

THE MAGAZINE DEVOTED TO MENTAL HEALTH

JULY 2021

# happiful

## A sensual awakening

Tune-in to your wellbeing in a whole new way

## The road to relaxation

Set a course for some quality R&R



## A change is gonna come

Stand up & make your voice heard

## Skin deep

Every scar tells a story.  
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**PLUS**  
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# A wrinkle in time

When you look in the mirror, what do you see? It's easy to nitpick at every so-called imperfection, to focus on aesthetics so much that we miss the bigger picture.

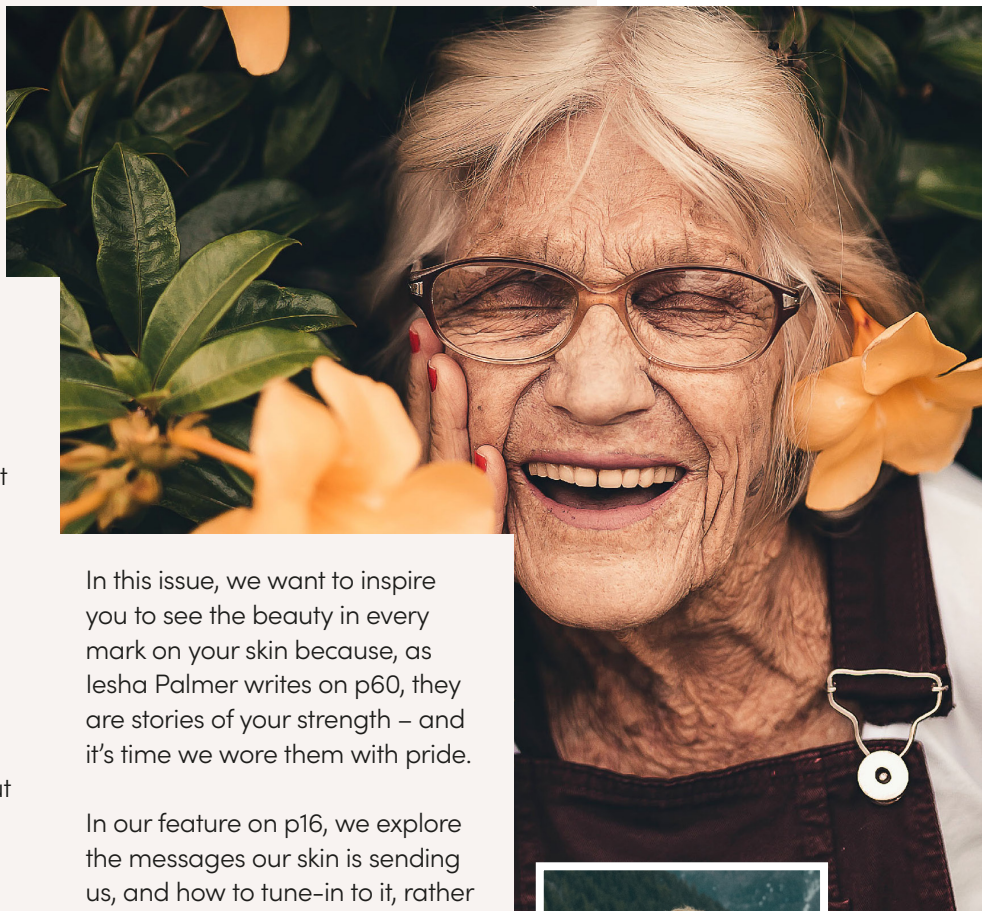
I have a big scar on my left knee from falling over on gravel as a kid. When I look at it, I can vividly remember how much it hurt – but I also recall my mum holding my hand, helping me to be brave.

I have stretch marks and cellulite, and in my reflection these things taunt me. But when I think back to holidays, with the waves meeting me as I ran across the sand to the sea, those marks didn't really *make* a mark.

Memories aren't tinged with shame or self-criticism, they're simply about the joy of the sand between my toes and the sun on my skin. In the moment, it doesn't matter at all.

As Megan Jayne Crabbe wrote in her book, *Body Positive Power*: "We can't see the beauty in everything that we are, because we've been taught to first see everything that we're not." And it's a hard cycle to break free from.

But the time has come for us to stop wishing ourselves smaller, less noticeable, less unique.



In this issue, we want to inspire you to see the beauty in every mark on your skin because, as Ilesha Palmer writes on p60, they are stories of your strength – and it's time we wore them with pride.

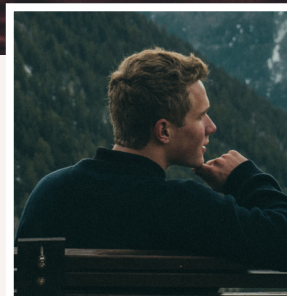
In our feature on p16, we explore the messages our skin is sending us, and how to tune-in to it, rather than fear it. Plus our feature on p45 is a great springboard for your own self-acceptance journey.

We don't need to fall in self-love, we can rise in it. Allow it to envelop us, like a hug from a friend in the moments where we feel most vulnerable and exposed, to act as a shield against the sometimes harsh wider world.

The story of our lives is etched on our skin, and it's time we reclaimed the narrative.

I hope this issue helps you on your way to writing the self-love story you deserve.

REBECCA THAIR | EDITOR



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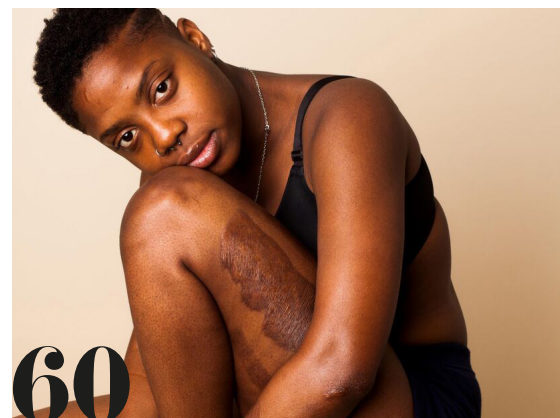
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## Expert review

Every issue of Happiful is reviewed by an accredited counsellor, to ensure we deliver the highest quality content while handling topics sensitively.

*The feeling of being 'comfortable in your own skin' is something that everyone strives for – although it isn't always something that is present. There can be many emotional challenges presented when our external appearances do not meet our personal expectations. In some cases, our personal expectations may be determined by what other people think, and this can be detrimental to our wellbeing. Head over to p16 to check out how you can work through these feelings. It's something we all inevitably experience, and is part of being human, but it can be managed, and you can cultivate a love of self.*



**RAV SEKHON**

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Rav is a counsellor and psychotherapist with more than 10 years' experience.





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Meet the team of experts providing information, guidance, and insight throughout this issue



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# Find help

## CRISIS SUPPORT

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Call Samaritans on **116 123** or email them at [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

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### Mind

Mind offers advice Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, except bank holidays: **0300 123 3393**. Or email: [info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk)

### Switchboard

Switchboard is a line for LGBT+ support. Open from 10am–10pm: **0300 330 0630**. You can email: [chris@switchboard.lgbt](mailto:chris@switchboard.lgbt)

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### DISABILITY INFORMATION AND COMMUNITY

Find practical advice and emotional support by visiting [scope.org.uk](http://scope.org.uk)

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### CONNECT WITH A COUNSELLOR

Learn more about counselling and connect with a professional using [counselling-directory.org.uk](http://counselling-directory.org.uk)

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### SUPPORT FOR EATING DISORDERS

Find information and support for those with eating disorders and their loved ones at [beateatingdisorders.org.uk](http://beateatingdisorders.org.uk)



Cover artwork  
by Charlotte Reynold

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# happiful

One undeniable truth is that finding the right help for each individual is a journey – what works for one of us will be different for someone else. But don't feel disheartened if you haven't found your path yet. Our Happiful family can help you on your way. Bringing together various arms of support, each of our sister sites focuses on a different method of nourishing your wellbeing – from counselling, to hypnotherapy, nutrition, coaching, and holistic therapy. Download our free Happiful app for more.

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ART

## Artists' quilts patch together Covid experiences

We're 'all in the same storm': that's been a common sentiment over the past year, and it's the title of an art exhibition showcasing a series of patchwork images that each capture a different pandemic experience, stitched together into one collective reflection.

The artwork, which was a collaboration between the De La Warr Pavilion, in East Sussex, and the local Refugee Buddy Project, was inspired by a group of women who, in Pinochet-era Chile, denounced the violence by creating similar images out of scrap material.

In this case, the patchwork images capture the feelings that came with lockdown, tapping into loneliness, fear, gratitude, and hope. In total, the campaign received 95 patchwork squares from people around the country.

Once sewn together, the patches formed four large quilts, which are now on display – demonstrating “a people’s history of a pandemic that sits within the long tradition of hand-stitching as a method of narrating individual and collective life under oppressive, unsettling circumstances”.

From a patch that marks the Black Lives Matter movement, to another that mourns the loss of college life, the exhibition reflects the highs and lows of the past year, demonstrating how, despite our differences, we’ve been through it together.

*‘All in the Same Storm: Pandemic Patchwork Stories’ runs until 5 September. Visit [dlwp.com](http://dlwp.com) for more information.*

*Writing | Kathryn Wheeler*

# The Uplift



## COMMUNITY

# Stop Asian Hate campaign launches in the UK

In the first quarter of 2020, Metropolitan Police figures showed that reported hate crimes towards the East and South-East Asian (ESEA) community rose by a staggering 146%. In a bid to support this community during a difficult time, fundraising platform GoFundMe has launched a new initiative: Stop Asian Hate.

Originally started in the US, the campaign has made its way to UK shores amid these worrying statistics. Showing their support are a number of high-profile

people and organisations, including actress Gemma Chan, model and TV presenter Alexa Chung, MP Sarah Owen, and charity Black Minds Matter.

Pulling together a community fund and hub of resources, GoFundMe has created a go-to location for people who want to support the campaign.

“By creating a centralised place where people can find individual fundraisers or donate to GoFundMe’s ESEA Community Fund, we’re able to provide a

rallying point for those who want to stand up, show their support, and help eliminate anti-Asian racism in our society,” a GoFundMe spokesperson tells us.

The money raised will be sent to organisations working with ESEA communities across the UK. So far, the US campaign has raised \$6 million, and there are high hopes that we will match that on this side of the pond.

*To learn more and donate, visit [gofundme.com/esea](https://gofundme.com/esea)*

*Writing | Kat Nicholls*

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## ANIMALS

# Walkies and wellbeing for new police therapy dog

West Midlands Police have welcomed their newest recruit – a four-legged fluff ball with a very important job: supporting the wellbeing of local communities. Truffles the Maltipoo pup, will be heading out on community assignments with her handler, who is a trained mental health first aider and peer support officer. The initiative, financed using £3,000 seized from criminals, will see Truffles visiting schools and local groups to help the police improve connections, and establish trust, with the community and young people.

Her recruitment supports important social education within the community across a wide range of issues, including anti-social behaviour, animal mistreatment, and emotional distress and abuse.

“As we’ve seen in the current climate, dogs are an amazing emotional support system,” said Dudley Police Commander, Chief Superintendent Kim Madill. “They have a calming influence, and people are noticeably more relaxed and comfortable in their presence.”

It’s hoped she will encourage and empower children and



young people to break down barriers, and share their worries about challenging or traumatic situations.

*Writing | Katie Hoare*









## ENVIRONMENT

# Forest 'the size of France' regrows

In great news for our planet, a new study from the World Wildlife Fund has discovered that a forest the size of France has regrown naturally across the world in the past 20 years. This restored forest measures 58.9 million hectares, equates to 22.25 billion trees, and is estimated to have the potential to absorb 5.9 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide – the equivalent of the annual emissions of the USA.

The WWF used satellite data in order to build a map of the regenerated forest. As the charity defines it, forest regeneration involves restoring woodlands through little-to-no intervention – for example, doing nothing at all, protecting areas from being disturbed, or removing invasive plants – and this natural route is thought to be better for biodiversity than actively planted forests.

However, while this news shows the potential for regrowth, overall global forests are in decline. And as the report from the WWF explores, natural regeneration must come alongside a decrease in deforestation.

While there is more work to be done (learn how you can contribute to positive change on p49), it's worth pausing to acknowledge the potential for change that continues to sprout around us, even through challenging times.

*Writing | Kathryn Wheeler*



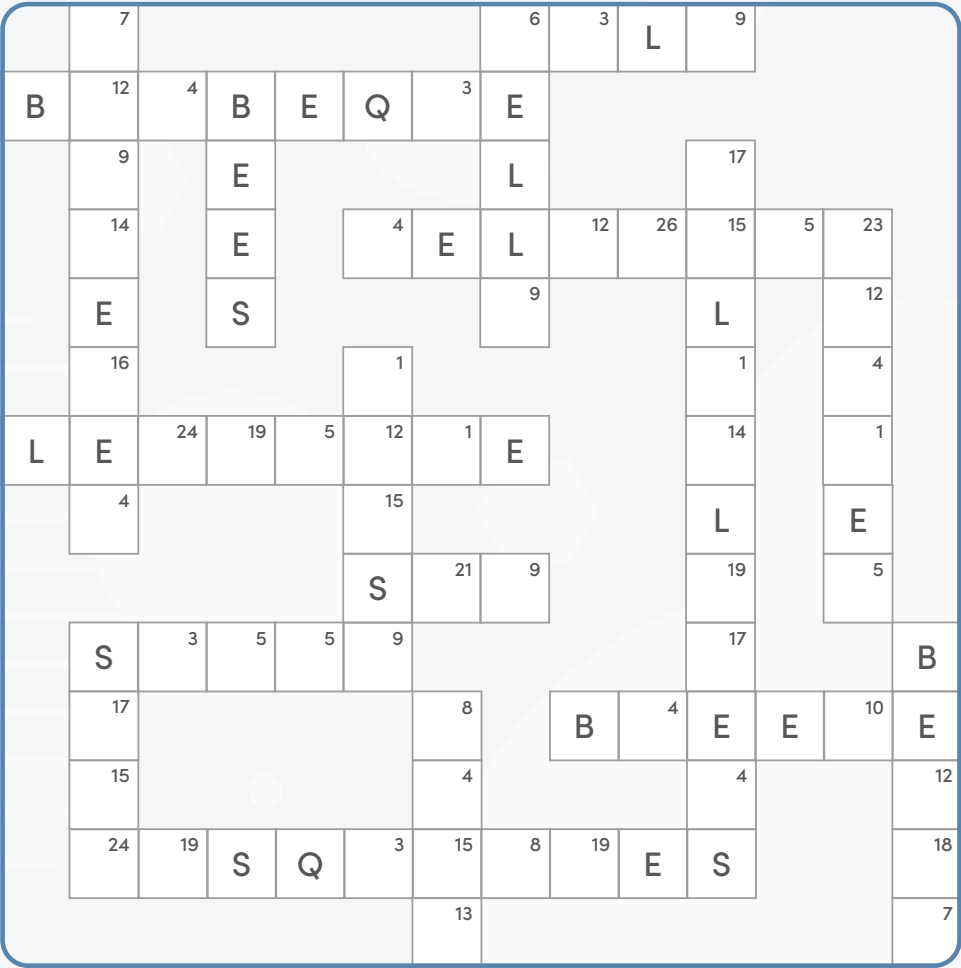
# Take 5

It's time to put your puzzling prowess to the test!

## Codebreaker

Logic is the name of the game here. It's a crossword with no clues – instead you need to methodically decipher the words, by uncovering one letter at a time. Every letter of the alphabet is used at least once, and is represented by a number on the grid. Good luck!

How did you do? Search 'freebies' at [shop.happiful.com](http://shop.happiful.com) to find the answers, and more!



**HINT:** we're in the summer spirit

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# The wellbeing wrap



Monzo Bank is offering **employees up to 10 days' paid leave after pregnancy loss for either partner**



In May, aged 80, Sir Tom Jones became the oldest male artist to get a **UK number one album**



Krispy Kreme are **giving away one million doughnuts** to celebrate the end of lockdown



**Bath is named the most scenic place in the UK**, as voted by travel photographers



A survey airing our dirty laundry, literally, revealed **a third of Brits only wash their sheets once a year**

## Breaking yawn

Not only are they contagious, but new research has revealed something surprising about yawns! The study found 'robust correlations' between brain size and yawn length – something to brag about next time you're tired perhaps?



After years of campaigning, the Animal Welfare Bill becomes law this summer, giving courts powers to impose tougher punishments, including up to five years in prison, on animal abusers. The previous maximum sentence was just six months!

## That's life... (unfortunately)

Is there a task or chore that really irks you? Well, you might not be alone, as a nationwide study by cybersecurity company Kaspersky has investigated what Brits consider to be the most irritating things in life. Tied for first place were both scrubbing the bath, and waiting in a call centre queue. So, hopefully those aren't on your to-do list today!

## Something to be proud of

Pride of Britain award-winner, six-year-old Tony Huggell, whose legs were amputated following abuse by his biological parents as a baby, has undertaken a new charity challenge inspired by Captain Tom's 101st birthday initiative, after raising £1.5 million last year. Tony, who has prosthetics, walked without crutches for the first time, taking 500 steps over four days and raising a further £70,000.



A 63-year-old Army veteran has single-handedly restored more than 80 graves of British servicemen across the South East of England. Steve Davies, from Kent, was inspired to start his restoration project after discovering an overgrown grave from the First World War. He's since gone on to tend to other graves, to ensure these soldiers aren't forgotten.

## Take a chance?

A life-sized Monopoly game is coming to London this summer! Players can join in the 'participatory gameplay' attraction in the West End, where you are led around a board featuring a mix of escape rooms and chance cards – just try not to 'go straight to jail'!

## Karma chameleon?

Ever notice that when one person checks their phone, suddenly half of the people you're with do too? Well, it's called the 'chameleon effect', and scientists believe it's evolved to our smartphone use, somewhat ironically, from the initial practise of assisting with group bonding. The study carried out by researchers from the University of Pisa, Italy, found that about 50% of people would subconsciously replicate the act of touching or looking at their phone within 30 seconds of someone else doing so.



**Zero deaths attributed to Covid-19 were reported in England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland on 10 May – the first time since July 2020.**

## Good deeds for those in need


Mohammad Javed Khan, of Bhopal in India, has transformed his tuk-tuk into a makeshift ambulance in order to help Covid patients get to hospital for free. He's even fitted an oxygen tank inside for the most severe patients, and speaking to the press, Javed said: "It's not as spacious as an ambulance, but it can surely save lives."

# What is a vulnerability hangover?

We're told getting things off our chest will make us feel better in the long run, but what should we do if we initially feel worse?

Writing | Kathryn Wheeler

Illustrating | Rosan Magar



Opening up and reaching out for support is a hugely important part of working through mental health problems – both big and small. And it can often bring a lot of relief as we lighten our mental load, and begin to see the steps in front of us as we navigate a way forward. But there are times when opening up can seem extremely exposing, leaving us feeling drained, embarrassed, and even regretful.

This feeling following a deep conversation, perhaps with a close friend, a manager, or even a counsellor, is called a 'vulnerability hangover'. At best, it's another hurdle to jump over as we work on our wellbeing,

but at its worse, it's a barrier to opening up again.

Psychotherapist Marteka

Swaby explains: "Vulnerability hangovers are caused by our fears and uncertainties of being exposed. If you are going over and over in your head, asking yourself: 'Why did I share that?' You are probably experiencing a vulnerability hangover, which could last a few hours, or even up to several days, depending on the way that you perceive the risk that you have taken."

It could be a toe-curling feeling of believing you've said 'too much', or a fear of what your conversation partner might be thinking, or the judgements they may make. You may believe that you took a risk in opening up, and while the payoff could be accessing support and a more meaningful relationship, there may still be a part of you that is worried about how this will all play out.





“I have been in many situations where taking a risk starts off exhilarating, to then come crashing down to a devastating low,” Marteka reflects. “Taking an emotional risk will often be uncomfortable, especially in relationships where you want to make a good impression, or fit in and be accepted.”



## We don't need to combat vulnerability, but accept it with boldness and grace

Marteka points to the example of speaking up at work, perhaps letting your manager know that you're struggling with your workload, or on dates with a new partner who you're just getting to know. In these situations, there are a number of dynamics at play as you navigate social etiquette, while still wanting to be true to yourself.

On the other hand, counselling offers a space to discuss what's on your mind, without balancing others' reactions – and in this unique environment, you'll probably speak about things you've never opened up about before. While it's the appropriate place to do so, a sudden flush of vulnerability can still be unsettling, to begin with.


“Brené Brown is my go-to person on vulnerability,” says Mareka, considering the benefits of pushing past these feelings, whatever the situation. “She says: ‘Vulnerability is our most accurate measure of courage.’”

