

The perimenopausal guide to muscle-building

Women's Health

Rochelle Humes

'Being underestimated?
It's my superpower'

Train like a PT

The 4-step formula they don't want you knowing

WH INVESTIGATES

From solicitors to spin instructors

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Welcome to Women's Health



Regular readers of this page will know that I'm training to run the TCS London Marathon. I've been pounding the pavements

relentlessly, attempting to fit my training runs around my (already busy, already stressful) life. Suffice to say, it hasn't been easy. With two marathons under my running belt already – both in my twenties – I know all too well how vital recovery is. Only this time, you won't be catching me napping on the sofa after my long Sunday morning run, but ironing school uniforms and doing the weekly food shop.

Come Monday, there's precious little time for life admin, let alone training. By 7.10am, I'm shooshing my 11-year-old son out the door to catch his school bus. By 7.40am, I'm dressed and on my way to drop my daughter at breakfast club, before catching a train to London for a long day in the office running two brands (I'm also editor-in-chief of our sister title, *Men's Health*). Evenings are reliably spent making sure homework is done, school bags are packed and the washing machine is well fed.

Amid all of this, I've been trying to snatch some moments to train. I'm lucky enough to have a treadmill at home, so early morning tempo runs have been my go-to. But it's been a juggle. My muscles are never not sore, an ongoing achilles issue means I'm often in too much pain to walk and I feel permanently exhausted – a state I shared with my running coach (a perk-of-the-job privilege without which I'd be lost) earlier this week.

To my relief, Anthony Fletcher – co-founder of Onetrack, a members' club for runners – had heard it all

before. 'It's not an age thing. It's a life stage thing,' he told me. 'Training for a marathon when you have very few other responsibilities and therefore can recover properly, crucially get enough good quality sleep and not have too much other stress going on, is very different to what you're dealing with.'

He's right, of course. I've always been a big proponent of women putting their health first by making time for exercise. Generally, working out makes me a better mother, manager, friend and daughter because I feel infinitely better for doing it. But I've realised those benefits are reaped when I'm exercising for me – and, right now, I'm not. I feel like I have to instead of choosing to do so. What keeps me going through the early starts and aching limbs is the knowledge that it will be all worth it, because if I remember how it feels to run a marathon, I also know how it feels to cross the finish line.

I'm not doing it alone, either. *Women's Health* has recruited four more women to run – and while I'll be arriving at the start line a year after being admitted to hospital with kidney failure, each of them has endured challenges of their own. We've joined forces with Lululemon and you can follow our journey over on the *WH* website and our social channels. I hope my juggle makes you feel a little less alone with yours. And if you see me on race day, be sure to say hi – I'll need all the encouragement I can get.

Until next month,

Claire

Claire Sanderson
Editor-in-chief

Follow me on Instagram
@clairesanderson



This month,
I'm loving



▲ **Vuori Bra** Beautiful, soft and oh-so comfortable to wear, this Vuori bra (£70) is perfect for everyday dressing and yoga.



◀ **Aligne X Lucy Bronze**

Aligne dresses are my work wardrobe go-to. I also love its new range fronted by Lioness Lucy Bronze.

Lululemon ▶ Fast and Free Tights

Now that my weekly mileage is ramping up, I've been living in these running tights (£118). Not only are they the most comfortable leggings I own, but they have pockets – ideal for long runs.



▼ **Trinny London Overnight Clarity Serum**

This repairing night serum (£75), with its potent combo of retinal and niacinamide, is just what my stressed skin ordered.



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Rochelle Humes

Post-pop career, the broadcaster and businesswoman has turned subverting others' expectations of her into an art form. She takes a break from running a wellness empire to share her own health habits

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Know How

If you do one
thing this month

...talk to
a stranger

There are no strangers, only friends you haven't met yet. If this swirly fonted sentiment has you reaching for the nearest bucket, first, we see you introverts; and second, it's time to reconsider the power of strangers. Conversations with people you don't know – as well as casual acquaintances or 'weak ties' – can predict greater life satisfaction, found researchers from Istanbul's Sabanci University and the University of Sussex. The same is also true for momentary interactions, such as greeting and

thanking others. Sending out questionnaires to a 3,266-strong sample from Turkey and a larger group of 60,141 people in the UK, the team asked respondents to rate their general happiness levels. Those who interacted with strangers, especially on a regular basis, reported higher feelings of subjective wellbeing, as they saw themselves as belonging to a community. So, it seems that while the ties might be weak, the social health game is strong.

Boost your
mood with a
quick hello

8



The number of personality traits that may help you to live beyond 100, a new study* has found. Thirty-five traits were identified in 19 centenarians, eight of which most shared: vitality (participating in activities); commitment (to family, work, goals); staying social; intellectual motivation; control; intelligence; positivity and resilience.

SIN TAX



It's official: hearing bad grammar causes physical signs of stress, according to researchers at the University of Birmingham. Looking at heart rate variability (HRV – the time between heart beats, which decreases when you're stressed), the team found a significant reduction when 41 English-speaking adults heard linguistic violations (aka, grammar errors), signalling subjects' distress.

LIPID ASSETS

Research has found that being sedentary in childhood can raise cholesterol levels by more than two thirds by the time you're in your mid-twenties, increasing your risk of premature death. But light activity (long walks, swimming) may completely reverse this – and is more potent than moderate-to-vigorous activity in lowering lipid levels (a measure of cholesterol).*

DREAM ON



Daydreaming may play a role in neuroplasticity (where your brain changes structure as a result of new habits). When researchers* tracked neurons in the visual cortex of mice in a quiet, waking state, they found the neurons lit up in the same way as when they looked at an actual image, suggesting that daydreaming could influence the brain's ability to reshape itself.

News you can use

Want the latest health intel? We've combed the science journals so you don't have to

In the know

Sunny disposition

Go outside – no, really. Those who spend more time in daylight experience better mental health. So says a team of researchers at Australia's Monash University who linked exposure with reduced risk of major depressive disorder. The cross-sectional analysis of 87,000 adults also found that, conversely, greater exposure to electric light at night – which disrupts the circadian rhythm – increases depression risk, along with anxiety and bipolar disorder.



PHONE-MO

Ahem, are you listening? Phubbing – 'phone snubbing' – is linked with feelings of isolation, psychological distress and reduced social connection, found experts from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Romania. The study also found that 'phubbees' – those subjected to phubbing – felt rejected and devalued, causing loneliness and decreased life satisfaction. You're not even listening to me, are you?

FOOD FOR THOUGHT?

Comfort eating: not as good as it feels, according to research from the University of Birmingham. The team asked healthy young adults to consume a high-fat meal before putting them in a stressful situation (a time-sensitive maths task). Eating fatty foods led to a 39% reduction in oxygen delivery to the prefrontal cortex, the brain region responsible for problem-solving and planning.



THE TO-DO LIST



GO

5 April is Walk to Work Day. Park a bit further away, get off a Tube stop earlier, take the stairs, or stretch your legs at lunchtime.



RELAX

April is Stress Awareness Month – and while you can't control the state of the world, you'll find strategies for controlling your internal one online at mind.org and on the *WH* app.



READ

A Better Second Half: Dial Back Your Age To Live A Longer, Healthier, Happier Life (£22, Yellow Kite). Beauty authority Liz Earle tells us how to live and age well through midlife and beyond. Out 25 April.

Move of
the month

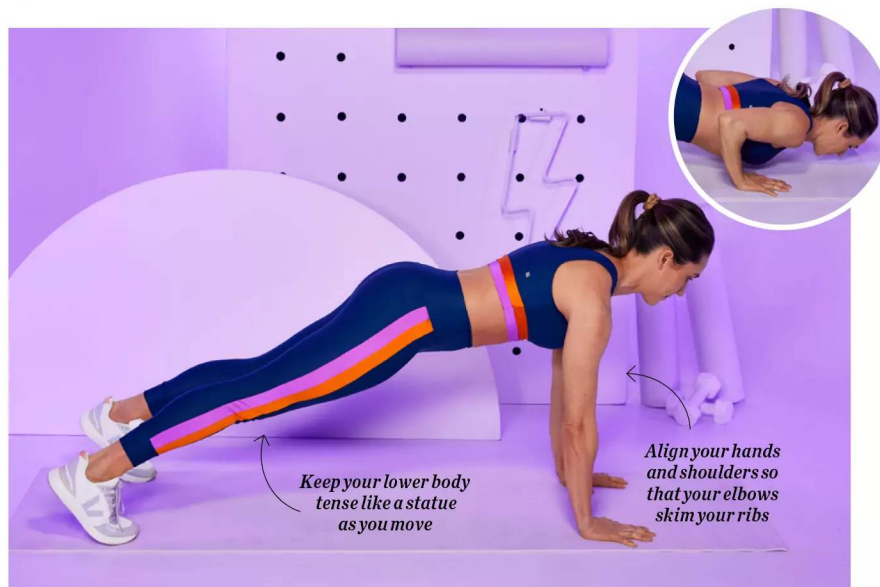
UPPER BODY BLAST

LEVEL



Push it real good

Press-ups, but make them harder – said no one. But if you can level up the notorious body-weight move, you'll reap some powerful rewards



WHY WE LOVE IT: The perks of plyometric moves aren't limited to your lower body – and the pop press-up, which targets the upper body, is proof. 'Achieve explosiveness and speed as well as deceleration by eliminating the slow eccentric lowering and focusing on the powerful push upwards,' says PT Lauren Kanski.

STEP 1 **ENGAGE** your muscles in a solid high plank, with your palms placed wider than your shoulders and toes pushing into the floor.

STEP 2 **DROP** down as fast as you can without losing composure in your lower body or the plank posture in your pelvis and core.

STEP 3 **PAUSE** at the bottom, chest right above the ground. Then explode back up to a high plank position by pushing the floor and jumping your hands closer together.

STEP 4 **REPEAT** the speedy drop with your hands narrow and launch back up to a high plank, while jumping your hands back to a wide position. That's 1 rep.



WORK IT IN
Do 3 sets of 3 to 5 reps as part of a HIIT circuit to prepare yourself before doing a lift.



SPEED CHECK
If the fast pace is too much, lower slowly to the ground and explode only on the upwards motion.

REACH YOUR RANGE

During this exercise, maintain your full range of motion throughout each set, from the first to last rep, lowering as close to the ground as possible before pushing back up, to reap the maximum rewards. If you're unable to, that's a sign you need to modify the move by resting on your knees, says Kanski.



Calling all beginners

Trying out the exercise for the first time? You can lean against a wall to lighten the load on your upper body.



Q **How bad is cortisol, really?**

It's often used as a synonym for bad bodily news. But the so-called stress hormone isn't designed to work against you. 'The purpose of cortisol is to maintain an equilibrium in your body,' says Adrian Sandra Dobs, professor of medicine and oncology at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Secreted into your bloodstream when you face a threat – whether that's a bus heading towards you at speed or a deadline – it's not exactly

to your detriment; an increase in cortisol triggers the liver to release glucose into your blood so you can summon the energy to confront or avoid danger. Cortisol also maintains metabolism, regulates blood pressure, fights inflammation (more on which, over the page) and is essential to your circadian rhythm. As for having cortisol levels that are too high, you can't *feel* cortisol; nor is there a way to test your levels, given that they're influenced by everything from the time of day to medications you're taking. But while high levels may not equate to a medical issue, if you're enduring cortisol elevators (chronic stress, poor sleep) then it's worth seeking advice.

Q Can napping make up for lost sleep?

● Dedicated disciples of the disco nap, look away now. While a daytime snooze can feel reviving, it can't compensate for the recommended seven to nine hours. For starters, you lose out on the perks of a complete four-stage sleep cycle, especially deep sleep, which is responsible for helping your body heal injuries and supporting your immune system. If you suffer from insomnia or sleep apnoea (characterised by the stopping and starting of breathing during sleep), napping could work against you, says Rashad Ramkissoon, a doctor at Houston Methodist

Primary Care Group. That's because you could take longer to fall asleep at night, thus disrupting your circadian rhythm. That said, napping does seem to be better than not sleeping at all. A study conducted at Universidad de la República, Uruguay, found that short daytime naps were linked to larger total brain volume, which – according to DNA from 379,000 participants – equated to a difference of nearly four years of ageing between habitual nappers and non-doers. The dream daytime snooze? A sub 30-minute nap, taken before 3pm.



Q How do I forgive someone?



● You're right to consider forgiveness a health habit. 'When we feel we've been wronged, it can cause emotional dysregulation,' says psychologist Simira Freeman. 'Making a conscious decision to forgive a transgression is a chance to release negative feelings.' But how do you actually do it? Forgiveness begins, says Robyn Martin, a senior clinician at Menning Clinic, a mental health clinic in Texas, USA – with tapping into the emotions you're trying to let go of. 'We

can't forgive what we don't acknowledge, so [take some time to] recognise the hurt and its impact on you.' Don't just focus on how you think you should feel – or how others expect you to feel, either. Next, understand what you need in order to forgive, whether that's firm boundaries or time apart. During the moment of truth, explain firmly but politely how their actions affected you. And know that even after you've decided to let go, it's normal for anger to resurface.



Q I keep reading about inflammation. Explain it to me?

● Challenge accepted. Inflammation falls into two categories: acute and chronic. The former is a biological defensive response to harmful stimuli, and a critical part of healing, says Erica Johnson, an associate professor of microbiology, biochemistry and immunology at Morehouse School of Medicine in Georgia, USA. When you cut yourself, white blood cells flood the area, causing swelling and pain. The same inflammatory process happens inside your cells when you have a cold or the flu. Acute inflammation usually subsides and you heal within a few days. With chronic inflammation, your immune system continually releases white blood cells and chemical messengers as if your body is constantly under attack. In some autoimmune disorders, such as type 1 diabetes or rheumatoid arthritis, the body mistakenly turns on its own tissues, which are then continually inflamed, potentially leading to tissue damage and a rash. But while it's believed that chronic inflammation can lead to disease (stroke, cancer, heart disease, to name a few) you can prevent it by following a healthy lifestyle. You know, moving your body for at least 150 minutes per week, eating a diverse range of plants and trying to get a solid seven to nine hours of good-quality sleep each night.

Are more sustainable diets healthier?

Greenhouse gas emissions can be curbed by what's on your plate. But do diets that support the planet's health also support yours? As we mark Earth Month, Laura Tilt chews over the science...



THE EXPERT

Laura Tilt is a registered dietitian and health writer

Travelling by train.

Buying pre-loved. Switching banks so you're no longer supporting one that finances fossil fuel projects. All commendable ways of showing up in the fight

against climate change. But if you're in the market for a method of effecting change you can engage with every day, your diet is a good place to start.

Climate scientists agree, flagging that food systems contribute over a quarter of the world's planet-heating greenhouse gas emissions, thanks to the changing land use involved in meeting global food demand, as well as the emissions involved in food production. The message is sinking in, with more than 75% of those polled by Ipsos Mori and the Food Standards Agency agreeing that it's important to buy food with a low environmental impact. But is what's good for the planet good for your health?

That meat production (especially red meat) is a significant contributor to climate change is unlikely to come as a surprise. It's the biggest source of methane – a potent greenhouse gas (GHG) emitted via belching cows (charming), along with manure. It drains an eye-watering amount of land and water, too; 1,695 litres of water goes into making the average quarter-pounder, according to the UN Environment Programme.

It means whatever way you cut it, the environmental impact of animal



Are you bagging yourself a healthy diet?

foods is greater than plant-based foods. A recent Oxford University study comparing the environmental effects of the diets of over 50,000 people showed vegan diets had 30% of the environmental impact of high-meat diets. Even among carnivores, there was a 30% difference between low meat eaters (zero to 50g a day) and high meat eaters (100g or more a day) for most environmental indicators.

And yet, defining what a sustainable diet looks like is messier than a cow-filled field at lunchtime, with factors such as water and land use weighed up against cost, nutrition and accessibility. Determining the impact of dietary changes isn't straightforward, either. Advice to eat local is misguided, with food miles a small contributor to GHG emissions.

According to Dr Hannah Ritchie, geoscientist and senior researcher at Our World in Data, what we eat matters more than food miles and packaging (the exception being air-freighted fruit and veg). With that in mind, plant foods generally have a smaller environmental footprint than animal products, with beans, tofu and nuts boasting the lowest protein carbon footprint. Other sustainable choices include reducing dairy and loading up on whole grains and greens.

An analysis by The Carbon Trust found that if everyone in the UK ate according to the Eatwell Guide (five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, prioritising whole grains and getting most of their protein from plants and sustainably sourced fish), we'd cut our GHG emissions by 45% and land use by half. Eating this way would also reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease and colon cancer. As with most things, it's not all or nothing; even partly replacing meat and dairy with plants can slash emissions by 30%. So if you want a dairy latte to fuel your ethical bank search, crack on.



THREE WAYS TO IMPROVE THE PLANET'S HEALTH – AND YOURS

1 EAT PLANT-BASED MEALS

Aim to have more meat-free days by swapping it for plant-based proteins such as tofu, nuts and beans.



2 REDUCE YOUR FOOD WASTE

To limit waste, do an inventory before you shop, plan your meals in advance and freeze any leftovers for later.



3 MODERATE YOUR DAIRY INTAKE

If you choose to reduce or eliminate your dairy intake, make sure that your plant-based milk is fortified with calcium and iodine.



Does it really work?

Rock climbing to conquer fear

Climbing is trending – and if Harry Styles can't convince you to give it a go, perhaps the Olympians at Paris 2024 can. One writer takes to an IRL climbing wall (a mountain) to ask: can I scale my way out of a phobia?



THE GUINEA PIG

Jennifer Nied,
WH contributor

Am I shivering from the morning mountain air? Or is it the weather inside my head that's turned my legs to jelly? I'm preparing to ascend a granite slab located in Squamish, British Columbia. I'm out here thanks to an invitation from Arc'teryx to attend its annual Climbing Academy – an event that brings together climbers of all levels. I came to learn the ropes – among other things – with a private lesson out in the wild, led by two of the brand's rock stars: athletes Shelma Jun and Alannah Yip, and I'm a long way up from my comfort zone.

I have a very real fear of heights, specifically near an exposure (any place close to a cliff) and when I'm on a surface I can see through (such as a suspension bridge). So I try not to think about how high the cliff soars above me as my instructors explain the basics. Fortunately, I'm in good hands. Shelma, belaying and holding my safety rope on the ground, founded the Flash Foxy climbing community to make the sport more accessible and welcoming to women and genderqueer climbers. Alannah, who cheers my every move, represented Canada in the sport's Olympic debut at the 2020 Summer Games in Tokyo, and she continues to compete internationally.

'Climbing,' I yell, signalling the beginning of my first ascent. My initial steps are timid: one toe on the wall,

then the second; find a left handhold and a right, then repeat. I feel surprisingly secure. The only moments I slip are the ones when I allow doubt to creep in. Alannah and Shelma assure me the little nub of rock my toe is balanced on will hold; all I have to do is push in – and trust it. With my mind laser-focused on the rock and my limb placement, not once do I think about how far away the ground is. When my feet touch it again, my instructors call me a natural.

Invigorated, out of breath and bleeding from cuts on my fingers, I take a break. And while the guide sets up a new top rope route, we have a few minutes to chat. Even on the World Cup circuit and at the Olympics, Alannah tells me you're not competing against the other climbers, it's you versus the rock. Then, she corrects herself – no, it's you *with* the rock. You *talking* to the rock, Shelma clarifies. The conversation with the cliff goes back and forth, the climber trying a hold and seeing how the rock responds. Is it secure? Is it shaky? Witnessing their passion for the sport, I can feel my own growing.

The ropes are waiting for me on the new route. Alannah and Shelma stay quiet to give me space and I choose my own holds. Near the top, my fingers are searching around for another, higher handhold, when I realise the anchor is at eye level. With the rope there for safety, I free-climb the rest of the route.

Has my time in British Columbia cured my phobia? No. But rising (climbing?) above my fear was a reminder that it's only as limiting as you allow it to be. Since returning home, I've even been climbing again – although the bouldering wall at the playground I take my daughter to is a little less daunting.

The verdict

Quick results	●●●●●●○○○
Confidence boosting	●●●●●●●●●
Ease of access	●●●●●○○○○
Long-term solution	●●●●●●○○○
OVERALL SCORE	●●●●●●○○○

Skin
deep

Do cellulite creams work?



THE EXPERT

Dr Johanna Ward, cosmetic doctor and GP

Before we go any further, let me say this. The dimples on your buttocks, thighs and stomach are both natural and normal. So normal, that it's estimated around 90% of women have the orange peel-like

bumps, caused by the distribution of subcutaneous fat – a type of fat that's stored just beneath your skin. But while a harmless skin condition that affects the vast majority of women *shouldn't* cause low confidence, that doesn't mean it won't. But there are a few things to be aware of before you add any 'cure-all' creams to cart.

Cellulite appears thanks to oestrogen – the higher the oestrogen level, the more likely it is that fat will be distributed around the hips and thighs, leading to the development of cellulite. Weak overlying skin also makes cellulite appear more visible, as the fat cells beneath the surface protrude. It affects women of all body shapes and sizes and, like grey roots and hangovers, is exacerbated by ageing, as your skin loses its elasticity.

But while body care is billed as the 'solution', no matter what products you use on the surface of your skin, the fat underneath it remains. That said, there are ingredients that can alter the appearance of cellulite. Caffeine works to increase blood flow to an area and creates a temporary tightening effect. Retinoids, aka vitamin A, can

strengthen the overlying skin, which makes underlying fat protrusions less visible, but they need to be used over a sustained three-to-six-month period.

As for in-clinic treatments (acoustic wave therapy, carboxytherapy, endermologie), studies have been small, meaning that evidence for their efficacy is relatively inconclusive. Results also vary from person to person, and all these treatments require between seven and 10 sessions. The exception is Cellulaze, a one-time treatment that uses a laser to break up fibrous bands and improve skin thickness, with results lasting up to a year.

But simple lifestyle tweaks can help, too. Cellulite occurs beneath the connective fibres of the skin; exercise helps to strengthen those, while increasing circulation – a bonus, given cellulite forms in the areas of the body with the least blood flow. You can also be mindful of foods high in refined sugar and salt. Snack instead on fruits high in antioxidant, anti-inflammatory lycopene such as watermelon, tomatoes and pink grapefruit. Ultimately, there is no magic bullet, but these swaps – along with a healthy dose of self-compassion – can serve as tools for being less bothered by your lumps and bumps.



SMOOTH OPERATORS

Our pick of products to reduce visibility of cellulite

1 Sol Janeiro Beija Flor Elasti-Cream, £21

Teaming cacay oil – a gentle retinol alternative and winner for sensitive skin types – with plant-based squalane, this hydrating hero leaves skin plump, soft and bouncy.



2 The N°1 Illume Glove, £15.99

Made of intricately woven silk, this viral product is designed to deeply exfoliate the skin, smoothing its texture to make cellulite look less obvious.



3 Legology Lymph-Lite Body Brush, £16

This densely bristled brush works by boosting circulation around any areas of cellulite to plump up your skin and reduce the appearance of dimples.



4 Paula's Choice Body Treatment, £33

This combines retinol with protective antioxidant vitamins C and E. Its shea butter and plant oils nourish and hydrate skin, too.



PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY



Ask the

Fit Squad

Want to run further, lift heavier or nail a pull-up? Each month, we put your questions to the Women's Health Collective panel – seven of the finest fitness brains – to help you make good on your goals

Q I'm perimenopausal. How can I maintain a healthy body composition with exercise?

Amanda Ngonyama says:

Many women will experience changes in their body shape during the perimenopause – the years preceding menopause when hormone levels begin to fluctuate and menopausal symptoms begin to emerge. The Study of Women's Health Across the Nation found that lean muscle mass decreases during this life stage, while the rate of fat gain could double in the two years prior to your final period, when you officially reach the menopause. But you're right to think that exercise could help you control these symptoms.

Some context: as you approach the menopause, and perimenopause begins, your oestrogen levels decline. Oestrogen optimises insulin, which moves glucose out of your bloodstream and regulates blood sugar levels. With less oestrogen, you'll have excess insulin, so cells in your pancreas that modulate how much insulin is synthesised and secreted will start to resist the insulin typically used for energy. This insulin resistance is what could cause weight gain. Your muscles may also struggle to recover, as they rely on stem cells called satellite cells, which need oestrogen to function optimally.

A hybrid training approach incorporating strength, cardio and yoga is recommended, but how long and how often you do each component matters. Let's

start with weight training. The more muscle you have, the more effective your metabolism will be and the more calories you'll burn at rest – and muscle growth requires stimulus from heavy lifting. Include bilateral (both sides) and unilateral (single-sided) exercises across twice-weekly sessions to isolate and strengthen individual muscles; this will help protect your joints as the amount of lubricating synovial

fluid inside them decreases and cartilage becomes thinner with age.

As for your cardio, this should comprise a HIIT session, no longer than 20 minutes, once a week. This will promote an increase in insulin sensitivity, which could reduce the likelihood of weight gain. Overdoing it will exacerbate hormonal imbalances by increasing cortisol levels, so once a week is sufficient, and any longer than 20 minutes won't be true HIIT as you won't maintain your max training effort.

Finally, aim for a 45- to 60-minute yoga session once per week. A study in the *Journal Of Obstetrics And Gynaecology Research* found that yoga can soothe hormonal symptoms – including changes in your body composition – in perimenopausal women by stimulating the glands responsible for regulating your hormones.

It's important to stay active outside of your training, too. Maximise your non-exercise activity thermogenesis (NEAT) – the movement you do when you're not working out – by walking as much as you can and using a standing desk if you have one. Research* shows that two hours of sitting can cancel out the benefits of a 20-minute workout. In short, it's less about going hard, more about simply getting moving.

Find your flow in your new life stage



Meet the squad

The team share their favourite form of cardio



Salma Husain
Online fitness coach and PT
Running – it's hard, but I love it.



India Morse
Inclusivity advocate and PT
For me, it's functional fitness, every time.



Rosie Stockley
Prenatal and postnatal expert and PT
A steady 30-minute run always feels good.



Amanda Ngonyama
Athlete and sports scientist
Always the elliptical machine.



Michelle Griffith-Robinson
Olympian, life coach and PT
It's interval runs all the way.



Izzy George
Strength and conditioning coach, PT
I love the StairMaster – it's low-impact and I can zone out.



Sanchia Legister
Yoga instructor
That's an easy one – for me, it's running.



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‘Being underestimated? It’s my f*cking superpower’

From launching multiple wellness brands to grilling the PM from the *This Morning* sofa, it’s easy to forget we first knew Rochelle Humes as a pop star. Now, as she fronts *WH* weeks after her 35th birthday, she reveals why she’s several steps ahead of anyone who dares to write her off...

