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Woman's Weekly

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**32
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I BEAT ADDICTION

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Claire Sweeney

My son is my best mate
– he's 11 and we've still
got that lovely bond!

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Creative MAKES



**DELIGHTFUL
LACE TOP
TO KNIT**



**STYLISH
OVEN GLOVE
TO STITCH**





Hello!

Our Dear friend

“As I’m writing this, and I look out of the window, I can see a carpet of snowdrops splashing a cascade of white across the garden, and beyond that, our lane now has a seemingly endless snowdrop guard of honour saluting any passers-by. I don’t remember anything like this last year, and can’t really imagine what’s caused this horticultural explosion, but it’s a joyful accompaniment to the increasingly long days. By the time you are reading this, the daffodils that are bursting out of the ground will also be opening into bloom. Who doesn’t love the harbingers of spring? Well, Tom Dear, for one. See page 94.”

Geoff

EDITOR

geoffrey.palmer@futurenet.com



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COVER PHOTOS: GETTY. *TERMS AND CONDITIONS APPLY

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FROM US TO YOU

Good to SHARE

Conservation cash, youthful voters and an art icon at the Tate Modern



SWAN LAKE

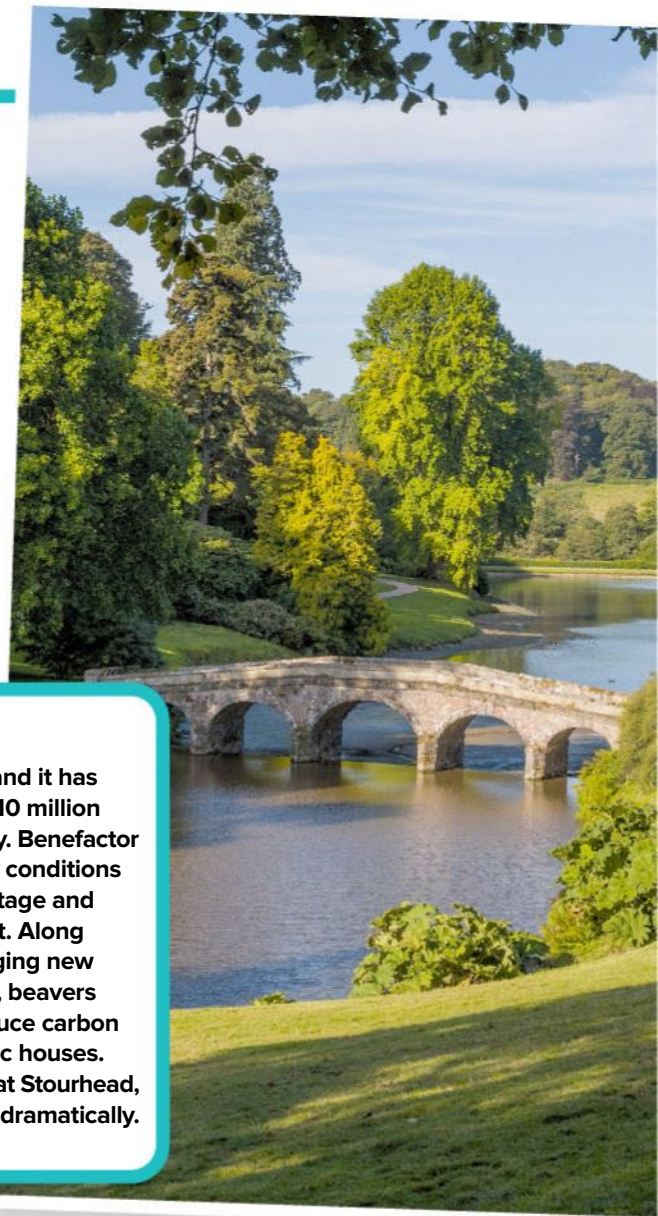
Bewick swans have overwintered in the UK ready for spring. These beautiful birds stay loyal to their favourite places, as well as to each other. One pair, Maisie and Maifeld, have returned as a couple to the Slimbridge Wetland Centre, in Gloucestershire, every year since 2016.

* wvt.org.uk

Heritage boost

The National Trust has big plans, and it has been helped immeasurably by a £10 million donation – the biggest in its history. Benefactor Humphrey Battcock has added no conditions to the money, so it's up to the heritage and conservation charity how it's spent. Along with wildlife projects like encouraging new populations of white-tailed eagles, beavers and dormice, the trust aims to reduce carbon emissions from estates and historic houses. New heat pumps and solar panels at Stourhead, in Wiltshire (pictured), should help dramatically.

* nationaltrust.org



Did you know?

Plants sold by Kew Gardens are now grown in peat-free compost, using materials like coir and grit, and composted bark and green waste. The aim is to help preserve precious peatland ecosystems. Visit kew.org.



On this day in history

13 March 1970 In the first by-election where teenagers could vote, the count in Bridgwater, Somerset, was eagerly awaited. The voting age had dropped from 21 to 18 the previous year. The result was a resounding success for the Conservatives. The new MP, Tom King, was carried through the streets on a chair by supporters. He served as the constituency's MP until 2001.



SPIDER SENSES

Any Marvel fan, young or old, will relish this in-concert showing of the animated film, *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*. The movie is accompanied by a thrilling mix of orchestral, electronic and percussion music, all played live. See it at London's Royal Festival Hall, then Glasgow, Sheffield and Birmingham, from 21-31 March.

* ticketmaster.co.uk



NATURE NOTES

From Louise Midgley



There used to be dozens of rabbits in the field behind my house, but over a relatively short period, they completely disappeared. Whether that was down to disease or a purge by the local farmer, I will never know, but I do miss watching their playful antics in the spring. The baby rabbits, or kits as they are called, would leave their burrows when they were around three weeks old and bravely enter my garden to feast on the tasty, green shoots.

I was heartened to see a kit this week in a neighbouring field, so fingers crossed, they will repopulate the wider area.

My garden week

I was given some scented hyacinth bulbs last Christmas. Now the foliage has died back, I have planted them, nice and deep, in the garden to flower again.



STEP INTO SPRING

By now, you've probably seen daffodils coming into bloom, and this cheerful My Mat daffodil-printed doormat will keep spring in mind all year round. Made with coconut-fibre coir, it will protect your doorway from muddy boots and paw prints. £15, laredoute.co.uk



Money-saving tip

Take a tumble

Hopefully, we'll soon be able to hang washing outside again. But if you're using a tumble dryer, keep costs down and efficiency up by emptying the filter after every cycle. Separate clothes into fabric types, so you don't confuse the machine's sensors by mixing heavy cottons with lighter fabrics.

DAME TRACEY AT THE TATE

Dame Tracey Emin's 40 years of confessional work is featured in a major retrospective at London's Tate Modern. *A Second Life* looks back over her career and includes the Turner-prize-nominated *My Bed*, along with other works, including paintings, drawings, neons and textiles. 'Art is not for looking at, art is for feeling,' says Emin. It's on until 31 August.

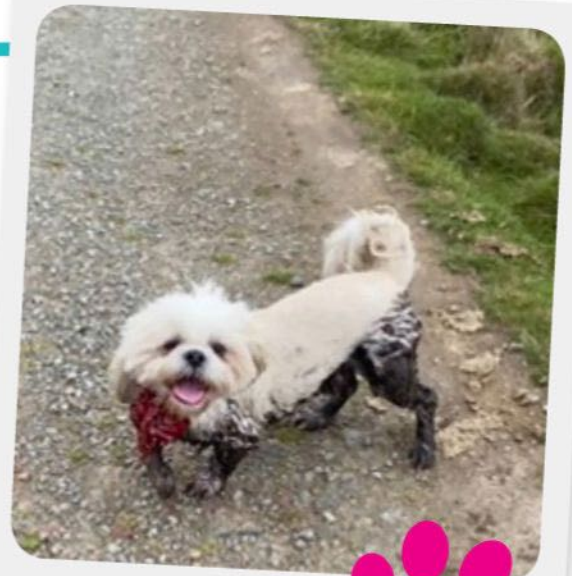
* tate.org.uk



FROM YOU TO US

Good to SHARE

We love to hear what you've been up to, so do get in touch!



PAWS FOR THOUGHT



I'm sending a photo of our much-loved Shih Tzu, Cubbie who, despite a small stature, has the biggest personality. After he recovered from an illness, it was nice to get him out on his favourite walk, where he was back to his mischievous self and promptly jumped in some mud!

Rebecca Kersh, Littleborough

* Got a pet pic that makes you smile? We can give it a good home

Finding inspiration in fiction

My mum took *Woman's Weekly* for many years, and when I was home in Norfolk on holiday, I always enjoyed catching up with the magazines. So when I retired as a Methodist minister in 2016, one of my retirement treats was to take out a subscription. I want to say thank you particularly for Christine Sutton's story *Not So Silent Night*, in the 23 December 2025 issue. Although retired, I still lead services regularly, so used the story at some carol services. For me it just described so well the Christmas message of love, hope – and in the case of Ben and Carmel – that first impressions can be wrong!

Jacqueline Betts, Kirkby



Letter of the week

GET IN TOUCH

WE LOVE LETTERS

Woman's Weekly, Future plc, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR.

P.S. It really helps when you put your details in capitals.

* We do not return photos (apart from You Wore It Well) so please do not send originals.

EMAIL US

womansweeklypostbag@futurenet.com

Tell us your full name, address and daytime phone number, please.

OUT WITH THE OLD

I'm 70-plus and a very keen cook, so thought I'd give some of the recipes from the Stir-up Sunday special [4 November 2025 issue] a try – the flaming figgy pudding, the orange and chocolate cake, and the mince pies with extra sloe gin. All worked perfectly and were so delicious and easy! This year, I'm planning a major sort-out, including going through boxes of recipes. I'll keep those passed down from my mum and granny, who

were both great cooks, but all other Christmas puds and cakes are for the bin now I have these three recipes!

Toni Hogget, Cheriton Bishop



LOOK WHAT I MADE

When my dear husband passed away, my friend made me a memory cushion from his ties. Now I feel like I'm having a hug from him, as I've always hugged my cushion when watching TV.

Krys Bather, Blackwood

Important! All contributions to *Woman's Weekly* must be original and NOT duplicated to other publications. £25 will be paid to the writer of the 'Letter of the week' for all rights in each letter printed. The Editor reserves the right to modify any letter. Future plc reserves the right to reuse any submission to *Woman's Weekly* in any format or medium, including social networking sites. We regret that we cannot enter into personal correspondence. Photos of children under 18 must be accompanied by written permission of a parent/legal guardian. All details correct at time of going to press.

What you're WEARING



Aurora Aliani, 63

Tell us about your look

My friend made this coat. I found the fabric at a market in Italy – the rich colour and texture caught my eye. It's such an easy shape and is hand-finished with a velvet trim. My friend did a great job and I just love it! My jeans and jumper are both Uniqlo and my trainers are New Balance. My bag is by Porter-Yoshida & Co.

What's your favourite thing about yourself?

I've been an amputee for 30 years and I've coped so well.



Marian Boucher, 75

Tell us about your look

I love putting outfits together – mixing things up and seeing what works. Today, I've layered up with two gilets. They're by a Scandi label called by.young. I bought them at a sample sale where a percentage of the profits went to Macmillan Cancer Support. My jumper is by Pure, the trousers are M&S and my boots are New Look. My bag is second-hand Louis Vuitton, but I call it vintage!

What's your favourite thing about yourself?

My strength and determination.



Maggie Fearn, 68

Tell us about your look

This is a favourite jacket – it's by ME+EM and I love the colour. To be honest, that's my go-to label. I'm reasonably tall and everything fits so well. My jeans and blouse are by Fairfax & Favor and my boots are Russell & Bromley. My bag is Mulberry, the scarf is from a boutique local to me and my sunglasses are from Whistles (I love them!).

What's your favourite thing about yourself?

My sense of humour!



Claire Loewe, 58

Tell us about your look

I often shop at charity shops, which is where I found my faux-suede gilet. It's perfect for layering up on a chilly spring day. My cardigan, blouse and jeans are all from Zara and I bought my studded belt in Morocco. My shoes are Clarks and my Loewe bag is an heirloom. My dad founded the company many years ago (sadly, it's no longer in the family), so it's very precious to me.

What's your favourite thing about yourself?

I love dancing and teach the tango.

YOU WORE IT WELL

Jenny and David Greenhorn, 1950, sent in by their daughter Anne Parker

I love this photo of my beloved parents. It was taken when they were on their honeymoon in Blackpool. They were both aged 22. I think they look very smart – and very happy!



* We'd love to see how great you looked in any era up to and including the 1980s. Please send a good-quality photo with your name, address and daytime phone number clearly written on the back, to: Fashion Dept, *Woman's Weekly*, Future plc, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR. Photos will be returned.

'I've learnt to live in the present'

Coronation Street star Claire Sweeney tells us about her precious family time and why she's moving on to pastures new

She's just announced that she's leaving *Coronation Street* to play her dream role in a nationwide tour of the hit musical *Annie*, but as excited as she is, Claire Sweeney says she isn't thinking too far ahead. Not only does she have several months left on the cobbles as Cassie Plummer, but she's determined to enjoy every second of them.

'When you're younger, you're always looking ahead, "What's next, what's next?" You're always wanting the next most exciting thing, but I've now learnt to just go, "It's brilliant where I am now. I'm loving this,"' Claire, 53, explains.

'That's both in work and life in general. I feel content. I've got to an age now where I want to simplify my life, and take things nice and easy, and just do the

things that are important to me. I've learnt to live in the present and enjoy the moment.'

Claire, who lives in London with her 11-year-old son Jaxon, smiles, 'It can be simple things, like sitting indoors with Jaxon and watching him paint. I did that at the weekend. Normally, I'd be on my phone or watching a movie, and instead, I just sat watching him. We had a great conversation and he really opened up to me. Moments like that are lovely.'

She tells *Woman's Weekly*, 'He's my best mate and tells me all his feelings. While we've got that lovely bond and I'm still his favourite person in the world, I'm going to cling on to it!'

'There are lots of things I want to do with him. I want to take him to see the Egyptian pyramids. And simple things, like we're going on an overnight stay at Chester Zoo. I just want to have great experiences with him.'

Claire joined *Coronation Street* in 2023 as Cassie, the long-lost daughter of Evelyn Plummer (Maureen Lipman). She began her career as a cruise ship singer, aged 19, and in the 1990s, she found fame playing Lindsey Corkhill in *Brookside*.

She went on to carve out a successful singing and stage career, and loved the excitement of

'In work, and life in general, I feel content'

being on tour, but after suffering two miscarriages, she feared that motherhood may have eluded her.

Then in 2013, she discovered she was unexpectedly pregnant. She reflects, 'I used to come into my lovely house and it would be cold, the lights would be off and it would be empty. Now, I walk in and see little shoes lined up, the heating's on, the lights are on. It's a home now,

which is lovely. I always wanted to be a mum. I couldn't imagine not having kids and never experiencing that love. Thank God, I could. I'm blessed.'

Since her arrival on the cobbles, Claire has featured in a host of dramatic and fun storylines, not least Cassie's poisoning of national treasure Ken Barlow and her love affair with taxi boss Steve McDonald.

Viewers recently saw her on the verge of a surprise marriage proposal to Steve, but before she got a chance to pop the



Claire with her son Jaxon



Claire's dream role in *Annie* (left) and as Lindsey Corkhill in *Brookside*



Still time for plenty of drama with Steve



THE
Woman's
Weekly
INTERVIEW

question, he received a phone call revealing the sad news that his dad had died. 'I really wanted to marry him! I feel cheated. I would have loved a wedding,' Claire laughs.

Her decision to leave the show this summer to join a nationwide tour of *Annie* has shocked viewers, but Claire explains, 'I've wanted to play Miss Hannigan for years – it's a dream role. The opportunity came along, so I'm very excited.'

'I love Corrie, and I would love to come back in the future for sure. Some of my happiest times have been spent doing this job.' Fortuitously, Claire's son breaks up for his school summer holidays just four days after the tour begins. 'So, we've got the whole summer holiday together,' she beams.

'We're going to Dublin, Cardiff and Nottingham. Jaxon loves Warhammer, a tabletop war game. Warhammer World is in Nottingham and it's his favourite place in the world!' The star adds, 'Plus, there are lots of kids in the show, so he'll get a whole new group of friends, no doubt.'

Claire, who has previously appeared on *Dancing on Ice* and *Strictly Come Dancing*, will still be filming with *Coronation Street* until June and will remain on screen until August. Cassie will have lots more escapades before she goes, including plenty more battles with Steve McDonald's ex-wife, Tracy.

'You might think things have calmed down between them, but you haven't seen anything yet!' she laughs. 'There are lots more clashes as Tracy ramps it up. She's territorial. She doesn't want Steve, but she doesn't want someone else making him happy either. Cassie has come and taken her life, even though Tracy is the one who threw it away. It's great fun, I can't wait!'

*** Find *Annie* tickets and dates at anniethemusicaltour.uk**

*** For more info on Corrie, go to itv.com/coronationstreet or X @itvcorrie**



Belfast puts on a show!

Enjoying the craic

Millions of us will be marking St Patrick's Day on 17 March

The Irish are famous for knowing how to party, and with just under 10% of the UK claiming to be Irish or of close Irish descent, it's not surprising that the nation will be awash with green and celebrating in style around 17 March. The date marks the death of Ireland's patron saint, Patrick (although he wasn't born there and was never formally canonised as a saint).

St Patrick was born in Roman Britain in the 4th century, but

kidnapped as a teenager and sold into slavery in Ireland. He escaped but then returned to Ireland as a missionary, and led the conversion of the island to Christianity. In 1631, his religious significance was recognised with a feast day.

None of this stops people around the globe celebrating St Patrick and all things Irish on 17 March. Parties and city parades will ensure the culture and music of Ireland can be seen and heard far beyond the Emerald Isle.



Armagh

From open-air concerts to masterclasses in making the perfect Irish coffee, the Home of St Patrick Festival in Armagh runs this year from 8-18 March. One highlight is the vigil walk at 8pm on Monday 16 March between the two cathedrals – Armagh is the world's only city to have two cathedrals dedicated to St Patrick. See visitarmagh.com for details.

Belfast

From 1.30pm on St Patrick's Day, the city centre will thrum to the sounds of Irish music as the annual parade weaves its way through the streets, promising a dazzling display of costumes, dancers and theatrical performances.

South Wales

For something a bit different on Sunday 15 March, head to Chepstow Racecourse in Monmouthshire for St Patrick's

Raceday. Gates open at 12.40pm with races from 2.10pm. See chepstow-racecourse.co.uk.

Glasgow

Celebrations start at St Andrew's Cathedral in Clyde Street with a mass featuring traditional Irish music at 11am on Saturday 14 March. A parade through the streets starts at 11.30am at McLennan Arch and finishes at Bell Street. With such strong Irish connections, the city has many watering holes including Jinty McGuinty's, Kitty O'Shea's and Waxy O'Connor's offering traditional food and music into the night.

London

Tens of thousands are expected to gather at London's Trafalgar Square for a giant free party on Sunday 15 March from midday to 6pm. The Mayor of London's annual St Patrick's Festival promises Irish music, dance, food stalls and colourful pageantry.

Armagh's St Patrick's Cathedral



Going green in Dublin

WORDS: CAROLINE BEDDOW. PHOTOS: ALAMY, GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK

Glasgow's Clyde Arc
bridge lit up green
in celebration



Two million people
attend New York
City's parade



Liverpool

For the 10th year in a row, Liverpool city centre will come alive with bands and floats as the St Patrick's Day Parade leaves the Old Irish Centre on Mount Pleasant at 2pm on Tuesday 17 March and winds its way through the city's streets.

Manchester

Thousands are expected on the streets of Manchester on Sunday 15 March to watch the St Patrick's parade, which will feature live music and traditional Irish dancers.

Dublin

Unsurprisingly, the Republic of Ireland's capital city hosts what is said to be the largest celebration of Irish culture and heritage in the world. Extending over four days from 14-17 March, it's a vibrant and joyful occasion, and is marked by parades,

performances and diverse expressions of Irish heritage.

United States

With so many Irish having emigrated to America, it's no wonder that some of the biggest parades are held there, with New York having the biggest and oldest. The first was held in 1762 and the modern-day version attracts over two million spectators. The Boston parade sees more than a million come to celebrate, while Chicago River has been dyed green each year since 1962!

TRADITIONS

* DROWNING THE SHAMROCK

It's common for revellers to wear a sprig of shamrock – Ireland's national emblem – on St Patrick's Day. Drowning the shamrock involves dropping the spray into a glass of whiskey. After emptying the glass, the leaves are taken out and thrown over the left shoulder for luck.

* KISS ME, I'M IRISH

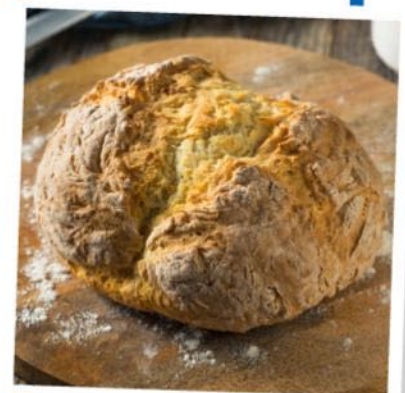
This slogan adorns green hats and T-shirts around St Patrick's Day. It harks back to the 'gift of the gab' bestowed on anyone who kisses the Blarney Stone – a stone built into Blarney Castle in Cork. Apparently kissing an Irish person is the next best thing!

* GREEN

Green is definitely the colour to sport on St Patrick's day. People in green are invisible to mischievous pinching leprechauns.

* BAKING SODA BREAD

If you are celebrating by making the Irish staple of soda bread (below), make sure you etch a cross into the dough before baking – as it lets the devil out!



Are hormones HOLDING YOU BACK?

Feeling a little off but not sure why? Take our quick quiz to find out what hormones might be to blame – and how to fix it

Tired? Emotional? Or gone off sex? Perhaps it's a hormone imbalance. 'After your mid-40s, hormone levels start to change, causing a range of

symptoms, which can really affect everyday life,' says nutritionist Pauline Cox*. Your quiz answers could help let you know what's going on in your body and what you can do about it.

THE TEST

Choose the answer that best sums up how you feel

WHEN YOU ARE FEELING STRESSED YOU...

- A Don't want anyone to touch you
- B Snap at anyone and everyone
- C Just want to cry and eat
- D Lie awake thinking about it

YOUR FRIENDS MIGHT BE SHOCKED TO HEAR THAT...

- A You have zero interest in sex
- B They're actually really annoying you right now
- C You'd give anything to be thin
- D You really do struggle to keep going sometimes

WHEN YOU'RE SHOWERING YOU THINK ABOUT...

- A When you last had sex
- B Whatever it is you're currently stressed about
- C How you can lose a few pounds
- D How to get through the day



IF YOU HAD ONE WISH YOU WOULD...

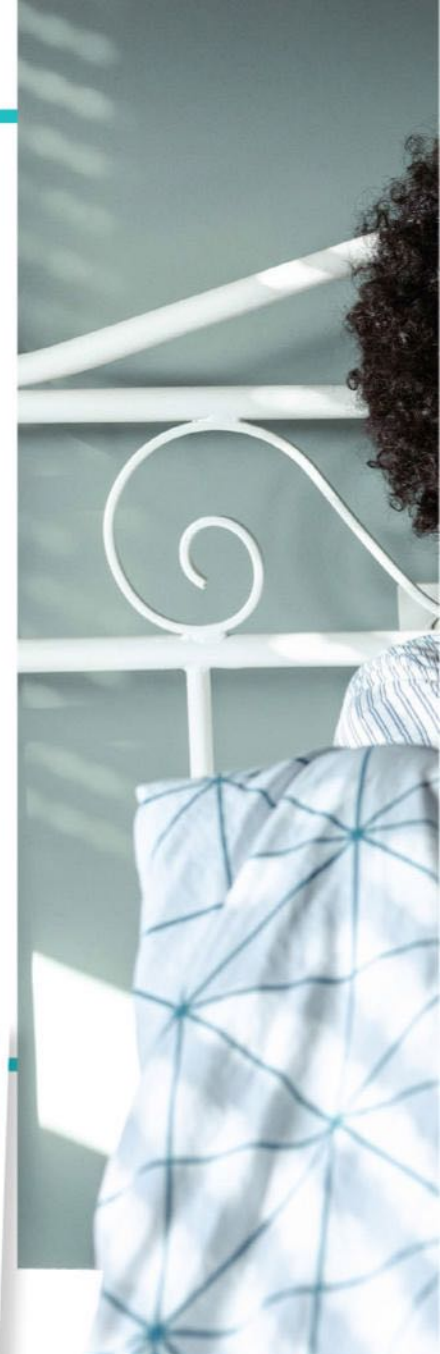
- A Live in a world without sex
- B Be happy all the time
- C Feel positive about your body
- D Be confident in your abilities

WHAT WAS THE LAST THING THAT UPSET YOU?

- A Feeling let down in the bedroom
- B Your low mood
- C Your weight
- D How forgetful you've become

RIGHT NOW YOU'RE IN THE LEAST CONTROL OF...

- A Sex drive
- B Emotions
- C Body confidence
- D Brain





GET TESTED

For a hormone test, your GP will probably ask a range of questions, as they'll want to know the purpose for it. They might suggest having a blood test on a specific day of your cycle. Hormone levels fluctuate day to night and, if you're on hormonal contraception, results can be unreliable. Results not what you expected? Plenty of perimenopausal women will show normal hormone levels until they are way into menopause, so talk to your GP about how best to proceed.

WHAT'S THE BIGGEST HINDRANCE TO YOUR LOVE LIFE?

- A Lack of libido
- B Mood swings
- C You hate how you look
- D No energy or motivation



THE RESULTS Add up your answers to uncover any hormonal issues

Mostly As

YOU'VE LOST YOUR SEX DRIVE

Does sex seem more a 'chore' than 'phwoar'? 'Loss of libido is often caused by declining testosterone levels, which naturally starts happening after your late 30s,' explains Pauline. 'When oestrogen levels also start to dip – often towards the second half of perimenopause – this can cause vaginal dryness and make sex uncomfortable.' Where you can, reduce stress levels, and try magnesium and zinc, which dial down anxiety-inducing cortisol. And speak to your GP, to see if hormone replacement therapy (HRT) could work for you.

*** FIX IT** Opt for oily fish, such as tuna, salmon, and sardines, for dinner a couple of times a week. It contains omega 7, which can help keep your vagina lubricated.

Mostly Bs

MOOD SWINGS MATTER

Feel like your emotions are more up and down than a lift? 'High levels of oestrogen can leave us irritable, but low levels can make us depressed,' says Pauline. 'However, the right amount keeps us on a more even keel.' Exercise is an effective way to reduce any negative symptoms, so try walking, swimming or anything that gets your heart rate up.

*** FIX IT** 'Journaling is a good technique for anger,' says psychotherapist Jennifer Cox. She describes this as 'evacuating energy – because then you are clearer to come back into the situation, own it, and say what you have to say'. You can also share your notes with your GP, to describe how your anger is affecting you.