It's a quote that will resonate with many, and for those grappling with vulnerability hangovers, Mareka has the following tips:

**Complete a risk analysis:** Before being vulnerable with someone, perhaps you need to complete an internal risk assessment, weighing up the pros and cons. It is often worth tolerating the vulnerability hangover if the pros far outweigh the cons. The payoff will be worth it!

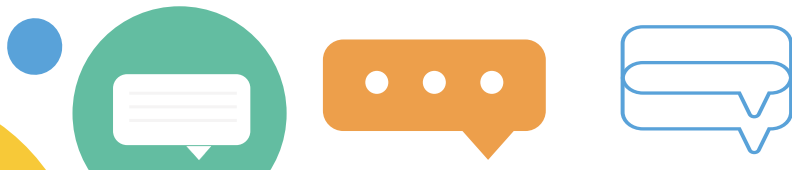
**Do it in a safe space:** If you feel a sense of judgement or dismissal from the person you're being vulnerable with, consider whether they are the right person to speak to, and if you have any alternatives. We all experience rejection, failure, and other shameful feelings, that make us feel vulnerable. We are not alone.

**Keep the bigger picture in mind:** Vulnerability is a powerful tool to build trust. We don't need to combat vulnerability, but accept it with boldness and grace. It is in this place that we have a greater sense of peace and connection.

Beyond the feelings of doubt, fear, and embarrassment, being true to ourselves and valuing our needs is a vital part of the steps we take towards a better sense of wellbeing. So, if vulnerability hangovers have stopped you in your tracks before, try to acknowledge them as a normal stage in your journey, and keep your focus on the horizon – and the empowering, productive, supportive relationships that await you when you take that monumental first leap of faith. 



*Marteka Swaby is a psychotherapist and founder of Benevolent Health and Mind Hub. Find more by visiting [counselling-directory.org.uk](https://counselling-directory.org.uk)*



# Written on the skin

It's time we took a fresh look at the relationship  
between our internal and external selves

Writing | Kathryn Wheeler

It's made up of more than three million cells, renews itself every 28 days, and provides us with the sense of touch that keeps us safe and brings us pleasure, and yet we often give our skin a hard time. Of course, we do so because our skin is so much more than the literal organ that covers our bodies. Our skin is what we face the world with, and the world responds accordingly. Plus, considering how we've spent most of our lives being told what it should look like, it's no wonder that the appearance of our skin is so deeply linked to our sense of self-esteem.

Shedding shame, or an idea of not being 'good enough', will never happen overnight, but wherever you are on your skin

journey – whether you're looking to embrace stretch marks, scars, skin conditions, or ageing – here, we're exploring the stories that our skin tells, and inviting you to join us in reframing your relationship with the skin that you're in.

## **A litmus paper for our mind**

A study commissioned by E45 found that a massive 81% of us have experienced a skin problem, making it a topic almost all of us can relate to. With that in mind, another study published in the *The British Journal of Dermatology* found that those with acne are 63% more likely to experience depression than those who have clear skin.

Beyond that, there's a vicious cycle going on. There's a clear

relationship between our diet and our skin – when we eat a varied and healthy diet with plenty of water, we might be able to tell by the way that our skin responds – but this is also the case for our mental health.

From deep below the surface, our mental state shows itself on our skin. Periods of high stress and low mood can make pre-existing conditions worse, or we may find that we break out in certain areas of our body which, in turn, can worsen a low mood and add to our mental load.

Although difficult to break free from, there is a chance here to reframe our thinking. Sometimes, periods of poor mental health can sneak up on us without us realising. And it's possible that feelings of stress,



## Touch points

To build a better relationship with your skin, life coach Kanika Tandon suggests tuning-in to your sense of touch with the following exercises:

- Splash water on your face, let it sink in, and allow time to really tune-in to the sensation.
- Turn the tap on and feel the running water over your hands.
- Run your fingers over your face, your lips, your eyelids, the back of your neck, and the soles of your feet, and just enjoy the sensations on your skin.
- Walk barefoot where you can.
- Keep a stone or pebble near you, and occasionally grasp it. Feel the cold body and texture in your palm as you exhale and release tension.

anxiety, or low mood will show themselves to you on your skin before you fully realise what's going on. Like a litmus paper for your mind, your skin may be laying out what's going on within, on the surface. For Laura Mathias, this is something she first realised when she was 13 years old. >>>







### Under the skin

Laura has had eczema for as long as she can remember, but it got worse in secondary school when her hair began to fall out as she developed a trio of autoimmune conditions: asthma, eczema, and alopecia.

“When I was diagnosed with alopecia at 13, my GP asked if there was anything happening in my life that was particularly stressful. My mum sat there looking defeated, and explained that she and my dad were going through a difficult separation,” Laura explains.

“To be honest, it was all too much for me to handle at that age, and I completely withdrew. I even stopped going to school for months. I was covered in eczema, counting the hairs I lost every day, and listening to the shouting matches between my parents. It was hell.”

Now in her 30s, to this day Laura can trace how stress shows itself on her skin.

“Sometimes it manifests immediately. For example,

the day after I finished my final exams at university, I came out in hives all over my body. I was so worried that I went to the emergency room,” she explains. “I’d never seen a reaction quite like this on my body before. The fact that my skin can still surprise me this way is a source of anxiety – I wonder what in my physical or psychological environment might set it off next.”

### The skin you’re in

Those with skin conditions similar to Laura’s may be able to relate to the waves of anxiety that came with a fear of how others would perceive her skin. This may also be the case for those with other conditions, as well as moles, stretch marks, scars, or burns, as life coach Kanika Tandon explains.

“If you take a look from a beginner’s mind, and appreciate the marvel that your skin is, you *should* feel in awe of how beautifully the skin communicates with you non-verbally (think pain and pleasure).

“Yet our focus somehow remains concentrated on just the *look* of skin, and often we begin to place our self-worth and self-image on this,” Kanika says. “While this may be an external sign of something that might need attention, we internalise the appearance, scaring our sense of self and our confidence. That is why a small thing such as a pimple becomes a big issue, and can potentially ruin our day. We begin to view a part of us as the whole of us.”

As Kanika sees it, building a better relationship with any part of our body begins with a wider sense of self-love, or self-acceptance. To do this, Kanika suggests starting with shifting your understanding of your skin from the ‘visual’ to ‘touch’, really taking the time to acknowledge what it does for us.

“Our relationship with any part of our body will be healthy if we have a healthy relationship with our sense of self,” she says. “And the element of accepting yourself is often overlooked.”





Laura shares her journey on  
Instagram: @RelightAlopecia

### Back to basics

It's an attitude that has really benefited Laura, who now actively tries to garner a sense of gratitude towards her body, rather than judging or punishing it.

"I make sure that, even during a skin flare when I feel most defeated and hateful of my body, that I take time to thank it for what it does for me," she explains.

"For years, I would waste time wishing to be like other women. I won't lie, I still think life would be 'easier' that way, but then I wouldn't be me.

"By accepting my skin, rather than hiding it, even when it's expressing my mental exhaustion in this most visceral and visible way, I am making my mind stronger. Maybe not in the short-term, when the anxiety of people's judgement is at the forefront of my mind, but in the gradual acceptance that my body is my business."

### In your own skin

Our skin tells our story. It could be a flare up of acne when we need a break, it could be stretch marks from where our bodies have

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*I make sure that, even during a skin flare when I feel most defeated and hateful of my body, that I take time to thank my body for what it does for me*

evolved, signs of aging from a life lived to its fullest, or scars from things that we overcame.

We can embrace and celebrate them, or we can learn to live quietly alongside them. And when we choose to tune-in to what skin can tell us, and harness a sense of gratitude, we take back control from the forces that would have us wallowing against unreachable standards.

As Laura says: "If people can see my stress written on my skin, it's my story and I will share it how I want to." That's a message we all should let sink in. **■**



Kanika Tandon is a transformational coach and a cognitive hypnotherapist who assists career-oriented women achieve work-life balance, and find fulfilment in their professional and personal lives. Connect with her using [lifecoach-directory.org.uk](https://lifecoach-directory.org.uk)

# How to talk to children about disability

From answering 'awkward' questions to encouraging curiosity and kindness, we explore how to approach conversations with children

Writing | Chloe Tear Illustrating | Rosan Magar



**T**here are 14 million disabled people in the UK, yet talking about disability is still seen as a taboo topic. It can feel awkward for everyone involved, but it doesn't have to be that way.

As a disabled woman, I've experienced numerous occasions where children have asked me about my condition. Having had younger siblings myself, I really encourage their inquisitive side and believe that ignoring the

topic actually does disability a disservice.

For example, I was waiting for a taxi from my local leisure centre when I noticed a little boy kept looking at me. At the time, I was using my wheelchair and





**People are often worried about saying the wrong thing, yet saying nothing at all can do more damage**

assumed that was why he was looking. After a few minutes, I overheard his mother talking about wheelchairs and then her son appeared by my side, saying: “Can I ask you a question?” I nodded. He responded, “How quick can your wheels go?”

We ended up talking about how fast I could go, and he reckoned my ‘magic wheels’ were as fast as a rocket! His mother thanked me for taking the time to talk with her son, and I thanked her because she enabled her son to have a conversation about disability that was age appropriate. I was really pleased she didn’t shut down his question, or pull him away.

People are often worried about saying the wrong thing, yet saying nothing at all can do more damage when it comes to explaining disability to children. Here are some tips for having those conversations:

### **ACKNOWLEDGE DISABILITY**

I’m not the elephant in the room. You can say the word ‘disabled’. If it’s something your child has not seen before, it’s natural for

them to have questions. Ignoring the topic can lead to fear of disability, and lack of education and awareness are the biggest contributors to discrimination.

### **NORMALISE DISABILITY**

Find TV shows or books with disabled characters. This helps to remove the stigma, and shows that it’s a normal part of society. There are many great books for kids that feature a disabled character, including: *Celine’s New Splints*, *Fun in the Sun*, *Haylee’s Friends*, *Jacob’s Traffic Jam*, and *My Brother is an Astronaut*. These books are a great way to open up the conversation about disability in a way that children can understand.

### **YOUR ACTIONS SHAPE THEIR VIEWS**

There have been countless times where a child has been told off for staring at me, or dragged out of the way when I’ve been in their path. I appreciate the good intentions, but what does that teach them? Should they keep away from disabled people? Are we taboo? Taking the time to

Disability equality charity Scope has a campaign called ‘End The Awkward’, which uses humour to highlight how uncomfortable people can be around disability. The campaign offers suggestions on how to deal with uncomfortable feelings, and has tips on appropriate use of language. You can find out more by visiting [scope.org.uk/campaigns/end-the-awkward](https://scope.org.uk/campaigns/end-the-awkward)

explain why they might need to move, or why that man has one arm, will help children to know we’re not to be feared.

### **BEING DISABLED IS NOT A BAD THING**

Being disabled doesn’t mean someone is incapable. We’re disabled by society and the barriers put in our way. If you can’t walk but need to enter a building, stairs are going to disable you. If there was a lift, you’d be able to access the building. This is known as the social model of disability. With the right support, disabled people can still live a normal life, and this is an important sentiment to explore with kids. If the next generation is knowledgeable about disability, disabled children can grow up in a truly inclusive society.

*Chloe Tear is an award-winning disability freelance writer and content designer for Scope. She shares her experiences of cerebral palsy and being blind to raise awareness and challenge public perceptions. For more information on Scope, please visit [scope.org.uk](https://scope.org.uk)*

# Change negative self-talk

When your inner critic puts you down, try to recognise it and flip the statement

Everyone hates me.

I can't control what others think, but I know there are people who care deeply about me.

Nothing good ever happens to me.

I will get through this – it won't last for ever.

I'm such an idiot.

I made a mistake, but it's not the end of the world.

I'm useless.

This may not be my strong point, but I have many skills.

This is difficult, but I can keep trying.

I can't do this. I give up.

**Negative thoughts:**

**Change to:**

This is impossible.

I'm facing a challenge, and I will try my best – that's what matters.

I'm worthless.

I'm struggling right now, but I am still worthy of love and compassion.

## Stop the cycle:

1. Pay attention to how you speak to yourself. Is it how you would treat a friend?
2. Challenge the negative self-talk when it arises. What evidence says that this thought is true? Know you don't have to agree or even listen to this voice.
3. Try to replace these negative thoughts with a more useful phrase.





# HAPPY NOT PERFECT

**Poppy Jamie** has lived experience of the damage that striving for perfection can do to our wellbeing. Now, she's taking that knowledge, as well as a mountain of professional know-how on self-acceptance, and sharing it so we can all embrace our wildest, most imperfect selves

Writing | **Lucy Donoghue**

**T**here are more than a few words I'd love to remove from our daily vocabulary. The first is 'should' – an implicitly judgmental and directional word. The second is 'perfect'; it's uncompromising and leaves no room for error, or evolving. The idea of perfection, in itself, is far from perfect.

Poppy Jamie knows just how problematic this concept is. In her mid-20s, her quest for perfection saw her bed bound, chronically exhausted, and with so little energy that she could barely reply to a text.

From this rock bottom, the only way was up. Poppy began to learn about her own mental health, and incorporate new practices into her life – including breathwork, which she reveals was transformational for her.

After speaking with numerous world-renowned mental health practitioners, and developing her own self-acceptance toolkit, Poppy decided that it was time to bring all the knowledge and self-led help she'd discovered together, in order to help others, too. And so, Happy Not Perfect was born.

Here, the 'Not Perfect' podcast host, founder of the Happy Not Perfect app, and now book of the same name, shares how to challenge limiting beliefs, embrace curiosity, and discover what makes you wildly happy:

## **'Perfect' is a damaging concept**

For me, it was quite life-changing when I really started to think about the beliefs I took on from a really young age, and how they instructed my behaviour and decision-making before I started to question them. When I was little, I developed the belief that I wasn't enough. >>>

Listen to Poppy Jamie's full interview  
on our podcast 'I am. I have'.

To become good enough I thought I had to work really hard.

I became a workaholic at the age of 13, and that morphed into a sense of perfectionism. If I could be perfect then I'd be OK. I'd be enough then.

That way of working, throughout my teens and 20s, meant that I ended up with chronic burnout and anxiety, because life isn't perfect and, of course, as human beings, we're all imperfect, too.

### **Perfection is unattainable**

Perfection is so transient – even if you've done something really well, another challenge appears and you might not do as well. Perfectionism is a completely unsustainable and deeply self-critical way of living life.

### **Self-acceptance is the key**

When I was 25, I woke up in the middle of the night with the words 'happy not perfect' in my mind. I didn't know why these words had come to me, but I knew it was a message, and it felt like an antidote to a way of being that I'd allowed to consume me. From that moment on, I wanted to know what happiness meant, and understand the self-acceptance that I was so far from.

I've since concluded that happiness *is* self-acceptance. Accepting who we are, wherever we are on the path, even when



Photography | Adam Brazier



life isn't anywhere near together, and we've got no idea what our next step is. If we just have self-acceptance, that will bring happiness.

### When you know better, you can do better

They say that it takes a village to raise a child, but I genuinely believe it takes a village to manage a mind! What I mean by that is turning to books, podcasts, reading, or hearing about lots of different perspectives on the mind.

For me, what created change was learning about my mental health. I do think learning is the route to all change, like that famous Maya Angelou quote: "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

### Embrace curiosity

We all have the power to be curious, and it can really help when you're stuck. Ask better questions of yourself. Before you jump to a negative conclusion about a situation, ask yourself: "Is this true?"

Byron Katie has been a huge inspiration and change agent for me. Her method is called 'The Work', and it includes four brilliant questions: Is this true? Can you absolutely know it's true? How do you react, what

happens, when you believe that thought? Who would you be without that thought?

This helps us to realise that the root of suffering is often *in* our thoughts. We're so convinced by our very powerful inner critic, storytelling brain, that sometimes it takes a professional, or a 'flexible friend' who can help you bend your thoughts to another viewpoint.

I believe that curiosity is the pathway to freedom, endless possibilities, growth, and a future we couldn't even dream of.

“THERE IS ONLY ONE YOU. YOU HAVE A UNIQUE WONDER THAT ONLY YOU CAN BRING TO THE WORLD

### Focus on your wildest future

I challenge you to think about a sustainable future that lights you up every single day. With my book, I'm hoping to help people understand what their wildest self wants, because we often lose sight of ourselves as the demands of life take over.

The world will try to tell us who we *should* be, but when we are our truest, wildest, most expressed self, we are our best 'us'. Unapologetically ourselves. ■

### POPPY'S THOUGHTS ON...

#### Perfection...

Doesn't exist! It's a stick we beat ourselves with, that limits us.

#### Happiness...

Is having total self-acceptance of who I am and where I am.

#### The best advice you've had...

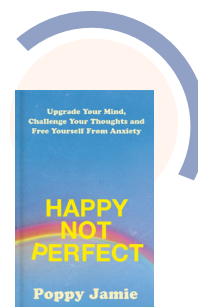
What is meant for you, won't pass by you.

#### Embracing yourself means...

Finding the joy in your imperfections.

#### If you're struggling, I'd say...

That you are more brilliant than you could ever imagine, and it's OK to forget at times, but there is only one you. You have a unique wonder that only you can bring to the world.



*'Happy Not Perfect: Upgrade Your Mind, Challenge Your Thoughts and Free Yourself From Anxiety' by Poppy Jamie is available now (Yellow Kite, £16.99).*

# Our ultimate guide to coping with overwhelm

Essential tips to help lighten the load when stress is mounting up

Writing | Kat Nicholls

A good way to think of overwhelm is like a backpack you have on while walking. Every now and then items get added to your backpack. Perhaps you're adding them yourself, or maybe other people are stopping you for a chat and adding items while they do so.

After a while, you notice the backpack is getting heavier and, soon, putting one foot in front of the other feels impossible. You need to put the backpack down and rest, but you have to keep walking. The weight is crushing and you feel paralysed, with no idea what to do.

Sound familiar? I think all of us can relate to this feeling. Various things can trigger this feeling, but often it's when lots of things build up that make you feel stressed. When we're stressed, our logical 'thinking' brain shuts down, and our primal 'animal' brain takes

over, putting us into fight, flight, or freeze mode. Because of this shift, it can be hard to make decisions and think about a plan to tackle overwhelm.

This is why, where possible, it can help to put plans in place before you reach that point where everything feels too much. One place to start is noticing what triggers overwhelm for you.

## How to recognise when overwhelm is building

Think back to the times you've felt overwhelmed recently – what do you think triggered it? Is there a particular area in your life where you experience this more – for example work, or life admin? Or is it often a collection of little things building up from all areas of your life?

Keep the bigger picture in mind when thinking about overwhelm. What's going on in the world that could be contributing to


these feelings? It could be a big project at work, political unease, the global pandemic, or family problems, just as a few examples. Even when we're not actively worrying about it, it's an underlying threat that our mind is aware of.

Try to recognise the way overwhelm feels to you, so you can spot your own red flags. Perhaps it affects your sleep, or you find you have more headaches? It might affect your thinking, leading to fast, non-stop thoughts. Try to build up your self-awareness using tools like meditation, mood tracking (note how you feel each day or use an app like Daylio), or journaling, to help you spot these warning signs that things are becoming a bit too much.

## Tackling overwhelm

When it comes to tackling overwhelm there are lots of





approaches you can take. Here I want to share some steps that can help, but it's worth experimenting to understand what's most effective for you.

- **Prioritise**

This is a great place to start. You might find it helpful to write a list of all the things you need to do (or the items in your backpack!), and decide what is essential and what's not. Something I recently did that helped was make a board in project management platform ClickUp, and allocate different priority flags to tasks so I can work through them methodically, focusing on the high priority jobs. If you need help with this in the workplace, it can be useful to chat to your manager.

- **Break tasks down into manageable chunks**

This is about making those items fit a bit better in your backpack. Sometimes we feel overwhelmed by the size of a project, and don't know where to start. By breaking it down into manageable actions, we can focus on one step at a time, and feel more present, calmer, and more capable of dealing with the task ahead.

- **Maintain your boundaries**

When we're feeling overwhelmed, our boundaries are often one of the first things to slip. We start to work longer hours to try to get everything done, or perhaps we're saying yes to people when really we need a breather and to say no – and this is adding to burgeoning overwhelm. >>>



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*If you are saying yes to other people, you are saying no to yourself. Try to listen to your body and what it really needs right now*

A couple of thoughts that can help here are:

1. If you can't complete your work in the allocated hours, something needs to change. Whether it's support with time management, delegation, or weeding out tasks that aren't absolutely necessary, it's worth speaking to your manager, and getting more ruthless with your prioritisation.
2. If you are saying yes to other people, you are saying no to yourself. And this will only make things more difficult for you in the long-run. Try to listen to your body and what it really needs right now.