Words Roisín Dervish-O’Kane Photography Mark Cant Styling Maddy Alford



W

hen our cover star joins the Zoom call, she's dressed in a square-necked black cami, her skin radiating a post-workout glow, laptop perched on the counter of a sunlight-dappled kitchen that's all neutrals, high ceilings – 'quiet luxury'. As entrances to a *Women's Health* interview go, this one's as on-brand as they come. 'Pilates – I'm such a Pilates girl,' Rochelle Humes smiles, when I enquire after what she's been up to this morning. 'That's what I'll typically do every day... It's so good for my mind as well as my body... I never thought I'd be the girl who's like, "I've not worked out today, I feel like I need that," it just sounds so *not me*,' she makes a face. 'But it really *is* me – which is bizarre.'

If Rochelle never had 'doesn't miss a workout' on her mid-thirties bingo card, it isn't the only element of her life where expectations haven't matched up with reality. Thanks, no doubt, to her plugging away at her performing arts career at school – and landing the S Club Juniors gig aged 12 – her gang of

friends in her home town of Barking, Essex, had her typecast. 'It was always like, "Oh, you're the career girl, aren't you?"' she recalls. 'A lot of my friends had that real "this is what you do: you leave school, you meet someone, you get married, you have a baby" – and that was never me. That was never what I wanted, that formula.'

Of course, life had other ideas. Rochelle began dating Marvin Humes at 21. They moved in together within months – and the rest (a big white wedding, concurrent broadcasting careers, three gorgeous children – Alaia-Mai, 10, Valentina, seven and Blake, three) is history. 'Whenever I had a baby, I think it shocked my friendship group a little bit,' she muses. 'I probably didn't think I'd have kids till about now – and I've just turned 35... You can never plan these things. Like my mum says, "Make a plan; God laughs." I get the

sense that our cover star rather likes to surprise people; to push against the sense that people (women) should fit neatly into boxes. 'Like we're the Spice Girls,' she laughs, rolling her eyes. 'In your friendship group, everyone has to be one – "She's the flirty one! She's the career girl! She's the homemaker!" Who says that you can't have an empire and have a family?'

BEING THE BOSS

About that empire, then. Rochelle has made wellness her business, scaling Cloudcha, her super-luxe matcha brand (rated best in class by one scrupulous *WH* editor), aimed to 'elevate your daily rituals'. 'We literally did

our launch and then sold out the next day... Then we had the nightmare logistics of replenishing the stock,' she tells me. 'So we're having to hire more people now because we didn't realise the demand.' As for her proudest achievement, though? That's My Little Coco,

the natural skincare and haircare brand for babies (and mums) that saw sales of £3.7m in 2022 after launching into Asda, Waitrose, John Lewis and Ocado. And while some celebrities lend their faces to their brands, if little else, Rochelle seems all-in. 'It's my baby – we worked it up around my kitchen table,' she tells me, the pride palpable. 'I've learned so much about people, I've learned so much about teams, I've learned so much about managing different characters.' She's across hiring, too. 'I didn't go to uni, I don't have a degree to my name... As long as you can do your job – and want to – I'm all ears... Just use your initiative. That's my thing.'

Of course, it isn't an easy time to be running a company; four years on from the start of the pandemic, conversations about productivity and remote working rage on. As a boss, what's her stance on this stuff? 'I think everyone gets a lot more done when they

'Whenever I had a baby, I think that it shocked my friendship group a little bit'



ON THIS PAGE:

SHIRT, MASSIMO DUTTI. BIKINI TOP, MYRASWIM. SKIRT (JUST SEEN), 8 BY YOOX. EARRING (INNER EAR) AND RINGS (RIGHT INDEX, LEFT INDEX AND LEFT RING), ALL ROCHELLE'S OWN. EARRINGS (LOWER LOBE), MISHO. NECKLACE, BY ALONA. BANGLE, MONICA VINADER X KATE YOUNG. RING (RIGHT MIDDLE), FRIDA & FLORENCE

OPENING SPREAD:

BIKINI TOP, MATTEAU. TROUSERS, JOSEPH. EARRINGS, BY ALONA. NECKLACE, GIOVANNI RASPINI. BANGLE, AS BEFORE. RING, AS BEFORE



feel like they're on top of their personal life because I really *know* that feeling. So I try to be relaxed,' she says, before adding. 'There have been a couple of people along the way [who] have probably pushed the boundaries slightly. But I've got a head on me and I notice – and then that will end.' She's not shy of delivering a bollocking, then? 'Like, I can switch it on – *please believe*,' she cocks her head to the side; I don't doubt it. 'But I have to get a pep talk from my husband to put my big-girl pants on.'

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Speaking of big-girl pants, a few weeks before our interview, Rochelle sat down on the *This Morning* sofa for one of the biggest broadcasting moments of her career so far. Co-hosts Rylan and Rochelle had 16 minutes with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, there to promote the government's vaping ban. Before their interview, the animated politician sampled a chicken dish being cooked during another segment and joked about his intermittent fasting regime. In the aftermath of the appearance – which was dubbed 'surreal' by some commentators – questions were asked about why Rochelle and Rylan, as entertainment hosts, were the ones charged with putting the questions of the day to the nation's leader. Does her 'use your initiative' stance to interviewing job applicants inform her approach to interviewing politicians? 'I think so,' she ponders – before levelling with me. 'I'm not a news journalist. I'm not a political broadcaster, right? So



'I think my superpower has become the fact that people think I'm not switched on. There was a time in my life where it would annoy me'



ON THIS PAGE:
TOP, FAITHFULL THE BRAND AT
BEACH CAFE. JEANS, AGOLDE.
EARRINGS (INNER EAR),
BOTH ROCHELLE'S OWN.
EARRINGS (LOWER LOBE),
MISHO. NECKLACE, SORU.
RINGS, AS BEFORE

OPPOSITE:
BLAZER, OLIVE. BRALETTE,
ROAR. BIKINI BOTTOMS,
BONDI BORN. EARRINGS,
HEAVEN MAYHEM. BANGLE, AS
BEFORE. RINGS, AS BEFORE

when it's those kinds of interviews, I'm genuinely asking questions [about things] I want to know... I keep up to date with what's going on in the world. But that isn't my background and I would never pretend.'

She offers an example. 'The other day, we were talking about knife crime. I want him to tell me what he's doing about it. I'm not going to say, "Well, this is the research, these are the stats from last year." I'm saying that every time I put the radio on, every time I'm sat on the sofa for hosting, interviewing a family that's been affected. [So I want to know] "How do we combat it? What's your plan?" They're genuine questions and I think, no, you don't

have to be so well versed in it, sometimes you just want answers.' It's an interesting argument – and given so many political interviews descend into people shouting over each other – it's one you may be sympathetic to. Besides, in a decade where your cheap fast-fashion boots have lasted longer than some PM's tenures, Rochelle's become well-practiced. 'I've done Boris, I've done Theresa May... I always will have an opinion – of course I will – of that person. But I actually try to put that to the back of my mind to just sit and ask...' she says, before breaking into a laugh – 'not that you always get the bloody answer.' No doubt her former super pop stardom (shout out everyone

who could perform a Saturdays number at karaoke without needing the lyrics) fed into commentators' criticism. But the way Rochelle tells it, she's used to being underestimated – especially in business. 'I think my superpower has become the fact that people think I'm not switched on. And you know what? There was a time in my life where it would annoy me. [But] when I entered my thirties I was like, actually, this is my f*cking superpower.' She's warming to her theme now – far rowdier than I'd anticipated. 'This guy in this meeting thinks I don't know sh*t. And I know a lot. I know what he's up to. I know what's happening.' Curious, I ask her to elaborate. 'I think sometimes people [are] thinking that I'm the woman in the room that's that "celebrity",' she says, audibly ick-ed out by describing herself as such. 'Or the one that's not really on the ball... but I'm already doing X, Y or Z. I just don't need to talk about it in the same way you do.'

ON A MISSION

If fame has its downsides, she's quick to point out the privilege attached to it, too – not least the ability to amplify causes she cares about. Rochelle won plaudits for her *Dispatches* documentary into the UK's maternal mortality scandal, digging into the galling disparities in birth outcomes for Black and brown women, compared with white women. (According to the latest data, Black women were 3.7 times more likely than white women to die during or up to a year after the end of their pregnancy, while Asian women were 1.8 times more likely to die than white women.) 'A production company approached me at the time and said, "Look, we really think if we add your name to it, we can get this away.'

A documentary like this has never been made, not on TV; it's a really important conversation," she recalls – something she was already aware of, via her family. 'If that [exposure] was going to happen by me hosting it, then that was exactly what I was gonna do.' The experience has left an impact. 'What's so important is the data and everyone being documented. What I found so shocking,' she continues, '[is] that they only document the lives that are *lost* rather than the near-death experiences. I couldn't understand. Like, you basically almost died, but you're kind of insignificant in this research. And I'll be damned if you have to *lose* a life to be a number in the research.' Will she be following developments this election year? 'There were so many incredible women that I met since making the documentary and I do a lot

with [the campaign group] Five X More – Tinuke [Awe] and Clo [Clotilde Rebecca Abe] are the most incredible women. And I'm always like, "Let me know what you need.'" While she wrote to several politicians at the time, none wanted to take part in the documentary; she's still on the case, though. 'You can imagine what I was like when I met Mr Rishi Sunak... I was like, "You really need to look at [this]," and gave him the girls' [Tinuke and Clotilde's] details,' she shares. 'It's not about me... I'll do whatever to get the voices heard. But I'm like, "This is who you need to talk to."'

HOME FRONT

Raising children proud of their mixed heritage – including their natural hair texture, something she wrote a children's book about – matters to Rochelle. She smiles as she recalls a recent interaction with her middle child, Valentina. 'They were doing Black History Month at school. She was like, "But Mummy, I am always brown. So I don't understand why it's a month." And I was like, "Very, very good.'" She recalls another recent conversation with her eldest. 'Alaia asked for her hair blow-dried for her birthday and I was very, "Oh, gosh, here we go," she tells me, confirming that she agreed to it, as a treat. 'She was swishing it around for a bit in *any* reflective surface she came across – and then she was like, "Mum, I think I'm gonna wash my hair because I just don't feel like me." And I was like – okay!

It's those little moments,' she says. 'They are who they are, and they're so proud of who they are, which is more than I could hope for.'

At the centre of their family life is a romantic and parenting partnership built on communication. 'If I'm pissed off, I'm telling him; if he's pissed off, he's telling me,' she says, plainly. 'We're not mind

readers. We know we love each other and all of that... But there's a lot that comes in the middle of that – three kids, work, life.' Respect for each other's careers, Rochelle believes, is key to their longevity. 'We've always had this rule that we can't both shine at once. So, if he's on tour, I'm gonna pull back... I'm on the school run – because we always make sure it's one of us on the school run – and working in the school hours.' It's glamorous stuff, hey? The theme continues when, as we approach the end of the call, I enquire after their evening plans. 'I'm delighted that it's a Friday night, we've not got a school run in the morning and we're just gonna watch TV,' she says. 'Genuinely, date night doesn't always have to be a five-star meal.' True to her brand, I assume she'll be up for Pilates in the morning. Although, as we've learned from Rochelle, it's best to avoid assumptions. **WH**

I'll do anything to
amplify the voices
of those I met via the
maternal mortality doc'



SWIMSUIT, MYRASWIM.
SKIRT, ROAR. NECKLACE,
VANESSA BARONI.
RINGS, AS BEFORE.
SHOES, CULT GAIA



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Spill the tea

From camomile to oolong, tea and wellness is a matcha made in heaven. But how much do you really know about the health benefits of your brew?

WORDS: SUSAN CHOUNG
PHOTOGRAPHY: CHELSEA KYLE



But first, caution

They may sound harmless, but it's possible to overdo it with herbal teas. You know the deal: consult your doctor to check if they'll interact with any medications and for advice if you're pregnant.

Some swear by a cup of chamomile before they climb under the covers of a midweek evening.

Others have long forsaken their AM americano for a morning cup of matcha. And with more than 3,000 varieties of tea out there, you're bound to find one that's your cup of proverbial.

All varieties of tea (black, green, white, oolong) come from the leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* plant. The length of time the leaves are exposed to air – or oxidised – determines the colour; the longer the exposure time, the darker and stronger the tea. While most white and green teas are unoxidised, oolong is partially oxidised and black is the most oxidised.

As for herbal teas, they're a kind of a misnomer. That they don't come from the *Camellia sinensis* plant means they aren't 'true' teas. A more accurate description would be an 'infusion', and while infusions can be made from herbs

(mint, lemon balm), they can also be made from flowers (lavender, hibiscus, jasmine), roots (turmeric, liquorice) and plant leaves (rooibos, nettle).

'Herbal teas can offer the benefits of plants [that aren't] typically consumed,' says Marissa Meshulam, dietitian and founder of MPM Nutrition, which is based in New York. She has a point. When was the last time you chomped on chamomile flowers? And yet, when dried and brewed in hot water, they deliver the liquid equivalent of a bedtime story.

Regardless of which cup you choose, what marks tea of any variety out as a superior beverage is its polyphenol profile – the antioxidant-packed compounds that are found in plant-based foods. 'Antioxidants help fight oxidative stress in our bodies, keep our cells working optimally and reduce our risk of chronic disease,' adds Meshulam. So let's read the tea leaves, shall we?



TAKE THE PLUNGE

In the market for energy? Different teas boast varying levels of caffeine, but even with teas on the high end of the spectrum, your body will process the caffeine in them more slowly than it would a similar amount in coffee. That's thanks to the L-theanine found in tea, which slows down absorption of the stimulant, helping you avoid the post-cup crash, says nutritionist Asako Miyashita. Another reason to love this amino acid? 'L-theanine in combination with caffeine produces sharper focus and mental clarity,' adds Meshulam. Study participants who took L-theanine performed better and faster on attention tasks, found research in the *Journal Of Medicinal Food*. Choose green tea for a cup that boasts the most. →

The tea on caffeine

How much is really in your cup? Here's the breakdown, per each 230ml cup



0mg

Camomile

This evening favourite is caffeine-free, which is the case with many other herbal infusions.



30mg to 70mg

Green tea

Many brews fall within this range, but there are a few powered-up exceptions.



50mg to 90mg

Black teas

Generally, the darker the tea, the more caffeine it contains. English breakfast (a blend of different black teas) or Assam (the tea often used to make chai) are just a couple that will give you an energy boost.



Up to 75mg

Matcha

There's a reason this revved-up green tea is a morning mainstay.



80mg to 100mg

Yerba mate

The most notable outlier to the caffeine-free herbal infusions has about the same amount of caffeine as coffee, cup for cup.



120mg to 140mg

Gyokuro

Another green tea that packs a very high caffeine punch, depending on how it's prepared.



BREW FOR SUCCESS

Even the best teas won't taste great if you don't prepare them properly. We asked Corinna Geib, co-founder and owner of ImmuneSchein Tea Haus, how to brew like a pro. Here are her three rules for excellence:

Perfect your water temperature

Some teas are best brewed at boiling temperature: black tea (including Pu'erh, aged teas, dark oolongs) and pretty much all herbal infusions. More delicate teas (Japanese green teas, white teas) shouldn't be brewed at boiling temperatures – doing so burns their leaves and releases bitter flavours.

Prioritise water quality

The water you use to brew your tea will also affect how it tastes. Feel free to use the water you drink at home, whether it's filtered or straight from the tap. But skip water that's chlorinated or overly treated to avoid a not-so-tasty result.

Time it right

Most teabags can spend three to four minutes in the hot water, then they're ready to remove. Leave it in longer and it will release more tannins – those mouth-drying compounds that make tea astringent. Go ahead and set a timer for the perfect cup. **WH**



**Food in
a flash**

Miso magic

Golden brown triangles of tofu soak up a rich, umami sauce atop a bed of cabbage for a quick-win, easy-to-make dinner that will also nudge you closer to your five-a-day

Roasted cabbage and tofu with walnut miso sauce

Total: **30 mins**

Serves: **4**

1 tbsp, plus 4 tsp **olive oil**

1 400g pack **extra-firm tofu**, drained and patted dry

1 small **red cabbage**, cut into 12 wedges, core intact

1 **garlic clove**, grated

2 tbsp **red miso**

2 tsp **honey**

1 tsp **rice vinegar**

60ml unsweetened

pear juice, warmed

95g roasted **walnuts**, roughly chopped

4 **spring onions**, thinly sliced

01. Heat the oven to 245°C with racks on the upper and lower thirds and brush two rimmed baking trays with 2 tsp olive oil each. Next, cut the tofu into four wedges along both diagonals, then stand each wedge on its side and cut in half lengthways to make eight triangles. Pat both sides

of the tofu dry and place in a single layer on one baking tray. Brush with ½ tbsp oil and sprinkle salt on both sides.

02. Place the cabbage wedges on the second tray and brush with ½ tbsp oil and a sprinkle of salt. Transfer both trays to the oven and roast for 15 mins. Flip the cabbage and the tofu and rotate both trays, then roast until the cabbage is tender-crisp and the tofu pieces are golden brown for

6 to 8 mins more.

03. Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, whisk together the garlic, red miso, honey, vinegar and a few grinds of pepper. Then gradually whisk in the pear juice and stir in the walnuts. Drizzle the cabbage and tofu with the walnut miso sauce and sprinkle with the spring onion slices.

Per serving:

About **403** cals,

27g carbs, **17g** protein, **27g** fat **W1**

Salmon
smørrebød
salad
RECIPE, P43

SALAD



Eat Smart

DAYS

Seasons change, and so does the food you put on your plate. Spring forwards with salad recipes that make light work of your five-a-day ambitions *and* meal prep

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALEX LAU



Buckwheat
salad
RECIPE, P43

Roasted vegetable salad

Total: **35 mins**

Serves: **4**

450g **brussels sprouts**,
trimmed and halved

3 tbsp **olive oil**

¼ tsp **paprika**

2 medium **sweet potatoes**, cut
lengthways into 2.5cm wedges,
then halved horizontally (if the
potatoes are long, cut into thirds)

1 tbsp **maple syrup**

1 tsp **sriracha**

70g **tahini**, stirred

3 tbsp fresh **lemon juice**

150g **baby spinach** and **rocket**

120g **lentils**, cooked

60g **goat's cheese**, crumbled

2 tbsp **sunflower seeds**, toasted

2 tbsp **pumpkin seeds**, toasted

01. Heat the oven to 220°C.

On a large baking tray, toss the brussels sprouts with 1 tbsp oil, paprika and ¼ tsp each of salt and pepper; arrange cut sides down. On another baking tray, toss the sweet potatoes with 1 tbsp oil and ¼ tsp each salt and pepper; spread in an even layer. Put both trays in the oven and roast the sprouts until they're golden brown and tender, about 15 mins, before removing. Toss the sweet potatoes and continue roasting until tender, about 8 to 12 mins longer.

02. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, stir together the maple syrup and sriracha. In a medium bowl, whisk together the tahini, 2 tbsp lemon juice, 2 tbsp water and ¼ tsp salt until smooth. If needed, whisk in more water ½ tsp at a time to reach drizzling consistency.

03. While the sprouts are hot, drizzle with the maple-sriracha mixture and toss to coat. In a large bowl, toss the greens with the remaining oil and lemon juice.

04. To serve, top the greens with the sprouts, sweet potatoes, lentils, goat's cheese and toasted sunflower and pumpkin seeds. Drizzle with the tahini dressing.

Per serving:

About **486** cals, **25.5g** fat,
51g carbs, **19g** protein →


**NO MEAT FOR YOU?
INVITE THESE PROTEIN-RICH
INGREDIENTS ON TO YOUR PLATE**

LEGUMES

■
Lentils,
chickpeas,
cannellini
beans

DIPS

■
Hummus,
cottage
cheese,
tzatziki

MEAT SUBSTITUTES

■
Tofu, seitan,
tempeh and
plant burgers

Eat Smart





Chickpea salad with pomegranate molasses vinaigrette

Total: **25 mins**

Serves: **4**

½ small **red onion**, finely chopped

1 tsp **cumin**

1 tsp **sumac**

2 tbsp plus 2 tsp

red wine vinegar

2 400g tins **chickpeas**, rinsed and drained

2 tbsp **pomegranate molasses**

1 tsp **dijon mustard**

60ml **rapeseed oil**

2 **romaine lettuce**

hearts, chopped

2 **Persian cucumbers**, quartered lengthwise and chopped

20g **flat-leaved parsley**

Handful of **mint leaves**

350g **cherry tomatoes**, halved

01. In a large bowl, mix together the onion, cumin, sumac, 2 tbsp vinegar and ½ tsp salt. Add the chickpeas and roughly mash; set aside.

02. In a small bowl, whisk together the pomegranate molasses, dijon, remaining 2 tsp vinegar and ¼ tsp each of salt and pepper. Slowly whisk in the oil until it's fully incorporated.

03. In a large bowl, toss together the romaine, cucumber, parsley and mint. Serve topped with the tomatoes and chickpeas. Drizzle with the vinaigrette.

Per serving:

About **377** cals, **18g**

fat, **48g** carbs, **12g** protein

Chicken
salad with
chicory
RECIPE, P43



HOW TO MAKE A STELLAR SALAD

Pick a few from each category to really satisfy your taste buds

THE GREENS

■ **Mild:** little gem and green leaf can provide a soft landing, while romaine offers crunch.

■ **Medium:** spinach, rocket and herbs bring a mouthful of flavour with every bite.

■ **Bitter:** consider complexity with frisée, radicchio or chicory.

THE TOPPINGS

■ **Texture:** mix creamy and crunchy, cooked and raw elements.

■ **Flavour:** balance tang or bitterness with sweetness. Add pops of salt or sugar (fresh fruit, anyone?).

■ **Shape:** Bite-sized is best, or go larger for a knife-and-fork vibe.

THE DRESSING

■ **Fat:** stick with an oil that won't overpower, such as mild olive, avocado or rapeseed.

■ **Acid:** citrus, mustard or vinegar add a non-negotiable punch.

■ **Seasonings:** salt is a must, but a sprinkle of spices or a drizzle of maple can bring it home.

THE BONUS

■ **Cheese:** good-quality hunks can simultaneously add texture, salt and tang.

■ **Nuts and seeds:** necessary for crunch and they'll also keep you feeling full.

■ **Croutons:** get creative. Try crushed crisps or dry-roasted edamame. ➔



Meal prepping?
Stash components
separately so
you can enjoy a
salad whenever
you're ready

Steak burrito bowl salad

Total: **30 mins**

Serves: **4**

1 400g tin **black beans**,
rinsed and patted dry
3½ tbsp **olive oil**
1 tsp **Mexican-style seasoning**
1 450g **sirloin steak**
(4cm thick), trimmed
Bunch of **coriander**, chopped
1 small **shallot**, roughly chopped
½ **jalapeño pepper**, seeded
and roughly chopped

60ml **orange juice**
2 tbsp **lime juice**
2 tbsp **Greek yoghurt**
400g short-grain
brown rice, cooked
230g **red cabbage**,
cored and thinly sliced

01. Heat the oven to 220°C. Add the black beans to a baking tray and toss with ½ tbsp oil and Mexican-style seasoning. Roast until the beans are dry, split and crispy, about 18 to 20 mins.

02. Meanwhile, heat 1 tbsp oil in a large frying pan on a medium-high heat. Pat the steak completely dry and season with ½ tsp each salt and pepper. Cook to desired doneness, about 5 to 6 mins per side for medium-rare. Transfer to a chopping board and let rest for 5 mins before slicing.

03. Meanwhile, in a blender, combine the coriander, shallot, jalapeño pepper, orange and lime juices,

yoghurt and remaining oil. Puree on high until smooth for 30 secs.

04. Divide the rice among the bowls. Top with the cabbage and roasted black beans. Add the sliced steak and drizzle with the green sauce. Sprinkle with more Mexican-style seasoning for an extra kick.

Per serving:
About **570** cals, **28.5g** fat, **48g** carbs, **32g** protein

Salmon smørrebrød salad

Total: **25 mins**, plus cooling

Serves: **4**

2 slices thin **rye bread**

550g **salmon fillets**

1½ tbsp **everything**

seasoning blend (via Amazon)

60g **Greek yoghurt**

1 tbsp **olive oil**

1 tbsp **white wine vinegar**

Small handful of **dill fronds**, chopped

½ **cucumber**, sliced into 0.5cm-thick half moons

½ medium **sweet onion**, thinly sliced

1 head **green leaf lettuce**, leaves torn

01. Heat the oven to 220°C.

02. Place the bread on a baking tray and toast on the upper oven rack until crisp and slightly darker brown around the edges, about 14 to 17 mins. Let it cool then cut into triangles.

03. Meanwhile, line another baking tray with greaseproof paper. Add the salmon and sprinkle the top with the seasoning and ¼ tsp each of salt and pepper. Roast on the middle rack until just cooked through, 14 to 18 mins. Let it rest for 5 mins, then flake.

04. Meanwhile, in a large bowl, whisk together the yoghurt, oil, vinegar, dill, 1 tbsp water and ¼ tsp each of salt and pepper. Add the cucumber and onion, then toss to coat.

05. When you're ready to serve, add the lettuce and mix well. Serve alongside the salmon with toast.

Per serving:

About **325 cals**, **10.5g**

fat, **24g** carbs, **33g** protein

Chicken salad with chicory

Total: **40 mins**

Serves: **4**

200g **barley**

5 tbsp **olive oil**

4 **chicken breasts**

3 tbsp **lemon juice**

2 heads **chicory**, sliced crossways 1cm thick

1 medium **fennel bulb**, very thinly sliced, plus a handful of **fennel fronds**

3 ribs **celery**, thinly sliced,

plus a handful of **celery leaves**

30g **blue cheese**, crumbled

40g roasted salted

almonds, chopped

01. Cook the barley per the packet instructions. Rinse with cold water until cool, then drain thoroughly.

02. Meanwhile, heat 1 tbsp oil in a large frying pan on medium. Season the chicken with ½ tsp salt and ¼ tsp pepper. Cook in a single layer, adjusting the heat as needed to prevent burning, until deep golden brown and cooked through, 6 to 7 mins per side. Remove from the heat and drizzle with 1 tbsp lemon juice. Transfer to a chopping board and let it rest for at least 3 mins before slicing.

03. In a large bowl, whisk the remaining 4 tbsp oil and 2 tbsp lemon juice with ¼ tsp each of salt and pepper. Add the cooked barley, chicory, fennel and celery; toss to combine.

