THE MAGAZINE DEVOTED TO MENTAL HEALTH

happiful

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EMELI SANDÉ: GROUNDED & STRONG

The musical sensation is shooting for the stars & finding inner peace

The matter of migraines

The secret might be going with your gut

Mental Health at work

Create a space to thrive, 9 to 5

19

essential life hacks to brighten your day

+

NO SHAME IN HAVING CONFIDENCE

(Grow outside the box on p26)

- Nomophobia: do you have it?
- The truth about health anxiety
- ASMR – sounds intriguing?

EXCLUSIVE! MATT HAIG'S EVOLUTION OF WRITING

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Photography | JoelValve

“Take these broken wings and learn to fly

– THE BEATLES







On the horizon

How many challenges have you faced today? This week? This year?

Out of the blue, or something that's been brewing for a while, there are times when we're really tested. When the thought of another day at work, or even getting out of bed, can be enough to summon that dread in the pit of our stomachs.

Mental illness, chronic illness, or big life events can change the way we look at the world, and ourselves. They send shockwaves through our lives, and it can be difficult to find a new 'normal'.

But, as the infinity fabulous Jonathan Van Ness says: "When you're willing to be vulnerable, you can surprise yourself at how strong you can be."

It's in those trying times that our true resolve and spirit can come through – it doesn't have to be immediately, but you can find your way. The view might be different, but it can still be beautiful.

This month, we feature some incredible stories of experiences changing our perspective, and propelling us down a new path.

Our wonderful cover star Emeli Sandé got through crippling self-doubt and feeling lost following her divorce. Writer and advocate Matt Haig used some distressing personal experiences to propel mental health into the spotlight. The team at Broken Biscuits charity transform the lives of disabled dogs, ensuring that every one finds the forever home they deserve – and a new set of wheels.



While the future isn't always what we expect, if you take one thing from this issue, we want you to see the possibilities that are on the horizon for you, too.

Happy reading,



REBECCA THAIR | EDITOR

Get in touch with us on social media, we love hearing from you!



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EXPERT PANEL

Experts are at the heart of what we do, ensuring we can offer high quality advice that you can be confident in. This month, meet the team of people who have come together to deliver information, guidance and insight throughout this issue



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FURTHER INFO

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Call Samaritans on **116 123** or email them on **jo@samaritans.org**

GENERAL LISTENING LINES

SANEline
SANEline offers support and information from 4.30pm–10.30pm: **0300 304 7000**

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

CALM
The Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) is a line for men, and is open from 5pm–midnight: **0800 58 58 58**

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



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Interested in the benefits of hypnotherapy? Browse local hypnotherapists in your area at **hypnotherapy-directory.org.uk**

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Offering a general helpline, as well as a youthline, studentline, and free information, Beat are there for anyone who needs support with eating disorders. Visit **beateatingdisorders.org.uk**

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A charity there for those affected by the full spectrum of anxiety disorders, Anxiety UK offer advice, resources, and an infoline. Visit **anxietyuk.org.uk** or call **03444 775 774**







LIFESTYLE

Feeling ‘at home’ could be vital for our health and wellbeing

It seems Dorothy was right – there’s no place like home. In a spot of good news for tenants who have great relationships with their landlords, researchers have found that feeling at home can have a significant impact on those in rented properties.

Experts studied 75 tenants over the course of a year in Glasgow. The tenants were interviewed about their health, wellbeing, local neighbourhood, housing, and financial situation.

Results have shown that tenants able to settle into their tenancy showed a reduction in health inequalities. But researchers believe that the rise in private rentals, and the decline in social housing, are thought to be a major challenge for those seeking affordable homes.

The study from Stirling University, Scotland, in partnership with Dr Lisa Garnham from the Glasgow Centre for Population Health, revealed the four key factors needed for a positive renting experience: a good relationship with your landlord; quality accommodation; support with financial obligations; and a choice of neighbourhood. Just a few things to keep in mind next time you’re trying to make a house your home.