• **Communicate with others**

When we're walking our path with a heavy backpack, it's easy to feel isolated. If you look up and around though, chances are you'll notice others on the path, heading in your direction. Tell other people how you're feeling, share tips, and communicate your boundaries with others.

• **Delegate and ask for help**

It's very easy to think: 'This will be easier/quicker if I just do it,' but every time we do this, we're adding another item to our backpack. Instead, pause, look around, and see if someone else can carry this item for you – or

even just help you to carry it. This may be your team at work, or family and friends at home. Asking for help feels sticky for some of us, but when we do it, the weight that gets lifted from our shoulders is incredible.

• **Make space for rest**

I know you think you have to keep walking with your backpack, but I promise you can put it down and rest. If you do this, you'll feel stronger, more resilient, and able to walk further when you get back on the path. Self-care is vital, especially when you feel like you don't have time for it. **■**



# Overwhelm helpsheet

*To help you make an action plan for the next time you're overwhelmed, our Happiful family has created an overwhelm help sheet. You can fill in the prompts, and keep it somewhere safe to refer back to when you're next feeling overwhelmed. And for more support with overwhelm, find advice on our Happiful app or visit [lifecoach-directory.org.uk](https://lifecoach-directory.org.uk)*

**These things make me feel overwhelmed...**

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**I know I am starting to feel overwhelmed when...**

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**When I start to feel overwhelmed I should...**

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**If I am feeling seriously overwhelmed I should...**

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# Reintroduce **joy** into your wardrobe



Breathe life back into your closet and express yourself in new ways, without needing to hit the shops

Writing | Kathryn Wheeler

**U**nderstandably, many of us have got ourselves into a bit of a fashion rut over the past year.

And who can blame us? With not much to do and no place to go, a 'whatever's clean' approach makes sense.

But fashion, and dressing in ways that ignites positivity and

confidence in us, can play a big part in how we feel about ourselves – and now things are finally getting back to normal, it's a tool we can begin to unearth once more. So, to help you feel your best as we take those first steps, we're sharing seven outfit prompts to help you rediscover a sense of joy

and self-expression with the clothes that are already in your wardrobe.

## **1. SOMETHING THAT REMINDS YOU OF HAPPY TIMES**

Is there a particular item that instantly transports you back to a happy memory? Perhaps an outfit you wore on a soul-warming



holiday, or a day you received good news? Put it on, and channel those positive feelings all over again.

## 2. SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU FEEL CONFIDENT

What makes you feel like you could strut down the street with your head held high? It might be something bold – an eye-catching pattern – or something that just screams ‘you’, and reflects your personality. Tap into that, and wear your confidence-boosting outfit with pride.

## 3. SOMETHING IN YOUR FAVOURITE COLOUR

Time and time again, colour psychology has found that colour can affect our mood, and you can blend that knowledge into your outfit choice to accentuate different feelings. Warm colours (like yellow, orange, and red) tend to be comforting, while blues and greens can be soothing. This is a good place to start, but the way we respond to colour is subjective – purple might put you in a good mood, while pink calms you – so pick a piece that speaks to you.

## 4. SOMETHING THAT REMINDS YOU OF SOMEONE YOU LOVE

Maybe it's something that was given to you by someone else, or handed down through the family?

It could be a style that someone you love always pulls off so effortlessly, or an item that you know would prompt a shower of compliments. Picking an outfit with these things in mind can help us to feel close to the people we love, even if we can't be together.

## 5. SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU FEEL SENSUAL

Even underneath ordinary clothes, good underwear can boost your confidence, put a spring in your step, and is a guaranteed way to help you tap into your sensuality. Beyond that, you can pick out clothes that accentuate all your favourite features, and a spritz of scent ties the whole thing together. Whether it's with the addition of a little bit of lace, or slipping into something sleek – embrace your sensual self, and watch your mood soar.

## 6. SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU FEEL NOSTALGIC

At the back of your wardrobe, is there an item that you've had forever, which you can never seem to get rid of? Perhaps you even have something from your youth that reminds you of carefree days, or from another era of your life when you had the

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*Warm colours (yellow, orange, and red) tend to be comforting, while blues and greens can be soothing*

whole world at your feet. Going back to our roots and reminiscing on our journeys can be a really soothing and insightful exercise. And, if you're lucky, you may have even unearthed something 'vintage'!

## 7. SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE

There are times for pushing the boat out and trying something new, and there are others for slipping into something that makes you feel cosy and safe. After a year out from dressing for the wider world, it can be a relief to ease yourself back in gently – prioritising what makes you feel comfortable over keeping up with the latest trends, or standing out in a crowd. Oversized sweatshirts or a trusty pair of dungarees can do the trick, but ultimately you'll be picking something that just seems to work effortlessly for you, and that makes you feel good from head to toe. ■

# How to have a more mindful period.

Whether it's mood swings, pain, or just not feeling right, many find their period uncomfortable and even start to dread it. Is it possible to turn things around, and have a more mindful, positive period?

Writing | Jenna Farmer



ramps. Mood swings. Random cravings. Spotty skin. Fatigue. These are just a few

of the symptoms that those who have periods associate with their monthly bleed. But, for some, it's more than just feeling a bit under the weather: research shows that 23% of women have taken time off work due to their period, in the last six months.

It's not just about the physical symptoms either – between 23% and 31% of us struggle with PMS (premenstrual syndrome) that is severe enough to affect our everyday lives. It's no wonder

then, that we often look at this part of our cycle with dread. But while we can't necessarily change the symptoms we have, there might be a way to change our mindset around periods, to make the experience a more mindful and positive one.

## See it as a fresh start

We often see our period as the end of our cycle, but technically it's the start of a new one. The first day of your bleed is day one of a new cycle, so just like you see 1 January as the start of a new year, see the first day of your period as a fresh start. Now could

be a good time to introduce new practices: will this be the month you take up yoga, or finally eat your five-a-day?

Remember, our perceptions around our period actually come from the society we live in. "Menstruation is just one part of the menstrual cycle led by hormones," says hypnotherapist Juliet Hollingsworth. "The mood changes are nearly always viewed negatively, as though certain times of the month should come with a warning sign to prepare others for a non-desirable exchange with the individual. This categorisation





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Being aware of your cycle allows you to live in-tune with your biology, rather than in spite of it

begins at school and continues into adulthood, as people find it acceptable to disregard others' feelings due to 'the time of the month', and those who menstruate feel they should hold back from expressing themselves, through fear of this reaction.”

### Start to track your cycle

One of the most empowering ways to get on board with your period is to simply begin tracking it properly.

“Being aware of your cycle allows you to live in tune with your biology, rather than in

spite of it. It gives you a deeper understanding of your body, and empowers you to embrace these changes, or modify your routine or behaviour to better accommodate them,” explains Dr Lynae Brayboy, chief medical officer at female health app Clue, an app which allows you to track your cycle and lots of things related to it – from the quality of your sleep to whether you're having a good hair day.

“Period tracking can also lead to positive self-development, too. One example is in the field of sport. There is data to suggest that some individuals even use cycle tracking to plan the kind of exercise that they practise,” Dr Brayboy adds. >>>



Adding some herbal tea into your morning routine could do the trick, as a study found chamomile tea helped with PMS, and green tea was found to reduce the prevalence of period pain

### Keep a period journal

An alternative to tracking your cycle via an app is to keep a period journal. While journaling is a way of logging physical symptoms, it also gives you the space to support your mental health, too.

Juliet says: “Combine cycle tracking with journaling, so your insight into yourself throughout your menstrual cycle becomes deeper, with the intention of knowing and understanding your cyclical self, fully and completely.”

Keeping a journal could allow you to record useful affirmations, reflect on your feelings, and spend a little more time on yourself during your period. We love Sisterhood: The Journal (£25, [wearethehood.com](http://wearethehood.com)) a beautifully designed menstrual



cycle guide that allows you to learn about your menstrual health, reflect and record each day of it, and gain insight around your cycle.

### Make some eco-friendly swaps

Switching to eco-friendly alternatives could be a positive change for the environment, and a more positive period. Why? As well as feeling you're making a difference, reusable period products may feel more comfortable, and there's no need to stress about carrying disposable sanitary products around in your bag or remembering to stock up.

Reusable period pants, with built in absorbent layers, can be particularly useful for those with heavy periods who may have anxiety around blood staining clothes or bed linen. For example, Modibodi ([modibodi.co.uk](http://modibodi.co.uk)) offers period pants in 'maxi' absorbency, specifically for those with very heavy periods.

Many eco-friendly period products centre around giving back, so you'll know that by using reusable products, you're supporting others, too. For reusable period pads, try Fern ([tickle-tots.com/my-fern](http://tickle-tots.com/my-fern)), a brand that uses 100% organic cotton,

and gives 2% of its turnover to create and donate reusable sets to children facing period poverty. Or Modibodi runs a 'give a pair' scheme for customers to donate a pair to those in need when they buy their own.

### Schedule in that self-care

Once you feel more in-tune with your cycle, scheduling that self-care for period week is a great feel-good strategy, and can also combat hormonal skin that some people experience.

While this is not the week to book in a brow wax (you're thought to be more sensitive to pain when on your period), it could be time to do an at-home facial. If your skin is particularly problematic at this time of the month, try Period Faace (£24, [wearefaace.com](http://wearefaace.com)) a face mask specifically designed to combat erratic skin symptoms you might experience on your period. Or Blob Box (from £19.99, [blobbox.co.uk](http://blobbox.co.uk)), a self-care period subscription which delivers period products, and self-care goodies, through your letterbox each month.

### Reach for a cuppa

A cup of tea feels as if it can solve any problem, but could it help you have a more positive period?

Adding some herbal tea into your morning routine could do the trick, as a study found chamomile tea helped with PMS, and green tea was found to reduce the prevalence of period pain. Try a specific period blend, such as Over The Moon Menstruation Tea (£6, [hotteamama.com](http://hotteamama.com)), for maximum impact.

While getting your period is unlikely to be your favourite time of the month, we hope these tips have offered some inspiration for embracing the changes that come with it, working with your body, and having an overall more positive experience. **IN**

*Jenna Farmer is a freelance journalist who specialises in writing about gut health. She has Crohn's disease, and blogs about her journey to improve gut health at [abalancedbelly.co.uk](http://abalancedbelly.co.uk)*



*Juliet is a therapist who works in a humanistic way using hypnosis, mindfulness, transpersonal psychology, and psychotherapy to help people form a complete understanding of themselves. Find Juliet and more professional support on our **Happiful app**.*

# Acts of virtual kindness

Simple ways you can spread the love online

## Pay someone a compliment with a kind comment.

Send a thoughtful text to someone who's struggling, such as: "I know you're having a hard time at the moment, but I want you to know you're amazing. I'm so proud to call you a friend."



## Tag a friend in an inspiring post you think they need to hear.



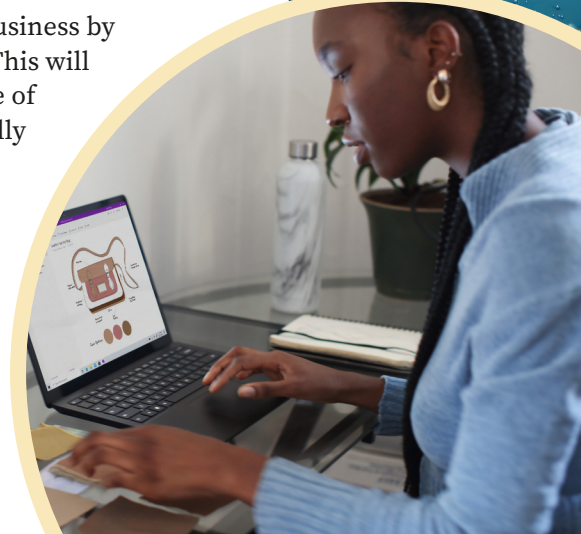
## Donate to a meaningful cause.

Use a search engine that gives back. Ecosia uses renewable energy to power its searches, and its profits to plant trees, while Lilo gives you 'water droplets' for each search, which you can donate to charities of your choice as real money.



Have a watch-party where you view the same show or film as a friend in unison. You can react in real-time, have fun and chat, letting them know you're there for them.

Support a small business by leaving a review. This will only take a minute of your time, but really can make such a difference – sites like Etsy often send prompts following a purchase to remind you.





# From a waking nightmare to living the dream

Anxiety and loneliness left Ian close to breaking. Then redundancy gave him the opportunity to head in a new direction – becoming a passionate champion for mental health first aid training

Writing | **Ian Hurst**

It was 2017 and I was on the plane home, heading back to my wife and two kids following a client meeting. It wasn't particularly stressful, just another work trip. But for some reason, this was where it started to unravel. Out of nowhere, I just broke down and started to cry. Everyone around me was like: "Woah." The poor woman I was with didn't have a clue what to do. She just said: "Chin up, mate."

Looking back now, of course, I know what was happening to me. I left college in 2001 and straight away started a job in insurance. I wasn't particularly interested in it, but it was a job, and I was making money. I worked my way up, and for nearly 20 years, I was a typical corporate employee.

Every day, I would travel into London from Fareham, in Hampshire, to look after the global insurance for high profile corporate clients like Porsche, Bentley, and Rolls-Royce. Insurance and corporate life were still not things I was passionate about, but the salary was good, I was able to provide for my family. From the outside,

I had everything I could ever want – my own home, nice holidays, meals out, and so on. Everyone around me assumed that life was fine and dandy.

Underneath the façade, the job was getting to me. I knew I wasn't happy, but I felt like there was no one I could turn to. I had two children who depended on me, and I just thought I needed to get through this and crack on.

Our mental health and feelings weren't things we talked about, especially in the City, where it can be seen as a sign of weakness. It's such a boys' club – and the work hard, play hard mentality was what drove me to my poor mental health.

After my breakdown on the plane, I realised I couldn't just 'chin up' anymore. I had already started to develop social anxiety, and being around groups of people really made me feel uncomfortable. When I tried to explain this to my colleagues, they were like: "Nah, not you mate, you're the life and soul of the party." I think it was the unacceptance by the people around me that led me to internalise it. >>>



*Ian had become detached from those around him*



Quite quickly, I became detached from myself and everyone around me. I was constantly tired, and emotionally drained, and suffering from profound loneliness. I just wasn't myself anymore, and couldn't do anything to change what was happening to me.

Luckily, around the same time in 2017, my employers were in the early stages of setting up mental health first aid training. Still quite a new concept in the workplace, it trains employees to recognise the signs of poor mental health, and treats mental health first aid as importantly as physical health first aid – although currently only 13% of managers in the UK have attended specialist training that focuses on mental health.

My wellbeing department asked if this was something I'd like to get involved with, and I was totally struck by how effective it was – I could see so much of myself in what I learnt. It was brilliant, and it literally changed my life. I found something new that I was completely passionate about, I loved working with people, and helping them to identify signs of poor mental health, and breaking down the stigmas surrounding it.

However, I still held a large amount of responsibility in my job, owning many client

relationships, and during this time I continued to experience mental ill-health. Half of my time at work I was really enthusiastic, almost finding a form of therapy in my new purpose, and the other half I would be uninterested and continue to feel isolated.

“

**Our mental health and feelings weren't things we talked about, especially in the City, where it can be seen as a sign of weakness**

In 2018, my company announced that it would be making redundancies, providing the catalyst for me to reconsider my career options, and take a completely different path – founding We are Hummingbird Health.





Left: Ian with his family



It was a huge leap of faith, and thankfully, with the support of my wife and children, I'm able to live my dream of helping others by delivering mental health first aid, and suicide prevention and intervention training.

In addition to delivering mental health first aid training, as part of We are Hummingbird, we break down the stigma of mental health through music, and I've worked with some great people around the world – musicians, DJs, and actors. I have also partnered in another mental health venture, Believe Tuesdays, and have recorded a six-part video series on mental health called *A Mental Session*.

“ I loved working with people, and helping them to identify signs of poor mental health, and breaking down the stigmas surrounding it

I'm so grateful to have experienced what I have. It's taught me so much about myself, and now I can use my life-changing experience to provide expert advice and training to businesses – how to spot when employees or colleagues might be experiencing poor mental health, and the simple, straightforward steps that can be taken to help them. ■

## OUR EXPERT SAYS

Ian created a career in the corporate world that appeared to deliver it all, yet in reality he was maintaining a façade. When he became unable to bottle up his feelings any longer, he felt isolated and withdrew from others. The key turning point came with the mental health first aid training offered to Ian at work. He felt more able to cope, yet still struggled with direction, until redundancy

offered the opportunity to change course with his career. He followed his passion to help others with mental health problems in the workplace, emphasising how important it is to both ask for and offer support to our colleagues.

Graeme Orr | MBACP (Accred) counsellor





# What to expect from **cognitive behavioural therapy** for anxiety

Reaching out for help can be daunting, and a fear of the unknown can hold us back. So we're here to make that next step less scary, as we share what *really* goes on in therapy

Writing | Katie Bishop

Illustrating | Rosan Magar

**A** pounding heart, sleepless nights, and worrying thoughts. For those who live with anxiety, these symptoms will be all too familiar. Some find that cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is an effective way to help manage anxious thoughts and feelings, but the idea of your first session might be a cause for even more worry.

CBT is a talking therapy that addresses cycles of

negative thoughts and feelings. Commonly used to treat anxiety and depression, therapy sessions focus on interrogating patterns of unhelpful thinking and behaviour in order to develop practical coping skills.

If you're considering starting CBT, or have already been booked in for your first session, knowing what to expect can help to ease any concerns. We spoke to counselling psychologist Dr Danielle Sampaio to find out more.

## **Know the basics**

"CBT is a here-and-now therapy that offers a way to understand your current thought processes, and how they are contributing to the problems that you are having," says Dr Sampaio. "It offers a way to restructure your thoughts, so that you can develop more helpful and balanced ways of thinking and behaving in relation to specific issues and circumstances."



Over the course of your treatment, you'll build a toolkit to understand your anxiety, and develop ways to address troubling thoughts. Sessions can take place in a group setting or one-on-one, and each session is about 50 minutes long.

### Assessing the problem

Your therapist might be interested to know what is driving you to seek treatment, any past therapy that you've already had, and your hopes for these sessions. This will also be your opportunity to tell your therapist about the development of your anxiety, and what specific issues you're experiencing.

"You might be asked to complete a questionnaire to measure the extent and type of anxiety, and any other issues that your therapist should know about," says Dr Sampaio. "You don't need to prepare anything, but if it helps you could write some notes beforehand, or things that you want to say or explain."

### Building a collaborative relationship

Seeking mental health support can sometimes feel exposing. But in order to effectively treat your condition, you need to be vulnerable and open about what is troubling you, and being able to create a relationship based on trust and honesty is key to getting the care you need.

"Your therapist will want to get to know your story, strengths, and struggles," she says. "This helps them to piece together how your experiences may be affecting you."



**The goal of CBT is to equip you with the tools you need to manage your anxiety once the sessions are over**

Although it can be challenging, be prepared to approach CBT with an open mind, and a willingness to share. Your therapist will be experienced in guiding and supporting you through the process.

### Doing your homework

CBT doesn't just take place within therapy sessions – most therapists will assign exercises to complete in your own time. This could be something like keeping a diary, or examining your thinking style each time you have a particularly pervasive worry.


"The therapy will encourage you to practise what you are learning in between sessions, to consolidate progress," Dr

Sampaio says. "This will help the therapist to understand what happens in a real-life example. Some clients worry about this part, but it's not like school homework – you won't be told off if you don't do it!"

### Learning therapeutic tools

The goal of CBT is to equip you with the tools you need to manage your anxiety once the sessions are over. You can expect to learn practical techniques to help keep worries in check, and to function through periods of poor mental health.

"This could be things like breathing exercises to help with panic, mindfulness, or compassionate exercises that build tools to help you to calm down," Dr Sampaio says. "Some of these you will practise with your therapist, and others you will do in your own time. You'll also have regular review sessions to consider how the work is going, and how these tools are helping."

These tools are there for you to call upon as you take the next steps, beyond therapy – like a first aid kit in your backpack, they'll help you help yourself through. 



*Dr Danielle Sampaio is a counselling psychologist who specialises in anxiety, personality disorders, and CPTSD. Find out more by visiting [counselling-directory.org.uk](https://counselling-directory.org.uk)*

# Up in your grill

It's time to say goodbye to boring burgers, as we fire up some flavours for a plant-based BBQ

Writing | Susan Hart

**B**arbeques are a great way to cook a wide variety of food, so there's no reason why someone who enjoys a plant-based or vegan diet can't also take full advantage of the alfresco experience!