04. Serve the chicken salad sprinkled with the fennel fronds, celery leaves, blue cheese and almonds.

Per serving:

About **446 cals**, **25.5g**

fat, **21g** carbs, **34g** protein



Buckwheat salad

Total: **30 mins**, plus cooling

Serves: **4**

220g **buckwheat**

¼ tsp **smoked paprika**

3 tbsp **olive oil**

8 large **eggs**

1 tbsp **sherry vinegar**

1 tsp country-style

dijon mustard

½ tsp **honey**

4 small heads **baby gem lettuce**, trimmed and leaves separated

1 small head **frisée** (about 115g), trimmed and torn into pieces

50g **gouda**, shaved with a vegetable peeler

01. Heat the oven to 150°C. On a small baking tray, toss 100g buckwheat with the smoked paprika, 1 tbsp oil and a pinch each of salt and pepper. Spread in an even layer and bake, stirring halfway through until golden brown, 25 to 30 mins. Let cool.

02. Meanwhile, cook the remaining buckwheat per the packet instructions; set aside.

03. Bring a medium saucepan

of water to a boil and fill a bowl with ice water. Add the eggs and rapidly simmer, 6 mins for runny eggs, then immediately transfer to the prepared ice water to stop the cooking. When cool enough to handle, drain and peel the eggs.

04. Meanwhile, in a large bowl, whisk together the vinegar, mustard, honey and ¼ tsp each of salt and pepper. Slowly whisk in the remaining oil until fully incorporated. Toss with the lettuce and frisée to coat. Divide the mixture among the bowls. Top with the cooked buckwheat, soft-boiled eggs (halved lengthways), gouda and toasted buckwheat. Add flaky salt and cracked black pepper to taste.

Per serving:

About **460 cals**, **27g** fat,

35g carbs, **22g** protein **WH**

GOOD TRIPS *Only*

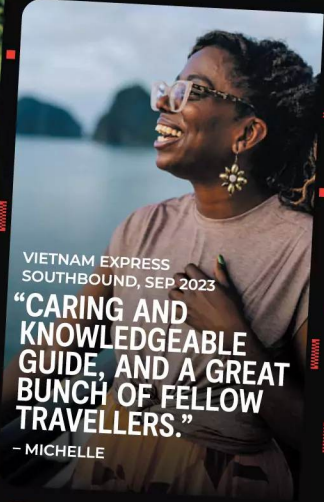
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CHANEL

Are you in your child-free era?

With birth rates across developed nations in decline, motherhood is increasingly being perceived as 'opt in', rather than 'opt out'.

But what happens on the other side of that decision? *WH* reports

WORDS: AMY WILKINSON





‘I feel I have to explain my decision and clarify that I’m not a monster.’ These words belong to Devin Propeck-Silva. And the 38-year-old business owner is anything but monstrous. She’s telling *WH* what happens when she meets someone new; the introductions, she explains, follow the same script. ‘After they find out that I’m married, they ask how many kids I have.’ (None.) ‘Then, they ask when I’m planning to have kids.’ (She isn’t.) That’s usually when the vibe shifts. Without meaning to, Devin finds herself mounting her defence; she and her husband Matt love kids; they’re proud to be an aunt and uncle; they just... don’t want their own.

For the child-free by choice, confused and critical responses to their decision-making are nothing new. In 1974, Marcia Drut-Davis was a 34-year-old substitute teacher when she agreed to appear on a TV show in which producers followed her and her then-husband as they broke the news to his parents that they didn’t intend to have children (a wild broadcasting premise for any era). Within a day of the episode airing, Marcia was blacklisted by her local school administration. Then the death threats started. ‘I was terrified,’ the now 84-year-old says of the response – one that seemed markedly different to the one her husband received. ‘His job wasn’t affected; his friendships weren’t affected. But I was less than a snail at the bottom of the ocean. I shut up about it for many years and didn’t say a word.’

Freed from desire

Some 50 years on, the world has changed; we’ve witnessed fourth-wave feminism and the rise of the #MeToo movement. But as stories such as Devin’s demonstrate, that stigma persists. ‘It persists because

[having children] is so deeply embedded in many of our social institutions,’ says Amy Blackstone, a sociology professor at the University of Maine and author of *Childfree By Choice: The Movement Redefining Family & Creating A New Age Of Independence*. ‘We tend to think of motherhood as a natural connection to being a woman. Religion depends on it; our economy depends on it.’

So when a woman decides to break this connection, people tend to have thoughts; accusations of selfishness are common, notes Professor Blackstone – even today. ‘We still hear occasionally that you’re “less of a woman” or you’re “not a real woman” unless – or until – you’ve had children.’ This, at a time when a woman’s right to choose is *still* up for political and ideological debate (see: the overturning of *Roe v Wade* in the US and the recent acceleration of prosecutions for women who have abortions beyond the legal limit in the UK). But the child-free stigma appears to be shifting. Along with millennials – the generation whose ages range from the tail end of their twenties to their early forties – Professor Blackstone points to the

work of younger women who are questioning long-held assumptions. ‘Gen Z has insisted on disentangling the connection [between being a woman and motherhood] openly and without apology,’ she says.

Verbal reasoning

Credit also goes to those who wore low-slung jeans the first time around – and it’s millennials who are creating brands, publishing empires and Instagram followings off the back of talking about the





Being child-free:
a passport to a
different life?

child-free lifestyle. Accounts such as @wearechildfree_ are garnering hundreds of thousands of views, while content from 'cool aunts' posting about their last-minute trips to Paris and 'DINKS' (dual income, no kids) doting on their goldendoodles are platforming a lifestyle that, until recently, has been largely invisible. Claire Guentz, a 35-year-old estate agent and influencer discusses her decision to forgo motherhood with her 150,000-strong following. She tells *WH* that the response has (largely) been positive. 'There have been

a couple of messages about how a woman's job is to stay at home, but I don't even entertain those.' Claire and her husband, who have two dogs, like to refer to themselves as DINKWADs (translation: DINKS with a dog.)

These aren't just online trends, but a bellwether of the state of motherhood – or, rather, otherhood. More than a third of adults who are not already parents never want to have children, according to data from YouGov, and one in five say they don't want children soon, while acknowledging that they might change their minds later. As for the reasons women are deciding to be child-free by choice – as opposed to those childless by circumstance – they're as diverse as the women themselves.

For 40-year-old Christina, a digital operations manager, the ambivalence has roots in her own childhood. She recalls holding baby dolls during playtime and feeling very little about the idea of being a mum. She assumed the desire would come, but by her late twenties – as she watched a handful of female friends choose to become single mothers – she realised she never would. 'Seeing them make this really definitive choice – it made it clear that it's not for me,' she says.

For others, the decision is based on the systems within which mothers are asked to parent – as well as the world as it exists today. 'For Gen Z and millennials, the environment and the economy are two main reasons,' adds Professor Blackstone. The carbon footprint a child may leave – along with the cost of raising them for 18-plus years – she explains, are simply too profound to ignore, while the 'we'll figure out a way' mentality of earlier generations feels, to many, increasingly out of step with reality.

During her 15 years of research, Professor Blackstone has also found that some women don't want to jeopardise their relationships, while single women may want to protect the life they've established. The choice may also be emotionally fraught, as they wrestle with an unhappy or traumatic childhood. '[This is] probably the most common reason,' says psychologist

Nicoletta C Skoufalos. 'People may not trust their ability to create a new, healthy type of family with their own child.' That's before you consider the recent news that the number of women who've died during pregnancy or soon after is at its highest level in 20 years, according to figures from the most recent MBRRACE-UK report. The Royal College of Midwives responded to the news with assurances that pregnancy and childbirth in the UK continues to be safe for most women. But it's news that's hard to unhear, particularly for Black women, who are three times more likely to die during pregnancy and birth than white women, as well as Asian women, who are twice as likely as white women to die.

Fencing

And yet, while the choice to have a child is straightforward for some, many find themselves languishing on the fence – unable to decide one way or the other. Even women who are pretty sure they don't want children can get caught up in the what-ifs. For some, the idea of regret looms large, while others worry about who will visit or take care of them when they're old. Others are concerned about leaving a lasting legacy once they shuffle off this mortal coil. The good news, says Karin Arndt, a clinical psychologist, is that it's okay to spend time in this grey area. 'I talk to a lot of women on a weekly basis, and a lot are struggling with ambivalence,' she says. 'Within our culture, we're not used to sitting in the tension of not knowing, and we're trained that we need to have an answer quickly. Therapy is a place where we can wrestle with that and not have to come up with an answer right away.'

Of course, the undecided have to make a decision eventually, and if having a biological child is a requisite of parenthood for you, that moment might arrive sooner than you'd like. Dr Arndt recommends taking a period of contemplation to clarify how you really feel. 'Commit to listening to yourself closely – not just the →

Strong Mind

topmost layer of your psyche, which is the conscious mind and rationally makes sense from a pros-and-cons perspective – and on a deeper level,’ she says, adding that creating space for your unconscious feelings through journaling exercises such as ‘morning pages’ and dream diaries can be useful.

For Devin, it was taking a more granular approach that helped her make the decision. ‘If someone’s questioning this, I think it’s important to think about what their daily life looks like now and what life is like on their worst day, then what daily life is going to look like on their worst day with children.’ Above all, remember that the decision is yours – together with your partner, if you have one. While seeking advice and counsel from friends and family can prove helpful, you’ll be the one raising this child. And there’s no ‘right’ answer. Whatever you decide, it might help to remember that the option to contemplate this choice at all is a privilege, both socio-economically and physiologically, that far too many women don’t have.

Going for gold

The flip side of eliminating one possibility is the door opening to so many others. For women who have decided to be child-free, Dr Arndt encourages that they work on discovering their driving passion. ‘What are you creating? What in your life is challenging you? What’s your crucible, as I put it – the fire in which you’re forming gold? We don’t tend to see or hear about models of what it means to be between 30 and 60 that don’t involve raising kids. What could

those years look like if you’re birthing something in your life and it has nothing to do with kids?’

For Claire, that’s meant setting up business ventures that excite her. For Christina, it looks like a fulfilling balance of work, travel and volunteering. As for Devin, she’s realising her dream of refitting a 13m yacht, with plans to sail around the world. No sad, selfish, bored women to be found here then. Nor, it seems, is there regret. ‘I feel spoiled,’ adds Devin, of her child-free lifestyle. ‘I get this quality time with my partner. Every weekend feels like a holiday.’ Lack of regret is the case for many child-free people, according to research on the topic. A 2022 study by researchers at Michigan State University found no evidence that older child-free adults experienced any more life regret than older parents, with the latter group more likely to want to change something about their lives.

In the years since *that* TV show, Marcia has become an advocate for the child-free-by-choice movement



Many of us simply don't have the drive

and written two books about her experience. For her, these findings bear out. While she admits to what she calls ‘Kodak moments’ of regret – such as when she sees a photo of a friend holding her newborn in the hospital – they’ve been few and far between. ‘The little vignettes are always so charming, but not the whole picture,’ she says. Now in her ninth decade, when she looks back on her life, she only has one real regret: ‘That I was too frightened to approach this subject earlier.’ The way she sees it, child-free women should be as proud of their choices as parents are of theirs – baby talk we can all get on board with. **WB**

HOW TO BABY-PROOF YOUR CONVERSATIONS

Small talk can be hard enough without questions such as ‘When are you having kids?’ entering the chat, especially when answers like ‘never’ stop the conversation dead in its tracks. When you’re faced with a situation like this, Professor Blackstone recommends reframing the question into one that continues the dialogue, while simultaneously changing the topic. ‘The best response is, “I’m not, but one thing I’m really passionate about is this...”’ she suggests. This allows you to shift to a safer subject that both parties can talk about, which is a win-win.

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Can smashing a plate help you process your emotions?

How about a glass? Or a car? It might, according to research. But they aren't the only activities that can help you sit with your feelings. Pull up a pew while we hear from those in the business of processing emotions in a healthy way

Too much on
your plate?
We've got you



When Heaven Marley went through her first big break-up last year, she wasn't sure how to process it. 'I'm the kind of person who bottles up my feelings and just acts [like I'm] okay,' the beauty influencer tells *WH*. 'I didn't have any closure.' When her best friend noticed that she was struggling, she had an idea. The two women visited an 'aggression arena'; also known as a 'rage room', it's a space filled with objects that you're allowed to break – for a fee. In the one Heaven visited, some rooms were filled with dishes, while another included a car you could destroy. She started breaking glasses, before warming to her theme in the car room. 'I felt so much lighter,' she says.

And while we're not advocating the destruction of the nearest vehicle to net a satisfying emotional release, the time Heaven spent smashing objects did help her sit with her feelings, which, according to mental wellbeing professionals, is a vital step on the journey to processing them.

An understanding of 'why' begins with an awareness of negative emotions – and the situations that cause them. While they aren't all the same, they're there for a reason: to tell us something – and it's up to us to listen. When negative emotions hit, you can usually tell where they come from, whether it's as astronomical as a break-up or as minute as someone cutting you up in traffic. And while it may feel easier to sweep them under the rug than to recognise they're there, suppressing your emotions can make you more prone to stress, says Emily Willroth, an assistant

professor of psychological and brain sciences at Washington University in the US. Bottling them up, she explains, leads to increased activation of the sympathetic nervous system, which is the body's response to danger.

Instead, 'it's helpful to think about all emotions, good or bad, as serving a purpose', she says. The not-so-great feelings can tip you off to something going on, not only involving yourself, but your relationships with others. This contributes to a process known as 'avoidant learning', adds Andy Thomson, a psychiatrist at the University of Virginia – or learning what kinds of situations to steer clear of in the future. It all adds up to a strong case for really feeling your emotions – and being guided by them. If you tend to brush everything off with a quick 'I'm fine', read on for experts' opinions on how to do just this. ➔

WORDS OLIVIA EVANS

PHOTOGRAPHY JOE LINGEMAN

Strong Mind



▼ WHEN YOU'RE...

Fighting the urge to scream into a pillow

Anger almost always involves a situation of 'should' says Steven Hollon, a professor of psychiatry and psychology at Vanderbilt University in the US. Your body is telling you that something feels unfair: you should've been treated better, or something in your life should've gone differently. In this case, you'll want to 'handle things in a way that resolves the problem', he explains. Say you're having issues with a friend – while it may feel tempting to ignore the problem to protect the peace, it's more productive to have a conversation – even if it doesn't help to repair the relationship. Fail to do so and the pent-up feelings never get resolved, meaning you remain angry. Word to the wise: be sure to cool off before you have the chat, though.

▼ WHEN YOU'RE...

Visited by the green-eyed monster

Olivia Rodrigo spells it out perfectly in her song *Jealousy*. *Jealousy*: this feeling often comes from insecurity in some form. If you're experiencing a lot of jealousy while in a relationship, it might be telling you that your partner isn't valuing you, says Dr Thomson. Try talking it out. And if these feelings come out of

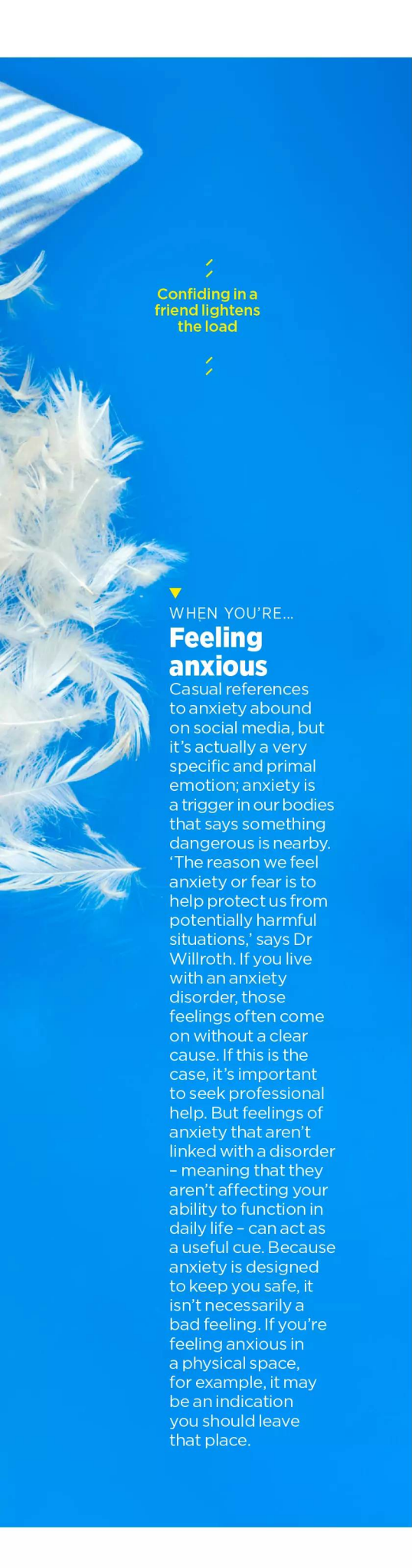
nowhere, it may be time to look inwards and work on your self-esteem. One helpful habit is to pick up a mindfulness practice such as meditation. Not only can it help to improve your self-worth, it could also help you get to the root of the issue, as you'll be able to reflect on what's triggering your jealous feelings, says Iris Mauss, a professor of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley.

▼ WHEN YOU'RE...

Feeling blue

Drawn-out periods of sadness may cause you to feel as if you don't want to – or even can't – do anything. But try to do the opposite, says Dr Hollon. 'You can still do all the things you did before you were down; you just don't think you can.' This desire to disengage is actually a signal that you're in need of support, says Dr Willroth. And if

you isolate yourself, your inner circle won't be aware of your feelings. Next time you feel the urge to pull away, try to recognise that feeling – and confide in a loved one about it – making plans with them if you can. And if you're feeling so down that it's affecting your ability to function in daily life, it's important to seek professional help from your GP in the first instance.



Confiding in a friend lightens the load

▼ WHEN YOU'RE...

Feeling anxious

Casual references to anxiety abound on social media, but it's actually a very specific and primal emotion; anxiety is a trigger in our bodies that says something dangerous is nearby. 'The reason we feel anxiety or fear is to help protect us from potentially harmful situations,' says Dr Willroth. If you live with an anxiety disorder, those feelings often come on without a clear cause. If this is the case, it's important to seek professional help. But feelings of anxiety that aren't linked with a disorder – meaning that they aren't affecting your ability to function in daily life – can act as a useful cue. Because anxiety is designed to keep you safe, it isn't necessarily a bad feeling. If you're feeling anxious in a physical space, for example, it may be an indication you should leave that place.



Are you feeling a little frayed?

What to do when you're fraying

There's no one-size-fits-all approach to dealing with negative emotions. 'Different things work for different people,' says Professor Mauss. But research suggests that mindfulness can be useful in many situations. Here's how to let your emotions wash over you

USE YOUR IMAGINATION

Professor Mauss recommends closing your eyes and picturing your emotions passing by like clouds. You can't control either in real life – they simply occur and move through your day. Similarly, 'emotions just happen, and you don't need to react to them [right away]', she adds. The more you try it, the easier it will feel.

TAKE FIVE DEEP BREATHS

That's it – it's that easy. Studies show doing so helps you to be more present when a negative emotion bubbles up. When you start to feel an emotion, pause, sit down and breathe. There are many techniques you can try, but for an easy place to start, extend your exhale so that it's longer than your inhale.

DISTRACT YOURSELF

Sometimes, the only thing that will make you feel better when experiencing a negative emotion is a full-on distraction – and that can be anything from visiting a rage room to walking your dog in the park. 'It helps your mind disengage,' says Professor Mauss, with the caveat that this is a short-term solution. Go back to the emotion later and unpack it. **WB**



Speaking
my mind

‘Understanding my brain is wiping away years of shame’

One in seven people in the UK are estimated to be neurodivergent, with many women diagnosed with ADHD and autism later in life. As April marks Autism Acceptance Week, one woman reveals how a diagnosis helped her understand her years-long struggle with her mental health

Lazy. It's a word that's

haunted me since the days when I'd be up at 1am trying to finish my homework after daydreaming in class. I knew managers were thinking it as they extended my probation – and fired me – due to 'poor performance'. Today, lazy is cancelled in my vocabulary.

That's thanks, in no small part, to Charlotte Mia. I was 19 when I met Mia (as I call her) at university in Plymouth. We didn't know that we were navigating undiagnosed ADHD and autism as we escaped the blaring music and throbbing crowds of student life to bask in the soft glow of our flat's fairy lights.

Our neurodivergent brains forged a special bond that remained even after we graduated and moved miles apart – I'm now in Warwickshire; Mia is in East Sussex. I knew she'd understand when I'd confide in her about my struggles at work – first at a bar, later at a beauty brand and a charity. I struggled with task switching, replying to emails and remembering assignments. Falling behind my colleagues and paralysed by stress, I'd have panic attacks in the office toilets. The stress was fuelled by masking: suppressing certain behaviours to appear neurotypical. But it caused a perpetuating cycle, as trying to catch up at home in the evening prevented me from recharging.

By 2020, I was struggling to keep up with a society that values productivity over all else. Scrolling past successful people on my Instagram feed, I noticed posts about neurodivergence – and so began the slow process of putting the puzzle pieces together.

The following year, I was diagnosed with ADHD by a private organisation, via the Right to Choose NHS pathway, in an attempt to avoid spending years on a waiting list. It was a process so emotionally draining that I decided to self-diagnose my autism, which isn't



Jess Joy, 30, is co-author of *How Not To Fit In* @IAMpayingAttention

recognised by the NHS, and support myself via my own research. (Mia was diagnosed with ADHD around the same time by her therapist.)

Obviously, a recognised label can lead to accommodations – employers being obligated to make a work environment

and processes as supportive as possible – but it can also facilitate systemic ableism (such as during the pandemic, when autistic Covid patients in hospital were given unlawful 'do not resuscitate' orders). That's even if you can get in front of a doctor – the average NHS waiting time for a diagnosis is three years, and seeking one privately isn't affordable for many.

Learning about how my brain operates has been so validating – it's heartbreaking that people could be denied that insight. It's also triggered deep grief resulting from spending so many years thinking I wasn't enough. An earlier diagnosis would have also allowed me to self-regulate sooner using stimming – the repetitive performance of certain physical movements or vocalisations to induce feelings of calm. Still, I count myself lucky that I wasn't misdiagnosed with depression or a personality disorder, as so many are, wondering why the medication isn't working.

Mia and I launched our Instagram account, @IAMpayingAttention, in 2021 to help provide empathy and empowerment to others on what can be a lonely journey. Back then, we weren't seeing ourselves represented in traditional ADHD and autism material, which focused on young white boys. (Though, it's important to note that Black people and people of colour have been even more under-represented in this space.) I now realise I've always gravitated to people whose brains are wired in the same way as mine.

'I gravitate to people with brains wired like mine'

It's why I'd become upset after overthinking the body language of school friends, and why I was drawn to Mia and also to my partner, Ryan. He's neurodivergent, and it's through our relationship that I've seen how neurodivergence can bleed into all areas of your life. I can think in circles when we communicate and can find even minor disagreements hard to drop (even though it might seem like I'm continuing the argument) because I want to make sure the issue doesn't arise again.

It's thanks to Ryan that I've avoided burnout. Being self-employed allows me to make adjustments to my working day without pushback from bosses, but it can be unstable; my relationship with Ryan has given me a certain level of financial security. The structure of our society – that everyone needs to produce to earn money – is so difficult for the neurodivergent. Without a safety net, many people with ADHD

and autism struggle with unemployment.

Three years on from launching our Instagram page, our community stands 100,000 strong. I've reached a certain peace: I'm gentle with myself, but firm on

boundaries – and surrounded by people who respect my need for alone time. I'm eternally grateful that I've been on this journey with Mia. We decided to write our book to expand our online conversations and hope it will continue to normalise that our brains aren't defective, they're just *different*. Mia and I helped each other feel seen – it's something we all deserve. **WH**

For more information, resources and support on neurodivergence, visit adhd.foundation.org.uk. *How Not To Fit In: An Unapologetic Guide To Navigating Autism And ADHD*, by Jess Joy and Charlotte Mia, is out now



Neurodivergence and mental health: the expert view

Dr Amber Johnston

is a clinical psychologist specialising in neuropsychology (healthymindpsychology.co.uk)

What are ADHD and autism?

Autism spectrum disorder and ADHD are neurological conditions affecting behaviour. Both can cause issues with sensory dysregulation, which can affect how someone processes things like sound, light and crowds. Autism involves difficulties with social interactions, while ADHD involves problems regulating stimulation.

How might these conditions affect mental health?

High co-occurrence between neurodivergence and other mental health conditions – such as depression and anxiety – is often a consequence of societal attitudes, self-blame or misdiagnosis. Negative coping mechanisms like substance abuse and self-isolation are common, too.

Can a diagnosis improve wellbeing?

It can help people to reframe their previous experiences through a more compassionate lens, allowing them to release years of accumulated shame about not 'fitting in'. Additionally, it can help people learn about tools or access accommodations that can assist them with life goals.

goals get you out there

Abbie has

52

days until

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Ella has

101

days until

ZIG ZAG
HALF MARATHON

BOOK NOW



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Best Body

How to
workout

build a

like a PT

If the idea of constructing your own muscle-making plan feels like flat-pack territory, worry not. With a little guidance, you'll be your own PT in no time – zero Allen keys required

WORDS: CAITLIN CARLSON



MOVE THIS WAY

Consider this your glossary of some of the main movement patterns that every exerciser should know. Select a move from each toolbox to develop a strength workout that stands strong



patterns – a useful method of categorising exercises based on how they force your body to move and which muscles they recruit. A push, for example, primarily involves chest muscles and allows you to – you guessed it – push a door open, as well as do a press-up on the floor. A push movement is just one of the biggies – and there’s a reason trainers use these patterns to construct their workouts: it’s a highly effective way of training.

Doing similar motions over and over again – albeit in slightly different ways – works most, if not all, of your muscle groups; it’s this, points out Gargano, that ultimately makes you stronger. Programming a mix of patterns in a workout also ensures you stay balanced and injury-free. Do all hinges and no squats, for example, and you’ll overwork the rear of your lower body. ‘To maximise hip strength and power, you need one, maybe two, heavy hinge exercises,’ adds Dr Fraboni. Then, you can counter that work by adding in a squat to improve knee strength and stability, while reducing pain.

With this in mind, allow us to introduce you to the must-know patterns, the most effective moves for each one and some easy-to-follow instructions. It’ll help you slot the pieces together for a full-body sweat that would make a PT proud.

Two women walk into an exercise conference. If this sounds like the start of a bad joke, it’s actually the start of a beautiful friendship. When trainers Angela Gargano and Jen Fraboni first met at a business event, they wasted no time hitting the gym together. But they weren’t there to spot each other. Instead, they set about crafting a full-body routine that targets every muscle group. ‘We knew that we wanted to do something quick and effective, so we made sure we had the right patterns in the workout,’ says Gargano.

The patterns she’s referring to? Movement

PUSH

You push in the real world more than you think, using this chest-dominant action to close drawers, doors and cabinets, says Dr Fraboni. Or to press a barbell.