Writing | Bonnie Evie Gifford

SPORT

Trampoline therapy takes off

New classes are designed specifically for autistic people

A trampoline park in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, has reached new heights of wellbeing, as it now offers 'Rebound Therapy' – trampolining classes specifically aimed at children and adults on the autism spectrum, and those with heightened sensory needs.

Offered to those in learning disability care homes, special needs groups and schools, charity agencies, and health groups, the scheme sets out to offer a different kind of therapeutic experience.

Trained Rebound Therapy instructors offer one-to-one or group classes that focus on muscle tone, balance and posture, as well as developing communication and reducing anxiety with fun, gentle exercise.

According to Rob Borg, regional manager for Jump In – the Leamington Spa trampoline park embracing Rebound Therapy – the classes are already a great success, with special needs schools and day centres reporting just how beneficial and rewarding bouncing can be.

"Freedom to play and move unaided is often something that children and adults with special needs can be restricted on when participating in many physical activities," says Rob. "Trampoline parks can really go some way towards offering more scope for unassisted play."

To find out more about Rebound Therapy, visit reboundtherapy.org

Writing | Kathryn Wheeler



A class at Jump In, Leamington Spa

ANIMALS

Robopets spark joy to those in care homes

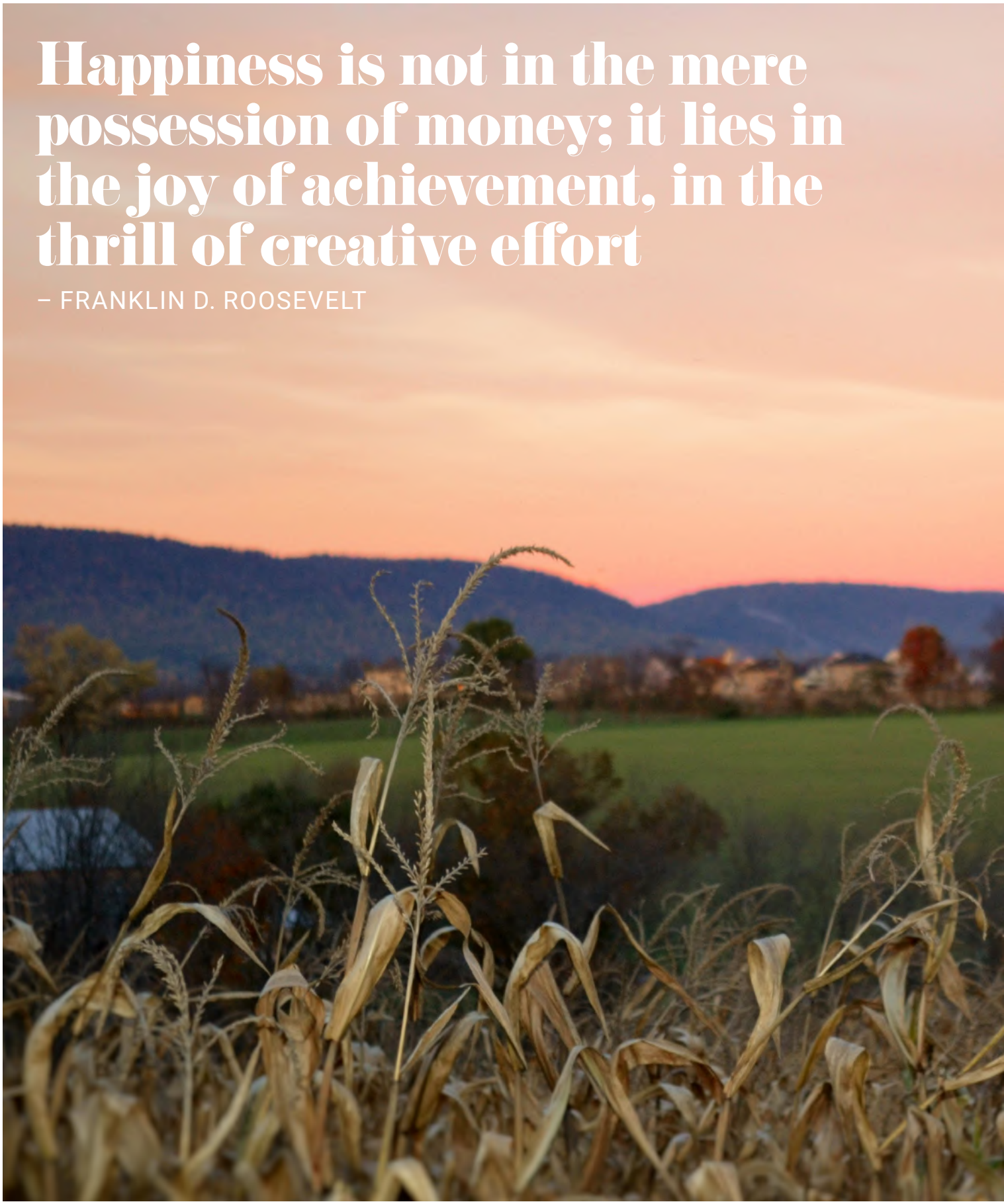
Could robotic pets be the future of better care home wellbeing support? A recent study from the University of Exeter Medical School has revealed robotic pets that can respond to human interaction could have a surprising impact on the elderly.