These three dishes are all meat-free, but are certainly not lacking in taste – plus they are packed with goodness! Most adults struggle to consume their recommended 30g of daily fibre, but these recipes – two bean burgers, a portion of

wedges, and a side of the baby gem lettuce – will go some way to rectifying that. With about 23g of healthy gut fibre you'll feel fuller for longer, help balance blood sugar levels, and keep your digestive system happy. Let's get cooking!

## Red kidney bean burger

Serves 4

### Ingredients

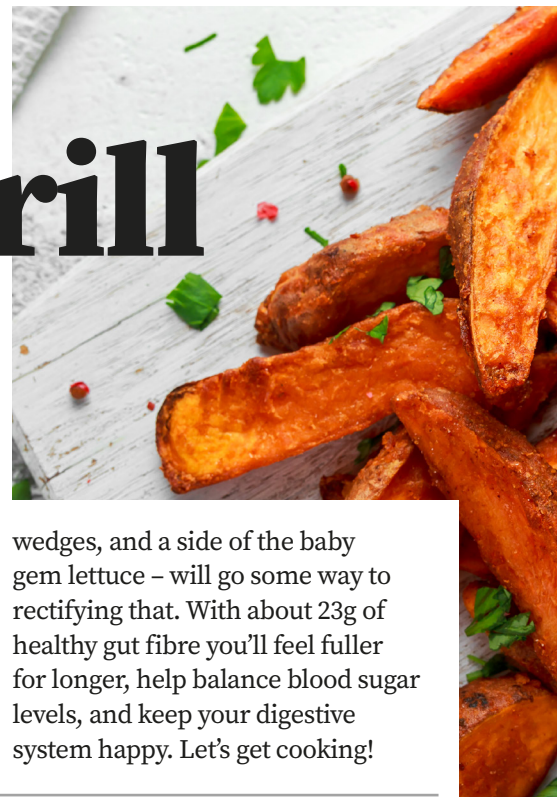
- 100g red lentils
- 1 tsp veg bouillon
- 1 tin red kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- Oil for frying
- 1 finely chopped onion
- 140g finely chopped mushrooms
- 1–2 cloves minced garlic
- 1 tbsp fresh chopped parsley or 1 tsp dried mixed herbs
- 1 finely chopped spring onion
- 2 tsp Marmite
- ½ tsp chilli flakes
- 4 tbsp gram/GF/plain flour
- 1 tbsp nutritional yeast
- Black pepper
- 1 tsp oil

### Method

1. Place the lentils in a saucepan, cover with water, and mix with the veg bouillon. Cook for 15 minutes until soft. Drain if all the liquid hasn't been absorbed.
2. Put the drained beans in a bowl, and roughly mash.
3. Heat the oil in a pan and fry the onion. When translucent, add the mushrooms. Cook until the mixture is golden and quite dry.
4. Stir in the garlic, herbs, spring onion, Marmite, chilli, cooked lentils, and beans. Cook for 2 minutes. When cooled add the flour, nutritional yeast, and black pepper.
5. Divide into 8, and roll into burger shapes. Keep in the fridge to firm up.



6. Brush with oil before placing directly on to the BBQ. Cook for 10 minutes, then carefully flip the burgers over and cook for a further 8–10 minutes.







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### BBQ baby gem lettuce with soya beans and toasted sesame sauce

Serves 4

#### Ingredients

- 2 tbsp sesame seeds, toasted
- 30g vegan spread or olive oil
- 1 tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tbsp rice wine vinegar or lemon juice
- 200g defrosted soya beans (edamame)
- 2 baby gem lettuce cut into quarters
- 2 tsp oil
- 2 spring onions
- Pinch of dried chilli flakes or ½ sliced fresh red chilli

#### Method

1. Add the sesame seeds to a small pan with the spread/oil, soy sauce, vinegar/lemon juice, and soya beans. Warm until the spread melts. This can all be cooked on the BBQ or separately on the hob.
2. In a bowl, add the quartered lettuce and coat in oil. Place them on the BBQ, and cook for 2 minutes on all sides.
3. Transfer to a serving dish, pour over the warm sauce, and scatter over the chopped spring onions and a few chilli flakes.

### Sweet potato wedges

Serves 4

#### Ingredients

- 300g sweet potatoes
- 2 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 tbsp oil
- Handful chopped coriander
- Salt and pepper

#### Method

1. Cut the washed sweet potatoes into wedges, coat in paprika, and place on a heavy-based baking tray. Drizzle on oil.
2. Place the wedges directly on the grill, or put the baking tray on the BBQ. Cook for 20 minutes (turning frequently) until brown.
3. Serve with chopped coriander, and a pinch of sea salt and black pepper.


### The healthy bit

Burgers are a great way to utilise some high fibre, high protein but low cholesterol beans and lentils, plus they give a great texture while holding their shape. What's not to love? You can easily double the recipe to tempt all the meat lovers, or keep extras in the freezer.

Forsaking the usual white bread roll for some fibre and antioxidant-rich sweet potato wedges is another great move. Not only do they taste great, but the slow releasing energy will keep you feeling fuller for longer. They also count as one of your five-a-day.

And, of course, not forgetting the charred baby gem lettuce with its delicious edamame dressing – again contributing to your five-a-day, without even trying. The beans are high in protein, and have a lovely crunchy texture.

If you don't have a barbeque, you can still recreate these flavoursome dishes. The burgers can be cooked in the oven – preheat to 200C. They take 20–25 minutes. The wedges can sit alongside them in a separate tray for about 30–40 minutes. All you need for the baby gem is a small saucepan, and a dry frying pan or griddle pan.

When barbequing, be mindful that many vegans want their food cooked on a meat-free barbie with utensils exclusively for them. This avoids any cross contamination. 

*Susan Hart is a nutrition coach and food writer. She is a vegan chef and regularly appears on local TV and radio.*





“When the whole world  
is silent, even one voice  
becomes powerful


MALALA YOUSAFZAI



# Self-love starts here.

Treating yourself with compassion and care isn't always as easy as it sounds, but we're here to make a compelling case as to why – and how – you should embrace the self-love revolution today

Writing | Lucy Donoghue

 I know at least a handful of people who would roll their eyes towards the sky at the mere mention of self-love. To be fair, it's not a completely concrete concept – perhaps because of the emphasis on the 'self', which means it's a deeply personal practise.

So, I'll start the ball rolling with my own definition. For me, self-love is practical. It's acknowledging that I need – and deserve – care and attention as much as anyone else in my life, and as an adult I also need to be responsible for giving myself that.

Some days my form of self-love might look like getting up early for a swim, because I know that my body will feel better for it. It might also be carving out time for a 30-minute soak in the bath at the end of the day, and allowing myself to quietly daydream when I feel myself becoming overwhelmed.

At other times, self-love is about actively working with my critical inner voice. The one that whispers derogatory comments about my body as I pass the changing room mirror on my way to the pool, or screams at me that "Rest is lazy!" as I run the bath, telling me over and over that there's still so much work to be done, and I should just crack on.

It's at these moments I imagine self-love as a huge dollop of soothing lotion, that I smooth on top of the criticism. I hear what the inner voice has to say, and I apply self-love and compassion to the situation. "Yes," I tell myself. "I know you think that about your body sometimes, but look at how strong you are, and how much you enjoy the feeling of being in the water. There's no need to be hateful."

## The absence of self-love

My approach to self-love may be different to other people's, just as my life circumstances will be. Not everyone will have the time or the household support to be able to incorporate a head-clearing swim of a morning, or regular time out in the evening, and I know many parents for whom self-love is a perceived luxury, and one their already jam-packed schedules can't seem to accommodate.

This is where flipping the conversation could be helpful. Whether it's an hour doing your favourite activity, or literally one minute to yourself, we may all incorporate self-love in different ways, but there are universal commonalities when we talk about the absence of self-love – which is why the subject is so important (and not at all 'fluffy' or 'indulgent').

The common traits around the absence of self-love could include >>>

heightened internal criticism, punishing routines around work, appearance, parenting, food consumption and exercise, abandoning rest or sleep, and perfectionism.

The absence of self-love could also see us constantly putting other people's needs before our own, not asking for or taking help when it's available, and becoming resentful, detached, and burnt out as a result. All these behaviours and emotions, in extreme, are detrimental to our long-term mental health.

The good news is that there are many ways to begin implementing your own strategies around self-love, and it's never too late to start. However, you do need to be open to the idea that self-love is also self-work and you'll need to carve out the time for it – but the benefits can be immense.

### **Three reasons to start practising self-love today – from the professionals**

#### **Self-love attracts more love**

“Self-love underpins everything that we do, how we show up in the world, and how we present ourselves to others,” health and wellbeing coach Claudine Thornhill explains. “When we have a good level of self-love, we're better able to attract and accept more love into our lives.”

#### **Embracing a self-love mindset changes your story**

“We are all stories we tell ourselves, so the way we speak to ourselves, that inner voice that



“

**Self-love underpins everything that we do, how we show up in the world, and how we present ourselves to others**

tells us who we are and what we can and can't do, really matters,” cognitive hypnotherapist Sophie Parker says.

“When you embrace a self-love mindset, you tell yourself that you are enough, you are worthy of happiness and love, and you silence your inner critic. Affirmations are a fantastic way to cultivate self-love and curb negative talk, simply by changing the words you use when you speak to yourself.

“Three of my favourite affirmations that I recommend you say daily are: ‘I believe in myself,’ ‘I am enough,’ and ‘I am loved.’ Say these out loud in front of a mirror, and notice how these phrases make you feel.”



## RISE UP WITH SELF-LOVE!

Our partners at The Body Shop believe that any act of self-love is a direct act of rebellion against a culture that wants us to feel self-doubt – and we couldn't agree more!

The Body Shop is now on a mission to share one million acts of self-love across the globe in one year, as part of its Self Love Uprising campaign. The size of these acts of self-love

doesn't matter, as even small acts can lead to big change.

Share your own self-love story on social media with the hashtag #SelfLoveUprising and tag @happiful\_magazine too. These acts can start your journey to self-love, and inspire others to rise up with you. We can't wait to see what you share!

**Find out more at [thebodyshop.com](https://thebodyshop.com)**

## You'll realise your best is good enough

"Self-love is quite simply being kind, compassionate and non-judgemental towards yourself," Bibi Jamieson, counsellor and couples therapist explains. "When you begin to feel that your own true authentic self is not good enough, please be kind to yourself – each one of us is unique, and we're not all meant to be the same. And if you're feeling that you're not getting self-love 'right', be gentle, keep trying. Your best is good enough."

## How to incorporate self-love into every day

### • Listen to, understand, and act upon your needs

Whether that's more sleep, rest, or fresh air, listen to and meet your own needs. Talk to friends, family and colleagues, and ask for help in creating small, regular pockets of time for yourself. If you live with other people, do this for each other, so everyone benefits.

### • Keep the promises you've made to yourself!

Be as accountable to yourself as you would be to a loved one you'd made a commitment to. You matter as much as they do.

### • Do things that make you feel good

Dancing, singing, masturbation, bubble baths, whatever it is – if it makes you feel good – make space for it! Even if you just try setting your phone to silent, or move it out of reach for the first last hour of the day, you'll be surprised at the extra time you find for you.

## One important caveat

There's so much we can do for ourselves by implementing self-love, but not all life and mental health challenges are equal.

If you're struggling with your mental health, you could contact your GP in the first instance, or Samaritans are available 24/7 on 116 123. You can also email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org), and remember that you do not have to be at crisis point to reach out.

By downloading the **free Happiful app**, you'll also be able to find local support groups, and search for mental health and wellbeing professionals who work online, over the phone, and face-to-face at a time, place, and cost that's right for you. **11**



*Sophie Parker is a cognitive hypnotherapist, coach, and founder of The Inner, a mind and wellbeing practice.*

*Claudine Thornhill is a naturopathic nutritional therapist, wellness coach, and qualified yoga teacher.*



*Bibi Jamieson is an integrative psychotherapeutic counsellor and couples therapist.*

*Find out more about these professionals, and get in touch with them, via the Happiful app.*

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EVENING SESSION

THE MIND & MENTAL HEALTH

RUBY WAX

KIMBERLEY WILSON

WILLIAM SIEGHART

### SAT 17TH JULY

AFTERNOON SESSION

SOCIETY & COMMUNITY

MARY PORTAS

NIKESH SHUKLA - EMMA DABIRI

MAGID MAGID

EVENING SESSION

NATURE, SCIENCE AND THE UNIVERSE

PROF. BRIAN COX

PROF. JIM AL-KHALILI

BELLA LACK

### SUN 18TH JULY

MORNING SESSION

LIVING BETTER FOR THE PLANET

SIMON REEVE

CHRIS PACKHAM

JULIA BRADBURY

EVENING SESSION

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# BE THE CHANGE YOU WANT TO SEE

Make your voice heard, and stand up for what you believe in, with these tips for creating positive change

Writing | Kathryn Wheeler    Artwork | Charlotte Reynell

**M**ost of us have a cause that we believe in – be that environmentalism, anti-racism, feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, political activism, or, of course, standing up to mental health stigma – and in 2021 there are so many ways to make our voices heard.

We can join rallies and demonstrations, connect with local groups within our communities, volunteer our time, take part in projects, or simply have conversations

with the people in our lives. But the internet means that we can also contribute to causes in new and innovative ways. Although sometimes given a bad rap as ‘slacktivism’, when done with intent and purpose, online activism can reach far and wide, and unite people across communities and borders – just think of the cultural impact of #MeToo and Black Lives Matter.

And since the start of the pandemic, we’ve been more engaged than ever before – online petition platform *change.org*

notes how petition-creation has increased by 227%, with the number of people supporting campaigns increasing by a massive 1,060% – leading the UK to place firmly within the top 10 countries with the highest civic engagement index, alongside South Africa, Japan, Canada, United States, Peru, Malaysia, South Korea, Philippines, and New Zealand.

“Activism is everywhere. It’s in campaigning for workers’ rights, fighting for gender equality, challenging systemic >>>

bias, and demonstrating against dictatorships,” writes Karen Edwards in the introduction to her book, *The Little Book of Activism*. “Any one of us could become a micro-activist by making changes within our own lives. Combine this with support from like-minded people, and that is how macro-activism begins.”

It is equally as easy to feel hopeless and intimidated by the scale of causes, as it is to feel complacent – as you get caught in a ‘social bubble’ where it seems everyone is already doing the work to achieve a collective goal. But both big and small acts are needed to propel a movement forward, and you may never fully know the impact that a seemingly insignificant conversation or action may have on the world, and people around you.

For Karen, it’s important to understand the history, and to acknowledge those who came before you; by getting familiar with the roots of a cause, we’re much more likely to see it flourish. In *The Little Book of Activism*, she explores just that, and here Karen shares eight actionable tips for how you can begin to make positive change right now...







## To become an ally is to stand in solidarity with those affected by a specific social issue

### 1. Educate yourself

If you campaign on behalf of a particular cause, be sure that you know the truth behind the issue. Write down factual information, statistics, and examples to explain why you support this particular cause, and read widely to ensure you understand the history behind it. If you can, talk to those directly affected by the issue.

### 2. Be a conscious activist

Activism by doing, is leading by example. It helps others to see an issue being tackled in an accessible way. Document what you do on a personal blog or your social media, and share valuable resources – such as books, articles, or videos, that have educated, supported, or inspired you.

### 3. Be an informed ally

To become an ally is to stand in solidarity with those affected by a specific social issue. This means seeking out the voices of those who are disadvantaged, to fully understand their experiences before you actively challenge misinformed attitudes.

### 4. Team up with local, like-minded souls

Look online for local groups and social clubs that support the cause or campaign you feel strongly about. Ask community organisations for connections, or approach social media groups who support the same issues. Making friends who understand and support your passion, is empowering in itself.

### 5. Write letters, paint, create

If you feel passionately about a cause, consider how you can share your advocacy in a creative way. You could use activism, articles, and letters, to inspire others to see things from your point of view, and get a message across.


### 6. Be realistic about what you want to achieve

When advocating for change, bear in mind there may not be immediate results. Prepare yourself for the long haul, and celebrate the little wins as much as possible – such as community recognition, a great turnout at events, receiving media coverage, and growing support from the public.

### 7. Remain respectful

Bear in mind that not everyone can be persuaded into supporting an issue, however important it might feel to you. When faced with opposition, always stay composed, and deliver your viewpoint based on facts.

### 8. Always use your vote

Vote for the government – both local and national – who will implement the change you want. This means empowering yourself by taking the time to research the policies behind each candidate. If unable to vote in person, you can register for a postal vote, or to assign a proxy, in advance. 



*'The Little Book of Activism' by Karen Edwards (Summersdale Publishers, £6.99) is out now.*

# Ask the experts: Are IBS symptoms causing you discomfort?

To help put your mind at ease, two gut health experts from Nutritionist Resource answer your questions on IBS

**Q I've heard about fasting to help relieve symptoms. Can that really help with IBS?**

**A** I wouldn't advise fasting; it may not be safe for people with a medical condition. Instead, you could consider time-restricted eating. This requires eating within a specific time period each

day, for example 10am–8pm. The digestive system has a mechanism called migrating motor complex (MMC) which acts like a vacuum cleaner. When digestion is at rest, the MMC removes undigested food that would otherwise cause havoc.

Resting the digestive system for 12–14 hours overnight may help to improve its function, but do always consult a professional before doing so.

**Q I've had IBS for years, will I always suffer with it?**

**A** I had IBS-like symptoms for several years – an urgency to go, bloating, flatulence, and a variation between diarrhoea and constipation. Today, after doing a stool test and readdressing

imbalances in my gut, I'm pretty much symptom-free.

I've worked with many people over the past few years who feel that their IBS is now resolved, and others who can manage their symptoms effectively. Working with a qualified nutritional therapist has been a game-changer for many people.

Marie Jarvis is a nutritional therapist and health coach specialising in gut health and IBS.



**Q I'm going through menopause and I'm experiencing lots of digestive discomfort. Can menopause bring on IBS?**

**A** The onset of menopause is a turbulent time hormonally for women. If you already have an imbalance in the gut, this rollercoaster of hormones can further adjust the gut balance, and that's when you can see IBS coming on as a result of menopause. Usually the issues are already underlying, and it's more likely to be lifestyle and eating habits that are causing you problems, but you can definitely work on these symptoms to alleviate them.





**Q** I get regular episodes of diarrhoea when feeling stressed. Can stress cause IBS symptoms?

**A** Stress is a very common trigger for IBS, and there's a growing body of research that links the gut and the brain – and it's bi-directional (the connection goes both ways). If we're stressed, our bowel habits might change, and if the gut's not healthy, that could also influence our mental health. Holistic approaches to relaxation, such as hypnotherapy and mindfulness, are great stress management tools.

**Q** Is the FODMAP diet a helpful treatment for IBS?

**A** Yes absolutely. The FODMAP diet is an elimination diet, and each letter stands for a fermentable sugar that some individuals don't digest properly, causing IBS symptoms. But it's actually not the first point of call. Because of the many potential

causes of these symptoms from a nutritional perspective, we would generally look at what could be the most obvious things first. Are you drinking enough water? Do you have a balanced diet? Have you got enough fibre? Are you stressed or not sleeping?

Once all of those things are in place, and if you're still experiencing problems, then we would look at FODMAPs.

**Charlotte Turner** is a registered nutritionist specialising in gut health and women's health.



## **SIMPILA** — Championing mental health in the workplace

Healthy Solutions

### Why become a Mental Health First Aider?



- **Join a growing community** of amazing people supporting the conversation around mental health

- **Recognise the symptoms** of mental ill-health
- Help to **improve awareness** and break down stigma and discrimination



- **Improve your own mental health** and self-care
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*You can hear more about the impact of MHFA training on Happiful's 'I am. I have' podcast, featuring Happiful's MHFA instructor Matt Holman. Listen on Spotify and Apple Podcasts.*

### Here's what our delegates say:

“

A course that really made me reflect. Delivery was excellent, and the instructor makes you feel valued and listened to. They make the course interesting and inclusive by sharing their own experiences. – *Sol*

“

I felt very comfortable and in a safe space. Honestly, it was life-changing. – *Jamie*

“

The instructor was amazing – so open and personable, and really made the tough subject matters digestible. It was really engaging, and they created a wonderful space for us to share openly. The course has enthused me even more to shout about mental health, and I feel extremely proud to now be a Mental Health First Aider. – *Emma*





# Is my psoriasis caused by the gut?

Expert insight into the autoimmune condition, and how our gut can play a key part in both its trigger and treatment

Writing | Dr Tim Bond

**P**soriasis affects 2–3% of people in the UK, and 120 million worldwide, making it the most common autoimmune disease. While its exact cause has never been pinned down, clinical research suggests the gut might have a key role to play.