What it works

Chest, shoulders, triceps

Must-do moves

Shoulder tap to press-up, dumbbell chest press, lateral raise, shoulder press, chest fly

PULL

Spend too much time on your phone? 'Add pull exercises to combat that forwards tendency,' Dr Fraboni says. Yogis, take note: counteract those yogic press-ups and reduce the chance of shoulder injury with pull movements.

What it works

Back, biceps, forearms

Must-do moves

Bent-over row, pull-up, chin-up

HINGE

To build hip strength or to grow those glutes, you want to improve your hinge pattern, Dr Fraboni says. Exercises that fall into this category ramp up hamstring, glute and hip extension power – all crucial for distance running, too.

What it works

Glutes, hamstrings

Must-do moves

Romanian deadlift, single-leg deadlift, glute bridge

SQUAT

Squat patterns bolster strength and stability. Runners: even though your sport recruits a lot of quad movement, practise squatting to support your knees and hip flexors, so you can go faster and further without discomfort.

What it works

Quads, glutes, hamstrings

Must-do moves

Heel-elevated squat, goblet squat

Set the bar high with a fiery new training plan

Tools of the trade

Get familiar with these important add-ons that can take your workout to the next level

LATERAL

Side-to-side patterns work muscles that supply more power and control. 'Don't stick to forwards and backwards exercises,' Dr Fraboni urges.

What it works

Lateral moves hit an impressive variety of muscles along the sides of your body, Dr Fraboni says, including the glutes and abductors (inner thighs).

Must-do moves

Lateral lunge, curtsy lunge, skater

CARRY

Grip strength is often overlooked in training plans. But a weak grip can keep you from PBs, such as a heavier deadlift or that extra pull-up. Enter: carry patterns to reinforce palm and forearm power.

What it works

Grip, core strength

Must-do moves

Classic farmer's carry, overhead and single-arm variations

FULL-BODY STRENGTH

This workout hits every movement pattern and muscle group. Do it up to three days a week. Once you're comfortable, bring in other must-do moves listed in each category to keep the gains great and the workouts fresh.

Instructions: Using a pair of medium to heavy dumbbells, do the following moves in order (push, pull, hinge, squat, then bonus patterns) for 30 to 45 secs each, with 10 to 15 secs of rest in between. Do 3 or 4 sets in total.

Exercises demoed by Ashley Reese, founder of Reese Fitness



PUSH

Shoulder tap to press-up

HOW TO: Begin in a high plank position with your hands slightly wider than your shoulders (A). Keeping your back flat and your hips square to the floor, tap your right hand to your left shoulder (B). Repeat on the other side. Return to a high plank, then bend your elbows and lower your chest towards the floor (C). Press up to return to the start.

PULL

Gorilla row

HOW TO: Stand with your feet wider than hip-width apart and place the dumbbells between your feet. Keeping your spine long, bend your knees and lower your hips into a squat. Grasp the dumbbells with your palms facing in, arms extended (A). Lift one weight off the floor towards your ribs (B), then slowly lower it back down. Repeat on the other arm.



HINGE

Romanian deadlift

HOW TO: With your feet hip-width apart, hold the dumbbells close to your body next to your hips, palms facing in (A). Keeping your spine long, send your hips backwards with control as you hinge forwards. Keeping the dumbbells close to you, slowly lower the weights to your shins, or as far down as you can without curving your spine (B). Pause, then reverse the movement to return to the start, engaging your glutes and core at the top.



SQUAT

Goblet squat

HOW TO: Stand with your feet slightly wider than hip-width apart, holding a dumbbell in both hands at chest height (A). Bend your knees into a squat, keeping your chest upright (B). Pause, then drive through your heels and glutes to stand.





LATERAL

Lateral lunge

HOW TO: Stand with your feet hip-width apart, a dumbbell in each hand. Step your left foot out to the side, landing with your left knee bent, in line with your ankle, weights on either side of your left knee. Driving through your left heel, engage your glutes to return to the start. Repeat on the opposite side.



CARRY

Farmer's carry

HOW TO: Stand tall with a dumbbell in each hand at your sides, palms facing in. Squeeze your shoulder blades together and engage your core and glutes, then walk forwards without letting the weights swing. Pause, then turn and return to the start.

Got
some time
on your
hands?



Why this workout?

We know you have questions. Luckily, we have answers

Why aren't there any classic abs moves in this plan?

We love a fiery core-blaster. But with a plan like this, they aren't necessary. 'You're using your core in every single one of the movements,' Gargano says. If you want to do more abs-focused work, go for it. Just know that if you're hitting

the movement patterns here, you're already doing plenty (and more) for your abs and the rest of your body. The same reasoning goes for, say, biceps curls or other arm-specific movements.

Why time, not reps?

Focusing on the clock allows you to worry less about how many reps you're completing and instead focus on the form and feel of each move, Gargano says.

How much does the order of the movement patterns really matter?

You can play around with the order a bit, but space out upper- and lower-body moves, as per Gargano's advice (so you don't exhaust any one muscle group).

Can I add in other exercises?

Of course. You can (and should) keep in mind that you don't live life in a contained manner. 'We twist and rotate even when walking,' notes Dr Fraboni. So, including exercises with a rotational aspect – such as throwing a medicine ball laterally against a wall, or doing cable machine wood chops – is also a great way to mimic everyday movements. **WH**

Wellness
curious

Nerve flossing

The technique's purported pay-off? Smooth, pain-free mobility

WORDS: JENNIFER NIED

I'm noticing more friends flossing lately. But it's not a surge in dental hygiene. Instead, it's a way to improve nerve health and move freely. Nerve flossing (or neural gliding) is a stretching technique that's easily done on your own and is said to reduce a whole host of symptoms.

Here's how it works: nerves get compressed by surrounding tissue – creating sensations of pain, numbness or tingling – and nerve flossing is a way to free them and get them moving, says Shannon Leggett, a physical therapist. 'Think of it like a dynamic stretch for the nerve,' she adds. Essentially, you're carefully and mindfully moving the joints around the target nerve. (In practice, it looks a lot like stretching but with even slower and more specific movements.) Here, physical therapists explain how to mobilise your nervous system with this technique and what to consider before you give it a go...

It's the same as stretching... NOT EXACTLY

- Both modalities improve range of motion (and are important), but there are nuances. For example, in a static hamstring stretch, you apply tension through the full length of the muscle by pulling your extended leg to its limit and holding. For the sciatic nerve (which runs along the leg), pull one knee up towards your chest, extend your leg up and point your foot, then bend your knee and flex your foot.

All you're doing is putting tension on one end of the nerve while adding slack to the other – this is key. Nerves are delicate; their function is communication. Pushing them to or beyond their limit can aggravate aches, Leggett notes. Muscles are made for moving and can take more strain than nerves.

It's totally safe to do on your own YES, BUT START WITH A PRO

- Nerve flossing is common PT homework that doesn't require any equipment. So yes, there are few risks and anyone is able to do it at home – but you may not need it or really know what areas you should be focusing on. That's where working with a physical therapist can prove particularly useful, as you'll learn how to do the movements properly. 'There's no one-size-fits-all solution to nerve pain,' says Morgan Sileo, an orthopaedic clinical specialist at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York. And take care: gliding the nerves could make the problem that you're facing even worse. Ouch.

If it hurts, it's working BIG FAT NOPE TO THAT ONE

- The goal of nerve flossing, when done properly and in the right area, is to diminish your pain and discomfort. Targeting your nervous system is different from massage or foam rolling (where a little eek is okay) because of the very delicate nature of your nerve tissue. If pain happens and your symptoms intensify, become more frequent or extend further down your arm or leg away from your spine – a sign of increased nerve tension – that's a sign you need to press pause. You may need to adjust your technique or modify the range of motion, says Sileo. Again, this is where professional guidance is key; they can help you finesse your form while you focus on healing.



PHOTOGRAPHY: KATIE THOMPSON

How
I get fit
done

‘Running a marathon was nothing compared with my arthritis’

Kate Dunbar, 60, from Norfolk, found resilience in running after the inflammatory condition left her bed-bound

Growing up, I never thought much about my health and fitness – until I had to. In hindsight, I realise back pain in my twenties was the beginning of arthritis. When I hit 40, I had a catastrophic flare-up. Within weeks, my joints felt like they were on fire. I was in bed for weeks, dosed up on painkillers; my husband thought I was dying. Finally, I was diagnosed with psoriatic arthritis – a form that comes with psoriasis on the skin. I was prescribed steroid injections and an immunosuppressant to reduce inflammation.

A few months on, I asked my rheumatologist if my diet could be inflammatory (the drugs were helping, but there were occasional flare-ups); however, he dismissed the idea. Movement-wise, things were limited: I’d attempt to swim, draped over a foam tube float, barely able to move. For months, I could only manage a few steps. It took a year to be able to walk my dogs.

Then, when I was 54, I met a fellow sufferer. She’d been medication-free for a decade and ran marathons. She credited the change to a whole-food plant-based diet (WFPBD), which omits the oil, sugar and processed foods permitted on a standard vegan diet. I decided to give it a go.

Two months in and no flare-ups later, I reduced my medication, dropping one tablet per week, then cutting it into quarters. I’d tried

this two years prior on my vegan-but-still-processed diet, on advice from my rheumatologist, but my joints and skin flared up. This time was different; I had monthly blood tests from the day I started on medication, to identify signs of inflammation or liver dysfunction, and these revealed everything was stable. Eventually, after around three months, I didn’t need to take them any more. I was grateful to the medication for reducing my inflammation, but I’d found a new way to control my symptoms.

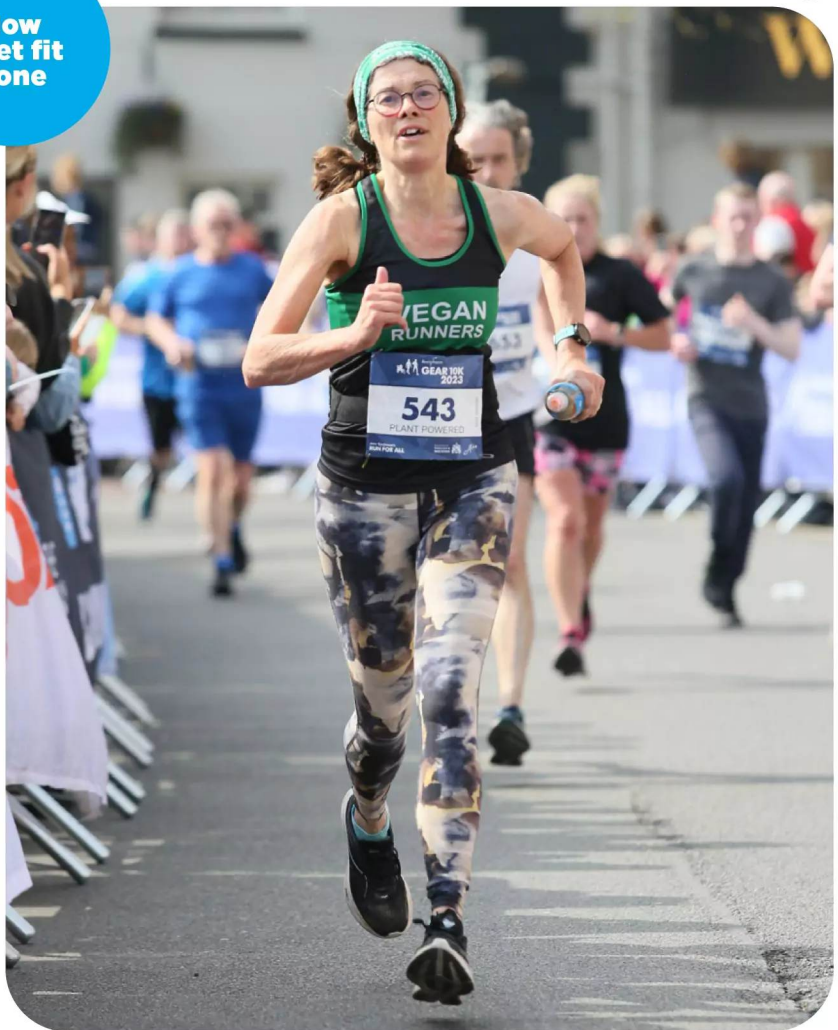
Soon after, I noticed my poor fitness levels on my dog walks and decided to try running. I started with just a few steps but stuck at it. I was out of breath but hooked. I continued four or five times a week, then joined the Vegan Runners run club. After finishing my first parkrun, I was elated. My mum has a milder condition of arthritis and, without a WFPBD,

she’d ended up in a wheelchair, yet here I was, completing a parkrun.

Since then, I’ve slowly built up my mileage and speed and now race in events. In 2021, I ran my first half marathon. The possibility of injury is always in the back of my mind. But I stretch religiously – following YouTube videos – before and after every run and strength train twice a week, building joint-protective muscle. I also follow my friend and vegan marathon runner Andrew’s training plans, including weights, endurance and interval runs.

I managed to run the marathon at a consistent pace with no walking breaks. My watch now says I have a fitness age of 20; if that’s not proof you can do whatever you put your mind to, I don’t know what is. **WH**

For more information about managing arthritis with a whole-food plant-based diet, visit plantbasedhealthprofessionals.com



Biggest learning
Do your research, and trust your gut.



Running record
I achieved a 5K PB of 25:15 last year.



Go-faster breakfast
Overnight oats with stewed fruit, seeds, ginger and soya yoghurt.

The WH expert running guide

Between the impending London Marathon and the ultimate celebration of athleticism taking place across the channel this summer, running has never been more popular. And when buzz builds, questions abound. Happily, we've got experts on speed dial, and they've got answers...

WORDS: CAITLIN CARLSON





Best Body



On the surface, running is incredibly simple. With a pair of trainers and the motivation necessary to not cancel your morning miles when those April showers hit, you can participate pretty much anywhere, any time.

But look under the bonnet (or, ahem, on Google) and the universal, ancient sport gets more complicated. From deciding where to start, figuring out how to up your mileage or pace and choosing whose advice you should be heeding, running discourse can be overwhelming. And then there's the gear. Even deciding on the key piece of kit – shoes – has become complex. And that's before we get to nutrition... But it pays to push through the noise – as many people are now doing. A fifth of runners are doing more of it now than they were pre-pandemic, according to a recent Nielsen study – in part thanks to the no-equipment, go-at-your-own-pace nature of the workout. Plus, 40% of people surveyed across 10 countries consider themselves runners, with 30% running at least once a week. Fancy joining them? Or simply want to raise your running game? We've got you. Over the next few pages, we cut through the clutter to bring you everything you need to know about becoming a better runner.



I want to do an endurance race. Now what?

'Just focus on stamina – especially if we're talking about the marathon, because you're out there for three to five hours,' says Mark Coogan, a New Balance Boston elite coach, an Olympian and the author of *Personal Best Running*. There's also the mental-stamina component necessary for success in a distance feat, Coogan adds. 'Being on your feet [for that long] is mentally tough.'

What-to-eat cheat sheet

Running for 30 minutes or less? It's okay to go on an empty stomach and not overthink the after-run eats – or overpile your plate. But as you get into longer distances, it's important to fuel properly for peak energy (and don't forget to hydrate)

Up to one hour

Carbs
30g

✕
Protein
7g to 10g

✕
Calories
150

✕ **Think:** a single serving of Greek yoghurt with fruit or a slice of bread with honey, jam or a spoonful of peanut butter.

Up to two hours

Carbs
45g

✕
Protein
10g

✕
Calories
220

✕ **Think:** porridge, with a banana and protein powder.

Two-plus hours

Carbs
60g to 90g

✕
Protein
15g to 20g

✕
Calories
300 to 440

✕ **Think:** peanut butter on toast or porridge with berries and a scoop of protein powder.

Post-long run

Carbs
30g to 45g

✕
Protein
30g to 40g

✕
Calories
250 to 450

✕ **Think:** overnight oats with protein powder, Greek yoghurt, chia seeds and berries.

✕ **Action mode:** get in the habit of slowing down rather than fully stopping when running any distance in training. 'This is an easy way to ensure you're going at a pace that's sustainable,' says Kara Dudley, a running coach and Bandit ambassador. Try to eliminate your 'medium' pace and focus on making your easy runs actually feel easy and your fast runs actually feel fast, she adds. 'You need to build your aerobic system and endurance, and if you're running your easy runs too fast, you're completely missing out on that,' Dudley says.

✕ What's the most important training factor?

Consistency. If you're scheduled for, say, three to four runs a week

REAP THE REWARDS

✕
Jogging just a mile or two a few times a week can help with longevity and lower your risk of disease

Partner up and your runs won't feel like hard work

but are doing only one or two of them, you can't expect to be prepared on race day. 'Consistency is your best friend if you want to feel good during your race, complete it and know you gave it your best shot,' Dudley says.

Action mode: motivation really matters here – and professional runners agree. Coogan recommends motivators such as having a training partner who holds you accountable or joining a running group in your area, like Puresport (puresport.co) or parkrun (parkrun.org.uk), which takes place on Saturday mornings. Setting short-term goals, such as signing up for a 10K in the middle of a half or full marathon training cycle helps mix things up.

Which recovery methods actually work?

You might crave a sexier answer, but the truth is that much of your body's ability to recharge comes down to old-fashioned sleep, proper nutrition and stretching. But if you're looking to be extra, getting a massage, while pricey, is a great investment.

'Massages are consistently proven to be the most effective method for alleviating delayed onset muscle soreness [DOMS],' says Jonathan Peake, a health faculty member at the School of Biomedical Sciences at Queensland University of Technology in Australia, who has extensively researched post-exercise recovery.

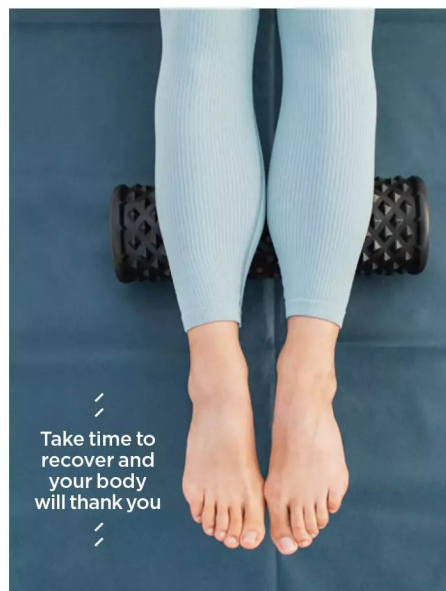
Action mode: permission for self-care? Granted. Go for twice-monthly massages – ideally after your longest run – if that's within your budget (but even once a month can be beneficial), advises Nancy Ann Richardson, a New York-based massage therapist. 'Receiving a sports massage while training for a race promotes faster recovery by reducing post-workout muscle soreness, fatigue, tightness and adhesions – commonly called knots – and joint stiffness,' says Richardson. Between (or in place of) rub-downs, it's ideal to use

compression garments and/or foam rollers for DIY healing. 'Although these other methods don't provide the same level of benefit as massage, they're less expensive and easier to apply at home,' says Dr Peake.

What's the deal with 'supershoes'?

These are essentially trainers that have a carbon fibre plate along with thicker midsole foams. The most up-to-date science appears to show that 'performances improve in both elite and recreational runners' when their trainers have these next-generation features. So says Adam Tenforde, a sports medicine doctor and running expert, who has researched performance footwear. Olympian and marathon champion Shalane Flanagan thinks they're a game changer, too. 'They buy you extra miles of feeling good because they take away some of the pounding that fatigues your legs and causes muscle tissue breakdown,' she adds.

Action mode: use them sporadically to avoid injury. Marathon coach Elizabeth Corkum wears these for speed workouts, races and on some long runs so they 'feel natural to me for marathon day'. (FYI: Saucony Endorphin Pro, Nike Vaporfly and Asics Metaspeed Sky+ are standouts.)



I want running to feel easier – how?

Running can be interpreted by your body as a response to something bad. 'We're wired to run away from threats, which requires a full fight-or-flight response,' says Aarti Soorya, an integrative medicine doctor at Grover Health. Running for extended periods of time can also circulate stress chemicals, so it's no wonder the feat often feels tough.

Action mode: tap into the ventral vagal state of your nervous system, which is activated when you feel safe. 'Bring in your senses,' says Dr Soorya. Ask yourself what you see, what you smell, feel, touch and taste. Consider it a moving meditation. **WH**

How to shoe shop

We recommend heading to a specialist running shop with a treadmill, so you can try a few pairs in person. But to kick things off, here are three expert-picked kicks



BEST FOR BEGINNERS

Asics Gel-Nimbus 26
'Start with neutral shoes – less is more,' notes running coach Meg Takacs. (£180, asics.com)



BEST FOR DISTANCE

New Balance Fresh Foam X 1080v13
'They're super comfy' for long runs, says running coach Dudley. (£160, newbalance.com)



BEST FOR 5KS AND 10KS

Mizuno Wave Rider 25
These have been coach Corkum's go-to 'for the past decade'. (£130, emea.mizuno.com)

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hi! hello?



you there??



Why I'm ghosting Botox

For years, *WH* beauty editor Perdita Nouril's had a repeat appointment with her injector. That was until she read claims that the muscle-freezing formula can limit your ability to connect with others. Are the findings compelling enough for her to quit the treatment for good?



I thought we had a good thing going.....

what did I even do???





THE WRITER
Perdita Nouril,
WH beauty editor

Not all purveyors of injectables start their anti-wrinkle injection (aka Botox) sermons the way I'm about to. Truly, though, it was only after five days of completely caning it at Glastonbury that I realised just how magical Botox is. While I may have

spent the weekend accumulating a 275,000 step count, consuming an ungodly amount of canned margaritas and passing out in my make-up, you wouldn't know it from my appearance. You see, alongside a well-honed skincare routine, having Botox injected into my face every five months for the past two years has meant that, unlike some of my peers, I came out looking miraculously unscathed. In my experience, Botox doesn't just hide a multitude of partying sins; on an average day, it fights against the long shadow that everyday tiredness casts. A demanding job and sleep-refusing small children are no match for its face-freshening abilities. After each top-up, my brows don't furrow like a Klingon's, my crow's feet don't protrude in unforgiving light and my elevenses lines no longer suggest I'm permanently incensed. So, it might surprise you to learn that I've let my regular appointment lapse.

I've not suddenly evolved past all vanity, nor shed my susceptibility to the myriad aesthetic pressures society places on women as we age. It's a choice made with my relationships in mind, catalysed one afternoon in the office when I came across a study. It showed how, after having Botox, people's brains responded differently when looking at images of faces showing emotion, in a way that meant they found it harder to interpret other people's feelings. The researchers posited that this happens because the toxin disrupts signalling

between participants' facial muscles and their brains.

Feeling more than a little disturbed, I promptly closed my browser and pushed the research to the back of my mind. But the seed of doubt had been planted. Commuting home that evening, I reflected on my recent interactions with loved ones. Did I misinterpret my eldest's feelings over coming second in a sports competition? Had I overlooked my friend's anguish about a tricky work colleague? Wasn't it ironic that the thing I use to, in no small part, function better in social situations (via the confidence boost that comes from a well-rested, line-free appearance) could actually end up blunting my social skills?

The prospect of ghosting Botox felt harder than giving up coffee, wine and sex all at once. But – with the study authors' findings ringing in my ears – I cancelled my repeat appointment with my injector and dived face first into the research with two questions in mind. What does it mean for society that we've embraced a beauty treatment that goes against the normal transmission of emotion? And what does it mean for my face?

A shot at fame

My search begins in the 1800s, when a Belgian scientist discovered that botulinum toxin (aka Botox), found in sausages, had triggered a life-threatening food poisoning outbreak that led to paralysis. By the 1940s, scientists were studying it in a lab, but much like superglue, pacemakers and LSD, the discovery of the toxin's cosmetic virtues was a happy accident. In 1987, Canadian eye specialist Jean Carruthers was using Botox to treat blepharospasm (involuntary eye twitching) in a female patient; when her patient didn't get injected in the forehead, she complained, saying, 'When you treat me there, I get this beautiful, untroubled expression.'

Together with her dermatologist husband, Dr Carruthers spent five



Ah, sorry! I've double booked

We can reschedule?

Yeah sure, sure, I'll come back to you

So, when works for you?

Hello?



'Consistent with our predictions, preventing frowning altered the way the brain processes faces'

years investigating their wrinkle-busting breakthrough, publishing their first study in 1992. A decade later, Botox was approved for cosmetic use in the UK. Already the norm among Hollywood actors, Botox was added to the treatment menus of aesthetic doctors on these shores. Today, an estimated 900,000 Botox injections are carried out in the UK each year, with the UK injectables market predicted to reach a value of £11.7bn by 2026.

Its popularity has soared in recent years, thanks in part to influencers extolling its merits online and those hours we spent staring at our faces on pandemic-era video calls. But also because, despite a wealth of other aesthetic treatments hitting the market, nothing else compares.

'While peptide-based skincare can provide a micro Botox-type effect with consistent use, it isn't an equivalent to the type of effects Botox can achieve,' explains aesthetic doctor Sophie Shotton. 'Fillers, lasers – these can play a role in addressing concerns, but if you're looking to treat lines related to movement in the face, Botox is the only treatment that effectively addresses these – and it takes minutes, with no downtime.' When administered by a qualified medic, it's also believed that Botox confers minimal physical risks (more details on p74).

Guess who

But, back to those psychological repercussions and *that* study. It was authored last year by a team at the University of California, who found that when Botox inhibits muscle contractions and decreases facial movement (by blocking acetylcholine, the parasympathetic nervous system's primary neurotransmitter), it affects people's ability to relate to others. 'Using botulinum toxin injections, we induced temporary paralysis in the female participants' glabellar muscles (responsible for frowning),' explains one of the study's authors, Shauna Stark.

The participants underwent two brain-imaging scans – one before the injection, one after – in which their functional brain activity was monitored as they were shown a series of happy and angry faces. After the injections, the brain scans showed that activity in the amygdala (the major processing centre for emotion) and fusiform gyrus (part of the brain that processes visual information) had changed. ➔



Sorry work is mad!

But hope everything's
all good with you

And definitely chat soon

Okay, sure, but when?



'Consistent with our predictions, preventing frowning altered the way the amygdala processes emotional faces,' she explains – adding that the changes in the aforementioned brain regions may indicate that Botox injections force the brain to engage in 'compensatory processes' when facial feedback through the primary, frown-activated emotional processing system is impaired.

Her hypothesis is based on the facial feedback loop theory, first presented by psychologist William James in the 1840s and used later by Charles Darwin in the 1870s. Since then, many different studies have been done to test the idea that recognising and mimicking others' faces (in microscopic ways) allows us to read and respond to

each other's feelings. The idea is that when we see an angry, worried or happy face, we contract or flex the relevant muscles to recreate the expression to assist in identifying and experiencing the emotion reflected.