Mostly Cs

BODY WORRIES HAVE TAKEN OVER

Changes in hormones can make it harder to shift those unwanted pounds, which can leave us feeling self-conscious. 'Metabolic changes make midlife women more prone to insulin resistance, meaning the body isn't as efficient at burning fat and tolerating carbs,' says Pauline. Prioritise protein like eggs, fish and lean meat, as this helps to build muscle. Also, consider eating at a regular time (eg, from 8am to 7pm), as this gives your body a chance to properly process food and helps with weight management.

*** FIX IT** In midlife, muscle mass depletes, so exercises like squats and lunges are best to strengthen and tone your body. Try a search on YouTube to find free demos.

Mostly Ds

YOUR BRAIN FEELS FOGGY

Having trouble remembering what day it is? Hormonal shifts can cause you to experience lethargy, memory loss and brain fog. 'Oestrogen helps to get glucose into our brain cells – when it depletes, our brain doesn't get enough fuel,' says Pauline. 'This is why it's common for women to suddenly have trouble remembering things and to find everyday tasks overwhelming.' Reduce screen time before bed and sleep in darkness, as this supports melatonin levels, giving your brain more time to recalibrate.

*** FIX IT** Stay hydrated, adds Dr Marilyn Glenville. 'Dehydration can lead to brain fog and reduced concentration. It lowers blood flow and oxygen to the brain, which can lead to headaches.'

PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY; AUTHOR OF HUNGRY WOMAN (£30, HB, Ebury Press); IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP; CONSULT YOUR GP OR MEDICAL EXPERT BEFORE TAKING NEW SUPPLEMENTS

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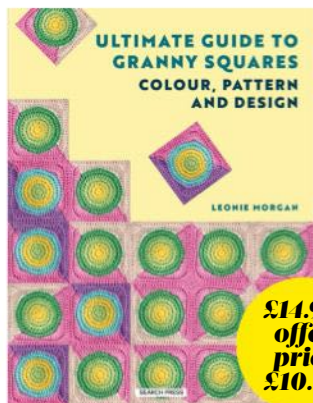
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The Bright & Bold Granny Square Card Deck
by Leonie Morgan

The sturdy, stylish box contains 50 colourful cards, each with a gorgeous granny square to make, mix and match. On the front of each card is a colour photograph of the finished granny square, while on the back you'll find a crochet-stitch chart that shows you exactly how to work the square. Simply lay out the cards to create your own design combinations to make up your project.



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by Leonie Morgan

There are 20 granny squares, multiple colour combinations, and over 100 geometric patterns! Transform simple crochet squares into endless, design possibilities. Suitable for all skill levels, this vibrant and contemporary guide features fabulous granny squares, each presented in multiple, inspirational colourways to mix, match and experiment with.



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The Beginner's Guide to Macramé
by Isabella Strambio

It's the essential beginner's guide to macramé, with eight simple, inspiring projects from macramé teacher and bestselling author Isabella Strambio. This fully illustrated, explain-all guide to macramé contains all the necessary knots and techniques that you need, whether you're a complete beginner or just looking for some great, fresh ideas.



£14.99, offer price £10.49

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by Tihara Smith

Discover brilliant raffia embroidery with fashion designer Tihara Smith. Create 10 vibrant, contemporary, Caribbean-inspired designs, ranging from colourful hoop embroideries and striking wall hangings, to a pretty bag, zipped pouch and cushion, all embroidered with vibrant designs. Using her unique process, you will be able to create these wonderful beginner-friendly projects.

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IT'S A FUNNY OLD WORLD

'I've always found joy in gardening'

THIS WEEK'S COLUMNIST Dame Mary Berry

“ I love being outdoors in the fresh air. When I was a little girl, during the war, Dad – though he wasn't really a gardener – grew vegetables and fruit simply because that was what you did then. I remember picking strawberries, raspberries and broad beans. We had two greenhouses with lots of tomatoes, and Mum's purple cinerarias. The garden was important to me and my brother. We'd have dens in there and it was a big part of my life.

When I got married, I lived in London's Notting Hill Gate. We had a tiny yard with just one shady bed. I imagined growing all sorts of things, but being inexperienced, nothing thrived in the shade.

The more I learnt, the more I enjoyed gardening. Spring is without doubt my favourite season – I love seeing shoots push through the soil, like snowdrops and cyclamen coum. Gently trimmed, they bring a little of the garden inside. I'm less fond of autumn; I prefer beginnings to endings and being outdoors as much as possible.

We recently moved house, and as the previous owners weren't gardeners, we had

to start from scratch. The aim was to create a garden with colour and interest all year round, but with low-maintenance. It's quite structured, with box hedging, plenty of interest and lots of little corners. As soon as I come home, I drop the shopping, open the doors, let the dogs out and check on everything. Even in winter, I like to have something from the garden indoors – snowdrops or a little winter honeysuckle.

When my grandkids visit in the autumn, I give the boys each a pair of secateurs and show them how to cut back two particular bushes. It becomes a friendly competition to make the plants look their best – and it helps me out. We also have raised beds, which

makes gardening easier: one for herbs, one for vegetables we eat and one for flowers I love. Then I have pots, which let me bring the seasons indoors. I cut back pelargoniums and move them into the greenhouse with a little heat for winter. I've also had a lemon tree in a pot for years. I'm lucky to have the space to move plants with the seasons.

Gardening and cooking are two things I love, but they are very different. I enjoy

cooking what I've grown, and I'm proud of it. My carrots aren't always straight, but gardening teaches patience – you sow seeds, care for them for months, and only then see results. Cooking is more immediate – you make something and get to enjoy it that day – but gardening rewards you slowly. I particularly enjoy weeding – I think it might be my 'killer instinct'. To look out on an interesting, structured garden, with neat stripes on the lawn and plenty of corners to explore – that's what brings me joy. ”

I like weeding – it's the killer instinct in me'

* *My Gardening Life* by Mary Berry (£25, HB, Dorling Kindersley) is out now.

'My funny old week'

WHERE I'VE BEEN In the garden, hoping the narcissi will be coming through. There are lots of buds, but they are nowhere near flowering yet.

WHAT I'VE SEEN *Poirot*. Aren't we lucky? I prefer the hour-long episodes to the ones that run all evening, as I'm usually ready for bed.

WHO I'VE MET I always look forward to Tuesdays when everyone comes into the office. Lucy – who's been with me for 36 years – and I have such fun. Today, we were all seeing who could cross our legs while sitting on the floor – and then get up without touching the floor. I did it!

WHAT I'VE BOUGHT I used to wear long johns for skiing. I'm back in them because it's so cold.





DID HE DO IT?

GONE

DAVID MORRISSEY
EVE MYLES

itv

 STREAM
NOW

1



POWDER PINK

A collar gives this otherwise classic knit a preppy spin that will smarten up a jeans and T-shirt outfit nicely.

Cardigan, £22.50, sizes xs-xl, F&F at Tesco

2



GO GREEN

This luxe-looking bag comes with a detachable strap and an extra purse – it will add a pop of colour while keeping you organised.

Bag, £18, George at Asda

3



DELICATE DETAILS

Looking to give your weekend wardrobe an upgrade?

Shop for basics with crafty embroidery to breathe new life into off-duty combinations.

Shirt, £20, sizes 8-24, Nutmeg at Morrisons

8



IT'S A CINCH

This gathered-waist shirt dress will look and feel special for a family lunch – finish with fancy flats and simple gold hoops.

Dress, £30, sizes 6-24, Tu Clothing at Sainsbury's

Aisle STYLE

Update your wardrobe with these bargain buys

4



WILD THING

Leopard print trousers are easier to wear than you might expect – team them with everything from a sweatshirt to a floaty blouse.

Trousers, £12, sizes 8-24, George at Asda

6



NIFTY NECKERCHIEF

Silky scarves are huge news. Try knotting around your neck, hair or handbag.

Scarf, £10, Tu Clothing at Sainsbury's

5



STRIKING STRIPES

As well as making a statement with pattern, the A-line shape and well-placed lines on this skirt will flatter your curves beautifully.

Skirt, £24, sizes 6-24, Tu Clothing at Sainsbury's

7



MODERN CLASSIC

A shorter-length trench is a winner as the weather warms, and can be layered over just about any outfit for an instant polished feel.

Jacket, £45, sizes xs-xl, F&F at Tesco

Feel—better BODYCARE

Take things below the neck with fun textures, bright aromas and skin-transforming results

Heaven scent

'Search out self-care that utilises scents with a positive impact on your mental wellbeing: whether calming, creating clarity, assuaging anxiety or encouraging optimism,' says Dr Alexis Granite, consultant dermatologist. She explains that '70% of our emotions are prompted by scent'.

* **ENERGISING AND UPLIFTING** **Make Waves Mandarin & Apricot Deodorant**, from £12, wearemakewaves.com, keeps underarms smelling crisp and feeling cared for.

* **CALMING AND COMFORTING** **Sol de Janeiro Rosa Charmosa Dewy Cream**, £36, **Boots**, delivers deep-down moisture and a glass-like glow, with a soothing foody-floral scent.

* **FRESH AND CLEAN** **Ciroa Cucumber & Green Apple Shower Gel**, £7.95, **Boots**, leaves your skin refreshed and senses awakened.



Solar power

When the sunshine fails, these products deliver. For easy and dare we say, enjoyable bronzing, look to **St Tropez Dark Whipped Mousse**, £37, **Boots**, for a sunshine glow that captures that holiday feeling in its fastest-acting formula. Even without tan, a dash of body oil will leave limbs gleaming and attractive. Apply **Sol Beauty Coconut Body Oil**, £7.99, solbeauty.co.uk, to shins, collarbones and shoulders. The tropical fragrance bottles the feel-good spirit of the beach.



Sleeping beauties

Regular sleep is crucial to our overall health. It's when our bodies can reset and repair. According to research by M&S, 53% of women cite better sleep as their number-one wellness priority, so set yourself up for a restful night with soporific scents that encourage calm. Hop in the shower an hour before bed with **Feather & Down Dreamy Shower Cloud**, £10, **Boots**. The airy whip feels like a hug, with a cosy aroma that makes for a dreamy escape before bed. Next, follow with **M&S & Sleep Dream Cream Body Lotion**, £10, **M&S**, to unwind with the relaxing aroma of geranium and lavender essential oils.





The texture factor

Turn your shower into a moment of self-care with fun formulas that are a joy to apply. From whipped mousse to decadent drizzles, these products work hard but play harder. **Monday Moisture Whipped Body Wash, £5, Tesco**, has a frothy, foam texture that melts across skin, imparting skincare-grade ingredients like hyaluronic acid, shea butter and coconut oil to refresh and replenish.

Fenty Big Dripp'r Body Wash, £22, fentybeauty.co.uk, is thick and luxurious, like honey, with a rich lather that wraps skin in silky suds, leaving skin smelling fresh long after rinsing.



Firm favourites

No cream is going to magic away inches, but the right formula can deliver smoother skin. As we prepare for warmer days, these body boosters will help make leg baring and arm revealing just that little bit easier.

* **Olay Regenerist Firming Body Lotion, £14.99, Boots**, is quick to absorb so you can dress immediately, with enhanced skin firmness in two weeks.

* **Joonbyrd Daydreamer Firming Body Serum, £78,**

joonbyrd.com, treats lines, crêpey skin, cellulite and stretch marks by stimulating collagen and elastin production.

* **Q+A Collagen Body Butter, £10, qandaskin.com**, plumps with vegetable collagen so skin feels supple and restored.



Touching tribute

A massage doesn't just feel good. The act of gently kneading skin has many benefits, including boosting circulation, flushing toxins, lowering blood pressure and reducing anxiety. According to Dr Granite, this could be something as simple as 'a moment of mindfulness as you smooth on a moisturiser'. She also recommends incorporating a body gua sha into your routine, 'not only improving blood flow and aiding lymphatic drainage, but supporting the reduction of stress and anxiety.' Use **L'Occitane Body Gua Sha Massage Tool, £11, uk.loccitane.com**, with a massage oil to glide firmly over skin. Body brushing is another great way to create positive touch with many skin benefits. Work **Botanics Exfoliating Body Brush, £6.50, Boots**, in light, flicking motions, moving towards the heart.



Addiction BUSTING

When Gaynor Mullin discovered self-help tools to restore her calm, she decided to guide others on their journey from addiction to wellness

Like many people, Gaynor Mullin enjoys a glass of wine. But the 54-year-old used to have a different relationship with alcohol – one that nearly spiralled out of control, until she made some lifestyle changes using simple yet powerful self-help tools. Now, Gaynor is helping others to manage their addictions.

'I wouldn't class myself as an alcoholic; I never drank during the day, but I was definitely a problem drinker,' says Gaynor, from Sale, Greater Manchester. 'Having a glass of wine, or three, was my coping mechanism – it's how I tried to shield myself from stress.

'I'd never had a stressful life until 2018, when two people I was close to both died in a car crash, then another loved one passed away. I felt bowled over by grief, all three deaths were unexpected. In the same year, my daughter Helen*, who has scoliosis, where the spine develops a curve and twists, was told she needed surgery; she was only 11 years old. I felt overwhelmed by life and struggled with my emotions. I drank too much alcohol as a way of coping.'

At first, Gaynor enjoyed the odd glass of wine. But within months, she was consuming



Yoga became a useful self-help tool

a bottle of red every evening. 'During 2018 and 2019, Helen underwent two surgeries on her spine and it was upsetting watching her go through these invasive procedures. Wine became my escape,' explains Gaynor. 'After the first glass, I could blot out my worries and I drank alcohol this way, using it as a comforter, for a year.'

Drinking to excess isn't unusual. In the UK, the recommended number of units per adult is 14 a week.

But according to an NHS Digital survey, around 19% of UK adults drink over this guideline amount.

'Deep down, I knew my drinking wasn't healthy or sustainable. I had to pull myself out of this rut for my sake, and for Helen's,' says Gaynor. 'The turning point came in 2020, during the pandemic. I started volunteering at a community hub putting together food parcels for struggling families.'

The voluntary work gave Gaynor a sense of self-worth,

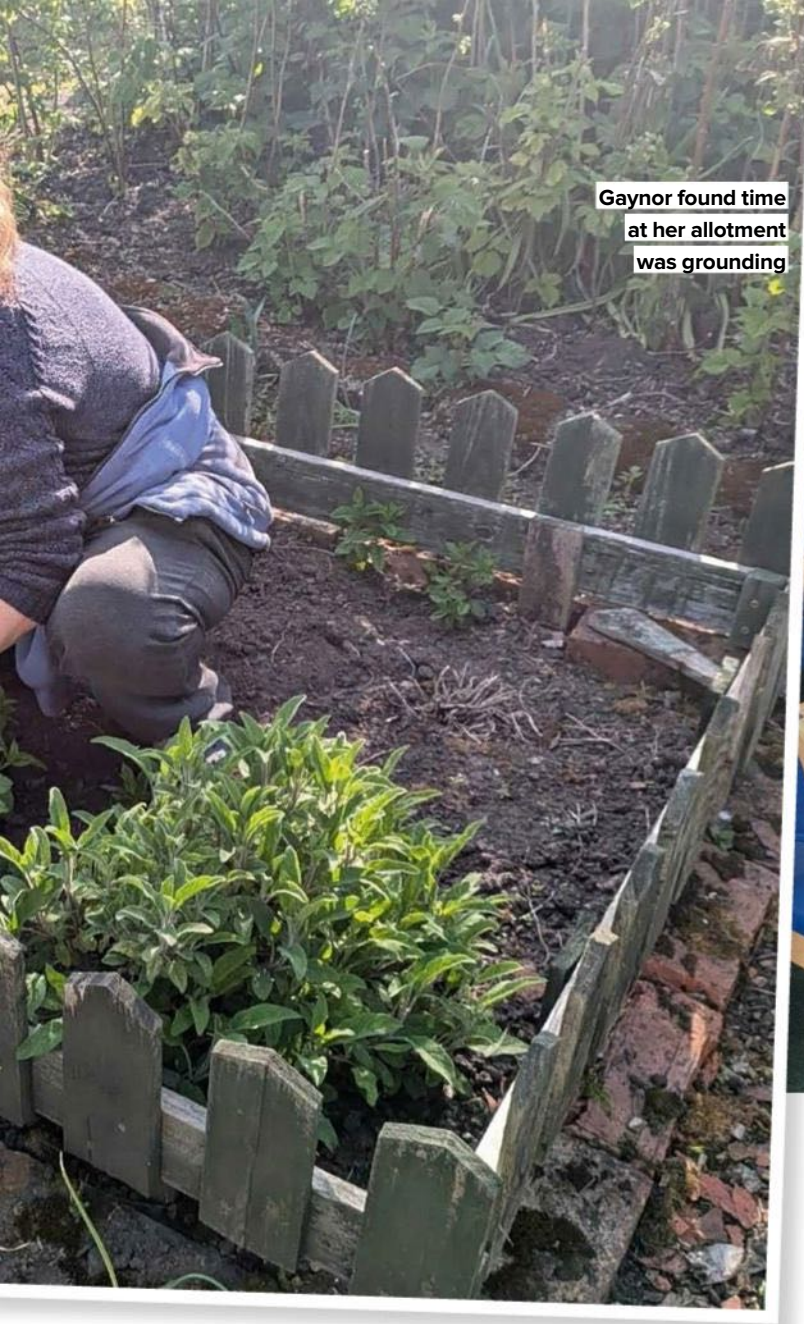
and another focus. It helped her to switch off from the challenging events in her own life and put things into more perspective.

'I realised I had a lot to be grateful for, especially as my daughter's surgeries went well,' says Gaynor. 'I began visiting my allotment more too. The greenery and getting my hands in the earth was grounding; research shows that nature can boost wellbeing and it worked for me. Gradually, I felt able to cope with the challenges in my life.'

Gaynor also explored other self-help tools like yoga and meditation, and practised them every day. The darkness slowly lifted, she felt calmer and began to feel positive about the future.

'For my daughter and myself,





Gaynor found time at her allotment was grounding



Setting up for a session of the support group

I had to look forward. I learnt to count my blessings every day, and focus on the positives, not the negatives. It sounds trite but flipping your mindset really does work,' explains Gaynor.

After 18 months of volunteering, Gaynor landed a job with Bluesci Support, a mental health organisation, as a peer support worker. After completing training, one of Gaynor's roles was running a weekly addiction and mental health recovery group for MileShyClub at her local library.

'Group support can literally

save someone's life,' says Gaynor. 'Only a few weeks ago, a woman in her 50s, who's been coming to the Thursday nights for months, said, "If it wasn't for this group, I don't think I'd be alive right now."

When I hear this kind of feedback, I know people are empowering themselves to make changes in their lives, just like I did.'

Unlike Alcoholics Anonymous, the support group doesn't insist that people stop all alcohol and drug use completely. However, no one is allowed to attend the group drunk or high.

It's possible to move away from a cycle of shame'

'My role as facilitator is to support the members of the group with their addiction, and the challenges they face staying sober,' explains Gaynor. 'The group includes a cross-section of people in their 20s to 60s, from professionals to the unemployed. I'm never judgemental when I listen to people talking. It's so easy to rely on alcohol, or drugs, when life gets stressful – I know because I've fallen down that black hole myself.'

The MileShyClub is about managing use, cutting down slowly, and learning health and wellness techniques that guide people naturally to want to stop addictive behaviours and improve mental health.

'If you demand that people go cold turkey, you're setting them up to fail; it's too much pressure,' says Gaynor. 'This approach supports people to help them improve their self-care tools, so they don't

have to rely on alcohol or drugs as a coping mechanism.

'The self-help tools we explore – like walking in nature, meditation and yoga – help people to find calm and reduce feelings of overwhelm. We've also had a GP in, talking about how addiction affects the brain, and how it's possible to retrain your mind with new, positive thoughts that can support addictive-free behaviours,' says Gaynor.

'I know from hearing people's stories every Thursday that it's possible to move away from a cycle of shame and self-loathing towards self-love. Once you love and accept yourself, addiction can start to lose its grip on your life. It might take time, but you can empower yourself with a new way of thinking and living, and set yourself free.'

*** For more information on MileShyClub, visit mileschyclub.com**

Spring CHICKEN

Swap your usual roast for one of these tasty ideas



PER SERVING
540 cal, 20g fat,
9g sat fat,
29g carbs

Roast chicken with warm veggie salad

A herby anchovy butter adds bags of flavour to this easy one-pan roast.

SERVES 6

PREP 20 mins, plus resting

COOK 1 hr 10 mins to 1 hr 20 mins

- * 1 large free-range chicken (about 1.8kg)
- * 150ml dry sherry
- * 700g baby new potatoes, halved/quartered
- * 4 large Romano peppers (about 500g), halved and deseeded
- * 3 small red onions, quartered
- * ½tsp sherry or red wine vinegar
- * Small bunch parsley, chopped
- * 50g pitted green olives, halved
- * 120g rocket

FOR THE ANCHOVY BUTTER

- * 75g unsalted butter, softened
- * 50g tin anchovies in oil (about 12)
- * 1tbsp finely chopped rosemary, plus 2-3 sprigs
- * 3 garlic cloves, crushed
- * Zest 1 lemon

1 Whizz the anchovy butter ingredients in a food processor with plenty of salt and pepper until smooth.

2 Heat the oven to 180C Fan/Gas 6. Spread the anchovy butter all over the chicken, and carefully push some under the skin over the breast. Slice the zested

lemon and put in a large roasting tin with the rosemary sprigs. Put the chicken on top; pour in the sherry. Roast for 20 mins.

3 Toss the potatoes, peppers and onions with a splash of oil and some salt, then arrange around the chicken. Return to the oven for 40-50 mins, until the chicken is cooked through.

4 Set the chicken aside to rest. Increase the oven to 220C Fan/Gas 9 and roast the veg for another 10 mins.

5 Toss the vinegar, parsley, olives and rocket with the veg, and serve alongside the chicken, with some crusty bread, if liked.

COOK'S TIP

Take the chicken out of the fridge 1 hr before roasting to ensure it cooks evenly.

Chicken thighs with cauliflower

This dish makes use of the whole cauliflower in a tasty puree and a roasted topping.

SERVES 4-6

PREP 20 mins COOK 55 mins

- * 8 skin-on chicken thighs
 - * 2 banana shallots, peeled and quartered
 - * 75g pack smoked bacon lardons
 - * 2 whole garlic cloves, skin on
 - * 3tbsp olive oil
 - * 125ml white wine
 - * 2 bushy sprigs rosemary
 - * 1 large head cauliflower, separated into florets
 - * 2 slices sourdough, cut into small cubes
 - * 50g butter, melted
- FOR THE GREMOLATA**
- * 1 garlic clove, chopped
 - * Handful parsley, chopped
 - * Zest 1 lemon
 - * 1tbsp capers, drained and chopped

1 Heat the oven to 180C Fan/Gas 6. Put the chicken in a medium roasting tin with the shallots, bacon, garlic and 2tbsp of the oil drizzled over. Pour the wine into the tray and tuck in the rosemary. Season

PER SERVING

(for 4):

526 cal, 25g fat,
6g sat fat,
18g carbs

COOK'S TIP

Save the cauliflower water and the leaves to become a great basis for soup and stocks.

with salt and roast for 55 mins, setting a timer for 40 mins.

2 Meanwhile, boil just over half the cauliflower, until soft (about 5-6 mins), then drain and set aside. Put the remaining cauliflower florets on a roasting tray, drizzle with 1tbsp oil, and season.

3 After 40 mins, increase the oven to 200C Fan/Gas 7, add the tray of florets to roast alongside the chicken for the final 15 mins cooking time. Add the bread cubes to the cauliflower for the last 5 mins.

4 Whizz the boiled and drained cauliflower in a food processor with

the melted butter, the garlic from the chicken and some seasoning, until smooth. Leave in the food processor to keep warm.

5 In a mixing bowl, mix the gremolata ingredients together. Add a spoonful of cooking juices from the cooked chicken. Toss in the roast cauliflower and sourdough, and season to taste.

6 To serve, spoon the cauliflower puree on to plates, and top with the chicken, shallots and bacon. Scatter over the cauliflower mixture, and serve with the cooking juices.

Poule au pot

Or 'chicken in a pot'. Our version is cooked alongside leeks and butternut squash for a delicious and stress-free one-pot meal.

SERVES 6

PREP 15 mins

COOK 1 hr 30 mins

- * 1tbsp oil
- * 1 medium free-range chicken
- * 2 leeks, thickly sliced
- * ½ butternut squash, sliced lengthways into wedges
- * 4 fat garlic cloves, skin on
- * 5 sprigs thyme
- * 2 bushy sprigs rosemary
- * 1 bay leaf
- * 150ml white wine
- * 1ltr chicken stock
- * 1 large jar butter beans, drained
- * 6 sun-dried tomatoes (dried)
- * 1tbsp wholegrain mustard
- * Chopped parsley, to serve

1 Heat the oven to 160C Fan/Gas 4. Heat the oil in a frying pan over a high heat; brown the chicken all over. Nestle the chicken in a casserole (one with a lid), and tuck in the leeks, squash, garlic and herbs. Season with sea salt and black pepper; pour in the wine and stock.

2 Bring to the boil, then cover and transfer to the oven for 1 hr.

3 Stir in the beans, tomatoes and mustard. Return to the oven, uncovered, for 30 mins. Top with the chopped parsley and serve with mash or steamed potatoes.

COOK'S TIP

To vary the recipe, you could swap the butternut squash for fennel, cabbage wedges or potatoes.



PER SERVING
340 cal, 9g fat,
2g sat fat,
10g carbs

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Downloading books is simple: just connect to Wi-Fi and tap to access your favourite authors and the latest releases. An eReader's battery life can last for weeks, and you can organise your collection into personal libraries for easy access.

The classic: Kindle

Amazon's Kindle launched in 2007 and was the first to offer easy wireless book downloads. Its newest device, the Matcha Kindle (with prices from £95), is essentially the basic model in a pale green colour (like Matcha tea) and compact size. Featuring a petite six-inch screen, it's extremely easy to

hold for long reading sessions. Both the Matcha and standard Kindle have a built-in light, brighter screens and fast page refreshes that won't interrupt your flow. The Paperwhite model (around £159) is the upgraded option, with a larger seven-inch screen, a more eye-friendly screen, warm light, faster responses, waterproofing so you can read it by the pool or even in the bath, and an impressive 12-week battery life. Kindle's vast bookshop is available through Amazon, offering instant access to bestsellers, with new releases delivered straight to your device.

Smart swap: Kobo Clara

The Kobo Clara is one of Kindle's biggest rivals and its name is an anagram of 'book'. It costs around £130 for the black-and-white model, while the Colour Clara costs about £150. The latter's colour eInk screen is perfect for illustrated

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LATEST HEALTH SOLUTIONS FOR YOUR MIND AND BODY

3 WAYS TO...

Manage dry skin



TRY...
Doublebase
Once
Emollient
for Body, £9
for 100g,
Boots

1 AVOID HARSH SOAPS 'Use emollients instead,' says Oxford dermatologist Professor Tess McPherson. 'Find an emollient that feels comfortable and suits your skin type, to keep it soothed and protected.'

