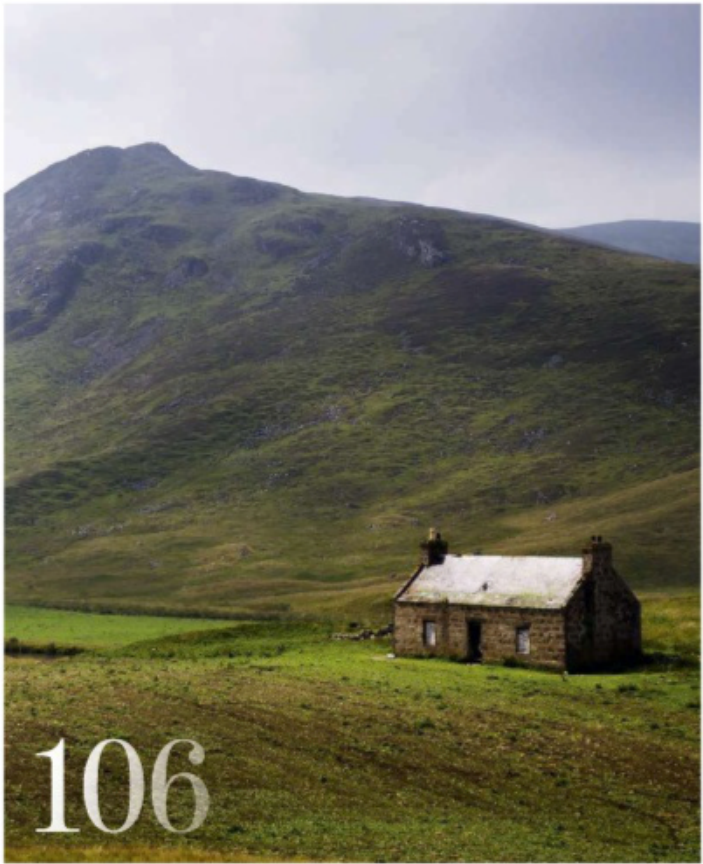
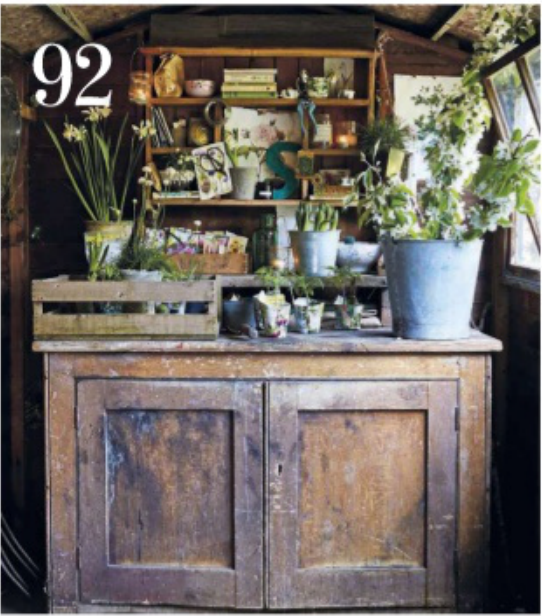
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Tackle insomnia by making relaxation your goal

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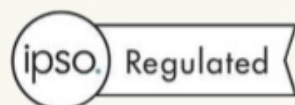
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NHS Direct on 111
Samaritans on 116 123
Befrienders Worldwide at befrienders.org

* WRITE TO US

Your thoughts...

We're always interested to hear from you! You can tell us your thoughts on this month's issue and share any topics you'd like us to feature at the email address below



Great expectations!

I just wanted to say how interesting I found 'The Power Of Anticipation' in issue 34. It shed some light on something that I had often wondered about; why is it that I much prefer to watch a movie after previously reading the book it was based on? The answer seems to be anticipation; of the events that are going to happen in the movie, and at meeting the characters. It brings out a much more intense enjoyment and increases the excitement. There is also a sense of satisfaction and contentment when I recognise the characters and scenes, and allow myself a little internal debate on how accurate the movie is and which was better... the book or the film. Absolute bliss!

Sue Watt, via email

a restoration project that I can lovingly create something beautiful out of. Thank you so much for the fresh perspective, the hope and the motivation this article has given me.
Wendy Seddon, via email

Digital detox

I loved your online article about digital detox – I've started leaving my phone on the landing an hour before I want to go to sleep and picking it up again in the morning. I'm getting more sleep and better quality too. Recently, for the first time, I didn't even think of my phone until I passed it on my way downstairs, already showered and dressed. It felt tough initially, but I look forward to the break now.
Sarah Conway, via Facebook

Find out if you're addicted to your phone with our quiz at bit.ly/digidetoxquiz

Life after loss

I really enjoyed and connected with the article 'Embracing the Gift of Creativity' by Kiran Sidhu in your New Year issue. I have suffered a lot of loss recently and was feeling very empty and bereft. Kiran's restoration of 'The Long Barn' and her idea that after loss we are ourselves a restoration project really gave me food for thought. Instead of seeing myself as empty and sad, I now think of myself as

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Meet our contributors

Introducing five of the talented writers who've shared their expertise, ideas and inspiration this issue...



1 LEAH LARWOOD

Leah is a freelance writer, poet and trained hypnotherapist. She runs workshops in therapeutic writing and is currently compiling her debut poetry collection. Find out more about Leah at themoonlab.net

Learn how to use the mindfulness of dreams and sleep to boost joy on page 44

2 SIOBHAN MASON

A freelance health and parenting writer living in Bristol, Siobhan loves Zumba, Pilates and ambling round Bristol's beautiful harbourside.

Identify your stress signals and pick up tips on how to restore calm on page 22

3 JESSICA LACEY

Jessica is a beauty editor with over a decade of experience testing, writing and talking about all things wellbeing.

Tailor your skincare routine to your hormonal cycle and discover the best products for your skin on page 64



4 XENIA TALIOTIS

Wellbeing and travel writer Xenia loves to discover new ideas and meet new people, sharing the lessons she learns along the way.

Xenia learns why matriarchal societies may once have been the norm on page 108

5 CLAIRE MUNNINGS

Claire is a health and wellbeing journalist interested in women's issues. She enjoys writing about ways that we can reconnect with our bodies and live more mindfully.

Could alcohol be affecting your sleep? Find out on page 35



good news

**Uplifting stories, ideas and inspiration from around the world*



Flavour friends

We often associate pairing food and drink with red or white, but with one in five of us regularly choosing a non-alcoholic option, it's time to think outside the bottle. Matching soft drinks with foods can work in exactly the same way, enhancing the aroma, flavour and texture of our meals. Feast Box, a recipe box subscription, have released a whole host of tips for finding the perfect drink to sip alongside your supper. Our fave need-to-knows? Choose a sweet drink to balance out a salty dish, and never underestimate something fizzy – the bubbles wake up our taste buds and increase our perception of fragrant flavours. Find more tips at feastbox.co.uk

Hobby happy

We know hobbies help us to relax, but it turns out the way we spend our free time is key. A recent study found that those who enjoy creative hobbies, like baking, knitting and photography, reported the highest levels of happiness following their chosen activity. We'll get our aprons on.





Working woman

While many of us dream of escaping the stresses of the world of work, it might be worth making a career plan instead - research suggests that women who work in midlife tend to be happier and live longer. The study, published in the journal *Demography*, found that those who worked until around the age of 64 reported fewer incidences of depression and a 25 percent lower risk of death than those who didn't. Whether that's a side hustle to accompany childcare or a whole new direction for your future, the key to reaping these rewards is to find a job that is satisfying (and pays an income), promoting improved feelings of stability and helping us to feel valued. Now that's a work perk.

OH HAPPY DAYS

Simple ways to grow your happy this month and beyond



1 Keep an eye on the clock. Recent research has found that 2:17pm is the time we feel most tired, which can impact our mood and productivity. To avoid this energy slump, try a 20-minute stroll or break from your desk to refresh your mind and aid in lunchtime digestion.

2 Find some balance. Balance Festival is back in London from 17th-19th April, this year with a focus on finding the routine that works for you. From heightening your emotional intelligence to trying healthful foods, there's something for everyone. [Balance-festival.com](https://balance-festival.com)

3 Spring clean! We spend many of our hours in bed, so looking after our mattress is essential. Sprinkling baking soda on top and leaving for an hour before vacuuming away is said to kill bacteria and send any stains away, leaving you to get a good night's kip.

4 Watch and learn. David Attenborough's new documentary about some of the biggest environmental challenges we face, *A Life On Our Planet*, comes out on Netflix this month and will be broadcast in cinemas on 16th April. Buy tickets at attenborough.film



Photography: Danny Martin Dale



5 Make the most of your products. Getting that last squeeze out of the tube is a nightmare, but UpCircle Beauty have the solution. Their clever little key will help you to get every last drop and at £1.50, it's a small investment for a big win. [Upcirclebeauty.com](https://upcirclebeauty.com)

6 Spice things up. A study in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* found that people who consume chilli peppers at least four times a week reduce the risk of dying from heart and brain related illness. Try adding fresh chilli to soups, sauces or a hot chocolate.

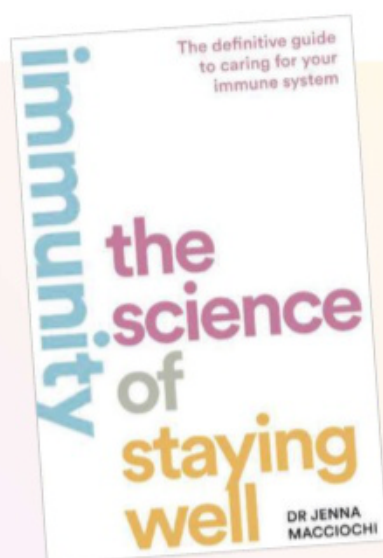


Sustainable subscription

We love discovering eco-friendly alternatives to our household and beauty faves, but sometimes it can be hard to hear about the newest developments or to source them locally. Enter the sustainable subscription box – it’s the perfect way to find new suppliers, ideas and inspiration for your ethical home. “The idea is to help you make simple, positive changes month by month,” says Alice, founder of UK-based box Authentic House (authentichouse.co.uk). Many boxes will also donate part of their profits to charities who share their goals: “We help them raise funds, reach more people, and tell their stories of empowerment and impact,” says Causebox, which covers all of the US (causebox.com). All this and the excitement of opening a parcel of goodies every month? We’re sold!

Soak it up

Sure, you might put apple cider vinegar on your salad, but bathing in it? Experts think that a cup of the stuff could be just what your time in the tub is missing. Its antibacterial properties can treat body odour, acne and fungal infections and there are even whispers that it could help keep wrinkles at bay – just make sure to rinse off afterwards!



* ON OUR SHELF

Immunity: the science of staying well

Dr Jenna Macciochi

This oh-so-useful book is a go-to if you often feel a bit run down. Expert immunologist Dr Jenna Macciochi

shares the science of strengthening our immunity with tips and clear explanations on everything from nutrition to sleep and mental health – we’ve never felt better.

£14.99 Thorsons. Available 16th April



Butter me up

Almonds contain healthy fats, fibre, protein, magnesium and vitamin E, and recent research revealed they are our favourite nut to snack on. Bake these to share the love!

ALMOND MUFFINS

1 Preheat the oven to 180°C. Line a muffin tray with cupcake cases and set aside for later.

2 Start by making a trail mix. Roughly chop 100g mixed nuts, 25g toasted banana chips, 25g of cacao nibs and 25g of raisins, then combine in a bowl.

3 In a separate mixing bowl, whisk together 100g melted coconut oil, 2 tbsp Pip & Nut Blueberry Trail Mix Almond Butter, 170ml almond milk and 1 tsp vanilla bean paste. Add 200g flour and 100g sugar, then add 2 tsp baking powder and 150g blueberries. Mix well.

4 Fold half the trail mix into the wet mixture, then spoon into the cupcake cases. Top with the remaining trail mix, then bake for about 18-20 minutes. Cool on a wire rack, then serve with a drizzle of almond butter.

Recipe by Pip & Nut. For more inspo and stockists, visit pipandnut.com



Movie magic

Researchers at University College London found that a cinema trip mimicked the physical effects of a light cardio workout, thanks to our responses to the events on the big screen. It also showed that cinema's immersive nature improved mental wellbeing – we're ready for a romcom.

* WHAT IS? HANXIETY



It's along similar lines to hanger! Feeling hungry can cause the body to enter a state of anxiety, thanks to a biological imperative to eat. Become less hanxious by taking calming breaths to separate the hunger from the anxiety, and keep snacks such as fruit or nuts on hand.

Take a leaf

While many of us love the faux leather look, production of both the real and artificial versions has a big impact on the environment. Dr Carmen Hijosa, a leathersgoods expert, was shocked by this on a trip to factories in the Philippines, and decided to find a solution. The answer? Pineapples! Leaves from this zingy fruit usually become a by-product during harvesting, but Dr Carmen found a way to extract their long fibres and turn them into a mesh-like fabric, which can be finished to take on a leather-like look. She now distributes this fabric, Piñatex, to designers and makers in the fashion, interior and automotive industries, and hopes to inspire new thinking. "Without having to plant anything extra, we have an abundant new source of raw material," she explains; "Piñatex represents a huge change." Find out more at ananas-anam.com



ON THE GRID

Instagram therapists

Get a daily dose of sage advice from mental health experts to help you reflect and grow

@nedratawwab @drlaurenfogelmersy
@lizlistens @notesfromyourtherapist

Reasons To Go To Therapy

@NEDRATAWWAB

- You won't hear things like, "It will be okay, I know how you feel, or you'll get over it."
- You get an entire hour to talk whatever you like want guilt-free (it's all about you).
- Saying things out loud will help you understand them differently.
- There is no competition in dialogue. A therapist won't make their problems more significant than yours.
- Therapists hold space for your healing.

www.nedratawwab.com

Moving your body is healing

@drlaurenfogelmersy

How to set boundaries

Recognize you might feel guilty. This is common. Learn your limits - how much can you offer? What is healthy for you? Use a neutral tone. State the boundary & need. Be brief & to the point.

@lizlistens

I need someone to listen who isn't trying to just move me out of the way that I feel right now.

Sleep deprived?

As every parent knows, when your child isn't sleeping well, neither is anybody else. And awake times with a tired child aren't so fun either. The last thing anyone wants is for bedtime to become a stressful experience, so we've teamed up with parenting experts MadeForMums and psychologist and wellness author Suzy Reading to create a brand new podcast!

Sleepy Time is designed to help parents support their child's sleep, with episodes including gentle guided meditations for settling down to sleep, tips for getting back to sleep, and sleepytime stories, especially designed for two to eight year olds. Find all eight episodes of Sleepy Time on all major podcast apps now.



* PODCASTS {to help you feel less stressed}

Not Perfect Podcast

Life has its ups and downs, but Poppy Jamie believes that we shouldn't sit and wait anxiously for the next challenge. She speaks to thought-leaders in the world of wellness about how we can combat stress, sleep better and calm our minds.

Happier

Gretchen Rubin wants us all to be happier, and she knows how to make it happen. In each episode, she and her sister, Elizabeth, delve into the newest science of happiness, as well as sharing manageable tips to try yourself.

How to Fail

Some of the most successful people attribute their success to failure. In this podcast, Elizabeth Day interviews well-known names, including chefs, authors and footballers about their worst days and what they learnt from them.



✿ WHAT I DO

Elise Wortley is raising awareness of forgotten female explorers by recreating their journeys

We often hear about the intrepid travels of men in history, but what about women? That's exactly the question that Elise Wortley found herself asking after reading Alexandra David-Néel's book, *My Journey to Lhasa*. "When I was a teenager, I was shy and I dealt with extreme anxiety for years. The fact that she'd done this epic voyage fascinated me. Women just didn't do things like that!" she remembers. "I had this inkling that I would love to follow in her footsteps, but at that time, I struggled to even get on the bus."

Thirteen years later, having overcome her fears, Elise decided to act on that idea and recreate Alexandra's journey. For her, it wasn't just about the travel itself; it was about reconnecting with our female ancestors. "I wanted to experience life travelling as a woman as closely as she would have done."

I realised that the only way to truly do this was to do exactly what she did, taking with me only what she had. This meant no modern-day mountain equipment, so with my yak wool coat, a wooden backpack I'd made out of an old chair and an all-female team in tow, I set off in search of the world's third highest mountain, and answers to questions I'd had for the last 13 years."

And answers she got; Elise's expedition was life-changing. "I realised that the stories and achievements of



Taking with her only what her hero, Alexandra David-Néel, would have had in 1923, Elise climbed to Mount Kanchenjunga base camp and found her inspiration.

history's female explorers should be celebrated and never forgotten," she says. "I decided to make it my mission to bring these stories back to life, hoping to inspire this generation and the next in the same way that Alexandra inspired me."

For her next journey, which took place last summer, Elise tracked nature writer and mountain wanderer Nan Shepherd through the Cairngorm Mountains in Scotland, also raising money for Scottish Women's Aid.

For Elise, looking at the past is the key to a more empowered future for

women. "These groundbreaking females took on incredibly hard challenges at a time when travel and exploration for women was so unorthodox, and their achievements have so often been overlooked compared to those of their male counterparts. I hope to raise awareness of women's rights in travel, encouraging others not to be afraid to take on a challenge, and to show that women were, and still are, at the forefront of adventure."

Read about Elise's adventures at womanwithaltitude.com

Vitamin D: The Sunshine Vitamin

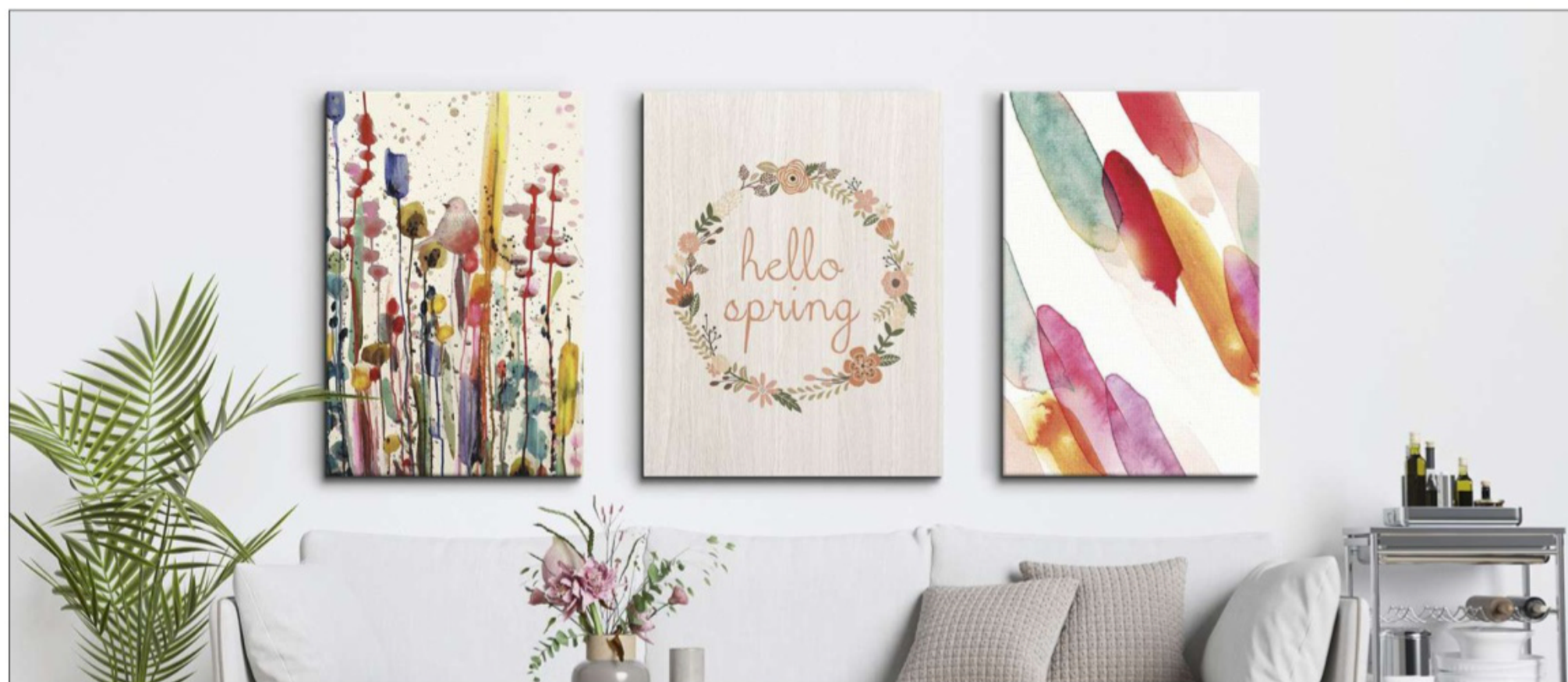
In the UK, vitamin D can be synthesised in the skin between April and September on sunny days. Public Health England have stated that one in five people in the UK are low in vitamin D and are not even aware of it. Vitamin D is a **key vitamin** for immunity during the winter months.



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wellness

How well do you cope with stress?

Identify your stress signals to find calm

Get better rest with our 22-page
Sleep Well Special

Not sure if meditation is for you? Try this!

The secret to glowing skin...



How well do you deal with stress?

Recognising how we react to stressful situations can help us to nurture a calmer approach. Take our quiz, then learn more about managing stress on the following pages

Words: Annika Rose

1 After a tough day at work and an uncomfortable meeting, you:

- A** Spend the evening relaxing, letting go of a bad day.
- B** Criticise yourself for not handling the situations better.
- C** Ruminates over what went wrong and replay the negative experiences on repeat.

2 Do you find it difficult to fall asleep and stay asleep through the night?

- A** No, I fall asleep quickly and sleep soundly.
- B** Sometimes it's hard to fall asleep if I have lots going on.
- C** Yes, I struggle with sleep and often find myself waking up during the night.

3 Is it challenging for you to make decisions?

- A** I can easily make decisions when I need to.
- B** I struggle to make decisions and don't always trust the decision I make is the right one.
- C** I am terrible at making decisions, it makes me anxious and tense.

4 Generally speaking, how much energy do you have?

- A** I feel energised most of the time.

B My energy levels are generally fine but sometimes lower than I'd like.

C I'm perpetually tired and seriously lack energy.

5 In challenging times, how do you support yourself?

- A** I try to keep a healthy perspective on the situation; I make time and space to deal with what's going on.
- B** I try to keep calm and carry on, sometimes I put on a brave face and other times I open up and seek help from friends or professionals.
- C** I struggle to manage my emotions and tend to blame myself. I don't know how to escape the overwhelm.