For anyone unfamiliar with ‘autoimmune diseases’, this is essentially where the immune system mistakenly launches an attack against the body’s own tissues, triggering an inflammatory response.

With psoriasis, this response causes skin cell production to go into overdrive. Excess skin cells build up in patches, called plaques. These plaques are usually red, flaky, crusty, and covered in silvery scales. They’re often sore and itchy, too. The condition can also affect the joints, causing swelling, stiffness, and pain (known as psoriatic arthritis).

There are many possible triggers of psoriasis and reasons why it flares in some people – everyone is different – ranging from infection to injury, medication, diet, alcohol,

smoking, and hormonal changes. It is also accepted that stress can both trigger psoriasis, and make existing psoriasis worse.

## How is psoriasis connected to the gut?

The human gut is much more than a tube through which our food is processed. Often called the ‘second brain’, the gut is involved in a bewildering range of processes, including immune defence, energy and water harvesting, lipid metabolism, cell signalling, synthesis of vitamins, >>>



*With ‘autoimmune diseases’, the immune system mistakenly launches an attack against the body’s own tissues, triggering an inflammatory response*

insulin sensitivity, hormone release, suppression of harmful bacteria, and maintenance of the gut epithelial barrier.

Overall, 100 trillion bacteria live on, or in, our bodies, meaning that we are home to more bacteria than our own cells! Gut microbiota is the name we give to the trillions of these microorganisms living in the human gut. Gut microbiota is made up of 5,000 different species, which have a combined 316 million genes. We have a mutually beneficial relationship with our gut microbiota; we are dependent upon them for our health, and they need us for food and shelter.

Our unique gut microbiota started life with us on the day we were born – or even when we were in our mother’s womb.

According to studies published in *High-Throughput and Nutrition and Healthy Aging*, it can be influenced by lifestyle factors, such as antibiotic use, stress, smoking, exercise, obesity and diet, as well as the normal ageing process. A growing body of evidence, including research published in *Arthritis & Rheumatology*, suggests that disruptions to gut microbiota can cause autoimmune diseases, such as psoriasis, as well as increased infection risk, constipation, diarrhoea, irritable bowel syndrome, cancer, type 2 diabetes, and obesity.

### **Gut health and nutrition**

Taking care of our gut microbiota, through wise diet and lifestyle choices, translates into increased diversity of bacteria, and a shift toward more friendly types.

The food we eat comes into direct contact with our gut microbiota, so the macronutrients, vitamins, minerals, fibre, microorganisms, and plant bioactive compounds from our diet are incredibly important.

But of particular note is the role of a cuppa when it comes to sorting our gut microbiota. New research reveals that four to five cups of tea per day could boost ‘friendly’ gut bacteria. The good news is that a range of different teas – including black tea, green tea, pu-erh, and oolong – can contribute to a positive shift in our gut microbiota. This shift can help avoid gut dysbiosis, in which gut bacteria composition becomes detrimental.

The secret behind this lies in the rich array of polyphenols in teas – natural flavonoid compounds found in the tea plant. Tea is one of the richest sources of flavonoid polyphenols in many global diets, demonstrating a prebiotic effect and rebalancing our gut microbiota towards more favourable strains, including *Lactobacillus*, *Faecalibacterium* and *Bacteroides*.

Studies further proved that green, oolong, black, and pu-erh teas also increased bacterial diversity, which is important for strengthening immunity – vital for those with psoriasis.



For more nutritional support, visit [nutritionist-resource.org.uk](https://nutritionist-resource.org.uk)

## Foods to help psoriasis

A change in diet can have an effect in as little as one or two days, a study in the journal *Nature* suggests – so it's worth eating more healthily from today.

- High fibre diets have been linked with improved microbiota balance. Try to include pulses, wholegrains, oats, and vegetables in your meals, as these often contain good amounts of fibre.
- Polyphenols are organic compounds found naturally in plants, especially tea, fruits, vegetables, cocoa, wine, soya, spices, and nuts. In general, polyphenol-rich diets boost levels of beneficial bacteria and decrease more harmful species. Tea is one of the main sources of polyphenols in the British diet.
- Vitamin A, vitamin D, and long-chain omega-3 fatty acids all have roles in gut health.
- Fermented foods and probiotic drinks contain live 'good' bacteria. If these are able to survive the pH extremes of the stomach and small intestine, the bacteria travel to the large intestine where they become established.
- Prebiotics are non-digestible carbohydrates, which can change the gut microbiota towards healthier species. They are

found in various fruits and vegetables, such as tomatoes, onions, garlic, asparagus, and bananas. Recent evidence suggests that tea can now also be considered a prebiotic. Prebiotics are relatively stable and, unlike probiotics, can be relied on to arrive relatively unchanged in the gut, despite digestive enzymes.

- Avoid ultra-processed foods, which tend to be low in fibre and high in fat. They have been linked with inflammation and gut dysbiosis.

## Treatment options

In addition to taking responsibility for improving our gut microbiota, there are also a wide range of effective treatments for psoriasis. These range from over-the-counter moisturisers and emollients to prescription creams, ointments, and medicines.

Finding the most effective therapy is often a matter of trial and error, and new products are being introduced all the time – such as medicated tapes with a fixed dose of steroid. It's important to keep going back to your doctor, or dermatologist, for advice if you are not happy.

At home, try to ensure you eat a balanced diet, and perhaps make two to three cuppas part of that daily diet to help maintain good gut health.

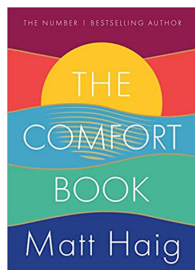


*Dr Tim Bond is a chemist, natural health expert, and tea scientist. He is part of the Tea Advisory Panel, a novel health group that conducts scientific studies into the healthy role of black tea in diets. [\[1\]](#)*

# HAPPY TOP 10 July

From appreciating each other and recognising the power of hope, to learning about our planet, we share 10 things to do this July

# 1



## PAGE-TURNERS ▲

### ***The Comfort Book* by Matt Haig**

For most of us, hope is a comforting emotion we rely on during periods of mental ill-health. Matt Haig's latest book delves into the reasons that hope holds so much power, building on the past wisdoms of philosophers. Described by many as a 'hug in book', *The Comfort Book* is a great one to pick up when you need a reminder that you're not alone, and that your feelings are important. (Out 6 July, Canongate Books, £16.99)

# 2

## OUT AND ABOUT

### **Luna Drive In Cinema**

If you've missed watching the latest films on the big screen, this is the perfect way to ease yourself back into the cinema world. Enjoy classics like *Mamma Mia*, or more recent box office hits like *Rocketman*, from the comfort of your car. With wonderfully retro click-and-collect food options available, and control over the car temperature, you can cosy up and enjoy the show! (Visit [lunadriveincinema.com](http://lunadriveincinema.com))

# 3

## PUT ON A SHOW ▼

### **Summer Olympics**

On 23 July, after a year of postponement, the Olympics will begin in Tokyo, Japan. You can support the GB team in sports such as swimming or basketball, which will be covered online and on the BBC. With new sports like softball making their debut appearance this year, there will certainly be something to keep you entertained.

# 4

## LEND US YOUR EARS

### **'Bottoming'**

Hosts Brendan and Matthew

discuss everything from LGBTQ+ community spaces, to how we can learn more about those who identify as transgender, and why LGBTQ+ people can have a strained relationship with exercise. With their frequent humour, the hosts prove that a friendly tone can make difficult and raw conversations accessible for anyone. (Listen to the podcast on iTunes and Spotify)



# 5

## PLUGGED-IN

### **Madeleine Olivia**

If you're keen to live a more sustainable lifestyle, or are excited by vegan recipes and minimalistic hacks, Madeleine has tips and tricks that are perfect for you. With an account dedicated to living a more eco-friendly and simple life, Madeleine shares her own experiences to help those who want to get started on their own journey. (Follow @madeleineolivia on Instagram)



## 6 TECH TIP-OFFS

### Flora: Green Focus

Aiming to help combat the urge to pick up your phone while having a green impact on the earth, Flora helps us to build life-changing habits. When you plan to be productive, you plant a seed. The longer you stay off of your phone the bigger the seed will grow, until it becomes a fully grown tree. Partnering with *trees.org* means that Flora is able to actually translate some of these digital saplings into real trees! (Download from the App Store or Google Play)

## 7 SQUARE EYES

### David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet

National treasure, Sir David Attenborough is back with this documentary exploring the origins of human history alongside his vision for the future. The documentary acts as Sir David's witness statement, covering how the earth has been affected by human life, and what we can do to build a better future. (Available on Netflix)



## 9

## THE CONVERSATION

### International Day of Friendship

Friendships have been fundamental in helping us all through some tough times, so what better way to appreciate the wonderful people in our lives than a whole day dedicated to them. Be sure to let your friends know just how much they mean to you, not only on 30 July, but every day. (Visit [un.org](http://un.org) to learn more)

## 10

## GET GOING

### Go Ape

If you're in need of a challenge, a trail up in the trees is waiting for you! From climbing across cargo nets, to tip-toeing across bridges, there is something for everyone, whether you're a thrill-seeker or just excited to be out in the fresh air. (Visit [goape.co.uk](http://goape.co.uk))

## 8 TREAT YOURSELF

### The Mind&Full Wellbeing 'Empower' Kit

Mindfulness can help support everything from anxiety, to simply slowing down. Mind&Full's Wellbeing 'Empower' Kit aims to spark inspiration, promote self-care, and encourage a more conscious approach to mental wellbeing. Including beautiful affirmation cards, stationery, and postcards, it makes for a great gift to yourself or a loved one. (£17.99, shop online at [mindandfull.co.uk](http://mindandfull.co.uk))

### Win a Mind&Full Wellbeing 'Empower' Kit

For your chance to win one of these 'Empower' Kits, simply email your answer to the following question to [competitions@happiful.com](mailto:competitions@happiful.com)

**Which of the following is *not* a yoga pose?**

- a) Downward-facing dog      b) Lotus position      c) Star jump

\*Competition closes 22 July 2021. UK mainland and Northern Ireland only. Good luck!



# Stories of strength

After a life-changing accident in their youth, Ilesha Palmer had severe scarring from burns – but it was the mental impact of this incident that left an even greater mark. Years later, Ilesha has found an empowering message in these scars, and it's a sentiment you need to hear

Writing | Ilesha Palmer

**L**ife isn't a linear trajectory – life-changing moments, can happen at any time. In 2006, when I was around 12 years old, I sustained third-degree burns on my left arm while trying to shield my niece. This resulted in the need for skin graft surgery, where they removed skin from my left thigh to cover my arm.

Through a lot of pain and tears, I slowly but surely regained mobility; the love and care from doctors and my mother was my saving grace. My time in the hospital was difficult, but the real challenge began when I returned home. A child who was once brave and full of life became extremely self-conscious and shy. My scars became one of the sources of my insecurities, and it would be that way for more than 10 years.

It wasn't until I started to see my scars as stories, that I was able to accept and appreciate them.

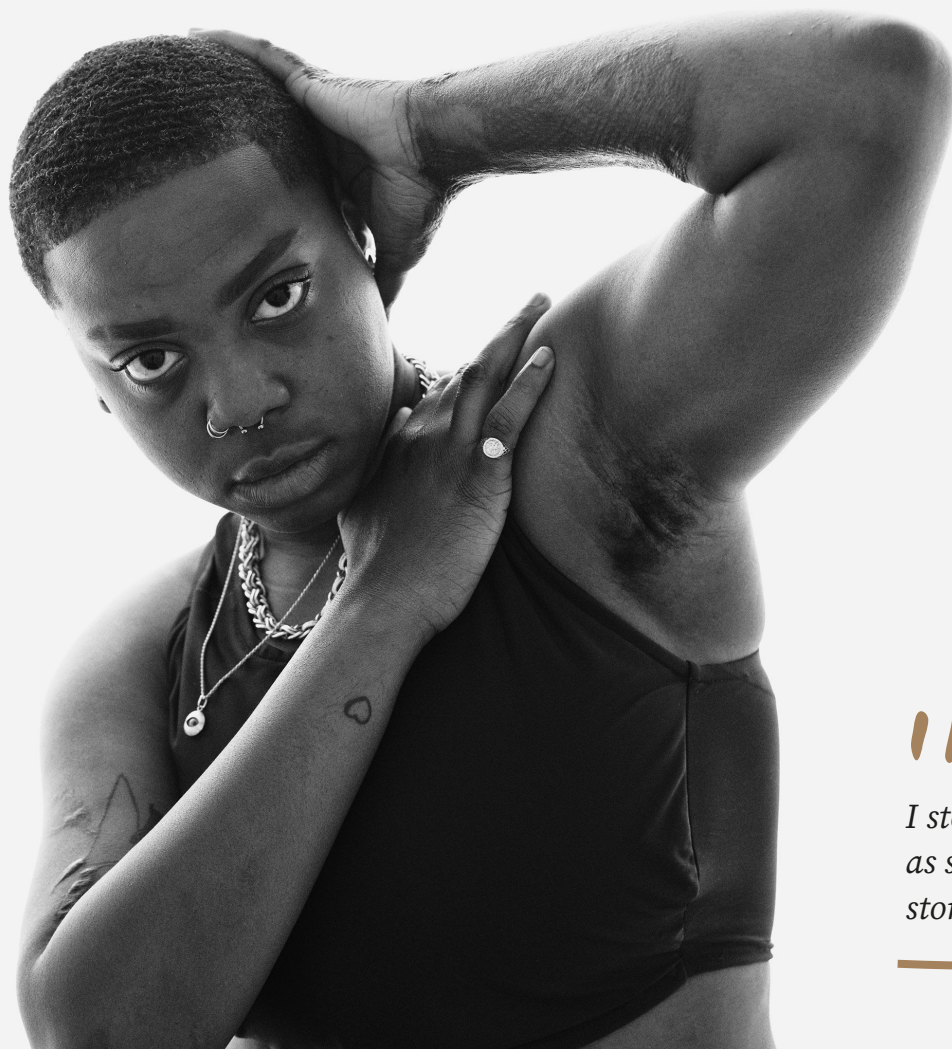
I can remember the moments leading up to the accident in summer 2006. I was sitting in the living room with my brother watching TV when I felt an impulse to go to the kitchen. Following it, I walked in on my niece, who was very young at the time, reaching up, about to pull a pot of hot oil off the stove and all over herself. I must have blacked out, because the next thing I remember is shrieking screams coming from myself, followed by the cries of my brother.

No words can describe the excruciating pain I was in – my arm looked unrecognisable. As my brother later explained, I had instinctively shielded my niece and the oil ended up falling on

me. My mother, who was on her way to work, rushed back. We went to a nearby pediatric hospital where my arm was wrapped up for the night.

The following day I was rushed to a major hospital in Miami, Florida, where I was admitted to the burn centre. During my initial examination, the doctor told my mother that I needed surgery, to which she responded with tears.

She cried a lot, whereas I didn't cry once when I was in the hospital – I think the whole ordeal was too surreal for me to process. When the doctor heard the story, he expressed that with my niece being so small, her body would have been engulfed by the oil and her burns would have been severe, if not life-threatening. But to me, I was just doing what any family member would do.



”

*I stopped seeing my scars as scars, but rather, stories of strength*

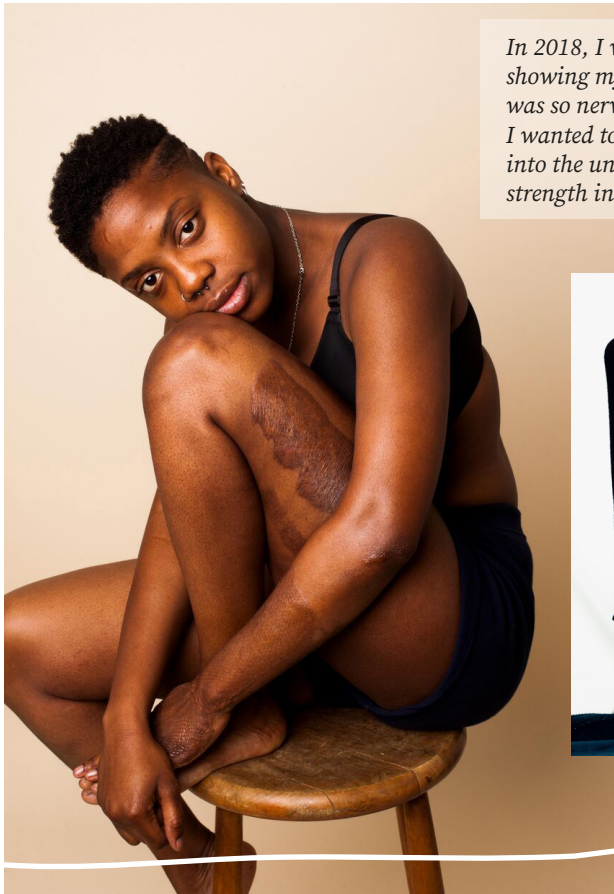
A lot of my time in the hospital was spent in silence; my mother had a full-time job and couldn't afford to take much time off. She was there when I came out of surgery, and I remember coming to and seeing her face – she looked as if she had seen a ghost.

It didn't take long for me to understand why her face was in such horror. I glanced down and

saw my thigh. “That's not mine, it can't be,” I thought, and it was then that I started to realise my body would never be the same again. In the coming month, I needed extensive physical therapy to regain movement in my arm and leg. It was hard, but with the help of the nurses I made it through, and thankfully the skin graft took beautifully.

The healing of my physical wounds wasn't reflective of my emotional and mental state, though. It was when I left the hospital things got really hard. I don't think I realised the effect it would have on my personality, how it would change the way I saw myself. I cried every day for weeks, struggling deeply with self-esteem and self-acceptance. >>>





*In 2018, I was in front of a camera showing my scars for the first time. I was so nervous and uncomfortable. I wanted to run, but instead I leaned into the uncomfortableness and found strength in being vulnerable.*



*Follow Iesha on Instagram @blvk.velvet*

Suddenly I was terrified of seeing my body, let alone allowing anyone else to.

As months went by, I started to overcompensate for my insecurities by making my personality bigger and brighter, so the people around me would be too busy being entertained to notice I was always wearing full-length sleeves. My school years were spent in Florida and the Caribbean, but the blistering heat made no difference. I endured the suffocation of jackets and trousers, because that was preferable to being seen.

This is how I was for so many years, and it was only in 2017 that

things slowly started to change. I wanted more from life, I was tired of living in fear of my own body.

At the beginning of 2018, I was hit with an epiphany. I started to reflect within, and see how I had allowed that moment to grip and limit my life. I had to start believing that I was deserving of self-love, that it was even possible for me to love what I see. It was around the same time I started to accept my queerness – life was happening again, but this time it wasn't happening *to* me. This time I was in control.

I stopped seeing my scars as scars, but rather, stories of strength.

And now, this is one of my favourite stories. I've realised that there's power in baring your insecurities, in relinquishing control and letting go – something that the past Iesha would never allow themselves to do.

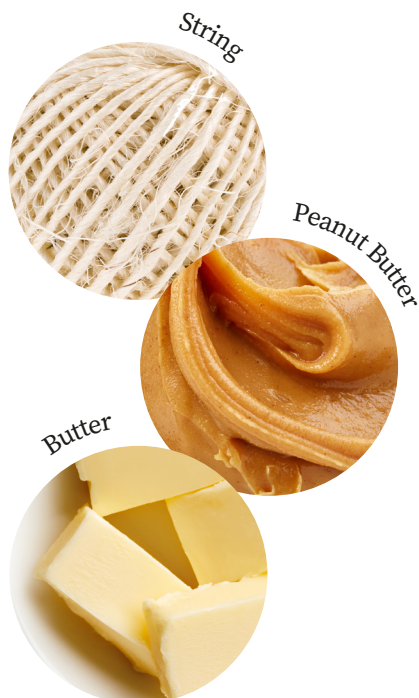
My hope is that this will resonate with someone reading, and convince them that they can do the same – we can take ownership of our scars, instead of letting them own us. Our scars are just stories on display, and them being seen is a sign that we are alive, and still fighting. Wear your story with pride, no matter what it is. ■

Photography | Right: @saneseven, Left: @sophiemayanne

# Feed the birds

And it doesn't even have to cost a tuppence a bag!

Follow these simple instructions to make your own eco-friendly bird feeder. If you've got kids, this can be a great activity to try together, and then watch out for some feathered friends who visit.



1

Take a walk through the woods and collect some pinecones.

5

Roll these, now sticky, pinecones through some birdseed.