2 DITCH THE LOOFAH They can harbour bacteria and trigger irritation or an eczema flare-up. Instead apply emollient by hand in the direction of hair growth to avoid irritation. 'Don't rub or massage it in, as this can cause irritation and remove some of the product,' explains Tess.

3 KEEP GOING 'Don't stop using your emollient when skin looks clear,' says Tess. 'Regular use can help manage symptoms and keep skin healthy over time.'

MY HEALTHY LIFE



Dr Miriam Stoppard is a health and relationship expert

My fail-safe remedy
I believe in keeping my gut microbiome healthy with fermented foods

like kefir, kombucha and kimchi, and with natural prebiotics (fibre) such as vegetables, prunes, figs and porridge (soluble fibre) for breakfast. I make a point of eating potato and fruit skins.

My favourite meal

The best meal I've ever eaten is the tinned sardines and custard-cream biscuits (I know!) we ate when our food almost ran out while trekking in the Himalayas when I was 53.

My favourite meal would be Indian, starting with Rajasthani street food followed by curried tiger prawns, spinach, aubergine, raita and naan, rounded off with fresh mango.

How I stay fit and healthy

I walk almost every day, using a stick if I'm feeling a bit wobbly. At home I concentrate on my posture, and I do sun salutations, stretches and standing push-ups at the kitchen sink for my core. I'm an advocate

of narrowing our eating window so I don't eat after 7pm and not before 1pm the next day,



to keep my blood sugar levels steady and not overeat.

My perfect day

It would be with my family and as many granddaughters as are free (I have 10). I'd start watching my youngest (nearly nine) horse riding in London's Hyde Park and we'd have an ice cream after. Lunch would be with two or three of my grown-up granddaughters at Roka, a Japanese fusion restaurant, then we'd wander around an art exhibition.

I'd take in an early film with whichever granddaughters are free, then supper at the local Indian with lots of chat.

TIME TO TRY...

Oats for breakfast

They have long been linked to better cholesterol levels but a recent study* shows that people at high risk of heart disease saw harmful levels of cholesterol drop by 10% in just two days following a calorie-restricted diet of porridge. The soluble

fibre beta-glucan in oats help expel cholesterol and lower your risk of heart disease. Their prebiotic fibre also helps feed your gut, to lower your cancer and diabetes risk, and boost mood.



New read

SEX, DRUGS AND WALKING STICKS
(£20, HB, MIRROR BOOKS)

Health and relationship expert Dr Miriam Stoppard presents a guide to living your best life in your 60s, 70s, 80s and beyond. It offers an anecdotal and personal view about feeling confident in your older years, written by a trusted voice on wellbeing as she approaches her 89th year.

Sex,
Drugs
and
Walking
Sticks

A GUIDE TO LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE
IN YOUR 60s, 70s, 80s AND BEYOND
Dr Miriam
Stoppard

WORDS: TANYA PEAREY, PHOTOS: PHIL COBURN, GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK. IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP OR MEDICAL EXPERT BEFORE TAKING NEW SUPPLEMENTS

*2026 STUDY FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF BONN, GERMANY



Doctor Gill

ADVICE FROM OUR WOMAN'S WEEKLY DOCTOR

Delivery data

Over the past 10 years, the number of caesarean sections has doubled. In 2024-25 there were more babies born by caesarean section in England than delivered naturally without assistance. Some 45% of births were by caesarean, 44% were spontaneous, unassisted births, and 11% needed extra support and interventions like forceps. Nearly half were planned in advance and influenced by many factors, including women choosing a caesarean, and a rise in pre-existing conditions such as diabetes and obesity.



PANCREAS SCREENING TEST

Scientists have discovered genetic patterns that could lead to targeted screening for pancreatic ductal carcinoma, the fifth most common cause of cancer deaths in the UK. Currently, no effective early diagnosis tools exist, so it's often detected very late, after it has spread. The scientists identified variations in genes which, when combined with age, gender and lifestyle factors, could help doctors identify individuals at higher risk.

Coping with... LICHEN SCLEROSUS

This skin condition causes itchy white patches, most commonly on the genitals

Lichen sclerosus affects people of all ages, including children, but is most common in women over 50, affecting one in 100 women. The cause is unknown.

It may be an immune system fault, mistakenly attacking and damaging skin, and it's commoner in those with autoimmune diseases. As it can run in families, it's likely there's some sort of genetic risk factor. Rubbing or damage to the skin can trigger lichen sclerosus or make it worse, but it isn't caused by infection or poor hygiene and is not contagious. People with white, brown or black skin can get lichen sclerosus, with patches on the skin that are usually itchy, white, smooth or crinkled, with skin easily damaged, which may bleed or hurt if rubbed or scratched. The patches can appear anywhere, but most often on the area around

the opening to the vagina (vulva) and anus, or foreskin and end of the penis. Sex can be painful if the vulva shrinks or tightens, or in men, if the foreskin tightens, making erections painful. See a GP if you have itching/discomfort or bleeding around the vulva, genitals or bottom, find sex or going to the toilet painful, or if even ordinary activities like sitting, walking and exercising feel uncomfortable. Look

'Your GP may refer you to a specialist'

Ways to self-care

- * **HELP STOP IRRITATION OR DAMAGE** Wash with an emollient soap substitute instead of regular soap (your doctor or pharmacist can suggest suitable products). Then regularly apply a barrier cream or ointment.
- * **CLOTHING** Don't wear tight/restrictive clothes. Wear natural-fibre (cotton or silk) underwear, and don't wash it with detergent – just use water. Avoid panty liners, especially fragranced ones.
- * **BE GENTLE ON YOUR SKIN** Don't scratch or rub affected skin. Gently dab genital area dry after peeing. Don't use scented soaps, bath/shower gel. Use lubricant if sex is uncomfortable.
- * **LIFESTYLE** Avoid activities like cycling or horse riding that can rub, until your symptoms have improved. Don't smoke – it ages skin and delays healing.

for an itchy white patch on your genitals or skin. Your GP may refer you to a specialist for tests and treatment. Lichen sclerosus can't be cured, but using strong prescription steroid ointment usually helps relieve the symptoms. You'll need to use this regularly for a few months to control them. After this



SOS

**True
or
false?**

Salmon sperm injection is good for collagen production

False. In this skincare trend, DNA fragments from salmon sperm are injected into the face, aiming to encourage collagen production and skin hydration. A recent review of the current literature found there's not good, strong data to support this therapy, and specialists say they would want to see at least a few more years of big, credible studies showing safety and efficacy before using them.

4 FIXES FOR...

A slipped disc

1 TIME Symptoms gradually improve.

Around half of sufferers improve within 10 days, 75% after four weeks and 90% by six weeks. Only 2% end up needing surgery.

2 POSITION MATTERS Sitting is often the most uncomfortable position, as this puts the most pressure on the nerve. Standing is often more comfortable, so it's best to stand and walk as much as possible then lie down.

3 STAY ACTIVE Don't rest totally; move around as soon as possible, easing gradually back into normal activities. As a rule, avoid anything that causes a lot of pain.

4 PAINKILLERS AND PHYSICAL TREATMENTS Take analgesia regularly, not intermittently. Ask your pharmacist. It's debatable whether physical treatments like chiropractic help everyone, but they may provide short-term comfort.

treatment course, you may be given other creams, such as a weaker steroid ointment or a moisturising cream. Although treatment helps, the affected skin may become scarred, tight or fused over time. The vulva may shrink, with the clitoris and small inner lips fusing. This scarring or tightness can cause discomfort when peeing, pooing and during sex. For men, having an erection can be painful. If severe, you might need a small operation, such as surgery to widen the vagina or circumcision to remove the foreskin. Lichen sclerosus increases your risk of cancer on your vulva, penis or anus. This risk is low, but check yourself regularly and see a GP if worried. Look out for a lump, change in skin texture, such as thickening, or an ulcer that doesn't go away or bleeds. Find more information from the British Association of Dermatologists (bad.org.uk) and lichensclerosusguide.org.uk.

Q What is C3G disease?

A C3 glomerulopathy is an inflammatory kidney disease caused by problems with regulation of the complement system, part of the immune system. This results in C3 proteins, protein fragments or debris collecting in the kidneys' blood vessels, which filter the blood, which over time causes inflammation, kidney damage and loss of kidney function. It's not common but tends to progress over several years, and over half of people experience loss of kidney function. Some may develop progressive kidney failure, needing dialysis or kidney transplant. Even after kidney transplant, there's a high risk of recurrence. Treatments vary depending

on severity, from initial monitoring to immunosuppressive medicines. Angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors medicines, and a limited protein and potassium diet can help limit blood waste build-up. It's important to ensure good blood pressure and cholesterol management, maintaining a healthy weight and not using tobacco products. A new treatment, a monoclonal antibody medicine, eculizumab, has been approved by NHS England, reviewing the evidence to treat CG3 after kidney transplant. Other new therapies are being studied.





Here to help

LET COUNSELLOR KEREN LIGHTEN YOUR LOAD

Disorganisation is ruining our holiday plans

Q My three adult children and their families like to go on holiday with us for a week in the summer. We know they like us but acknowledge the main reason is we'll look after the children and they can go out for meals together. We love it, so all is good. The problem is that one of them struggles to decide on dates, tending to leave everything to the last minute. I can't pin them down and at this rate we won't find a house for all of us.

Miranda, Bath

A It sounds like the perfect holiday where you all win! But I think you must accept that people are either planners or spontaneous beings. At times, it's very hard for those groups to make decisions together. As a family, you need to set a deadline as to when a decision must be made. Some people in your situation find somewhere with a late cancellation so they know they have a place and the cancellation date becomes the deadline, but you may well feel that's unfair on the owners.

How do I get her studies on track?

Q My daughter is 16 and GCSEs are looming. But she seems more focused on her friends and boyfriend than school. She's slipping in her grades and I worry about her future. I don't want to push her away with our arguing. How can I help her motivation?

Lizzie, Bristol

A A teenage girl who prefers her friends to her books? What a surprise! Joking apart, you're right: there does need to be a balance if she's

I feel guilty asking for help

Q I'm 71, live on my own and have osteoporosis. I've recently broken two bones: one in my right wrist and the other in my leg. I needed help the first time, as it was a bad break. My family and friends were very kind. I now need support again and I feel terrible asking for help. I don't know what I'd do if it happened again.

Lillian, Baldock

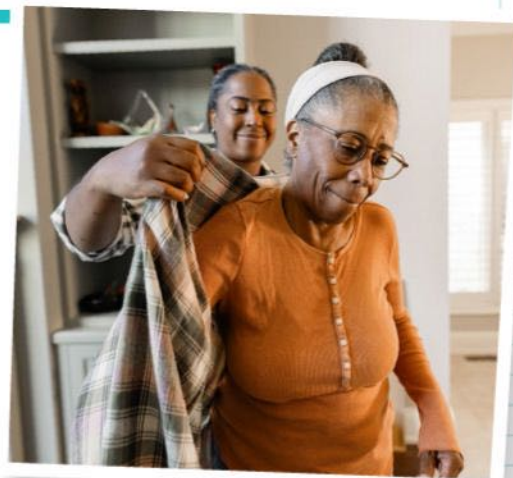
A It's hard when you live alone or with a partner who is unable to look after you when you are unwell. This will increasingly become an issue for people as they age. That said, we live in a country where both statutory and voluntary help are offered. But the services won't know you need help unless you ask them.

Our relationship expert Keren Smedley has over 20 years' experience. Keren welcomes your letters, emails and texts, but she cannot reply to individual cases and will select correspondence at random for publication.

going to achieve her potential. But, rather than arguing or nagging, tell her that you know it's hard to study when there are other more appealing things to do. Sit down calmly, and explain your concerns about her grades and future, focusing on your care for her rather than criticising her choices. Together, work out a plan so she has time for study and for her friends. It's important not to pin her to her desk, as she will only rebel.

I can't touch the baby

Q My son and daughter-in-law have a seven-month-old baby but I've never been allowed to hold her. If she cries when we're there, her mother picks her up and removes her from the



I suggest you contact your GP, explain you need some personal care and ask to be put in contact with the district-nurse service. Social services will come and assess your needs. You can also contact your local branch of Age UK and ask them about volunteer support. If you use a combination of friends and services, you won't wear anyone out.

room. My son says it is up to his wife. I dreamt of cuddling and holding my granddaughter – I love that new baby smell. What is wrong with her that she won't let us touch our granddaughter?
Susan, Leeds

A I'm sorry that you're missing cuddles with your granddaughter, as I know that's very special. Your daughter-in-law may be concerned about the baby catching an illness, or perhaps she's anxious she'll become overstimulated. This could be a rational choice or come from a neurotic place. But it's your son and daughter-in-law's decision, and your son has made it clear he's backing his wife. If she obviously becomes overanxious about her child, it would be worth you mentioning something to him in private. As the child grows up, she will have more contact with professionals who will also be monitoring her wellbeing. Any issues will be picked up by them.

Healthy SPRING SPECIAL

Boost your wellbeing with our expert tips and ideas



Drop up to 7lb in two weeks



Are you drinking too much?



The UK's best walking trips

PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY, SLIMMING WORLD



Hello!

“What an inspiration the women on page 52 are. Myra and Helen are in their 80s and they’re both still super active. They are a prime example of how you can still be fit and healthy in your later years. Why not follow their example, and the expert advice packed into this 32-page extra health special, to enhance your wellbeing?”

Spring is the perfect time for a refresh, not just for your home but your mind and body too. Longer days, warmer weather and this time for regrowth makes getting your health back on track so much easier. From your morning routine to your drinking habits, from eye and skin health, to eating well to lose weight and walking smart to get fitter, you’ll find the resets we all need to live our lives to the full.”

Tanya

TANYA PEAREY, HEALTH EDITOR
WOMAN'S WEEKLY



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Want to cut down on drink? See our expert advice on page 56

Time to try... choosing a non-alcoholic tippie

Pensioners are more likely to overindulge than youngsters, says an NHS survey. It shows that almost a third of those aged 65-74 are drinking at 'risky' levels. Advice is to keep within the guidelines of no more than 14 units of alcohol a week.

What's that?



THINNING HAIR

Fluctuating hormones can lead to flat, lifeless locks. So give them a lift with Q+A Volumising Shampoo and Conditioner, £8.95 each, Holland & Barrett. A blend of biotin, pea peptides and amino acids will help nourish, enhance volume and replenish moisture, to bring back a bounce to your hair.

Good to SHARE

The latest developments and ideas in the world of health and wellbeing

MOVE IT, MOVE IT!

Just one short walk a day can help you live longer. A daily stroll of just 10 minutes can cut your risk of early death by 15% and significantly improve your health, says research from the UK, US, Sweden and Norway*. The researchers found that simply making lifestyle tweaks in midlife, such as taking the stairs instead of the lift, could add years to your life. Read our feature on ways to get walking regularly on page 58.



Novel dementia study

Sir Terry Pratchett's books may be helping to shed new light on Alzheimer's. He died of the disease in 2015. Now a study, using computers to track the words in his novels has found that subtle use of language changes may have signalled changes in his brain 10 years earlier than his diagnosis in 2007. Researchers from Cardiff, Loughborough and Oxford Universities think that similar shifts in how people communicate could help to speed up diagnosis.



NEWSFLASH

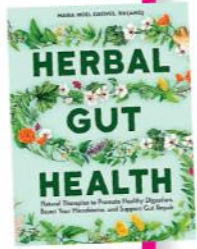
Breakthrough

drugs for brain cancer

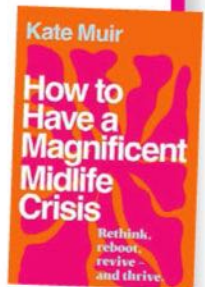
Brain cancer is getting a **£32.3 million boost for research, with the introduction of a database linking cancer patients to clinical trials for promising new drugs, potentially extending the lives of the 13,000 people diagnosed each year in the UK. The cancer is notoriously tricky to spot and treat, but the new push promises to speed up trial referrals through the NHS app.**

THREE NEW... WELLBEING READS

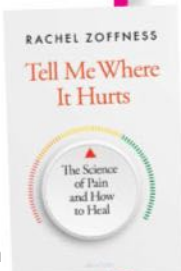
1 HERBAL GUT HEALTH (£20, PB, Storey Publishing)
Clinical herbalist Maria Noël Groves gives a comprehensive guide to the best herbs and natural practices to boost your gut microbiome, decrease your risk of chronic disease, and alleviate conditions like irritable bowel syndrome and leaky gut.



2 HOW TO HAVE A MAGNIFICENT MIDLIFE CRISIS (£10.99, PB, Simon & Schuster)
This empowering book by Kate Muir draws on personal experience and scientific research to show you how to have better sex, upgrade your relationships, and love your microbiome as you approach the second half of your life – with confidence, purpose and energy.



3 TELL ME WHERE IT HURTS (£25, HB, Allen Lane)
Imagine if you could turn down the dial on pain. Well, you can, says pain psychologist Rachel Zoffness. With a combination of cutting-edge science and patient's stories, she shows you how to uncover the power we all have over chronic pain, which is more treatable than we might have imagined.



EASY WIN

Make flossing part of your twice-a-day cleaning routine. 'Your toothbrush can only reach about 60% of your tooth surfaces,' says dentist Dr Andrew Mueller**. 'The remaining 40% (the spaces between your teeth and around your gum line) is where bacteria love to hide and multiply.' Remove it by flossing morning and evening, using string or interdental brushes. 'Think of it this way,' says Dr Mueller. 'If you only cleaned 60% of your dishes after dinner, would you consider them clean? The same logic applies to your mouth.'

WORDS: TANYA PEAREY. IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP. *PUBLISHED IN THE LANCET. **FROM DOCTORIMPLANTS.COM

The hidden signs of SKIN CANCER

We all know about looking out for changing moles, but there are other spot checks we should be making

Are you part of the 49%* of Brits who suffer from sunburn at least once a year? With melanoma skin cancer rates in the UK increasing by almost a third over the past decade, according to Cancer Research UK, there's never been a more important time to know what to look out for.

It's not just changing moles to be aware of – other skin issues could be a sign of cancer. 'Basal cell carcinoma and squamous

cell carcinoma, for example, often don't look like moles at all – and yet they're among the most common skin cancers we treat,' says consultant dermatologist Dr Paul Farrant from expertsinskinandhair.co.uk.

Skin changes to notice include a sore that won't heal, shiny, pearlescent or translucent bumps, scar-like areas, scaly, crusty or raised lumps, plus a rapidly growing lump or nodule.

The good news? Early detection can

make treatment far more effective. 'Ideally, you should check your skin once a month,' says Dr Ross Perry, medical director of cosmedics.co.uk. 'It doesn't need to be obsessive, but it does need to be consistent. Skin cancer is often spotted first by the patient – not the doctor – so knowing what's normal for you is crucial. A monthly check allows you to notice new marks or subtle changes early, when treatment is most effective.'



4 WAYS TO LOWER YOUR RISK

- 1 Avoid the sun when it's at its hottest, between 11am and 3pm.
- 2 Put on sun cream before you get dressed. It takes around 30 minutes for the protective SPF to take effect.
- 3 Pick a hat with a wide brim made of a tightly woven fabric.
- 4 Watch for windows – UVA radiation can penetrate glass, such as car windows or conservatories.

Lesser-known symptoms Look out for the following.

* A SORE THAT WON'T HEAL

'Many patients describe "a spot that keeps coming back over months or even years",' says Dr Tina Tian from Stratum Dermatology Clinic Oxford (stratumclinics.com). A sore, scab or ulcer that hasn't healed within four to six weeks should be checked.

* A SHINY, PEARLESCENT OR TRANSLUCENT BUMP

'These are typically painless, and people often ignore them for months,' says Dr Perry. 'They are most common on the nose, cheeks, forehead and neck.'

* SCAR-LIKE AREA WITHOUT INJURY

'Often flat and firm, and can appear on the torso or face,' says Dr Perry.

* PAINFUL LUMP

Scaly, crusty or raised, they can feel tender or sore and often grow fast. They are usually found on the scalp, lips, ears and backs of hands.

* RAPIDLY GROWING LUMP OR NODULE

Fast growth is a red flag and should be checked promptly, regardless of colour.

* RED SCALY PATCH

'This can be a sign of superficial basal cell carcinoma and is often mistaken for eczema or psoriasis,' says Dr Tian.



NOT A SUN WORSHIPPER?

You can still be at risk of skin cancer. 'Incidental sun exposure (daily walking, driving, holidays from years ago), sunbed use, genetics, fair skin, immune suppression and age all play a role,' says Dr Perry.

DID YOU KNOW?

Men are more likely to develop skin cancer on the scalp, ears, back and chest, often because of hair thinning, says Dr Perry.

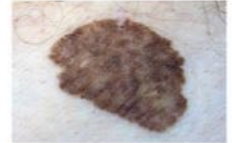
'Women more commonly develop melanomas on the legs and lower limbs.'

HOW TO SPOT A SUSPICIOUS MOLE

A new mole appearing over the age of 40 should be monitored carefully, says Dr Tian. 'Two-thirds of melanomas arise as new lesions rather than from pre-existing moles.'
Look for:

*** ASYMMETRY**

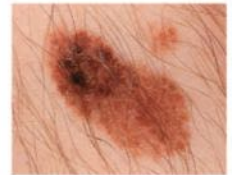
One half of the mole is different from the other.

*** BORDER**

An irregular, scalloped or poorly defined edge.

*** COLOUR**

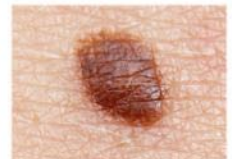
Uneven colour or variable colours within a mole.

*** DIAMETER**

The mole is bigger than 6mm in size.

*** EVOLVING**

The mole is changing in size, shape or colour.



Plus, be alert for any new moles that bleed or fail to heal.

Use your smartphone

Are you struggling to tell whether something is changing? 'Use your phone to take clear, dated photographs,' advises Dr Perry. Photos allow you to track changes in size, colour or shape over time, and that evidence can be very valuable when you see your GP or dermatologist.

Make sure that you're always keeping track of hard-to-see areas too. 'Ask someone to help you to check your back and scalp, as you can't see these yourself,' says Dr Tian. 'Place a ruler or coin next to any moles being monitored – having a fixed size reference helps track growth accurately and can be invaluable for spotting gradual changes.'

CHECK NAILS

Dark brown or black changes under the nail could be a subungual melanoma. It's frequently mistaken for bruising.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Found something that concerns you? Don't panic, but don't ignore changes either. If something looks different, feels different or behaves differently, trust your instinct and get it checked by your GP.

'If your GP has concerns, they will refer you via the urgent two-week wait pathway to a dermatology service,' says Dr Perry. 'You may then have a dermoscopic examination and, if needed, a biopsy or excision under local anaesthetic. If cancer is confirmed, most skin cancers are treated very successfully when caught early, often with simple surgical removal.'



NUTRITION MYTHS

you need to ignore

& what to do instead

There's so much advice out there about healthy eating. So what can you really trust to keep you and your family fit and well?



Eat this! Don't eat that! This is good for you – that isn't! Keeping up with what makes up a healthy diet can feel like a full-time job sometimes, with advice seemingly changing all the time and too many tips, often on social media, which you really can't trust.

'With so much conflicting advice online, it's easy to feel overwhelmed about what's actually healthy,' says dietician Dr Carrie Ruxton. But sticking to a well-balanced, nutritious diet is key for our wellbeing. Here are some of the most common myths about healthy eating uncovered – and what you can do to fight back. 'Instead of chasing trends, focus on simple practical habits that can make a real difference,' says Dr Ruxton. Here's what you need to know.



Myth All ultra-processed foods (UPFs) are bad for you

FACT Not all UPFs are created equal; some are nutritious when consumed as part of a balanced diet, says Dr Ruxton. 'UPFs often get a bad reputation, but the category includes a range of foods – from healthy plant milks, vegetable sauces and high-fibre cereals, to unhealthy sugary sodas, snacks and confectionery. Many foods badged as UPF are not harmful when eaten as part of a balanced diet, and are affordable, convenient and nutritious. Studies suggest that the health risks linked to ultra-processed foods are more about overall dietary patterns and calories than the processing itself.'

TRY THIS INSTEAD 'Read the label and choose products that are higher in fibre and vitamins, and lower in sugar, salt and saturated fat,' says Dr Ruxton. 'It's better to focus on nutrients, portion sizes and variety, and forget UPFs.'

WORDS: TANVA PEAREY. PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK. IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP. CONSULT YOUR GP BEFORE STARTING A DIET OF FEWER THAN 1,200 CALORIES A DAY.

Myth Detoxes and juice cleanses 'reset' your gut

FACT Detoxes and cleanses may be a popular trend online, but our bodies don't need them. 'The body already has a natural detoxification system,' says Dr Ruxton. Simply let your body's natural detox systems like your liver and kidneys do their job – handling the toxins in your body. 'Detox' tricks might make you feel virtuous by creating a placebo effect, but they don't remove extra toxins from the body. In fact, in some cases, they can do the opposite, by

starving our gut barrier of essential nutrients.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

'Supporting your body through balanced nutrition, hydration and limiting alcohol are far more effective,' says Dr Ruxton. Eat a balanced diet low in salt and sugar, and drink plenty of water – including herbal teas and soups. Maintain a healthy weight, exercise regularly, don't smoke, and don't drink too much – keep alcohol consumption to a minimum, never exceeding the recommended limit of 14 units a week.



Myth Carbs make you fat

FACT Too much of any food can cause weight gain, but overly restrictive diets or banning food groups entirely isn't healthy. 'Quick fixes are rarely backed by science, and restrictive fads can actually work against your goals,' says nutritionist Melissa Jaeger. Carbs aren't the bad guys, we need them for energy – they fuel our brains, muscles and organs, so our body functions properly and we feel fit and well.

TRY THIS INSTEAD Complex carbs – found in wholegrains, fruit, veg and legumes – are rich in nutrients and fibre, so opt for these. And avoid the refined carbs found in white bread, sugary cereals and sweets, which have little nutritional value.

AND IF YOU ARE LOOKING TO LOSE WEIGHT Eat nutritious, well-balanced meals based around wholefoods while tracking what you eat through a reliable app such as MyFitnessPal. 'By tracking what you eat, you can bring awareness to how different foods may impact your health goals, while gaining the knowledge to make informed choices that work for you,' says Melissa. 'Real progress comes from consistent, balanced actions – not from chasing the next fad.'

Myth 'Low fat' and 'fat free' are healthier

FACT Not always. 'Just because something says "low fat" or "0% fat" doesn't mean it's better for you,' warns Dr Ruxton. 'To make up for lost flavour, many low-fat or fat-free foods add extra sugar or fillers – which are no better for your health.'

TRY THIS INSTEAD Choose natural sources of healthy fats over 'low-fat' or 'fat-free' marketing claims. Your body needs healthy fats from nuts, seeds, oily fish, avocados and olive oil because these help protect your heart, provide antioxidants and support brain function. So eat plenty of these.