6 Can you easily concentrate on completing your tasks and day to day duties?

- A** I can easily concentrate and focus my attention where it's needed.
- B** I sometimes get distracted and I can be a bit forgetful too.
- C** I regularly struggle to concentrate, and I worry I have a poor memory.

7 Would your friends and family say you're a snappy, irritable person?

- A** Not at all, that's not me!
- B** I'm only snappy if I am feeling overwhelmed or time-poor.

C I am sometimes irritable with loved ones, and it happens more often than I like to admit.

8 Do you find it easy to ask for help?

- A** Yes, I ask for help all the time.
- B** I sometimes struggle with tasks for a while before realising I can ask for help.
- C** I find it hard to ask for help as I worry it will be seen as a failing or a weakness.

9 What's your schedule like right now?

- A** Flexible – I like lots of free time, you never know what may pop up!
- B** Busy, but I'm mostly managing the demands of the day.
- C** Unmanageable – I'm taking on too much and I can't keep this up.

10 Do you recognise when you're stressed?

- A** Yes, I notice I'm taking on too many demands and I feel worried. That's when I know to pull back.
- B** Yes, my eating habits change, I have less energy, experience headaches and tension around my body.
- C** I never notice until it's too late – I'm exhausted, my body aches, I get bad headaches and feel dizzy, I struggle to sleep, my stomach is upset, and I usually get a cold on top of it all!



Adding too much to your schedule is a sure route to stress – keep some time for yourself to strike a better balance.

What your answers reveal...

Mostly As
You know how to switch off and self-care is a top priority

Your toolkit of stress management techniques serves you well and it allows you to keep your reactivity and health in check. Your resilience helps you to take on life's challenges and you even have the capacity to help others whenever they might be in need. Remember it's okay to stretch yourself from time to time as stress isn't something to be avoided altogether. Try making a list of meaningful goals and passions you would like to pursue in the next 12 months, knowing you've got what it takes to not become overwhelmed as you take on a new challenge or two.

Mostly Bs
You cope well with pressure but there's room to improve

You're becoming more aware of the situations that stress you out, but that's usually after the fact. Try keeping a diary for a week and notice all the things that trigger you or tick you off. Reflecting on your stressors will give you a chance to make changes and respond more wisely to them, or remove them, in future. Empower yourself to be assertive if you know certain situations or demands are too much for you by gracefully saying no. Be mindful of what you do, and don't, take on, and the impact this can have on you both mentally and physically.

Mostly Cs
A small glitch is enough to make your head spin

You're overloaded with daily demands and you're reaching, or have reached, your upper limit. You're tired of being exhausted and it's leading you to become highly reactive to situations where you'd like to be more thoughtful and responsive. Respect your limits and set some healthy boundaries moving forward. Otherwise, you'll burn out before you know it. Firstly, listen to your body. Taking time to switch off is just as important as anything else on your plate, so make it priority number one and dedicate time daily or weekly to resting, relaxing and enjoying yourself.

Good stress vs bad stress

Stress is a natural response, and can even be useful when we keep it in check, says Annika Rose

If you've felt stressed this month, this week or even at some point today, welcome to the club. Stress is an inevitable part of modern life. While it can be useful in small doses and certain situations, over a long period stress can wreak havoc and do damage. It is, however, possible to make friends with stress. You can recognise the signs when it arrives, keep it in check or even use it to your advantage, and let it remind you to aim for better balance in body and mind.

There are lots of things in today's world to trigger stress. Overflowing inboxes, complex relationships, credit card debt and workplace worries are abundant.

Interestingly, while a social media snub may send you into a stressed-out spin, your bestie may not bat an eyelid at such 'trivial' things. Recognising what sets your stress off, and where your upper limit lies, can be crucial in managing it responsibly. It's important to respect that everyone's triggers and thresholds vary.

Not only do we all differ in what causes us stress, our behaviours during periods of stress can be wide-ranging too: overeating or missing meals, becoming tired or wired, acting irritably or withdrawing completely. It helps to notice your own signs and signals and how you respond when demands get too high. Developing a deeper awareness of how you react can help you to identify early on that you're becoming stressed – and therefore, how to handle it best.

Your body naturally responds to demands and danger by activating the stress (fight or flight) response. Within an instant, this can signal that something is seriously wrong, and you should always pay attention to the warning signs your brain and body shares with you. However, you also need to judge the weight of your worries realistically, because your brain can be quick to panic based on perceived, rather than real, threats.

Whether something stressful is actually happening or you're imagining it, your stress response reacts in the same way. Your brain and body is immediately flooded with hormones and chemicals preparing you to fight or flee. As you sit in safety imagining the worst-case scenario, you're signalling danger and can feel totally stressed out within seconds.

Keeping your stress in check is good for a number of reasons. Not only does life feel a lot better when you're cool, calm and collected, but it's also seriously important for your overall health and wellbeing.

Managing your stress will keep you happier and healthier; it lifts your mood, boosts your immune system, makes it easier to focus and can even help you to live longer. But the more you put yourself under pressure or find yourself frequently dealing with stressful situations, the more compromised your systems become – you're more likely to feel frazzled and act irritably, catch a cold or pick up an infection. Chronic stress over a prolonged period of time can





lead to a range of more serious health issues from stomach ulcers and insomnia to increased risk of developing heart disease.

Don't let the downside overwhelm you, however, as there is also an upside to stress. Good stress, or 'eustress', refers to an optimal level of stress that you can use to your advantage. A surge of this will spur you on to meet a tight deadline, run for the train or deliver your best presentation yet. On the stress spectrum, good stress is located beyond your comfort zone but before you become overwhelmed. Therein lies a space where experiencing higher stress than normal is associated with increased performance and personal growth; it's where you get things done and can accomplish your goals.

Your brain is malleable and constantly being reshaped by your experiences and thoughts thanks to a process called neuroplasticity. What you pay attention to really matters – as the focus of your awareness builds or breaks down different networks in your brain. If you're always stressed, worried, and focussed on what's wrong, you're actually training your brain to do more of that – becoming a prolific panicker. By spending a little time each day building your capacity to be calm and clear, you'll strengthen these networks in your brain instead. You can support yourself to operate from a positive, relaxed state, where stress is more manageable, and worrying is optional. 🧘

Strengthen your ability to remain calm under pressure by spending a little time each day building your capacity to be calm and clear.

Annika's quick calm tips

- * Get moving. Walk, ride, dance, swim... any kind of movement will help clear your head and make you feel calmer.
- * Eat fresh and regular meals. Steer away from comfort food, this is when you need to nourish. Do your best to avoid caffeine and other stimulants and avoid drinking alcohol when you're distressed.
- * Hang out with some furry friends. Spending time with animals can ease your worries and leave you a lot less tense. There are apps that let you borrow a dog if you don't have your own!
- * Try to be more mindful. An 8-week mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) course can really help. There's plenty of research to support how well this program works for your wellbeing, giving you great tools and effective strategies to manage your challenges.
- * Ask for help. Discuss your symptoms and stress levels with your GP if you're concerned. They can recommend useful coping strategies or refer you on to counselling or therapy for further support and to learn effective stress management skills.



Annika Rose

Annika is a wellbeing scientist and meditation teacher and the founder of thewellbeingcollective.com. She has worked as a mental health professional in both the UK and Australia and has two degrees in psychology.

Turn the page to learn more about recognising your personal stress signals and how to head them off at the pass...

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a black beanie with a fur pom-pom, a grey scarf, a white sweater, blue jeans, and tan boots, is swinging happily on a swing set in a park. She has her eyes closed and a smile on her face. The swing set has blue and yellow poles. The background shows a grassy field, trees, and a clear blue sky.

wellness

Let go of stress

Our body gives us many signs when it's under too much stress; learning to read and react to these signals can help us quickly back to calm

Words: Siobhan Mason

When we feel under stress – whether it’s from an upcoming public speech, work overload or physical threat or danger – the hypothalamus (a tiny region at the brain’s base) sets off an alarm system that triggers the release of the stress hormones adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol. Together, these cause a series of physiological changes that give our bodies the energy and strength needed to fight or flee.

Our heart rate and blood pressure increase (pushing blood to the muscles and essential organs), our lungs dilate (to take in more oxygen with each breath), more glucose is released into the bloodstream (giving our brain and muscles extra energy) and our senses sharpen. Our immune system alters so that it can recover quickly from injury or infection and our digestive and reproductive systems – which aren’t needed in an emergency – slow down. Once the perceived threat has gone, our body’s systems return to normal. At least in theory...

This ancient stress system can still help us get through an exam or dodge an oncoming car, but it is not always the appropriate response to our modern, non-life-threatening sources of stress (as tempting as it can be to dart out of the office when summoned by

the boss). If one stressor follows another in quick succession, or we feel under pressure all the time, we can get stuck in a constant state of fight or flight. The changes in our body that were meant to be temporary can go on for too long, overexposing us to stress hormones and disrupting our body’s usual processes.

“Stress can have devastating consequences for health,” says Dr Rangan Chatterjee, author of *The Stress Solution: The 4 Steps to Reset Your Body, Mind, Relationships and Purpose*. “Too much of it contributes to the development of obesity, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, strokes and Alzheimer’s disease. It’s also a key player in insomnia, burn-out and autoimmune disease, as well as many mental health disorders,” he says.

We may feel powerless to change our main cause of stress – say, if it’s a demanding job or an ill relative – but there are many smaller stresses in our life (notifications on our phones, for one), that Dr Rangan calls Micro Stress Doses (MSDs). By reducing these, and by making minor changes to our routine, he believes it *is* possible to reduce or completely eradicate stress. By being alert to our body’s signals that stress has struck, we can take steps to interrupt the stress response. ➤

DE-STRESS WITH ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING

Slowing and deepening our breath is one of the speediest ways to change our body’s physiology

Lucy Aston, founder of yoga and meditation company Yogadoo (yogadoo.co.uk) recommends using alternate nostril breathing to restore calm whenever you feel overwhelmed: “Bring your right hand up towards your face with your palm facing you, put your “peace fingers” on your forehead, breathe out completely and close your right nostril with your right thumb. Inhale through the left nostril then close this nostril with your finger. Open the right nostril and exhale through this side. Inhale through the right nostril and then close this nostril. Open the left nostril and exhale through the left side. This is one cycle. Continue for up to 5 minutes.”

Alternate nostril breathing is believed to affect our circulatory system via our nervous system – calming us through distraction and a sense of control.





Dr Rangan Chatterjee

Dr Rangan is a British physician, television presenter, author and podcaster. His most recent book *Feel Better in 5: Your Daily Plan for Life* (Penguin, £16.99) draws on his 20 years' experience as a physician to offer tips for a healthier, happier you. Follow him on Insta @DrChatterjee

Often described as a moving meditation, t'ai chi reduces stress and promotes calm through gentle, flowing movements.

Know your stress signals...

and how to ease your symptoms and keep your calm

STRESS SIGNAL: TENSE MUSCLES

Our muscles tense up in response to stress. If stress is ongoing, they can end up in a constant state of guardedness, leading to tension-type headaches and other muscular pain, particularly in the neck and shoulders.

STRESS BUSTER: EXERCISE

"Exercise gives our body what it needs and is expecting: a physical workout that helps us out of the fight or flight mode," says Dr Rangan. "Next time you're feeling overwhelmed or anxious, dancing to your favourite tunes for a few minutes or a brisk walk around the block will help your body process the stress that has built up in your system."

Exercising as a direct response to stress can bring relief, but regular exercise can also teach our stress response system how to recover more efficiently, according to Dr Rangan, making us more resilient to stress in the long-term.

We can also educate our bodies to release tension regularly by going to posture-promoting, calm-inducing classes such as yoga, t'ai chi or Pilates.

STRESS SIGNAL: HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Our heart rate and blood pressure increase in stressful situations to allow fast oxygen delivery to our muscles and vital organs. Frequent or chronic stress can make our heart work too hard for too long, however, putting a strain on our circulatory system and leaving us prone to heart disease and strokes. If we cope with stress by turning to unhealthy habits like smoking or eating junk food, our risk can increase further.

STRESS BUSTER: FIND A DAILY DOSAGE OF NATURE

Taking a lunchtime stroll in the nearest park or finding a green route to work are simple but effective ways of keeping stress at bay. A recent study at the University of Michigan showed that taking twenty minutes a day to stroll or sit in a place that 'makes you feel in contact with nature' significantly lowers our levels of cortisol.

STRESS SIGNAL: FINDING IT HARD TO CONCENTRATE

Stress initially sharpens our responses. "A small amount of cortisol helps your brain work better, improving the function of your hippocampus, the memory centre in your brain," says Dr Rangan. "But when the process is prolonged, the cortisol that made your hippocampus work so much better instead damages it, which can lead to multiple problems, not least the development of memory problems as you get older, including Alzheimer's."

STRESS BUSTER: MAKE SPACE FOR AFFECTIONATE TOUCH

"By simply stroking the skin, we can lower our cortisol levels," says Dr Rangan. "Pleasant affective touch also lowers our stress levels by increasing the tone of the parasympathetic nervous system." This is one of the reasons why he recommends a 3-D approach (with eyes, touch and voice) when greeting your loved ones every day



Listen in

Learn more about coping with stress by listening to the In The Moment podcast with Dr Rangan Chatterjee – available on all major podcast apps.

STRESS SIGNAL: FEELING LOW

If we don't have the chance to recover our emotional equilibrium after a stressful day, we can start to feel low and irritable. "When stressed, your emotional brain becomes dominant while your rational brain is side-lined," says Dr Rangan. Without a practised strategy, he believes we're more likely to ruminate on our problems and spiral into a whirlpool of negativity.

STRESS BUSTER: PRACTICE GRATITUDE

"Gratitude is the antidote to rumination," says Dr Rangan. He recommends being grateful for three Ps each day – a person, a pleasure and a promise (something that popped up that day that offered promise for the future). If we're stuck in rumination mode and need a nudge when working out what to be grateful for, gratitude meditations available on apps such as Insight Timer or Calm are ideal.

STRESS SIGNAL: ALWAYS COMING DOWN WITH COLDS AND OTHER INFECTIONS

When our immune system gets the message that it's under threat, it primes itself to repair tissues quickly in the event of injury or infection. It does this partly by boosting our inflammation response.

This works well in the short term, but if it goes on too long it weakens our body's defences making us more prone to infection, as well as increasing our risk of modern chronic diseases including type 2 diabetes, heart disease and depression.

STRESS BUSTER: A MORNING ROUTINE

Having a regular morning routine is a simple way of preventing our bodies from entering stress mode in the first place. "The act of putting yourself through a series of familiar, habitual steps at the same time every day tells your system that you're in a place of safety and control," says Dr Rangan, "and helps shift you into the thrive state."



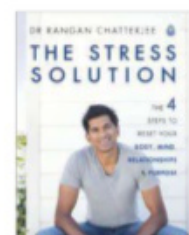
STRESS SIGNAL: BOWEL PROBLEMS

During the fight or flight response, our gut goes into a resting state to allow more blood to be directed to the muscles, brain, heart and lungs. If stress goes on too long, this constant interruption can mess with the functioning of the gut, leading to pain, bloating, indigestion, constipation and diarrhoea.

STRESS BUSTER: FEED YOUR GUT WELL

"There are several communication highways between the gut and the brain," says Dr Rangan. "Our gut's massive population of bugs (our gut microbiome) can affect our reactivity to stress. Keep them happy by cutting out the highly processed and refined foods that damage them, and feed them food that nourishes them, such as wholefoods rich in fibre, vegetables, fruits, legumes and pulses." 🌱

Research published by Harvard Medical School found that "gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness... [helping] people feel more positive emotions ... deal with adversity, and build strong relationships."



For more tips on how to boost your resilience to stress read *The Stress Solution: The 4 Steps to Reset Your Body, Mind, Relationships and Purpose* by Dr Rangan Chatterjee (Penguin, £16.99).

In praise of difficult women

It's time we consider the qualities we expect from our female role models

Words: Harriet Griffey / Illustration: Vanessa Lovegrove

Growing up as a resolute tomboy with my nose constantly stuck in a book, having the words “Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever/Do noble things, not dream them all day long” quoted at me, really rankled. This was NOT the girl (embodied by Victorian novelist Charles Kingsley) that I wanted to be. Happily, the image of a soppy Victorian Miss was knocked for six by my reading of *Little Women* and finding in Josephine March someone I could identify with: outspoken, imperfect, fearless, scorched skirts and all.

We can usefully learn almost as much from fictional heroines as from those in real life. Samantha Ellis’ *How to Be a Heroine* reminds us that the Shrew doesn’t need to be tamed. “Well-behaved women seldom make history,” wrote another American, historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, in a 1976 essay, going on to publish a book of the same name in 2008 which cites both the 15th century writer Christine de Pizan and Virginia Woolf, among other notable, difficult women.

A similar theme has been picked up by Helen Lewis in *Difficult Women: A history of feminism in 11 fights*, where she endorses the idea of female role models, but with the proviso that “...the way they are used in feminism can dilute a radical political movement into feel-good inspiration porn.” What I’d suggest is that being difficult may just be a value judgement designed to keep us in our place, when really it’s just an alternate way of creating positive change. We can make the choice, as Nora Ephron says, to “... be the heroine of your life, not the victim.”

It’s an interesting time to be considering the value of difficult women as role models as we approach International Women’s Day, going from strength to strength since its inception in 1911, just prior to women in the UK becoming very difficult indeed. After years of polite campaigning, the 1910 Conciliation Bill was presented with the aim of giving women the vote, but was ultimately blocked by prime minister Herbert Asquith. After this insult, Emmeline Pankhurst’s Women’s Social and Political Union advocated ‘deeds, not words’ leading to riots, hunger strikes and generally ‘bad’ behaviour until, finally, some women got the vote in 1917. But not

until 1928 was everyone over the age of 21 given the right to vote (lowered to 18 in 1969).

If difficult women have agency as role models, then we are currently blessed by those around us who are challenging the status quo. She may be Donald Trump’s *bête noire*, but Greta Thunberg parries his disparaging tweets with good grace while remaining committed to climate activism. For many she has shown that engagement in what you believe in can have international leverage and we don’t have to apologise for it.

Well-known female role models, from former FLOTUS Michelle Obama to New Zealand’s prime minister Jacinda Ardern, can inspire us, but there are many others much closer to home. For me this includes the small heroics of my neighbour who juggles caring for a disabled child and a full-time job with good humour; many of my female friends, but in particular journalist Maggie O’Kane who set up a global media campaign to end FGM, and the unknown woman on a bus who stood up to racial abuse and was prepared to call it out.

International Women’s Day this year has the theme of #EachforEquality, promoting the idea that “...individually we’re all responsible for our thoughts and actions – all day, every day. We can actively choose to challenge stereotypes, fight bias, broaden perceptions, improve situations and celebrate women’s achievements.” Here is the encouragement we need to use our agency and be unapologetic about supporting each other. And to recognise it’s not just role models we need to help us make sense of this world, but we need to be role models too. To take those small individual steps and, in the misquoted words of Arleen Lorrance, to be the role models we wish to see in the world. 🍷



Harriet Griffey is a writer, journalist and author of more than 20 books on health and wellbeing. Read more in her book, *I Want to Be Confident* (Hardie Grant, £7.99).



Sleep talk

Struggling to sleep? Help unlock your inner zen at night with BetterYou's natural and effective transdermal magnesium range

It's no secret that a good night's sleep contributes to a strengthened immune system, better muscle function and improved concentration, but nodding off at the end of the day isn't always easy.

In fact, it's often when you're finally winding down that everything from the day's events to your shopping list suddenly pops into your head and you find you're wide awake. And if your body doesn't get enough time for rest and recovery on a regular basis, you may also find you're more susceptible to symptoms of anxiety and depression.

BetterYou's transdermal magnesium range offers a natural and effective way to relax your body and mind, so you can sleep with ease. Enriched with soothing aromatherapy oils that help slow sensory activity and quieten the brain, the lotion is clinically proven* to improve your sleep quality when used as part of a bed-time routine. The fast-acting range is completely tablet and capsule-free – so you'll be drifting off in three, two...



* Based on tests carried out on 78 healthy adults using BetterYou Magnesium Sleep Mineral Lotion



THE MAGIC OF MAGNESIUM

A commonly overlooked yet vital nutrient, magnesium possesses serious sleep-healing powers and is key to helping the body maintain a state of complete relaxation. An essential mineral, it ensures the GABA receptors (neurotransmitters that promote sleep) in the brain and nervous system are working efficiently, helping your brain to switch off in preparation for sleep.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

A natural, easy and effective way to soothe tired and aching muscles, BetterYou's transdermal magnesium range offers a variety of lotions, body sprays, bath flakes and gels. Absorption commences immediately when massaged into the skin, helping to promote muscle recovery and natural relaxation in preparation for sleep.

BetterYou

To discover the full pill-free magnesium range, and to shop online, visit betteryou.com

22
page
special

How to SLEEP WELL

*Do you get your eight hours every night?
According to The Sleep Council, 70 percent
of us don't. So what can we do about it?*

Getting a good night's sleep is crucial to our health and wellbeing. Being well-rested has been shown to help us concentrate, cope better with stress, be more productive and begin our day with a positive outlook. Yet according to research by UK sleep charity The Sleep Council (sleepcouncil.org.uk), over a quarter of us experience poor quality sleep on a regular basis, and almost half of us are kept awake at night by stress and worry. There is, thankfully, plenty we can do to help.

In our Sleep Well Special we look at tackling insomnia through breathwork, muscle relaxation and visualisation techniques; we examine how alcohol affects our sleep; Ayurvedic practitioner Mira Manek shares her bedtime rituals to help us prepare for sleep; and we explore how the mindfulness of sleep and dreams can bring joy, boost our wellbeing and help us enjoy a good night's rest. ►

How to *improve your sleep*

Do you struggle to sleep well? You're not alone. Try making relaxation, not sleep, your goal, advises Rob Hobson

Most of us spend one-third of our lives asleep, but not all of us sleep well. The amount of time we sleep and the quality of the sleep we get on a nightly basis can lead to tiredness and fatigue, the effects of which can filter into all aspects of daily life, affecting our emotions, our ability to focus on daily tasks, appetite, relationships and memory recall.

So, why do we need sleep? While sleeping is considered to be a time of rest, your body is actually working hard to ensure you are kept in good health: the production of skin cells, red blood cells and immune cells increases; protein is replenished at a faster rate to support growth and repair; growth hormone increases help repair your body's tissues; and your brain processes information and memories.