2

When you're back home, take a length of string and tie it around the base of your cones – this will allow you to hang them up, and can be reused afterwards, to be more eco-friendly.

6

Once thoroughly coated, you can hang up your bird feeders on trees and bushes. And the good thing is, if you don't have a garden of your own, you could still put these up somewhere local and have a nice excuse to visit to see how the local wildlife is enjoying your tasty treat! [L](#)

3

Melt together some peanut butter and butter, until the mixture is runny. But allow it to cool enough so that it's not scalding to touch!

4

Dip your pinecones into this mixture, ensuring they're fully covered – watch out this can be messy (but also lots of fun).



# How to generate sensory awareness

Tune-in to the world around you, and discover a new sense of wellbeing

Writing | Georgia Dodsworth Illustration | Rosan Magar



Our senses play a huge part in our everyday life, yet we often take them for granted.

It's only when we're unwell and one of our senses is temporarily cut off (for instance, if we have a blocked nose), that we finally notice and appreciate it.

Each of our five senses is powerful and unique, and they can bring feelings of relief and safety – like that good feeling you get after experiencing something comforting, which leads our bodies to release oxytocin, reducing our heart rate and lowering stress levels.

In some therapeutic practices, such as dialectical behavioural therapy, sensory practices are used as a grounding, self-soothing technique that can help to reduce anxiety, promote mindfulness, and regulate emotions. So, how can we generate sensory awareness in our everyday lives?

## Sight

Colour psychology is a method for using colours for wellbeing, and for many years the link between colour and mood has been explored by researchers.

What they've discovered is that different colours can have outstanding benefits – blue can evoke a sense of productivity and safety, while purple is thought to encourage creativity.

Start to mindfully pay attention to the colours around you. Observe and describe what you see. Consider the colour, shape, texture, and notice how you feel. Stay in the moment. At home, keep the lighting soft and warm. Maybe light a candle, or purchase a lava lamp or a salt lamp, as they can create a calm mood for rest and sleep.



## Sound

A study published in *Scientific Reports* found that listening to naturalistic sounds, along with being in 'green' environments, is linked to relaxation and increased feelings of wellbeing. Listening to the sounds of ocean waves, streams, and thunderstorms, can help to relax the nervous system. Try taking 10–15 minutes out of your day to listen to a natural sound of your choice, and home-in to all the different elements within the sound. Head out into the wild, or keep it cosy at home – there are plenty of natural sound clips to stream or download on YouTube, Spotify, and Apple Music.





## “Because as we touch ourselves, we are reminded that we are alive, and safe in our body”

### Smell

Aromatherapy is the practice of using essential oils for an array of wellbeing purposes. Essential oils such as lavender, ylang-ylang, and clary sage may help with anxiety and insomnia, so you could try putting a few drops on your wrists or pillow (mix them with a carrier oil if putting directly on the skin). Rosemary, citrus, and geranium can help to lift your mood, or can be used when you need to focus.

Aromas are highly emotive, and breathing in a familiar smell can bring you back into the present moment. Maybe carry a scent in your bag – you never know when you might need it.



### Taste

Eating food while watching TV is a regular practice for many. But sometimes we don't actually notice what we've eaten, or when we're full, because we're distracted. Try to replace this mundane practice with mindful eating. Pay attention to what you're consuming – the colours, flavours, textures, and sensations. Let your taste buds engage with every mouthful.

Another tip to use if you're experiencing a heightened moment of anxiety is putting a strong taste in your mouth (such as a cough sweet or liquorice). Your attention will go to the strong taste rather than the anxiety you feel.



### Touch

From birth, we have a desire for social contact and connection. The sensation of being hugged or held feels good. But, when others aren't around, how can we replicate this? A daily practice of holding or squeezing our hands, our arms, or our face, brings a sense of security and self-validation. Another way of generating this feeling is by moisturising your body. Focus your attention on massaging the cream into each part of your skin, and notice how you feel while doing it. The sense of being able to touch ourselves can help if we experience a panic attack, because as we touch ourselves, we are reminded that we are alive, and safe in our body. [1](#)



*Georgia Dodsworth is a queer woman of colour who campaigns about mental health and body positivity. Founder of World of Self-Care, a platform that promotes mental wellbeing and self-care, she delivers self-care workshops and keynote speeches sharing her story living with borderline personality disorder. Follow her on Twitter and Instagram @SelfCareQueen\_*



**“And the day came when the  
risk to remain tight in a  
bud was more painful than  
the risk it took to blossom**

**ANAÏS NIN**

# Behind my painted smile

On the surface, Kirsty was living the good life. But in reality, she was masking intense feelings of anxiety, low self-esteem, and failure. Now, having come through her own crisis, she wants to help others who may be on a similar journey

Writing | **Kirsty Summers**

**D**o you look into other people's lives and think they have the world? We sometimes wonder, or assume, what others are thinking, yet in reality we have no clue. For so long, I painted on a smile. It has taken a while, but I feel comfortable with what I am about to explain, and I am almost thankful for the experience – for bringing me to where I am today.

The truth is I didn't want anyone to know or see how sad I really was. I would just let it all build up, and then cry on my own, and be sad in silence – like living two different lives. For me, emotionally, things came to a head in October 2018, and the breaking point was when my health started to deteriorate. Stress was killing me, and my relationship was dead.

My depression started a long time ago, as a culmination of numerous life challenges and experiences – including bad relationships, self-doubt, and always blaming myself for anything unfortunate that happened to me. I always felt like I was in the wrong, and was filled with self-doubt.

So when an opportunity arose to move to Dubai for what I thought would be my dream job in real estate, I felt like it was the change I needed after spending so much time unhappy and stuck in a rut. My family were a little uneasy with my

decision, but once they knew how much I wanted it, and to be honest *needed* it, they came around.

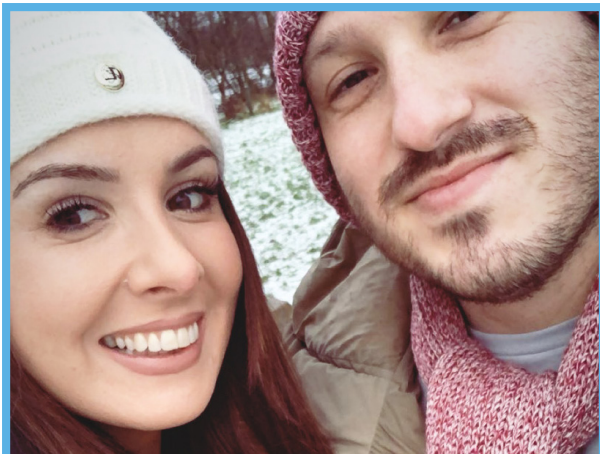
The problem was that I was sold a dream, but it ended up a nightmare. I worked so hard over there, but ended up losing out to the first company I worked with. I met my now ex-partner, and found myself so caught up in the bubble together that I forgot who I was as a person, and found myself giving my whole world to this person – without giving myself a second thought. I believed he was the one, so when things turned sour, it was horrific. Having never been in love before, and for the first time to be in love with someone who was living a lie, and did not love me like they said, broke my heart.

I was living a huge lie to the whole world, to my family, friends, and all my loved ones, but most importantly to myself. I was in denial. I ended up a shell, and I didn't even recognise myself.

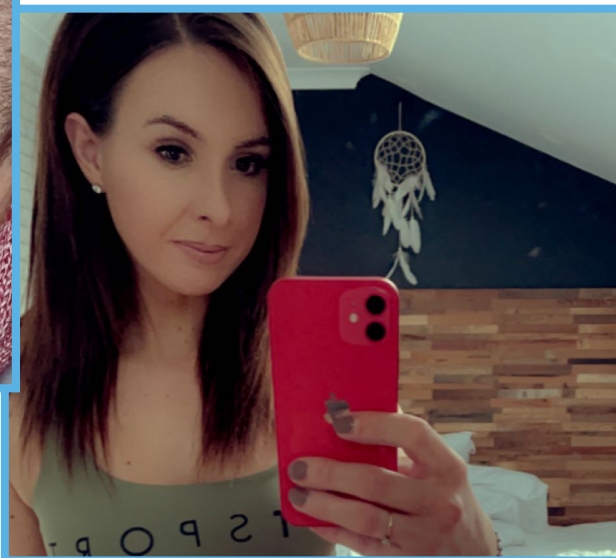
It got to the point where I could no longer paint on that smile; I could no longer function with daily life. Each day was a blur, and I was just plodding along. I felt so low, it was heartbreaking. I had a daily struggle of trying to pull myself together, while giving up at the same time.

I felt like I had no purpose. This feeling would not leave, and I couldn't lift my mood, no matter how hard I tried. >>>





Read Kirsty's blogs at [kirstysummers0.wixsite.com/website](http://kirstysummers0.wixsite.com/website)



So, in the end I realised I had two choices: sit and wallow in self-pity and the past, or get up, get on with my life, and start shining again!

I think moving home to Scotland from Dubai in 2019 undoubtedly saved my life. I'd lived out there for about two and a half years in total, and to everyone back home – and anyone who was following my social media – it looked like I was having the time of my life, but in reality I was so sad.

Don't get me wrong, I had some amazing times, and I don't regret taking that chance and starting a new adventure. Sadly, things just didn't go to plan as I was also experiencing extreme panic attacks and a feeling of worthlessness. I felt I should not be there, that I did not deserve to be there.

I had a sense that I had failed in life, and a strong dislike of myself. I could not lift the dark cloud that lingered around me. Most days I would cry at almost anything. Yes, I am an emotional person, but this was not normal.

When I hit rock bottom, I realised my only two options were to give up, or get on – I made the choice of the latter as I wanted to live, and believed that there was more out there for me.

My approach was simple: one day at a time. I realised the importance of taking time for me, and found that being alone helped me to create plans to move forward with. I spoke to my close friends – including a couple I actually called my Dubai mum and dad, who took me

in and who I'll forever be grateful to. Their wise words helped me so much, and encouraged me to rebuild 'me' again.

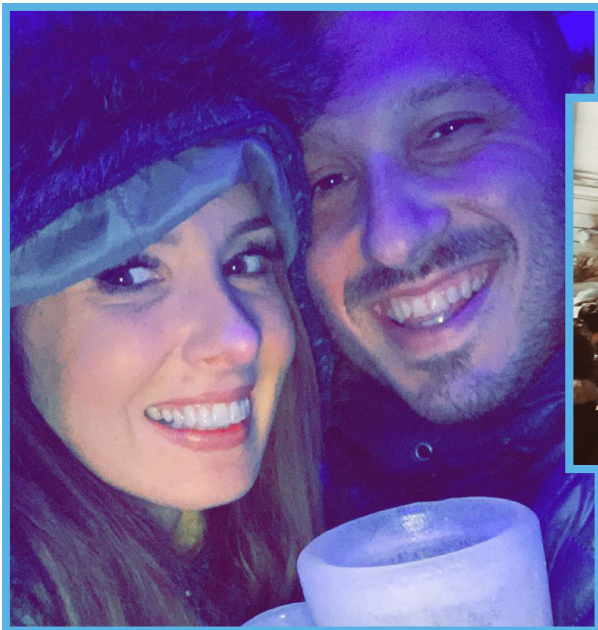
Reading was incredibly beneficial, and exercise was another outlet – whenever I worked out or went for a run, my head became clearer. Writing was useful; it's funny that if you write down how you're feeling, when you see it in front of you it often doesn't seem so bad.

“

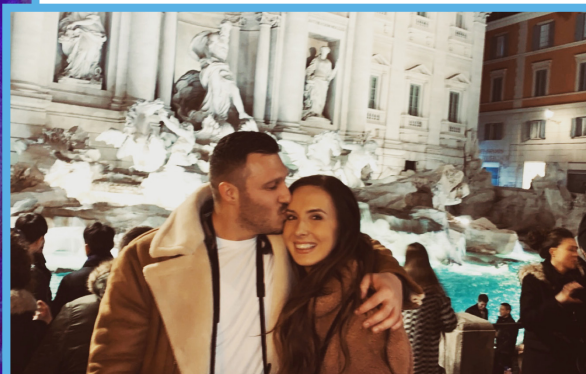
**I had two choices: sit and wallow in self-pity and the past, or get up, get on with my life, and start shining again!**

As soon as I got home to the UK, my first step was to speak to a doctor, and the second was speaking to a therapist. This can be daunting, and to be honest I was nervous, but it turned out to be the best thing for me! I wanted to get help as soon as possible, as it was so alarming how I was feeling, so I sought counselling privately.

Now, I'm in a much better place. From having days where I hated who I was and could barely



*Kirsty's past has made her who she is today*



look in the mirror, now I'm more content, and know that I'm a good person. I've learned to look after me a bit more. I watch for the signs I'm struggling, and make sure my mental health comes first.

My partner, Kris, and I recently bought our first home and move in August this year, which I'm so excited about. We have two gorgeous cats – Summer and Nala – and our family is growing with a baby on the way! Life is so magical, and I am so grateful to be where I am now.

The reason I wanted to share my story is to help other people who may be struggling right now, and are wondering if there is a way out. The answer is, yes! No matter how tough things are, there is always help, and light at the end. Please

“  
There is no shame in asking for a helping hand – you are not a burden, and things do get better

know you're not alone. When you are in a depressive state, your mind plays tricks on you to say that you're not good enough, and that you're not worthy – but you are.

Please seek help. There is no shame in asking for a helping hand – you are not a burden, and things do get better.

When things start to fall into place, this is when you look back on things and appreciate how far you've come, and how your past has made you the person you are – and for that I am grateful. ■

## OUR EXPERT SAYS

Kirsty highlights just how easy it is to assume others have everything, when inside it may be a different story. Social media can add to this, leaving people feeling – as Kirsty experienced – almost as though they're living a lie. Kirsty made a brave choice. She realised there really is no shame in reaching out. With determination and a growing strength, she made her way through

to build a life filled with love and purpose. If you find self-doubt or anxiety are affecting your life, remember, there's help out there. The real challenge is reaching out and making that first step.

**Rachel Coffey** | BA MA NLP Mstr  
Life coach



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# Happiful reads...

From managing your money to extraordinary stories, we share four books you won't want to miss

Writing | Chelsea Graham

**H**aving read ethnicity pay gap statistics, and noted how Black women tended to fare in comparison to their peers, Selina Flavius was motivated to find a way to help women invest in their own financial future. As a senior account executive herself, Selina put her knowledge into a

website and Instagram account that now host a community of around 10,000 people.

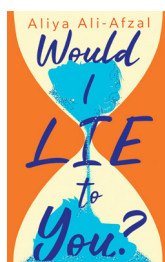
Money can often be a difficult topic to discuss with loved ones or to tackle yourself, but *Black Girl Finance* is a practical guide that you'll want to share. Selina creates a safe space, with a non-judgemental approach, and goal-



*Black Girl Finance: Let's Talk Money*  
by Selina Flavius  
Out now

setting exercises for anyone wishing to gain control of their finances.

## Must reads



*Would I Lie to You?* By Aliya Ali-Afzal

Out 8 July

When things go wrong, it's easy to think hiding it from

others is the best option. But what happens when you can no longer tell the truth? Compelling and heartwarming, Ali-Afzal's novel tells the story of Faiza, who has spent years shaping her life into the one she always dreamed of. When her husband Tom suddenly loses his job, she can't bear to tell him she has spent all of their savings.

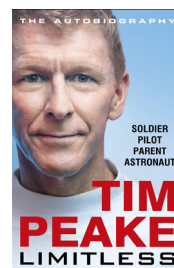


*Cookfulness* by Ian Taverner

Out now

For those who live with mental ill-health,

chronic illness, or chronic pain, preparing multiple nutritious meals a day can often require a lot of energy, and can sometimes feel unachievable. Packed full of tips and tricks for making mealtimes more accessible, *Cookfulness* strives to reignite a passion for therapeutic cooking in all of its readers.



*Limitless: The Autobiography* by Tim Peake

Out now

The aptly named, *Limitless*, tells the extraordinary story of Tim

Peake's journey to becoming an astronaut – from joining the British Army as a pilot to finally experiencing the weightlessness of space. Sharing personal stories and exclusive diaries, this book is testament to the incredible power of pursuing your ambitions, even when the end goal is, quite literally, out of this world.



# An honest conversation

Finding the right treatment is essential for managing our mental health, but one factor that can damage our self-esteem and potentially dissuade people from sticking to their plans can be changes in weight. Here, we explore how to navigate mental health medications when weight changes can be triggering, and how to ensure you find a healthy, suitable solution for you

Writing | Katie Conibear

**W**eight gain is a common side-effect of many mental health medications, but it isn't often talked about. It's absolutely vital that people receive the right treatment to help manage their mental illness, but the potential fear, or triggering nature, of weight changes could be something that puts people off seeking much-needed support. And the stigma surrounding both medication and weight gain can prevent people from talking about this connection, too – making it a challenge that many feel they are facing alone.

As someone who takes medication for bipolar disorder,

I've experienced weight gain. As much as the medication helped stabilise my moods, the weight I put on had a huge impact on my self-esteem. On a personal level, I felt miserable and it impacted my confidence. My sex life was affected too, and it put a huge strain on my relationship.

Having a history of bulimia, (I'm now in recovery), it was vital I was told about the possible implications. This experience taught me how important it is to communicate with GPs, therapists, and psychiatrists. When we were discussing treatment options, I didn't think about the side-effects I might go through, or the possible impact it would have on my body image

and overall mental health. The side-effects are so important to talk through to ensure individuals have proper understanding of what to expect, and can express any concerns or needs.

Counsellor Kathryn Taylor explains: "Eating disorders are often caused by low self-esteem, and having a negative self-image or feelings of having no control over various areas of an individuals' life. Individuals presenting with eating disorders often see taking control of what they put into their body as a way of taking back some of that sense of control, and improving their self-image."

Personally, gaining weight caused me to relapse temporarily. Eating disorders are often



“

**This experience taught me how important it is to communicate with GPs, therapists, and psychiatrists**

accompanied by other mental health conditions, so it can make finding the right treatment and medication a little more complicated.

“When an individual who has an eating disorder seeks treatment and finds ways to manage their thoughts, emotions, and feelings, this can greatly aid them in managing their condition,” counsellor Kathryn says.

“However, when they go through periods of stress, this will possibly impact their mental health and ability to see positives about themselves, which negatively impacts their self-esteem and body image, and this may then may result in a relapse.”

With all this considered, it's so important to be clear and honest with your GP or psychiatrist about any history of disordered eating you may have, and/or your fears of relapsing into unhealthy habits. When I was initially diagnosed with bipolar disorder, I wasn't honest, and ultimately it put back my journey to finding long-term stability. Sometimes when we're at our lowest, or struggling the most we >>>





ever have, we will take the first option put in front of us, which isn't always the right fit.

"Talk to your GP about your concerns and the fact that the possible side-effects worry you," says Kathryn. "Then work with your GP to look at alternative medication, to ensure you have the appropriate mental health support structure in place to enable you to manage your mental wellbeing at this time – as well as working towards resolving the underlying causes."

Finding the right medication can sometimes be trial and error – so it's your right to choose a different medication if you're

worried about weight gain, but you must do this safely. One important thing to remember is that you should only stop taking medication when you've been instructed to do so by your doctor, which usually involves a slow taper off the medication.

Now, I'm on medication that works for me, and have more of a handle on bipolar and its symptoms. Although I have gained weight, I'm more focused on maintaining a healthy lifestyle – eating well with regular exercise. Ultimately, when it comes to your overall health it's about finding what is healthiest and happiest for you.



**Ultimately when it comes to your overall health it's about finding what is healthiest and happiest for you**

It might be embracing a healthy lifestyle that helps counteract some side-effects, or it could be seeking out therapy to help you understand why you have a negative self-image or self-esteem issues. Those initial conversations with your doctor should be a two-way conversation, where



they make sure you know what to expect from side-effects, and you express your worries and anxieties.

Positive lifestyle changes, such as eating healthily and getting regular exercise, can help to boost your self-esteem, but there is more to lifestyle changes than just food and exercise. Focusing on your mind, and how you approach each day, to making sure you're doing something every day that brings you joy, can be just as beneficial.

To help you on your journey to a healthier you, counsellor Kathryn Taylor shares some top tips:

**1. Identify positive things in your life.** Keep a journal and note down at least three positive things each day to have a regular reminder. If this is difficult at first, start with small things and build from there.

**2. Ensure that you drink plenty of water** – dehydration can impact your mental state.

**3. Try to get outside in the fresh air and nature each day.** If this is challenging for you, start by standing near an open window or door for five minutes, and gradually build on this.

**4. Try to avoid situations or people in your life that don't support you, or negatively impact you.** Setting boundaries is healthy.