LOW FAT

Myth Skipping breakfast helps with weight loss

FACT Contrary to popular belief, skipping breakfast doesn't help you lose weight. 'In fact, research suggests that skipping breakfast can actually disrupt blood sugar control and increase cravings later in the day,' says Dr Ruxton.

TRY THIS INSTEAD 'Regular, balanced breakfasts, which include a mix of protein, wholegrains, healthy fats, fruits or vegetables, will help to stabilise blood sugar levels and keep you feeling energised throughout the day,' says Dr Ruxton. Try oats with Greek yogurt and berries, nuts and seeds; scrambled egg and smoked salmon on wholegrain toast, or a freshly blended smoothie.



Dream ON!

Confused about how best to get a re-energising night's sleep? Our experts answer your most common bedtime questions

IS SEVEN HOURS ENOUGH?

It's very much down to the individual, but there's no negative impact from getting seven hours a night, says research* – yet that's the minimum. Anything less is harmful, says Dr Irshaad Ebrahim of The London Sleep Centre. Plus, a German study found you may need less rest in warmer weather months than in winter, but consistency is key.

TRY THIS

* **Quality over quantity**

'Build a regular bedtime and wake-up routine, and listen to your body's natural sleep needs,' says expert Sammy Margo from Dreams.

* **Exercise early**

Don't exercise within four hours of sleep, as your body temperature will be too high to switch off, advises Sammy.

VETO THE VINO

Alcohol may help you drop off, but you'll spend less time in the deep-sleep stage.

Getting moving earlier in the day, however, will help you get a good night's sleep.

* **Listen to an audio book**

A calming audio book could be key to drifting off deeper. Try *Bedtime Stories for Stressed Out Adults* (free for 30 days, Audible).

CAN I CATCH UP ON SLEEP AT THE WEEKEND?

Unfortunately, a weekend lie-in won't help a weekday 'sleep debt'. 'You can't just 'pay back' at the end of the week,' says sleep scientist Theresa Schnorbach.

TRY THIS

* **A daily catnap**

'A daily nap could be more beneficial instead,' says Theresa. But head for bed. 'As tempting as dozing off on the sofa might be, bed is the best place,' she says. 'You won't wake up with aches and pains.'

* **Go to bed earlier**

Another effective way to address sleep debt is prioritising going to bed early

rather than relying on sleeping in late, says Sammy.

* **Sip coffee**

Before a catnap, have an espresso (if you're OK with caffeine). 'As it takes 20 minutes for caffeine to kick in, you should fall asleep without the caffeine affecting you,' says Dr Lindsay Browning. 'When you wake, the caffeine would have worked, helping you to feel even more alert.'

EMBRACE LIGHT

After your siesta, bright light exposure will make you feel more awake.

TOO HOT?

Fling out your foot from under the covers. The soles are well-endowed with blood vessels, which expand when you're hot, allowing heat to dissipate.

NEED THE LOO?

Excessive trips could be a sign of diabetes or an unstable bladder, so see your GP. Avoid caffeinated drinks before bed, which can have a diuretic effect.

IS WAKING IN THE NIGHT NORMAL?

Most of us wake up many times for a few seconds and don't realise it. 'It's your body's way of checking if your environment is safe,' says Dr Neil Stanley. Plus, as you age, sleep becomes lighter, so you will be more easily disturbed by external factors.

TRY THIS*** Distract yourself**

Not focusing on the need to sleep can help you fall back asleep, explains Dr Stanley. 'Create a non-stressful problem to solve in your head – I like planning the layout of my fantasy private jet.'

*** Focus on breathing**

'It's a way of quieting your mind,' adds Dr Stanley. Inhaling



for four, holding for seven, then exhaling for eight will help your body and mind to relax.

*** Do a body scan**

Tensing and relaxing every muscle group from head to toe can help you fall back to sleep.

*** Use white noise**

Sleep disturbed by outside noises? White noise (like the static on a radio) can help diminish these sounds, says Dr Browning. Find free videos on YouTube.

NAKED OR UNDIES OR PJS – WHAT'S HEALTHIER?

It can depend on the weather, but 'sleeping naked can trap sweat on the skin,' says sleep expert Martin Seeley from MattressNextDay. 'Without clothing to wick away moisture, your body can't regulate its temperature effectively.'

TRY THIS

*** Choose the right material**
Wear loose-fitting clothes made

from cotton or bamboo, says Martin. 'Natural fibres allow your skin to breathe.'

*** Never wear a bra to bed**

Keep it on 24/7 and you could restrict the blood supply to your breasts and surrounding areas, says Dr Shazia Bhatti. 'It may also restrict the flow to the lymph nodes around the breast and armpit, which may hinder toxic waste products from being flushed from the body.'

*** Take off knickers**

They may cause an increased risk of getting thrush or a urinary tract infection.

**SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT SNORING?**

It's usually harmless, but one in 10 regular snorers could have sleep apnoea. Alongside snoring, your partner may notice you choking, gasping and stopping breathing for seconds at a time. You may wake feeling excessively tired – it's important to see your GP.

TRY THIS*** Gargle and hum**

'To help ease snoring, before bed, do a warm salt-water gargle, then hum – or sing – in a low tone for two to three minutes,' says Dr Ramit Singh Sambyal. 'It tones the pharyngeal muscles.'

*** Review meds**

'Beta blockers and sedating antihistamines can relax throat

muscles, making snoring a problem,' says Dr Sambyal. 'Sometimes switching the time that you take them can help.'

*** Make a soothing spray**

Essential oils can reduce snoring, says Dr Deborah Lee. Mix a few drops of lavender, peppermint or eucalyptus oil with a little water in a spray bottle, spritz on to a tissue and inhale deeply before sleeping. Oils reduce airway inflammation.

BLOW UP BALLOONS

This strengthens the soft palate and surrounding muscles. Practise a couple of times daily.

Lose
up to
7lb*

Shape up for SPRING!

Drop half a stone in two weeks and enjoy a slimmer spring like never before with this exclusive Slimming World eating plan

Refresh your routine now spring is coming with Slimming World's newly updated healthy eating plan for 2026. It makes it easier than ever to enjoy delicious,

filling meals that fit around your lifestyle and help get you started on the right track to great wellbeing – for you and all the family. Follow the plan for two weeks and you could lose up to 7lb*.

THE PLAN

- * Choose one breakfast, one lunch and one dinner each day. Repeat any meals.
- * Slimming World's healthy eating plan, Food Optimising, has helped millions of people to lose weight. It's a flexible plan that's centred around 'Free Foods', foods that are lower in energy density, meaning they have less calories per gram, and are highly satisfying, so you can fill up on them for fewer calories.
- * There are more than 350 basic Free Foods which can be eaten freely to satisfy your appetite, with no need to weigh or measure them. These include rice, pasta, noodles, grains, poultry, fish, lean meats, plant-based proteins, eggs, beans, lentils, fruit and veg. We've built lots of these into this plan, so you won't go hungry!

- * To ensure you're getting a balanced and nutritious diet, you can also enjoy measured amounts of foods that provide calcium, fibre and healthy fats. We've incorporated a variety of these throughout this plan for you.
- * To support your calcium intake, enjoy one of the following each day: 350ml skimmed milk, 250ml semi-skimmed milk, 400ml plain unsweetened soya/almond milk with added calcium, 30g full-fat hard cheese, 40g reduced-fat hard cheese, 3 Dairylea triangles or 2 mini Babybels. You can enjoy these as part of your meals, in drinks or on their own.
- * Being able to enjoy your favourite foods without guilt makes the plan easier to stick to, so enjoy up to two options every day from the list on page 45.

4 STEPS TO SUCCESS

- 1** Stay hydrated: aim for six to eight drinks a day – choose water or sugar-free drinks.
- 2** Fill up on fibre: include wholegrains such as wholemeal pasta, brown rice and

- wholewheat couscous where you can.
- 3** Pack in the protein: it will help you to stay fuller for longer, so choose plenty of foods like lean meats, poultry, fish, plant-based protein,

- eggs, beans and pulses.
- 4** Eat a variety of plant-based foods: they're great for your gut. Choose a mix of different fruit, veg, nuts, seeds, herbs, spices, beans, pulses and wholegrains.

BREAKFAST

CHOOSE ONE
All serve one, unless otherwise stated



Cooked breakfast

- * Spray a frying pan with 1-cal cooking spray and fry some sliced mushrooms.
- * Cook 2 Linda McCartney Red Onion & Rosemary Sausages according to the pack instructions.
- * Serve with hot baked beans, roasted vine tomatoes, slices of ½ medium avocado and 2 slices of wholemeal toast (from a small 400g loaf).
- * Garnish with chopped fresh parsley.



Keep in an airtight container in the fridge for up to a week. Freeze any leftovers.

Raspberry and coconut balls

Serves 4

- * Add 160g pitted dates, 90g cashew nuts, 2 level tbsp freeze-dried raspberries or strawberries and 2 level tsp desiccated coconut into a food processor and pulse to combine.
- * Roll the mixture into 8 equal-sized balls and chill for an hour or until set.
- * Enjoy two energy balls with fat-free natural yogurt and fresh fruit.



Avocado and poached egg muffin

- * Chop ½ a medium avocado, season lightly, squeeze in some lemon juice and mash with a fork.
- * Spread on to a halved and toasted 60g wholemeal muffin.
- * Top with 2 poached eggs, to serve.



Cherry bix

- * Top 2 Weetabix biscuits with milk from your allowance, fat-free natural yogurt and sliced fresh cherries.
- Health boost** Sprinkle over 25g flaked almonds to add some healthy unsaturated fats to your breakfast.

Banana toast

- * Top 2 slices of toasted wholemeal bread (from a small 400g loaf) with sliced banana.
- Health boost** To add some healthy unsaturated fats, spread your toast with 25g peanut butter (made with 100% peanuts).



CONTINUED OVERLEAF



Tuna and sweetcorn jacket potato

- * Top a baked jacket potato with tuna (in spring water), mixed with sweetcorn and 1 level tbsp extra-light mayonnaise.
- * Serve hot with a mixed salad.

You could also top with some cheese from your allowance.

CHOOSE ONE
All serve one, unless otherwise stated

LUNCH



Creamy chicken pasta

- * Cook dried pasta (any shape) following the pack instructions, adding halved green beans for the last 3 minutes.
- * Drain and mix in some shredded cooked skinless chicken breast, fat-free natural fromage frais and a squeeze of lemon juice.
- * Serve with chopped carrot, cucumber and beetroot.

Tomato soup

Serves 4

- * Chop a red onion, a carrot and a celery stick and stir-fry in a pan sprayed with 1-cal cooking spray for 5 minutes.
- * Add a can of chopped tomatoes, 2 tbsp tomato puree, 1 level tbsp sweetener and 600ml boiling vegetable stock.
- * Simmer for 15 minutes and blitz until smooth.
- * Add a swirl of plain quark and scatter with small basil leaves, if liked. Save any leftovers for another day.

Smoked salmon and chive omelette

- * Pour 3 beaten eggs into a small frying pan spritzed with 1-cal cooking spray and cook until set.
- * Remove from the heat and spread plain quark or fat-free natural fromage frais down the centre of the omelette.
- * Top with strips of smoked salmon, season lightly, then scatter over chopped fresh chives.
- * Slide the omelette on to a plate, fold over and serve with a mixed salad.



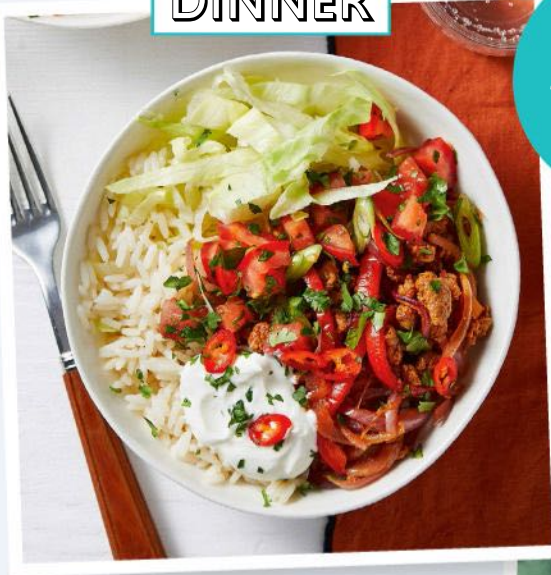
A great time saver for on-the-go days.

Slimming World Lunch Bowl

- * Pick up a Slimming World Lunch Bowl, like the Naked Chicken Katsu & Rice, from Iceland, The Food Warehouse or Dunnes stores and prepare according to the pack instructions.



DINNER



CHOOSE ONE
All serve four, unless otherwise stated

Quorn chilli taco bowls

READY IN 25 minutes

- * 200g dried long-grain rice
- * 1-cal cooking spray
- * 1 red onion, finely chopped
- * 1 red pepper, deseeded and sliced
- * 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- * 2tsp fajita seasoning
- * 2tbsp tomato puree
- * 400g frozen Quorn mince
- * 4 spring onions, finely sliced
- * 1 tomato, diced
- * 30g fresh coriander, leaves roughly chopped
- * 4tbsp fat-free natural Greek yogurt
- * ½ iceberg lettuce, finely sliced
- * 1 red chilli, sliced
- * 1 lime, sliced into wedges, to serve

- 1** Cook the rice following the pack instructions. Drain and keep warm.
- 2** Meanwhile, spray a large frying pan with the cooking spray and fry the onion and pepper for 2 minutes. Add half the garlic and the fajita seasoning, and fry for 2-3 minutes. Add the tomato puree, Quorn and 100ml water, and simmer for 10 minutes.
- 3** When the chilli is nearly ready, make the salsa by mixing together the spring onions, tomato and half the coriander. Then mix the rest of the garlic into the yogurt and season lightly.
- 4** Spoon the rice and chilli into the bowls, then add the salsa and lettuce. Add a dollop of yogurt, then scatter with the chilli and the rest of the coriander. Squeeze over the lime wedges and serve.



Peppered steak veg fried rice

READY IN 30 minutes

- * 250g dried long-grain rice
- * 2 lean beef rump steaks, all visible fat removed
- * 1-cal cooking spray
- * 1 onion, finely sliced
- * 200g carrots, sliced into matchsticks
- * ½ white cabbage, shredded
- * 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- * 4tbsp soy sauce
- * 20g fresh coriander, roughly chopped

- 1** Cook the rice following the pack instructions, then drain and run under cold water to cool it quickly. Drain a final time and set aside.
- 2** Meanwhile, grind lots of black pepper over the steaks and spray them with

the cooking spray. Fry the steaks, in a frying pan or wok, for 4-5 minutes on each side for pink to well done. Wrap the steaks in foil and leave to rest while you cook the veg.

3 Wipe the pan, spray with the cooking spray, add the onion, carrots and cabbage, and stir-fry for 5-6 minutes. Add the garlic and fry for 1 minute. Add the rice and stir-fry until everything is piping hot. Stir through the soy sauce and take the pan off the heat.

4 Unwrap the steaks and slice thinly. Toss through the rice with the coriander, then divide between the bowls to serve.

FIBRE BOOST
Choose brown rice for this recipe.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF



Salmon noodle stir-fry

READY IN 20 minutes

- * 250g dried medium egg noodles
- * 1-cal cooking spray
- * 1 red onion, finely sliced
- * 3 peppers (mixed colours), deseeded and finely sliced
- * 1 bunch of spring onions, whites separated, greens finely sliced
- * 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- * 5cm-piece fresh root ginger, peeled and finely grated
- * 4tbsp reduced-salt soy sauce
- * 1tbsp rice vinegar
- * 4 skinless and boneless salmon fillets, chopped into bite-sized pieces

1 Cook the noodles following the pack instructions. Drain and rinse under warm then cold water to wash off the starch. Set aside.

2 While the noodles are cooking, spray a large wok or frying pan with the cooking spray and put over a medium-high heat. Fry the red onion, peppers and spring onion whites until softening and a little coloured.

3 Add the garlic and ginger and fry for 2 minutes. Then add the soy sauce, vinegar and salmon. Fry everything until the salmon is just cooked through, being careful not to break it up too much.

4 Add the noodles and stir-fry until they're piping hot. Scatter with the spring onion greens and serve.

Roast pork with traybake veg

READY IN 2 hours

- * 1.5kg pork loin, skin and all visible fat removed
- * 1-cal cooking spray
- * 1kg floury potatoes, chopped into chunks
- * 1 celeriac, peeled and chopped into chunks
- * 600g carrots, sliced into batons
- * 6 sprigs of fresh thyme
- * 1 head of broccoli, chopped into large florets
- * 20g gravy granules

1 Preheat your oven to 180C Fan/Gas 6. Put the pork in a roasting tin, season lightly and spray with the cooking spray. Cook for 1 hour 30 minutes, until cooked through.

2 When the pork has been cooking for 30 minutes,

spread the potatoes, celeriac and carrots over a roasting tin and scatter in the thyme. Spray with the cooking spray and roast on the shelf below the pork for 1 hour, turning halfway.

3 Take the pork out of the oven, loosely cover with foil and leave to rest until ready to serve. Add the broccoli to the tin of veg and spray with the cooking spray. Put back in the oven for 20 minutes. While the veg finishes cooking, prepare 400ml gravy following pack instructions.

4 Carve the pork into thin slices, discarding any visible fat, and throw away the thyme. Plate up the pork and veg, pour over the gravy then finish with a twist of black pepper to serve.





TOP CHOICE
Lentils are a great source of protein and fibre.

Lentil shepherd's pie (vegan)

READY IN 30 minutes

- * 1-cal cooking spray
- * 1 carrot, diced
- * 1 small onion, chopped

- * 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- * 200g dried red lentils, rinsed
- * 600ml hot vegetable stock, suitable for vegans
- * 2 tomatoes, skinned and diced
- * 60g frozen peas
- * Dash of Tabasco sauce
- * 1kg floury potatoes, diced
- * Boiled veg, to serve

1 Spray a large saucepan with the cooking spray and cook the carrot, onion and garlic until softened. Add the lentils and stock, bring to the boil and cook for 10 mins.

2 Stir in the tomatoes, peas and Tabasco, simmer until tender, and season lightly. Transfer to an ovenproof dish.

3 At the same time, cook the potatoes in a large pan of boiling water until tender. Drain and mash, season lightly and spread over the lentil mixture. Use a fork to create decorative grooves, if you like. Preheat your grill to high.

4 Put the pie under the grill and cook for 2-3 minutes, until golden brown and crispy on top. Serve with boiled veg of your choice, such as peas and green beans.

INDIVIDUAL PICKS

CHOOSE UP TO 2 A DAY

- * 16g bag Quavers
- * 25g Haribo
- * 1 large chocolate rice cake
- * 3 level tbsps reduced-fat houmous with vegetable crudités
- * 25g sweet or salted popcorn
- * 25g salted pretzels
- * 1 standard two-finger Kit Kat
- * 2 Jaffa cakes
- * 125ml glass red, white or rosé wine
- * 440ml can reduced alcohol lager



REVIEWED BY SLIMMING WORLD'S TEAM OF REGISTERED NUTRITIONISTS AND DIETICIANS. REMEMBER THAT YOU CAN FIND MORE DELICIOUS RECIPE IDEAS, TOP TIPS AND INSPIRATIONAL STORIES AT SLIMMINGWORLD.CO.UK OR SLIMMINGWORLD.IE. PHOTOS: SLIMMING WORLD/ANDREW BURTON, ANDREW WARBURTON, DAN JONES, GARETH MORGANS, JAMES LEE, KATE WHITACKER, MAJA SMEND, MOWIE KAY, SAM FOLAN, GETTY. ©SLIMMING WORLD 2026. 'SLIMMING WORLD' IS A TRADEMARK OF MILES-BRAMWELL EXECUTIVE SERVICES OPERATING AS SLIMMING WORLD. *SLIMMING WORLD RECOMMENDS A SAFE AND STEADY WEIGHT LOSS OF ONE TO TWO POUNDS PER WEEK, BUT YOU MAY LOSE MORE IN YOUR FIRST WEEKS. **PREGNANT WOMEN, THE ELDERLY, BABIES AND TODDLERS ARE ADVISED TO CHOOSE EGGS SHOWING THE BRITISH LION STAMP IF EATING RAW OR PARTIALLY COOKED EGGS.

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REAL SUPPORT

* Discover Slimming World's new-style, pacy, success-boosting groups. Navigate the ups and downs of weight loss with inspiration and motivation from real people who get it and get exclusive access to the top-rated member app. Plus, get fitter at your own pace, whatever your starting point, with Slimming World's active lifestyle programme.

REAL RESULTS

* Choose the weight and size you'd love to be. Slimming World will help you achieve it and feel confident you can stay there. If you're taking weight-loss drugs, Slimming World is here for you too. The support you'll find in a group will help you build healthy habits around food and fitness, so the weight stays off long after the medication ends.

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Slimming World

- * To join a Slimming World group, our exclusive offer means you'll pay no joining fee, saving £5/€9†, between 11-24 March 2026
- * If you'd prefer to join Slimming World Online, save £15/€25 off our Gold, Silver or Bronze packages with our second exclusive discount
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Woman's Weekly – valid until 24 March 2026

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TONED ARMS in 10 minutes

Banish bingo wings in time for T-shirts and spring dresses with these six quick and easy moves



Reveal your upper arms with pride this spring, thanks to this at-home exercise plan. It will help make you stronger too. 'Building arm strength makes it easier to perform everyday tasks, such as shopping and household chores, as well as improving posture, which reduces the likelihood of developing rounded shoulders or back pain,' says personal trainer Rowan Clift. 'Weight-bearing exercises also help bone density, reducing the risk of osteoporosis.' Ready to wave goodbye to the wobble?

Your shaping moves

These exercises work your biceps (front of your arms), triceps (back of your arms) and shoulders. It takes just 10 minutes, three times a week, to get the best results.



1

SHOULDER PRESS

Stand with feet shoulder-width apart. Hold a dumbbell in each hand and raise them to head height, palms facing forwards, elbows making a right angle. Lift the weights up together above your head. Slowly lower back to shoulder height. Do 8-10 reps x 3 sets.



2

ELBOW TO HAND PLANK

Perform a plank, then drop knees to the ground and untuck toes. Push up on to your left hand, keeping right forearm down. Bring right arm up to join the left. Lower left arm to rest on forearm, then bring right arm down to join it. Do 8-10 reps x 3 sets.

TRICEP DIP

Sit on a chair or sofa and place hands either side of your bottom. Slide off the chair, move legs forward and bend knees to form a right angle. Bend elbows at 90 degrees and lower hips to the floor (keep bottom close to chair or sofa). Press up until elbows are straight (not locked). Do 5-10 reps x 3 sets.



NO WEIGHTS?

No worries. Use filled water bottles or tins of beans instead.

PICK THE RIGHT WEIGHT

New to strength training? Follow Rowan's advice to get started.

- * Begin with lighter dumbbells to prevent injury. To find the right weight for you, pick one you think you can lift comfortably.
- * Do a set of 5-10 repetitions, ensuring you can maintain proper form – this means doing the exercise correctly with control and the right range of motion.
- * The final few reps should be challenging, but achievable. If completing the set seems too tough, decrease the weight.



4



DUMBBELL ROW

Place your feet hip-width apart. Hold a dumbbell in your right hand and hinge forward from your hips. Rest your left hand and knee on a bench or chair in front of you, keeping your back flat and hips square to the floor. Keeping core muscles tight, pull up the weight into the side of your chest, so your elbow is pointing to the ceiling (keep elbow tight to the body). Do 8-10 reps on each side x 3 sets.



5

BICEP CURL

Hold two dumbbells by your thighs, palms facing forwards. Engage your biceps to lift the dumbbells in towards you until they are at shoulder height. Slowly lower. Do 8-10 reps x 3 sets. Try not to wildly swing the weights when lifting – maintain control!



6

LATERAL RAISES

Stand with feet hip-width apart, a dumbbell in each hand. Slowly raise arms out to the side until they are parallel with the ground. Slowly lower back down. Do 8-10 reps x 3 sets.



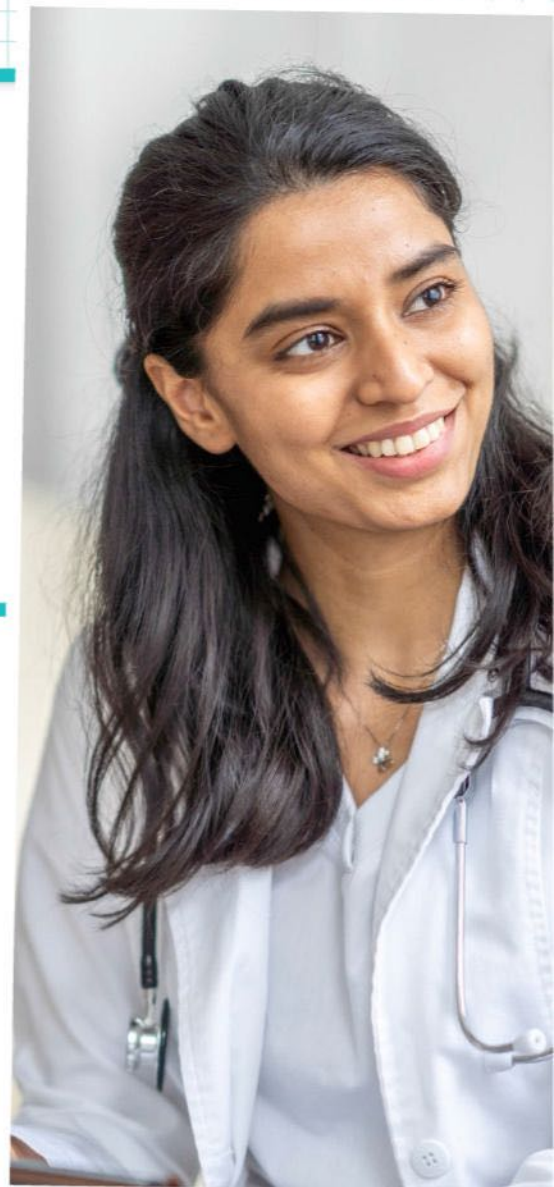
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PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS); GETTY; RICHARD BUTCHER. IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP



Ask the EXPERT

Your spring health questions answered
by GP Dr Gill Jenkins



Q Why are my hands so dry after winter?

A Our skin dries out in winter because cold air holds less moisture and so, like the air around indoor heating, has low humidity, leading to moisture loss in the skin. Many types of skin conditions, such as eczema, can worsen in winter. Also, some people find that the repetitive handwashing from trying to reduce the spread of winter bugs such as norovirus and flu dries their hands further. Remember to stay hydrated with plenty of clear fluids – although winter is colder, it's easy to forget how central heating can be very dehydrating, so consider using humidifiers in the house. Take shorter, warm but not hot showers, avoiding harsh soaps and extreme heat. Applying moisturiser immediately after bathing traps water. It helps to frequently use thick moisturisers (creams/ointments with glycerin, hyaluronic acid or ceramides). When outdoors, protecting your face, neck and hands with a hat, gloves and scarf prevents the effects of windburn, which can be very drying.