Five types of robopets (small, animal-like robots), ranging from cuddly cats and dogs, to baby seals, were used by researchers. Evidence suggests that these stand-in pets can provide the elderly with comfort and satisfaction, while reducing feelings of loneliness and agitation.

Research published in early May looked at the evidence from 19 studies across 900 care home residents, staff, and family members. While researchers admit not all residents liked the robopets, those who did interact with them found they helped stimulate conversations, triggered memories of past experiences with real pets, as well as offering comfort from touching the robopet itself. Having something to care for created joy in many of the residents.

Researchers hope to undertake further research into the sustainability of the benefits, to hopefully determine whether some robo friends could be the key to a happier future for those in care homes.

Writing | Bonnie Evie Gifford


Happiness is not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort
– FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT



FARMING

Care farms for mental health

We all know the wellbeing benefits of getting out in nature and spending time with animals. Now, a farmer from Pembrokeshire, Wales, is combining these ideas to support those with mental health conditions and addictions, through farming.

Eurig Evans hopes his Gwaun Care Farm will help people regain confidence, and develop essential life skills. After receiving a bursary from Farming Connect's Farm Management Exchange programme, Eurig went to Italy to see how San Patrignano Care Farm helps young people. Visiting the farm cemented Eurig's desire to create a space to care for others.

"If there's one thing I took away from my visit to San Patrignano, it's that it is possible to do anything. If you can turn someone living with heroin addiction around, you can do anything." Eurig said.

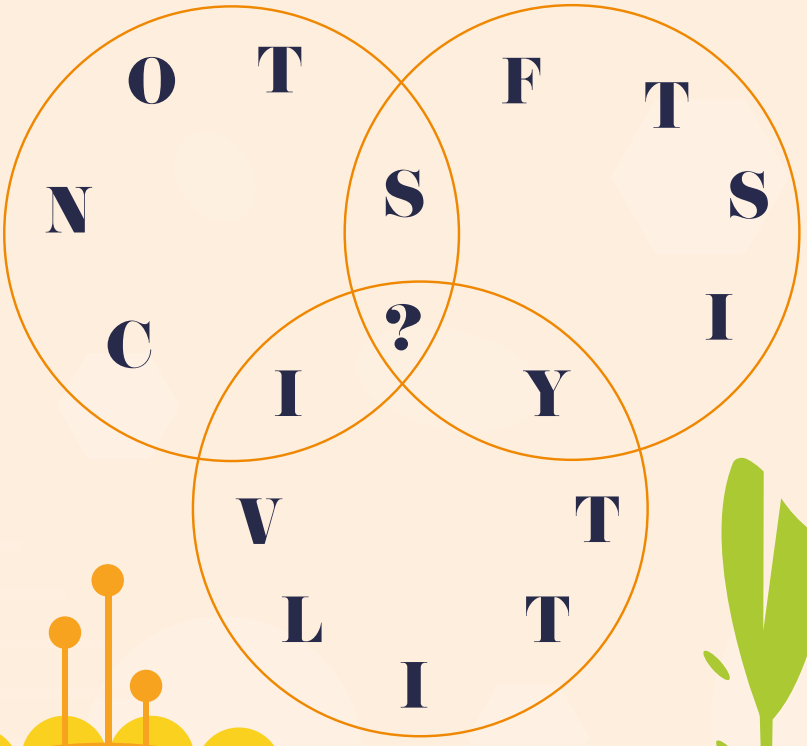
Eurig has started tutoring land-based studies part-time at Coleg Plas Dwbl, in Clynderwen, where he helps students improve their communication, work, and living skills. He has also started a course in counselling.