While it remains unclear how facial feedback works, what researchers *do* know is that Botox essentially disrupts the mechanism. Such was the finding of a study by researchers from the University of Southern California and Duke University's Fuqua School of Business. For the 2011 study, the team compared people who'd had Botox with a control group who had another cosmetic procedure that doesn't reduce muscular feedback. They found that those who had Botox struggled more than

the others to interpret what people were thinking and feeling. 'This failure to mirror the faces of those they're watching or talking to robs them of the ability to understand what people are feeling,' the study's authors concluded.

It's not just your ability to read other people's *faces* that Botox could be affecting, either. Italian researchers found those who had been administered with Botox rated emotionally provocative sentences as less emotionally resonant than those who didn't receive the treatment. That said, it's worth noting that while all studies show a consistent pattern, they're small in scale – meaning outcomes are more variable and conclusions less reliable than those on larger, randomised controlled trials.

‘Non-verbal communication reveals who we are and impacts how we relate to other people’



Lost connections

The reality that the demographic over-represented among Botox patients – women in their thirties and forties – are those most affected by the current connection crisis adds another dimension. While my WhatsApp groups are popping, face-to-face hangs aren’t. I’m not alone; millennials have been dubbed the loneliest generation, with 51% reporting that they regularly feel lonely – markedly higher than older generations – and those whose friendships were affected by the pandemic have reportedly shed an average of four pals since 2020. Could our fondness for anti-wrinkle injections be making this worse?

Psychologist Ravi Gill cautiously endorses the argument. ‘The long-term effects of not reading someone’s emotions could include challenges in building and maintaining healthy relationships,’ she explains – adding that if you come off as apathetic, people may be reluctant to socialise or engage with you. ‘Our facial expressions influence our emotional experience when connecting with others. So, it follows that if you dilute the emotional intensity of these interactions, then social experiences may decrease in quality.’ Every day, Dr Gill explains, we respond to thousands of non-verbal cues – facial expressions, postures and gestures. ‘This type of communication reveals who we are and impacts how we relate to other people. In the perceived

absence, the connection crisis may be exacerbated.’

If you’re thinking that you wouldn’t miss those bonding moments as much as the effects of regular injections, Martha Laham wouldn’t be surprised. The US-based marketing lecturer and author of *Made Up* tells me that the societal pressures women face to hold on to youth are so strong, they may override any concerns about losing their ability to empathise with others. ‘As aesthetic trends such as injectables continue to dictate beauty ideals, this could lead women to forsake the appearance of physical empathy for a flawless, wrinkleless, affectless face.’ We discuss the fact that Gen Z, who are also reported to feel disconnected (YouGov stats show that 46% of those aged 18 to 24 say they experience some difficulty making new friends), are facing increasing pressures to stay youthful, posting intense youth-preserving routines – using retinol and blocking out sunlight – while they’re still going through puberty.

Reality check

The future looks pretty bleak – at least in my mind, which conjures visions of a *Black Mirror*-coded future, full of ageless-looking octogenarians, interacting with as much warmth as a robot. When I discuss this with Elena Touroni, a consultant psychologist and co-founder of The Chelsea Clinic, she interrupts my spiralling. ‘The idea that cosmetic treatments will make women less empathetic is a false concern,’ she argues. ‘Ultimately, there are many ways to understand emotions beyond facial expressions. And if people are aware that their facial muscles are impeded, they might focus on being clearer in their verbal communication,’ she says, ‘which isn’t necessarily a bad thing.’

Injectables specialist Dr Shotter agrees, pointing out that most of

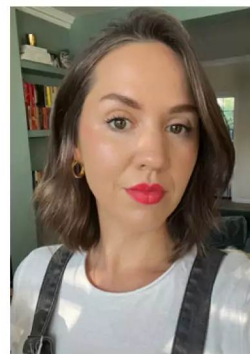
her patients report feeling more positive post-treatment. Longer term, there’s even evidence that the substance can help treat depression. Scientists are unsure of the mechanism, but the way the toxin reduces frowning is one suggested explanation. It’s also been mooted that Botox could be transported to central nervous system structures involved in regulating mood and emotion, easing depressive symptoms, regardless of where it’s injected.

Even Dr Stark, co-author of the latest research, doesn’t believe the findings are cause for major alarm. That’s because while there were changes in brain activity, these didn’t impede the participants’ classification of emotions – ie, they could still identify a face as happy or sad. But she welcomes more nuanced studies to identify subtle changes – and track what happens in the brain when the visible effects of the treatment tail off.

Indeed, in the time that I’ve given up Botox, I’ve not observed any meaningful improvement in my relationships. But I’m certainly more conscious of reading people’s facial expressions – and those I’m making now my forehead moves again – which has made me feel more present and engaged in someone’s company. (And that can’t be a bad thing.)



‘Fresh-faced and Botox-free on holiday’



‘A month after getting Botox in my forehead and around my eyes’



‘Botox hiding a multitude of partying sins at Glastonbury’



Face forwards

So, will I be ghosting Botox for good? It’s complicated. While reporting on this piece has largely quelled my fears about it making ➔

Beauty Lab

You okay? Was really hoping we could meet as normal

Saw this thing today and thought of you 😊

Helloooo?

‘Six months on, my frown lines returning has been a non-event. No one’s batted an eyelid’



me emotionally inept, it’s underlined my concerns about perpetuating ‘Botox culture’ and adding my face to the bank of evidence – which my generation and younger will draw on – that suggests getting injections is as normal as applying foundation or going for a pedicure.

And it’s just *not*. Injectables are medical procedures and this one has been shown to have a knock-on effect on the brain. And yet, I’d be lying if I said I had the energy to rail against the beauty ideals of our patriarchal society. When it comes to appearance, I think people should be able to make their own choices.

It feels fitting to end where we started: my face. One month after my lapsed appointment with my injector, I chastised my appearance in the mirror and poured scorn on my knackered-ness. But, six months on, my frown lines returning has been... a non-event. That no one has batted an eyelid has made me question if I ever really needed it. So, presently, the answer is no. Next month? Who knows. **WH**

Botox up close

Time to straighten out key questions on the anti-wrinkle treatment that just won’t quit



Straight up, is it safe?

No procedures are risk-free but, broadly, the answer is yes. ‘Studies indicate there are no long-term or life-threatening adverse effects related to Botox for cosmetic purposes,’ notes Dr Shotter. ‘The low risk of possible complications can be reduced by thorough analysis of the patient’s medical history and the use of the appropriate dose and technique for the injection.’



So, who you choose to administer it matters?

It’s paramount. While there are few safety issues with the substance itself, seeing a qualified health professional – doctor, nurse, dentist – is essential for safe results (they’ll be on a register to show they meet certain standards). If your beautician offers cheap injections alongside waxes and manicures? That’s not illegal – although the botulinum toxin is a prescription medicine, anyone can legally administer it in the UK – but booking is ill-advised.



And what’s the deal with the terminology?

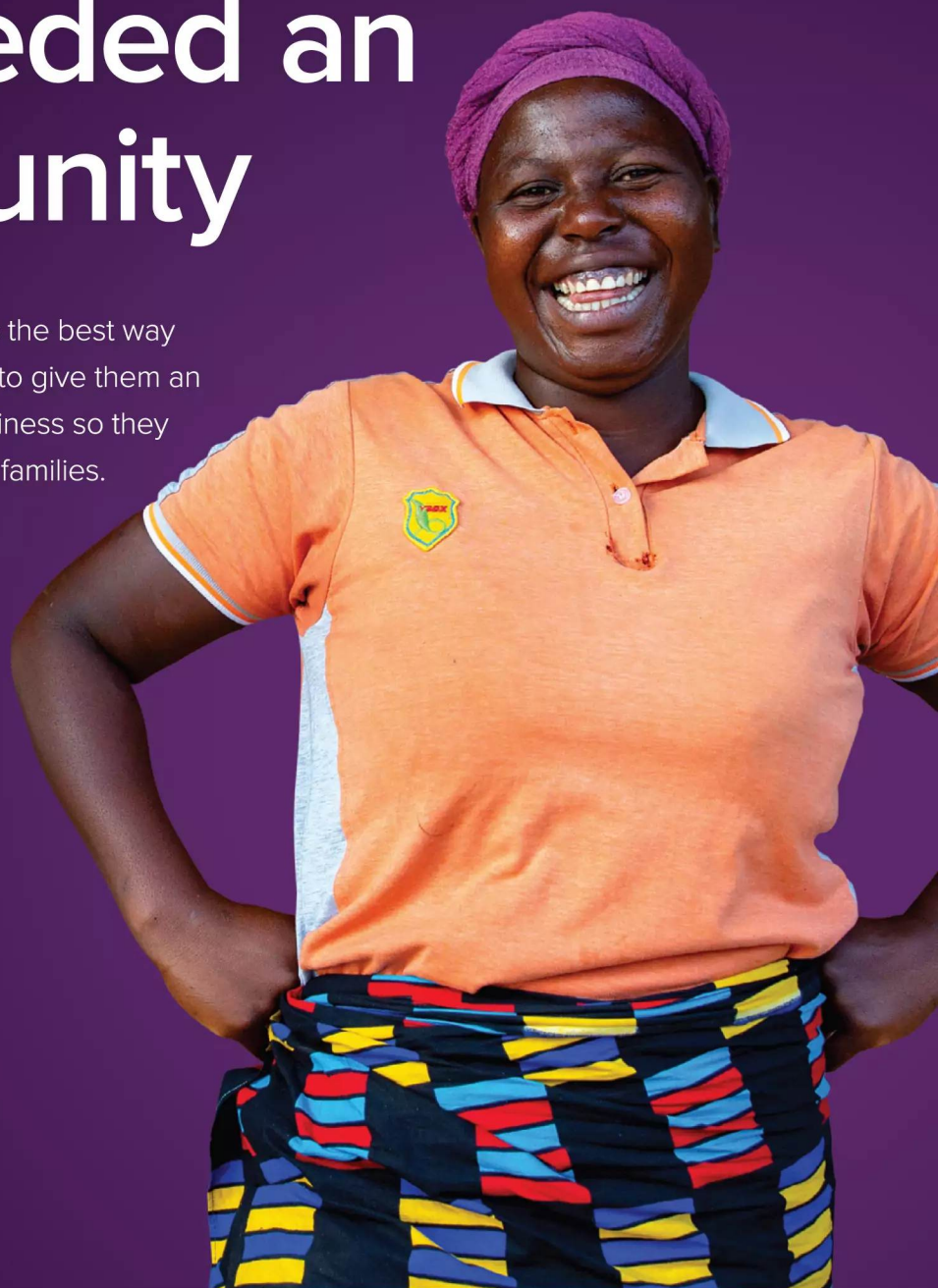
Botulinum toxin is generally, but often wrongly, referred to as Botox. Botox is the trade name of just one of the seven forms of botulinum toxin. Others include Xeomin, Azzalure, Dysport, Vistabel and Bocouture. Confusion happened because Botox, made by Allergan, is by far the best-known brand of botulinum toxin, as it was the first on the market in 1994.

Mary didn't need Charity She needed an Opportunity

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#SKINSHELFIE



Jamie Genevieve

When the Glaswegian make-up artist and YouTube star launched her make-up range, it received critical acclaim. Here, she reveals her most treasured cabinet members



THE EXPERT
Jamie Genevieve, 30,
make-up artist and
founder of Vieve Muse

A typical day

Nothing gets you loving routine like having a baby. Alarms are set for 6.30am and after my daughter, Romy, has her morning bottle, we have a cuddle and coffee in bed. If it's been a rough night for sleep, my husband, Jack, will take Romy while I get a bit more sleep. Breakfast is usually a green juice and some yoghurt with berries and honey. By 8.30am, I'm in work mode, and if I'm not travelling to London for meetings, I'll be shuffling between my home office and filming room, depending on my to-do list. Tasks include working on new Vieve products, creating assets for social media and prepping for photo shoots and events; I love that no two weeks look the same. I try to do any Zoom meetings at the start of the week, so I can get into a creative headspace for the rest of the week. I only realised I needed that 'quiet work' time after working with a business coach, and it's been one of the most valuable takeaways. Lunch is bread and eggs, and dinner will be a meal from our weekly Gousto box, which my husband will cook for us – having a recipe box has been a saving grace since Romy came into our lives.

Skincare philosophy

 Use light layers of great products that are right for your skin type – and don't feel that you need to use every active you read about.

Skincare non-negotiable

 Cleanser. Never (ever, ever, ever) sleep in your make-up.

Main skincare concern

 I don't really have one, but I'm always striving to have plump, hydrated skin with an even tone.

Day

01
RHODE GLAZING MILK, £30
Using Hailey Bieber's Glazing Milk has been a pleasant surprise. At first, it doesn't seem to be something to rave about. But the watery, light texture transforms into something that feels cushioning on the skin and makes it look glossy. Plus, it's hydrating and skincare then layers beautifully on top.

02
FRESH ROSE DEEP HYDRATION OIL-INFUSED SERUM, £57
This is a must-have during the colder months, as rose helps to calm down any redness caused by the weather. It's deeply hydrating, soothing and light on the skin, making it perfect for layering, too. (Can you tell I'm big on skincare layering?)

03
LA ROCHE-POSAY ANTHELIOS INVISIBLE FLUID SPF50, £20
The French pharmacy brand La Roche-Posay has been my go-to for SPF for years. The weightless formula works perfectly under make-up but, crucially, it also gives unrivalled protection against UV rays.

Night

04
BENEFIT THE POREPROFESSIONAL SPEEDY SMOOTH PORE MASK, £35
Benefit's Pore Range shouldn't be missed. I use this five-minute mask to exfoliate before a pampering skincare routine or before make-up application for a big event.

05
SUNDAY RILEY B3 NICE 10% NIACINAMIDE SERUM, £54
This is a new addition to my routine, but I can safely say that it will be staying. It really works wonders for your skin, reducing the appearance of pores and redness, while boosting your glow.

06
SKIN ROCKS THE SUPPORT OIL, £60
My list wouldn't be complete without a Caroline Hirons hero product. This oil is the last step in my routine and works to seal in all my previous skincare, ensuring my skin stays hydrated and feels bouncy and fresh in the morning.

Signature scent

07
BYREDO GYPSY WATER EAU DE PARFUM, £140
I wore this scent on my honeymoon, layered over the body cream of the same scent, and I've taken it on every holiday since. Scent is a memory, so every time I wear this, I can almost feel the sand beneath my feet.

Mood-boosting make-up

08
VIEVE SKIN NOVA RADIANCE PRIMER, £29
This is the bestselling product from my brand – and with good reason. It works for all skin tones and types, and will help to breathe life into your skin. No matter what make-up look I'm creating, this is always step one. You can wear it alone, under make-up or pressed on to the high points of your face.

09
NARS NATURAL RADIANT LONGWEAR FOUNDATION, £39
For me, this is the holy grail of foundation. It can be easily built for more coverage or sheered out for a lighter look. Nars really knows how to nail complexion products. You'll always find this on my desk and in my kit.

10
VIEVE NOVA GLOW LIQUID LIGHT, £25
This product is like moonlight in a bottle and it can always be found in my make-up bag. You can wear it on its own, mix it with moisturiser or add it to your foundation to easily enhance your all-over radiance. **WIN**

Growing resilience

Summer hair season is (almost) in session. As a crop of bond-building products promise to do for your hair what strength training does for your muscles, *WH* combs through the science

WORDS: DANIELLE JACKSON



Are your
locks in need
of a lift?



Imagine a hair treatment that allows you to strength train your locks, fortifying strands from the inside out in the same way that lifting weights builds muscle. It's not magic; it's bond building – and you can add products featuring this technology to your shopping basket right now.

Just as the term suggests, these masks, serums and pre-shampoos are designed to improve your hair's overall toughness and manageability by repairing broken bonds deep inside each strand – connections that may have become compromised by colour, chemical straighteners or heat styling.

And while they were once only available in the salon, now, bond-building products are everywhere. The shift is powered by consumers, says Beth Labrecque, a product development scientist at Dove, which released a bonding collection recently. '[Consumers are] becoming more interested in the health of their hair, rather than just the style,' she tells *WH*. But what's the science behind these hair healers? And how can you put them to work? Let's start with a quick chemistry lesson.

Inside job

First, try to picture what each individual hair strand looks like under a microscope. The outer layer, called the cuticle, resembles a shingled roof, and it protects the inner cortex – a collection of cable-like structures – from damage. 'The cortex is primarily made up of a protein called keratin, which is separated into two amino acid chains that are held together by three different types of chemical bonds,' says Crystal Aguh, a dermatologist and associate professor at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Baltimore, USA. (For more information on this triumvirate, see our bond lexicon below.)

These bonds are responsible for maintaining the shape, strength and integrity of your hair. In order to alter its look or feel – to, say, change your hair colour or add some curl with a hot tool – these bonds must be broken, says Dr Aguh. And while you may get the desired result, this process can make your locks feel brittle or dull. 'Other environmental factors, such as exposure to UV radiation,

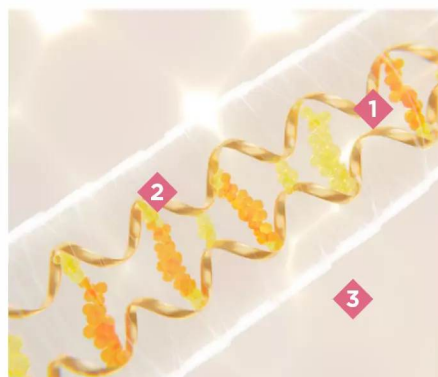
can cause bond damage as well,' says Neera Nathan, dermatologist and researcher at Massachusetts General Hospital and Lahey Hospital and Medical Center in Boston, USA.

Though we know what bonds are, the exact science of how bond-building products work is tricky to pinpoint. Many of the most popular ones on the market – Olaplex No.3 Hair Perfector or the newer K18 Leave-In Molecular Repair Hair Mask – are made with proprietary ingredients that aren't clearly disclosed.

But experts agree that the main factor these formulas have in common is that they're enriched with amino acids, which penetrate the cuticle, fortifying the damaged cortex with protein and causing the bonds to reattach, creating a thicker, stronger hair shaft, says Dr Nathan. These amino acids often come in the form of peptides, but newer formulas also contain reparative ingredients such as alpha hydroxy acids or hyaluronic acid, a hydrator that can reduce frizziness. →

Bond lexicon

Don't speak hair? Consider this your at-a-glance guide



1. Hydrogen

'These are the most abundant, primarily contributing to hair's hydration and texture,' says Labrecque.

2. Ionic

Also known as salt bonds, these give strands their strength.

3. Disulphide

These are the strongest – and maintaining shape is their job, says Labrecque.

Boost your roots



The miracle-workers that will enhance your hair from its very core

Starter story

The pioneer of this category is designed to fix breakage and split ends before you shampoo. Apply to wet hair, wait 10 minutes, then rinse. *Olaplex No.3 Hair Perfector*, £28



Top 10

This peptide-rich mask provides double-digit benefits (detangling, breakage prevention and frizz reduction) in just four minutes. *K18 Leave-In Molecular Repair Hair Mask*, £70



Last resort

After shampooing and conditioning, slather on this protein-packed leave-in oil and style as usual. *Philip Kingsley Bond Builder Lipid Shield Oil*, £27



Strong start

Before washing, coat your hair with this affordable option that has a reparative complex, which includes citric acid. *L'Oréal Paris Elvive Bond Repair Pre-Shampoo Treatment*, £15.99



Beauty from within

Part of a five-step system, this two-minute intensive treatment contains 5,000 concentrated Nutri Pearls that instantly dissolve into hair to repair damage deep within the cortex. *Pantene Molecular Bond Repair Intensive Treatment*, £9.99

Mane event

So, who should be using these products? Honestly? Anyone with hair. If you're colouring your locks or are often styling with heat, it's a no-brainer. 'But certain bonds can also be broken by dry weather, combing or brushing, as well as a result of ageing,' adds Dr Aguh, who likens bond-building hair products with using moisturiser on your skin. 'If someone has eczema, a great cream can help. But even if you don't have a diagnosed skin condition, you'd still benefit from a moisturiser because it will make your skin feel better.' The same goes for bond builders: if your hair feels brittle, has split ends, is less shiny or feels more frizzy, a bonding treatment could be the fix.

You'll come across these products as masks, serums, conditioners or pre-shampoo treatments, as well as full collections with shampoos and conditioners. For the best results, use the treatment on wet hair once a week (water causes the hair's cuticle to open, making it easier for bond-building ingredients to penetrate), says Dr Aguh. If you're someone who doesn't have significant damage or if heat, colour or chemicals aren't something you frequently use on your hair, a monthly treatment will suffice.

Just don't go overboard. Using these products more than recommended may result in protein overload, causing your hair to feel dry and brittle – the very problem you're trying to fix, says Dr Nathan. (For more on this, see 'Can your hair have too much protein?') That said, your preferred shampoo and conditioner are designed for daily use – and can be used as part of your routine, says Isfahan Chambers-Harris, a trichologist and founder of Alodia Hair care. Good hair days ahead – our word is our bond.



CAN YOUR HAIR HAVE TOO MUCH PROTEIN?

If you've had bonding treatments and your hair still feels dry and damaged, it's possible you've overdone it on the proteins. 'They're essential for strengthening and repairing your hair, but excessive or frequent use can lead to an imbalance,' says Dr Chambers-Harris. The biggest giveaways are 'stiffness or brittleness, a lack of elasticity, increased breakage and a rough feeling to the touch'. Fortunately, there's an easy way to course-correct. Hold off on using your bonding treatment; instead, replace them with moisturising and deep conditioning products for a few weeks. Then, get back on track, using the bonding products only as directed. **WHI**

Wear Well



The locker room

From hi-tech waterproofs to functional caps, the *Women's Health* fashion team are here to help you spring into a new season – whatever the weather

SHOPPING EDITOR
MADDY ALFORD

Image courtesy
of Alo Yoga

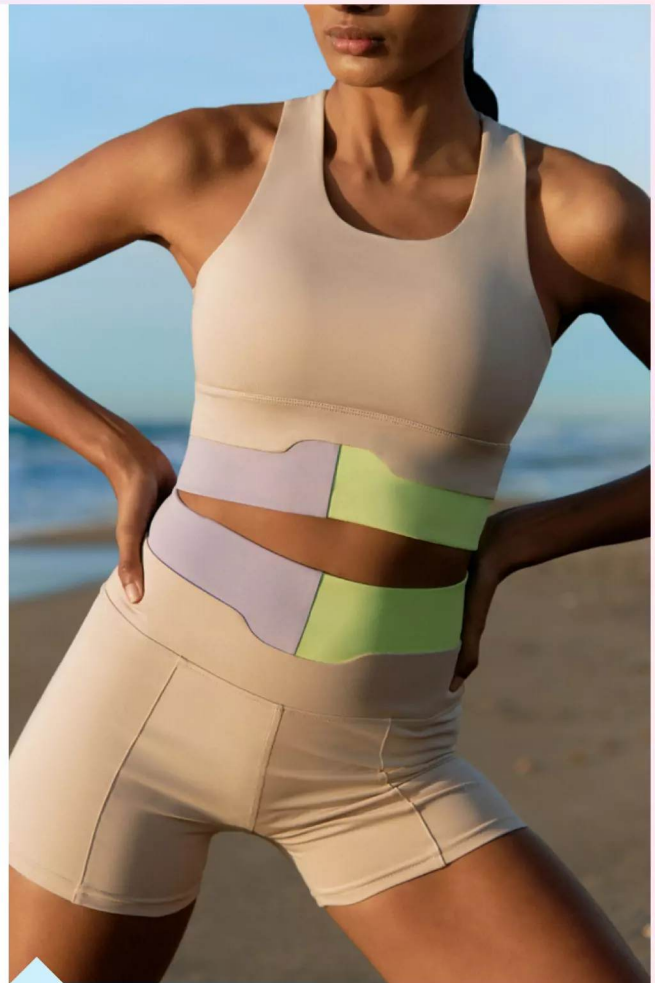


FLOWER POWER

The surf experts at Roxy and the running pros at Mizuno have teamed up for a third time on their popular fitness capsule. This iteration sees the iconic Roxy hibiscus flower pattern adorning activewear in a navy and peach colour combo. Prices from £32, Roxy x Mizuno

SPLASH OUT

Outdoor brand Gramicci is kick-starting our holiday packing list with an array of bright separates, including ombre long-sleeved tops with UPF protection and unisex swim shorts perfect for water sports. Shorts, £90, and top, £75, both Gramicci



FLOW WITH IT

The new spring co-ords at Born Living Yoga are top of our wish list. These breathable sets offer seamless comfort and come in a range of pretty colours for easy-going weekend style. They'll take you from vinyasa to brunch in style – napkins at the ready. Top, £49.90, and shorts, £49.90, both Born Living Yoga

LIGHT ON YOUR FEET

Saucony has just released the all-new Guide 17 for your most comfortable run yet. Its CenterPath Technology uses a broader platform, higher sidewalls, an asymmetric profile and a rocker shape that guides your stride. Plus, you'll be running on a stack of cloud-like foam for extra comfort. Guide 17 trainers, £135, Saucony



INNER PEACE

Our fashion director's go-to for luxurious planet-friendly yoga co-ords? Meet Noble Yoga, a technically minded brand founded by two passionate yogis. Their highly functional pieces are sustainably made in Portugal and designed in the UK for your most comfortable practice yet.

Top, £65, and leggings, £85, both Noble Yoga

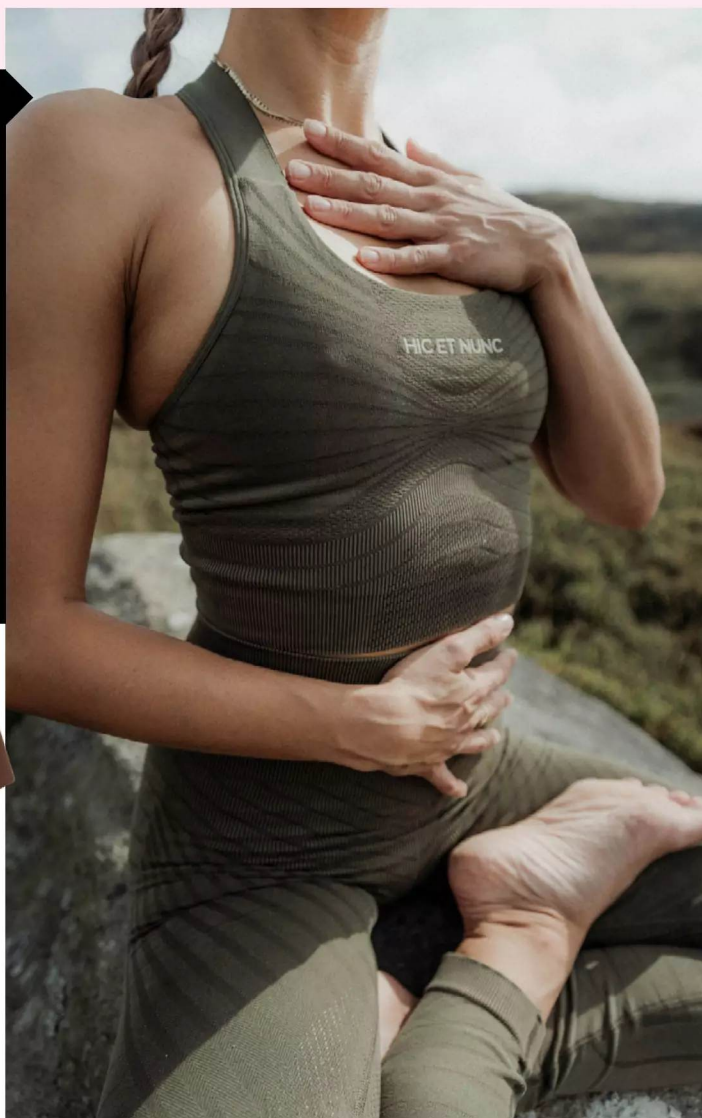


STAFF PICK

Courtney Smith, **fashion assistant**

'Swim label Monday has ventured into the world of activewear, and we're already impressed. Trendy separates in black, ivory and brown are perfect for a weekend class and for someone like me, who never strays too far from neutrals. This ribbed top and matching shorts are all set to become my new Pilates go-to.'