Q Why has my GP labelled me as 'mildly frail' in my NHS App notes?

A Your medical team will be increasingly aware of the importance of considering frailty as a risk factor in patient care. There are several different scoring systems for this, but the Rockwood Clinical Frailty Scale is a nine-point tool used in the NHS to assess frailty in older adults. It evaluates their medical conditions, function and cognition, ranging from 1 (very fit) to 9 (terminally ill), and is used to identify individuals at risk and guide care planning. Administered by a GP or nurse, it's a quick way to classify frailty and risk in clinical and community settings to help healthcare teams make decisions. Some GP

electronic notes systems are now also automatically doing a score through searching a patient's history and medication needs. It has been validated in various clinical settings, including for

Q Why won't my doctor simply do a blood test to check that I'm well?

A There's a medical saying that, mostly, doctors can make the diagnosis from the history and examination, while blood tests (or other tests) just confirm what they think. While this is a simplification, there are now literally thousands of tests available. They include blood tests, samples such as urine/stool/spit/pus/skin swab/tissue biopsies, radiological tests (including X-rays, ultrasound, CT, MRI or PET scans), electrical tests like ECGs, EEGs and nerve conduction tests, and interventional

diagnostics such as endoscopies or cardiovascular such as angiographies. There's no single test to show you are healthy, so the doctor has to work through what is most appropriate to start with, depending on their initial clinical diagnosis, then work on from those results. Some people presume a total body scan is the answer, but scans don't show many diseases and can confuse the diagnosis when 'abnormalities' show up that are actually just a variation of normal that you may have had all your life.

Q *I've had repeated cramps all winter. Why is that, and will it improve in spring months?*

A Cramps are common in winter, as the cold constricts blood vessels, limiting oxygen and nutrient delivery to muscles and joints. Also, your muscles tighten to generate heat, which can lead to tension and cramps. Overall, we are less active in winter, and less movement weakens muscles and decreases flexibility, making them more prone to cramping. The cold can also affect nerve function and increase pain perception, making cramps feel worse. Hydration is important. Drink plenty of clear fluids, especially water, as dehydration and electrolyte imbalance (sodium, potassium, magnesium) worsens cramps, but limit

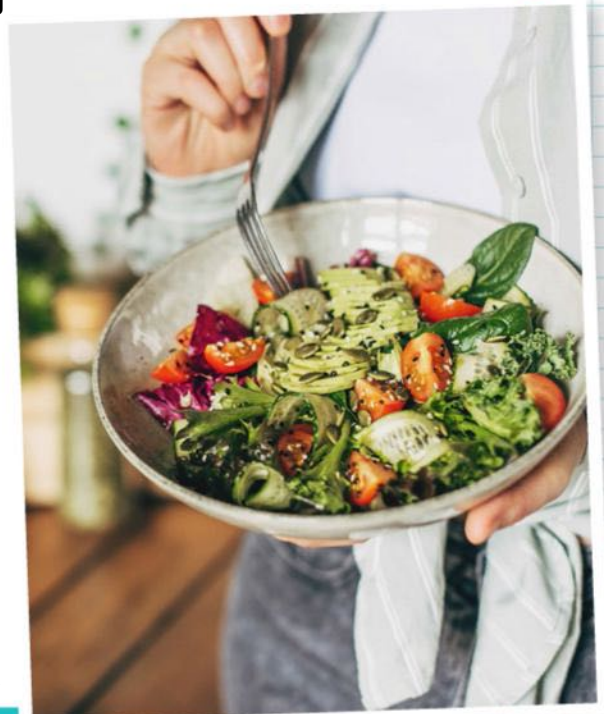


caffeinated drinks, as caffeine can temporarily constrict blood vessels. Remember to do warm-up and cool-down exercises, with limb stretches, indoors to prepare for going outside, and do keep up some walks, even indoors if it's too cold out. Make sure you stay warm when out, with layers of clothes to trap air, and consider heat pads or heated clothing. It should improve in warmer weather.

Q *What evidence is there to suggest I need vitamin supplements?*

A There's debate over whether a person taking a healthy, balanced diet actually needs vitamin supplements. The only daily supplement the NHS advises is vitamin D, which has many roles including bone and muscle health, and immune strength, as we don't get enough sunshine on our skin (where the body makes it). The NHS Eatwell Guide gives you an idea of what is considered a balanced diet. Restricting your diet to certain food groups risks deficiencies in some vitamins or minerals. For example, vegans risk deficiencies in vitamin B12, iron, calcium, vitamin D, zinc and iodine, as they are less available in plant-based foods compared to animal products. While it's possible to consume vegan foods that do provide these dietary elements, comparatively it's harder. There's also debate about the soils food is grown in and whether that can be deficient

if poor quality. Read the annual National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS), which assesses the diet, nutrient intake and nutritional status of the general UK population.



patients with cancer, to predict prognosis. However, bearing in mind the old NHS adage 'nothing about me without me', you should have been involved in it.



Give your eyes a SPRING CLEAN

You'll be surprised at just what a difference small lifestyle tweaks can make to your eyesight and wellbeing. Here's how to focus on your eye health for the best results



diagnosed and treated as early as possible,' says Denise Voon, clinical adviser to the College of Optometrists. 'Eye conditions can emerge at any stage of our lives, from squints and short-sightedness (myopia) that develop in childhood, through to age-related conditions, including presbyopia (struggling with near sight, such as reading a menu or a phone screen) and AMD [age-related macular degeneration] from our 40s onwards.' They can also play a key role in early detection of other health conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure, often before other symptoms appear.

Have regular eye checks

Every two years. Or more regularly if recommended by your optometrist. 'Going for regular eye tests means any issues with your vision or eye health are detected,



KEEP MOVING

Staying active supports your eye health. 'Movement can boost blood flow to the eyes, so they get more oxygen and nutrients,' says nutritionist Dr Emma Derbyshire. 'Exercise has also been shown to help reduce the chances of developing eye-related diseases.'

STOP SMOKING

You're twice as likely to lose your sight if you smoke. 'While many people are aware of the dangers smoking poses to the heart and lungs, few are aware of the damage it can cause to their eyes,' says Dr Stephen Hannan, clinical Services director at Optical Express. 'Smoking introduces toxic chemicals into the body that can directly affect the ocular surface and the delicate tissues in the eye.' It makes smokers twice as likely to develop AMD, a leading cause of irreversible vision loss, and raises their risk of other eye conditions, such as cataracts, glaucoma and even permanent blindness.

* HELP TO QUIT

'Smoking can cause the eye's protective tear film to break down, leading to dry eyes, irritation, and discomfort,' says Dr Hannan. Ask your GP about Stop Smoking support in your area.

PROTECT YOUR EYES FROM THE SUN...

'Exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light from sunshine has been linked to eye conditions including cataract and potentially to AMD,' says Denise. Make sure that you have good-quality, dark sunglasses with UV protection – look for sunglasses with the UKCA or CE mark.

...EVEN IN THE WINTER

Winter sun can be just as damaging as in the summer, so wearing sunglasses is still important, particularly when doing winter sports such as skiing. Winter sun can also be problematic when driving, as motoring in low sun is more likely to cause glare. 'Sunglasses can help with this, and your optometrist will be able to advise which sunglasses are suitable for driving and when to wear them,' says Denise.





FREE EYE TESTS?

Many people in the UK qualify for a free NHS eye test, including those over 60, children aged 18 and under and in full-time education, those at risk of some eye conditions, and people on income support; visit [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk). In Scotland, everybody can access an NHS-funded eye test.

Know your family history

'You may be at a higher risk of certain eye conditions, including glaucoma and macular degeneration, if your parents or siblings have the condition,' says Denise. So it's important to know your family's eye health history and to share this information with your optometrist.

* WHO KNEW?

You may qualify for free NHS eye tests if you have a family history of some conditions; visit [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk) for details.

TAKE REGULAR SCREEN DETOXES

'With more of us spending longer on digital devices, the importance of protecting our eyes from strain is greater than ever,' says Denise. Try the 20-20-20 rule when looking at a screen: every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds. 'This brief pause relaxes the eye muscles, helping to prevent the discomfort, dryness and blurred vision often associated with prolonged screen time,' says Denise.

HAVE DIABETES?

Remember to attend your regular diabetic eye screening appointments if you have diabetes. Make sure you go for regular eye tests too, as your optometrist will also check your vision and for signs of other eye health conditions.

Eat eye smart

* Eat your five a day – at least!

Ensure you are getting plenty of essential eye-supporting vitamins such as vitamins C and E. Consume a rainbow of different-coloured fruit and veg for a range of different nutrients, and include leafy green veg, like kale and spinach, to support good eye health and reduce your risk of macular degeneration. Following a healthy diet will also help you to maintain a healthy weight and keep your blood pressure under control, reducing your risk of conditions such as diabetes and risk of stroke, which can both affect your vision.

* **Think zinc** It helps maintain normal vision, and is found in red meat, poultry, oysters and other seafood, nuts, dried beans, soy foods, milk and other dairy products, wholegrains and fortified breakfast cereals.

* **Consider supplements** This will fill any dietary gaps.

* **Eat oily fish once a week** Salmon, sardines, mackerel and anchovies all contain omega-3 fatty acid DHA, which is vital for eye health. 'The cell membranes of the retina contain a high concentration of DHA,' says optometrist Francesca Marchetti. But only 31% of Brits say that they eat oily fish once a week or more, with 18% admitting they never eat it*!

* DON'T LIKE THE TASTE OF FISH?

'Try mixing it with a sauce,' says Francesca. Or bridge dietary gaps with a supplement. Try **MacuShield Original+ Omega 3**.



£28.99
for a 30-day pack.
Boots



Fit in OUR 80s!

Meet the inspiring women still lacing up their trainers in their ninth decade

Staying active in later life supports your physical health, independence and confidence but, equally as important, doing exercise can bring connection, purpose

and pleasure. Do you need some inspiration to get moving? Helen and Myra prove that keeping fit – and having fun while you're doing it – is possible no matter what your age.



Playing padel and being active is essential for Helen



'I want to win!'

Helen Marlow, 80, from Buckinghamshire, played padel for the first time last year and now can't get enough of the game.

I've always enjoyed sport, particularly anything that involves a racket. As a child, my brother and I would make do with whatever space we had – playing in the road or hitting a ball against a wall. We even sneaked on to local

tennis courts to play because our parents wouldn't let us join a club.

Life became busy when I had my four children, so exercise took a back seat for years. It wasn't until my early 40s that I returned to it. My daughter became an aerobics instructor and persuaded me to join her classes. I was convinced she was trying to kill me, but it did get me moving! I've never enjoyed gyms though. I find them dull. What I love is competitive

sport – I always want to win!

I took up tennis properly in my mid-40s and have played ever since. I'm now 80 and I'm still on the court. I've even had a knee replacement, which could have been the end of it for some people, but with physiotherapy and determination, I was back playing within a few months. I can run around now without pain, which is amazing.

Last year, I discovered padel, and was instantly hooked. Other tennis players had suggested it, and my son, who lives in Spain, encouraged me too. People often assume padel is an easier option when you retire from tennis, but I disagree. It's even faster and more dynamic than doubles tennis. It keeps me sharp, both physically and mentally.

Padel has also been wonderful for me socially. I didn't know a single person when

'I can still run 5k'

Whether it's completing parkrun or hiking on holiday, Myra Wilby, 88, from Kent, loves to challenge herself.

Sitting still was discouraged when I was a child as there was always gardening to do, walking, keeping busy – and I suppose that mindset stayed with me.

For many years, squash was a big part of my life. My husband was heavily involved in the sport and I played regularly until I was about 60. Eventually, I gave it up – everyone seemed to be getting younger. When that chapter ended, I moved naturally into keep fit classes, and joined a local group that kept me moving and connected to others in my local area.

Staying active became even more important when my husband died and I later moved to Kent to be nearer to my daughter. She introduced me to parkrun – she thought I would be able to do it. I never considered myself a runner, but I've always walked fast and had a good base of fitness, so I gave it a go. I was rather proud to be at the top of my age category for a while, and I can still complete the 5km route in around 50 minutes. I love it so much I volunteer as a parkrun marshall, so if I'm not running it, I'm there helping out.

Over the years, I've tried many different types of exercise. Pilates is a favourite

because it keeps me strong and flexible, and helps me get up and down from the floor unaided. I also attend Move It or Lose It** classes, which focus on muscles, balance and all the things you really need to look after as you get older. The sessions are well planned and thoughtful, with enough time to breathe and recover. Recently, I've started their circuit classes too, with different stations that work the whole body. The variety keeps it interesting and encourages people of all abilities, including men, to join in.

Exercise has never just been about fitness for me. The social element has always been important too.

'The social element is important'

I made lifelong friends through squash and keep fit classes, and I still meet up with some of the people I exercised with decades ago. You have to make the effort, but it keeps

your world open.

I know good genes help – my father lived to 99 and my mother to 92 – but I've always tried to eat well and take care of myself, and think it's paying off. I still have the energy to travel – I hiked Machu Picchu in Peru last year, am going to America this year, and would love to visit India again. At 88 I still walk everywhere I can, drive when I need to and get out with my dog daily. I love that I can still do it all. That feeling of capability and freedom is why I keep moving.

Myra at parkrun and working out



On her travels and, right, with daughter Kim



I joined the UK Padel* club at Stoke Poges, but it's a really welcoming and inclusive sport. Better players are happy to include you. The club runs group lessons, social mornings and tournaments where everyone can take part, regardless of level. I've met people who had never exercised before and are now completely hooked like me.

I still have regular maintenance physiotherapy to look after my body, and I also do aqua aerobics, which is excellent for strength without putting strain on joints. For me, staying active is not optional. I don't want to sit at home all day. I want to move, play with others, laugh and have a nice coffee afterwards with friends. Padel gives me all of that and reminds me at 80, age does not have to be a barrier.

Good morning SUNSHINE!

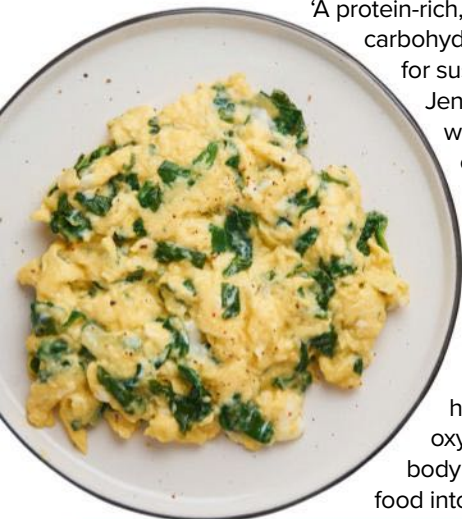
Healthier habits to boost your routine first thing



Wake feeling groggy and struggle to get out of bed? Already tired and irritable come lunchtime?

Not only does being an early-morning riser allow you to make the most of your day, but it can help to ward off depression and boost wellbeing, says research*. But if you're not naturally an early bird, that doesn't mean you can't learn to become one. Here, our experts reveal the easy lifestyle tweaks you can make to help you rise and shine.

1 FUEL AT BREAKFAST



'A protein-rich, fibre-full and complex-carbohydrate-containing breakfast is key for sustained energy,' says nutritionist Jenna Hope (jennahopenutrition.com), who recommends scrambled eggs on rye toast with spinach. The protein from the eggs helps slow the release of carbohydrates from the bread, keeping you fuller for longer, while the iron from the spinach helps transport oxygen, which the body uses to convert food into energy.

2 DRINK UP

Starting your day with a warming mug of tea or coffee could put a spring in your step, says a recent study**. 'They both contain caffeine, which blocks adenosine receptors from receiving adenosine (a neurotransmitter that leaves you feeling sleepy),' says Jenna. 'Caffeine can also increase hormones such as dopamine and cortisol, which can boost focus, mood and alertness.' Aim to have your caffeinated drink 60-90 minutes after rising to allow your body to wake up naturally, and eat breakfast first, to prevent a large spike of cortisol, as this may leave you feeling jittery.

3 SKIP THE SNOOZE BUTTON

Repeatedly hit mute on your alarm? This can do more harm than good, says Dr Lindsay Browning at troublesleeping.co.uk. 'Each time your alarm goes off, it wakes you from sleep and, when you nod off again, it leads to fragmented sleep with repeated awakenings.' Instead, set your alarm for the latest possible time you need to wake and get up at that time, without pressing snooze. Try popping your alarm clock on the other side of the room to help.



BUSY MORNINGS?

Make overnight oats with yogurt or milk, chia seeds and mixed fruit.

GLOOMY OUTSIDE?

Natural daylight will still be more powerful than your indoor lighting, so even enjoying your cuppa in the garden for 10 minutes can help.



4 HEAD OUTSIDE

Getting your fix of natural daylight first thing, whatever the weather, will signal to your brain to suppress the sleep hormone melatonin, helping to increase alertness, explains sleep expert Dr Browning. 'It's also a great way to strengthen your circadian rhythm, aka your sleep/wake cycle – making you feel sleepy earlier at night and more awake during the daytime.'



5 MEDITATE

When your mind is overloaded with thoughts, decisions and worries, it drains your energy, says Sarah. Try this 10-minute meditation when you wake to help clear mental clutter.

- * Sit comfortably with eyes closed.
- * Begin by taking slow, deep breaths. Inhale through your nose for a count of four and exhale for a count of six. Continue for a couple of minutes, allowing the body to relax.
- * Bring gentle awareness to your

body. Notice your face, shoulders, chest and legs. If you sense any tension, soften it with your breath.

- * Now deepen your breath slightly. As you inhale, silently think 'energy in'. As you exhale, think 'tension out'. Imagine your body filling with light and warmth as you breathe.
- * For the final minute, choose one word or intention for the day such as 'calm', 'focused' or 'energised'. Sit quietly with your intention before slowly opening your eyes.

6 STRETCH

Moving your body can help to gently wake up your muscles and connective tissue, which signals to your brain that it's time to become alert, says yoga teacher Sarah Highfield (yogagise.com). 'This improves blood flow to your brain and releases tension that can make you feel sluggish.' Sarah recommends this standing side stretch to wake up your body and mind: Stand tall with your feet hip-width apart, interlace your fingers and stretch your arms overhead, palms facing up. Inhale deeply. As you exhale, gently lean to the right, keeping both feet grounded. Hold for three to five slow breaths, then return to centre and repeat on the left. 'This stretch opens the ribs, increases lung capacity and boosts energy,' says Sarah.



7 TAKE A COOL SHOWER

It might sound like the last thing you want to do, but the shock of cooler water can stimulate a low-level fight-or-flight response in the brain as a result of the adrenaline rush, says research***. The cold exposure also increases blood flow in the brain, enhancing your alertness and energy. No need to go hardcore, just flick the temperature down a touch for 30 seconds to awaken your senses. If you suffer with heart problems or are at risk for stroke, consult your GP before trying this.



DRINKING *too much?*

A sore head isn't the only way your body might be telling you to ease off

A crisp, clean sauvignon to make you unwind. A glass of red to help dinner go down. Or a pop of fizz in celebration. Whatever our tittle, we often turn to alcohol to make us feel good, but it's not always great for our health – and too much is positively bad for it.

Most people are in control of their alcohol consumption and rarely suffer the next day but, even so, our bodies might be giving us some subtle warning signs that we're having too much. But do you know what to look out for? Luckily, our experts do.



Broken sleep

If you wake at night (especially between 2-3am), it could be due to alcohol. Alcohol suppresses REM, the restorative part of the sleep cycle, explains sobriety and 'grey area' drinking coach

Sarah Rusbatch (sarahrusbatch.com). 'It makes you move from deep sedation to fragmented sleep, leaving you tired and groggy. Many women attribute fatigue to busy lives or age, without realising alcohol is the cause.' Poor sleep can lead to sugar cravings and lower mood.

*** EASE IT** Hydrate with water before bed. Adding a pinch of sea salt to a glass of water helps to replace lost electrolytes.

Unusually bad hangovers

As we age, our levels of ALDH (the enzyme that breaks down alcohol) decline, meaning it isn't metabolised as efficiently. 'Because of this, even small amounts can leave us with brain fog, nausea or fatigue, and with worse hangovers than previously,' says Sarah. Women produce less ALDH than men, making them more vulnerable to the physical health risks of alcohol.

*** EASE IT** Have a glass of water or a non-alcoholic drink in between alcoholic ones to keep hydrated and dilute the alcohol in your system.

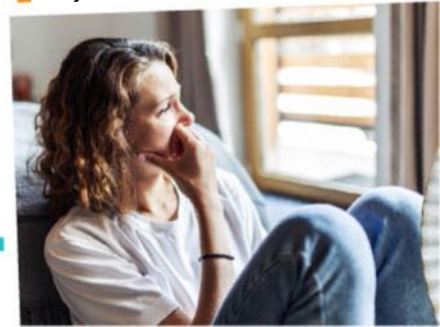
THE MONDAY MORNING BLUES

Feeling a bit low after the weekend? 'Alcohol is a depressant, so while it might initially make you feel relaxed or euphoric, too much can disrupt the balance of neurotransmitters in your brain, particularly those related to mood, like serotonin and dopamine,' explains Dr Krutika Nanavati. 'As your body processes the alcohol – which can take days – these neurotransmitter levels can dip, leading to feelings of sadness, anxiety or irritability.'

*** EASE IT** Drink water, get rest and eat protein-rich foods, such as eggs, to replenish vitamins and minerals. Gentle movement like a walk, swim or yoga can boost circulation and lift mood.

Heightened anxiety

Feeling anxious and not sure why? It could be alcohol playing with your hormone balance. 'When we drink alcohol, our bodies release cortisol (the stress hormone) and, unfortunately, this can linger long after the alcohol has gone, leading to heightened anxiety,' says Sarah.





MAKE A CHANGE

Don't want to quit drinking altogether?

Sarah shares her tips for cutting back:

KEEP TRACK Remember, a glass of wine at home isn't always one unit and especially if you're using big glasses, it can be more like two or three.

NOTICE TRIGGERS Is it a habit or a certain situation? The first step to change is awareness. Experiment with alcohol-free drinks. Can you have a ritual of pouring a 'special' non-alcoholic drink in a nice glass on a Friday, instead of a boozy one?

CHALLENGE YOURSELF Try to commit to 30 days off alcohol to see how you do without it. Notice whether your sleep, energy, mood, stress levels and weight are positively impacted.

OUT FOR A DRINK?

Always have a light meal before you go, unless you are eating out. Prioritise protein, which slows absorption of alcohol into the bloodstream.

SKIN BREAKOUTS

Alcohol can play havoc with your skin, causing it to look puffy and papery or prone to spots. 'Firstly, it's a diuretic, which makes you urinate more often, and that can dry out your skin,' says Dr Deborah Lee from Dr Fox Online Pharmacy (doctorfox.co.uk). 'Your skin may then produce more oil to compensate, which can clog pores and lead to breakouts. It can also trigger inflammation throughout the body, worsening skin conditions like acne, rosacea and eczema.'

*** EASE IT** As well as drinking plenty of water to flush out toxins and rehydrate skin, avoid abrasive skin products. Choose mild, fragrance-free cleansers and pat skin dry with a towel.

*** EASE IT** While it is tempting to follow a night of drinking with coffee and sugary treats, these can lead to energy crashes, exacerbating feelings of anxiety. Focus on keeping your blood sugar levels stable and eating foods high in omega-3, like oily fish, and magnesium – think leafy greens, almonds and cashews – which can help calm your mind.

HARD-TO-SHIFT BELLY FAT

Often in the gym, eating well, but still finding that spare tyre hard to shift? 'The body prioritises breaking down alcohol before burning fat, which can make weight loss more difficult – especially around the midsection – even if you're otherwise fit and healthy,' explains Dr Nanavati. And as we lose muscle and gain fat as we age, so alcohol is broken down more slowly. 'Another overlooked effect of excessive alcohol consumption is digestive issues,' says Dr Nanavati. 'So if you're



experiencing bloating, alcohol could well be the culprit.'

*** EASE IT** Choose lower-calorie options. Opt for light beer, wine spritzers or spirits with sugar-free mixers.





WALK YOURSELF WELL

in less time than you think!

You don't need to hit 10,000 steps a day to get fit and healthy

Another day – another 10,000 steps! We've been obsessed with clocking up this number to help us on the path to a healthy life. But most of us don't come anywhere near that daily tally, and recent research suggests we may not have to.

Multiple studies say that health benefits can be gained by walking just half this number of steps. The two most recent* found that 5,000 steps could delay cognitive decline and ease depression. While 4,000 was enough to reduce death by any cause and just over 2,000 cut your risk of dying from cardiovascular disease**. So get moving for a healthier and happier life.

Why 10,000?

This magic number didn't come from medical

research but originated from a 1960s Japanese marketing campaign for a pedometer called the Manpo-Kei (or 10,000 steps meter), launched just before the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. A researcher, Dr Yoshiro Hatano, suggested increasing steps from 4,000 to 10,000 to help burn more calories, and from there the memorable number just, sort of, stuck.

While memorable, it's not really that magical. 'You don't

need to hit five figures to feel the physical and mental benefits of walking,' says sports scientist and founder of the WalkActive Method Joanna Hall (walk-active.com). 'While higher step counts can be beneficial, many studies suggest that meaningful health benefits begin at lower daily step totals.' Just 4,000 to 7,000 is thought to be enough to significantly reduce the risk of heart disease, dementia and early death. After that, gains, especially for less active people, tend to level off.

Consistency is key

When it comes to walking, it's not about chasing a big number once or twice a week, says Joanna. To reap the rewards, you need to do it regularly – that means getting out once a day for a minimum of 15 minutes.

A short daily walk can:

* Keep joints mobile and nourished

- * Support circulation and heart health
- * Help regulate blood sugar levels
- * Improve mood and stress resilience
- * Significantly boost brain health by promoting new brain cell growth

Walking regularly also builds lasting habits, allows your body to adapt and get stronger over time, improves your physical and mental health gradually, and creates a momentum that makes sticking with it much easier. It's all about turning small efforts into big gains and significant long-term results.

The need for speed

Walking at a brisk pace – think more than 100 steps a minute (around 3-4mph) can actually enhance the anti-ageing and cardio benefits. Even just a seven-minute brisk walk has

DON'T PLAY CATCH-UP

Missing days and trying to 'make up' steps at the weekend? 'This can overload your joints and doesn't create the same steady, cumulative benefits,' says Joanna. 'Plus, the inconsistent bouts of intense exercise after periods of doing very little can overstress your body.'

Feel invigorated
When the body moves efficiently, walking feels energising, rather than tiring, and you are far more likely to repeat it.

Move for your mind

'Daily movement can help regulate the nervous system, lower stress and improve sleep quality,' says Joanna. Just make sure you:

- * Walk without using your phone (even three to five minutes helps).
- * Focus on steady breathing rather than distraction.
- * Use walking as a transition between tasks, not another item on your to-do list.
- * Improve posture so your eyeline lifts, stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system in your brain. This will help you feel calmer and reduce feelings of anxiety.