As well as typical farming tasks, he hopes to offer nature-based activities at the farm. Connecting with others, developing new skills, and caring for animals sounds like a recipe for success to us – we wish you the very best of luck in your venture, Eurig.

Writing | Kat Nicholls

Take 5

You'll need your thinking caps for this month's puzzle page! Carve out some quiet time and set the world to rights by solving these two brain-teasers



Circlegram

Unscramble the word in each of the three circles to discover the centre letter that links them all.

HINT: WELLBEING



How did you do? Search 'freebies' at *shop.happiful.com* to find the answers, and more!

Kakuros

Complete the grid so that the numbers in each row and column add up to the totals at the edge. You can use digits one to nine, but remember each number can only be used once in a sum!

	20	18	12
23			
20			
7			

The wellbeing wrap

Going up

Plant fever! Ireland to spend €19 million on 'grow your own' goods in 2019

Through origami, two US teens have raised $1.5 million for clean water projects

Plastic plight UK to ban plastic straws & stirrers from April 2020!

Koalas are now 'functionally extinct' in the wild

80% of teachers say students' MH has got worse in the past two years

Going down

Icons | *shutterstock.com*, Font Awesome: *fontawesome.com*

Pokémon sleep?

The phenomenon of summer 2016 is coming back guys, and no you're not dreaming – but you will be! In 2020 Pokémon Sleep is to be launched, linking to activity trackers so you can train your Pokémon as you snooze – those Zs, gotta catch 'em all!

Iceland is the first country in the world to make it illegal to pay women less than men to do the same job! The law, which came into effect on New Year's Day, is a step forward in equality. Hopefully other countries follow suit, not at a glacial pace...

SISTER ACT!

They may steal your clothes, and eat your food, but sisters are actually good for your mental health, according to a study from Brigham Young University, USA. The research suggests that sisters can help their siblings to feel less self-conscious, lonely, guilty, and fearful. But if you don't have one, remember: friends are the family we choose for ourselves...

A NOVEL APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH SEES A SURF INITIATIVE TACKLE THINGS 'ONE WAVE AT A TIME'. ON 'FLURO FRIDAYS', GROUPS GATHER FOR SOME SALTWATER THERAPY AND A CHAT ABOUT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH ON 150 BEACHES ACROSS THE WORLD. SURF'S UP!

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

A new study from Switzerland has revealed that playing music to very prematurely born infants (born before the 32nd week) can help their development! Intensive care can be a stressful environment, but this research found that playing music specially written for them, helped build the neural networks in babies, aiding their sensory and cognitive development.

SPILLING THE TEA

No need to feel guilty, a good gossip and moan to your colleagues can have a positive effect on employee morale and relationships, according to an Australian study. A little complaining here and there can help relieve stress and frustration, and aid bonding. So when times get tough, vent away to your work-wife!

CanO Water

Infinitely recyclable, drinks stay cooler and fresher for longer, and addressing the plastic pollution crisis? We cannae think of a better idea than that!

Mapping mental health

A report has mapped the most Googled mental health concerns across the US, and discovered some really interesting results. It seems geographical location can have a part to play, with New Yorkers – living in a pretty expensive city – most concerned by financial stress, and Utah residents searching for postpartum depression, in a state often in the top 10 for birth rates.