Sleep, then, is essential to everyday life and influences many areas that impact on our day-to-day health and wellness, including our attention, insight, concentration, creativity, learning, memory, decisions, emotions and relationships.

Unfortunately, many of us are victims of the 24-hour culture in which we live, as the modern-day demands and expectations of work and life in general, as well as the impact of social media, very much influence how we live our lives. This way of living can take its toll on our ability to sleep well, and while you may think you are managing to survive on very little sleep, take it from me that you are not. Many of us have

developed coping strategies to function on a daily basis (does that third cup of coffee before 11am sound familiar?) rather than taking a step back to address the real problem, which is not being able to sleep.

If you're not sure whether your sleep is being affected by your lifestyle, ask yourself whether any, or all, of these three indicators sound familiar:

YOU CAN'T TURN OFF YOUR BUSY MIND

You keep going over and over your stresses, worries and frustrations, contemplating them from various angles. It's almost like they're playing on a continuous loop that you can't shut off, which interferes with your ability to slip into slumber.

YOU ARE TENSING YOUR MUSCLES

You're experiencing muscle tension and pain, or stress-related aches such as neck and shoulder pain or headaches, and it can be difficult for you to fall asleep or stay asleep. Complicating matters, poor sleep can set the stage for you to experience even more tension headaches and increased pain sensitivity the next day.

YOUR THOUGHTS SET YOUR HEART RACING

Your heart rate is revved up and variable, associated with increased levels of cortisol (a stress hormone), greater physical tension and increased autonomic arousal (commonly palpitations and hyperventilation) which affects your ability to fall asleep or sleep well. ▶

Listen in

*Learn more about
sleeping well by listening to
the In The Moment podcast
with Rob Hobson
– available on all major
podcast apps.*

Make relaxation your goal

How can we improve our sleep? Make relaxation your goal. While relaxation is not a replacement for sleep, it will still help to rejuvenate your body, and by taking the pressure off yourself to fall asleep you are more likely to do just that. Ultimately, the true secret to the art of sleeping is finding a ritual that works best for you. Try experimenting with these relaxation techniques to soften the mind and reduce stress...

Relax every muscle

Relaxation techniques can help you achieve physical and mental relaxation by reducing tension and interrupting the thought processes that can disrupt sleep. Try this twenty-minute relaxation technique at any time of day, but particularly before bed, to slowly release tension one muscle group at a time. Follow these steps:

- * Sit comfortably or lie down in a quiet place, hands resting down by your side.
- * Begin by breathing slowly and start to notice your inhale and exhale while your abdomen rises and falls. Remember to keep inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth throughout.
- * For each muscle group, take a slow, deep breath in as you tense and hold it for 5-10 seconds. Focus on the difference between tense and relaxed muscles. Don't tense too hard and repeat twice for each muscle group. Relax for 20 seconds between muscle groups and then count backwards from five to one to bring your focus back to the present.

DEEP BREATHING

To breathe through your diaphragm, place one hand on your belly to feel the rise on the inhale and dip on the exhale and place your other hand on your upper chest to make sure it's still (breathing through your chest can maintain the body's stress response whereas deep breathing triggers the parasympathetic nervous system to calm and put the body into a relaxed state).



* Tense and relax your muscles in the following order:

Foot – curl your toes downwards

Lower leg and foot – tighten your calf muscle by pulling your toes towards you

Entire leg – squeeze your thigh muscles and pull your toes towards you, then repeat on the other side of your body

Hand – clench your fist

Arm – tighten your bicep by drawing your forearm up towards your shoulder to 'make a muscle', while clenching your fist at the same time; then repeat on the other side of your body

Buttocks – tighten by pulling your buttocks together

Stomach – suck your stomach in

Chest – take a deep breath to tighten the chest

Neck and shoulders – raise your shoulders up to touch your ears

Mouth – open your mouth wide enough to stretch the hinges of your jaw

Eyes – Clench your eyelids tightly shut

Forehead – Raise your eyebrows as far as you can



Rob Hobson

Rob Hobson is a nutritionist with over 15 years' experience and is a regular contributor to newspapers, magazines, TV and radio in the UK. After years of struggling with insomnia, he began researching different approaches to achieving the best possible sleep.

Follow a guided visualisation

Visualisation is a valuable exercise that can help you to unwind, relieve stress and fall asleep. Unlike meditation, visualisation is more active as your breath and mind are guided in a specific direction to achieve a desired result. This technique helps to direct your attention away from the thoughts that may be causing stress and anxiety by associating sensations of relaxation with peaceful images in the mind. Try this guided visualisation, then experiment with creating your own using your favourite place.

- ✳ To start, find a quiet place free from distraction and make yourself comfortable. Take a few deep breaths to centre yourself and then close your eyes, remembering to breathe deeply throughout this exercise.
- ✳ Imagine it's a beautiful sunny day and you're walking on a beach.
- ✳ Close your eyes, visualise being there and relax into breathing deeply.
- ✳ The sky is blue, the water is crystal clear, you hear the sound of gently rolling waves as the light breeze caresses your skin.
- ✳ The white sand feels warm on your bare feet and trickles between your toes.
- ✳ You are wearing flowing light clothes and breathing deeply, inhaling the smell of fresh ocean air. A sense of freedom washing over your body, you lie down and let your body sink into the warm soft sand.
- ✳ Let go of any tension and soften your eyes while continuing to breathe in sync with the waves.
- ✳ You sink deeper and deeper into relaxation.
- ✳ Say to yourself: I am relaxed, my body feels warm and heavy, I am safe here.
- ✳ Hold onto this image and assure yourself that you can return to this place again to help you to relax before you open your eyes.



This is an extract from *The Art of Sleeping - for a happier calmer, more successful day* by Rob Hobson (HarperCollins, £9.99), out now.

Breathwork

preventing palpitations

If your heart is fluttering as you try to sleep, use this exercise to calm your mind

When you feel your heart pounding, fluttering, or beating irregularly, sometimes accompanied by sensations in your throat or neck, use this integrative breathwork exercise to get your body back into a natural rhythm and calm your mind. This exercise is also useful when you feel stressed or anxious, and to help you go to sleep.

NEED TO KNOW

BENEFITS *Reduction in symptoms; calmer; more grounded; more centred.*

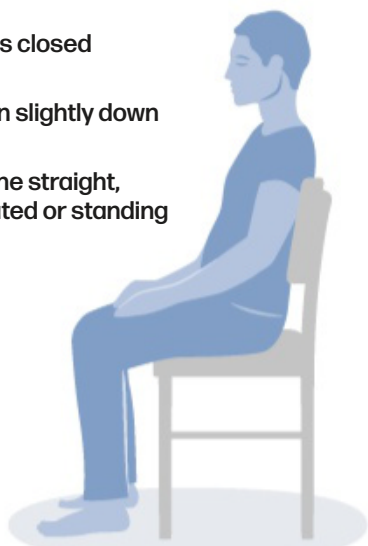
TIME *1-3 minutes; as needed; the more regular the better.*

CAUTION *Seek medical help if you experience dizziness, breathlessness, or chest pain.*

* Eyes closed

* Chin slightly down

* Spine straight, seated or standing



01

Take a few normal breaths in and out through your nose. Once you feel settled, close your eyes and breathe in for a count of 4, then breathe out again for a count of 4.

02

Allow the weight of your body to expel the air from your lungs without force or effort. If your breath leaves quickly, pause at the end of the exhale until you reach the full count, then inhale.

03

Repeat 4 times for the count of 4. Then move up to 5 breaths to a count of 5, then 6, then 7. This will gradually increase your lung capacity and confidence in your breathing capabilities.

04

When you are ready, return to normal breathing. Open your eyes and go back to your day, moving slowly out of the process, without sudden moves.



This is an extract from *Breathwork* by Nathalia Westmacott-Brown (DK, £9.99), out now.

Is alcohol *affecting your sleep?*

*Have you forgotten what it feels like to be well-rested
in the morning? Are you prone to night-waking?
The culprit could be your empty wine glass...*

Words: Claire Munnings

There are all sorts of things that can impact our sleep – a late-night cup of coffee, spending too long scrolling through Instagram in bed, or a bad case of Sunday-night anxiety. And, added to that list should also be a glass of wine or two.

Many of us know how alcohol can make us feel drowsy or tired, and a significant number of us actually use its sedative effects to help us get to sleep on a regular basis. But as research into the subject continues to grow, experts are warning that drinking can impact the quality and quantity of our slumber in ways we're probably not aware of.

Aggie Connor is a sober coach and the founder of Fresh and Fab (freshandfab.co.uk) in Southsea. She offers lifestyle coaching and advice to those who want to give up alcohol and has seen how drinking can influence our night-time routines.

"A lack of good quality sleep is a big problem for around 90 percent of all the people I work with," she explains. "For many of them, the issue gets resolved relatively quickly when they start to reduce their alcohol intake, but the effect it can have on their physical and emotional health is very noticeable."

As a former binge drinker herself, Aggie has also experienced this first-hand. "The quality of my sleep was horrendous – on those evenings when I drank I would just pass out," she says. "I wouldn't even call it sleeping. My body was working hard to filter the poison out during the night, and so I wasn't giving it the chance to rest and recuperate. It meant I'd wake up feeling really shattered and anxious as a result."

But it's not just moderate and heavy drinkers that can suffer. Research published in the journal *JMIR Mental Health* suggests that even just one drink can impair sleep quality. So, what exactly does alcohol do to our body to impact it in this way?



Aggie Connor

Aggie is a sober coach for women and the founder of Fresh and Fab. To find out more visit freshandfab.co.uk

Behind closed eyes

"Alcohol affects the quality and the quantity of our sleep patterns," explains Dr Arghya Sarkhel, lead consultant psychiatrist at the Living Mind clinic (livingmind.co.uk) in London. "It impacts our circadian rhythms and pushes our body out of sync."

Multiple studies have confirmed the effect this can have – drinking disrupts our master biological clock, limits the production of melatonin (also known as the sleep hormone), elevates levels of adenosine (which makes us feel sleepy when we've been awake for a long time) and forces our liver to work harder. All this makes for a disturbed night and a sleeping pattern that goes against the grain.

"Alcohol often has an immediate sedative effect and reduces the time it takes for us to fall asleep," explains Dr Sarkhel. "However, it also suppresses REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, which is a lighter kind of sleep. Studies show that in the earlier stages of the night – when the body is metabolising the alcohol consumed – people spend more time in deep, slow-wave sleep and less time in REM." ▶



Falling asleep without the 'help' of alcohol helps us to wake up feeling rested, refreshed and ready to start the day.

“I used to wake up at 1am every morning”

Lucy, 34, used alcohol as a way to cope with feelings of anxiety, stress, low self-esteem and a lack of confidence. Here, she tells us how stopping made her feel so much stronger – and helped her sleeping patterns...*

“I don’t know if I ever had an addiction, although I do know that I struggled when I tried to stop drinking. I started when I was a teenager, and at first it was just weekend drinking, but it soon built up. I’d go through stages where I’d stop for a while and try to be healthier but old habits soon crept back in.

“After I split from my husband, I moved back in with my parents and then to my own home. I had never really lived alone and I found it quite difficult. Once I’d put my two kids to bed, a bottle of wine would help me de-stress. I’d fall asleep heavily at about 10pm, but only for about three hours and then I’d be wide awake.

“A lot of the time I couldn’t get back to sleep – and if I finally did, it wouldn’t be until 4 or 5 in the morning. When I woke up at around 6.30am with the kids, I’d be in a horrible mood. I was snappy and irritable all the time, and I felt like

I was taking it out on my children. I felt mentally drained and the tiredness from the lack of sleep was overwhelming. It was making me anxious, depressed and miserable, and so I decided to make a change, with the help of Aggie.

“The first few days I was worried about how I was going to deal with it and I struggled going to bed. With the wine, I’d be flat out in minutes but suddenly I found myself listening to every noise in the house, and looking out the window for ages.

“That didn’t last long, though, and within about two weeks of giving up I was going to bed between 9.30 and 10pm and sleeping through till about 6am in the morning. I felt like a new woman – and it’s helped my self-esteem too. I now haven’t touched alcohol since May 2019 and it’s been the best thing I’ve ever done.”

*Name has been changed



Dr Arghya Sarkhel

Dr Sarkhel is the lead consultant psychiatrist and founder of the Living Mind clinic, which offers a holistic approach to health and wellbeing. For more information visit livingmind.co.uk

While this may sound beneficial, it's not. Our sleep structure has biologically evolved over the years – and changes aren't good for our physical and emotional health. "REM sleep is important for mental restoration, memory and emotional processing and is often when you dream. A lack of this can lead to cognitive impairment, an inability to concentrate and daytime drowsiness," Dr Sarkhel adds.

Once alcohol has been metabolised, the body often feels the impact of the 'rebound effect' in the latter half of the night, and moves to a lighter slumber from which it's more likely to be woken up. This means that those who have indulged in the evening often find themselves wide awake at 2am and unable to get back to sleep.

A further problem occurs if you're relying on alcohol to help you drift off, and using its sedative quality as a sleep stimulus. "Because I was using drink to help me sleep, I found my body unlearnt its natural rhythms and so on the nights I didn't have any wine, I struggled to switch off because my body didn't

know what to do," Aggie says. "I was like a living zombie on certain days and my mental health was in shreds. I was really anxious, my self-esteem was out the window and my relationship with myself suffered."

Indeed, while a lack of sleep can have negative health consequences for any of us, it's particularly noticeable for those who struggle with stress and anxiety, or other mental health issues.

"The relationship between mental health and alcohol is rather complex," Dr Sarkhel says. "We can broadly divide this into two categories: primary harmful use and secondary harmful use. Primary harmful use refers to those who may develop anxiety or depression as a direct result of alcohol. Secondary harmful use relates to those who may already be experiencing mental health issues and, in this instance, the use of alcohol is an attempt to cope with the distressing symptoms of these issues.

"In either situation, a lack of sleep can be particularly problematic as we know that sleep disturbance is a well-recognised trigger for many conditions, such as anxiety," Dr Sarkhel explains.

This means that it can be even more difficult to kick the habit.

Break the habit

If you want to cut out or limit the amount you drink, Aggie has some tips...

* Look for your motivation:

For me, it was my daughter. I wanted to give up alcohol for her and to be a better mother, and in many cases having an external motivator makes the commitment stronger. You could also use the 'fast forward' technique to motivate you – imagine your tomorrow and consider if you'll be able to do all the things you'd planned to do if you drink tonight.

* Know your triggers:

Triggers are individual to all of us, but it's important to recognise and understand what it is that makes your habit stick, and try to reduce your exposure to any triggers which might prevent you succeeding.

* Don't listen to your brain:

Don't let your brain talk you out of your decision to stop drinking. This part of your body doesn't like change, and it will tell you all sorts of lies in order not to rock the boat, but I never met anyone who said they regret giving up alcohol.

* Get help:

If you're finding it hard to stop drinking, I would advise that you ask for help. So often people rely on their strong will, but sometimes this just isn't enough and you need a little extra support.



When reestablishing healthy sleep patterns, check in with your 'sleep hygiene': limit caffeine, screen-time and stimulus.

Reset your clock

For Aggie, cutting alcohol out of her life improved her sleep dramatically. “At the beginning it was scary – and dealing with the identity crisis was really hard. But as the days and weeks went by and I started to feel better physically, I also started to feel better mentally. After about two to three weeks, my sleep improved hugely and I was really surprised to discover that I’m an early bird by nature, which was not something I expected! I was able to regenerate during my sleep and I felt so much calmer and in control during the day.”

This is a common outcome reported by many drinkers. In fact, a recent study by the University of Sussex found that 71 percent of participants reported they slept much better when they abstained from drink for a month. Interestingly, 67 percent reported more energy, 70 percent had generally improved health and 57 percent enjoyed better concentration levels too.

To reestablish your own healthy sleep patterns, the first step may be to cut down or reduce your alcohol intake (see Aggie’s helpful tips). Creating the right sleep environment will also help you to ease back into

a regular pattern. Make sure your bedroom is around 18°C, dark and quiet, and try to reduce the time you spend on your phone before bedtime (the blue light emitted by these devices can disrupt our levels of melatonin). If you’re suffering with stress and anxiety and this is impacting your ability to sleep – and creating a reliance on alcohol – it’s important to address this too.

So, before you reach for that nightcap, consider whether you really need it. With an increasing number of people speaking freely about the impact drinking has on their lives and the sober curious movement gaining traction, it could be time to reassess your relationship with alcohol. You may find you’ll benefit in more ways than you think.



Claire Munnings

Claire Munnings is a health and wellbeing journalist. She enjoys writing about holistic ways that we can live more mindfully and improve our health.

Breathwork

calming your nerves

Use ocean breath, or ujjai breathing, whenever you need a dose of calm and to help you sleep

Ocean breath is an effective way to rebalance your body, mind, and spirit when you are feeling nervous. In this gentle breathing cycle, you use a slight contraction in the throat to recreate the soothing sound of waves which, with practise, will calm both body and mind. Helpful any time, ocean breath is particularly beneficial when you cannot sleep.

NEED TO KNOW

BENEFITS *Calm mind; warm, energised body; and present-moment awareness.*

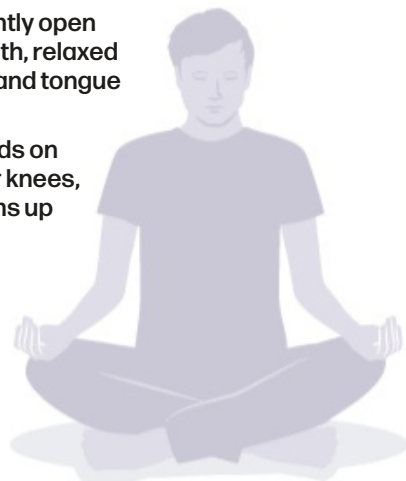
TIME *5 minutes daily; building up over time.*

CAUTION *Seek guidance if you have a respiratory condition such as COPD or asthma. Slow down if you feel faint or dizzy.*

* Eyes closed

* Slightly open mouth, relaxed jaw and tongue

* Hands on your knees, palms up



01

Breathe in through your mouth and as you breathe out, slightly contract the back of your throat, softly whispering "Huhh". Avoid contracting too much, which will tighten the throat.

02

When you are comfortable making this sound on the exhale, hold the slight contraction while inhaling too, making a wave-like sound as your breath moves gently in and out.

03

Close your mouth, keeping your lips soft and your tongue relaxed. As you breathe through your nose, keep up both the contraction and the wave sound from the back of your throat.

04

Now, focus completely on the sound of your breath, which should be audible only to you, letting it calm you. Breathe rhythmically and smoothly.

05

Fill your lungs as much as possible without straining, then fully release the breath as you breathe out. Continue for as long as it feels comfortable before returning to a normal breathing pattern.

This is an extract from *Breathwork* by Nathalia Westmacott-Brown (DK, £9.99).



13 rituals for *restful* sleep

Winding down at bedtime in our fast-paced world can be difficult, but a few simple rituals can help, says Ayurvedic practitioner and author Mira Manek

According to Ayurveda, sleep is just as important as diet, and the best time to sleep is from 10pm until 6am. These hours are the most rejuvenating and as our biorhythms are programmed to follow nature's rhythms, ideally we should sleep when it's dark and wake with sunrise. Of course, seasonal changes affect these times, but 10pm is also a good time to sleep because of the dominance of the *kapha* element [the *dosha*, or energy, responsible for the support of our physical body] at this hour, making it more conducive to fall asleep.

We live in a fast-paced world. Many of us feel exhausted during the day but can't fall asleep at night, with constant thoughts, to-do lists and worries running through our minds. Naturally more of a night person, I often feel 'wired', with a sudden burst of energy, at night. It's hard to get to sleep when feeling energised, or when the mind is pacing through all your thoughts.

This is why there's now such an emphasis on winding down, on putting away your phone, on

switching off from social media. It is important not just for the mind, but for all the body functions and our own wellbeing, to calm ourselves and activate our parasympathetic nervous system, so we're in 'rest and digest' mode (opposite to 'fight and flight'). Activation of our parasympathetic nervous system allows us to digest food properly, allows our muscles to relax and our heart rate to drop.

The realisation of our absolute need to relax and de-stress is the reason why meditation apps are so widely used – they're as popular with the business and banking communities as they are with yogis. There have been a number of brilliant books on sleep in the last few years, from Arianna Huffington's *The Sleep Revolution* to *Why We Sleep: The New Science of Sleep and Dreams* by Matthew Walker. The world has woken up to the detrimental effects and consequences of insufficient sleep.

So how do we ensure that we can actually fall asleep? How do we create an environment that allows us to, and encourages us to, slow down and get into sleep mode at night? Ayurveda can help... ➤

1 Environment

When you enter your home in the evening, lighting is the first thing that sets the tone and the mood. Bright lights can be stimulating, so try and have lights that dim, or have a couple of lamps that you can switch on at night.

2 Stimulants

What you've eaten during the day will, of course, have an impact on how well you sleep. If there is any caffeine in your system, it might prevent you from getting into that very deep sleep, so try not to have any coffee or anything with caffeine after around 3pm. Chocolate also contains caffeine. Having a small piece might be okay, but having a whole chocolate dessert or ice cream might affect your sleep.

3 Turn off your phone

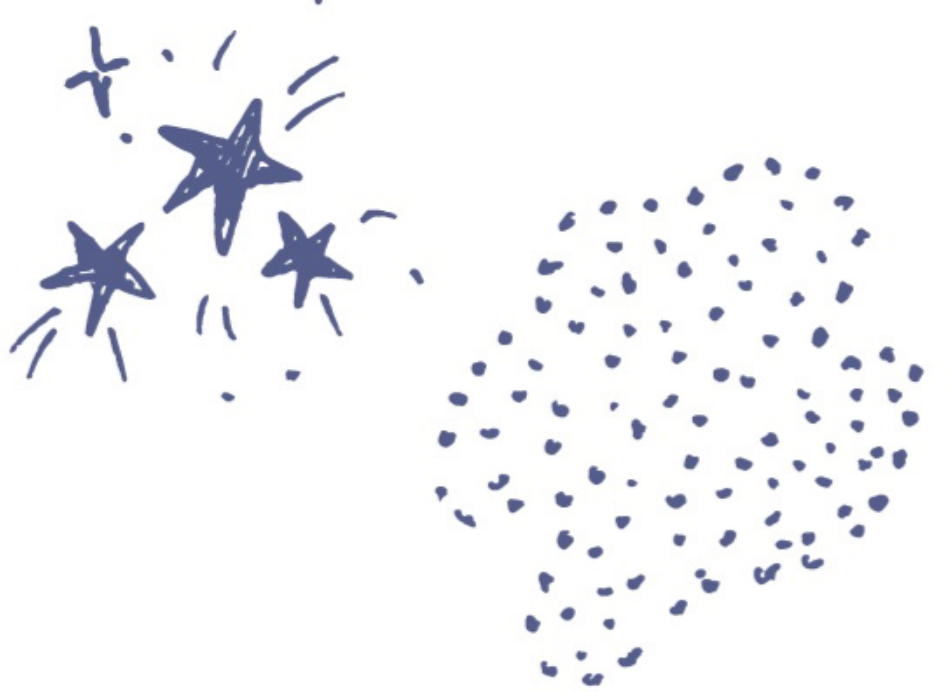
You may well find this difficult (like me) but try not to look at your phone for at least an hour before you sleep. The brightness of the screen and engagement with others on social media stimulates the senses and keeps everything 'on', rather than helping you to wind down in preparation for total switch off. When you go to bed, turn off your phone or don't take it into your bedroom. If you need to, switch on the alarm on your phone half an hour before you get into bed so that looking at your phone screen isn't the last thing you do before your head hits the pillow. Mobile phones are wonderful things but they can be very disruptive for our sleep.