**5. Ensure you get enough rest** – listen to your body and what it needs.

**6. Be kind to yourself and do things you enjoy** – reading a book, taking a bath, calling a friend, gardening, making time for a hobby.

**7. Set yourself small challenges,** and take small steps towards achieving your desired goals.

**8. Practise breathing exercises** for two to three minutes, several times a day (or whenever you feel you need to take some time out), as these help to calm the nervous system and reduce anxiety. Try the following two options...

**Belly breathing:** Ensure you breathe properly, opening up your chest and shoulders, placing a hand on your chest and one on your stomach as you breathe in. You should feel the hand on your stomach lift up as you breathe in, and deflate as you breathe out. Follow the path of your breath in through the nostrils noticing how it feels, imagine the breath going down through your chest and into your lungs, down to your stomach, then rising back up and coming out of your nose – noticing it's slightly warmer than at the start.

**Box Breathing:** Breathe in for five seconds, and hold this for five seconds. Breathe out for five seconds, then hold for five seconds. Repeat this for two to three minutes.

*Katie Conibear is a writer who blogs at [stumblingmind.com](https://www.stumblingmind.com). Her first book, 'Living at the speed of light', about bipolar disorder, is out now. [📖](#)*



*Kathryn Taylor is a certified counsellor and coach, helping people cope with a variety of issues. For more expert insight and to get in touch with Kathryn, visit [counselling-directory.org.uk](https://counselling-directory.org.uk)*





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# Take a different route to relaxation

When the usual advice isn't hitting the spot, it's time to try a path less trodden to reach a calmer destination

Writing | Kat Nicholls



A quiet mind, a soft body and a settled spirit. This is the holy grail when it comes to relaxation. Finding this can be tough at the best of times, but it's safe to say when a pandemic got thrown into the mix, it became even harder.

There are certain tried and tested methods to help us relax, from deep breathing and yoga to walks in nature and connecting with loved ones. For many, these are clear steps to calm that do the

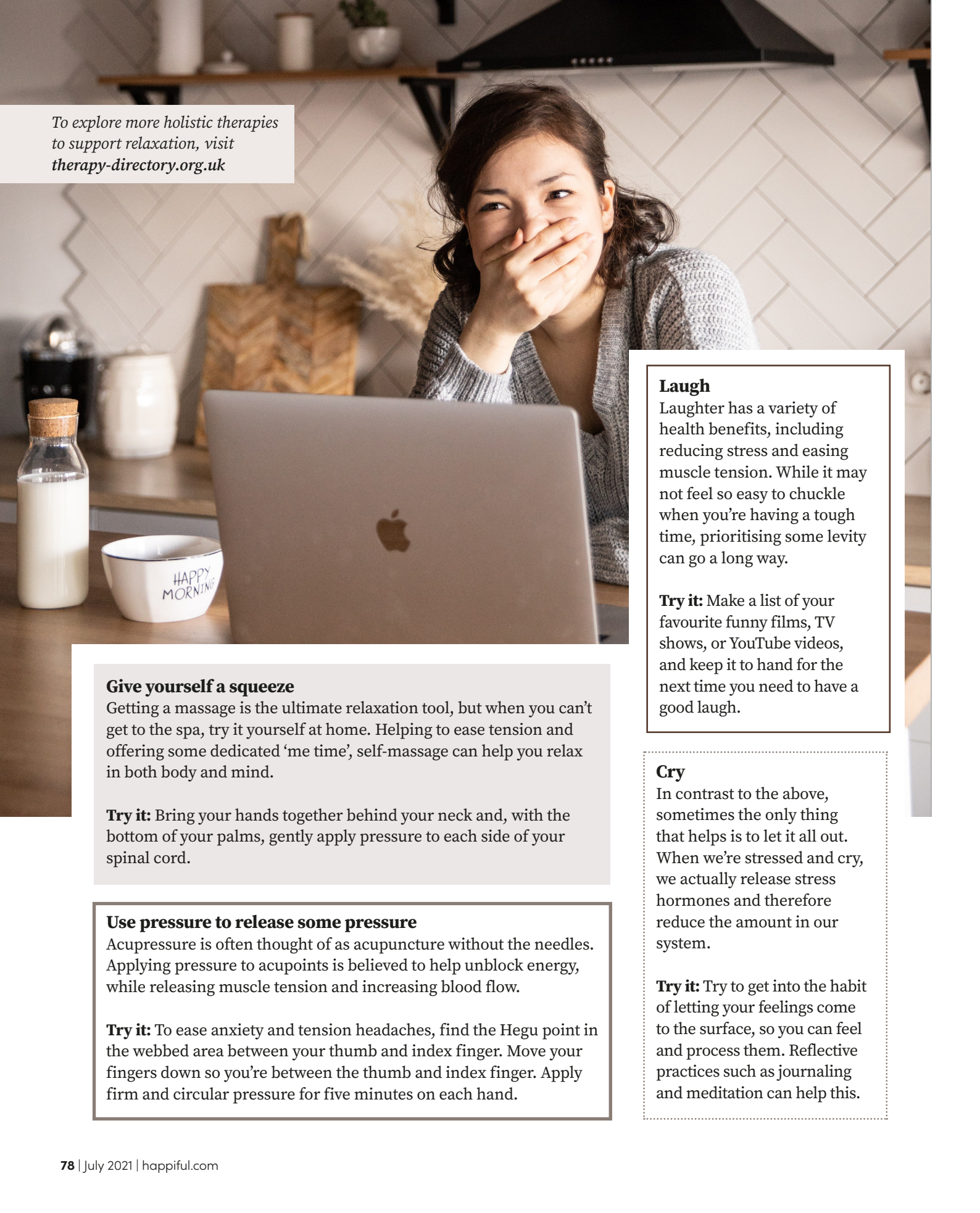
trick every time. But what can we do if the traditional routes to relaxation aren't working for us?

We're all gloriously unique, and many of us are going through emotions we've never encountered before. Sometimes the thing that everyone raves about just isn't right for us anymore. When this happens, seeking out a different approach can help. Here are some lesser known tips to relax that you can experiment with.

## Dance it out

Helping you get out of your head and into your body, any sort of movement can be a great stress-reliever. Listening to music you love, and moving in a totally free way, can boost your mood and inject a bit of fun into your day.

**Try it:** Set a timer for five minutes, play your favourite songs, and let go! Dance in your kitchen, with the kids, or at your local park (wherever you feel comfortable), and see how you feel after. >>>



To explore more holistic therapies to support relaxation, visit [therapy-directory.org.uk](http://therapy-directory.org.uk)

### Give yourself a squeeze

Getting a massage is the ultimate relaxation tool, but when you can't get to the spa, try it yourself at home. Helping to ease tension and offering some dedicated 'me time', self-massage can help you relax in both body and mind.

**Try it:** Bring your hands together behind your neck and, with the bottom of your palms, gently apply pressure to each side of your spinal cord.

### Use pressure to release some pressure

Acupressure is often thought of as acupuncture without the needles. Applying pressure to acupoints is believed to help unblock energy, while releasing muscle tension and increasing blood flow.

**Try it:** To ease anxiety and tension headaches, find the Hegu point in the webbed area between your thumb and index finger. Move your fingers down so you're between the thumb and index finger. Apply firm and circular pressure for five minutes on each hand.

### Laugh

Laughter has a variety of health benefits, including reducing stress and easing muscle tension. While it may not feel so easy to chuckle when you're having a tough time, prioritising some levity can go a long way.

**Try it:** Make a list of your favourite funny films, TV shows, or YouTube videos, and keep it to hand for the next time you need to have a good laugh.

### Cry

In contrast to the above, sometimes the only thing that helps is to let it all out. When we're stressed and cry, we actually release stress hormones and therefore reduce the amount in our system.

**Try it:** Try to get into the habit of letting your feelings come to the surface, so you can feel and process them. Reflective practices such as journaling and meditation can help this.

**Get sorting**

‘Tidy home, tidy mind’ is a cliché for a reason. When we’re feeling mentally cluttered with stress and overwhelm, it can help to clear away physical clutter. The mindful act of organising and sorting through things can also be meditative.

**Try it:** Pick an area of the house to sort through, and get to it! We love doing this with our wardrobes and kitchen cupboards in particular, as a place you’ll feel the benefit of being organised each day. Put on some music, and let yourself get fully immersed in the task.

“Self-hypnosis is a bit like taking meditation, and infusing it with an intention to change

**Try sound therapy**

Music can have a profound impact on our mood, and certain types of music can often be a shortcut to calm. To take things a step further, try listening to music with low-frequency sound waves and binaural beats. This can slow our brain waves, and induce a feeling of calm.

**Try it:** Head to YouTube or Spotify and search for low-frequency music and/or binaural beats.

**Walk barefoot**

Getting out into nature, and letting your bare feet walk the earth, can feel incredibly freeing, and research says it could reduce stress, too. Studies are limited, but the negative charge from the earth’s surface is believed to act as an antioxidant, and could improve sleep, reduce stress, and even ease pain.

**Try it:** The next time you go for a walk and you’re near a green space, kick off your shoes and feel the dirt between your toes. Focus on the sensations, and being connected to the ground beneath you.

**Give self-hypnosis a go**

Self-hypnosis is a bit like taking meditation, and infusing it with an intention to change. Tapping into the power of your subconscious, self-hypnosis is ideal if you’re looking to change habits that will make relaxing easier.

**Try it:** Get yourself into a comfortable position, and focus on relaxing each muscle group one by one. Create suggestions for yourself to encourage a change in habits, for example: “I will switch off from work when work is done.” Visualise this happening in great detail, and note how it feels. Repeat the process regularly.

**Try Reiki**

Reiki is an energy healing system that originated in Japan. Attuning themselves to universal life energy, Reiki practitioners can then use their hands to adjust this energy in others. Encouraging you to lie down, relax, and connect with something outside of yourself, many people find Reiki sessions incredibly soothing.

**Try it:** Search for a Reiki practitioner and, if in-person sessions aren’t possible, enquire about distant healing.

**Slip into something more (or less) comfortable**

Wearing comfortable and tactile clothes can help you feel freer in your body, and more relaxed. A cosy texture can also stimulate your sense of touch, which can help ground you. In contrast to this, some people find constricting ‘athleisure’ soothing. With compression garments stimulating ‘deep touch pressure’, similar to weighted blankets.

**Try it:** Experiment with different types and textures of clothes, and see what feels best for you.

Hopefully there’ll be something on this list you haven’t tried before, so get experimenting, see what works for you, and expand your relaxation repertoire. ■



# A breath of fresh air

**Alice Liveing** is the fitness superstar, best-selling author, and founder of brand new wellness app Give Me Strength, redefining our approach to exercise and sharing, with raw honesty, how she's 'doing the work' with therapy to boost her resilience

Writing | **Gemma Calvert**

**B**eing outside in nature was so good for my mood," a fresh-faced Alice Liveing says, describing this morning's dawn walk. "It's important to check-in with your body, and know when you can push and pull."

Leaping out of bed at 6am is inspiring, but for Alice, today's walk is life in the slower lane. "Five or six years ago" the 28-year-old recalls waking at 5am to be in the gym, before racing around London all day training clients. Exercise was a strict six-days-a-week priority, and the cocktail of commitments left her frazzled.

"I completely overrode any signals of tiredness or hunger. Now, I have a really good level of intuitiveness," she explains. "I have a much healthier balance. I have a respect for my body, for rest, and know that exercise isn't always a good thing. Sometimes the best thing you can do is do nothing, and that's OK."

Mindful of the restorative benefits of rest, and the impact various factors such as hormones, insufficient sleep, and stress on energy levels, recently in the midst of "the most awful period", Alice abandoned exercise plans in favour of "vegging on the sofa".

While this visceral approach to health is refreshing, Alice is equally conscious of the dangers of inactivity. A 2017 study by the British Heart Foundation said "around 20 million adults in the UK are insufficiently active", and she believes we need to celebrate a greater variety of role models, to encourage more people to take their health seriously.

"We have to start championing a diverse range of voices in order for people who live all over the country, who might have never engaged with exercise before, to see someone on a bus or in a magazine be like, 'She looks like me. I can do that,'" she says.



“

Fit looks different on everyone, and healthy looks different on everyone. We really need to diversify who we're seeing as our role models. You can't be what you can't see

“We don't celebrate female athletes enough. Why aren't we seeing female rugby players, shot putters, weight lifters? Fit looks different on everyone, and healthy looks different on everyone. We need to diversify who we're seeing as our role models within that fitness space. You can't be what you can't see.”

And Alice has come a long way in her own journey to try to be that role model for others. When the former musical theatre student from Buckinghamshire burst on to the scene in 2015, she was a student-turned-food-blogger who quickly built a vast social media following under the moniker Clean Eating Alice.

But by the summer of 2019, after banking a raft of celebrity clients and outselling the likes of Mary Berry and Jamie Oliver with the first of three best-selling books, the qualified PT and nutritionist admitted that at the height of her rise to fame, she fell victim to societal pressures and body image hang ups, which led to a propensity to over-exercise. She later conceded that her original approach had been a little “restrictive”, but says that learning from those mistakes helped her realise the power of inclusive, instinctive fitness.

“My journey was played out incredibly publicly, and it was painful at times to have to regress on some of the stuff I'd said. But do I regret it? In some ways, no, because so many women who follow my page now see that journey in themselves,” says Alice honestly, whose motto is now “everything in moderation”. >>>

“

I'm not a superwoman. We all can be hurt, we all go through things that are going to damage us. My biggest message is do the work and take the help, because that's what will make you resilient

Today, honesty still reigns as Alice reveals how, during the pandemic, she found herself struggling with her mental health, and sought counselling to better understand herself.

“This time last year, I was in such a bad place,” she says. “Up until lockdown, I'd lived my life at a million miles an hour, and I had filled voids of emptiness and sadness with keeping myself busy. The stillness of lockdown and everything being ripped out from underneath us all made me really think, ‘There's a lot that I need to connect with here, and I need to deal with.’”

A survivor of domestic abuse, Alice was just 16 when a new boyfriend became controlling, and abused her physically and mentally over the course of a year.

“It really messed me up. It messed up my ability to have relationships, and my ability to trust. I'm incredibly nervous in certain situations – I still

have times where I have really bad flashbacks. A lot of stuff still haunts me,” says Alice, explaining how she first found it easier to “bury my head in the sand and pretend it never happened”, before eventually turning to counselling.

The self-help was short-lived though, as Alice elected to “walk away” from talking therapy when she and the therapist failed to click. Then last year, at the start of the pandemic, Alice found an “amazing” therapist online, and finally began healing past trauma through bi-weekly sessions.

“In the past, therapy almost felt like a tick box exercise. I'd sit there, tell them all my problems, then leave and feel terrible,” says Alice. “What I really learned

was I needed to find someone that I really gelled with, had a relationship with, and [with whom] there was a level of trust, and communication. Ten years later, I'm ready to talk about it.”

And how is she feeling now, following that period of support and therapy?

“There's work to be done in terms of healing a lot of that trauma, but I would say I'm 99% there. There are moments where I see someone that looks like him, or I'm walking down my road, when it's dark, and I suddenly think, ‘Oh my god, what would I do if he was behind me?’ I never feel 100% safe, but you *can* heal it. It takes time.”

Ask Alice – now a Women's Aid ambassador and happily in a relationship with her boyfriend,





*Alice Liveing's app, Give Me Strength, is available now at [givemestrength.app](https://givemestrength.app)*

Paddy – to pinpoint the most incredible thing she has learned about herself during one year of consistent, regular therapy, and she contemplates for a moment.

“What abuse does, is it makes you feel so worthless that you think nobody will love me or care about me,” Alice says. “My confidence was so shredded, and that’s why I was constantly trying to fill that void by projecting this image of happiness. All that stuff is just a sticking plaster for a deeper issue, and I have learned that I need to like myself from the inside out first, and the only way that we can start to have a better relationship with everyone around us, is to have a better relationship with ourselves.”

It makes total sense that Alice called her new app Give Me Strength – the same name as her hugely successful podcast, which sees her interviewing extraordinary people about building mental and physical resilience. Alice is a prime example of someone who’s discovered durability during dark times. She links her resilience to her parents, who she says are “very strong people”, but believes her true power comes from not being afraid to invest in self-improvement.

“My life is a million times better now than it ever has been, but I’m also doing the work,” she says.

“I’m not a superwoman. We all can be hurt, we have all experienced trauma, we all go through things that are going to damage us. My biggest message is do the work and take the help, because that’s what will make you resilient.”

Since the pandemic, Alice has observed a shift in the fitness landscape, as more people turn to exercise, not just to reap fitness benefits.

The closure of gyms sparked a surge in home workouts, which provided an energy release, and a much-needed sense of community during isolation.

“The last year has made people call upon exercise for different motivations. People recognised that they needed it to support their mental wellbeing,” says Alice. “We are very lucky we’re in a time when talking about mental health is far less taboo, which means that people can speak about relying on exercise to help with their anxiety or their depression.”

These days, Alice has become a virtual trainer to the masses, having shifted her entire brand online. During lockdown, she provided daily live workouts over Instagram. Now the app is taking her services to the next level.



“I hated only being able to see 10 clients in a week. Now I can be everyone’s pocket personal trainer in the app,” she smiles. “It’s very much about what I can give to you, how I can educate you, and help you to have a positive environment in which you can develop a healthy relationship with exercise.”

Alice swears by a multifaceted approach to physical wellbeing, because a combination of factors create our personal optimal health. But her best bit of advice?

“The one thing everyone can do for free today to feel better is to walk more,” she says. “We are becoming a much more sedentary nation, and walking is incredible for our mind and body. Walk a little more, really enjoy that time and, if possible, make that walk in nature to make it even better.” **h**



# How mindfulness can re-invigorate your sex life

Harness the power of mindfulness to form deeper connections

Writing | Jodie Bond

**W**e all know the benefits of mindfulness, but have you ever considered introducing aspects of mindful practice into your sex life? Many of us don't associate calm and mindfulness with the passion we strive for in the bedroom, yet taking the time to think mindfully about sex is a great way to super-charge your love life.

Professor Lori Brotto is a psychologist and author from the University of British Columbia's Sexual Health Laboratory. Considering the links she's found in her research, Professor Brotto says: "A large body of scientific research shows that mindfulness significantly improves sexual desire, and several other facets of sexual function, mood, and sexual quality of life."

Improving the way we tune-in to our bodies through mindfulness can improve the way we tune-in to our sexuality. These five steps will help you get started.

## **Passionate sex is mindful sex**

Think back to your most powerful sexual experience. Do you remember what was running through your head? It's likely that you don't. When we're immersed in the throes of passion, we are seized by the moment. We give our whole being to it. And that is exactly what mindfulness is. Passionate sex is mindful sex: we give all our energy to the heat of the experience, with no room for distraction.

In long-term relationships, we often find ourselves slipping into autopilot. We put ourselves through the motions of sex without being present. Do you

ever find yourself thinking about work, or your never-ending to-do list? Our thoughts can be a barrier to intimacy.

## **Learn to switch off**

Be in the moment during sex. Focus on your senses, and not on how you're performing. This will not only help both you and your partner to relax, but will make the experience more enjoyable. Focus on the parts of your body that are alight with sensation. Notice your movements, the rise and fall of your breath, the warmth and coolness, the shiver of your skin.

Talking to your partner about what you're experiencing during sex will help you both gain a better understanding of how to dial up the pleasure. Those whispers between the sheets can also be a huge turn on.





### Meditation and sex

Meditation and sex might sound like contradictory activities. Meditation is practised alone, usually in stillness and silence; sex is often active, noisy, and frequently practised with a partner! But these two activities are more complementary than you might think.

Research suggests that meditating in our daily lives has a positive impact on our enjoyment of sex. Regular meditation reduces the amount of the stress hormone, cortisol, that we produce. We all know that feeling stressed pushes sex down the priority list, and makes us more distracted when engaging with our partner. By lowering our

stress levels through meditation, we can give our mind, and libido, the breathing space required to ignite our sense of desire.

### Don't put pressure on yourself

Often, we think of an orgasm as the primary goal when having sex, but placing climax on a pedestal can create unwanted pressure. According to a study published in *Socioaffective Neuroscience & Psychology*, more than half of women struggle to climax through penetrative sex, and chasing after an orgasm can distract from other sensual pleasures, and lead to frustration. Letting go of expectations, and simply enjoying the moment for what it is, will often yield astonishing results.

“

**When we are immersed in the throes of passion, we are seized by the moment**

### Make a date

It is easy for sex to slip down the list of priorities in long-term relationships – it's not often given the time it deserves. A survey published in the *British Medical Journal* revealed that we are having less sex than we used to. This is often attributed to the fast pace of our modern lives.