Oh, beehive

We all know the importance of watching out for our pollinating friends, and a new scheme in London is going the extra mile to help them – or seven to be more precise.

With studies blaming a decline in wildflowers as part of the reason our pollinating friends are not so common, new wildflower meadows are being planted across 22 council parks in north London.

Bees can travel up to 20 miles per hour

Known as the 'bee corridor', the hope is this seven-mile stretch will become a paradise for pollinators, and really help them to thrive. Although, given bees can travel up to 20mph when tracking down a food source, perhaps it'll be more of a honey highway. Either way, don't worry, bee happy.

Do you have nomophobia?

Do you ever get that sinking feeling when you check your pocket to find there's an empty space where your phone should be? A wave of panic washes over you, followed by a feeling of dread. This is the phobia you never knew you had...

Writing | **Becky Wright** Illustrating | **Rosan Magar**

Don't get me wrong, it's annoying when I'm without my phone – sometimes it can feel like my whole life exists within that screen. Yet one day without it, and I can make it through just fine.

But for some people, the thought of not knowing where your phone is, or not having it with you, can cause real anxiety.

If the latter feels more familiar to you, that you must know where your phone is at any given moment through the day, and the thought of being without it leaves your blood running cold, you may be experiencing nomophobia.

The term is an abbreviation for 'no-mobile-phone phobia', which was coined during a 2008 study of anxieties experienced by mobile phone users by the Post Office. It found that nearly 53% of mobile phone users in Britain tend to be anxious when they 'lose their mobile phone, run out of battery, or have no network coverage'.

Granted, this study is more than 10 years old, and a lot has changed in this time. Significantly, another anxiety pointed to was 'running out of credit' – I rest my case. But, I wonder whether things have become even worse in the last decade? Certainly, there seems to be a worrying trend among the youngest in society, with a 2017 YouGov study revealing that 38% of teens felt they couldn't last even a day without their smartphone.

Hypnotherapist Biodun Ogunyemi shares some insight into the problem:

> **Nomophobia is a growing phenomenon, predicted to be among the biggest non-drug addictions of the 21st century**

"Technological advancement has meant that we literally carry our daily lives around in our pocket. We not only use our phones to instantly communicate with people anywhere in the world, but we carry out our business via emails, and we can pay for goods and services with them."

It's true that, as a society, we now rely on our phones more than ever before. Phones can make our lives so much easier and, yes, it's OK to use this to your advantage. But the danger comes when you are dependent on your phone. We shouldn't be at the mercy of our own technology.

You may experience nomophobia as a result of pre-existing mental health problems, such as separation anxiety, social anxiety, or panic disorder. If you are concerned about your mental health or any related symptoms, seek advice from a qualified professional.

ARE WE ADDICTED TO OUR MOBILE PHONES?

Although nomophobia isn't in the current edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, it has been proposed as a 'specific phobia'. But, in the meantime, the jury's out as to exactly what nomophobia should be classified as.

It could be a phobia or a type of anxiety disorder, but, for the most part, nomophobia is synonymous with smartphone addiction. In fact, it's predicted to be among the biggest non-drug addictions of the 21st century.

The symptoms of nomophobia are certainly akin to those of other addictions. "If you accidentally leave the house without your phone and go into a panic, this impacts you not only psychologically, but also on a physiological level," says Biodun. "You may experience symptoms such as shaking, sweating and palpitations."

Addictive behaviour can lead to a number of psychological issues. One such factor is low self-esteem; if we are constantly seeking reassurance from our phones (usually through social media engagement), our sense of self-worth becomes reliant on our proximity to our smartphones.

HOW TO TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PHONE

The best thing is to start small. Set yourself a goal, perhaps to leave your phone at home while you pop to the shops. Or, if you leave your phone on your desk at work, try putting it in your bag or drawer. The aim isn't to go completely phone-free (unless that's your ultimate goal), it's just to help you feel less reliant on it.

With any phobia or addiction, professional support could help. Although, as it is a relatively new concept, there are few scientifically-backed treatment options.

However, cognitive behavioural therapy and EMDR have shown to be promising options.