Photography: Emma Dudlyke @emmadudlyke



Mira Manek

Mira is an Ayurvedic practitioner, cook and author. She is the founder of Chai by Mira (chaibymira.com) – a cafe, chai lounge and event space in London. She holds supperclubs, workshops and retreats in London and globally (miramanek.com).



4 Relaxation

What is it that relaxes you? For some, it might be playing a guitar and for others it will be listening to music while cooking. Do what relaxes you and brings you into a meditative state. All these things, from cooking and listening to music to going for a walk, to writing a journal or playing an instrument can be meditative, if it is what you love and enjoy. Schedule this time in, even if it feels selfish, because there will always be other things to do, people to meet, places to be, but if you never switch off from this, from the noise, from others, from the world, you will lose your connection to you and the essence of your own self.

5 Stillness and meditation

For some, a meditation practice, whether it's long or short, can be incredibly therapeutic. Try a meditation app to help you find a mode of stillness that works well for you.

6 Journalling and writing

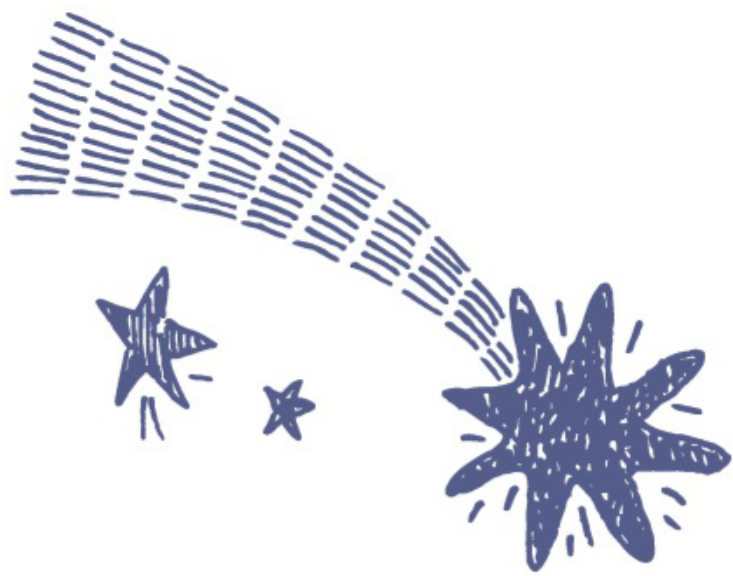
Jotting down your thoughts can be a wonderful form of therapy and healing, making sense of all the fragmented thoughts and emotions, bringing them together in one place and finding a release.

7 Soothing drinks

Sipping on hot milk with a little saffron and nutmeg can help induce sleepiness. Saffron not only helps you sleep but can even help with depression.

8 Sesame oil

Rub sesame oil on the palms of your hands and bottoms of your feet – another Ayurvedic sleep remedy. You could also use ghee.



9 Breathing

Taking deep breaths, or practising *ujjayi* breathing (also known as ‘ocean breath’ – follow the exercise on page 40), can be very calming and allow you to enter a state of relaxation. I often listen to podcasts by philosophers and thinkers or switch on my Indian classical playlist while I do my breathing exercises.

10 Evening walk

Getting some fresh air, clearing the head and walking in the outdoors can be a wonderful way to de-stress. It might also be something you can do with your partner or a friend, a time to laugh and chat and re-energise the soul as you walk.

11 Hot bath

Having a bath, perhaps with some candles, can be incredibly meditative and relaxing. For me, it’s often just 10-15 minutes, but I put on some soothing music or an inspiring podcast, I light a candle, sip on a herbal tea or a cup of lemon, ginger and honey, and close my eyes.

Adding Epsom salts into your hot bath will additionally draw out toxins from the body, and Epsom salts also contain magnesium, which enters the skin and muscles and helps us relax even more. This is great for when you’ve been lifting weights or just working out a lot. If you have a cold, then adding a little eucalyptus and camphor oil to your bath could be just the thing you need.

Baths are a wonderful way to send you into sleep mode before bed, but they’re equally brilliant to warm the entire body in the winter, when you’ve just got home in the evening and it feels like the cold has penetrated into your bones. Try not to expose yourself to bright light after the bath so you stay in this relaxed state and get into bed as soon as possible after bathing.



sleep

12 Steam and sauna

I love using a steam room and sauna, especially in winter, first and foremost to warm up, and then to soothe any aches and pains and feel entirely relaxed. My skin also feels great after a short time in a steam room, because the sweating opens up the pores and helps to remove dead skin cells and toxins. In Ayurveda, the steam bath, called *Swedana*, increases circulation, helps remove toxins from fat cells, reduces stress (the heat and relaxation stimulate the release of endorphins), gives the heart a workout and helps clear sinuses.

13 Evening playlist

This eclectic collection of songs, for me, is infused with relaxed energy to immediately bring the mind into evening mode and lift the mood. Create a relaxing playlist with these tunes and add to the collection all of the songs which soothe you.

‘*Hanuman Chalisa*’ – Keerti Mathur

‘*Mul Mantra*’ – Snatam Kaur

‘*Reunion*’ – Anoushka Shankar

‘*Morey Pya Bassey*’ – Cheb i Sabbah

‘*Bangles*’ – Niraj Chag

‘*Ong Namo*’ – Mirabai Ceiba

‘*Pashupati*’ – Sharon Gannon

‘*Nataraja*’ – Jai Uttal and Ben Leinbach

‘*Gayatri Mantra*’ – Deva Premal

‘*Hari Om (Tiruvannamalai)*’ – Janet Stone and DJ Drez

‘*Long Time Sun*’ – Snatam Kaur

‘*Purnamadah*’ – Shantala

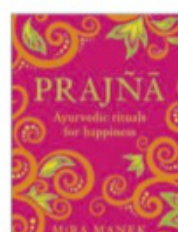
‘*Jai Radha Madhav*’ – Deva Premal

‘*Water Sign*’ – East Forest

‘*Om Gam Ganapataye Namaha*’ – Edo & Jo

‘*I am (Krishan Liquid Mix)*’ – Nirinjan Kaur

‘*Rudrashtakam (Shiva Stuti)*’ – Krishna Das



This is an extract from *PRAJÑĀ – Ayurvedic rituals for happiness* by Mira Manek (Headline Home, £12.99), out now.

The mindfulness of *dreams* and sleep

Mindfulness, visualisation and positive thinking have the power to shape our neural pathways for our wellbeing, but did you know these techniques can be practiced during sleep?

Words: Leah Larwood



What if I were to tell you that you can transform your waking life while you sleep? That you could not only help to solve recurring challenges and heal emotional wounds but that you could wake in the morning with a surge of renewal and joy. You would still benefit from the same amount of rest, and actually, more often than not, you'd wake feeling even more refreshed than you would ordinarily. Sounds like a no-brainer surely? The thing is, most people don't realise they're actually sitting, or rather lying, on a goldmine at night when untapped potential lies in wait, just ready for the taking.

Mindfulness of dreams and sleep is an approach developed by leading mindfulness teachers, best-selling authors and dream work experts Rob Nairn and Charlie Morley. In a nutshell, mindfulness of dreams and sleep is about using different sleep states to harness your potential. The first key sleep state that you can work with is the moment just before sleep, the hypnagogic state, which often includes sensations of floating, falling or spinning. Then there's the hypnopompic, that broad and refined state you experience just as you are surfacing from sleep. It's possible to use mindfulness within these two states to increase your levels of joy. Better still, if you can have some awareness while you are within a dream, also known as lucid dreaming, you're in a powerful place to really effect change.

For me, the most fascinating of the three states is the lucid state. This is effectively a dream where you are aware that you are dreaming, and you're able to



Charlie Morley

A bestselling author and teacher of both lucid dreaming and shadow work, Charlie has been lucid dreaming for 20 years and teaching workshops for 10. Find out more at charliemorley.com

exert some gentle influence over the content. Lucid dreaming isn't a new thing. It's something that has been practiced by various traditions, cultures and religions for centuries, yet it's only been in recent decades that we've realised you can actually do some pretty powerful inner growth work within lucid dreams, and within the states of consciousness just before and after sleep – especially when using mindfulness techniques.

Lucid dreaming is something that can be learnt, even if you're not currently recalling many of your dreams. Here in the West, it was first recognised scientifically by a Dutch psychiatrist named Frederik van Eeden, who came up with the term for lucid dreams in 1913. But it was in the 1970s that lucid dreaming was explored in depth, and various studies validated and delved deeper into the field.

Before I go any further, let me share an example of how I've used these sleep states to find joy. In 2015 my daughter was born, and for the first two years of her life I had post-natal depression. It was a profoundly difficult time and feelings of joy were sparse. However, mindfulness of dreams and sleep had my back.

Like many new mums, I had zero time for myself but lucid dreaming allowed me to have some 'me time'. Those constant wakes in the night during the first couple of years were exhausting, but actually, all those blurry wake-back-to-sleep episodes meant that the chance of having a lucid dream was more probable.

I didn't have time to think about meditation or yoga during the first two or three years of my daughter's life, but I could do these things in my dreams. It was also a comfort in the dark winters. I would visit somewhere warm and tropical in my dreams and wake feeling as though I'd received a dose of sun.

I was also able to use the other sleep states to find

creative inspiration and to discover new insights. There were many occasions when I'd recite: "I sleep deeply and wake refreshed" while in the hypnagogic state, and even after six hours of broken sleep, I'd wake feeling ok.

During this time, my lucid dreams gave me back an element of control, support, and a sense of identity. Mindful dreaming handed me empowerment, when I needed it the most. It gave me moments of joy to work with.

A short while before my daughter's birth, I had also been suffering from writer's block, and through lucid dreaming, I found inspiration again. I now have 40 poems, the first draft of a collection.

My wonderfully inspiring teacher on the subject, Charlie Morley, explains more about why lucid dreaming is a powerful way to impact change. "During lucid dreams, neural pathways in the brain can be strengthened and created, just as they can while we're awake," he says. "This means that dreamers who consciously engage in certain practices within their lucid dreams, such as sport, acts of kindness or engaging with joy, are creating and strengthening the pathways associated with those practices, making them easier to do in the waking state."

Our capacity for joy is, of course, already within us; it's inherent. But life struggles, health, childhood trauma, triggers, work, finances and a plethora of other day-to-day 'blocks' can often feel like a barrier to our experience of joy. However, within our unconscious mind lies a huge amount of potential to explore ways in which we can overcome these obstacles. Mindfulness in itself is one proven path, and dream work can act as a support to mindfulness and vice versa.

Charlie adds: "One of the easiest ways to explore our unconscious is through our dreams. Lucid dreaming takes this exploration a step further because, as hypnotherapy expert Valerie Austin once told me, it allows us 'access to this data straight from the unconscious without it being edited by our rational, conscious mind'. Our true capacity is just ➤

HOW TO INDUCE A LUCID DREAM

Practice mindfulness.

Keep a dream diary. The more you're able to recall your dreams, even just fragments, the easier it will be for you to have a lucid dream.

Try to stay in the mindfulness state during the hypnagogic state, you may then enter straight into a lucid dream.

Try some reality checks during the day. Every time something surreal, unusual or uncanny happens in the day, ask yourself: Am I dreaming? If you get into this habit, you're more likely to ask yourself that same question within an actual dream, just before you become lucid.

You can then 'test the dream' to see if it's real.

Try switching on a light at the wall. Your brain won't be able to make the light appear as quickly (or in the same way) as a real-life light switch would.

Look at your hands, look away, and then look back at your hands. When you look back at your hands, they will be blurry or mishapen because the mind can't replicate the same image in quick succession.

Try to read text or your mobile phone screen in a dream. You'll find the words are illegible, jump around or are difficult to read.

HOW TO HARNESS JOY WHILE YOU SLEEP

The approach is simple. The core ingredients include: having a dream plan or goal for your nocturnal adventures, simple mindfulness techniques and a strong intention. Use the hypnogogic, lucid dream and hypnopompic states to recite *sankalpas* (a Sanskrit term for an intention, used in yoga), affirmations, visualisations and intentions and the results will be heightened. Try these steps:

Goal setting: Start by making a list of the areas or relationships in your life in which you would like to cultivate more joy. Most things you choose to work with will undoubtedly impact your joy.

Intention: Motivation and intention will play a vital part in your success so it's important to make sure you feel into your body and really tap into a strong motivation before you embark.

Create a 'sankalpa' or affirmation: It's important to use the first person 'I' and the present tense; eg. 'I feel joy in my life; I am abundant with feelings of joy'.

Hypnogogic: This state is a great place to recite affirmations as you drift off to sleep.

Lucid dream: If you become lucid within your dream, call out to the dream to meet joy. You might be faced with some beautifully surprising ways your psyche sees joy. This in itself will be pretty powerful but you may also like to ask it questions: What does it need to thrive? What is holding it back? You can also call out your affirmation to the dream. This is a powerful way to evoke change: remember you're in a really refined state of consciousness when lucid.

Embrace love: End the dream by embracing your manifestation of joy – either literally give it a hug or leave an offering such as flowers, a candle or another object that is significant to you. Your subconscious will recognise your kind intentions and this will have a beneficial impact on your experience and joy.

waiting to be revealed to us, and when we start to do mind-training work such as meditation, self-hypnosis, energy work and, of course, lucid dreaming, we begin to get an idea of just how deep the iceberg goes.”

So, what are the benefits of lucid dreaming? When you're within a lucid dream, you've accessed a refined state of consciousness. It's a bit like a state of hypnotherapy, only more powerful, and you're totally in the driving seat. Anything you do within a lucid dream is said, by Buddhists, to be seven times more powerful than if you were to do the same thing within a waking state. That's because neural pathways are being laid down and your brain switches to 'gamma brainwave frequency', which offers the state of 'feeling blessed' – a state often experienced by high level meditators, such as monks and nuns.

Whether you regularly remember your dreams or not, we can all learn how to have a lucid dream. When in a lucid dream state, you can decide what it is you would like lucid dreaming to help you with. This could be to solve problems you're facing at work; as a tool to help find inspiration on a project; to practise a skill you want to perfect; to develop your spiritual path by meeting your teachers; to find your joy; or simply just to sleep well and awake feeling rested.



Leah Larwood

A clinical hypnotherapist, Leah is one of 17 therapists in the UK to recently complete the first-ever training for therapists in mindfulness of dreams and sleep with world-renowned teacher Charlie Morley. Connect with Leah at themoonlab.net

A ROAD MAP OF SLEEP

Stage 1: Hypnagogic

This is the first stage of sleep: the hypnagogic state. It's very light sleep, and it's often accompanied by alpha brain wave patterns of relaxed wakefulness. The most recognisable aspect of stage 1 sleep is the hypnagogic imagery: the dreamy hallucinations that flash and fade before our mind's eye as we drift off.

Stage 2: Light, dreamless sleep

Most people experience this as light but dreamless sleep. We've now moved from the semi-conscious hypnagogic into the blackout stage of sleep, but we are yet to start dreaming.

Stage 3: Deep sleep

Our brain begins producing delta brain waves and we enter into the deepest level of dreamless sleep. Stage 3 is restorative sleep. It's the state we release HGH (human growth hormone), repair our cells and recharge the batteries.

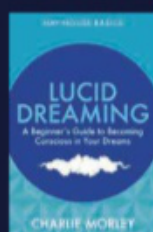
Rapid Eye Movement (REM)

This is where our body becomes paralysed, our brain becomes highly active and we dream. Although some dream imagery can occasionally seep into all stages of sleep, it's in REM in which we dream most abundantly.

Most people have about four or five 90-minute sleep cycles per night, with REM dreaming being a feature of every one of these. That's about four or five dream periods a night, which become almost 1,800 dreams per year and well over 100,000 dreams in a lifetime. That's 100,000 opportunities to get lucid!

Hypnopompic

This is the transitional state between sleep and full wakefulness. It's the state we experience just before our mind has woken fully from sleep and when our eyes are still usually closed. It's characterised by a soft clarity of mind, so you might like to hang out there if you can, resting in what's one of the most refined levels of consciousness. It's also a great place to access the lucid dream state too.



This is an extract from *Lucid Dreaming: A Beginner's Guide to Becoming Conscious in your Dreams* by Charlie Morley (Hay House, £10.99). Read more at charliemorley.com where Charlie also offers a wide range of workshops, retreats and online courses.

Breathwork

reducing back pain

Any hint of pain can make sleep seem near impossible – try this exercise to ease back pain ready for bed

With practise, this back-breathing exercise from the Pilates tradition can improve your posture and reduce or even eliminate back pain. This process cultivates space between the bones of the back and elongates the curve of the spine. It offers support to lower abdominal muscles and reduces neck and shoulder tension.

NEED TO KNOW

BENEFITS *Pain reduction; improved posture; elongated spine; easier breathing.*

TIME *5–10 minutes, regularly through the day; as needed.*

CAUTION *Seek guidance if you have a respiratory condition such as COPD or asthma. Slow down if you feel faint or dizzy.*

* Eyes closed

* Chin down slightly

* Lie, sit, or stand comfortably



01

Breathe normally through your nose. Direct your next in-breath towards your tailbone, inhaling up the back of your ribs, lifting your lower ribs away from your hips.

02

As you breathe out, flatten your lower belly. The area just below your belly button gets pulled up, in, and back a little way towards your lower back ribs.

03

As you continue to exhale, roll your shoulders back and down to lengthen your upper back and extend your head and neck lightly upwards. This completes one breathing cycle.

04

Repeat steps 1–3 for at least 5 minutes; longer will be beneficial. It might feel odd at first but with practise, you'll find a rhythm. Return to normal breathing. If you were lying or sitting down, get up slowly.

This is an extract from *Breathwork* by Nathalia Westmacott-Brown (DK, £9.99).

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iMEDicare
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When it comes to women's intimate health, many of us are reluctant and embarrassed to talk frankly about it, which often leads to suffering in silence. A lot of the problems we worry about, however, are surprisingly common, such as stress urinary incontinence (SUI) – a frequent effect of the menopause experienced by as many as one in three women.

SUI occurs when muscles in the base of the pelvis become weak, perhaps as a result of pregnancy, childbirth or natural ageing. Hormonal changes associated with the menopause cause further weakening, leading to a reduction in muscle bulk or thickness and the loss of normal muscle function and fitness. Leaks caused by coughing, sneezing or exercising, needing to urinate more often and leaking before making it to the bathroom are all typical symptoms.

Understandably, the taboo nature of incontinence can make women feel ashamed, anxious and uncomfortable – but it doesn't have to be this way. iMEDicare's Pelvic Health Naturally range comprises award-winning discreet, clinically effective and easy-to-use products designed to get your pelvic floor muscles working well again and give you reliable protection from leaking.

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✿ DEAR AUNT JOSEPHINE

“My friend drops me as soon as she gets a new boyfriend”

It's easy for friends to disappear from our lives when circumstances change, but friendship is complicated and, if it's important to you, can weather most storms

Q I met my friend at university 10 years ago and the pattern has always been the same. When she is single, she's always around and up for doing things together, but as soon as she gets into a relationship, she disappears off the scene. One time I literally did not hear from her for two years, apart from when she messaged on my birthday. She's been with her current guy for about 10 months, but I've heard through a mutual friend that things are a bit rocky and I'm bracing myself for the usual WhatsApp from her with loads of kisses and a winky face, asking if I want to meet up like nothing has happened. Part of me wants to call time on our friendship because I'm sick of her using me like this. I've always made time for my friends, even when I have been in relationships, and I don't know if the fact she's so brazen about it makes it better or worse. The annoying thing is that I really enjoy her company when I do see her: she's funny and charming and generous and we've had some really good times together. But just because she's good fun doesn't mean I should let her get away with behaving like this. What should I do?

Fed Up Friend, Bath

A I did smile at the winky face. Your friend clearly has some awareness of how she's behaving but, understandably, the charm has started to wear thin for you. Most of us have been guilty at some point of dumping our friends for a new love interest. It starts to threaten the friendship code when it becomes a *modus operandi*. You are completely entitled to feel the way that you do, but before you cut off a decade-long friendship, let's have a deeper look at what's going on.

You're also right that friendship shouldn't be used for one person's convenience. I would say you are justified to jump ship when a friend habitually vanishes from your life every time a new partner comes along, before turning up again expecting your time and attention and all the other benefits of friendship, without putting in any of the

groundwork. That's not how it works, sorry. Do you feel your friend is guilty of this, or could you call her if you were going through a crisis, or had some good news to share?

It's quite common for friends to disappear from our lives for the domestic, daily stuff. Good friends can go weeks, months, years without seeing each other, but with the knowledge that they have things in common, shared experiences and the complicit understanding that they're there for each other if needs be. Your friend still texted you on your birthday during her two-year hiatus, so she obviously keeps you in mind. Sometimes it's enough to know that we have the unspoken support of our friends without them actually showing it. Maybe that sounds like a bit of a cop-out but I think that's the reality of many modern friendships.

The other big thing here is, could you just accept your friend for who she is? She obviously brings lots of good things to your life (when she's in it). Sometimes we can't put all of our expectations and needs into one friendship. You want consistency and commitment, but your pal can't (or won't) give you that. Can you get over that and look for what you need in other friendships? You could sit down and have an honest chat with her, but the bottom line is this is probably how she operates as a friend. If you did cut her out, would your life be richer or poorer for it? Once you work that out, and if you can make peace with her version of what friendship looks like, you will have your answer. 🍷



Josephine Carnegie holds a certificate in holistic counselling and is best known for giving good advice (@dearauntjosephine).