Top, £63, and shorts, £61, both Monday



HAPPY TRAILS

You may know Timberland for its range of tough-as-nails boots, but in February the brand launched its new Motion Range Collection, which aims to get you outdoors and on to the trails. Expect recycled fabrics, DryVent technology and ergonomic construction around your joints. We're eyeing up the Greenstride Motion 6 Hiker and the waterproof jackets.

Prices from £90, Timberland Motion Range Collection



STAFF PICK

Alexandria Dale, **fashion writer**

'I wear a lot of jewellery day to day, but I prefer to ditch my bling when I hit the gym after work. This jewellery case keeps my trinkets safe while also being easy to find buried at the bottom of my gym bag.'

Jewellery case, £40, Hey Harper



STAFF
PICK

Sophie Leen,
bookings editor

'Over-ear headphones have become the street style accessory donned by every It girl papped at fashion week – just one reason I was drawn to these white Sennheiser beauties. With 50 hours of wireless listening time and ultra-comfy wear, they're simply dreamy.'
Accentum Plus headphones, £199.99, Sennheiser

IT GIRL

Millennial and Gen Z favourite activewear brand Adanola has released its biggest collection to date, with a spring 2024 wardrobe that boasts over 40 pieces. Expect sculpting unitards, new shapes, warm jackets and a focus on the brand's popular burgundy colourway. Prices from £22.99, Adanola



STAFF
PICK

Clementina Jackson,
fashion editor

'I'm a sucker for anything ballet-inspired, so this fuchsia one-piece from Port De Bras immediately caught my eye. It's flattering, stylish, made from biodegradable fabric and designed to take you from barre to bar. Basically, it's everything I look for in activewear.'

All in one, £262, Port De Bras

KEEP IT COOL

For springtime runs, we're keeping cool in Salomon's new Knit Flow fabric. It's a naturally self-cleaning antimicrobial fabric designed with advanced thermoregulation and moisture management technology. (Oh, and we love the brand's cool five-panel caps, too.)

Sense Aero singlet GFX, £60, Salomon



Meet the women making a living from trainers

The wildly lucrative world of the high-end trainer resale industry was once dominated by men. *WH* hears from the 'sneakerhead' traders to find out how women are now changing this high-stakes fashion game

If love at first sight is rare, it's even more unheard of in my line of work. As a fashion writer, I come into contact with hundreds of items of clothing each month, and I like to think I'm more immune to the allure of the shiny and new than I used to be. So it was humbling to learn that I'm still capable of falling hard. And to the surprise of this former girly girl, it was a pair of trainers that stole my heart.

I'm not the only one who's undergone a rebrand. Blame the pandemic-era prioritisation of comfort or the pace at which sports brands are collaborating with luxury fashion houses, but there's no question over fashion's favourite shoe: the designer trainer. It was the Adidas x Wales Bonner Samba Silver trainers that had me at hello last June – just one example in a long line of high-fashion collabs.

Take the Cecile Bahnsen x Asics trainers, whose floral motifs made them the prettiest shoes going. They sold out within two minutes

when they dropped in July 2023. Then there's the iconic Maison Margiela x Reebok Tabi shoes, which combined the fitness brand's Instapump Fury trainer with the fashion house's signature split toe. All of which means that if *Sex And The City* was set in 2024, Carrie would take a pair of Off-White c/o Virgil Abloh low-tops over her trademark Manolos any day.

That's if she could get her hands on them. Despite marking my calendar for the Adidas x Wales Bonner release, the shoes sold out in every size within a few minutes – and I can't say I'm surprised. Once the official shoe of the commute, trainers have made huge strides, and now a new 'It' pair drops online almost daily.

Inevitably, the only way to get your hands on these designs is if

'Women have so much power in this resale industry'

you're willing to fork out two or three times their retail value via resale platforms. Back in the early 2000s, it was Nike Air Jordans ruling the scene. By the mid-2010s, it was Adidas Yeezys, bought and sold almost exclusively by men. But in recent years, women have started to change the game – not just as customers keen to land the trainer of the moment, but as sellers, or rather, resellers. 'Women have so much power in this resale industry because we're deciding what's in fashion,' Alicia Jones*, who's been reselling trainers for almost 20 years, tells *Women's Health*.

When she first started out, Alicia would put down a deposit a week in advance of the latest release at her local sports store in her home town of Brooklyn, New York, paying up to \$50 more to guarantee she'd get a pair. But it wasn't long before she turned her habit into a full-time job, first as a personal shopper and stylist, and then in her current role at The Edit Ldn, a luxury resale site

Musician
Gabriella
Bishop in the
Adidas x Wales
Bonner Samba
Silver trainers





Nike's collab with the Japanese label Sacai

selling trainers from the most coveted brands. Slowly but surely, she's seeing a shift in the products entering the resale arena – the customers, too. 'So many [trainers] that really defined the past year came from celebrity cool girls and Instagram fashion influencers making them a commodity,' she explains. 'They're adding a whole new element to the resale world.'

But there's still a long way to go. 'It remains a male-dominated industry, as not all drops have female size runs, which is something the fashion brands need to work on,' says Ruby*, a fellow Edit Ldn reseller who entered the game six years ago. And in an industry where the 1% are prepared to spend more on a pair of trainers than on a car (Alicia shares that The Edit Ldn's highest-grossing trainers were a pair of Nike x Louis Vuitton Air Force 1 Low By Virgil Abloh in metallic gold, which sold for £40,000), it's high time women had a slice of the proverbial pie.

So how do you break into the exclusive – and expensive – world of resale? For Kate Jasinski, it started in 2020 when she tried to get her hands on a pair of Nike Air Jordan 1 High Dark Mochas. 'The only pair I got was a size 11 men's,' she tells *Women's Health*. When her partner didn't want to keep them, she decided to list them online. And after selling them for a 60% profit,

It's all about getting your foot in the door first

she was hooked. 'I enjoy the rush of hitting on really popular drops; you feel you've achieved something that you can show off.'

It's a similar story for Ruby. 'The first pair of trainers I sold were Nike x Sean Wotherspoon Air Max 1/97s I'd won via a raffle I'd entered. When they didn't fit me, I listed them and sold them for £1,000.' That there are fewer women's shoes to buy on resale sites, she explains, makes it easier for women to sell theirs on. Today, Ruby enters raffles all over the country to up her chances of winning; once, she travelled from Brighton to Cardiff to pick up a pair of Nike x Travis Scott Air Force 1 'Cactus Jack' trainers. 'It's an odd game,' she acknowledges, with the caveat that she no longer thinks anything of making 400-mile round trips.

Kate agrees that raffles are a great entry point, though she also casts her net wider. 'I've noticed I hit most on the European skate shops because not as many people go for them.' As for advice for women who want to break into this male-dominated world? 'Know that it doesn't take much to start, just a love for the product,' she says,



'Sneakerheads' will spend thousands on the perfect pair

pointing to the fact that while you might have to shell out £150 for your first pair of trainers, you could recoup thousands on resale.

Ten months after I first laid eyes on them, I'm still lusting after those Adidas x Wales Bonner Silver Sambas. While I can't currently justify the resale price as a *buyer*, maybe I can find a way forwards by starting out as a reseller, making a serious profit and reinvesting? A budding sneakerhead can dream. **WH**



UNWRAPPING A REVOLUTION IN FEMALE HEALTH TESTING

From urine tests for endometriosis to tampons that diagnose HPV and robotics transforming breast cancer screening, there's never been more momentum behind helping us understand our symptoms. Here, one writer, for whom the story is acutely resonant, takes a closer look and asks: should we dare to hope?



WORDS: CHLOE GRAY
PHOTOGRAPHY: CHELSIE CRAIG
PROP STYLING: JOJO LI



Chloe specul-ates
over the future
of diagnostics



The hardest part about being on the waiting list for endometriosis services isn't the clapping pressure on my spine and pubic bone every time I have a period. It's that, given the average eight-year waiting time from initial symptoms to diagnosis, I can only see things getting more painful before they get better. That sentiment was confirmed when, after 10 years of pain and begging for a referral, I saw a gynaecologist. Delivered alongside a preliminary diagnosis was a reminder that we can't truly know without a laparoscopy. That's a type of keyhole surgery that can find endometrial tissue similar to the lining of the uterus growing outside of the womb (causing symptoms including pain, disabling bowel issues, infertility) and remove it. And so it's from here that I write to you, at the bottom of another waiting list. That this is where I'm spending Endometriosis Awareness Month is an irony that isn't lost on me.

It feels archaic that a condition as common as diabetes calls for such invasive procedures. I oscillate between exhaustion (from trying to get answers, via a diagnosis) and fury that I have to experience *more* pain to be, if not pain-free, then more knowledgeable about the agony I experience. And I'm not alone: 84% of women felt that they haven't been listened to by healthcare professionals, according to the government's Women's Health Strategy for England, while research commissioned by Nurofen also found that less than half of the women surveyed received a diagnosis for their pain within 11 months, compared with two-thirds of men.

Speaking of men, I tell a not-really joke that if endometriosis was a male condition, it would be diagnosed with a saliva swab. So, when news arrived of a urine test that could diagnose women with the condition within eight days

rather than eight years, I had to know more about it. Developed by Barbara Guinn, a researcher in biomarkers at the University of Hull, the urine test is capable of identifying whether the patient has superficial or deep endometriosis (whether it sits on the top layer of organs or penetrates within them). The team hope it'll be the first step in a woman's journey to diagnosis, available for GPs to test from the initial onset of symptoms.

I can't help but imagine the self-compassion I might have been able to feel a decade ago if I'd just been able to wee on a stick and learn that my pain wasn't all in my head. Maybe I wouldn't have forced myself through normal work, social and fitness routines during intense flare-ups because there's 'nothing wrong with me' – the self-gaslighting a mirror image of that directed at me by my doctors. My symptoms would likely have

been exactly the same, but I'm confident that I would have been a lot gentler on myself if they'd just been given a name.

But it's not just endo where change is afoot. November saw the female-founded sustainable sanitaryware brand Daye launch its diagnostic tampon, allowing users to collect samples of their menstrual blood, post it back to the lab to screen for STIs, receive digital results and book an online consultation with a doctor. It's a welcome disruptor, given that 70% of women with chlamydia don't notice any symptoms, which are often progressive. Existing tests aren't adequately used either, with 59% of Brits never having had a sexual health check, according to Bupa Health Clinics.

Elsewhere, researchers from the University of Bristol have built a robot that can 'feel' for cancerous tissue in breasts as an alternative to mammograms (where a patient's breast is placed on one plate then compressed with another, called a paddle, while an X-ray machine produces a small burst of rays that pass through the breast to a detector located on the opposite side). It's a welcome innovation, given that research indicates up to 79% of women report pain during a mammogram. And it's just one of many, as research institutions publish studies pointing to the promise of AI-enabled breast cancer diagnostics, with the testing market being projected to be worth \$11.3bn (£8.93bn) by 2030 for this cancer alone. Scientists at University College London have also developed a non-invasive PCR test for womb cancer as an alternative to the transvaginal ultrasound scan.

It stands to reason that removing the barrier of painful, protracted diagnostic examinations would change how women feel about, ask for and receive medical help. And innovations in a category that's been stale for decades, providing half the population with woefully inadequate services, are to be welcomed. And yet, I've existed in a woman's body for long enough that my curiosity comes tinged with scepticism. So, it's with my own health – and yours – in mind that I ask: what's behind

scientific research, these advances have had the effect of increasing the pace of research,' she explains.

Then, in the consumer world, the rise of so-called 'femtech' brands has spurred on research into female health. The divisive portmanteau was first coined in 2016 by Ida Tin, the founder of period tracking app Clue, to describe the market of biotech products and services designed to tackle the health issues that only or disproportionately affect women. Research into female conditions by femtech brands rose 700% between 2011 and 2021, directing new technologies – and financial interest – into the under-tapped ecosystem of female health.

Take menstrual blood, for example. Despite containing much of the same cells and markers as you'd get in blood drawn from your arm, plus endometrial tissue, it's largely been ignored in medical research historically. But it could hold untapped insights into women's health. The US biotech brand Qvin has just received FDA approval for its diagnostic menstrual pad, which is able to diagnose and offer information on women's health concerns, such as perimenopause, endometriosis, fertility and thyroid, as well as anaemia and diabetes. Another brand, Yoni Health, is building Europe's first menstrual blood bank, also in the hope of furthering this neglected area of research.

After all, research doesn't just happen because it 'should' – there needs, as ever, to be a financial imperative for it. 'It might feel uncomfortably cynical to think of healthcare as a capitalist system, especially when we've grown up with an ostensibly free-at-the-point-of-service system in the UK, but that's how it works,' says Sula Windgassen, a health psychologist who specialises in supporting people dealing with chronic illnesses, stress, burnout and trauma, often arising from female medical conditions. That our experiences are now taking up more space – on social media and column inches – all feeds momentum. 'The more people →



\\
New innovations
bring the historic
lack of funding into
sharp relief
\\

the sudden boom? And can these changes meaningfully affect our lives when the system, for those at its mercy, feels so utterly broken?

Test and learn

The reasons long given for the lack of scientific breakthroughs in female health treatment plans is invariably some derivative of women's bodies being 'too complex'.

So, I'm keen to understand what's changed. Is it that we just *know* more now? Dr Guinn would say so. 'There's starting to be a cultural shift, where researching endometriosis is of more interest to the public,' she says. 'But certainly Big Data and being able to get a snapshot of gene expression in samples via RNA sequencing and next generation sequencing have played a role. Together with the rapid, open access publishing of

Testing times

there are aware of the suffering, the more scope there is for profit from the companies who want to plug that gap,' she says.

Heads in the game

It doesn't take someone with world-class qualifications to join the dots between the historic male domination of science and technology and the limited progress in the research of – and treatments for – female health conditions. So, there's an argument that recent advances have arisen thanks, in no small part, to women occupying more seats at the table in scientific institutions. Women make up 28% of the Stem workforce in the US, where much of the femtech boom originated, while the proportion of UK women in science sits at 26%, an increase of 5% from 2016.

There are sometimes – not always – grindingly personal experiences of conditions intertwined with the origins of these new devices. It was only after talking to a friend with endometriosis (which, incidentally, she also suffers with) that Dr Guinn thought to use her research speciality to learn more about it. Meanwhile, after seeking an STI test and doctor's appointment in 2017, Valentina Milanova – Daye's founder – was inspired to make STI diagnostics fit for the reality of women's busy lives. 'I had to go to a walk-in clinic on the weekend and wait hours to be seen,' she says. 'I was in pain for a long time, as I had symptoms I couldn't manage until I got antibiotics.'

People like Milanova having the capacity to direct research efforts based on their own experiences is vital to putting women's healthcare front and centre. But, shockingly, her research into STI tampons wasn't exactly a revelation. 'We've known since the 1990s that tampons are a better sample collection method for STIs – particularly chlamydia – compared [with] the swab. But this innovation didn't receive enough funding, so it was never commercialised,' she says. That it has now *could* be seen as cause for cautious celebration. But there are still further hurdles. 'It took us four years to complete our own clinical trials and to obtain regulatory approvals for the STI tampon,' she

explains. 'There's a complicated regulatory framework you have to go through, which doesn't recognise women's health products like tampons as medical devices.'

To be clear: while female-focused biotech is booming (predicted to grow from \$6.69bn (£5.28bn) in 2023 to \$20.59bn (£16.25bn) by 2030), it's not like we've crossed the threshold into an era where investing in tests for the sources of – and treatment of – women's pain is deemed 'worth it'. Just look at the speculum. The tool used to allow health practitioners access to your vagina and cervix has a dark history (examinations were enforced on

Relentless self-advocacy is wearing

any woman suspected of being a sex worker in the 1800s in a bid to stop the spread of STIs) and archaic connotations (until last year, the smallest instruments were known as virgin speculums). It remains a key part of cervical cancer screening, in which a speculum is used to open up the vagina, allowing the nurse to take a sample of the cervical cells. And according to Jo's Cervical



Cancer charity, 36% of UK women report pain during their cervical smears: a factor linked to 25% of women not attending screenings – meaning abnormal HPV cells, including those that pose a high risk for the future development of cervical cancer, go unmonitored.

An alternative, founded by female designers and engineers, was unveiled in 2019. Unlike the aforementioned, Yona' doesn't have screws that stick out and pinch your vaginal wall or make any ratcheting, clicking sounds. And the silicone cover makes insertion much more comfortable. And yet, its makers still don't have partners to ready it for distribution. 'The lack of funding for mass market implementation is unfortunate; these tools could encourage more women to undergo regular screenings, ultimately contributing to early detection and prevention of cervical abnormalities,' notes Amit Shah, a gynaecologist and co-founder of Fertility Plus, a clinic on London's Harley Street.

Out with the old

Whether these innovations will make a real difference for you and I is complicated. When *WH* asked about the timeline for rolling out innovations in diagnostics (including the new endometriosis urine test) at the government's Women's Health Summit in January, Health Secretary Victoria Atkins offered no dates. Instead, she stressed the need for new treatment pathways, referring to the £50m of new funding for women's healthcare innovation. Dr Guinn was more forthcoming; she's hoping GPs will have access to the urine test within two years. The swab for womb cancer will be commercially available in Austria and Switzerland this year, with developers currently working to make it available in the UK, too. Researchers behind the robot mammogram tell *WH* it'll be at least eight to 10 years before it's available to the public. (In the UK, all medical devices require approval by the British Standards Institute, while NICE evaluates diagnostic tools for a minimum of 63 weeks before they're used by the NHS.)

Then there's the reality that while new technologies are important, a hangover in traditional treatments

– like how IUD fittings don't offer anaesthetic as standard, yet colonoscopies (a treatment men also have) do – still exists. To make things worse, a male contraceptive injection, dubbed ADAM (official name Contraline) is being developed with anaesthetic as standard. You can imagine how the news and its message – women's suffering is fine; men's comfort must be protected at all costs – landed online. 'If that's the place we're starting from, we're already on the back foot when a diagnostic procedure is performed,' says Dr Windgassen. 'If a man reported pain when undergoing a clinical procedure, it would arouse more clinical consideration.' If that sounds a little *strong*, may I point you to the landmark 2001 'Girl Who Cried Pain' study, in which US researchers found women were more likely to be given sedatives rather than painkillers when reporting pain. A two-decade follow-up, published in 2022, found that practitioner bias, lack of education and difficulty diagnosing women meant they still receive comparably worse treatment for pain than men.

The problems are vast, deep and systemic. In the face of which it can be hard to work out: what do I need to do? To the right, I've asked experts for their guidance on some of the gnarliest diagnostic procedures women face. I really hope they help. As for me? Six months after being referred for surgery, I'm still waiting for the letter with an appointment date. I was previously chasing up the clinic with regular calls – but not any more. Partly because relentless self-advocacy is wearing. But also because the reality of surgery has been weighing on my mind. I'm a freelance writer and fitness instructor, I don't get paid sick days and I'm anxious about taking time off work to recover from diagnostic surgery that might not even find anything.

I'm weighing up what's worse: not knowing the cause of my pain or going through surgery to have it diagnosed. A pick-your-poison roulette I'm subject to because I'm a woman. I sincerely hope these innovations mean the next generation won't endure its torment. **WB**



Diagnosis survival guide

Leading experts on self-advocacy and how to cope

01

Getting a smear...

Imperfect as the process may be, don't ignore your invitation. 'Communication with your doctor or practitioner is key for preventing pain and fear during smears – especially if you've had negative experiences in the past,' says Dr Shah. 'Scheduling the test during a time in the menstrual cycle when the cervix is less sensitive can also help the experience feel more comfortable. It tends to be at its most sensitive around ovulation, and easier to swab around seven to 10 days before your period.'

02

Talk through having a mammogram...

'The nature of your tissue being squeezed during a mammogram means some pain is likely,' says Dr Windgassen. 'One way to lessen discomfort is to intentionally clarify *why* we're experiencing pain, while making the distinction that this doesn't equate to harm,' she says, adding that doing so stops your brain from amplifying the sensation of pain. 'Discuss fears with your practitioner, who can explain the procedure to calm your nerves.'

03

Manage endometriosis symptoms...

My number-one learning? Request differences of opinion between you and your doctor be put on record and bring someone to appointments who can ask questions.

Pain-wise, there's not much that can stop physical pain from diagnostic – and subsequent – surgery and recovery, but managing expectations can help. 'Many think their pain will be gone straight after surgery, but tissue damage affects the same pain networks,' says Dr Windgassen. 'Thinking that the operation has failed can exacerbate pain – lean into comforts to recalibrate pain sensations.'



SHAPING SELF ESTEEM

From Mercury Prize-nominated album *Prioritise Pleasure* to playing the lead in *Cabaret* and composing the soundtrack to *Prima Facie*, Rebecca Lucy Taylor has *range*. Here, the 37-year-old – who makes music under the alias Self Esteem – reflects on painting her own picture of success, the power of getting physically strong and why she’s on a mission to help the next generation hate their bodies less than she did



AS TOLD TO ROISÍN DERVISH-O’KANE ILLUSTRATIONS OLI FRAPE



omething I've figured out recently is that the universe did me a solid by letting me be more visible at 37 than at 27 or 17. I didn't always feel this way. I used to be annoyed that I spent a decade in a band, from my late teens, where I felt that people didn't want my point of view. Part of the heartache was that I'd bought into the patriarchal idea that I've only got until 33 to still be relevant. I remember being 25 thinking that women at 35 were so old, which is as absurd as it is sad. Still, I need to give my younger self some credit. The music industry is tough – and while getting your big break in your thirties isn't impossible, it wasn't something for which there was a well-trodden road map.

Recently, I've been working out how to be a woman in her forties in the entertainment industry. Sure, I'm only 37 now – and will be working on my third album once I've finished a stint playing my dream role of Sally Bowles in *Cabaret*. But I'm not planning on going anywhere any time soon – and, when my fourth album comes out, I'll have hit that milestone birthday. In an industry and society that places so much value on youth, that can feel terrifying. But there's something radical in being a fortysomething woman putting a pop album out. It'll be a challenge – one I'll celebrate.

Reframing the way I think about my career trajectory has had a marked impact on the way I think about my body. Every time I've joined a gym, the goal has always been weight loss. But this time, I was like, 'My goal is strengthening the muscles that aren't strong, so I can stand up straight for as long as possible because my life's just starting.' I had a moment the other day listening to Billie Eilish's *What Was I Made For?* Maybe it's because the intensity of nightly *Cabaret* performances has left me feeling emotionally sensitive, but it just vividly made me think about myself at 18: stood at the edge of the world like, 'I'm this woman, I know I'm talented, here we f*cking go.' I didn't think I was perfect or the best – and I had a normal amount of wanting to be really pretty – but that girl had no idea how much what she looked like would be scrutinised or how her sexuality would be used and abused. Every time anything bad happened, I was so shocked. And listening to that song made me feel like I was 18 again. But now I've got all the tools, I've got the strength, I've got this sort of bravery, I'm not going to be shocked any more. I'm ready to fight.

It's been a profound shift – genuinely the first time I've not sought to shrink my body or change how it looks. I'm learning about health and wellness, and that keeping your body active is just a slow, boring commitment to do something a few times a week, not with the goal of walking into a room and having people go, 'Wow!', which is what my desire was before. It's more about waking up in the morning and things don't hurt. It's about sustaining my body in order to say the stuff I want to say because I need to leave the planet having changed someone's brain. If every girl goes through it again, like I did – I just can't bear it.

Watch and unlearn

According to research from Dove's Self-Esteem Project – of which I'm a proud partner – the current picture looks bleak. Nine in 10 kids are exposed to toxic beauty content on social media, negatively impacting their mental health, with 90% of mental health specialists saying exposure to harmful beauty content on social media can lead to disordered eating or self-harm. The insecurities clearly haven't died out with the gossip magazines' circling of celebrities' cellulite I vividly recall from my teens. Although it's worth noting that I imbibed the thinner-is-better-and-hotter message from all the cool, arty stuff I consumed, just as much as from mainstream culture. You wanted to be the cool girl – the one at the centre of the story. And whether she was in the back of an indie rock video or papped with a handbag balanced on her arm, she was always thin.