Another method for treating phobias and addictions is hypnotherapy. Biodun explains: "Hypnotherapy can help by alleviating the physiological symptoms that accompany the panicked feeling. This can help rationalise the situation, so the person can realise they don't have to be a slave to technology, and can continue their lives without any illogical fears."

The key takeaway here is that, like any phobia, nomophobia is an irrational fear. We've survived (and thrived) without smartphones before, and there is no reason why you can't continue to do so – even if you do leave your phone at home.





There's no place like home

While scaling the heights of the UK and US charts in 2013, **Emeli Sandé** was also experiencing the heartaches and emotional difficulties of a divorce from her highschool sweetheart, which left her feeling lost – not just personally, but with her music, too.

Now, she's in an incredibly positive place. Focused on taking care of herself emotionally and physically, her music may be skyrocketing, but her feet, and heart, are firmly planted on the ground

Interview | **Gemma Calvert** Photography | **Joseph Sinclair**

In her bedroom in Shoreditch, east London, Emeli Sandé has installed a treadmill where she jogs every morning, before sinking to the floor for 20 minutes of yoga and meditation.

Fitness fanatic? Lucky to have an hour spare daily to invest in her health? For singer-songwriter Emeli, there are no labels, only truth. Moving her body, as she's discovered after a very private struggle with depression and anxiety, is now as fundamental to her living as breathing oxygen. Her emotional wellbeing depends on it.

"Exercise has made such a difference to me," says Emeli. "I feel so much happier, and I'm not doing it to lose weight, but to feel good and like myself again." >>>





Blouse | Georgia Hardinge, Jeans | Frame

"The physical changes are a by-product of the emotional changes. I've learned that you can't give yourself all the time. With yoga and meditation, energy comes back in, and it's also about what you put into your body, and who you spend time with. Anything less, and you'll just drain yourself out."

"Even though I was shy as a kid, I was very confident about what I wanted to do, and I worked to try to make it happen"

Emeli has been there. The aftermath of her well-documented divorce from childhood sweetheart Adam Gouraguine in 2013 preceded depression and growing anxiety about her place in the music industry, which would surprise anyone familiar with her stellar rise to global stardom.

Emeli was three years into a medical degree when she quit to become a singer. By 2012 she was the UK's most promising new artist, scooping a Critics' Choice Brit Award – a surefire indication of future stardom, with previous winners including Adele and Florence and The Machine. Her first album debuted at number one, has sold more than 5.4 million copies to date, and has been certified platinum seven times in the UK and Ireland. Emeli was also awarded an MBE last February, and has written songs for megastars including Rihanna and Katy Perry. Yet despite her money-can't-buy achievements, five years ago Emeli began emotionally unravelling.

"I doubted whether I wanted to continue being a musician," she admits. "I questioned whether people wanted to hear me, because people were saying I was on TV too much. People said I was overexposed, and then I thought: 'Maybe I don't have a place in this music industry, and if people don't want to hear it, what shall I do?'

"I was going through my separation, and really trying to get my head around the industry and where I sat in it. It was everything all at once, and I lost my confidence. Even though I was shy as a kid, I was very confident about what I wanted to do, and I worked to try to make it happen. The saddest part, when someone's suffering like that, is you lose your natural personality and the confidence goes."

Emeli opened up to her best friend and younger sister Lucy – mum of her beloved nine-month-old nephew and with whom she lives with part-time – but put on a brave face to everyone else. The problem, she understands now, is she didn't fully comprehend how troubled she was.

"People who really knew me, they could have seen but, me? I was thinking: 'I'm just tired and stressed.' At the time, I was like, 'I'm not depressed,' but looking back this year, and knowing how I am now as a person, I've realised.

"I never had therapy, and that would have fast-tracked [things]. It's scary because it's like quicksand if you don't recognise it." >>>

Songwriting has always been Emeli's counsel. Her 2016 album *Long Live The Angels* was an audible outpouring of heartbreak, with 'Breathing Underwater', a track documenting her divorce, so emotionally raw you want to leap through the speakers and hug away Emeli's pain.