POWER-UP YOUR WALK

- 1 Walk within the first hour of waking** Natural light and gentle movement can help set energy for the day and support sleep at night.
- 2 Walk mindfully** Notice colours, sounds, changing light – it's a simple way to calm the nervous system.
- 3 Walk socially** Getting out with a friend or group boosts motivation and enjoyment – two major drivers of consistency.
- 4 Walk better** Investing in how you walk optimises the benefits you get.



WALK WITH INTENTION, NOT TENSION

STAND TALL THROUGH YOUR SPINE

Think length and lift rather than effort.

ALLOW A NATURAL PENDULUM ARM SWING

Relaxed arms support rhythm, balance and improve breathing.

LET POWER COME FROM THE BACK LEG AND HIP LIFT

Avoid pulling yourself forward from the front. Imagine peeling your back foot off the ground like Velcro to help you visualise the movement. Avoid overstriding too. You'll improve pace, achieve a smoother rhythm and reduce joint strain on your knees.

Smooth and controlled, not rushed and forced

KEEP CHEST SOFT AND OPEN

Think lifting up out of your hips rather than your ribcage – this will strengthen core stability and improve breathing.

CREATE AN ACTIVE FOOT AND OPEN ANKLE

A supported stride starts from the ground up.



been associated with a 14% reduction in heart disease, while a lifetime of brisk walking has been shown to reduce biological age up to 16 years compared to a lifetime of slow walking***.

And it's never too late to start. A study by the University of Leicester revealed it's possible to gain around an additional year of life expectancy simply by introducing a 10-minute brisk walk into your daily routine.

Make those minutes matter

For those short on time – women juggling work, family and caring responsibilities, we hear you! – you'll be pleased to know that *how* you walk is more important than *how long* you walk. 'Fifteen minutes of well-aligned walking can deliver more benefits than a longer walk done with poor technique,' says Joanna. So make the most of your time with these tips.

STEP *this way...*



Average daily distance: 6-15 miles

Get out there with seven of the best UK walking trips

Historical landmarks

WHERE Hadrian's Wall, Tyne and Wear/Cumbria

WHAT It doesn't get more historic than Hadrian's Wall, one of the UK's most significant archaeological treasures and UNESCO World Heritage site. You will start from the banks of the River Tyne, cross the windswept and rugged moors of Northumbria, and end up in the rolling landscapes of Cumbria. Self-guide or join an organised walking group coast to coast across the UK, following the route of this Roman defensive barrier.

FIND OUT MORE rambleworldwide.co.uk; 01707 524358.

Blend views with 2,000 years of history

Average daily distance: 9-15 miles

Whisky galore!

WHERE The Speyside Way, Scottish Highlands

WHAT One of Scotland's lesser-known trails, the Speyside Way trail follows the banks of the River Spey, often along disused railway lines, as it makes its way from the sea to the Cairngorms National Park. Starting from the fishing village of Buckie on the Moray coast and finishing at the village of Aviemore in the foothills of the Cairngorms mountain range, you'll pass through open moorland and



Hike through villages, woods and rural riverlands

pause at some of the finest whisky distilleries ahead of your arrival in the mountains.

FIND OUT MORE wildernessscotland.com; 01479 420 020.

Pack ponies

WHERE Swindale Valley, Cumbria

WHAT On this walking trip, you're accompanied by your own designated pack pony, who will be carrying all the gear you need to camp out. Learn all about these native, rare fell ponies, while trekking through spectacular scenery, discovering the iconic fells, which offer breathtaking views of Cumbria. Evenings are spent cooking and eating around a campfire, before retreating to your tent to sleep under the stars.

FIND OUT MORE fellpony.co.uk

Average daily distance: up to 8 miles



Wilderness walks

WHERE The Brecon Beacons

WHAT Combine sightseeing with walking on this four-day, self-guided holiday.

You will be based at the country hotel Nythfa House, and will have an ample selection of different walks to choose from every day. From 'laid back' and 'leg

stretcher' to 'full on', you will enjoy some of Wales' magnificent mountain landscapes, valley and lakeside paths, waterfalls and caves, plus the chance to take on more challenging peaks, such as Pen y Fan.

FIND OUT MORE

hfholidays.co.uk;

0203 974 8865.

Wales packs a punch when it comes to scenery



Average daily distance: 3-11 miles

Riverside trails

WHERE The Thames Path, Oxford to Marlow

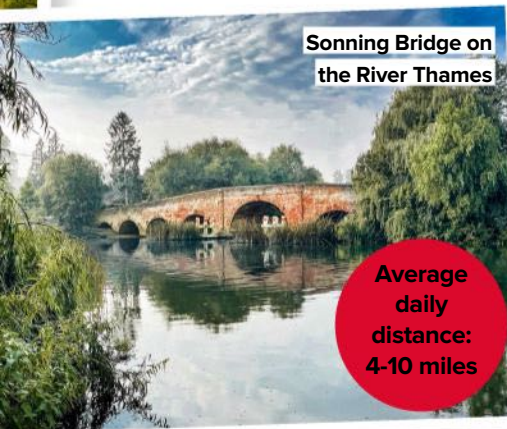
WHAT This starts with a tour of Oxford and its dreaming spires, before following the Thames to Wallingford, picturesque Sonning and regatta town

Henley-on-Thames. You'll also encounter the Beetle and Wedge Boathouse, a restaurant famed for its setting on a stretch of the river featured in *The Wind in the Willows*, and National Trust-owned Pangbourne Meadow.

FIND OUT MORE

inntravel.co.uk;
01653 617001.

Sonning Bridge on the River Thames



Average daily distance: 4-10 miles

Go wild camping with a fell pony



Movie magic

WHERE Scottish Highlands

WHAT This exploration of the Highlands takes in some lesser-known trails as well as more classic Scottish walks, including the Cairngorms, Glencoe (location for films such as *Skyfall* plus the Harry Potter movies) and Loch Leven. Those who fancy the challenge can finish off with a climb to the summit of Ben Nevis, the largest mountain in the British Isles.

FIND OUT MORE

ganeandmarshall.com; 01822 600 600.

Average daily distance: 6-9 miles

St Michael's Mount is a spectacular sight



Coastal treasures

WHERE The Lizard Peninsula, Cornwall

WHAT Starting from Marazion, near Penzance, this route takes you around the southernmost tip of England, wending through picturesque fishing villages and along cliff paths. Highlights include the iconic

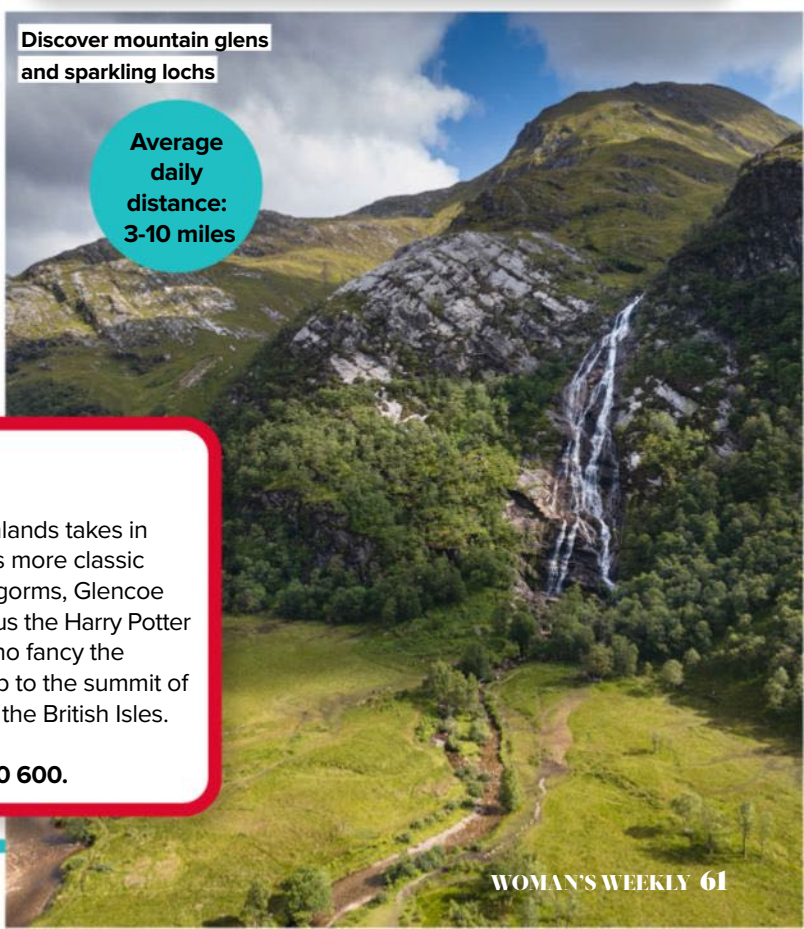
tidal island of St Michael's Mount, Lizard Point (the most southerly point of the British mainland) with its famous lighthouse, the unusual rock formations of Kynance Cove, and the pretty seaside village of Mullion.

FIND OUT MORE

headwater.com;
01606 720199.

Discover mountain glens and sparkling lochs

Average daily distance: 3-10 miles



LACE UP and go!

Ten of the best hiking boots – injury-busting and route appropriate



Extra width

Brooks Ghost 16 – Wide, £80.89, Runners Need
Specially designed wide-fit with extra upper stretch that gives space for feet to breathe.



ANKLE SUPPORT

Keen Targhee IV Waterproof Hiking Boots, £155, keenfootwear.co.uk
Ankle support and a heel-capture system for stability on uneven ground in soft premium nubuck leather.



GOOD FLEXIBILITY

Vionic Cream Walk Max II Wide Fit Arch Support, £140, Next
Forefoot flexibility for comfort and fit and rebound motion to help your stride, with added arch support for stability.



Joint-friendly

Saucony Women's Ride 19, £140, saucony.com
Adaptive cushioning for shock absorption, including cushion heel collar for proper alignment, with mesh stretch for a close and comfy fit.



FOR PLANTAR FASCIITIS

Merrell Moab 3, £110, merrell.com
Sturdy and comfortable with arch support and a shock-absorbing midsole, to help ease tension and impact.



FOR BUNIONS

Topo Women's Atmos, £150, topoathletic.co.uk
Lightweight and stretchy upper with a roomy toe box to allow a natural and comfortable toe spread. Plus soft cushioning.



On city streets

Hoka Bondi 9, £110, Foot Locker
Maximum cushioning for fantastic protection on hard ground.



For Achilles tendinitis

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Declutter your KITCHEN

As the hubs of our homes, kitchens can attract clutter like no other room, but these simple tricks and tips can help restore order

1 CHECK USE-BY DATES

Go through your cupboards of jars, spices and tins, then determine if they're worth keeping. Play your own version of *Ready Steady Cook*, where you and your household create meals from random ingredients – ie, the ones going out of date shortly! For everything else, decant dry foods into clear storage pots so you can easily see what's there and what needs using up.

* **CupboardStore** five-piece in-cupboard storage container set, £45, [Joseph Joseph](#)



2 CLEAR COUNTERS

If your worktops are cluttered, don't overlook available wall space or the underside of wall cabinets. The latter can be fitted with a kitchen roll holder or cup hooks. Rethink how you store your pans, chopping boards and trays too. These often take up less space if stored upright, vertically on a shelf or within a deep drawer.

* **Picket 5 wall hook**, £45, [uk.umbra.com](#)





4 A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING

If you have space for additional storage, a free-standing larder with adjustable shelves can be configured to suit your needs, while deep drawers are ideal for pots and pans or linens. It will look great too!

* **Henley large larder, £1,599.99, Oak Furnitureland**



5 BE REALISTIC

Allow for everyday clutter with a tray, bowl or basket in the kitchen to gather up random bits and bobs that naturally migrate to the heart of the home. Once they reach the rim, it's time to relocate less-used contents to a more defined permanent home.

* **Natural Lydford ceramic trinket dish, £20, Next**

3 EDIT YOUR APPLIANCES

Decide which ones deserve to be hogging kitchen counter space, and if not being used regularly, stash in base units, a corridor cupboard or even on garage shelving to be brought into the kitchen when needed. A tray or box to include any attachments or accessories make it feel less of a burden to shuttle around.

* **Swan pump espresso coffee machine, £119, acacia long crumb catcher bread board, £18, and Minimal luxe texture mug (just seen), £4, all Dunelm**



6 QUICK BLITZ

Got five minutes? Clean out the kitchen drawer – you know the one, with cables, batteries, pens and so much more junk!

7 CLEAN SWEEP

Target your kitchen's other clutter magnets, like the cleaning cupboard or the one under the sink, organising what kit you can in baskets.

* **CupboardStore two-tier easy-access storage caddy, £35, Joseph Joseph**

Simple DESSERTS

Whip up a sweet finale with just
a handful of ingredients

**PER
SERVING**
381 cals, 29g
fat, 18g sat fat,
25g carbs



Speedy chocolate pots

This light and silky chocolate mousse is a great pudding for entertaining, and it's so easy to make for a crowd.

SERVES 8

READY IN 20 mins, plus setting

- * 500g ready-made custard
- * 200g chopped chocolate
- * 300ml double cream
- * Chopped mini eggs or chocolate, to serve

YOU WILL NEED

- * 8 pots or glasses

1 Warm 200g of the custard and the chocolate in a pan until the chocolate is melted and smooth. Set aside to cool.

2 In a mixing bowl, whisk the remaining 300g custard and the double cream to soft peaks. Fold through the cooled chocolate mixture.

3 Divide the mixture between the pots/ glasses. Chill for 2 hrs, then serve, sprinkled with chopped chocolate.

COOK'S TIP

If you don't have 8 matching glasses, a mismatched collection will still feel stylish.

Easter ice cream buns

In need of a last-minute pud? You can create these sweet treats in no time.

SERVES 4

READY IN 10 mins

- * 2 Mars bars, roughly chopped
- * 100ml double cream
- * 4 hot cross buns, halved and toasted
- * 4 small scoops ice cream

1 Gently melt the Mars bars and the double cream in a small pan until smooth. Set aside to cool.

2 To serve, top the toasted bun bases with a scoop of ice cream and add a dollop of the chocolate sauce. Sandwich with the toasted bun tops and serve straight away.

COOK'S TIP

This recipe works well for slightly past-their-best buns, lightly toasted to freshen.

PER SERVING
633 cal, 33g fat, 20g sat fat, 72g carbs



COMPILED BY: ROSE FOOKS. RECIPES AND PHOTOS: FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM

Lemon posset

This zingy dessert is the perfect end to an indulgent meal.

SERVES 4

READY IN 20 mins, plus setting

- * 300ml pot crème fraiche
- * 70g caster sugar
- * 2 lemons, zested, and 50ml juice
- * Blueberries, to serve

1 Put the crème fraiche and sugar into a large saucepan with the zest of 1 lemon. Bring the mixture to a rolling boil and allow it to bubble for around 5 mins, stirring continuously, so it doesn't catch. Add the lemon juice, then remove from the heat.

2 Pour into a serving bowl or divide between 4 ramekins. Chill for at least 4 hrs.

3 Serve with a handful of blueberries and extra lemon zest.

PER SERVING
360 cal, 30g fat, 20g sat fat, 21g carbs



COOK'S TIP

This is a great option for entertaining, served with shortbread biscuits for an extra flourish.

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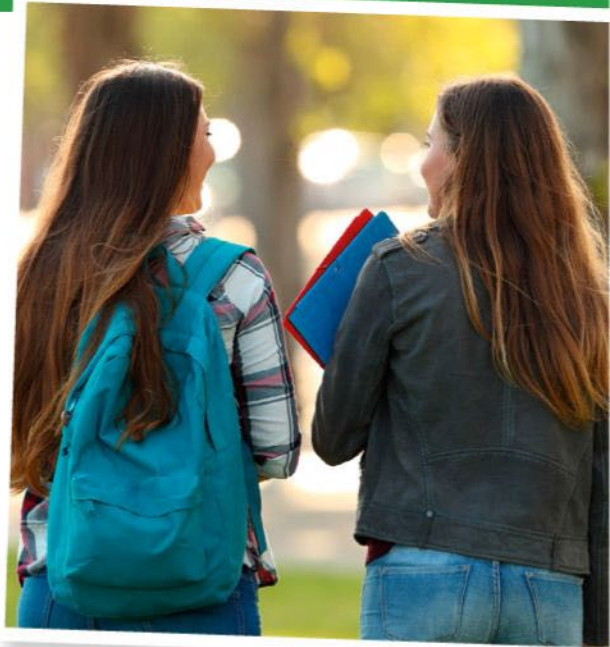
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MY 3-YEAR-OLD SAVED ME FROM A KNIFEMAN
There was blood everywhere as he slashed me with a blade - then a little voice piped up

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Getting the MESSAGE

Maeve's pal was on a romantic mission – but would it ring true?



Hey, Maeve, what's the craic? Lost an earring?' I look up from my kneeling position in the grass outside the school gates and see my friend Una. I've been waiting for her. We always walk home together, but today she has been in detention after getting caught vaping before morning assembly – again.

She throws down her bag and sits beside me.

'I'm looking for a four-leaf clover,' I reply.

Una's eyes widen. 'Aren't they like unicorns? They don't really exist.'

I sigh. 'Weren't you listening in Biology class? They do exist. They're a genetic mutation of common clover.'

'Wow!' Una says. 'I must have drifted off when Sister Mary Agnes came out with that fascinating fact.'

'It's true,' I continue. 'Only one clover in 5,000 has four leaves.'

Una blows out her cheeks. 'So you might be here some time. Those things are lucky, aren't they?'

I turn to sit beside her. 'Yes, but you'd need luck to find one.'

Plucking a stalk of clover, I hold it up to the sun. 'Just three leaves,' I point out. 'Did you know that the shamrock is a type of clover, and never has four leaves?'

Una shakes her head. 'But I do know St Patrick used a shamrock to symbolise the Holy Trinity – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'

'And he banished snakes from Ireland...'

'Never mind St Patrick cancelling the snakes,' Una cuts in. 'What do you think?'

She waves her right hand in front of me. On her middle finger is a silver Claddagh ring.

'It's a bit big for me,' she says. 'Granny gave it to me last night. I couldn't wear it in class of course. Do you like it?'

'It's lovely,' I say, gazing at the crowned heart clasped by two hands – such a romantic symbol. It's said that a 17th-century Galway fisherman

was captured by pirates and sold into slavery. While imprisoned, he learnt how to be a goldsmith, and fashioned the ring

to symbolise love, loyalty and friendship for his sweetheart back home. Years later, he returned to Galway and found she had waited for him. He gave her the ring and they were wed.

'Do you notice anything?' Una grins now.

I nod. 'The heart is pointing outwards.'

'Exactly,' Una replies. 'Meaning I'm single and open to love.'

'Well, you're not in a relationship, so you can't wear it with the heart pointing inwards.'

'Not in a relationship – at the moment, Maeve,' Una says meaningfully.

I know what she's referring to – or should I say *who*?

Liam Doyle. Maeve has had her eye on him for months.

'Come on!' she says, standing up. 'Let's head into town.'

On the way, she tells me she hopes Liam notices her Claddagh ring. Surely he will see the symbolism and ask her out?

In town, we go down to the harbour. That's where sixth-formers like me and Una congregate after school.

Today, there's just one lad sitting on the wall – Liam. When Una spots him, her eyes light up like a lioness that's spotted a limping antelope.

'Liam!' she gushes, putting her bag next to him.

Liam blushes. 'Una, Maeve,' he mumbles, his eyes cast down as he scuffs his shoes against the stone wall.

'Love the hair,' Una babbles. 'A mullet suits you.'

The crimson of Liam's cheeks intensifies. 'I've just had it cut.'

'Isn't it grand, Maeve?' Una ploughs on, reaching out to pat the dark curls that skim Liam's collar.

I glare at her, but the lioness

is teasing her prey. She's standing now, as if admiring Liam's new hairstyle, pressing her finger against her lips, the sun glinting off her silver Claddagh ring.

'Have you seen that new spy film?' she asks.

Liam looks up, a spark of interest in his eyes. 'Not yet, have you?'

'We could all go see it. Here, let's swap numbers.'

I'm fuming as Una punches Liam's number into her phone. I don't want to be a gooseberry on their date.

Over the next half hour, Una hangs on Liam's every word, laughing and grabbing his arm if he says something even mildly amusing. I'm all but forgotten. At one point, she even tells him about four-leaf clover being a genetic mutation. Liam seems impressed.

When I finally manage to drag Una away, saying we need to head home, she links my arm and giggles excitedly. 'Isn't he gorgeous, Maeve? Do you think he saw my Claddagh ring? Did he realise I'm up for a date?'

I turn to her and smile. 'I think he just might have got the message, Una.'

Then we both burst out laughing.

THE END
Nell O'Neill

I'm single and open to love'



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South Downs TREASURE

Michelle Hather discovers the delightful East Sussex village of Alfriston on a short break

What beats a walk along one of England's greatest coastlines or a cold pint overlooking a village green? Not much, as I found out while enjoying the charms of Alfriston.

I started early in this East Sussex beauty – fitting, as in 1931 it was Alfriston that inspired Eleanor Farjeon to write the hymn *Morning Has Broken*. Blackbirds were speaking (like the first bird) when I arrived in the village and popped into The Singing Kettle. At this teahouse, cosy meets contemporary, with avocado on toast and excellent coffee fuelling the inevitable walk.

Medieval monks passed through these parts en route from Battle Abbey to Chichester Cathedral, and it feels natural to follow in their footsteps. Alfriston also sits on the final stretch of the South Downs Way, which provides fantastic views of the English Channel.

Hiking boots on

My National Trust 10.4km loop began off Alfriston High Street. Leaving the village behind, I followed a chalk path through

arable fields towards Berwick Church, where artists from the Bloomsbury Group painted colourful murals. From there, the route promised me a glimpse of the Long Man of Wilmington, a 70-metre chalk figure carved into Windover Hill. My guidebook warned he was 'barely visible', and he certainly remained elusive to my eyes. Harder to miss was the Weald's stunning panorama, and then views of Newhaven Harbour. Keeping to the South Downs Way, the view of the coast towards the Seven Sisters eased into view, followed by Alfriston in the valley below.

It was a hot day and my chilled pint at the finish was an exquisite prize. Despite its diminutive size, Alfriston is packed with pubs, and I settled in at the Six Bells, overlooking The Tye, a picture-perfect



The historic
Clergy House

village green. The green wraps around St Andrew's, known as the Cathedral of the Downs and the resting place of former Chancellor of the Exchequer Denis Healey. Another claim to fame is the next-door Clergy House, a classic 15th-century Wealden building and the first property bought by the National Trust (in 1896 for £10).

Exploring the High Street

Alfriston's population of around 800 is spoiled for choice for



The nearby
Battle Abbey



The stunning views of the South Downs National Park

food too. From cakes at Badgers Tea House (badgersteahouse.com) to bottomless Sunday roasts at Poco (poco.wine), you're never more than a step away from delicious Sussex produce. At The Star (thepolizzicollection.com), owned by Alex Polizzi (*The Hotel Inspector*) and her mum, luxury rooms and modern dining await behind a frontage of ancient beams. I lost myself in the fantastic Much Ado Books store, and then popped into The Dressing Room, stuffed with vintage goodies. I bought lemon and ginger olive oil, and passion fruit vinegar at Seed & Leaf (seedandleaf.co.uk), then window-shopped in the High Street's plentiful homeware and art stores.

Time to relax

By now I was ready to check in to my hotel, named The Alfriston. With roots in the 14th century, the property overlooks the Cuckmere River, and started life as a merchant's manor before morphing into a hotel

some 100 years ago. Alongside its sumptuous bedrooms, there's a brasserie serving local Sussex fare, a bar and a spa. The outdoor pool was bliss after the day's exertions. Before dinner, I sampled outstanding local fizz from the Rathfinny Wine Estate, just a pop of a cork away. In the restaurant, I chose wild garlic soup, and chicken Milanese with black truffle oil and creamed spinach. A crême brûlée cheesecake to finish combined everything I love in a pudding.

The next day, friendly staff recommended other nearby walks (if it's wet, there's a Welly Wall to grab footwear), including to Rathfinny vineyard or the Drusillas Park zoo. So much to do, so little time. I'll just have to come again.

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Double rooms at The Alfriston from £150, including breakfast; thealfriston.com



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Tips,
tricks
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GARDEN notes

Know your soil and balcony plants

COLOURFUL STEMS

Dogwood (Cornus) is famous for its hot-hued stems that warm up the winter garden. To encourage colourful growth, hard-prune these shrubs every other year. Only tackle plants that are at least three years old, and do so from late February to mid April. Use sharp secateurs or loppers to reduce stems to 7-10cm from the ground, then mulch around the base.



EASY SQUEEZY

Not sure what soil type is in your garden? Find out in a few minutes. Scoop a palmful of earth and squeeze it into a ball. If it:

- * Holds its shape firmly, it's mostly clay, which is fertile but poor to drain.
- * Falls apart easily and feels gritty, it's sandy, a light and well-drained soil but lacking nutrients.
- * Forms a ball but crumbles when poked, it's loam, an ideal mix of clay, sand and silt.

3 OF THE BEST...

Balcony blooms



DWARF

MOUNTAIN PINE

A neat evergreen (*Pinus mugo*) that copes with wind and sun. H4m



NEW ZEALAND SEDGE

An upright grass (*Carex*) that filters wind through its strappy leaves. H50cm



GERMAN PINK

Dainty magenta flowers bloom on wiry stems. *Dianthus carthusianorum* flourishes in heat. H40cm



GARDEN TO VISIT NOW

Enjoy daffodil-strewn lawns and vanilla-scented wild grape hyacinths at Chippenham Park, Cambridgeshire. In the orchard, quince and pear are heavy with blossom.
* chippenhampark.co.uk



Kitchen **STITCHING**

Use up remnant fabrics to sew this unique quilted oven mitt



**TESTED
BY US**
so they work
for you

FINISHED SIZE

7½ x 13½in

YOU WILL NEED

(to make two mitts)

- * Assorted cotton fabric remnants for the outer
- * Four 10 x 14½in pieces of low-med loft cotton batting
- * Four 10 x 14½in pieces of 975 insul-fleece
- * Four 10 x 14½in pieces of lining fabric
- * Two 2 x 20in pieces of binding or bias tape
- * Paper and pencil for a template
- * Grid ruler
- * Scissors
- * Sewing machine and thread
- * Iron
- * Water-soluble marker
- * Pins
- * Off-white Sashiko thread

1 Cut the cotton fabric remnants into 3in squares – you will need at least 96 squares. Arrange the squares into four rectangles of four squares across by six squares high – you need two rectangles for each mitt.

2 Place the first two squares right sides together with edges aligned and sew along one edge with a $\frac{3}{8}$ in seam allowance. Repeat to add the next two squares and continue until you have six rows of four squares, then sew the rows together in the same manner. Press the seams open with an iron. Repeat to make four patched panels each measuring approximately 10 x 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.