'NOW I'VE GOT THE STRENGTH AND BRAVERY, I'M NOT GOING TO BE SHOCKED ANYMORE. I'M READY TO FIGHT'

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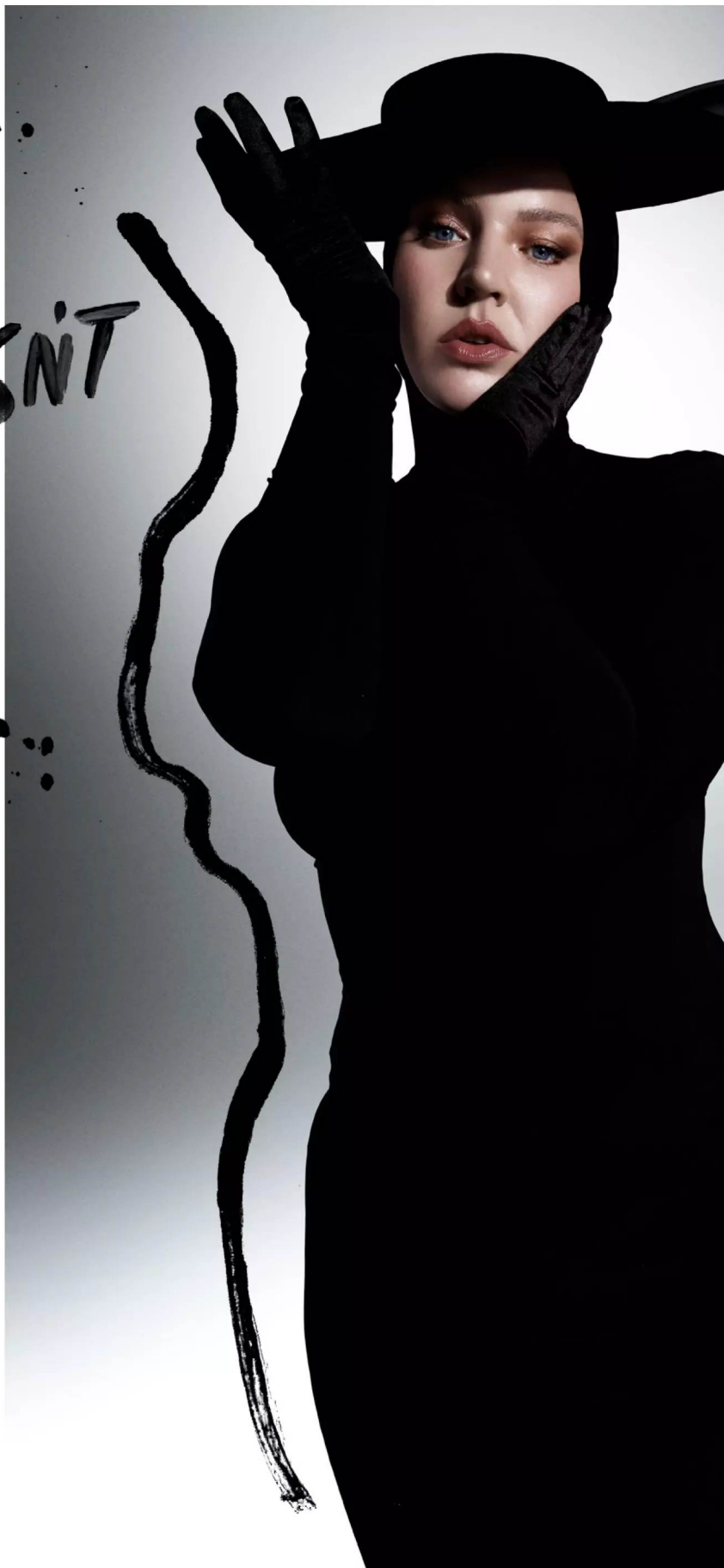
STRANGE
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BUT IT DOESN'T
MAKE YOU
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Sure, the internet has helped the next generation in some ways – if you're queer you can find people and role models just like you; there is greater representation and celebration of beauty from women of non-white backgrounds. But the majority of what you see is still the same shite I saw on the telly back in the early 2000s: promoting a narrow vision of what a 'good' or 'desirable' body looks like. The message is consistent and it's one that ruined me; it saw me struggle with disordered eating – and still impacts me now.

A case in point is that I've still not watched *Smothered* – a romantic comedy series set in London, my first TV role – because I know, when filming, I was the heaviest I've ever been. I can't watch it. And that's what I mean when I say I'm not 'cured' – I'm not this beacon of positive body image. This horrible, age-old wiring is hard to shift. I'm not proud to admit that but I think it's important to be honest. It's part of why I don't think of myself as a role model. My music is more about me going, 'Hang on a minute...' I'm taking the wool off my eyes in real time and telling people about what I observe.

I know there's a trend for female artists making songs about not needing a man and about body positivity in a way that's very on the nose. There's a place for that, of course, but for me it's not realistic. Don't get me wrong, I think it's cool when people go, 'Oh, the message of your music is going to help my daughter.' I'm proud that Dove is providing resources to help caregivers and parents nurture positive body image for the next generation; and I'm proud to be someone who creates art through which people see



● IT DOESN'T BOTHER SELF ESTEEM THAT HER BIG BREAK CAME AGED 34



and hear something that makes them realise something they've never thought or felt before. But I've not ascended into an entirely new plane of confidence. I'm still figuring out stuff as I go along.

Goal time

I'm a big believer in the power of manifesting. So, in the spirit of speaking things into existence in this next, post-*Cabaret* stage of the year, I want to record my next album, buy my parents a campervan and freeze my eggs. I'm not sure if motherhood is what I want and I don't think enough people are talking about the fact that not wanting children doesn't mean you're some strange or incomplete woman. But I don't want to be in a situation where if I did, I can't because it took me too long to decide or because I didn't meet someone. I have relationships with men and women, so I've always known there's a high probability that me becoming a mum will involve some form of intervention – and I'm certainly not against adopting. I just want to make myself bulletproof against anything I might end up needing or wanting in the future. It probably speaks to my self-reliant streak that finding the right partner being the only way for me to become a mother doesn't make sense to me. But I'm under no illusion about how expensive, time-consuming and painful the process is. So right now, I'm saving and figuring out when in the schedule I can afford to go through the process.

Elsewhere, I also want to get better at saying what I think. In my music, I've always said what I mean, but I've very rarely said it to the people my songs are about. In most of the major conflicts in my life, all I've done is ejector-seat myself out of them, move on and change my life. And I'm proud of being able to survive. But that's not a healthy or sustainable thing in the long term. And with my mental and relational health – as well as the physical stuff and my career – I'm all about building towards longevity. I've just come out of a big relationship and I'm resolved that, whatever happens next, I've got to say what I mean – I've got to be truthful.

I was raised to not cause too much trouble. And it's funny that still shapes so much of my behaviour, as in many ways it's not congruous with my personality. So

Owning it

● TAKING CENTRE STAGE AS SALLY BOWLES IN *CABARET*



often – in my personal as well as past professional life – I've just fallen in line. And while it keeps you safe, it doesn't make you happy. I realise now that my biggest depressive episodes have been when I've not been able to be truthful. It can feel easier in the moment, to avoid conflict, but I've really paid the price down the line. Without saying what you mean, you live in resentment – it's a place from which I lived a lot of my life and I believe it contributed to a litany of health issues in my twenties – chronic tonsillitis, psoriasis, my stomach was a mess and I had so many weird immune issues. Largely, these have subsided. (When my physical health is on the floor, it's largely thanks to brutal pre-menstrual symptoms; which you'd think – with all the advances in science and technology – women shouldn't *still* have to be at the mercy of, but that's a story for another time.

Body of work

What's helped? Well, in the spirit of being honest: I'm no longer on my arse, financially. I wish that wasn't the difference-maker – it shouldn't be. But let's be honest: that some savings and a mortgage have helped me move to a place where I'm more solid in my convictions makes sense. Especially as someone from an ordinary street in a south Yorkshire town who had no idea when bounding into that drama school audition, aged 18, that she wasn't privileged. I had probably only seen two plays and was unsuccessful in the audition. I didn't lack talent; I lacked the resources and reference points. But I'm getting to live that part of my dream now. Less desperate, more seasoned – with my eyes open.

But I love that I've built a career that's not just chasing down superstardom – and I like that I don't stay in one lane. It makes me feel like I don't need to pull my pants down in theatre and I don't have to pull my pants down for music. Society wants things to make sense immediately – especially women. You have to be this plaything or be really powerful and terrifying and there's no room for both. I'm not sure I make sense immediately – making music under my name, Rebecca, probably would have helped. But, honestly, if there's one thing I've learned, it's that living a life that makes sense to me is a far healthier and more satisfying goal to aim for. I'll say it once again: here we f*cking go. **WH**

Rebecca Lucy Taylor, aka Self Esteem, is a partner of Dove's Self-Esteem Project – raising awareness of harmful online content

● 'I'M TAKING THE WOOL OFF MY EYES IN REAL TIME AND TELLING PEOPLE WHAT I OBSERVE'

GAME CHANGERS

PHOTOGRAPHY MADELEINE PENFOLD AS TOLD TO ISABELLE ARON



Women's rugby is on the rise – and it's showing no signs of slowing down. We speak to six Wales players about striving to be the best, altering perceptions and inspiring women and girls to break down barriers to success



PRINCIPAL PARTNER





What do you associate rugby with? In the past, thoughts of burly men or lads drinking pints might have sprung to mind. But that's all changing, thanks to the rise of women's rugby. In 2023, the Women's Six Nations broke records, clocking up over 10.4 million viewing hours, compared with 7.7 million in 2022, and the most recent Women's World Cup final in 2021 attracted 42,579 spectators – over double that of the 2014 final.

The Wales team is a prime example of how the game is developing; the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) introduced professional contracts for its female players in 2022, meaning they can now train and play full time. Sponsors like Vodafone helped make this possible, changing the face of women's sport.

The Wales team has also become the first to use Vodafone's menstrual tracking app, PLAYER. Connect, to help them understand their bodies better. As the players prepare for the Women's Six Nations, we speak to some of them about their journeys so far and hopes for the future.



ALEX CALLENDER, 23 plays as a flanker for Wales and Brython Thunder in the Celtic Challenge. She originally started her career as a netball player, having been selected for the Wales U21s team. She started playing rugby in 2017, and quickly rose from the Scarlets U18s to the Wales Sevens team. Two years later, she received her first cap for Wales in the 2019 Six Nations.

The first time I played rugby, I fell in love with it. I was 17 and playing netball, but I saw an advert for a new rugby club and thought I'd give it a go. From that moment, I knew it was the sport for me.

I'd also started watching the women's games. I remember thinking during the 2017 World Cup, 'I want to play for Wales one day.' In 2018, I got called up for the squad and trained with the senior team, and in 2019 I got my first cap. It was surreal and emotional. I felt so much pride. I'm passionate about being a Welsh woman and I love putting on the jersey. It's amazing to see how many younger

fans are supporting us, too. I want to inspire the younger generation – I want girls and boys to look up to us and dream of playing for Wales.

I have this little fan, Sophie, who comes to every game. I gave her my jersey during the Six Nations when we played against England. Her mother said it made her year. To be able to do little things like that means a lot. It's so inspiring – not just for them but for me.

I want to be the best player I can be. Using Vodafone's PLAYER.Connect app makes you aware of when your body is at its lowest and when it's at its highest – being on your period might impact things like why you can't lift as much in the gym. A lot of studies are based on the male experience, so to have this tool for women is a massive step forwards, not only within rugby but in women's sports.

Rugby is my happy place. Throughout my life, rugby has been there and it's helped me through difficult times. When it comes to goals, I'd like to get to 100 caps and to captain my country. I'm excited to see what the future holds.

LISA NEUMANN, 30

plays on the wing for Wales and Gloucester-Hartpury. She's been playing for the national team since 2018, and represented Wales at the 2021 Women's Six Nations. Previously working in the clinical trials industry alongside playing rugby, she was one of the first 12 Welsh players to be given a full-time, professional contract in 2022.

The idea of being a professional rugby player didn't even cross my mind until I was 22 and one of the Wales rugby coaches gave me the chance to play for the Scarlets in a Super Six competition. That led to me being selected for the Wales Six Nations team in 2018. Then, in 2022, I signed my contract with Wales. I'd been playing rugby alongside my regular job, so being able to play and train full time was a dream come true.

I often get asked which female rugby players I looked up to growing up, and I never have an answer. There was no coverage, so I didn't have female role models. It's fantastic girls now do – and nice to be part of changing that narrative.

The growth of women's rugby is having an impact on the Welsh Rugby Union. Professional contracts mean we're able to devote ourselves to the sport, and have access to experts. That's huge for the women's game, and it's going to push the team and players to perform better.

A big turnout changes the whole atmosphere of a game. When I look out to the stands, I think, 'How are so many people in this stadium?' When I was younger, I never went to watch women's rugby. It's incredible to see so many little girls at the games and for them to feel inspired.

I hope the women's game continues to grow. Rugby is about so much more than playing the game – it creates friendships and community, and it allows you to push yourself to compete against brilliant players. Being part of a team can bring out the best in you.



DONNA ROSE, 32
plays as prop for Wales and north London team Saracens. She is a carpenter by trade, as well as an ambassador for Rugby Against Cancer and rugby mental health charity Brave Mind. She made her debut for the Welsh squad in 2021 and represented her country at the 2021 Women's Six Nations.

My whole life revolves around rugby. When I'm not playing it, I'm watching it, and when I'm not watching or playing it, I'm coaching. As well as the physical benefits, it supports my mental health – it's like an antidepressant.

I'd been playing for Wales for less than a year when I was offered one of the first contracts. I vividly remember that moment. I was in a shop, picking up timber, when I got the call. It took a few days for it to sink in, but there was no doubt in my mind that I'd take it.

My biggest highlight with Wales so far has been playing against Ireland – it was the first game after

we'd been given our contracts, so it meant a lot. We all felt we had a point to prove. I was on the bench and we were losing. When I got the nod to enter the field, I thought, 'I need to change this.' I scored two tries within eight minutes and we ended up winning 31-5.

It's interesting learning more about my body through Vodafone's PLAYER.Connect app. It's helped me to learn when I can hit my peak performance. It's also helped the staff to understand what might be going on with us – one day we could be flying and the next we might be an emotional wreck.

It's been amazing to be playing as the game grows. We're bringing in fans who didn't know about women's rugby, and now they watch it every week. During the World Cup, we played New Zealand in front of 17,000 people. Never in my life did I think I was going to play in front of more than 10 people. It's fantastic to see the women's game becoming so popular, and I'm excited for the youngsters who are coming up as well. ➔



HANNAH JONES, 27 has been playing rugby since she was a young girl. She plays as a centre for Wales and Gloucester-Hartpury, getting involved in the Wales national set-up when she was still doing her A-levels, and making her debut with Wales in 2015, when she was just 16. She is now the Wales captain.

I've been playing rugby since I was six. My cousins played for a boys' team and I used to watch them and think, 'I want to play.' My dad was against it – he didn't want his little girl getting hurt – but my mum took me to training one weekend and I loved it; when my dad saw me playing, he came around.

I never thought I'd be paid to play rugby. It's brilliant to see the fans and matches being televised and everything that comes with it

– sponsors like Vodafone. The game has seen huge growth. Before professional contracts, players were going from work to training, getting home around midnight and then getting up for work in the morning. We weren't performing at our best for work or rugby.

Things have massively changed within the women's game. I started playing for Wales in 2015 and I was 16 years old when I received my first cap. Back then, I could easily spot my mother and father in the crowd. Now, the stadiums are full – my parents have to be in the same seats for me to know they're there.

It's nice to see mums and dads bringing their daughters to games. When I was younger, I watched the men play and didn't even know there was a national women's team until I was 13. There's still a huge perception that rugby is a male-dominated sport, but that's

changing. We want little girls to have female players they can idolise, and the more visibility the game has, the more that will become the norm.

Vodafone's PLAYER.Connect app has helped me to understand my body. This kind of technology is important. For years, we've been trained like we're small men, but we should be treated and trained as female athletes. By tracking my menstrual cycle, I know whether to push myself or to go easier. It helps optimise my training.

If a young girl wants to become a rugby player, I'd tell her to go for it. I always use the example of my father not allowing me to play. Now, I play for Wales and my dad is my number one supporter. I try to be a positive role model on and off the field. I hope to inspire girls to pick up that ball. If just one girl tries it and enjoys it, that's my job done.

SISILIA TUIPULOTU, 20 plays as prop for Wales and Gloucester-Hartpury. Her father used to play for the Tonga national rugby union team. After trying out rugby in college, she played for Gloucester, before making her Wales debut at the 2022 Six Nations. As well as rugby, she is currently studying psychology at the University of Gloucestershire.

When I was younger, I never really thought about playing rugby. My parents wouldn't let me – they were worried about me getting hurt. I used to play netball, but when I went to college at 16, one of the coaches at my college asked if I'd ever tried playing rugby. I haven't looked back.

When I was 17, I was approached by Gloucester about coming to a training session. From that point, I thought, 'There's a place for me in this sport – this could be a serious career.' My parents are fully on board now, too.

I was sitting in a uni lecture when I got the call to say that Wales was offering me a contract – I wasn't expecting it at all, I was so excited.

Some people think of rugby as a man's sport because of the contact, but anyone can do it. All you need to do is be able to hit with two shoulders. I love the contact aspect of the sport.

Getting my first cap at the 2022 Six Nations with the Wales team will always be a career highlight for me. I couldn't believe I was playing for my country. I've always played sports but I didn't think I'd make a career out of it. I'm grateful for the opportunities I've had.

The community is so important. When you're playing and you hear the fans cheering, it's like they're our 16th player. They give you the courage to keep going and to play the game for them.



ABBIE FLEMING, 27 is a flanker and lock for Wales and Harlequins. She's been playing rugby since she was 12, making her WRU debut against Spain in 2019. She joined the Exeter Chiefs the following year and represented Wales at the Six Nations and Rugby World Cup in 2021. She's also a qualified physiotherapist and has worked for the NHS.

Growing up, women's rugby was something I enjoyed on the side of training to be a physiotherapist. As my career developed, I realised I could focus on rugby if I worked hard. When the opportunity came up to play professionally, I grabbed it with both hands.

Some people treat men's and women's rugby the same, but they're not. Women need different tools – we have menstrual cycles and some players might want to have a child and then come back.

Vodafone's PLAYER.Connect app enables staff to support us and understand our hormones.

High-level sport is hard at the best of times, and sometimes your body is capable of doing things and sometimes it's not. It's about getting the best out of everyone.

There are many misconceptions about women's rugby. Society holds a lot of expectations of what a woman should look like and we're minimising those views. We're empowering women to be strong and healthy while playing rugby.

It's positive that kids can look up to us and think, 'I can achieve that.' We talk a lot about inspiring kids to pick up a ball and play but it's gone beyond that – it's about female empowerment. We're saying, 'You don't have to play rugby; you can do whatever you want to do.'

During a game against Australia, we stopped a ball 10m to 15m out from their tryline – stopped them all dead. And that's so powerful because you're connecting together for a common goal. You're not just playing for you, you're playing for all the other girls in the jersey alongside you.



• **Vodafone is the Principal Partner of WRU Women's and Girls' Rugby. Discover more at vodafone.co.uk/mobile/partnerships**

Smart, successful and drinking in secret

When *Women's Health* asked for anonymous stories of people using alcohol as a private crutch, confessions poured in. From city lawyers to spin instructors, we hear from the health-conscious women keeping their loved ones in the dark about their habit

WORDS: ROSAMUND DEAN



Shadowy sips

Are you still
living in the
shadow of
a bottle?



Every evening, after another long day at her corporate law firm, Hannah Stephenson* engages in the same ritual. She reaches for the bottle of gin sitting on the shelf, mixes it with the contents of an ice-cold can of Fever-Tree from the fridge, and drinks. With every sip, she feels her brain switch off a little more. Sometimes one's enough; other times she'll pour a second or third glass. 'I don't think of myself as someone with a "drinking problem", but I do drink every day,' says the 32-year-old. 'My job is full-on, so stress levels are high and I have very little time for healthier stress-relievers like exercise. Pouring myself a G&T – or three – is the off switch my brain needs.'

Within ambitious, health-conscious circles, signs indicate that alcohol seems to have – finally – lost its cool. Ordering a kombucha or a Lucky Saint at work drinks is the smart woman's move. She knows the clarity-blurring, energy-deadening and sleep-disrupting effects of a large glass of crisp riesling will do nothing to benefit her work, her PB or the mood that accompanies her throughout the day.

A look at the most recent data chimes with trends you may have noticed within your circles. Last year's annual Drinkaware Monitor national survey, conducted for the charity Drinkaware by YouGov, suggests UK women are, indeed, drinking less frequently. It notes that 59% are drinking alcohol less often than weekly, a slight rise from 54% of women in 2019. What's more, 14% of us don't drink at all, while 69% drink less than the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines of 14 units per week.

And yet, when *Women's Health* put out a call to hear from women uncomfortable with the way they drink alone, the responses poured in. It paints a curious picture: that just because the 'work hard, play hard' image of high-powered executive pairing late night spreadsheets with a glass (okay, two) of pinot noir is no longer aspirational, that doesn't mean it no longer exists. It's just... quieter now, especially among women who otherwise tick the boxes of a healthy lifestyle.

SILENT SIPS

'I've definitely managed to cut back drinking socially over the past few years, but I still use alcohol as a private crutch,' says Marie*, 46, an advertising director-turned-PT. 'Having a child means far fewer nights out, and retraining as a fitness instructor has helped because I can't be hungover at work. That said, whenever I feel anxious or stressed, my default response is a glass of wine.' But Marie's not announcing that she's tapping out with a loud sigh and resharing a wine o'clock reel to her Instagram Story. She's drinking in secret.

'I tend to drink on my own while preparing dinner,' she tells *WH*. 'I buy the wine myself and carry my handbag to the kitchen so it's not obvious, and drink from a water glass, which I've been known to hide behind a pan if someone comes into the kitchen. I'll also open a new bottle rather than finish a near-empty one, then take the empties out when no one else is home.'

It used to be a habit – a couple of nights a week. But it's morphed into a ritual, further embedded into her routine in recent months. 'This past year has been rife with family problems and personal issues, so I've drunk secretly most nights. I'm very conscious of my health in every other aspect, but this is my big weak spot.'

Weak is possibly the wrong word, given that alcohol is an addictive substance, stimulating GABA receptors in the brain and reducing anxiety in the moment. If women are drinking as a salve for stress and other negative emotions, you don't need to look far for the reasons driving them to the alcohol aisle: rising everyday overwhelm and stress, financial worries, horrific world events played out via mainstream news and in-your-face social feeds, misdiagnoses of female health conditions and shockingly long waiting lists.

And we've grown up being sold the story, via film, music and even meme-like greetings cards, that a state of calm and contentment is easier reached with the help of a glass of rosé with pals. And while it's no longer 'cool', it's a correlation with staying power.

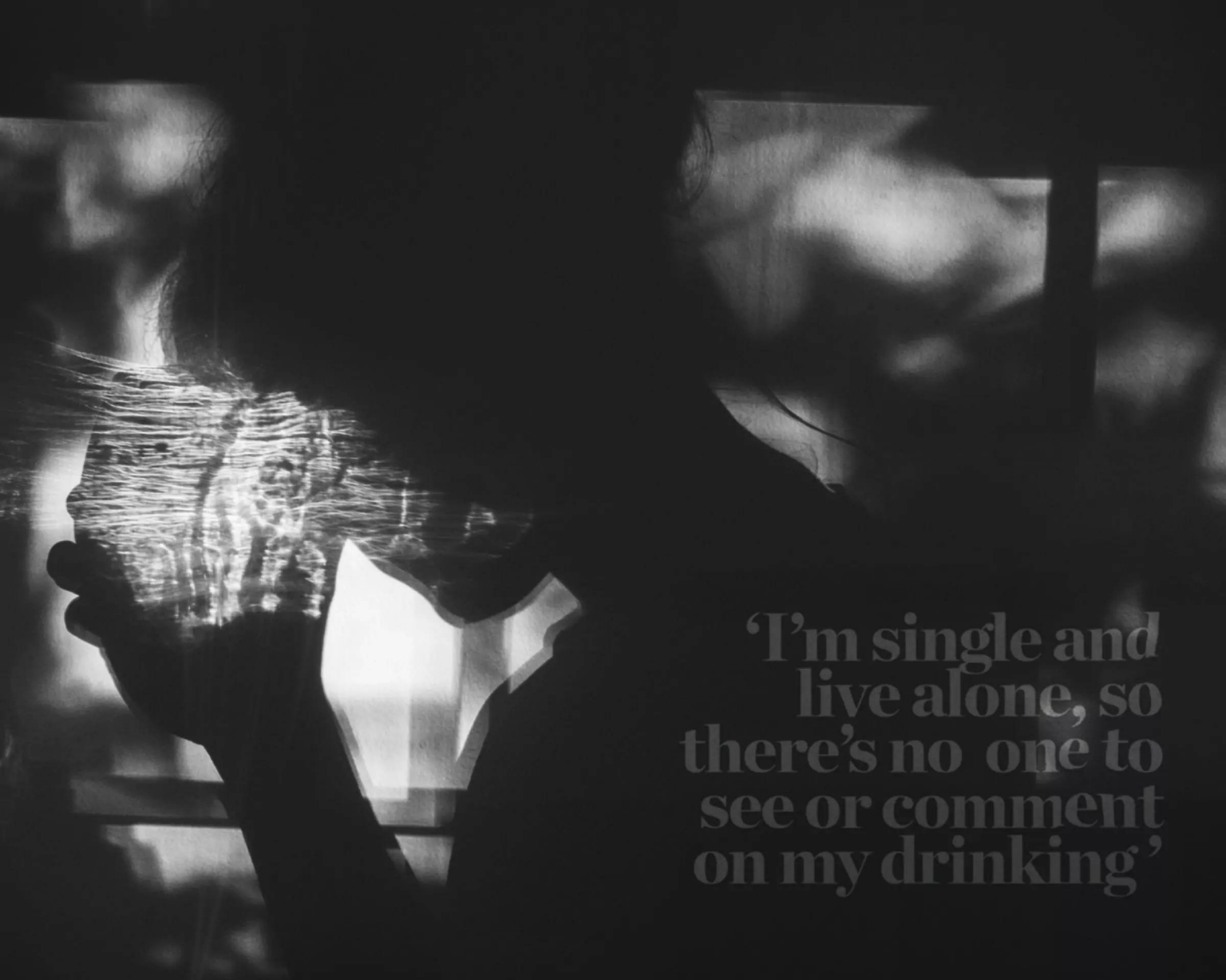
SHAME ON ME

The emotion that best characterises the way Marie perceives her nightly coping mechanism? Shame. Something that, according to coach and behaviour change expert Shahroo Izadi, is laced through many people's relationships with alcohol – especially if they're unhappy that their drinking habit doesn't sit right with their wellness-conscious lifestyle.

'A lot of people feel ashamed about their inability to stop doing something that we all know isn't objectively good for us,' she explains. 'That's especially true when that disconnect is evident to other people who wonder why their loved one would do things in the long term that they know will harm their health.'

Central to this shame is people's perception of *how* they are drinking. Izadi notes that certain types of alcohol consumption hold more negative associations: drinking alone at home, drinking in response to negative feelings or drinking urgently. 'I have a lot of clients tell me it's how they're drinking and what they're using alcohol for that bothers them; as a coping strategy for anxiety or stress or boredom,' she explains.

Sometimes it's the other habits that develop around the secret drinking that have a domino effect into shame. 'Whether it's falling asleep on the sofa instead of doing a nightly skincare routine before



'I'm single and live alone, so there's no one to see or comment on my drinking'

going to bed, or waking up feeling lethargic and less likely to exercise,' Izadi offers. 'There are many things that people don't want to admit are being directly impacted as a result of their inability to drink less.'

For Hannah, it's the big stuff that makes her question her relationship with alcohol. 'I'm worried about the impact [of drinking] on my fertility – because I would like to meet someone and have a family – but it's one habit that I can't break,' she confesses. (See over the page to find out exactly how heavy drinking affects fertility.)