When we meet at a riverside cafe in east London, it's to discuss her new album, *Real Life*, which in contrast to her last, is like a fizzing ball of bright sunshine – reflective of her newly restored state of mind after spending the past year transforming her health, both physically and emotionally.

"This past couple of years, I thought: 'I want to be in control and I don't want my emotions to be dictating my body,'" says Emeli. "I've been through something and now I'm out the other end, but even before those difficult years, I'd never felt this energised or happy. Once you defeat something, you're stronger than ever before."

Emeli's motivation to get back in the driving seat of her own life was twofold. Last summer, she returned from a music festival "inspired to feel fully empowered in myself". She also watched a YouTube video of Whitney Houston's rousing 'Welcome Home Heroes' performance from 1991, which reminded her of the artist she needed to be.

"It's the most pristine, perfect performance vocally and visually; she had so much energy for the crowd," says Emeli. "When you go on tour, you have to have energy. I just thought: 'I want to get my energy back, to express myself properly.' I wanted to make music that's happy, and not be lying about being happy. That was the biggest incentive to me — feeling and expressing myself [again]."

Emeli believes she has been afflicted with anxiety "most of her life", but in recent months, through meditation and yoga, has learned to "quiet" her mind.

"It was a breaking free of some sort, and I felt a confidence from completely having no expectations"

"My anxiety came from over-thinking, but learning how to breathe has helped me to relax and release endorphins," she explains.

"It sounds silly because we all need to breathe to stay alive, but sometimes you're doing shallow breathing all day, and that affects your mentality."

Born Adele Emeli Sandé (professionally she chose to use her middle name), Emeli grew up in Alford, a tiny village near Aberdeen, with her Zambian dad Joel, Cumbria-born mum Diane, and sister Lucy. A self-confessed "loner", she locked herself in the music room every lunch break to play the piano, but while she was conversationally introverted, her creative talent spoke volumes.

"I couldn't express myself so much through talking, that's why it got channelled into singing or weird hair," says Emeli, who began dreaming of being a pop star after seeing Alicia Keys in concert at 16. When she quit university and moved to London to follow her dreams, she discovered more expression by dying her hair, styling it into a quiff, and decorating her body with tattoos.

"Looking back, I think that was my delayed teenage rebellion! It was a breaking free of some sort, and I felt a confidence from completely having no expectations," she says.

Emeli's confidence was also boosted by making friends "on a deep level" with people as equally music-obsessed as she, plus finally living in a culturally diverse city, vastly different to Alford where Emeli and her sister were the only two mixed-race children at school.

"London is so special because there's black culture, and so many different kinds, so many mixed-race people," explains Emeli.

"I'd always been like 'I'm black and I'm different', but then you start to dissect it into: 'I'm mixed-race and my mum has a whole separate culture.' In London everyone can be who they are, as long as they're bringing the best of themselves. I love that freedom of mind. It's just: 'Who are you? Show us and be bold about it.'"

That boldness is less obvious these days. Aesthetically and inwardly, Emeli is calmer. Her once-peroxide blonde, artificially straightened hair is now a beautiful mass of natural curls, and she's ditched meat in favour of vegetables. Emeli explains this as an evolution of maturity.

"I've stepped into womanhood and I'm not putting so much emphasis on: 'Is my hair perfect? Have I got the quiff?' >>>



Jumpsuit | Reiss



Dress | Pleats Please by Issey Miyake

"Growing my hair natural has been a big, conscious decision. There's no abuse to the body, and I'm trying not to cause any harm to other beings," she says. "Spiritually, that's what's given me certainty in myself. I've found a nice balance."

Emeli is one of the uber-famous stars who actively (and refreshingly) choose to live their lives more ordinary, which contributes to her sense of wellbeing. She "loves interiors and finding quirky places" and owns a number of properties – not that she'd dream of discussing the finer details, other than to say it's important her family feel "they have a home they can all share".

Emeli looks fleetingly sheepish when I ask if she's ever been seduced by material things.