Ask Aunt Josephine a question by emailing hello@auntjosephine.co.uk. Unfortunately, Aunt Josephine can't enter into personal correspondence.

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wellness



Free *your body*

When we think of meditation, the seated pose often comes to mind, but there are many ways to find your om, explains yoga and meditation teacher Maude Hirst

Meditation is something that many of us will have tried; with everyone from Katy Perry to Oprah lauding its benefits, it's hard not to be intrigued. And, I know we hear this a lot, but meditation has totally transformed my life, helping me to change from hiding behind scripts, characters and busyness in an acting career to knowing my true self and being comfortable in my own skin. But if traditional, seated meditation isn't for you, there's no need to assume that you can't reap these rewards; there are many more ways of meditating than meets the eye, and it might take you a while to find the right one.

I spent years researching, training and participating in a wide array of different meditation practices: from a vipassana

retreat (10 days of silence, sitting for up to 10 hours a day in meditation) to walking meditations in the desert. Each of these practices I have valued – and learnt from – in their different ways, but it wasn't until I came across combining meditation with movement that I found a style of meditation that really worked for me.

The idea of moving meditation isn't new; yoga, Qi Gong and t'ai chi are all forms of mindful movement that aim to create headspace and calm thought. But, for me, freeing our movement from sequences or poses is key to getting out of our heads and fully connecting to the body. It was on a trip to LA a couple of years ago that I first encountered this, attending a class taught by Scott Picard, a former gymnast and dancer. His class was centred on intuitive movement, ►

accompanied by breath and visualisation practices. It helped me to suddenly listen to my instincts in a new way. I had been unaware that most of the movements I was making in my body were coming from my mind. I realised that my whole life, I'd been constantly thinking about, and being conscious of, how I thought I should move, instead of actually listening to what my body wanted to do naturally. It was incredibly liberating, allowing me to find a new freedom of movement that helped me to reconnect to parts of myself that I had forgotten or been ignoring.

Upon researching this topic further, I discovered that this restriction of movement is common in all of us. Before the age of two, we have thousands of movements that the body does naturally, helping us to express how we feel moment by moment. By the time we reach our adult life, this is reduced significantly because we become conscious of how we look as we move, comparing ourselves to others. A movement practice, such as Scott's, is designed to reconnect us to that childlike freedom, where there is no judgment, no right or wrong, just an exploration into our body, strengthening the mind and body connection.

Inspired, I started to incorporate these ideas into my meditation practice, creating something which I now refer to as elemental movement meditation and share in my own classes. Each class takes a similar format,

“It helped me to reconnect to parts of myself that I had forgotten”

hoping to reconnect back to your body and intuition.

With eye masks on, I guide everyone into a meditative state and then the soundtrack (carefully designed in collaboration with sound designer Barney Quinton) begins. We travel through each of the elements, earth, fire, water and air, connecting with the breath and beginning to explore movement in each. As we're all wearing eye masks, it immediately stops being a practice of comparison to the person next to you or replication of the teacher; instead, everyone can begin to explore movement in our own unique way, creating a practice of trust in ourselves and our bodies. Even just 30 minutes of this is enough to have an impact, giving you an opportunity to step away from the overthinking mind and listen to your body and breath. It can leave you feeling powerful, totally connected to yourself and calmer, both mentally and physically.

Each different kind of movement or meditation practice has its own unique benefits, all of which are useful at different times. I'd highly recommend trying as many different practices as you can until you find the one that resonates the most. However, I believe that our contemporary lifestyle presents us with different needs and challenges to those of generations past, so our choice of practice should match these changes. It is important to find a practice that allows us to both reflect inwardly to discover how we are feeling and have an external physical component to help shift our energy – rather than storing it in our bodies – which will allow us to feel fully liberated in all areas of our life. 🧘



Photography@gritsiworld

Maude Hirst

Maude Hirst is a yoga and meditation teacher based in London, UK. She shares knowledge about many mindfulness practices on her website (energyrise.co.uk), and also teaches classes at Re:Mind meditation studio (remindstudio.com).

Move your body

Maude shares a simple movement meditation you can practice in the comfort of your home

Find a space where you can be totally alone. Turn on some calming, sensual music, close your eyes and allow yourself to move freely. Be guided by your body and the breath rather than the mind. Take a moment to notice how you feel afterwards. It can be the most empowering feeling to switch off from the logical mind and be fully connected to your body. Take this feeling with you as you continue with the rest of your day.

There are times when a traditional seated meditation pose feels right, says Maude, but we can also allow ourselves to meditate in other ways.



Photography @mattbenstone



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✿ HAVE YOU TRIED

Craniosacral therapy

Craniosacral therapy uses light touch to restore balance to the body and mind and support self-healing

Words: Karen Young

Developed by osteopath Dr John Upledger in the 1970s, craniosacral therapy is a non-invasive therapy that is said to gently work with the central nervous system, helping to improve function in the body while supporting its ability to self-heal.

By placing their hands on specific parts of the body, a craniosacral therapy practitioner ‘tunes in’ to the subtle rhythm created by the movement of the fluid that bathes the brain and spinal cord and is contained in a thick membrane.

Often referred to as the ‘craniosacral rhythm’, this gentle movement in the cerebrospinal fluid is linked to physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health and anything that restricts its flow is believed to affect our overall wellbeing and the body’s natural capacity to self-heal.

“Using our ‘listening hands’, we feel how well the craniosacral rhythm is reflecting out to the rest of the body and from there, use gentle techniques to help improve its function,” says Caroline Barrow, a craniosacral therapy practitioner and training provider (upledger.co.uk).

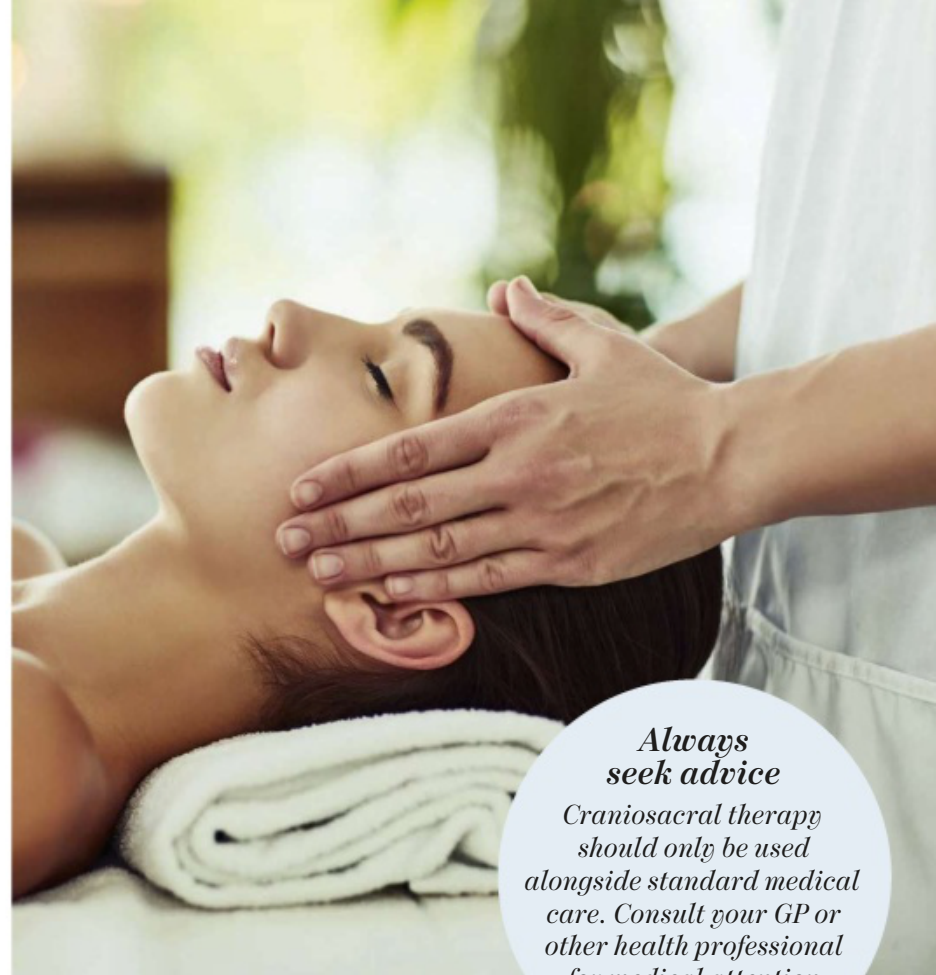
“This could mean simply encouraging it along its path, similar to flushing more fluid through a sticky pipe, or it could involve using gentle

techniques to unwind kinks in the body’s fascia – a bit like straightening out a sock that isn’t on quite straight, only the fabric we’re working with is soft tissue.

“An important aspect of the treatment is that the practitioner is not trying to figure out what is ‘wrong’ with you or ‘fix’ a specific problem,” says Caroline. “We are simply tuning in to what your body needs and then helping it to return to a state of balance and optimum health. As the body’s fascia is interconnected, you may also find that your practitioner treats an area where you are not experiencing any symptoms, as our bodies can be very clever in how they adapt to stresses and strains.”

Following a full consultation, you will be asked to lie on a therapy couch, either face up or on your side, remaining fully clothed throughout the treatment. The practitioner will then gently place their hands on your head, neck, the base of your spine and other areas of the body. Many clients report heat or tingling sensations in the body during the course of the treatment and feeling either deeply relaxed or energised afterwards.

Sessions typically last an hour and cost £40 to £100, depending on the location, length of treatment and seniority of the practitioner. 🧘



Always seek advice

Craniosacral therapy should only be used alongside standard medical care. Consult your GP or other health professional for medical attention and advice.

Four benefits of craniosacral therapy

1 Many describe this as a deeply relaxing therapy, which can help to ease stress and anxiety and improve sleep.

2 Craniosacral therapy is said to release tension and restrictions affecting the soft tissue, which can help to reduce associated aches and pains and restore function.

3 As a ‘holistic’ therapy said to affect and benefit the whole body, some clients have regular treatments as a form of ‘preventative’ healthcare.

4 Many people who try craniosacral therapy find that it supports both their physical health and emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

The Federation of Holistic Therapists (fht.org.uk) is the UK’s leading professional association for complementary, holistic beauty and sports therapists.

Weathering the storms

Stress affects us all, but often we direct our frustration at the wrong person. Show your vulnerability and find new resilience together

Words: Natalie Lue

Something many of us fear is that honesty and vulnerability will invite criticism and rejection. This can extend itself to disguising stress by putting on a veneer of calm so that our partner doesn't think we're 'needy' or 'high-maintenance'. We might fear opening a can of worms, preferring to sweep it under the carpet.

In new relationships, we might assume that disagreeing means we're wrong for each other. The end of the honeymoon period is often seen as a problem instead of the beginning of real intimacy. Depending on our respective communication styles and associations with conflict and stress, doing things 'my way' can result in a power struggle.

If it continues, we might chug along happily until we're stressed, or a problem crops up. Even though these situations might feel fraught, if we value honesty and growing together, our joint response to conflict and stress improves over time, even if there are hot button subjects.

But, if either of us gradually avoids talking about their innermost feelings and thoughts, we'll shut down, become fatigued by the situation and lose faith in the relationship. Resentment will build, and at some point, one or both will explode or implode.

Each of us has strong ideas about the way to do certain things in a relationship. While it might be about usage of 'best' towels (a friend), not denting the butter (my husband), or where dirty socks belong (me), it might be who we think our partner is supposed to be if we're doing 'all the things' (i.e. being a Good Partner™). It might be about how to spend money, the division of labour, free time, parenting, how much we work... the list goes on.

Our strong ideas about how to do things are based on beliefs. This includes what we learned from our past. But they're just our view of things, not *the* way. Relationships have to be collaborative partnerships based on finding the way *together*, not fighting to come out on top.

The small stuff doesn't become a source of repeated tension, friction and misunderstanding if

we haven't got bigger fish that we're not frying. Or, if we're not using it to avoid vulnerability.

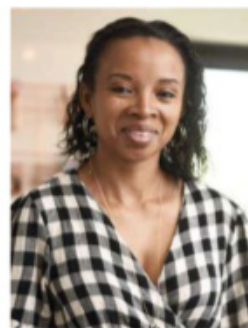
But even small stuff can feel pretty big when we've got unexpressed stress, frustration and resentment. That might be about bigger issues, but it can, as I can attest to, be about anxiety or annoyance about something work-related, exhaustion, or grappling with feelings of loss.

We don't necessarily say 'I'm struggling' or 'It really wound me up when that person did X'. We might jump on our partner's case or be super cranky though, to relieve some of our stressy feelings, potentially creating conflict and hurt.

So many couples become adrift because one or both think it's better not to bring something up because it will hurt feelings, cause problems or burden. But the moment we do this, it blocks intimacy. It can be really lonely when it feels like we're drowning and our partner doesn't see it. Equally, plenty of us find it baffling when our partner won't just speak up or appears to be disproportionately stressed by something.

But we're all just humans being human. We get triggered by emotional baggage that shows up when we're stressed. Acknowledging this allows us to see ourselves and others better, rather than expecting people to fit our vision. Often, we're not fighting our partner; it's people from our past that our partner or the situation remind us of.

The more we evolve our responses to stress, then, the more we heal that baggage. We, and our relationship, feel and become resilient against life's inevitable stresses. We feel, even if we're going to disagree, that we can weather it together. 🍷



Natalie Lue is the author of seven books aimed at helping overachievers and people-pleasers break unhealthy habits. She has been writing her blog baggageclaim.co.uk for 15 years. Follow her on Insta @natlue





Know your *skin cycle*

Fed up with flare ups? Adapting your skincare to your hormonal cycle can help to minimise blemishes and keep skin at its radiant best

Words: Jessica Lacey

Like it or not, we are all made of hormones. But far from being the inconvenient party-pooper crazy-makers their bad rap might have you believe, hormones are in fact highly intuitive chemical messengers that regulate our organs and tell our body how to function. Oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone are the three main sex hormones that control the menstrual cycle and, in the most part, they play an effective balancing act, rising and falling in beautiful symbiosis. But, as skin is an outward visible manifestation of all that our body is going through, it's little wonder that what our hormones are getting up to is often written across our faces.

"Women most definitely have a skin cycle relative to our hormones," says skincare expert and Pai Skincare founder, Sarah Brown.

For some, it's a random blemish or dried out dullness, while for others it's a full-on flare up. "A drier skin type would most likely get the odd pimple or two during their cycle, whereas an oilier skin is more susceptible to acne due to increased sebum production but that isn't to say that dry skin types won't also experience hormonal acne too," Brown explains.

Affectionately known as the diva hormone, oestrogen gives you that sass and makes you all woman. Skin loves oestrogen; it suppresses sebum production, reduces bacteria, boosts hydration and also kick-starts collagen production. So, in the menstruating phase when oestrogen is at its monthly low, skin is understandably at its worst. Fast-forward 10 days though to when you're ovulating, oestrogen takes the main stage and skin is clear and glowing. You'll likely be firing ➤

on all cylinders too, enjoying peak creativity, railing through the to-do lists and generally enjoying life.

Yet, as with all divas, things can get out of hand, so along comes progesterone to calm things down and keep your party-girl side in check, as this hormone also helps you to rest.

“Progesterone can increase sebum production and sebum-filled pores are the ideal place for bacteria to live – particularly *P. acnes*, which loves to colonise these pores and cause inflammatory acne,” explains Laura Rudoe of Evolve Skincare. Using light moisturising products that are non-comedogenic (clogging) can help to stop skin from being overloaded during this phase. Also, using topical exfoliators such as AHA (glycolic acid) or BHA (salicylic acid) toners 2-3 times a week can help remove any dead skin cells clogging pores.

“Menopause can also be a typical time for skin to go on a rampage because of the significant alterations in hormone levels.



Sarah Brown

After her skin became unusually irritated, Sarah discovered even 'organic' and 'hypoallergenic' products contained synthetics and irritants. So, she set up Pai Skincare (paiskincare.com) to fill the gap.

“Hormones are complex, so the key is not to fight the tide”

It's estimated that 50 percent of women ages 20 to 29 have hormonal acne but around 25 percent of women ages 40 to 49 are still affected by hormonal skin,” continues Rudoe.

“During perimenopause, the ovaries begin to produce less and less oestrogen, so by the time menopause hits, both oestrogen and testosterone levels are low and skin suffers from dryness, loss of elasticity and starts ageing more rapidly. Switching your skincare up to include a creamier cleanser, richer moisturiser, anti-ageing serum and sun protection can help to guard against this.”

If you have a hormonal condition like endometriosis, where the uterus lining grows in places it shouldn't, or polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), hormonal skin flare-ups can be extreme and painful. “Bizarrely, it's still unclear as to why endometriosis occurs but we do know that abnormal hormone levels can cause tissue to build up,” says nutritional therapist Marjolein Dutry van Haeften, (hormoniously.com), whose London clinic is dedicated to supporting female health. “Women with PCOS often have acne and an inbuilt resistance to oestrogen means they don't benefit from the super glowy skin stage either. She believes both conditions are linked to gut health and keeping a food diary is the first step to finding a solution.

Hormones are powerful and complex, so the key is not to fight the tide. Know what to expect, understand why it's happening and treat it accordingly. Everyone's hormones are doing this to differing extents so rather than resenting their influence, trust your body and its ancient chemistry. We can sometimes feel our body is betraying us but accepting our body's wisdom can help us to appreciate it, work together with our hormones and feel far better as a result.

As hormone levels change during menopause, skin can become dry and lose elasticity - time to choose a richer moisturiser.



Eat plenty of foods rich in vitamins B and C in the middle of your cycle for glowing skin, like kale, cauliflower and broccoli.



Go with the flow: the skin cycle explained

So how do you know what to expect? It's actually fairly simple; map where you are in your menstrual cycle and you'll have a good idea of your hormone levels.

Day 1-5: Menstruation

* Oestrogen and progesterone are low and you might feel it too. Skin may look lacklustre and drab.

Day 6-13: Follicular Phase

* Preparing for ovulation and things are looking up, oestrogen and testosterone levels are rising slowly and your skin should be clearing up nicely.

Day 14-16: Ovulation

* Oestrogen is at a high so you're feeling good and your skin is clear. This is when we feel most positive about our appearance.

Day 17-28: Luteal Phase

* Progesterone builds, soars and then comes back down again. During this phase skin swelling and pore tightening due to water retention can lead to excess sebum and clogged pores. In a word, acne.

Take down disruptors

In the UK, we're wising up to the fact that most plastic products, including water bottles and food wraps, can release chemicals that act like oestrogen. BPA is one of the most widespread chemicals found in things like plastic straws, the concern being that this chemical can spread into food and disrupt our hormonal balance. Parabens used in beauty products to give them a longer shelf life also expose the body to BPA and are particularly prevalent in synthetic perfumes. Switching to paraben-free skincare and natural fragrances is a good way to sidestep the risk.

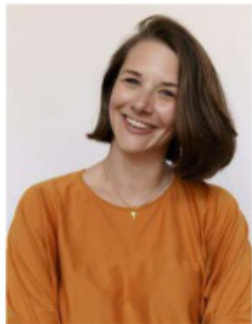
Order up!

Studies have shown that hormonal skin is intrinsically linked to gut health, so in this case you can absolutely eat yourself radiant. Foods rich in vitamins B and C boost your progesterone levels, so stock up on greens – especially cauliflower, broccoli and kale – and also egg yolks in the middle of your cycle. However, if you find yourself a tad



Laura Rudoe

Laura set up Good Ventures (goodventures.co.uk) in 2008 with the mission to create new organic personal care brands that make a difference. A former Management Consultant and Venture Capitalist, Laura holds an MBA from Harvard Business School and was the founding employee of NUDE skincare.



Marjolein Dutry van Haeften

Marjolein is a registered nutritional therapist (hormoniously.com), who uses comprehensive lab testing to design personalised nutrition and lifestyle programs to transform women's lives.

constipated towards the end of your cycle, it may well be you're maxing out on progesterone and this harbouring of toxins can lead to congested skin and breakouts. Fibre and water are the best way to flush out toxins and both olive and hemp oil work wonders to flush out the gut.

If you eat meat, choose organic because farm animals are often given synthetic hormones to speed up growth and when you eat their meat, you inject these too. Swapping dairy for almond milk can also benefit skin.

Foods rich in vitamin B6 regulate hormones no matter where you are in your cycle so stock up on salmon, beans and kale for dinner. Finally, avoid maxing out on sugar in all its forms, it's super-inflammatory and as soon as your insulin drops, acne-triggering cortisol will kick in.

More of these please!

Look for these ingredients in your skincare:

Zinc not only stops bacteria from growing and has anti-inflammatory properties but also helps your body use vitamin A, which helps repair the skin and reduce acne.

Epilobium is an Alpine herb that reduces the activity of the enzyme 5-alpha reductase making the skin less oily, therefore reducing the likelihood of breakouts.

Salicylic acid is an excellent exfoliator for breakouts and helps to unclog pores.

Copaiba is a rainforest herb with antibacterial activity that's seriously gaining popularity in beauty products.

Pomegranate oil boosts local hormone levels and the seeds are rich in lignans – fibre-associated compounds which provide antioxidant and oestrogenic effects.

Ask the experts

Help for hormonal skin shifts is out there, you can book in for skin therapy sessions with a Pai expert on Skype or phone call. The 30 minutes sessions cover flare ups, diet, sleep, stress and hormones and encourage you to keep a skin diary to help you take control of your skin patterns and triggers (paiskincare.com). 



On the double: Cleanse with an oil first to remove impurities on the skin's surface, then follow with a calming cream cleanser like Pai Skincare Camellia & Rose Gentle Hydrating Cleanser, £40 (paiskincare.com) – it will leave pores truly clear.



Reach for radiance: For the downright drab days, when oestrogen levels are low, reach for a smoothing, brightening serum. Baie Botanique Rose Renew Anti-Aging Serum, £34 (baiebotanique.com), gives us that glow factor.



Swap the rough for smooth: When high levels of sebum are produced, pores can become blocked. Evolve Liquid Radiance Glycolic Toner, £20, (evolvebeauty.co.uk), contains AHA and BHA to encourage cell renewal and unclog pores.



From drab to richness: Oestrogen levels drop during menopause and skin can easily dry out so a rich face cream that prevents water loss like S5 Restore Cream, £46, (s5skincare.com), will bring skin back from the brink.