Hannah is clear that the habit causing her so much anguish thrives because, well, there's no one watching. 'I'm single and live alone, so there's no one to see or comment on my drinking. My friends and I don't go out and drink as much together – and they have no idea how much I drink at home. It's not something we talk about.' And herein lies one of the biggest issues when it comes to alcohol: we don't talk about it – at least, not when it matters.

The Drinkaware research shows that only 29% of adults would feel comfortable having a conversation with family, and 24% with friends, about their alcohol

habits. And women struggle most, with a third feeling too awkward to start a conversation about a friend's drinking, compared with a quarter of men.

COMPARISON CULTURE

While conversations between friends and family may be swerving the topic of booze, the opposite seems to be true on social media, particularly among those who've turned their back on it to adopt a sober lifestyle. Stylishly packaged advice from lean, glowing, energised women has fuelled the rise of sobriety culture; being alcohol-free is no longer perceived as the reserve of alcoholics.

It no longer seems weird, boring or (literally) dry – and there are limitless no- and low-booze options

(often celebrity- or influencer-endorsed). The downside being that for someone unhappy with their own drinking habit, sobriety advice or encouragement can feel sanctimonious at best and shaming at worst.

Laura*, 34, is a teacher with a young child who has very little time to herself between work and parenting. 'I'd like not to use wine to chill me out, but I'm so tired and don't have time to go for a swim or do a yoga class,' she says. 'The only time I get more balance is in the school holidays. I do feel shame [around my drinking], but also envy for people who have the time to invest in their wellbeing. It feels out of my reach.'

But, as with most kinds of comparison, judging yourself by someone else's standard, or ➔



**‘I still use alcohol
as a private crutch’**

drinking behaviour, is a fool's errand – not to mention a fast track to feeling more shame. Though Izadi hasn't personally had clients report that current sobriety culture adds to their shame, she can see why it might be the case for some. 'When people are on these wellness journeys, whether that be sobriety or healthy eating or anything else, they're excited about what they're discovering and want to talk about it; sharing can also help to reinforce positive habits,' Izadi says.

'This can leave a portion of people inevitably reflecting on their own behaviour, and if there was something they were already meaning to change, I can see why it would be intimidating and isolating to see a bunch of people appearing to find it easier than they do to stop.'

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

But while people are quick to notice others' behaviour, the data suggests they have a lack of self-awareness about their own. According to the aforementioned Drinkaware survey, 59% of women believe the UK as a whole has an unhealthy relationship with alcohol. But when asked about their own drinking habits, only one in 10 felt it was a problem. A standard bottle of wine is around 10 to 11 units, so half a bottle three times a week is over the maximum recommendation, which means many women could be straying into 'overdrinking' without realising it – so says Drinkaware CEO, Karen Tyrell.

The lives of the women we spoke to for this piece differed in myriad ways: some mothers, some not; some partnered, some single. But the one thing uniting them? They don't want their habit to continue to define their path. Everyone's journey is, of course, different. But, according to Izadi, an important element is addressing the shame that's driving their concealment.

'Fundamentally, shame – like other negative feelings, such as guilt or sadness – doesn't help activate positive behavioural change,' she argues. 'You need to feel empowered and positive and calm, and worthy of taking care of yourself.' When it comes to neutralising this change-blocking emotion, Tyrell believes opening up conversations about how we drink is key. And, not only once we've vanquished our sub-optimal habits and are reaping the many mind-body rewards of an alcohol-free lifestyle.

'We never used to talk about having anxiety or depression, or experiencing work-related stress, but over the past 10 or 15 years we've moved as a society to a place where some of the stigma is gone and we're able to have more open, non-judgmental discussions about that stuff,' she says. 'That's not yet the same for alcohol.'

As well as normalising conversations about our drinking habits – and what's helped us to cut down – there are practical tools to help reduce your alcohol intake. Apps such as MyDrinkaware can help track how much you drink, as monitoring a habit is the first step towards changing it. You might find marking another alcohol-free day on the app to be surprisingly satisfying.

You might also choose to make drinking inconvenient by not keeping alcohol in the house, or changing your route home so you're not passing by your usual shop. By taking alcohol out of the equation entirely, you're making the decision more simple.

Beyond the hangover: your body on booze

A scientific look at how alcohol affects the way you feel and function



Your brain...

Evidence suggests that drinking too much is associated with greater distress symptoms – such as anxiety and depression – more prominently in women than in men[†]. In the long term, regular drinking is associated with brain volume loss – with two drinks daily associated with two years of brain ageing by the time you're 50[†].



Your longevity....

Genetic research shows that alcohol accelerates biological ageing. A study in the journal *Nature* found those with an alcohol-use disorder showed signs of biological ageing equivalent to three to six years beyond their chronological age. An analysis in *The Lancet* found higher alcohol consumption was associated with a greater risk of stroke, heart failure and early death.



Your skin...

Scientists are confident that, given its direct impact on biological ageing, a regular drinking habit increases visible signs of ageing on the skin. Meanwhile, if you're struggling to manage flushing, cutting down on alcohol is advised, with research linking drinking (especially white wine) with greater incidences of rosacea[†].



Your fertility...

For future fertility, moderation matters, given that alcohol disrupts sex hormone levels and reduces egg count. A study in *Human Reproduction* found that six-plus drinks per week reduced chances of conception, especially during ovulation and the luteal phase of your menstrual cycle.

FOCUS ON YOU

Other peoples' experiences – and practical tips – are useful, especially if you find a community of people, IRL or online, seeking a similar goal that can help keep you accountable. But, ultimately, success relies on you being clear on your own motivations.

For Izadi, the biggest shift for her clients comes when they're able to stop focusing on the negatives of the habit they want to change and instead understand the purpose that habit – ie, drinking alcohol – is serving for them and the needs they have.

The first step? 'Take out the stigma and see alcohol as a coping strategy that you're turning to more frequently than you'd like,' suggests Izadi. 'What's it doing for you? How's it helping you? And what else can you do or use that can help you achieve that same outcome?'

We all have different drivers, she explains. 'It's possible that someone's drinking less than you because they're training for a new fitness goal. Or because their drinking was having a negative impact on their relationship or their ability to wake up early for a new job,' she offers. 'So, their motivator is going to be strong. If your motivator is perhaps a more vague understanding of how alcohol isn't good for you, you're going to have very different motivation levels, which aren't comparable.'

So, shed the shame, get specific with your motivation – and curious about carving your own path. 'Think about what you've historically found motivating – what kinds of habits, what kinds of circumstances,' Izadi suggests. 'Then, use that insight to shape your goal around changing your relationship with alcohol. You're allowed to do it your way.' **WH**

Mindful Drinking: How Cutting Down Can Change Your Life, by Rosamund Dean, is out now

If you're concerned about your drinking habits – or the drinking habits of someone you love – Drinkline is a free, confidential helpline staffed weekdays between 9am and 8pm, and weekends between 11am and 4pm. Call 0300 123 1110

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COLLECTION HIGHLIGHT

Just 40 minutes from Alicante airport, in the spectacular Sierra Helada National Park, lies SHA, Spain's leading medical spa. As well as sensational mountain and sea views, this luxurious property offers a 360° approach to wellbeing, with its cutting-edge clinic delivering alternative and science-backed disciplines to optimise guests' health. As well as relaxation areas, you can enjoy dynamic exercise classes, Nordic walking, mountain hikes, cookery workshops and a complete hydrotherapy circuit with two swimming pools. Suites boast floor-to-ceiling windows from which you can take in the stunning surroundings, and there are three menus, so no matter your goal, delicious meals and snacks (as well as healthy cocktails!) await.

View the collection online at elegantresorts.co.uk/wellness

Travel Well

CONNECT ZONE

Not the kind you take to reach a long-haul destination, but travelling with your social health in mind. Book a trip to one of these holiday hotspots for some sun, sea and socialising



FLIGHTS



01 ZenBoat, Greece

What: A holistic health retreat on a vintage gulet

Where: Sails from Corfu (but other Greek routes are also available)

How much: Seven nights from £2,050 per person; zen-boat.com

Who: Rebecca Johnson, SEO manager

A retreat on a boat, I'm on board.

Oh, you will be. If you thought paddleboarding was hard, try holding a downward dog while balancing on the deck of a boat moored somewhere off the coast of Corfu. ZenBoat has taken the concept of a wellness retreat and run with it. Or rather, sailed with it. After setting sail from the holiday hotspot, you'll anchor up at villages, beach towns and islands (Parga, Antipaxos and Sivota are all on the itinerary that I was on), as well as the kind of swimming spots you

usually see on the Instagram feeds of millionaires. The couple behind the concept – Louis Papadopoulos, a Swiss chef, and wife Lisa, a certified nutritional therapist – came up with the idea for a retreat at sea when they were on holiday in Greece. But while most of our holiday brainwaves fade quicker than the tan, this couple made good on theirs. They bought a vintage gulet – a traditional, crewed, motor-sailing yacht made of wood and designed for small ship cruising – and set about building a retreat premised on the ingredients for holistic health: delicious Mediterranean food, gentle exercise and communing with like-minded people.

What's on the itinerary, then?

Each morning, you're woken at 8.30am to the sound of a bell. If that sounds a bit brutal, once you climb out of your cabin – wooden, generously sized and complete with an en suite – you're met with a view so awe-inducing, you'll think you're still dreaming. Every night



The cherry tomato on top of the cake? An authentic Med diet

you're moored in a different place, so the view changes each day. After a breakfast of Greek yoghurt and coffee, you'll set sail for a few hours before stopping off to do some swimming and snorkelling. Daily classes take place at sea and on land, with timings depending on the day's plans. As well as hatha yoga – best enjoyed at sunset to the backdrop of a watercolour sky, you'll wade waist-deep into the

Rebecca taking to boat life like a fish to water



azure ocean for an aqua aerobics class that puts the sessions at your local leisure centre to shame. Lunch invariably features a Greek feast; expect grilled fish, feta, dolmades and beans, enjoyed with lashings of hummus and tzatziki, which you'll make in an on-board cooking class. Afternoons are spent reading and napping (this is busy work), then you'll hop over the island to do some exploring and have dinner before doing it all again tomorrow.

Will I make boat friends? Almost certainly. Perhaps it was living in close quarters, moving our bodies in synchrony during classes (shown by research to enhance social ties) or conversations that felt as nourishing as the meals, but the experience was uniquely bonding. My group featured a dancer, a photographer and a journalist, with ages ranging from late-twenties to mid-forties. By the end of the week, we'd gone from strangers to friends – embryonic connections that are now gestating on dry land. ➔





Soul & Surf, Portugal

What: Community-focused surf and yoga holiday in the Algarve

Where: Soul & Surf, Lagos, Algarve, Portugal

How much: From £1,020 per person per week. Two-hour surf sessions with an ISA qualified instructor are £55 a pop; yoga classes are £15; soulandsurf.com

Who: Claudia Canavan, health editor

You can't swing a soggy bikini for yoga and surf retreats.

Why should I pick this one?

It's 4pm when I pull up at Soul & Surf's Algarve Quinta – a country house in Portugal. The terracotta-tiled courtyard is painted in liquid sunshine, giving golden highlights to the white bricks that form the outside of the structure and to the sofas making up a communal hang-out area. Strung high over the feasting-style dining table are white lights, a glittering swimming pool beyond it. If it sounds idyllic, it is: a little corner of chill eked out in the wild mountains of the region. That you're joined by a like-minded community of open, friendly

travellers means you're topping up the social tank, along with the tan, too. Gender-wise, it's mixed – though our group had a female majority – and there's a blend of people who've pitched up with a mate or a partner and those who've travelled solo. All in all, you'd be hard-pressed to find an offering more devastatingly alluring.

Sounds cool, but I'm no wave-riding pro...

It's all good. Daily surf sessions are led by warm but firm instructors (they will push you, but you'll improve). In our group, there were abilities ranging from pure beginners – people who'd never set foot on a surfboard – to a middle range who weren't newbies but definitely rusty, through to one or two who could rip through the water like Kate Bosworth in an early noughties romcom. Sessions are split into ability levels, so no one feels rubbish. I went with a handful of previous surfing trips to my name but zero confidence and was coaxed to being able to (briefly) stand up within two sessions.

And when you're not in your Blue Crush era?

You'll be unfurling your body in restorative yoga sessions. Yoga is



Camping, but make it chic: the tents at Soul & Surf

performed in the soft sunlight of the late afternoon and is a welcome relief after the core-clenching work of balancing on a board. You'll also be eating food – and lots of it. Breakfast, lunch and dinner – all very Ottolenghi – are served communally, meaning those in the market for new mates are in the right place and those who aren't will still get the social-biome boosting benefits that come with sharing good food with nice people. Dishes such as roasted squash with labneh, toasted seeds, focaccia and dips are on rotation, homemade pizza is served from an outdoor oven and Saturday nights are often a fresh seafood fiesta. Are you a 'get stuck in' person by nature? Then I'd bet my last stick of waterproof sunblock that Soul & Surf will be a slice of your personal paradise.

03

Hvammsvík Spa, Iceland

What: Hot springs and fun in the fjords

Where: Reykjavík, Iceland

How much: Rooms from £431 per night; hvammsvik.com

Who: Florence Reeves-White, senior beauty writer

Iceland is all Blue Lagoon and Instagram posing, right?

Wrong. When I pictured a weekend in Reykjavík, I envisaged clichéd steamy swimsuit shots in the near-neon Blue Lagoon. But as hard as I tried to immortalise each moment (you should see my camera roll), you simply can't capture the full majesty of Hvammsvík Hot Springs through a lens. A peaceful fjord that backs on to the north Atlantic, it feels like another planet, despite being a mere 45-minute drive from Reykjavík. Every view is postcard perfect: hues of brown and gold and mossy green on one side meet jet black mountains sprinkled with

rivers of white snow; and wild chestnut horses with icy-blond manes gallop across fields in the foreground of craggy cliffs. Being immersed in it feels like lighting a scented candle for the soul.

Sounds magical. Tell me about the hot springs...

Your body will thank you. Aches and pains from hiking in the surrounding hills will dissipate after the geothermal heat gets to work on your muscles. Your skin's in for a treat, too, as the high concentration of silica in the spring water softens dry and rough patches, with signs of psoriasis, acne or eczema being soothed by the high-mineral sulphur. From yoga retreats to paddleboarding and the teachings of Wim Hof, Hvammsvík is one of the few places where it's more difficult *not* to be present – and the word's got out. Visitors from all over the world with an appreciation for mother nature gather here to feel close to her. It's somehow better as a shared experience, the natural landscape and fresh air compelling you to commune – and few wellness experiences

are quite as bonding as plunging yourself into the north Atlantic soundtracked by the shrieks and squeals of your new ("this is definitely good for you, right?") pals.

Sold. But what about the food?

Oh my. The food. It's cooked by chef Hinrik Carl Ellertsson – previously at Michelin-starred restaurant Dill. We ate lunch at Stormur, the site's own farm-to-table eatery where the arrival of each new dish was greeted with audible gasps – namely, the laksa soup poured over a bowl of fresh seafood. Served with a hearty hunk of bread to dip and chunks of butter with flakes of salt peppered on top, it's hygge on a plate. **WH**

Googles house prices in Iceland





**BECOME A PROFESSIONAL
HEALTH & WELLNESS COACH IN 2024**

CEO's of Health Coaches Academy, Ann Garry & Carolyn St John Loder

THE HEALTH &

Would you love to work in the fast growing Health & Wellness Profession making a real difference to the health and wellbeing of others? Are there areas of your own health you would like to improve too?

Then consider a rewarding and purposeful career as a Health and Wellness Coach. Health Coaching is one of the fastest-growing professions in this decade full of varied career opportunities and is being described as 'the Future of Healthcare'.

WHAT IS A HEALTH & WELLNESS COACH?

A Health Coach works with people to improve their lives in any area that will have a positive impact on their wellbeing: nutrition, physical health, happiness, vitality, life purpose, relationships, career, self-development and more.

BECOME A HEALTH & WELLNESS COACH IN JUST 12 MONTHS.



Find out how you can train with the UK's most experienced Health Coaching & Nutrition team by **booking a free Discover Health Coaching call** or join one of our **free webinars** with the Directors of HCA. Visit www.healthcoachesacademy.com or **scan the QR code.** ➡

The next intake date for our part time, 12-Month Level 5 Diploma in Health & Wellness Coaching is **10th April 2024 and 12th June.**

Health Coaches coach others to live their best life, healthy and well; they can work in private practice, with doctors, chiropractors, psychologists, at health centres and clinics, within corporate and at wellness retreats. They can also run groups in person or online, work within education, or publishing and can practise in a multitude of flexible ways, working either full time or part-time.

COULD YOU BE A GOOD HEALTH COACH?

Many Health Coaches who train with us have areas of their own health and wellbeing they would like to improve; this motivation can stem from personal health challenges as well as a desire to help your loved ones. Whatever brings people to us, the common thread among all of our students and graduates is a deep desire to create a genuine, positive impact on the health and wellbeing of others, and become part of this powerful solution to our current healthcare crisis.

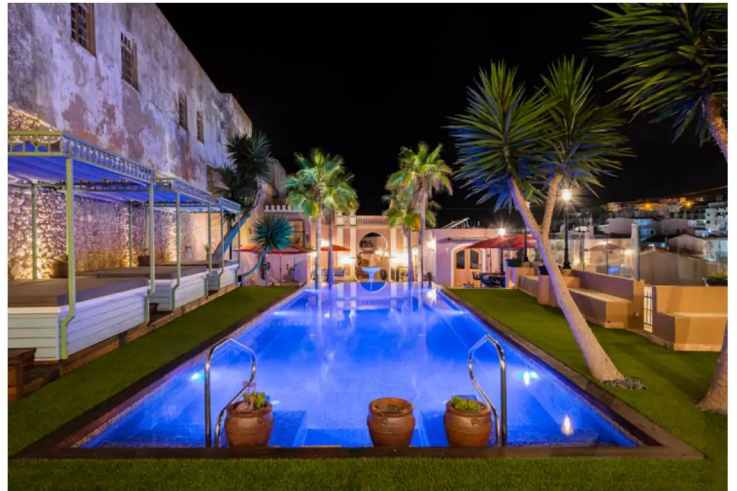


"This course has been a life changing experience for me. There's so much more to it than diet and coaching. I was very unhappy in the hospitality industry so I quit my job and went for it. I am now combining my Health Coaching practice with Yoga, collaborating with a Health Shop to deliver wellbeing talks and helping people to change their lives through personalised sessions. I absolutely love it!"

– HCA Graduate, Monique Weschta

VILA ORIGENS: URBAN BOUTIQUE HOTEL ALBUFEIRA

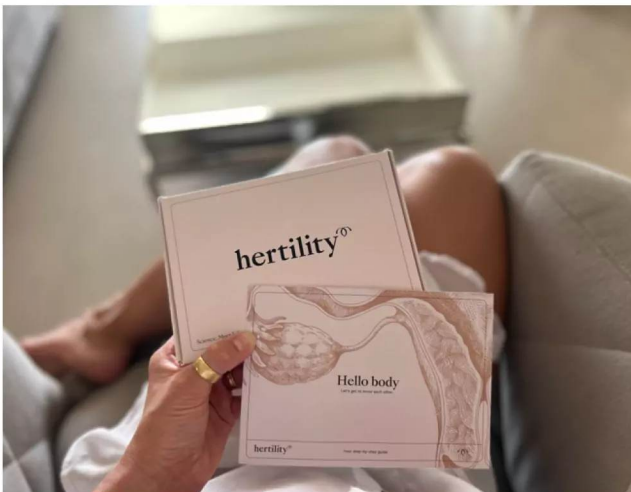
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FITNESS EDIT



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Tracking our steps, calories and sleep gives a perception of 'keeping healthy', but what dictates our energy, our metabolism, and our sleep? Our hormones. Hertility's at-home Hormone & Fertility test brings reproductive science out of the lab, direct to your sofa. With tailored at-home testing, innovative diagnostics (we can diagnose 18 gynaecological conditions), online consultations and access to a trusted network of female health experts. We've got you covered from menstruation through to menopause. Work with your hormones not against them, no matter what your fitness goals are. Visit Hertilityhealth.com. Follow @hertility_health on Instagram.



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WH PROMOTION



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THE HEALTH &



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of-the-night wake-ups. Flexee is making waves in the joint supplement space, thanks to its revolutionary ingredient, egg shell membrane. **Scan the QR code** for your exclusive discount. Shop at www.extracted.co.uk and follow us on socials @extracted.co.uk



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FITNESS EDIT

WANT TO STAY ACTIVE? TRY TURMERIC+

From gardeners and walkers to cyclists and workout warriors, so many people are discovering how Turmeric+ can help them stay active.

FutureYou Cambridge is offering you the opportunity to try a free 28 day supply of their leading joint supplement: Turmeric+.*

Based in Cambridge, the company works with some of the world's leading experts in science and nutrition, and is renowned for developing high-quality health supplements backed by cutting-edge scientific research.

'I thought I had nothing to lose by trying it. The difference it made was unbelievable.'

The key active ingredient in turmeric is called curcumin, but it's hard for our bodies to absorb from ordinary turmeric powder.

So Turmeric+ uses a patented curcuma phospholipid complex formulation with a unique phytosome delivery system to increase absorption. Pharmacokinetics studies show that it enhances absorption by 30 times, in an

innovative and effective natural alternative to black pepper.

It's become the world's most scientifically documented curcumin formulation, featured in 45 human studies involving over 2,000 people. It's also been officially recognised and certified by Informed-Sport.

Turmeric+ delivers the full bouquet of curcuminoids, including high levels of demethoxycurcumin (DMC), the most powerful of all. This is combined with vitamins C and D which contribute to normal function of cartilage and normal muscle function.*

Turmeric+ has received numerous positive reviews since its launch, becoming the company's best selling product. 'I always liked to stay fit. Unfortunately, I began to slow down due to wear and tear,' says Sylvia, a happy Turmeric+ subscriber.

'I thought I had nothing to lose by trying it. The difference it made was unbelievable. I was able to work-out and can now continue with my fitness regime.'

'We're happy to offer people their first pack of Turmeric+ for free so they can experience it

for themselves,' says Adam Cleevely, Chair of FutureYou Cambridge.

'Most people know if it's working for them within four to eight weeks – and if they like it, they will stick with it.'

HOW TO CLAIM YOUR FREE TRIAL PACK

*Just pay £1.50 postage. To claim your free 28 day Turmeric+ subscription trial pack worth £19 visit **FutureYouOffers.co.uk** or freephone **0800 808 5740** and quote the code **TUF318**

*Your first box is free (just pay £1.50 postage) and you will be enrolled into a flexible subscription costing £19 (inc. postage) every 28 days, which you can cancel at any time, without obligation.

***Turmeric+ contains vitamin C which contributes to normal collagen formation for the normal function of cartilage and bones. Vitamin D contributes to the maintenance of normal muscle function.**

Introductory offer valid for new UK customers only. Offer expires 30th April 2024 and cannot be used in conjunction with any other promotions. Cancel any time, without obligation. See **FutureYouHealth.com/TUF318** for full terms and conditions.



JUGGLE

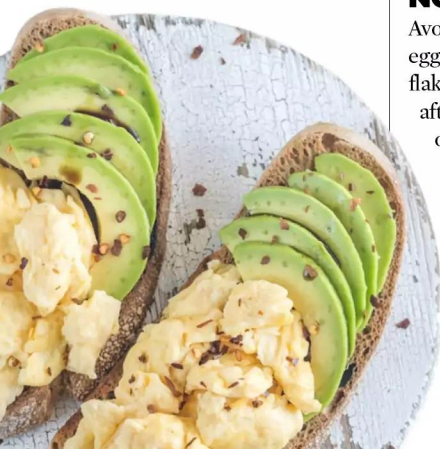
As a mother of four, there's no rule book. Finding new ways of working out that suit my daily life has been a process. There's a natural assumption that being an Olympian affords you a life of being totally fit and at the top of your game – it really doesn't. I get DOMS just like everyone else. If I've had a break from working out, my body has to get accustomed to that feeling again. It doesn't matter who you are.

MOVE

Without the athletic hat on, I didn't make as much room for wellness in my life. But during the pandemic, I needed that breakout space, and whether it was walking or finding gym time, it was essential to surviving. I now love exercise again – I love being 50-plus and still being able to count on my body.

DISCOVER

There are a lot of similarities between being an athlete and doing broadcasting and punditry.



MY LIFE IN WELLNESS

Denise Lewis

The Olympic gold-winning heptathlete turned broadcaster on life as a mum of four and why punditry is its own performance



Being a pundit is a performance as well, so you have got to be prepared. You've got to fuel yourself well because sometimes you're on air for nine hours. That readiness I talk about as an athlete going into a major championship, you have a similar feeling.

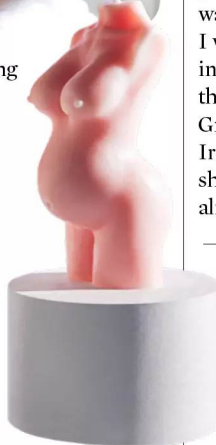
NOURISH

Avocado and scrambled eggs on toast with chilli flakes is my go-to breakfast, after I've had my shot of Symprove. Having had a lot of problems with my gut health, I realised that having a really good probiotic in the morning – as a shot, with millions

of live bacteria, going straight to the gut where it's needed – is essential for my body to feel well.

GROW

I had baby number one, my daughter, while I was still competing. As well as my changing body, I had to contend with some negative responses at that time. That was really hard. Not feeling that I was getting support was hard. I think, because of my personality, I just kind of marched on and soldiered through, but it was quite a lonely time.



STATS

AGE: 51

JOB: Olympian and pundit

FITNESS MO:
Strength and intervals

WIND-DOWN

SECRET:
The Calm app



FOCUS

I'll never forget that time before the Sydney Olympics and how stressful it was. In the lead-up, I had a lot of injuries – so I had to demonstrate my ability to bounce back and to really zone in on rehab and physiotherapy. You have to learn to dust yourself off and get back on the horse because the results are there, *if you're ready*.

REFLECT

That feeling when I eventually crossed the line in Sydney [finishing in first place to secure the gold medal] is one I'll never forget. My gut instinct said I'd done it. But I didn't want to pre-empt destiny. I just wanted it to be confirmed; I wanted to see my name in lights; I wanted to hear that Denise Lewis from Great Britain and Northern Ireland had done it. I was shaking all over. It was almost like time stood still.

GUIDE

My advice for any athletes prepping for the Paris Olympics this summer is to try to stay present. If it's your first Olympics, it can be overwhelming. Just try not to get carried away; try to keep your expectations in check; scale back the enormity of the situation and go for it.

Denise Lewis is an ambassador for Symprove

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