A lot of value is placed on our ability to be spontaneous with sex, but there is no shame in scheduling it in. If you take one thing from this, promise yourself that you'll dedicate a few hours to engage mindfully with sex.

Mindfulness is about finding an anchor for your focus. Let the anchor be your own body. Learn to return to that anchor when you are distracted, and you will revolutionise your love life. That's a promise. **■**

*Jodie Bond is the author of 'The Vagabond King'. She writes on a variety of topics, and has a particular interest in sex and desire. Follow her on Twitter @jodierbond*



# Are you a wellbeing professional?

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# CHALLENGE ACCEPTED!

Five activities to take you out of your comfort zone, and boost your confidence

Writing | Rebecca Thair

## ROCK-CLIMBING

When we're facing a challenge, it can feel like we're up against a wall – so why not tackle this literally? Rock climbing is as much a mental test as a physical one, helping to develop your problem-solving skills as you navigate your way up the wall.

Plus, rock climbing is quite an accessible activity. As 'seeing the route' is less important than feeling for friction, and maintaining balance, it can be great for those with visual impairments. There are also harnesses to support those with mobility issues – visit [anyonecan.uk/go-rock-climbing](https://anyonecan.uk/go-rock-climbing) for more.

## MENTORING

So often we doubt our knowledge and feel like imposters, but we have so much value and insight to share, that many people would be grateful to hear. Helping someone else is a wonderful thing in itself, but it can also boost your self-belief as you realise how much you truly have to offer.

Why not visit charity [reachoutuk.org](https://reachoutuk.org), which connects young people from disadvantaged backgrounds with a mentor in weekly sessions?



## COOKING CLASS

Experiment with new cuisines, learn valuable skills, and have fun whipping something new up in the kitchen. You could go with a friend to ease you in, or make new 'foodie' friends there – search for classes in your local area online. Alternatively, if attending a class might be a few steps too far for you, you can still breathe some life into your tried and tested kitchen favourites by exploring new recipes. Some quality time making food for yourself is not only a way of showing yourself love, but it can be a really mindful activity as you focus on the moment, the smells, tastes, and textures.

## CAMPING

When modern life feels overwhelming, taking things back to basics could help you reconnect with what truly matters to you. Whether it's at a

proper campsite, or just in your back garden, taking a weekend away from technology and spending time with loved ones – or just you – can be incredibly freeing. You'll realise how little you really need.

## CLUBBERCISE

Group exercise classes can have so many benefits, but personally I've always found the concept intimidating. But the great thing about Clubbercise classes is that you can enjoy them in the dark! There's no eyes on you if you miss a step, so you can completely let loose and have fun – yet you'll still benefit from a boost of endorphins, and who doesn't feel better after dancing it out?

# Did you know?

Fun facts to brighten your day – and perhaps help you storm your next pub quiz

**1** Bees sleep between five and eight hours a day, and sometimes they bed down inside flowers. Plus, if that wasn't cute enough, they like to cuddle up and hold each other's feet!



**2** Bhutan is the only country in the world that measures its population's happiness levels – known as its Gross National Happiness (GNH).

**3** The famously green Statue of Liberty is actually made of copper – and was originally the colour of a penny. Over time, thanks to oxidation, it turned a turquoise-green.

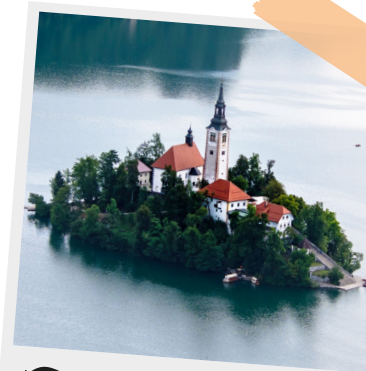


**4** Astronaut Eugene Cernan wrote his daughter's initials on the moon in 1972.

**5** Popular cartoon Great Dane Scooby-Doo's full name is actually Scoobert Doo.



**6** A study in the journal *Emotion* revealed that interpersonal synchronisation happens when we look into a loved one's eyes – with breathing, heartbeats, and thought patterns linking up.



**7** Sweden has the most islands of any country in the world – more than 220,000!

**8** The creator of the modern-day seatbelt, Volvo engineer Nils Bohlin, gave up the patent to the designs for free, to ensure as many people as possible could drive more safely.

**9** The British Library in King's Cross is the largest in the world – containing more than 170 million items.

**10** Scots have more than 400 words for snow, including feefle (to swirl), unbrak (the start of a thaw), and fyoonaach (a dusting). ❄️



# Not just thin-skinned: Understanding rejection sensitive dysphoria

What can you do when rejection feels utterly unbearable? Here we explore rejection sensitive dysphoria and its ties to ADHD

Writing | Kat Nicholls

**N**o one likes to be rejected, do they? As humans, we've evolved to fear social rejection – back when we lived in caves, we needed the support of our tribe to stay alive. If we were rejected, we were quite literally left out in the cold. These days, many of us are able to push past this fear, learning that, while rejection isn't pleasant, it won't hurt us and we'll get through the day.

For those with rejection sensitive dysphoria (RSD), however, this learning doesn't quite stick.

## What is rejection sensitive dysphoria?

RSD is intense emotional sensitivity and pain triggered by the perception that you've been rejected, criticised by someone, or feeling like you don't belong.

"Dysphoria literally means 'unbearable suffering' in Greek, and that matches my experience of it for sure," online educator and RSD sufferer Sara Tasker explains. "It's overwhelmingly painful and frightening – even if I know that what's being said about me isn't fair or true."

For Sara, getting rejected (or even just suspecting that she might be rejected) can take her from feeling fine to desperate and suicidal, with a low mood that can last for days or weeks. The speed at which this mood can change has led to some people being misdiagnosed with rapid cycling mood disorder.

Counsellor Nic Higham also experiences RSD and notes that, while these events may seem insignificant for others, for those with RSD, it feels like "an injury that can't be soothed".

"In response, they might instantly act defensively, seek acceptance compulsively, attempt to numb the pain, or become withdrawn," Nic explains. "They may also pursue a euphoria-inducing activity or substance as a way of coping, which could be said to be the opposite extreme of dysphoria."

When she was younger, Sara's coping mechanism was to withdraw and become a chronic people-pleaser. "Every single criticism of me was valid and true, as far as my brain was concerned and, by my late 20s, I had crippling low self-esteem, and felt like I needed to perpetually apologise just for my existence.

"As I've gotten older, and had a lot of therapy, I've been better able to show up without that fear in my everyday life. >>>

“

It's overwhelmingly painful  
and frightening – even if I  
know that what's being said  
about me isn't fair or true

“But because my work is quite visible – I'm an online educator, with a big podcast and Instagram following – there are still lots of occasions where rejection hits me really hard. Something as simple as a book review or tweet from a troll account can send me spiralling, and cripple my ability to work, parent, or even function for days.”

When asked how she came to learn about RSD, Sara explains that she discovered it after receiving a diagnosis of ADHD.

### The link to ADHD

If you have ADHD or are neurodivergent in other ways, chances are you may well recognise the RSD symptoms described.

“Up to 99% of adults with ADHD are more troubled by the perception of rejection than those who are neurotypical,” Nic says. “The ADHD mind and nervous system don't like to leave things unfinished; specifically, things that activate a state of hyperfocus. A seemingly rejecting interaction will activate this state, and so it feels impossible to let it go.”

ADHD is characterised by internal hyperactivity, hypersensitivity and hyperarousal, memory difficulties, and often perfectionism. “All of which provide a fertile ground for rejection sensitivity,” Nic says. “Frequent bouts of ambiguity and overwhelm nourish the seeds of rejection, and the impulsivity and scattered attention make the experience hard to bear.”

When Sara read about RSD, and was able to give her experience a name, she says she cried with relief. Similarly, Nic says knowing he wasn't alone, and that there was a name for this “unique form of pain”, meant everything. For many, learning what RSD is and recognising that it's far more than being ‘thin-skinned’ helps immensely.

### What can help?

The condition is notoriously difficult to treat, with some experts saying medication is the only thing that can help, while others say therapy can be useful. Sara agrees that she's

not found anything that can stop the pain of the immediate experience, but she has learnt lots of strategies to help her stop believing it's true.

“Whereas previously, I would have adopted the criticism as an essential fact about myself, now I'm able to question the feedback, set up boundaries, and hold firm in the things that I know to be true about myself,” Sara says. “I've done a lot of work on choosing whose opinions really matter to me, and allowing myself to stay strong in my knowledge of the good things about myself.”

Nic agrees there are strategies to help, and believes counselling can be supportive for those with RSD.

“A person who experiences RSD may discover equanimity, belonging, and clarity in counselling, and ideally will be supported in cultivating these qualities and holding the pain.

“While episodes of profound rejection will continue, counselling may bring to light ways to soften the blow, for example, with distress,



“  
What’s key is to  
learn that although  
rejection is hard  
to bear, it isn’t  
unbearable, and  
will eventually pass

tolerance, and resilience skills. They may also gain greater awareness of how generalising, deleting, and distorting thinking has shaped the event.”

Softening the blow and limiting the damage caused by rejection does appear to be possible. It may not be easy, and it may take a

multi-pronged approach, but the key thing is it is possible.

If you recognise the symptoms described, Nic recommends considering an ADHD assessment. “I was 36 when I was diagnosed, and I found the self-understanding the diagnosis brought life-changing.”

Speaking to others who ‘get it’ can also be a help. Sara notes that there are helpful online spaces, like Reddit, where you can read about how others cope. “Most of all, though, I’d say to remember that you are not what other people think of you. That’s not what defines who you are in this world. Really recognising this, and starting to slowly internalise it, has been the biggest change for me with this issue.”

Similarly, what helps Nic is reminding himself that, despite his feelings of not belonging, he’s very much present and alive.

“What’s key is to learn that although rejection is hard to bear, it isn’t unbearable, and it will eventually pass.” ■



*Nic Higham is a counsellor, life coach, and a mindfulness author. Find Nic and other counsellors who support those with ADHD on [counselling-directory.org.uk](https://counselling-directory.org.uk)*



# Ask the experts: confidence crisis



Life coach and career coach **Alana Leggett** answers your questions on confidence, to bolster your self-esteem and help you feel empowered

Read more about Alana Leggett on [lifecoach-directory.org.uk](https://lifecoach-directory.org.uk)

**Q** I seem to have lost my spark. I'm full of doubt, second-guessing every thought, feeling, and decision. Are there any techniques I can try to rekindle my self-trust?

**A** I have a lot of clients coming to me full of doubt, and unsure what to do next. I have

found that most often this comes down to feeling stuck because there are too many options – which can, ironically, make us feel more trapped. When we don't know what we want, and there are multiple routes we could take, this often makes us less confident in our decisions. This is called the "paradox of choice" (Barry Schwartz). One way to feel more decisive, and to reduce self-doubt, is to limit your choices,

ruthlessly rule options out, and take action. It doesn't need to be the perfect idea or the perfect timing – by making any decision, you will no longer feel stuck and will now be in motion. You can learn from that, adapt as needed, and even change course – but first you need to get moving. Once taking some form of action, those feelings of self-trust will come back and remind yourself how capable you really are.

**Q** I lost my job during the pandemic, and am starting somewhere new. It's a bit daunting – have you got any advice for coping with change?

**A** If you're feeling overwhelmed at the thought of a big change in your life, the first thing to know is that these feelings are normal, and completely understandable. The

parts of our brain designed for self-preservation don't like risk, therefore we're wired not to enjoy change.

You can't predict how your first day will go, what your new colleagues will be like, or what will happen long-term, but there are many things that you can control that, in turn, will make you feel less worried and more empowered.

Research the company before you start, pack your bag the evening before your first day,

and organise your clothing, so the morning runs smoothly. Do some exercise, even if it's 10 minutes of stretching, to release some endorphins and wake you up. Put your favourite playlist on. Try to create, and find, moments of joy, while taking charge of all the elements you can control.

The truth is, change will always be daunting, so it's about finding tips and tricks to rewire the way we think, so that we can ensure we're in the best frame of mind to take on the challenge.



**Q** With all the changes to restrictions, I'm feeling pressured into saying yes to things. I want to set healthy boundaries, but I worry about upsetting people. What should I do?

**A** First of all, it's worth understanding what it is you want and don't want, so you have got it clear in your own mind. Next, remind yourself it's perfectly reasonable to communicate what you would or would not like to do – think about how many people around you do that on a

daily basis, and it never seems unreasonable, does it?

Practise will help you to feel less awkward to communicate those boundaries. Write down examples of ways you can tell someone your boundary. For example, we can communicate our needs while still being friendly: "I would love to do 'ABC' but unfortunately 'XYZ' so I will not be able to." "Thanks so much for thinking of me, and I'd love to join you another time." Or "I am unable to join you for XYZ, as I am still adjusting to lockdown ending. I'll let you know when I'm feeling more comfortable."

The person you need to be most afraid of upsetting is yourself; you're perfectly within your rights to make choices that make you feel happy, and at peace.

**Q** I've had a tough year, and my confidence has really been rattled. What can I do to build my self-belief back up?

**A** It's been an incredibly tough year, and everyone has experienced this differently. The huge sense of uncertainty is enough to rattle anyone's confidence. One of the best exercises to do, to remind yourself of all your capabilities and strengths, is to literally start a list of all the things that you are great at, and all the amazing qualities you possess. It's very hard to do this exercise and not feel more positive by the end of it!

If you don't know where to start, ask five friends, colleagues, or family members to tell you three things they like about you, and/or that you do well. Write down the phrases and words from both you and them, and watch the paper fill with the picture of a very capable and worthy person. When you feel unsure, come back to this piece of paper as a starting point. **LI**



**“ Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier**

**MOTHER TERESA**



# Putting anorexia in the past

After struggling for years in the grips of an eating disorder, Emily's support network, and speaking out honestly, helped her to break free. And now, she's using her own experience of anorexia to help others

Writing | **Emily Simmonds**

**U**p until the age of 15, I had never thought of food as anything other than tasty fuel. It was something that I got to enjoy every day, but something that also kept me energised at school, playing sport, and being out with friends. Which is why being diagnosed with severe anorexia nervosa eight years ago came as such a shock to everyone – including me.

'Ana', as she became known in our house, crept into my life at a point in my teenage years when things began to feel out of control. It turns out that this is quite common when it comes to eating disorders. A combination of exam anxiety, insomnia, and the passing of a beloved dance teacher (all while unknowingly having glandular fever) were the elements of a perfect storm. Unfortunately, this storm didn't blow over as quickly as we had hoped. In fact, we had no idea what we were in for.

I was under the grip of anorexia for six long years. During that time, I battled depression (a bi-product of having an eating disorder), suicidal thoughts, and was hospitalised multiple times.

At my worst, I was fed through a tube in my nose, which gave me the calories I needed to stay alive. This was just before my 18th birthday.

There is a happy ending though! Two years ago I kicked anorexia out of my life, and I have been happy and healthy ever since. That's not to say that I don't have difficult days, or hear Ana's dulcet tones every so often. But those negative thoughts now leave as quickly as they come, and I no longer feel the need to use food restriction as a way to make me feel better.

People often ask what helped me recover from my eating disorder and, as with its arrival, it wasn't just one thing, but a combination of a few different factors.

Firstly, I have an incredibly strong and supportive network. My father had been to the 'dark side' (as we call it) of a severe depression 10 years prior to my illness. Therefore, he could empathise with me in a way that most couldn't. My mother found it much harder to cope with my eating disorder but, with time, learned to speak the language of mental ill-health, which was the only way to help me fight against the >>>



Read more about Emily Simmond's story in 'Breakdown and Repair: A Father's Tale of Stress and Success', or follow her mental health and recovery journey on Instagram @mentaltalk\_withem



demons. I am also fortunate to have a circle of truly wonderful friends who never gave up on me, even in the darkest of times. They still support me to this very day.

Secondly, I strongly believe that learning to be honest, and express my negative thoughts and feelings, was my saving grace. Opening up to those closest to me about my struggles, both big and small, not only helped me kick anorexia out of my life, but it has also kept anxiety and low mood at bay over the past few years in times of stress.

Christmas and New Year were always the trickiest times when I was in the depths of my eating disorder. A holiday focused around food, followed by a month of diet plan suggestions everywhere you look, is hardly the best environment for recovery. One thing that helped to keep me on the right path was a piece of advice I received from a very wise friend. "Don't let others derail you in your tracks. Everyone is different, and every single body is unique, so all you have to do is look after yours." It may have taken some time, but that is exactly what I did, and what I have continued to do these past few years.

Unfortunately, the number of young people suffering from this merciless eating disorder (with

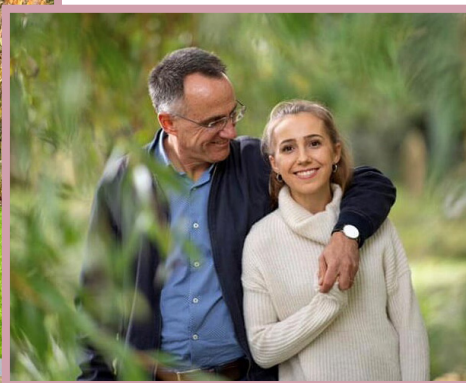
the highest mortality rate of all mental illnesses) is greater than ever. This comes as no surprise to me, with a pandemic that is disrupting the way we live, and multiple lockdown rule changes throwing regular routines and stability out the window. It has become a feeding ground for Anas everywhere, allowing them to sneak into people's lives to try to 'help' their victims out.

“  
I strongly believe that learning to be honest, and express my negative thoughts and feelings, was my saving grace

Over the past few months, my parents and I have unwittingly become a support system for a number of families who are struggling to cope with an eating disorder in the household. We have regular phone or Skype conversations with parents or daughters, and simply speak about what helped us in a similar situation, in the hope that it may benefit their own.



*Emily and her family have been providing support to others struggling with EDs*



The silver lining is that I've had the pleasure of meeting (virtually) and helping a beautiful young girl on her recovery journey. Although there are still a few hurdles to overcome, I know that she can beat her demons for good.

I have also started a page on Instagram dedicated to mental health and recovery, in the hope that I can keep the conversation flowing and growing through these difficult times with a wider community. As I said, talking is the key, and if I can help even one person believe that they can live a happy and fulfilled life without anorexia, then it will have been worth it.

I will always be grateful for the professional help I received, which undoubtedly aided my recovery and kept me safe when I was on the

“  
The silver lining is that I've had the pleasure of meeting (virtually) and helping a beautiful young girl on her recovery journey

very edge. But at times during my illness, what I really wanted was some reassurance from someone who had actually been through it themselves. And for that person to tell me that they really understood the thoughts circling around in my frazzled mind. That I wasn't alone in my fight, and that I would live to tell the tale. I'm hoping that I can be that person for another sufferer – because you don't have to fight the monster on your own, and you *can* recover with the help of others around you. ■

## OUR EXPERT SAYS

Emily's heartwarming story truly highlights the difficulty of living with an eating disorder, and the damaging impact it can have. A strong support network and developing the ability to express her feelings has been key for Emily; creating space for positive change and growth.

With this strong foundation of awareness, Emily now inspirationally supports others, and is able to draw upon her experience as a source of strength.

**Rav Sekhon** | BA MA MBACP (Accred)  
Counsellor and psychotherapist





# What do you need?

Show yourself a little bit of love this week...

|                  | Thought of the day                           | Challenge  | Treat   |
|------------------|--|--|---|
| <b>Monday</b>    | I let go of that which no longer serves me.  | Think of any lingering resentments or stresses, and choose to forgive or forget what you need to.                            | Buy or pick flowers to brighten up your living space.   |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | My possibilities are endless.                | Start that project or new activity you've been meaning to get to.  | Declutter a place in your house – it could be just one drawer, or a whole room. See how you feel. |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | I am more than my appearance.                | List five things you like about yourself that have nothing to do with how you look.  | Cook up your favourite meal.  |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | I listen to my body and will meet its needs. | Try to embrace healthy habits (drinking enough water, nourishing yourself, enjoying rest). Really consider your needs today. | Take a walk in nature with no goals or step counting. Look around you, and breathe deeply.        |
| <b>Friday</b>    | I choose to be thankful.                     | Write down 10 things you are truly grateful for in your life.  | Spend some time chatting to a friend.   |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | I deserve respect and support.               | Reflect on your personal boundaries, and try to be firm with your needs.   | Try a guided meditation.  |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | I am worthy.                                 | Treat yourself with compassion and love all day. Challenge any negative self-talk, and allow yourself to be, as you are.     | Plan a solo date, doing all the things you enjoy most!  |

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