3 To make a template for your oven mitt, draw the shape around your hand or draw around an existing oven mitt. Add a $\frac{1}{2}$ in seam allowance and cut out the template. Place it on top of the right side of one patched panel and trace around it using a water-soluble marker. Draw a second one the same way, then flip the template over to draw two more that are a mirror image to create both sides of the mitts.

4 Place each patched panel right side up on top of a piece of batting and pin together. Using your grid ruler, draw a line down and across in the middle of the fabric pieces, then repeat to draw a grid of lines.

5 With Sashiko thread and a needle, stitch along the drawn lines using a running stitch. This will keep the layers together as well as provide padding. Make sure to stop stitching when you reach the edge of the template outline and finish by tying a knot underneath. When all the stitching is finished, trim all the layers to the outline of the mitt template. Repeat for the remaining panels.

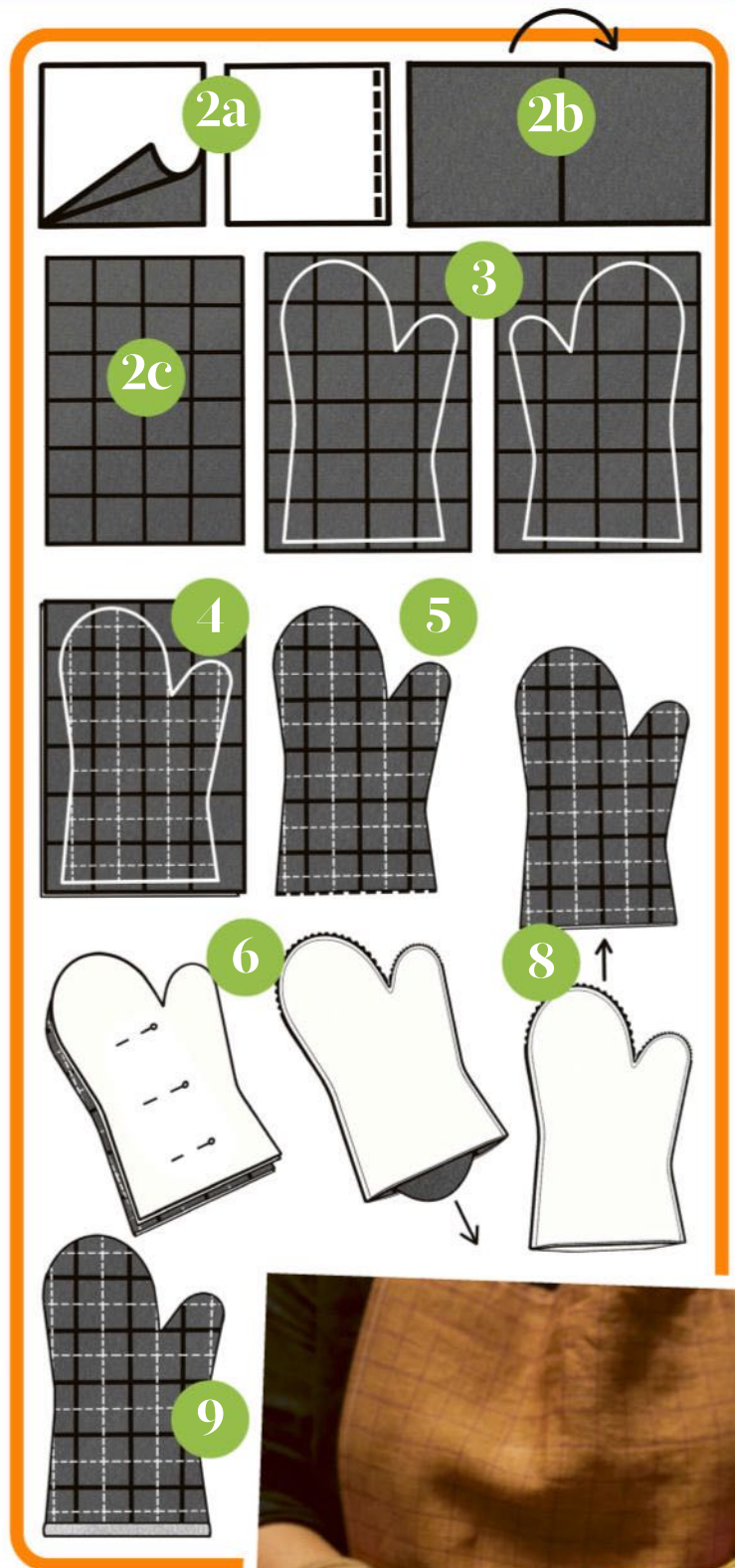
6 Place the panels right sides together to make a pair of mitts, then sew around using

a $\frac{3}{8}$ in seam allowance, but leaving the bottom edge unsewn. Snip into the seam allowance along the curves and in the space between the thumb and fingers area. Turn the mitt right side out. Spritz with a little water so that the water-soluble lines will disappear.

7 Use the oven mitt template to cut out four pieces of lining fabric, again flipping the template if there is a right and wrong side to get two opposite pairs. Place a piece of insul-fleece on the wrong side of each lining fabric piece and pin in place. Place a pair of linings on top of each other right sides together and sew all around the edge using a $\frac{3}{8}$ in seam allowance, but leaving the bottom edge unsewn. Snip into curves and the space between the thumb and fingers as before.

8 Slide a lining inside each mitt. Sew the outer and inner layers together all around the unsewn edge of the bottom of the mitt, very close to the edge, then trim any extra fabric to around $\frac{1}{8}$ in from the seam.

9 Align one edge of the binding right sides together along the bottom of an oven mitt and pin. Fold the beginning end over on top, then sew the binding to the oven mitt all around with a $\frac{1}{2}$ in seam allowance, overlapping the end as you stop. Fold the binding over the bottom edge to the inside, then fold one more time to turn the raw edge of the trim underneath. Sew down with a ladder stitch. Repeat for the other mitt.



Project taken from *The Handmade Home* by Arounna Khounnoraj (£18.99, PB, Quadrille), which is out now.



STAR of the Show

The director thought Melody was perfect for the part – but what if she knew the truth?

Melody's hands trembled as she handed the music to the pianist. She then swung around to face a tall woman in a purple floaty dress, her long grey hair tied in a plait that swung as she walked towards her.

'I'm Betty,' the woman smiled. 'I'm the director of the show. I started Dazzle Musical Theatre Company 20 years ago. We haven't done too badly over the years. It's lovely to meet you.'

Melody's mouth felt dry as she shook Betty's hand. She wasn't expecting to be auditioned by the founder of the amateur theatre company.

'What piece of music did you pick?'

'*I Don't Know How to Love Him* from *Jesus Christ Superstar*,' mumbled Melody, feeling her cheeks flush. Her heart was hammering in her chest.

'A bit before your time then!' Betty chuckled and nodded to the young man at the piano. 'Geoff, you know this one, don't you? Great piece of music.'

At first, Melody's voice was barely audible as nerves got the better of her. But as she continued, she felt her passion for the song well up inside her. When the pianist played the last note, she sighed and felt her shoulders relax.

Betty's loud clapping startled her.

Melody glanced at Geoff,

who grinned at her. 'Excellent,' he said. 'Lovely voice.'

'You've just got the role!' Betty said triumphantly.

'I have?' stammered Melody. 'But I thought I was auditioning for the company, not for a specific part. What is the production?'

Betty laughed heartily and winked at Geoff. 'She doesn't know what our next production is!'

Melody had the grace to look embarrassed. She hadn't thought to check their website. She had simply heard that this was the best amateur drama group in town, and they were

looking for new members. And – as her best friend Jemima had said – 'It's never too late to tread the boards.'

Betty grinned. 'We're doing *Grease*.'

'Okaaay...' began Melody slowly. Maybe she would have the part of the stern Miss Lynch, the English teacher.

'You've got the role of Betty Rizzo.'

'Excuse me?' 'Betty Rizzo,' repeated Betty, her eyes twinkling. 'My namesake.'

Melody laughed nervously with her. 'I'm not sure that's the right role for me.'

'Why ever not?' Betty motioned for Geoff to move over on the piano stool, then

she started to play *There Are Worse Things I Could Do*.

'I'm sure you know that this is Rizzo's big number in *Grease*, and you have the perfect alto singing voice, with the advantage of looking right for the part.'

Melody pushed her hand anxiously through her short hair.

'Yes, but...'

Betty stopped playing and gave her the benefit of a bright smile. For a moment, Melody was disarmed. She could see why Betty had named the company Dazzle.

'Are you worried about

playing someone like Rizzo?'

'Um...'

'She is rather... sultry. We can try you with some

of the script.'

Melody shook her head, then nodded.

Betty burst out laughing, making Melody jump again.

'I know what it is!' Betty cried.

Oh, at last they were getting to it. Melody felt herself relax a little.

'Age!' said Betty delightedly. 'You're worried about being a bit older.'

Thank goodness! The elephant in the room.

Betty continued, 'Other members I have in mind for the principal roles will be older than teenagers. So you will fit right in. They're around the 20s and 30s

age range. Just like the actors in the movie.'

In their 20s and 30s! Melody gawped, incredulous. She was 50 years old! Surely, Betty didn't think...

'I know this must be a shock for you, Melody,' Betty beamed. 'Getting a plum role like Rizzo right out of the gate, but you wowed us with your audition, didn't she, Geoff?'

Geoff grinned. 'Indeed, and it helps that you look right for the part.'

'I do?'

'Oh yes,' he replied. 'You might be a little older than the girl who's playing Sandy, but that will work well anyway, don't you think, Betty?'

'Definitely,' Betty said. 'Oh, how I wish I were still in my 30s.'

Melody gulped. Now was the time to come clean...

But seeing Betty's dreamy expression of lost youth, and Geoff smiling at her warmly, she found herself accepting the role.

Aged 50, she became a member of Dazzle Musical Theatre Company. And she was going to have to pretend she was about 15 years younger!

'What in the world are you doing there?'

Jemima watched Melody in fascination as she worked out to an 'All-body fitness with dumbbells' video she had found on YouTube.

'What does it look like?' panted Melody, trying to lift the weights above her head. 'I'm trying to get toned.'

'If you are attempting to, erm, reduce any extra...'

'Extra what?'

Jemima sat on a seat opposite her perspiring friend and laughed. 'Extra arm. If you are trying to reduce that area, you are doing it wrong. You need to take the weight behind your head.'

Melody put down the dumbbells, pressed pause on her laptop and slumped on to a chair. 'Oh, Jem, what have

'This must be a shock for you'

I got myself into?’

‘Look,’ Jemima crossed her arms thoughtfully. ‘The pressure to look and act like someone younger than yourself is...’

‘Ageing me?’

They both laughed, then Melody sighed deeply. ‘I should just tell them, shouldn’t I?’

‘You should.’

‘Then I will lose my principal role.’

‘More than likely.’

Melody grabbed a towel and wiped her forehead.

‘It is such a compliment though,’ said Jemima, winking at her friend. ‘We went to school together and I am sure no one would confuse *me* with a millennial!’

‘They might. We both act like kids after all!’

After a dance workout where Jemima joined in reluctantly, Melody uttered the words breathlessly that she was sure would seal her fate... ‘I will tell Betty tomorrow.’

The following evening, Melody arrived at the theatre with her speech prepared.

Only, she was greeted by an anxious Betty. ‘Could you possibly help me out, Melody? I know it is a lot to ask, but some of the members need a bit of guidance – from someone who knows their stuff... like you.’

Before Melody knew it, she was working with cast members on their harmonies. Then she was helping the young man playing Danny Zuko with his lines. After that, she found herself giggling with the girl who was Frenchy, and sharing singing tips with the young woman who was playing Sandy.

How on earth could she leave now?

Opening night arrived.

‘I will be at the front, cheering you on,’ whispered Jemima. ‘Break a leg. Not literally though!’

They laughed together, then jumped when Betty suddenly appeared and wrapped her arms around both of them.

‘Sisters?’ she enquired, smiling.

Melody could see that Jemima was struggling to contain her mirth.

‘You are going to be fantastic, Melody!’ said Betty, beaming from ear to ear. ‘The awards are going to come flooding in.’

‘No pressure then’, said Melody as Betty wafted off.

‘You will be great!’ Jemima reassured her. ‘Just one thing though.’

‘What’s that?’

‘Does Betty wear glasses?’

Melody frowned, trying to control her mounting nerves.

‘Not that I know of.’

‘Well, she needs to. She really does.’

As they collapsed with laughter again, Melody felt her anxiety melt away.

Melody was the star of the show! The audience clapped and cheered when she took her final bow. The round of applause for her was deafening.

‘Wow, that was amazing!’ said Jemima, embracing her when Melody finally emerged from the dressing room.

‘That was exactly what I was going to say,’ Melody laughed. ‘Being on stage, it’s hard to describe, but it felt like I was home.’

‘You were fabulous as Rizzo!’ said Jemima, linking arms with her. ‘I never dreamt you would be that good.’

‘Well, thank you... I think!’ Melody chuckled. ‘Hopefully, the company may attract an award for that performance. Everyone was so good.’

‘Only three more shows to do,’ Jemima beamed at her. ‘You just have to keep up that standard. Oh, watch out! Betty is heading this way.’

Before Melody knew it, her best friend had walked off discreetly to leave her facing the owner of the company. She wasn’t sure what to expect. Maybe she didn’t like the performance, perhaps...

The next moment, Betty had swept her up into a big hug.

‘You were fabulous!’ she gushed. ‘Just fantastic. Oh, I can’t wait for the reviews.’

Melody smiled sheepishly. ‘There’s something I must tell you...’

She gazed at Betty’s smiling face. How could she tell her now?

‘I...’ she began.

‘Oh!’ Betty interrupted her.

‘I need to tell *you* something first. Our next production will be *Cinderella*. And of course you will be auditioning.’

‘Well, yes, but...’ Melody stumbled over her words. Then she took a deep breath. It was now or never.

‘What have I got myself into?’

‘Betty. You need to understand. I am not in my 30s.’

The owner of Dazzle Musical Theatre Company

waited expectantly, still smiling.

Melody plunged on. ‘I am actually 50 years old. I know I should have...’

She abruptly stopped as Betty suddenly burst out laughing, making leaving members of the audience look at them curiously.

‘I never would have guessed! But it’s not an issue for me – or for all the people who gave you a standing ovation.’

‘Oh,’ Melody was lost for words.

‘So, once we have finished *Grease*,’ said Betty eagerly, ‘you must audition for *Cinderella*.’

‘Well, yes,’ Melody smiled with relief. ‘If you would like me to.’

‘Of course I would!’ bellowed Betty. ‘And I have just the right role in mind.’

Melody had a feeling she knew what was coming.

‘The stepmother?’ she ventured, biting her bottom lip. ‘Fairy Godmother?’

‘No, no!’ said Betty, clapping her hands with glee. ‘But you might need a blonde wig.’

‘Not Cinderella, surely?’

‘Why not?’ chuckled Betty.

Melody laughed and shrugged. Why not indeed. Why should she let her age stop her when it wasn’t concerning anyone else? She was going to make the most of every opportunity in future, and have the best fun ever while doing it.

Cinderella was most certainly going to the ball!

THE END

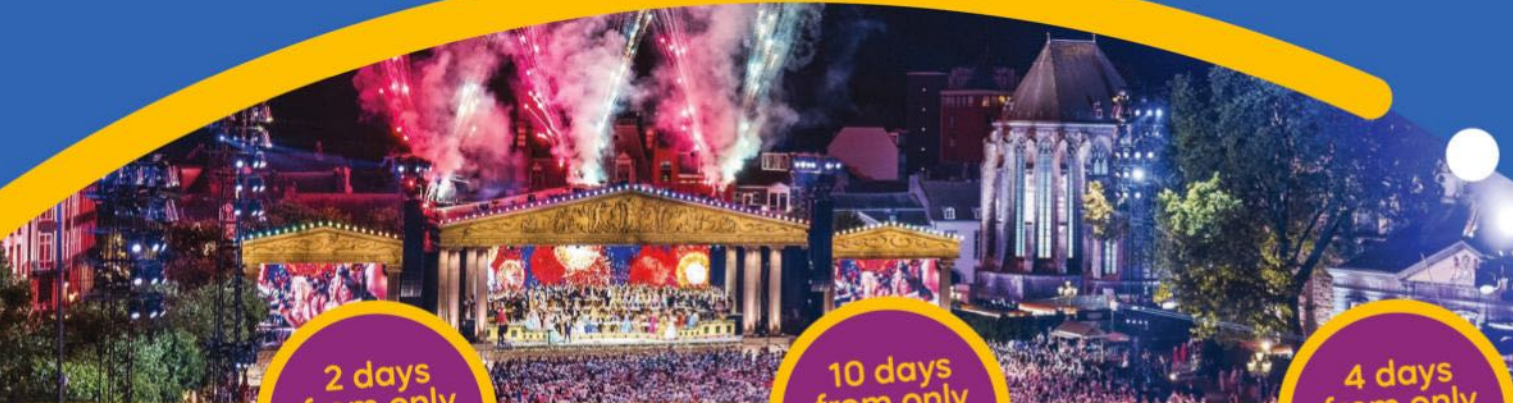
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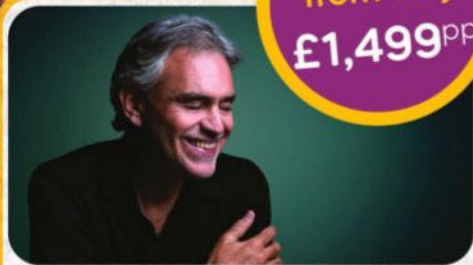
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MEASUREMENTS

To fit bust 82-87 (92-97) (102-107)
(112-117) (122-127)cm/32-34 (36-38)
(40-42) (44-46) (48-50)in.

Actual measurements 99 (110) (121) (132)
(143)cm/39 (43¼) (47¾) (52) (56¼)in.

Length to shoulder 48 (49) (50) (51)
(52)cm/19 (19¼) (19¾) (20) (20½)in.

Sleeve length All sizes 43cm/17in.

MATERIALS

8 (9) (9) (10) (11) x 50g (120m) balls
of King Cole Finesse Cotton Silk DK
(77% cotton, 23% silk) in Blush (2831)*.
Pair each of 3.25mm (No. 10), 3.75mm
(No. 9) and 4mm (No. 8) knitting needles;
stitch holders. Yarn is available from
theknittingnetwork.co.uk.

TENSION

22 stitches and 32 rows to 10x10cm,
over pattern, using 4mm needles.

ABBREVIATIONS

Dec('d), decrease(d); **inc**, increase by
working twice into the same st; **k**, knit;
p, purl; **skpo**, slip 1, k1, pass slipped
stitch over (to dec 1 st); **ss**, stocking stitch
(k on right side and p on wrong side);
st(s), stitch(es); **tog**, together (dec by
working as many sts together as stated);
yf, yarn forward (to make 1 st).

NOTES

Yarn amounts are based on average
requirements and are approximate.
Instructions are given for small size.
Where they vary, work figures in round
brackets for larger sizes. Figures in
square brackets are worked as stated
after 2nd bracket.

*YARN SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY

Instructions overleaf

★ ★ ★
Difficulty
level

Knitting

BACK

With 3.75mm needles, cast on 110 (122) (134) (146) (158) sts.

1st rib row: K2, [p2, k2] to end.

2nd rib row: P2, [k2, p2] to end.

These 2 rows form rib. Rib 20 rows more, inc 1 st in centre of last row – 111 (123) (135) (147) (159) sts.

Change to 4mm needles.

1st row (right side): K2, [yf, skpo, k7, k2tog, yf, k1] to last st, k1.

2nd row and every wrong side row: P to end.

3rd row: K3, yf, skpo, k5, [k2tog, yf, k3, yf, skpo, k5] to last 5 sts, k2tog, yf, k3.

5th row: K4, yf, skpo, k3, [k2tog, yf, k5, yf, skpo, k3] to last 6 sts, k2tog, yf, k4.

7th row: K1, [k1, k2tog, yf, k1, yf, skpo] to last 2 sts, k2.

9th row: K1, k2tog, yf, k3, [yf, slip 1, k2tog, pass slipped st over, yf, k3] to last 3 sts, yf, skpo, k1.

11th row: K5, k2tog, yf, k1, yf, skpo, [k7, k2tog, yf, k1, yf, skpo] to last 5 sts, k5.

13th row: K4, k2tog, yf, k3, yf, skpo, [k5, k2tog, yf, k3, yf, skpo] to last 4 sts, k4.

15th row: K3, k2tog, yf, k5, yf, skpo, [k3, k2tog, yf, k5, yf, skpo] to last 3 sts, k3.

17th row: As row 7.

19th row: As row 9.

20th row: P to end.

These 20 rows form pattern and are repeated.

Pattern until Back measures 47 (48) (49) (50) (51)cm from cast-on edge, ending with a wrong-side row.

Shape back neck: Next row:

Pattern 33 (38) (43) (48) (53), skpo, turn and work on these 34 (39) (44) (49) (54) sts for first side of back neck.

Next row: P2tog, pattern to end – 1 st dec'd.

Shape shoulder: Next row:

Cast off 11 (12) (13) (14) (15) sts, pattern to last 2 sts, skpo – 21 (25) (29) (33) (37) sts.

Next row: P2tog, pattern to end – 1 st dec'd.

Next row: Cast off 10 (12) (14) (16) (18) sts, pattern to end – 10 (12) (14) (16) (18) sts.

Next row: Pattern to end. Cast off.

With right side facing, place centre 41 (43) (45) (47) (49) sts on a holder, rejoin yarn to remaining sts, k2tog, pattern to end – 34 (39) (44) (49) (54) sts.

Next row: Pattern to last 2 sts, p2tog – 1 st dec'd.

Next row: K2tog, pattern to end – 1 st dec'd.

Next row: Cast off 11 (12) (13) (14) (15) sts, pattern to last 2 sts, p2tog – 20 (24) (28) (32) (36) sts.

Next row: Pattern to end.

Next row: Cast off 10 (12) (14) (16) (18) sts, pattern to end – 10 (12) (14) (16) (18) sts.

Next row: Pattern to end. Cast off.

FRONT

Work as for Back until 12 rows fewer have been worked than on Back to shoulder shaping.

Shape front neck: 1st row:

Pattern 43 (48) (53) (58) (63),



skpo, turn and work on these 44 (49) (54) (59) (64) sts for first side of front neck.

2nd row: P2tog, pattern to end – 1 st dec'd.

3rd row: Pattern to last 2 sts, skpo – 1 st dec'd.

Repeat 2nd and 3rd rows, 4 times more, and then 2nd row again – 33 (38) (43) (48) (53) sts.

Shape shoulder: Next row:

Cast off 11 (12) (13) (14) (15) sts, pattern to last 2 sts, skpo – 21 (25) (29) (33) (37) sts.

Next row: P2tog, pattern to end – 1 st dec'd.

Next row: Cast off 10 (12) (14) (16) (18) sts, pattern to end – 10 (12) (14) (16) (18) sts.

Next row: Pattern to end. Cast off.

With right side facing, place centre 21 (23) (25) (27) (29) sts on a holder, rejoin yarn to remaining sts, k2tog, pattern to end – 44 (49) (54) (59) (64) sts.

Next row: Pattern to last 2 sts, p2tog – 1 st dec'd.

Next row: K2tog, pattern to end – 1 st dec'd.

Repeat last 2 rows, 5 times more – 32 (37) (42) (47) (52) sts.

Next row: Cast off 11 (12) (13) (14) (15) sts, pattern to last 2 sts, p2tog – 20 (24) (28) (32) (36) sts.

Next row: Pattern to end.

Next row: Cast off 10 (12) (14) (16) (18) sts, pattern to end – 10 (12) (14) (16) (18) sts.

Next row: Pattern to end. Cast off.

SLEEVES (BOTH ALIKE)

With 3.25mm needles, cast on 50 (50) (62) (62) (74) sts.

Rib 22 rows as for Back, inc 13 sts evenly across last row – 63 (63) (75) (75) (87) sts.

Change to 4mm needles.

Pattern as for Back **at the same time**, inc and work into pattern 1

st at each end of 7th row, and 9 following 10th rows – 83 (83) (95) (95) (107) sts.

Pattern until Sleeve measures 43cm from cast-on edge, ending with a wrong side row.

Shape sleeve top: 1st row: Cast off 4 sts, pattern to end – 79 (79) (91) (91) (103) sts.

2nd row: Cast off 4 sts, pattern to last 2 sts, p2tog – 5 sts dec'd.

3rd row: Cast off 4 sts, pattern to last 2 sts, skpo – 5 sts dec'd. Repeat 2nd and 3rd rows, 5 (5) (6) (6) (7) times more, and then 2nd row again – 14 (14) (16) (16) (18) sts. Cast off, working skpo over final 2 sts.

NECKBAND

Join right shoulder seam.

With right side facing and 4mm needles, pick up and k17 sts down left front neck, k21 (23) (25) (27) (29) from front neck holder, pick up and k17 sts up right front neck, 5 sts down right back neck, k41 (43) (45) (47) (49) from back neck holder, pick up and k5 sts up left back neck – 106 (110) (114) (118) (122) sts.

1st rib row: P2, [k2, p2] to end.

2nd rib row: K2, [p2, k2] to end. These 2 rows form rib. Rib 1 row more.

Change to 3.75mm needles. Rib 2 rows more.

Change to 3.25mm needles. Rib 2 rows more.

Cast off in rib.

TO MAKE UP

Join left shoulder and neckband seam. Sew on sleeves. Join side and sleeve seams.

*** If you have any queries about this pattern, please contact knitting and crochet editor Sarah at sarah.neal@futurenet.com**

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Having cancelled her job interview, Ellie took a step into the unknown

THE STORY SO FAR

On returning her flatmate's academic gown to her old college, Cambridge graduate Ellie is excited to see the college grounds being used as a film set. She meets Ben, the production assistant. Flustered, Ben explains that one of the extras has lost her gown for the shoot, so Ellie offers to lend him her flatmate's gown. Ellie thinks she recognises the extra as being someone from her schooldays called Jackie Atkins, but Ben says her name is Sienna. Ben invites Ellie for a drink. They click and she accepts his offer of a job as a runner on set. Ellie knows her mother hopes she'll get the steady job she's going for the next day, but is it what Ellie wants? She cancels the interview. She also recalls that Jackie was charged with arson when they were at school. And Ellie is now sure that Sienna, the extra from earlier, is definitely Jackie.

Just before six the next morning, Ellie mounted her bike and sailed along the deserted Cambridge streets to the unit base for the movie.

'Think of the unit base as the HQ,' Ben had explained. 'Everything you need to put a film together is located there. But in trailers, not offices.'

Catering, he'd added, was the most important trailer of all. And keeping the tea urn going would be one of her many jobs.

'You do know how to make a good cup of tea, right?' he'd teased, as the two of them were leaving the pub the night before.

She joked that her tea-making skills were second to none but she couldn't say the same about her cooking. Fortunately for her – and even more fortunately for the cast and crew – cooking was not in her remit. All she would be expected to do on the food front was take orders for sandwiches and make sure they were delivered to the right person at the right time.