Pomegranate is a wonder ingredient for your skin. It also contains punicic acid which helps to improve the appearance of scars, wrinkles and dryness.



On the spot: When time is of the essence, Skyn Iceland Blemish Dots, £20 (marksandspencer.com) are the quick-as-a-flash solution. Gel patches saturated with salicylic acid offer a targeted treatment for lone blemishes.



Call on some calm: Inflammation and general skin anger demands daily drops of Tandem Back on Track Booster, £20, (tandemskincare.co.uk). Naturally anti-bacterial willow bark extract reduces redness and controls oil production.



High tech hero: When you're staring in the face of skin that's lost its life-force, NIOD Copper Amino Isoate Lipid 1%, £70 (niod.com), is a turbo boost. Beauty editor beloved, this blue gel is a pro-collagen, barrier building, elasticising wonder!



Drops of zen: Ohne Yours Hormonally CBD Oil, £27 (ohne.co) is the world's first targeted CBD oil for hormones. Designed to relieve muscular pain, anxiety and skin woes, it's blended with hemp seed, argan and evening primrose oils.

wellness

Rethink period care

*It's estimated we'll each spend
£18,000 over a lifetime of
periods – save yourself some
cash and help the planet
with these eco alternatives*





It's a keeper

Keeping your period plastic-free just got a whole lot simpler thanks to DAME, the world's first reusable tampon applicator. It works with every size of tampon, is self-sanitising (so no need for boiling water), carbon neutral and lasts for life. You can even calculate just how much plastic you'll save with DAME on their site.

£24.99 wearedame.co



Ready to reuse

Designed to be comfortable, absorbent, and pretty too, these washable pads from Earthwise Girls are an ideal eco swap. Just use as you would your usual pads but, instead of reaching for the bin, pop them in the wash ready for next month and see how much you save from landfill.

£8.25 earthwisegirls.co.uk



Go organic

At its launch in 1989, Natracare was the world's first brand of organic and natural period products. They're now in good company, but these cotton tampons – designed to expand widthways – can't be beaten. Plus, they're completely free of perfume and chlorine so you can be sure there are no nasties here.

From £2.59 bowercollective.com



Try a cup

Swap tampons and pads for a menstrual cup, like this one from Feminesse, and you'll notice a difference in both how much you throw away, and how much money you spend on your period. It's ideal for travelling too, as it comes with a handy case and wherever you're going, you'll only need to pack one!

£7.99 feminesse.co.uk



Fancy pants

Ditch the disposable altogether and opt for period pants. WUKA's medium flow bikini-style pants can be worn for up to eight hours, then just machine wash at 40°C and line dry – it couldn't be simpler. Plus, everyone's covered as they come with varying absorbency in sizes 4 to 20 and there are tween sets available too.

From £19.99 wuka.co.uk



Simple switch

If you know you're looking for something more planet-friendly, but aren't quite sure what suits you, this organic, vegan and cruelty-free switch kit from TOTM is a great choice. The bargain box contains a selection of tampons and pads for you to try – plus, you get a £2 discount off your next order too!

£2 totm.com

ADVERTISEMENT
FEATURE

Plastic not fantastic

It's time period products had an upgrade – ditch the plastic with Natracare's planet-friendly, organic and natural pads and tampons



You've likely long stopped using plastic straws, replaced plastic bags with fabric shoppers and opted for a reusable coffee cup, but there's still one time of the month where you may struggle to reduce your plastic use and be as eco-friendly as you'd like – when you're on your period.

Plastics, non-organic cotton, perfumes, dyes and chlorine bleaching... many women don't realise what's in conventional period products. Fortunately, Natracare is on a mission to shake up the way we think about Aunt Flo.

Natracare believes our bodies and the planet deserve better – that's why it created the world's first 100% organic cotton tampon. And, 30 years later, it's still championing period products created with eco-friendly, natural materials.

With typical pads containing up to five plastic bags' worth of plastic, it seems periods aren't so great for Mother Nature. Thankfully, Natracare's period pads are plastic-free, so not only are they gentle on your skin, they're also gentle on the planet.

Natracare only uses the best renewable, biodegradable and compostable materials, like soft organic cotton and naturally absorbent wood pulp. Free from chlorine bleaching, perfumes and dyes, their certified vegan period products are soothing and calming on intimate skin.

So try swapping to Natracare – it's a little change that can make a big difference. You'll be able to go about your day leak- and worry-free. And, better yet, you'll be kinder to your body and the planet.



natracare

Want to make your period plastic-free? To find out more head to natracare.com

creativity

Have courage in your convictions!

Write your story and tap into the
positive power of nostalgia

Book club: Hadley Freeman discusses
her exceptional family saga



Courage, dear heart

Have the courage to follow through on creative ideas and you'll reap rewards – whether they work out or not

Words: Sara Tasker / Illustration: Vanessa Lovegrove

We built my daughter a bedroom this month. She'd never had one before – just a curtained off corner of our open plan top floor where we all slept in a tangle of limbs.

The joiner was up for the job. He and my husband sketched it out; shiny new plasterboard walls and MDF doors to make a practical little hallway and rooms. Rationally, it made perfect sense, but my creative brain was not on board. Instead, she was on Pinterest: collecting examples of huge glazed panels stretching up into the eaves.

There's this moment when a creative idea blossoms in our mind. A point of decision: are we going to take this idea to its end? Letting it go means living forever with the 'what ifs'. But going with it means actively choosing the rocky road of self-advocacy, with all its potential for failure.

What if my idea – still a little vague, not to mention significantly more expensive than theirs – turned out bad? How, I wondered, did anyone ever take on a *Grand Designs* style house construction, when I was so weathered by this simple choice?

Following through on our creative ambitions – whatever the size or consequences – calls on us to face a storm of self-doubt. When something exists only in our mind, there's nobody else to share our vision. We can't outsource our conviction in it to the general consensus. Our ideas exist only for us, until we make their potential turn real.

And so at every stage, I've felt the weight of responsibility for this work. Committing to an idea means taking full responsibility for the outcome.

Midway through, that creative voice piped up with another unusual concept. A secret den with a hidden door. It's the stuff my childhood daydreams were made of, and the joiner seemed to share my glee. So when, a week or so later, I noticed the design hadn't happened, I mustered courage and asked when it would be made for us.

He was surprised. "You're never really going to get around to doing that, are you?" Well, yes! Why would I have asked him otherwise? But it made me wonder how many of his clients over the years had

abandoned their ideas at the earliest stage. For him to assume that it was normal – to come up with a concept, and then cool on it again in a matter of days – suggests it's a pretty common occurrence.

And I've seen that too. We start with excitement and energy, and then our brain pummels us with its cold-cut reality until, beleaguered and scared, we agree not to take on such unnecessary risk.

If it hadn't been for all my practice at this, I don't think I'd have been able to push ahead with the project. But two weeks later, the walls are up, the hidden den would make Enid Blyton jealous, and everyone agrees we made something wonderful.

In fact, so lovely is the hideout that it got featured in the national press, and landed me a sponsorship to have the finished room decorated. It feels like the universe is congratulating me on honouring my creative ambition, or perhaps, simply that creativity and self-belief always begets more of the same in our lives. Creative courage, in my opinion, is the secret sauce to crafting a truly intentional life.

Those people living your dream creative life don't have any skills or character traits that we inherently lack. They've just had more practice; have done enough workouts to build up their muscles of conviction, confidence and belief.

Like lifting weights, our tolerance for the discomfort in creative commitment grows with practice. We can start small: choosing a photo to post; hitting send on that pitch email; starting that project that feels too advanced for us. It's not the results that really matter, in the end, but the relationship this helps us forge with ourselves. 🍷



Sarah Tasker is a photographer, writer and creative coach who goes by the name Me & Orla (@me_and_orla). Her first book, *Hashtag Authentic* (White Lion Publishing, £16.99), is out now.



Write your story

Creating a memoir can tap into the positive aspects of nostalgia, helping to calm and ground us

Words: Harriet Griffey

Writing a memoir, whether about yourself or another family member, can be a wonderful way to bring positivity to nostalgia. Both an emotion and a thought process, research has shown that nostalgia has many positive aspects, from helping us deal with stress and anxiety to deepening our connections to people and places and helping to build stability.

“Any change, good or bad, is very stressful. So what nostalgia enables you to do both emotionally and cognitively is keep track of what has remained stable, giving you some sense of continuity,” explains Krystine Batcho, professor of psychology at Le Moyne College, New York, who has been researching nostalgia since 1994.

This can be true of adverse or unhappy memories too. “When nostalgia is used in a healthy way,” she writes, for *healthline.com*, “it can be like a crutch that grounds you in your past while you figure out how to move forward. Whether it’s something extreme like a new culture or less extreme like a new job, it can buy you a little emotional time because it gives you the sense of security to say, ‘I know I can do this.’ Then you can plan your future.”

The idea of writing a memoir can, however, be daunting, so it’s helpful to think through the process a little, how you might structure it and what personal stories to focus on. Having a rough idea of what you want your memoir to accomplish is a good starting point. Does your story relate to a particular event? Does it have extra resonance because of something that happened to you? Did something change the course of your life in some way?

Though based in factual events, this is still an act of creative writing and it uses many of the same tools as any other form of prose, imaginatively combining observation and experience with how you felt and making use of characterisation and dialogue. You could start with your birth or with some other event pivotal to your life’s story. It doesn’t matter, it’s your memoir and you get to tell it how you want to, starting (and finishing) where you choose.

Where to begin?

Start by identifying what for you is a pivotal event on which your memoir might rest. This could be something to do with you, or someone else, a parent’s death perhaps, or their religious belief, for example, or the birth of a sibling. It could be to do with a political shift or a geographical move to another country. For Damian Barr, author of the memoir *Maggie and Me* (£8.99, Bloomsbury), it was that his parents separated in 1984 when he was eight years old, on the night that UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher survived a bombing at the Grand Hotel in Brighton. This pivotal moment doesn’t have to be historically significant, but it’s useful for it to be relevant to you as it will provide a focus, initially at least, to help you formulate the structure of a memoir. ➤



Find common ground

While everyone's life is unique and some are exceptional, there are many aspects of life that are universal. We all feel happy, sad, angry or lonely at times. Few of us spend our days, as Proust did, in a cork-lined room but are the sum of our relationships and experiences, defined by some if not all of them. However, we all experience times of disappointment, grief or wonder; these are points of reference that will resonate with readers, even if it's our individual experiences that create the stories. 'I know how you feel,' we might say to a friend sharing a story about some experience, and although the circumstances are different, and specific to each of us, it is the universality of our feelings that enables the reader to identify with us. It's this which will engage the reader.

Exercise 1

Draft an initial page of text on a pivotal moment of your life, which will create a focus and material on which to build.

Put yourself at the centre

Keep in mind that you are the most important person in your memoir; this is your story and all the memories you utilise must relate to your story in some way. It is useful to remember this when you are writing, because it will help you work out what to keep in and what to leave out.

Exercise 2

Focusing entirely on yourself, draft a word portrait of how you remember yourself at that time. This is utterly subjective and will be different to how others remember you or the event, but it's your starting point for your story.

Flicking through photos is a great way to find your starting point – is there an event which jumps out as the start of something or a change in direction?

Find time to write whenever you can and be prepared to edit drafts.

Exercise 3

Draft six different first lines. This can help to find an initial starting point that can guide the emphasis of your story.

Make them memorable

The first line of any memoir should grasp the reader's attention. The trick to writing the first line is often to finalise it towards the end of the first draft, when it's become clear to you what that hook is. Memorable ones give us a clue to the rest of the story:

* "A few months after my twenty-first birthday, a stranger called to give me the news."

Dreams from My Father by Barack Obama

* "When my mother was angry with me, which was often, she said, 'The Devil led us to the wrong crib.'" *Why be Happy When You Could be Normal?* by Jeanette Winterson

* "I was three or perhaps four years old when I realised that I had been born into the wrong body and should really be a girl."

Conundrum by Jan Morris

* "I met Pablo Picasso in May 1943, during the German Occupation of France. I was twenty-one and I felt already that painting was my whole life."

Life with Picasso by Françoise Gilot

Exercise 4

Draft your personal 'back story' in note form. This will help you evaluate key aspects that illuminate the other characters – a childhood friend, a teacher, a grandparent – that could feature in your memoir; the specific details of which had an influence on you and on which you can build the telling of your story.



Exercise 5

Take a specific event in your life and focus on what you remember feeling, because this will be relevant to how you remember it. Take care over the adjectives or metaphors that you use – try to be as specific as you can about the quality of those feelings.

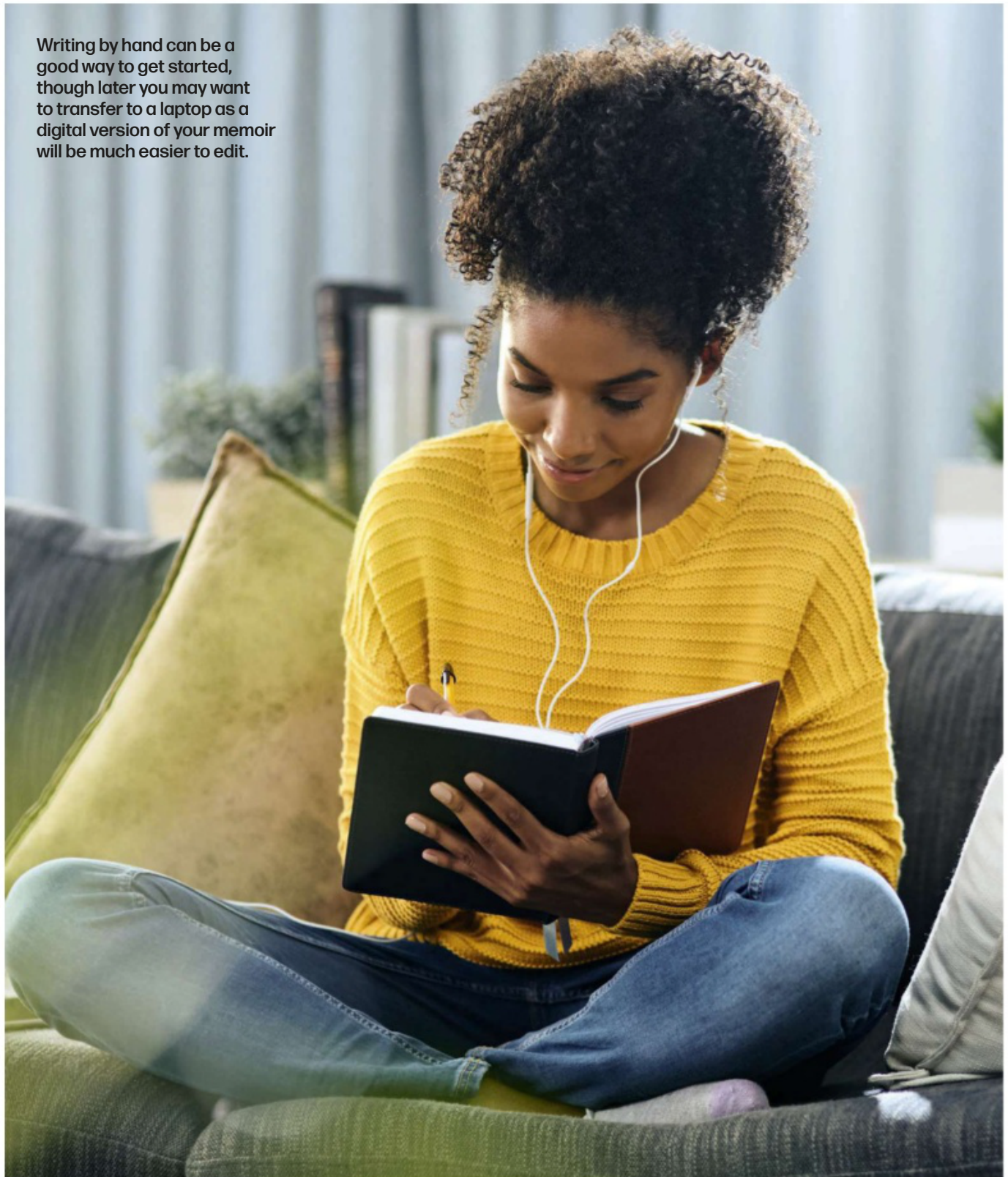
Use your senses

Sometimes it's how we feel that can evoke memories. Focus on the sensory aspect – touch, smell, taste. A sensory memory might take you back to an emotional experience. In focusing on and trying to articulate one memory, you might find that this sparks others.

Don't forget dialogue

Dialogue is important in a memoir as it reinforces characterisation and lifts the text – endless prose can be difficult to read. Dialogue creates immediacy too. In addition, when someone else in your story reflects or comments on events, it brings another relevant perspective to bear that will illuminate your own. It amplifies the effect of your experience to have a response or reaction from others.

Writing by hand can be a good way to get started, though later you may want to transfer to a laptop as a digital version of your memoir will be much easier to edit.



Exercise 6

If you are writing dialogue as yourself, be true to this, flaws and all. Don't say things you wouldn't say in real life, otherwise it will jar. Real conversations range wide, with interruptions, pauses and repetitions, but in literature you need the bare bones of an exchange when committed to paper and this should add to, not repeat, other parts of your prose. Jot down those highlights of a remembered conversation, and what insights these might convey, that could work as dialogue.

Things to remember

- ✱ Memory is inevitably subjective. However, it is your memoir, so your story can be told from your own, subjective, point of view.
- ✱ A writer's imagination extends into how a memoir is told and what tools are used in terms of chronology or structure, to make it come alive.
- ✱ A memoir is premised on truth but sometimes, in order to protect other people and their role in your story, you may have to be careful about this, especially if you are going into print and they are still alive. 🍷



Photography: Julia Burstein

Harriet Griffey

Harriet Griffey runs writersretreats.org and is the author of *Write Every Day: Daily Practice to Kickstart Your Creative Writing* (Hardie Grant, £12.99) on sale March 2020.

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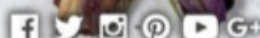
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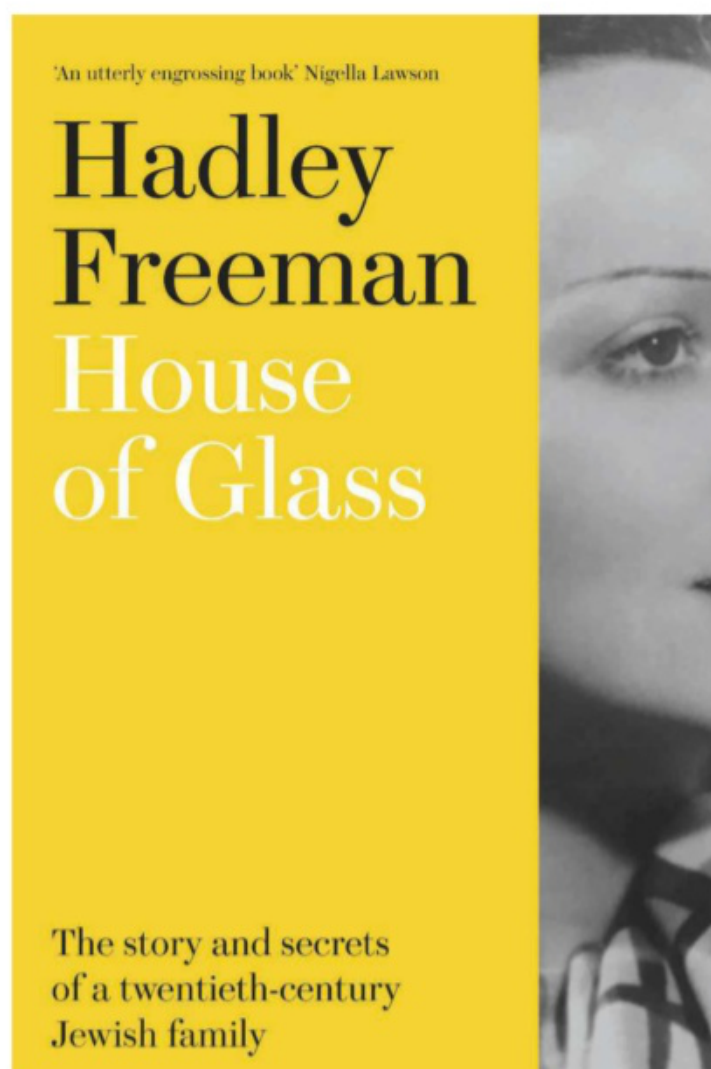


* REVIEW & INTERVIEW

House of Glass

When she began to explore her grandmother's past, Hadley Freeman discovered four exceptional stories, each leading in a different direction

Words: Sarah Ditum



As a girl, Hadley Freeman found her grandmother Sara a perplexing and distant figure. “If pressed, I would have said she was ‘weird’, but what I meant was that she seemed sad, and sad adults are confusing for children,” writes Freeman. Just what lay behind that sadness, however, was something that Freeman would only learn after her grandmother died, in the process of writing this book. She would learn, too, about the lives of her grandmother’s three brothers, and find in the Glass siblings (fittingly, given the name they adopted) a lens onto Jewish life in the twentieth century.

Henri, Jacques, Alex and Sara Glass were born in the early 1900s to two peasant Jews in the village of Chrzanów (now in Poland, then in Austro-Hungary). Their original names were Jehuda, Jakob, Sender and Sala Glahs: “Jews’ names as a whole in this period were unfixed, mutable,” notes Freeman. Driven from their home by pogroms, finding refuge in Paris, it makes sense that they would obscure their origins. But antisemitism was unconstrained by borders. In 1940, Nazi forces occupied the Glass’s adopted home, and found many French citizens who were ready to assist in eliminating their country’s Jews.

The Glasses’ stories are by turns breathtaking and heartbreaking. Henri was denounced by neighbours and spent the war largely in hiding. Jacques, who was the least assimilated and the most trusting, died in a concentration camp. Alex lived a life of drama: a fashion designer, a resistance fighter, and by the end of his life, a fixture of the fine art scene. And Sara was married off to an American by Alex and survived, but at the cost of leaving her beloved Paris for exile in New York suburbia. It’s a luminously written family saga that surpasses fiction and reveals the deepest truths, both personal and political.

Hadley's grandmother, Sara, was devastated when she was forced to leave Paris, the family's adopted home, after the Nazis occupied the city in 1940.



Q This book starts with you finding a shoebox of documents in your grandmother's apartment after she died. How did it feel to lay hands on those?