Just as she was reminiscing about her previous evening with Ben and wondering if he'd enjoyed it as much as she had, her phone rang. Only Mum would think of calling so early, was her first thought. Her second was to let it ring out. She didn't have the headspace for Mum right now, although she knew a text would soon follow.

Ping! She was right.

After locking up her bike, she

opened the text with a sinking heart...

Good luck with your interview today, she read. Let me know how you get on. Mum xx

'Hey!'

It was Ben, striding towards her. Sliding the phone back into her pocket, Ellie shut off all thoughts of how she would explain to her mother that she'd changed her mind and wouldn't be attending her interview after all.

'We need to get a shift on!' Ben said. 'Come and help me pack the tea table.'

'Sure,' she murmured, putting his gruff manner down to the early hour.

She followed him meekly as he strode towards a long row of trailers. When he wasn't using his walkie-talkie

or scanning his phone for messages, he addressed her over his shoulder with a long list of dos and don'ts, only half of which she actually heard, and not very many at all of which she understood.

What if this brusque manner of his wasn't just early morning blues, she wondered, trotting behind him. What if he'd just been laying on the charm last night in the pub because he'd been desperate for



her to accept the job?

Fine, she decided, as she helped him wheel the tea urn and other bits and pieces towards the van that would transport them to the film set. So what did it matter if she'd totally mistaken last night's affinity between them? All that meant was that now she'd be able to concentrate fully on the job.

But then, once they'd finished packing the truck and had clambered inside, Ellie in the passenger seat and Ben behind the wheel, his manner softened.

'Sorry if I'm rushing you on your first morning,' he said. 'I wish I had more time to take you through everything more slowly.'

She attempted to shrug it off but he stopped her before she could reassure him that she completely understood how important it was to get moving.

'The whole team woke

Then his manner softened



up to a bit of a sharp email from the production bosses this morning,' he said. 'They're cracking the whip because we've allowed the filming to get behind schedule.'

'That's got to be serious, right?' Ellie said.

'You bet,' he replied. 'Time is money to these guys, and hitting targets is what they get out of bed for. But on set we're dealing with human beings. You can't push people around like dollar signs on a page.'

'So what's been causing the delay?'

Ben sighed. 'Where do I start?' he said, before relaying a list of minor catastrophes that had slowed down filming over the past fortnight and on occasion brought it to a complete standstill.

'Little things when taken one by one. You witnessed one of them yourself yesterday,' he said. 'Supporting artists setting

things back because of a mislaid prop.'

'Oh! That girl with the long hair, you mean?'

Ellie felt a queasiness in her tummy she couldn't explain as Jackie Atkins' face flashed up before her.

'That's one way of describing her,' Ben said. 'I'd call her a pain in the butt. Unfortunately the director's taken a shine to her. He gave her a line yesterday. Which was why we couldn't carry on filming till the missing gown was found. She needed it for the scene.'

Turning to Ellie, he added, 'Stroke of luck that you came along and saved the day.'

'Oh,' she said. 'It was nothing.'

The traffic was beginning to build up now, even though it was still early. While they waited for the lights to change, Ellie risked another question.

'What else do you know about her? Sienna, did you

say her name was?'

Ben gave her a sidelong glance. 'That's right. How come you're interested in her?'

'I'm not,' she said quickly. 'Just making small talk.'

Her remark seemed to satisfy him. The last thing she wanted to do was to rouse Ben's curiosity about Sienna. What if Ellie had made a mistake about this girl's identity? What if Ben went marching over to the director to tell him an innocent extra had a criminal past? The girl might get thrown off the set and lose the opportunity to have a speaking role in the film?

'Cool,' Ben said, eyes still on the road.

'Forget Jackie Atkins,' thought Ellie.

For a while they sat in silence, but Ellie's mind was in overdrive. She felt a sudden urge to confide in Ben about the job interview she'd cancelled. Had she made a stupid mistake? After all, it would mean the world to her mother if she became the first in their family to get a job with holiday and sick pay, opportunities for promotion, and a very nice pension at the end.

But she had known Ben for less than 24 hours. She couldn't unload on him about her fears and self-doubt. So instead she asked what other things had been holding back filming. Thankfully Ben was all too willing to tell her.

'Cast members falling out and refusing to talk to each other. Finding every single walkie-talkie battery was flat.'

'Wow!'

Then there were the various accidents.

'Mostly minor,' he said.

'People tripping over something that should have been put away. One dope who wasn't looking where he was going ended up in A&E after falling

over some cables that hadn't been taped down. Cost us an afternoon.'

Ellie widened her eyes.

Ben grinned. 'Yeah, I know. I sound like one of those ruthless money men I was just slagging off, don't I?'

'I couldn't possibly comment,' Ellie said, straight-faced.

They were approaching the university site that was home for the shoot. But Ben still had things to say.

'It had repercussions though. Could have been the end of the film. Richie was so freaked out that his blood pressure soared. He passed out, and Health and Safety refused to let him back on set till he got the all-clear from his specialist.'

'Richie?'

They had arrived on set at last. Ben jumped out of the truck and Ellie followed his lead.

'Richie Slater,' he called over his shoulder, making his way to the back of the truck and throwing open the doors. 'The director. He's not long since had a heart bypass. It's only

Had she made a stupid mistake?

because of his reputation as a director that the producers have given him the OK to direct this film. The insurance is costing them a fortune.'

Richie Slater.

As Ellie hovered by the truck doors, waiting for instructions, she turned that name over in her mind, wondering why it rang a bell.

Then Ben called over to her. 'Anyway,' he said. 'Never mind all that. The important thing now is for you to familiarise yourself with the call sheet.'

'That's the list of the actors required in each scene, right?'

He thrust a sheet of A4 paper typed on both sides towards her.

'Correct,' he said. 'See! I said you were a fast learner.'

Her busy day had just begun.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

Towards the end of the afternoon, Ellie finally managed to grab a break. Perching on a window ledge in a quiet corner looking out on to the college quadrangle, she gulped her lukewarm tea and silently reviewed how the day had gone so far. Ben had warned her she'd be in for a long shift.

But only now, more than halfway through her first day, was she able to interpret the look on Ben's face when she'd replied that as far as she was concerned, being busy was far better than not having enough to do. What that quizzical expression had been saying was that she'd be lucky to find time to draw breath, let alone get bored!

Some jobs on set – key grip, gaffer and best boy, for instance – needed an explanation. Not to mention other terminology she'd picked up throughout the day. Who knew that a hot brick wasn't a hot brick at all but a fully charged walkie-talkie battery, for instance? Or that the 'honeywagon' was less to do with beehives and more with calls of nature.

However, the word runner needed no explanation. As jobs went, this one did what it said on the tin.

Suddenly, Ellie became aware of movement and chattering coming from the other end of the room. While she'd been ruminating on her new-found vocabulary, a bunch of noisy extras had turned up and descended on the snack trolley. They were now in the process of ravaging its contents.

Well, if the tea was cold that was their fault not hers, Ellie told herself. Or one of their bunch anyway, since once again filming had been delayed because someone had turned up late. Or so she'd learnt from a fuming Ben when they'd crossed paths earlier.

For one split second she caught the eye of the young

woman referred to by Ben as Sienna. The girl Ellie was now certain was Jackie Atkins.

On realising that Jackie had seen her too, Ellie, heart pounding, quickly looked away. But still she felt the girl's eyes on her. If Ellie had recognised Jackie, then surely Jackie had recognised her?

Memories of her schooldays flooded back. The only place she had felt happy at school was in the classroom with her books, and in the company of teachers who encouraged and praised her.

Outside the classroom, Ellie had few friends. There was no time to make them. She'd had other priorities. Her father had been sick almost all her life. During her final two years at school his condition had rapidly deteriorated, and her support both for him, but mainly for Mum, was increasingly called for.

Teachers and neighbours had praised her for being a help. What they hadn't understood was how often she'd resented her situation. How she'd hated herself for feeling hard done by every time her mother told her

there was no money for school trips or new clothes. To bury those dark feelings she'd worked even harder at school, so that one day she could get away from the likes of Jackie Atkins, get a place at university and land a job that would pay her enough to recompense Mum for all the sacrifices she'd made.

And she had got those prized qualifications. So why couldn't she find the courage now to go up to the girl and say hello?

The answer was simple. Jackie – now passing herself off as Sienna – had stood out from the other extras. She had a line in a film that would be seen by millions. Whereas Ellie was just the runner ordering lunch.

It was a huge relief when a message came through on her walkie-talkie blocking her thoughts. It was time to start running again.

The thing about reliving old school memories, Ellie decided back at unit base later, was that people had a tendency to get stuck on the negative ones at the expense of the positive.

She suddenly remembered an occasion when she'd taken refuge in a toilet cubicle to quietly sob, after hearing more bad news about her father's illness. She had thought she was alone. But someone must have heard her. She remembered the tissue sliding under the door, the hand that offered it immediately withdrawing, footsteps and the echo of the main door slamming behind the fleeing Good Samaritan.

This memory gave way to another. She'd been kidding herself. Jackie Atkins hadn't been a particularly popular girl in school at all. She'd been more of a hanger-on.

One of many.

It had been seeing the director's name – Richie Slater – on the call sheet that had prompted Ellie to recall someone else from school with that surname. One Maxine Slater. Queen Bee. The girl everybody wanted as their best friend. A girl who, so Ellie discovered, after a quick google, happened to be the director's daughter.

To get a smile or a friendly word from Maxine back then would light up the life of whoever received it. Ellie saw how girls like Jackie hovered



around Maxine's clique hoping for an 'in'. How they'd fawn upon her if ever they were lucky enough to be thrown some crumbs of acknowledgement.

Ellie, who had no time for school politics, went about her business untroubled by any thoughts of how to win Maxine's favour. She had bigger fish to fry.

At the end of the day, Ellie was looking forward to a leisurely cycle home, a shower, a beer and an evening of TV with dinner on her lap. But her mood soon plummeted when she spotted that both her bicycle tyres were flat.

She looked around her – for what she didn't know. How could this have happened? This morning she'd left her bike with two functioning tyres. Now they'd get her nowhere!

And suddenly, unbidden, Jackie Atkins' face sidled back into her head. Could it possibly be that for the second day running Jackie had been the one to cause the delays on the set? Had Jackie indeed recognised Ellie? Had she perhaps let down Ellie's tyres too? After all – Ellie had stuff on Jackie. And what about Maxine Slater? Was it just a coincidence that her father was the director on this film? Or was there more to it than that?

TO BE CONTINUED
Geraldine Ryan

Her mood soon plummeted



Great reads

Zoe West shares her picks for the week

Dead Heat

by Sabine Durrant
(£16.99, HB, Cornerstone)

Staying at his best friends' cottage in Greece offers much-needed respite for Matt, recently split from his girlfriend in London and with nowhere to live. But when Celia and Adam arrive, the dynamics shift. Adam's larger-than-life personality grates, while the couple become distracted by the comings and goings at a new 'mega mansion' across the bay. Feeling lost, Matt fixates on a missing Brit on the island – an obsession that slowly unravels everything. With a modern-day *Great Gatsby* feel, the novel explores adult friendships and bad behaviour, building to an explosive ending.

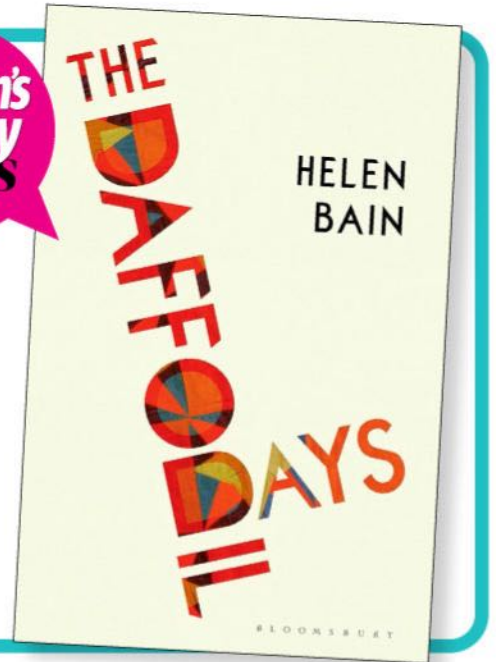


The Daffodil Days

by Helen Bain
(£18.99, HB, Bloomsbury)

Sylvia Plath died by suicide over 60 years ago, but the fascination with her continues. In her debut novel, Helen Bain focuses on a pivotal year in Plath's marriage to fellow poet Ted Hughes, when they have moved from London to a thatched house in a small Devon town near Dartmoor with their young daughter. Through a kaleidoscope of stories from the various locals who meet them, Bain builds a fascinating portrait of the dynamic between the most famous couple in 20th-century literature as they unravel.

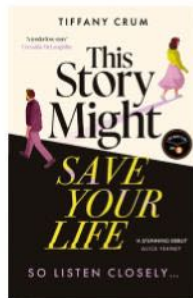
Woman's Weekly LOVES



This Story Might Save Your Life

by Tiffany Crum
(£16.99, HB, Hodder & Stoughton)

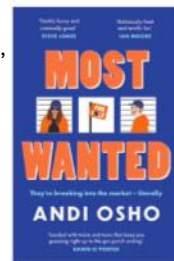
Benny and Joy, best friends in Los Angeles, hit the jackpot with a comedy podcast about surviving life-threatening scenarios. But when Joy faces a deadly real-life situation, can she save herself – or will Benny come to her rescue? A will-they-won't-they love story rivalling Mulder and Scully, it explores domestic abuse, coercive control and murder. A gripping, page-turning tale for fans of *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow* and complex male-female friendships.



Most Wanted

by Andi Osho
(£9.99, PB, Harper Collins)

In the charming Wickstone area, Naya and Jake search for their dream home amid an overcrowded market. After years of looking, they may have found The One – until Naya's dad, Sonny, loses his house and London's market becomes even tougher. A half-hearted joke about crime rates unexpectedly tips the balance. With sharp humour, this twisty story explores home, grief, childhood influences and romantic connections, offering dual perspectives and fresh reflections on modern housing and relationships.



Westward Women

by Alice Martin
(£16.99, PB, Virago Press)

America, 1973. Young women are infected by a mysterious bacteria that takes over body and mind, starting with an itch and an irresistible urge to travel west, erasing their past. When Aimee's friend disappears, she sets out to find her. Meanwhile, journalist Eve hunts the Piper, a man who lures girls westward and kills them. In their search, both women uncover hidden truths about themselves. Haunting, nostalgic and sharply observant of women's health and societal neglect.

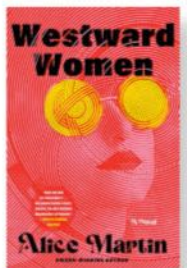


PHOTO OF ZOE: ELISABETH HOFF. THIS STORY MIGHT SAVE YOUR LIFE REVIEWED BY FRANCES LEATE AND MOST WANTED BY BECKY SPICER

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Jumbo puzzle

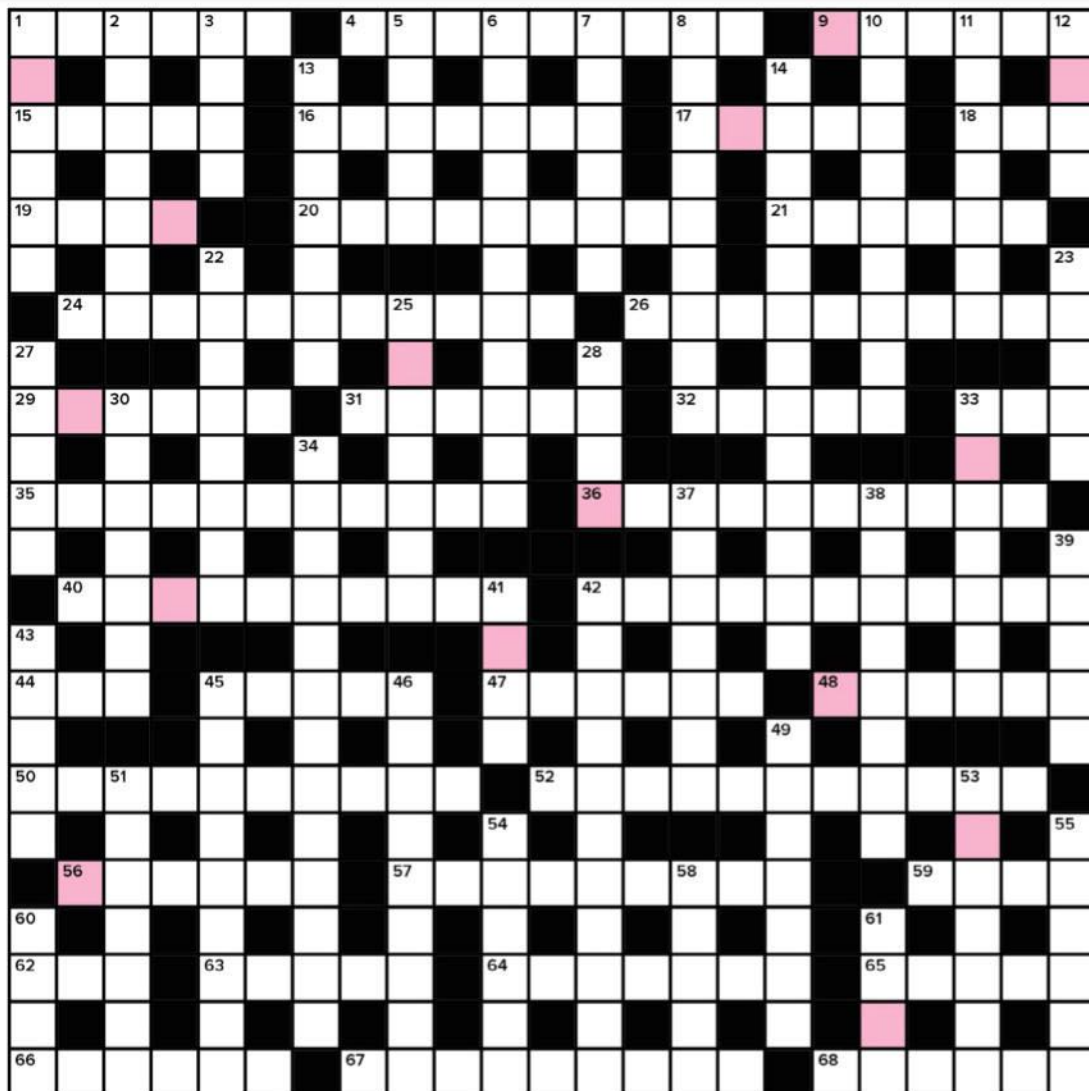
Read down the letters in the shaded squares to spell out celestial object (9,6).

ACROSS

- 1 Specify (6)
- 4 Desires (9)
- 9 Jumped on one leg (6)
- 15 Shelf-like projection (5)
- 16 Cut into pieces (7)
- 17 Employing (5)
- 18 Snow runner (3)
- 19 Land measure (4)
- 20 Transmit on TV (9)
- 21 Flap of leather on a shoe (6)
- 24 Domestic power (11)
- 26 Children (10)
- 29 Alcove (6)
- 31 Courageous (6)
- 32 Amazes (5)
- 33 Insect (3)
- 35 Findings (11)
- 36 *Upstairs* ____, TV drama series (10)
- 40 Always (10)
- 42 Focus one's attention (11)
- 44 Used to be (3)
- 45 Desiccated (5)
- 47 Timber (6)
- 48 Forbidden (6)
- 50 Isolation (10)
- 52 Nature (11)
- 56 Span (6)
- 57 Make believe (9)
- 59 Leave out (4)
- 62 Everything (3)
- 63 Sorts (5)
- 64 Blighty (7)
- 65 Dry and brittle (5)
- 66 Next to (6)
- 67 Scientific study of heavenly bodies (9)
- 68 Rubbed out (6)

DOWN

- 1 US monetary unit (6)
- 2 Level of government (7)
- 3 Require (4)



- 5 Snapshot (5)
- 6 Treks (11)
- 7 Takeaway cuisine (6)
- 8 Mathematical statements (9)
- 10 Living beings (9)
- 11 Grazing land (7)
- 12 Fall in drops (4)
- 13 Shipping hazard (7)
- 14 Noble (13)
- 22 Cutting instrument (8)
- 23 Remains of a fire (5)
- 25 Pharmacist (7)
- 27 Rank (5)
- 28 Corrosive substance (4)
- 30 Traditions (7)
- 33 Good buy (7)
- 34 Connections (13)
- 37 Victors (7)
- 38 Really (8)
- 39 Swamp plants (5)
- 41 Scream (4)
- 42 Contest (11)
- 43 Bloat (5)
- 45 Overjoyed (9)
- 46 Sends away (9)
- 49 Loosening (7)
- 51 Knitting rods (7)
- 53 Bellies (7)
- 54 Men's hairdresser (6)
- 55 Daft (6)
- 58 Scare (5)
- 60 Young sheep (4)
- 61 Wound mark (4)

**YOU CAN
WORK IT OUT...**

*** Find the puzzle answers on the horoscopes page.**

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Puzzle TIME

Arrow word

What location is in the title of the only seascape painted by Rembrandt, which was stolen from a Boston museum in 1990? Solve the puzzle by following the arrows and writing in your answers. Then read down the letters in the shaded squares to find the answer.

Fitness club		The <i>Hateful ...</i> 2016 film	Beast of burden		Solo operatic song	Light shade of brown	That woman	Singer, ... Garfunkel	Type of paint	Wintry weather	What a bird lays
TV sitcom, ... Minister			Secret agent		Burnt remains Peculiar			Got up Performs a role			
Important task					O	Consuming In the past					
	Breaking ... drama series		Cushion	P	A	D	Curve Place of work		Thick piece of wood		
	As well		Unreturned serve in tennis		Canine	D		Use money	Very cold	Not tight	Talons
				Possess	Type of metal	Petrified animal or plant					Grows old
Facts and figures		Head, boss Moist					Sealed tin	Type of solid fuel			
Curse						Decorate a cake		Type of gentle exercise			
			Mountain that might erupt						Stitch		
Foot digit	At that time					Conclude			Not as much		

YOUR ANSWER:

WORDSEARCH

Which of these *Ice Age* characters shares their name with the mascots of Colchester United FC and the band Iron Maiden? The answer is the one missing from the grid.

P	U	Y	E	I	L	L	E	G
E	X	N	N	C	R	A	S	H
A	K	N	A	R	F	O	S	M
C	J	A	B	D	D	O	N	L
H	O	M	I	T	T	D	T	O
E	E	S	A	O	I	L	E	U
S	B	R	C	E	K	E	Z	I
Z	C	A	G	A	S	V	T	S
S	V	O	D	L	R	A	C	W

YOUR ANSWER:

- | | | |
|-------|-------|---------|
| CARL | ELLIE | PEACHES |
| CRASH | FRANK | SCRAT |
| DAB | LOUIS | SID |
| DIEGO | MANNY | SOTO |
| EDDIE | OSCAR | ZEKE |

Mini crossword

1	2	3	4
5			
6			
7			

The shaded boxes spell out a word.

ACROSS

- 1 Lily (4)
- 5 Pipe (4)
- 6 Mimics (4)
- 7 Luton's county (abbr) (4)

DOWN

- 1 Pequod captain (4)
- 2 Cord (4)
- 3 Second-hand (4)
- 4 Jumble (4)

Spring FEVER

The sun is shining, but Mr Dear definitely isn't



“

Mr Thomas Dear stood in the middle of our modest greenhouse and sighed deeply.

By the way, you might have noticed that we do a lot of sighing deeply down our way. It's not that we have very much to sigh about – we live on the edge of a small provincial town and life is very pleasant here.

We have lots of jolly friends, and there's proper countryside just a stone's throw away (assuming that the stone is thrown by an Olympic standard, world record-holding stone thrower).

But, as I suggested only last week, you don't really want to read about life when it's going well. You want drama, you want light comedy drawn from the daily routine.

Anyway, back to Mr Dear and the greenhouse. He was sighing as I stepped through the door with a mug of latte from our new coffee machine.

Well, I say new but actually it's a hand-me-up from my little sister Deb, who now has something which looks like the flight deck of a Boeing 707. If she goes for a couple of days without coffee, it will throw the Brazilian economy into chaos.

'That was a deep sigh,' I said as I handed over the mug, which has the inscription *Head Gardener*.

'Oh,' he said, stretching that word out for about five seconds. 'It's the sheer monotony of it.'

'Of what?'

He glugged at his coffee.

'I say, this is rather good, isn't it?'

'I'm glad you like it. I thought I'd try a new coffee to go with the new machine.

This is pure Colombian from Tesco.'

'Mmm, very nice.'

'Don't avoid the subject. What's the sheer monotony that's annoying you so much that you have to sigh deeply and mull that up the glass?'

'It's the seasons.'

'Ah, well. I'm afraid you're stuck with the seasons. They come, they go. You should be used to it at your age.'

He was about to sigh again, but thought better off it. Instead, he blew air out of his mouth and made his lips wobble. You know, like a raspberry but much more polite.

'Here I am,' he said, 'getting the greenhouse ready for the planting season, just like I did last year, and the year before

that, and the year before that. Grubbing up the tomato plants and putting them on the compost. Just like I did last year.

'And I really ought to start mowing the lawn, which means every Saturday until late November. And there's the weeding, and cutting the hedge, and... I don't know... the whole ruddy monotony of it all.'

I opened my mouth to say something, but he hadn't finished.

'It doesn't help that I get all the dull jobs – cutting stuff back, pulling stuff up, sharpening tools, oiling tools...'

'But you like sharpening things? You once told me that you took a pride in keeping things sharp and well oiled. That a worker is only as good as his tools.'

'That's not the point, is it? If there's anything interesting to be done in the garden, like planting, you do it.'

That's not entirely fair. Who wheeled four barrows of horse manure on a hot summer

'We do a lot of sighing deeply down our way'

day last year from our neighbour's paddock?'

The thing is, this is just a version of a conversation we have annually at about this time of year.

For everybody else, spring is a time of joy. *In the Spring, a fuller crimson comes upon the robin's breast*, said the poet Tennyson (don't be too impressed – I had to look it up).

In the Spring, a livelier iris changes on the burnish'd dove; In the Spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.

By contrast, Mr Dear's fancy in the spring turns gloomily to thoughts of compost heaps, lawn fertilisers, weeding, mulching and the pricking-out of half-hardy annuals.

'Cheer up, Eeyore,' I said. 'Worse things happen at sea.'

'Name one,' he said gloomily, and returned to his work.

When I got back to the kitchen there was a WhatsApp message waiting from my sister.

You might remember from last week that she has started volunteering at our charity shop, and has taken an instant dislike to our manager, Mrs Protheroe.

She was particularly outraged, on my behalf, when Mrs P suggested I was old and unglamorous. Which is harsh, but probably accurate.

Come over for tea, read Deb's message. Have worked out a foolproof way of getting rid of Mrs P. Are you in?

”

Rosie XX

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