A It felt very sneaky. I wasn't actually sure what I'd found to be honest. I had been thinking about doing this book for like, five years, it was quite deep into the process. The way I put it is, I researched the book for 18 years, and I wrote it in 18 months. What I saw first were the photos, and then I saw the Picasso drawing, and I just immediately shoved it into my bag and I had to get to the airport so I didn't really look at it till I got back to London. It was this realisation that there is a real story here, and I can actually find stuff out now, which is what I doubted before.

Q Did writing *House of Glass* help you to see your grandmother as whole person?

A For sure. There's a part of me that feels like, God, is this really self-indulgent? Like I'm getting to know my grandmother, but my grandmother's dead, what good is this to her? There's a bit of guilt there that I didn't get to know her in life, so I'm trying desperately to get to know her in death. Of course it makes you look at your own life and realise how much your life was shaped by her. She gave up so much to give me a life. And it also feels treacherous. Because you know that she didn't really want me to know, and here I am forcibly undressing her in a sense.

Q How exceptional do you think the siblings were?

A I think Alex was exceptional, and Henri had exceptional elements to him, but really not that much. I mean, my grandmother's story is definitely not exceptional. It's bonkers how she met my grandfather, but the idea of a Jewish woman giving up everything and marrying a stranger to get out of her country isn't

that exceptional. And certainly Jacques' story is not that exceptional, except for the fact that he was let out for the day.

But that's what I like about it. I wanted to give a human face to these very typical stories. I guess what is exceptional is that they all had such different stories, so I got to represent each of the four options that were open to them in the thirties in Paris. I think it's both ordinary and exceptional. That's kind of most people's lives. Ordinary and exceptional. And what's nice with Alex's story is that it allows me to bring some glamour – there's a bit of Dior and Picasso and Edith Piaf if you like that type of thing. I didn't want it to be unremittingly depressing. It's not like everyone died, you know, some of us are still around.

Q Before writing this book, did you know quite how extraordinary Alex was?

A We used to go to Paris for lunches with him, and my dad would take me to his apartment, and you go in and there's Monet's Water Lilies, Van Goghs, incredible sculpture all around. So many Chagalls, because he was friends with Chagall, so many Picassos. So even I, an idiotic 21-year-old, knew that there was this



Hadley Freeman is a columnist and feature writer for *The Guardian* newspaper, where she also writes the popular 'Ask Hadley' fashion column. *House of Glass* is her third book.

Photography: Linda Nylind/The Guardian newspaper

incredible story. And he used to talk about how he escaped from the train – that was his thing, escape from the train, fighting the Nazis – although my parents were always like, you know he exaggerates, don't take it too seriously. But what I didn't expect is that all the stories he used to tell were true. That was the biggest surprise.

Q How worried were you about, for example, Jacques being read as the antisemitic stereotype of the passive Jew?

A I didn't really worry about it because this was his personality. Some Jews were passive, you know. Not all French people were in the resistance, not all Jews were in the resistance. This is a true story. And fortunately, he's only one character out of four. It's not that he was like this meek lamb. It's just that he believed in the rules, which a lot of people did. Jacques was actually the easiest to write about because he has no descendants.

My grandmother was far harder to write about, because I was very aware of my father, my uncle

reading it, and their feelings. I was very aware of that responsibility. In terms of representing the Jews, the one that felt more risky was social mobility with Alex. I had to be careful about acknowledging the fact that, yes, Jews did get wealthier and better educated in the 20th century, because that does play on other antisemitic tropes.

Q The Glass siblings took different approaches to assimilation.

A It was quite hard to unpick that because I'd never really thought about it. How you want to assimilate, what does that say about your feeling that you're accepted in this country or not? Because I'm very lucky. The only move I've ever made is from New York to London, and that's not the worst culture shock and I wasn't in danger of being rejected.

But it's a sign of how insecure Henri felt that he had to assimilate. And it's also a sign of how conscious Alex was that he could never fully be seen as French that he didn't, he made a very conscious decision not to. Whereas Jacques kind of took it for granted – I'm here, that's it, it's fine – without bothering to assimilate into the country.

Q What does it feel like to finish something that's been a part of your life for so long?

A It feels very weird because I never thought I would actually finish it. It feels like a massive relief. I used to think, 'God if I was hit by a bus and I was lying in the road about to die, what would I regret?' I would regret not having written this book. So now I can die. Now all buses can hit me. I'm done. 🍷

House of Glass by Hadley Freeman (4th Estate, £16.99) is out now.

living

Christine Liu shares a natural recipe for rest

Create an outdoor sanctuary with Selina Lake

Get the look – finds inspired by Selina's style

The unexpected joys of far-away friendships



Photography © Shed Style by Selina Lake (Ryan and Peters & Small)

A recipe for rest

What do you do when anxiety and stress stop you from sleeping, then tiredness exacerbates your anxiety and stress?

Words: Christine Liu / Illustration: Vanessa Lovegrove

Two years ago, I was caught up in the grind of corporate work life. My daily routine started at 5am for an intensive session of hot yoga, then continued into a meeting-filled day at work from 8am to 5pm. I would go home to prepare a quick dinner with my husband shortly after, only to open up my computer again and prepare for another busy day ahead. If I was lucky, I would fall asleep by 11pm, but often I would find myself lying completely awake, scrolling through my phone or making to-do lists as I worried about the next day.

Unsurprisingly, this ongoing lack of sleep and stress built up into a trend of panic attacks at the end of every work day. The smallest thing would put me in a downward spiral of negative thoughts and panic, and it didn't take long for my husband to take me to a much-needed doctor's appointment. I didn't feel like myself, and there was an overwhelming sense of dread with every new day.

At my doctor's appointment, I described my symptoms, ranging from lack of sleep to non-stop worry. After some additional questions, my doctor ran a quick test and came to the conclusion that I had anxiety – in my case, it was so strong that most people would have to take medication to combat the symptoms. Having anxiety came as a surprise to me, as there's still some stigma regarding mental health. My family or friends never told me about their struggles with mental health, and it was always kept under the radar.

Everyone's level of anxiety is different, and medication may be necessary in some cases, so I would always recommend speaking with a medical professional regarding specific symptoms. As it was my first time dealing with my mental health, my doctor thought it would be best for me to work with a counsellor to figure out some solutions to help me rest and slow down instead of turning straight to medication as a way to cure my anxiety. It's been over a year since I've implemented quite a few habits into my night routine to help me slow down, and as my anxiety has improved, I wanted to share some of my favourite habits with you...

Turn off your screens. This was one of the first things my counsellor recommended. Digital devices produce blue light which makes us more alert, and also slows down our body's production of melatonin, which helps us to fall asleep. Turn off your devices and limit screen time for at least an hour before bed to help your body produce the melatonin it needs for a good night's rest.

Embrace stress free activities. Instead of taking a look at your digital devices, consider stress free activities to help keep your mind and body present. Some of my favourites are drawing simple doodles, or completing a page in an adult colouring book.

Offload with a brain dump. If you're having a tough time settling down, I'd recommend doing a brain dump of all the things you want or need to do. Write all those thoughts down, and leave them for the next day, knowing that the list will be there for you tomorrow.

Drink warm tea. A soothing herbal tea or warm drink can also help calm your mind and body before going to bed. Chamomile is great for relaxation, or consider valerian root tea or any other decaffeinated tea you have in your pantry.

Melatonin might be right for you. If you're a light sleeper, melatonin is also available in liquid or pill form. Taking a dose before going to bed may help you fall asleep more quickly, and also give you better rest throughout the night, but always check with your doctor before taking any supplements.

Even if you don't have anxiety or high stress in your life, consider a few of these simple habits to help form a more restful sleep routine. 🍵



Christine Liu is a California-based author and creator who is passionate about simple, slow, and sustainable living. Read more about her lifestyle at simplybychristine.com and in her book, *Sustainable Home* (White Lion Publishing, £18).



living



By looking at the garden as you would rooms in a house, Selina has created beautiful zones which each offer something different.



MY SANCTUARY

A transformed garden oasis provides both personal sanctuary and professional inspiration for styling guru Selina Lake

Words: Caroline Rowland/Photography: Ryland, Peters & Small

Discovering a love for gardening and styling outdoor spaces coincided when stylist and author Selina Lake moved into her current home five years ago. Prior to this, Selina focused very much on interiors in her work, writing numerous books on the topic. While she is still hugely passionate about beautiful indoor spaces, it was the overgrown back garden that she and her husband inherited with their new Surrey home which led her down this new path – quite literally!

The garden was the first area they tackled upon moving in, and Selina reminisces that despite facing a monumental task, those early days clearing weeds and debris, together with her husband Dave, are some of her happiest times. “We were so excited to have a garden again as we previously lived in a flat with no outside space,” she explains. “We set to work taming the weeds and discovered lots of plants and shrubs, and added many new ones too.”

Once the garden was cleared, the pair combined their skills to transform it into a botanical sanctuary; Selina employing her styling and sourcing know-how, with Dave flexing his DIY talents. The shed, which resides at the bottom of the garden, is a particular triumph. “We inherited the shed in a very rundown state – the door was missing and the roof was caving in,” describes Selina. Over a long weekend, Dave made a new door and rebuilt the roof, before Selina set about staining the structure black. “I had been inspired by black cabins and summerhouses I’d seen on my travels to Denmark and Sweden, so I used a Ronseal wood stain called Tudor Black.”

Inside, the shed maintains its rustic charm and an old wooden cabinet left by the previous owners acts as the perfect potting bench. “I like to reuse and recycle where possible,” says Selina, “so a shelf unit we took down from the kitchen wall found a new home inside the shed too.” The black exterior of the shed is a backdrop to vignettes created by Selina ▶



Photography © Shed Style by Selina Lake (Ryland Peters & Small)

using her collection of gardenalia, which she's always on the lookout for when out and about. "I find items at fairs, flea markets, flower shows, salvage yards and second-hand shops. Some of my favourite finds include beautiful zinc galvanised watering cans, an antique decorative statue and a white painted French bistro set which has turned a little rusty with time."

While Selina admits that finding time for gardening can be challenging, with the couple both having busy jobs, she says it is important to her and at the first signs of spring, she is itching to spend all of her free time out there. "I sow seeds in the shed, make spring wreaths, fill my planters and give it a restyle."

During their initial transformation of the space, they created 'zones' in the garden. Their back door leads to a decked area, framed with wisteria, which houses an outdoor sofa and their barbecue, followed by a lawn section with a rose and lavender border, through to a patio where an outdoor table lends itself to alfresco eating. Further on, there is what they call 'the meadow' due to its spring bluebells and summer wildflowers, followed by a cottage garden section where foxgloves, roses, verbena and hollyhocks bloom. These various areas mean the couple can utilise the garden almost as if it has different 'rooms': "We relax by using different spaces for our meals. Breakfast in the sunny spot in the cottage garden at

the bottom, lunch on the middle patio and dinner on the lawn surrounded by our lavender, then we retire to the sofa for coffees on the deck with candlelight."

Selina's own home and garden clearly inspire and inform the books she writes, and in the years since living in their new home her titles have included *Outdoor Living*, *Botanical Style* and *Garden Style*, with her latest, *Shed Style*, publishing recently, too. But, her work can also influence her life. "After working on my book *Natural Living Style*, plus all the awareness in the press, I'm now desperately trying to live a more sustainable life. It's so great to pick and eat your own homegrown plastic-free produce," Selina enthuses. "We grow vegetables such as peas, carrots, potatoes and leeks and we have an apple tree that I use to make apple crumbles. We also have blackberries, strawberries, blueberries and redcurrants – I truly love walking down the garden to pick my breakfast in the summer months."

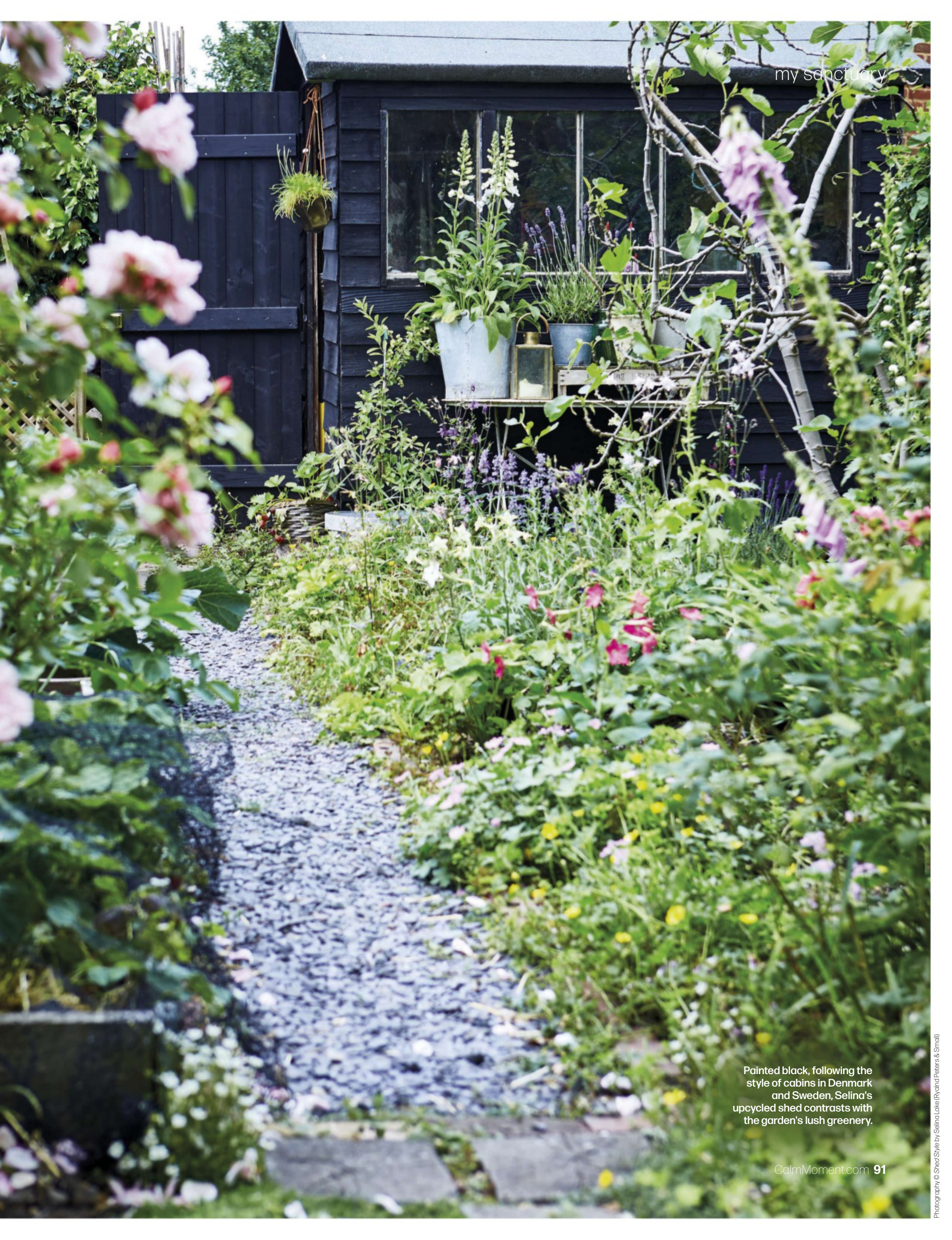
Along with the joy of picking their own produce and homegrown flowers, Selina believes that creating an inspiring space is so important to boosting our wellbeing, and this applies both indoors and out. Not only does she recommend bringing the outdoors in with cut flowers and plants, she suggests styling your garden as you would any indoor room. "You can experiment with all kinds of gardenalia. For example, old metal gates look great and can double up as a support for climbing plants. Sourcing items is sometimes the most fun part – you may spy an unusual piece and have a plan for it instantly, or maybe you buy it and decide later – it can hang out in your garden until inspiration hits."

With this philosophy, it's not surprising that Selina has created such a wonderful oasis from what was once a tangle of brambles and weeds. She confirms the joy their outdoor retreat has brought: "When I'm outside in the garden enjoying the beautiful sights and sounds of nature and filling my lungs with air, I couldn't be happier." 🍷

Feeling inspired? Turn over for our style picks to help you transform your outdoor space into a soothing sanctuary



Shed Style by Selina Lake is published by Ryland Peters & Small. Readers can buy a copy for £14 (RRP £19.99). Free UK P&P. Order at rylandpeters.com using code MOMENTSS at the checkout. Offer valid until 1 May 2020. Read more at selinalake.co.uk and on Insta @selinalake



Painted black, following the style of cabins in Denmark and Sweden, Selina's upcycled shed contrasts with the garden's lush greenery.

living



Back to nature

Take some style tips from Selina Lake and create your own rustic outdoor sanctuary

Words: Caroline Rowland / Photography: Ryland, Peters & Small



Beautiful basics

If you want to take your gardening a little more seriously, then opting for a good quality set of tools is essential. They will last a lifetime and will also look great displayed in your shed! We love these copper and beech tools from The Future Kept, which are sure to age with charming patina.

From £30 thefuturekept.com



Vintage finds

Style up your shed interior with smaller vintage finds like glass bottles, botanical pictures and candles – it will make your time pottering around that little bit more beautiful! These pretty green apothecary bottles will add a dash of colour to your shed shelves and are a great way to show off homegrown flowers.

£15.95 for a set of 3 deepuddy.co.uk



Choose pre-loved

If you are lucky enough to have a garden shed, or even a covered space, then adding a table will make life easier when you are potting up seeds or plug plants. Going rustic generally works best as older furniture ages so well. Look out for pieces to fit your space at flea markets, or Louisa Grace have a great selection.

£795 louisagrace.co.uk



Get creative

Like Selina, keep your eyes peeled for vintage gardenalia when you are out and about. Lovely old tools and garden accessories can be transformed into talking points in the right space. These wooden sieves are a brilliant find and could so easily be hung as wall art in your outdoor escape.

From £40 homebarnshop.co.uk



Under the stars

Even after the sun has gone down and the evening chill has set in, switch on some festoon lighting and get the fire pit going for an evening under the stars. This industrial style raw metal fire pit will create the perfect focal point for your outdoor gatherings and make sure to keep everyone cosy too.

From £110 gardentrading.co.uk



Warm tones

No matter the size of your outdoor space, pots are going to feature. They add interest and allow you to move plants around. You can get creative with what you repurpose as planters – zinc containers, enamel buckets, an old sink – but terracotta pots, like these 'antique rose' ones, are a classic.

From £6 thefuturekept.com

living



WHAT IF I'VE MADE THE WRONG MOVE?

Change is inevitably accompanied by feelings of doubt. Sometimes, looking back can help us to move forward

Words: Lottie Storey

“Doubt kills more dreams than failure ever will,” according to the quote by Suzy Kassem. Sometimes it can feel like that dream is a videogame. Each level comes with an end boss to beat. However, when the prize is a dream job or a hard-earned qualification, the stakes are a bit higher.

In the early weeks of my counselling course, doubt hit me hard. The group was beginning to form in the way that only groups do, with the extroverts dominating discussions, making us all laugh... and me? Well, I pondered my place within the group. As one of the more mature students (I'm 43), I felt old. Shy. Nervous. After a couple of sessions I confided in a friend. “Oh, you're slap bang in the middle of the Storming phase,” she said, referring to Bruce Tuckman's ‘Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing’ stages of team formation, a model first defined back in 1965. “That's just how group dynamics work!”

She was right – and I wasn't alone. In the next college session, one of my fellow students used our group check-in time to voice similar concerns about feeling on the outside of the group but for very different reasons. People soon joined in. It turned out that most of us had spent varying amounts of time in our own heads battling our own personal doubts. This realisation opened up a massively healthy discussion (counselling students are pretty good at expressing vulnerability, on the whole). Sharing these experiences of isolation resulted in closer bonding, paradoxically. I left feeling relieved that it wasn't just me and curiously reassured that a 55-year-old model of developmental psychology could explain much of our shared angst.

On reflection, I was glad to have a friend whose wisdom on the subject really shifted things for me. Often, doubts can cause us to look to others for the answers. As vulnerability and shame researcher, Brené Brown says, “I know I'm in trouble when I find myself polling everyone around me about what I should do, versus listening to my own thoughts or just doing it.” Hands up, who else does this?

Shifting careers is big, and with bigness comes uncertainty. It's how we deal with the uncertainty that matters. Noticing our inclination to look outside ourselves for the solution, our desire for some ‘sign’ from the universe, or even becoming aware of our own delay tactics – these are all indicators that we're unsettled. Brené's advice?

“Instead of begging everyone in your address book for answers, ask one or two loved ones to remind you it's normal to feel vulnerable when you're in a period of change. As my husband often tells me, ‘It's supposed to suck right now. Go walk!’ Uncertainty is a necessary part of getting where we want to go.” It's also unavoidable. There are no guarantees that doing something new will work out. There is risk involved, and no amount of polling will allay your fears. Reminding ourselves of our resilience helps though. When did you last feel this way? And how did that scenario pan out? What did you learn that could be useful this time around?

But some niggling doubts just won't go away. They may begin as a whisper that gets louder over time. Society frowns on the idea of quitting, equating it with weakness, but I disagree. Ploughing on regardless when your doubts have transformed into stubbornness, fear or anger is never going to end well. Much like when you flip a coin and get lumbered with the lesser of two fictional scenarios, you might feel your stomach lurch or your heart sink at the prospect of not continuing. And if this happens, you know what you need to do. After all, the opposite of doubt is conviction and confidence. What powerful ways to beat that videogame boss. Level up. 🎮



Lottie Storey is a Bristol-based freelance writer, mum/step-mum of six and a total psychology geek. Now back at university, Lottie is studying counselling and hopes to practice alongside her writing work, seeking imaginative ways to bring the two together.

Living



Far-away friends

*Out of sight doesn't have to mean out of mind.
Lydia Smith discovers the unexpected joys that
long-distance friendships can bring*

A year ago, I emptied my London flat of the final few boxes and locked the door for the last time. I cried as my partner and I got in the van and set off on the M1 towards Yorkshire – our new home – in part because I was nervous about the big change, but mostly because I was leaving behind my best friends.

When I went to university more than a decade ago, it didn't take long to work out who I would become close to. A few years later, I moved to the capital and met another group of friends. We soon became inseparable, seeing each other every week to vent over wine or coffee, if not every few days.

As we navigated the occasional rough-ride of our 20s, we supported each other through break-ups, minor catastrophes, rogue career moves, illnesses and bereavements. I learned that best friendship is like being on standby – you're there for your friends when times are tough, but it's never an imposition, because they are there for you too.

Over time, though, my friends began to move away. One went back to her native US. Another to Portugal. Then at the end of 2018, it was my turn. After eight years in the capital, I moved up north to be closer to family and experience a change of pace.

It's relatively easy to be there for someone when you are a short bus ride away. When you're separated by more than that – whether it's a five-hour drive or a flight – it certainly makes things more challenging. Although it might not be easy to be there for your friends physically, however, it's not impossible to preserve what you had. And since the big move, I've found out that long-distance friendships can be more rewarding and beneficial for my mental health than I had ever imagined.

We might not see one another every other day like we used to, but I've found the time we do spend together means a lot more. As soon as we're on the sofa together eating snacks or in the pub over a bottle of red, it's like nothing has changed; we slip back into being completely comfortable around each other – the foundation for a good friendship.

“When you see a friend in person infrequently, the time spent together is especially significant and memorable,” says life coach Alison Goldie (alisongoldiecoach.com). “When your friend visits you, take it as an opportunity to reinvent your routine life and make a holiday in your own town, visiting a beautiful place on your doorstep you've never been to or going to that exciting new

restaurant. Making the rare shared time out of the ordinary means that you create memories that really count, and bond you closer.”

I’ve also found I appreciate the small things more, too. Earlier this year, two of my best friends sent me a handmade invite to my hen party and it was a joy to open something so personal. It means a lot to receive a card or gift in the post, and it means even more when friends find the time to visit or have me stay with them, particularly when everyone works long hours.

For Laura Parsons, seeing a good friend she met at university means taking two planes, as she lives on a remote Scottish island. “But when you get there it is a magical place. Sophie is also one of the funniest and wisest women I know,” she says.

“When we see each other again, it feels like no time has passed. With some people you can just pick up where you left off,” Laura adds. “We may not live close by, but some friends are good for your soul and Sophie is one of them.

“I know she thinks about me and I think about her. When I was going through a particularly dark time, because my mother was sick, she sent me a Chanel nail varnish,” Laura recalls. “Small things like that make a big difference. It makes me happy to know that we’re still friends after all this time.”

Another benefit of long-distance friendships is the enjoyment you get from visiting your friends

in new places. I had mixed feelings seeing friends move abroad. I was happy for them, but in a selfish way, I was sad too. But I’ve had the opportunity to visit San Francisco and Lisbon to see friends on their home turf and be a part of their new lives. When I visit friends in London now, I appreciate the capital far more than when I lived there.

“When you have a friend that lives a long way away it gives you a connection to a different country or culture that you might not otherwise have,” Alison says. “It is an opportunity to increase your knowledge of that place, through your friend’s perceptions of it and your own visits. If you are the one that has moved away, your friend is an important conduit to your old home, and all it means to you.”

Perhaps most importantly, the gradual realisation that living apart doesn’t signal the end of a friendship is both comforting and reassuring. It turns out my fear of growing apart from my friends was unfounded – and although our lives will no doubt go in different directions in the future, I’m positive we will be able to maintain and grow the bonds we already have.

A well-maintained long-distance friendship is a huge source of comfort when things are difficult. “Knowing there’s someone out there in the world who cares about you can give you an imaginative – or even actual – escape route out of your own life when it might feel mundane or oppressive,” explains Alison.

That being said, we do have to work harder to preserve and cultivate our friendships when we’re physically apart. This can be difficult when everyone is busy with work and life gets in the way. Not everyone has time to pen long letters, but even a WhatsApp message can lift us when we’re feeling lonely. A phone call or Skype is a great way to feel connected. There are certainly times when I’ve missed being a short journey away from friends. Sometimes there’s no reason for missing someone – we just do. But we just have to remind ourselves that although there is a distance between us, picking up the phone will make us feel closer again. It’s hard, yes, but it is rewarding to know a friendship can withstand everything life throws at us. 🍷





Long-distance friendship takes more work, but it comes with many benefits too.

How to make a long-distance friendship work

Try these four tips from life coach Alison Goldie to help maintain your connection over the miles

* Send regular emails. "Better to send more infrequent ones, in which you share experiences and deep thoughts, than knock off hastily-written ones with a sense of obligation," says Alison. "A text with a good joke can be sent on the fly but is not a substitute for a meaningful missive."

* Make communications personal. "Don't just tag your friend in on a Facebook post or invite them to join your Insta feed. Send a special photo by email, text or mail just for them," she adds. "Or record a voice message for them."

Or send some great music you love and think they will too."

* Learn more about where your friends live. They are being shaped by their locale and if you are genuinely interested in it, your bond will deepen.

* Plan in some alone time together. You'll no doubt see your friends' partner/children/friends when you visit, but it's important to spend quality time together alone, so you can catch up on all the life events that have gone on.



Alison Goldie

Alison is a life and career coach and a member of the Life Coach Directory, with a background in theatre, broadcasting and teaching. Find tips from Alison in *The Improv Book: Improvisation for Theatre, Comedy, Education and Life* (£12.99, Oberon Books) or read more online at alisongoldiecoach.com

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escaping

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Top spots for a night under the stars

A woman's world? Why matriarchal societies
may once have been the norm



4 great solo getaways

Get a little headspace with a break all to yourself. Whether it's a retreat or a cosy bolt-hole away from the stresses of everyday life, you'll treasure the time away

1 HEALTHILY HAPPY

If you feel like your schedule is constantly full and all you need is some time to rest, reflect and refocus, Raw Horizons' 'Healthily Happy' women-only retreat could be the perfect tonic. Press pause with a five-night Yorkshire stay, where guidance is on hand to help deal with stress and work out what's next for you with a group of like-minded women. After yoga, meditation, workshops and time spent in such gorgeous surroundings, you'll return home refreshed and full of enthusiasm.

From £1,195 for a five-night retreat
rawhorizons.co.uk



Photography © Raw Horizons Retreat



Everything at this Yorkshire-based retreat is about transformation – finding your purpose, new confidence and balance are all on the agenda.



The team at Burren Yoga Retreat have been hosting revitalising getaways for over 20 years.



Photography © Burren Yoga Retreat

2 BACK TO NATURE

Most people who head to Burren Yoga Retreat in County Galway, Ireland, go alone – perfect if you're hoping to retune without distraction. Take time to enjoy the stunning local scenery on daily walks and enjoy delicious vegetarian food when you get back in. Yoga and meditation are central to the experience, but it doesn't matter if you're a complete beginner or an experienced yogi, all groups are small enough for everyone to get personalised tuition.

From €335 for a two-night weekend retreat burrenyoga.com

3 CORNISH COMFORT

Experience life at a slower pace on Cornwall's north coast. Encircled by undulating hedgerows and rolling hills, The Nook is an enchanting refuge from the pressures of everyday life. From this modern base, embark on walks among the wildflowers, explore windswept beaches or simply stay indoors and use your time to relax in comfort.

From £950 for a two-night break
perfectstays.co.uk



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4 UNWIND AT DYFFRYN HOUSE

Located just outside the Carmarthenshire town of Kidwelly, Wales, Dyffryn House is a retreat to soothe the mind, body and soul. Rent the whole house and enjoy the spacious gardens, relax in the hot tub and take your time exploring the lush local scenery. Or opt instead for one of the retreats run by owner Laura and nurture yourself with yoga and meditation classes, organic food (the recipes for which you can take home with you) and explore nearby Cefn Sidan beach with plenty of time to simply unwind in the comfortable house.

£449 for a three-night retreat
dyffrynhouse.co.uk/retreats.php

*UK only. Entries close on 4th April 2020.
Full terms & conditions at calmmoment.com



There's plenty of space for socialising and relaxing alike at Dyffryn House.

Shut-eye under the stars

Just one night spent in the great outdoors is enough to feel more connected, more balanced and completely relaxed

Words: Sian Lewis / Illustration: Vanessa Lovegrove

We spend a third of our lives asleep, but getting a good rest can often seem elusive. My solution is simple – try a night in the great outdoors. Sleeping outside (be it in a tent, hammock, bivouac, yurt – the choice is yours) removes us from the artificial surroundings of a house, a street, a city. It takes away solid walls, automated central heating and bedtime Netflix binges and strips sleeping back to a simple ritual of curling up to recharge in the dark. Camping, if you ask me, is the perfect tonic for bad sleep.

Getting some shuteye outdoors has been proven to help us sleep by boosting our serotonin and energy levels. We now know that simply being outdoors is very good for you, and that the sounds and sights of nature reduce our cortisol levels, which lowers stress.

Take that connection further by spending a night outdoors, and you're reconnecting with your natural sleep pattern (going to bed when it's dark and waking when it's light). Our body is skewed by working and living indoors, but natural light and fresh air work fast to make you feel calmer and more balanced, reconnecting with your circadian rhythms even after just one night in nature. I think the best part is sleeping far from the distractions of artificial lights, laptop screens and wifi signal – I can physically feel myself relax when I remove myself from these stimulants before bed.

This is all a complicated way of saying that camping out is very good for you, both mentally and physically. But sleeping under the stars can be intimidating if you've never tried it before. I often hear from people who want to give it a go but are worried about being cold or uncomfortable. My advice is always the same. First, arm yourself with good camping kit. Second, make your first trip easy for yourself – pick a good weather window, camp close to home and go for just one night on your first try. Third, pitch your tent – and then just relax into the pleasure of doing nothing for a night.

Besides being warm and comfortable enough, there's another common fear to address – isn't

sleeping outside scary? We modern humans are conditioned to fear every bump in the night, but years of camping have taught me that the only thing to really fear is your bloody-minded imagination.

The most worried I've ever been on a camping trip was in Canada, when after being very careful to bearproof my belongings, leaving food miles away locked in my car, I hung my hammock up between two pine trees. I was just dropping off to sleep when I suddenly remembered the half-eaten Snickers bar in my backpack. I spent the rest of the night wide awake, flinching at every scratch in the night, convinced I would be a bear sandwich before dawn. I must have fallen asleep from exhaustion – and when I realised it was daylight, I heard an unmistakeable furry rustling right next to my face. Finally, I couldn't take it any longer and opened my eyes to confront a ravenous... chipmunk. He saw me, screeched and ran for the nearest tree trunk. The moral the story? Your fears of sleeping in the unknown are often the size of grizzlies in your head, but mostly chipmunk-shaped in real life.

I always think of the bear-to-chipmunk ratio if I'm camping alone and feel a niggles of fear, and after many nights outside, I find that the pleasures of a night outdoors far outweigh any worries. Camping can be surprisingly comfortable, too – you might even love the feeling of swinging from trees or sleeping on the ground, far more connected to the earth than in a stuffy bedroom.

Want to sleep like a baby? Try a night on the wild side – I promise there's nothing like the feeling of waking up, unzipping your tent to a view of the world and feeling a true connection to nature. 🌲



Sian Lewis is a travel writer and adventurer. Sian blogs at thegirloutdoors.co.uk and her book, *The Girl Outdoors: The Wild Girl's Guide To Adventure, Travel and Wellbeing* (Conway, £14.99) is out now.



escaping

Campers' havens

Sleep out under the stars to connect with the varied beauty of the natural world that surrounds us

1 DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK
If you'd like to try wild camping for a night or two, there is no better place to start than Dartmoor. Though it isn't allowed in England and Wales without permission from landowners, anyone is welcome to sleep out under the stars in the wild moorland of Dartmoor – just check their interactive map online at dartmoor.gov.uk to see where you can pitch and find a spot all to yourself for a truly restful night.

DID YOU KNOW?

Scientists have found that sleeping outdoors for a weekend can reset your circadian rhythms, shifting your sleep schedule to line up with natural light cycles, helping you to get to sleep earlier and wake up feeling more refreshed.



2 CAIRNGORMS, SCOTLAND

A mix of magnificent forests, wetlands, farms and crofts with rivers winding through the spectacular landscape, Scotland's Cairngorms National Park makes reconnecting with nature simple. If you're not sure about setting up your sleeping bag in the wild, there are plenty of choices when it comes to bedding down here. Go for a camping pod, set up your tent in a sheltered forest site with all the amenities you could ask for or go a little wilder and seek out one of the many bothies in the park.



4 LOCH ENOCH, GALLOWAY FOREST PARK

Just over the border in Scotland, Galloway Forest Park is filled with rolling hills and dotted with lochs lined with stretches of white sand – it's practically impossible to feel stressed before this sight. Plus, as Scotland allows visitors to wild camp as long as they follow the code of arriving late, packing up early and leaving no trace, you can enjoy a night surrounded by abundant nature. Loch Enoch is a particular favourite among regular campers.



3 BRECON BEACONS, SOUTH WALES

The most magical thing about spending a night outdoors has to be an uninterrupted view of an inky sky speckled with bright stars. On a clear night in the Brecon Beacons, you can see the Milky Way, major constellations, bright nebulas and even meteor showers – ideal for budding stargazers. Set up in the Camp Cynrig glamping village at the centre of the park or look up their list of landowners (breconbeacons.org) who are happy to welcome wild campers before you go.



5 PEPPERCOMBE BEACH, NORTH DEVON

Dramatic coastline more your thing? Follow the South West Coast Path towards Peppercombe and you'll find a wonderfully secluded shingle beach where experienced wild campers have been known to set up shelters. Alternatively, head off the beach for the night and go to sleep to the sound of the waves in the National Trust's Peppercombe Bothy (nationaltrust.org.uk), then wake to a spectacular dawn chorus and beautiful views across the bay.



escaping

A Minangkabau woman wears a traditional bridal headdress. The Minangkabau tribe, from West Sumatra, Indonesia, is the largest surviving matrilineal society in the world.

This is a woman's world

Equality. Democracy. Harmony. Xenia Taliotis learns why matriarchal societies may once have been the norm, and explores five of the few that remain ›



“Matriarchal communities are egalitarian, democratic – decisions are made by consensus – and the distribution of wealth is balanced so that no one goes without”

In the novel *Herland* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, which was published in 1915, three male friends set out to find a remote civilization that is rumoured to be populated only by women.

As they embark on their expedition, the pioneering mansplainers (yes, they existed even before they had a label) speculated on what they might find. “It will be like a nunnery,” said one; “just women and mothers,” said another; “we mustn’t look for inventions and progress... or any sort of order and organisation,” said the biggest dunderhead of them all. “It’ll be awfully primitive... they would fight among themselves. Women always do.”

What they in fact found was a beautifully run democracy, a community untainted by pettiness, jealousy or bitterness, a land where everyone was looked after. In other words, what they found was a typical matriarchal society, but with one fantastical difference – reproduction was parthenogenetic: no males required.

Back in the real world, matriarchal societies still exist on most continents, having somehow survived through the ages and the unassailable march of patriarchy. Among these are the Mosuo, in China; the Khasi, in India; the Minangkabau, in Indonesia; the Bribri, in Costa Rica and the Zapotec, in Mexico.

Professor Heide Goettner-Abendroth, a world expert on the subject and founder of the International Academy HAGIA for Modern Matriarchal Studies, has researched all these and more, and has written one of the best books on the subject: *Matriarchal Societies: Studies on Indigenous Cultures Across the Globe*.

She is convinced that prehistoric clans were matriarchal, and remained so for millennia – roughly from the Paleolithic period (about 2.5 million years ago) to 4,000BC, when patriarchy began to take over. “Women were revered in prehistoric times because they were the givers of life and the ones who ensured the survival of the tribe,” she says. “They were treated almost like deities. Over thousands of years,

the reverence in which they were held faded, but they retained their status as heads of their communities – as matriarchs – until patriarchalisation, through clan wars and conquests (essentially through violence), gradually became established as the norm.”

Matriarchies, says Professor Goettner-Abendroth, operate in a very different way to patriarchies. “People often make the mistake of thinking of matriarchy as patriarchy run by women, but this is absolutely not so. They do not mirror male-run societies in any way. For instance, they are not defined by ruling, or by holding or exerting power. The women have strength for sure, but they do not use it to dominate, because matriarchal communities are non-hierarchical. They are egalitarian, democratic – decisions are made by consensus – and the distribution of wealth is balanced so that no one goes without. Women hold the purse strings and use the funds not for their personal gain but to ensure that the needs of the group are met. Accumulation is frowned upon.”

She concedes that, given the lack of intention to rule, it may be more accurate to say that the culture is not, strictly speaking, matriarchal, but matrilineal – where ancestry is traced through the maternal line; matrifocal – where mothers are at the centre of the family and fathers play a secondary or even more detached role in raising children; and matrilocal – where couples, or sometimes only the woman and her children, continue to live with, or near, her mother.

And interestingly, for many marriage is of very little significance – children are born of happy unions, the need to produce or the simple human desire for sex. No one feels tied down, or compelled to be with someone to protect property or status, and there are no imperatives – financial, social or otherwise – for relationships to continue to the point of misery.

Like what you hear? In honour of International Women’s Day this month, we explore five of the world’s remaining matriarchal societies... ➤



For women of the Khasi tribe, north-east India (dressed here in traditional costume during the harvest festival *Shad Suk Mynsiem*, or 'dance of the joyful heart'), marriage is at least as much about joining two clans as two people.



escaping



The Mosuo people live in the Himalayan foothills at the edge of Lugu Lake in China's Yunnan Province. Children are raised by their mothers, grandmothers and uncles.

Mosuo, China

The Mosuo live in a verdant valley at the foothills of the Himalayas in Yunnan, south-west China. The head of each household is *ah mi* – the mother figure – who is often the grandmother, or other female elder. Adult children continue to live with their mothers, so children are brought up by mothers, grandmothers and uncles – fathers play little or no role. Mosuo follow the practice of “walking marriages,” or *zou hun*, which means that women take lovers as and when they please: knowing who the biological father is, is of no consequence. The women are completely free agents – sex is not dependent on a relationship – and it is their choice whether to spend more than one night with any man.

Things are changing now for the Mosuo – tourism is beginning to encroach on their traditions, and foreigners are visiting in search of free love...

Khasi, India

The hilly state of Meghalaya, in north-east India, is home to the Khasi tribe. Children bear their mother's name, daughters inherit any property, and the groom comes to live with his wife's family. In times past, a woman would propose marriage (or sexual union),

but the man would run away. The woman's family would capture him and bring him to her, and this process would be repeated until the man relented. That ritual seems to be disappearing, and what remains is the fact that marriage is as much a bond between two clans (blood relations cannot marry), as between two people. Should the union falter, it is dissolved with no recriminations, stigma or custody battles – children always stay with their mothers.

Minangkabau, Indonesia

With a population of about 4.2 million, the Minangkabau tribe, from West Sumatra, Indonesia, is the largest surviving matrilineal society in the world. Mothers have the highest status, and property is held by women and handed down from mother to daughter. While the *datuk* (clan chief) is always male, he's chosen by the women, and they can remove him if he doesn't do his job properly. Power and authority are therefore shared equally, and decisions are all by consensus.

After marriage, a woman will have her own sleeping area at her mother's house, and her husband will live with her, but is expected to have breakfast with his own mother.

Bribri, Costa Rica

Tribal lineage and land within Talamanca's Bribri matriarchal clans is passed down through the mother, and knowledge and tradition through the grandmother. The role of the women is to nurture and to provide for the community by channelling the energy and life force of Mother Earth. Women play a key part in religious rituals – only they can prepare the sacred cacao served at ceremonies.

Zapotec, Mexico

Strong, powerful, independent Zapotec women run Juchitán (in full, Juchitán de Zaragoza), in southern Mexico, where respect for all is one of the culture's defining characteristics. The area is known for its belief that there are three genders – male, female and *muxe*, who are people born male but identify and live as women. "In Zapotec, there are no grammatical genders," explained *muxe* Lukas Avendaño, in an article that appeared on the BBC's site. "There is only one form for all people. *Muxes* have never been forced to wonder if they are more man or woman."

Women manage the finances, the homes and the local markets, but political power rests with the men. Interestingly, their commercial activities are for the benefit of society rather than for individual gain, so they use co-operation rather than competition as a driver. For instance, says a paper from the Second World Congress on Matriarchal Studies, which was held in 2005, one woman might sell salad, while her neighbour will sell salad dressing. Or one might make clothes but will hand over the embroidery to someone else. "The aim is to improve the life of the community, not to become number one at the expense of others," says the report.

The Zapotecs see their egalitarian culture as more evolved: there is no pressure for women to marry, no stigma if they decide to have a child on their own, and no disapproval if they divorce.

It may sound ideal and, in principle, matriarchies are. But let's not forget that things are changing for these societies as they are for all. Poverty and the encroachment of tourism and globalisation are causing seismic shifts and people are embracing what they see as progress. Still, in theory at least, a purely matriarchal society sounds perfect. As John Lennon wrote: "Imagine all the people/Living life in peace... Imagine no possessions I wonder if you can/No need for greed or hunger/A brotherhood of man". Or better still, a sisterhood of woman. 🌍



In Bribri clans, everything is passed down matrilineally. Property, like these huts constructed from natural materials, are passed from mothers to daughters.



Zapotec people wear traditional Tehuana-style dress (famously adopted by the artist Frida Kahlo), at the Vela de Las Intrepidas, a celebration of third gender (*muxe*) people.



✿ LIFE LESSONS

“Sometimes you’ve got to stop daydreaming and take that leap of faith”

*Following great loss, Karen Davis was spurred into action
– she says death has a way of focusing the mind*

It's easy to lose yourself in the depth of grief when someone you love dies. The first time I experienced the raw emotion of loss was in 2004 when my mother died from breast cancer. After spending time searching for answers, I made quite a few radical changes to my life, and then faced my fears and started my own creative agency.

Fast forward 15 years and the wind was knocked from my sails again as one of my dearest friends died suddenly in January 2019. We had spent the last 20 years of our lives supporting each other through life's many challenges and just being there for each other, no matter what. He was always the first one to tell me to stop only talking about my business ideas after using the phrase 'one day I will.' His death, like my mum's, was a wake-up call.

I've always been convinced of the healing power of crystals and, like many, I love being surrounded

by candles. When I'd first had the idea of combining the two, it had stayed firmly on the backburner as family life took priority. But I could hear my friend's voice in my head, "Sometimes you've got to stop daydreaming and take that leap of faith!"

Within a month I'd turned my cottage kitchen into an apothecary, banished the family and set about blending, pouring and perfecting – three months later my first collection of Serenity Scents soy wax candles was hand poured and curing. From sweet orange and chilli pepper to classic lavender and bergamot, they've been crafted to capture emotions and states of wellbeing, with a healing crystal embedded in each one to enhance the process. If you have an idea for a business, or something that you know you want to achieve in life, don't wait, don't find excuses, don't say 'I'll do it tomorrow.' What if tomorrow doesn't come? 🍷

Karen Davis is a creative marketer whose range of healing crystal candles can be found at serenity-lifestyle.co.uk Follow her on Instagram @serenitylifestyleuk

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