"I definitely got my fancy car at one point. I blame my cousin!" she laughs. "He said: 'Why don't you just get that? You work really hard!' So we marched to the BMW showroom and got one of the i8s, but then I got really embarrassed. It had doors that go up at the side, so I'd go to Tescos or get petrol and be like, 'Awww, this is so not me!' so I took it back."

Emeli now drives – wait for it – a 30-year-old Volvo.

"It's an old-school car from the 80s, with pop up lights. I feel like a kid again because my dad used to have one. It's cool and the sound system's wicked!"

Emeli removes her sunglasses when the sun goes behind a cloud. It's my first opportunity to observe her eyes, which are dark brown and full of life from the smile that lingers. It's clear she has made a conscious decision to tether her feet to the ground.

"There's definitely been moments where, it's almost required that you stop being grounded, especially when you're trying to perform. But especially after those years I found so difficult, I realised I need to be grounded for my own sanity, both my mental and physical health. I really prioritise it, and that's where yoga and meditation came in, and living with my sister. I never want to unknowingly float away, or not have my feet somewhere that feels like home."

Emeli says the greatest pressure she puts on herself is to utilise her brain. For her first two years at university she studied biochemistry, and the third was dedicated to neurology and psychiatry, which captivated her – specifically the "depths of the subconscious".

"It's like a galaxy inside there, and there are so many unknowns, so many disorders, and so many things that we don't know how they're caused," she says. "Things like that really fascinated me, the mystery."

Stress, she says, also comes from the absence of anonymity and the media's obsession with celebrity appearance. "How you look becomes more of a thing because you're on TV," expands Emeli, prompting me to question whether this is why she turned down being a judge on *The Voice*.

"My initial reasoning was because I [once] had such a hard time with the music industry," replies Emeli. "I got knocked down so many times. I remember that heartbreak. This was when I'd been published as a writer, and everyone wanted to use my songs, but didn't want me as an artist. You're like, 'What's wrong with me?' I'm glad I got through that; it's made me stronger, but I would never want to crush someone's dream like that."

Later, as our shoot comes to an end, our photographer asks what song inspires her to get up and dance. Within seconds, Whitney Houston's 'I Get So Emotional' fills the room – a timely reminder of the fierce and bold energy that inspired Emeli's voyage of self-discovery, and helped her feel ready to love again.

"Starting at zero again has given me such a strong foundation of who I am, what I'm giving them, and what I want back," she says. "I have started dating, and how I feel about myself now will, hopefully, help it make a lot more sense."

What a lucky chap. He's presumably getting the best-ever version of Emeli Sandé?

"Yeah," she smiles. "He's waited for the right time."

Emeli's new single, 'Extraordinary Being', is out now. Taken from the new album, Real Life, out soon.

Styling | Krishan Parmar
H&MU | Yasmina Bentaieb using Kérastase Hair and Delilah Cosmetics

Animal attraction

The sense of joy we get from taking care of our pets is often unparalleled. But have you ever stopped to think just how much these animals are genuinely aiding and improving our mental health, too?

Writing | **Jo Woodnutt** Illustrating | **Rosan Magar**

It's a picture everyone recognises: outside the exam room, nervous students biting fingernails, leafing through last-minute revision notes, and regretting the nights spent out rather than revising. I was one of these students. It was finals – and failing them would lose me my first job before I'd even started. And then in walked the senior tutor with a cuddly beagle. The mood instantly, palpably lifted.

As a vet, I see the human-animal bond every day, and know how much our animals mean to us... But what effect are they having on our mental health?

1 STRESS RELIEF

Stroking animals releases oxytocin, a 'happy' hormone that floods our system and helps us relax. One study from Tel Aviv University, Israel, took a group of stressed adults and gave them either a toy or animal to hold. Those holding animals showed a decrease in their anxiety levels, whereas those with the toy didn't. The animal doesn't even have to be 'cuddly' – the same stress response was seen with a tortoise as with a rabbit. It's long-lasting, too; an experiment published in the journal *Stress and Health* showed the stress-relieving effect lasts at least 10 hours in a group of students given time with a therapy dog.



5 TAIL-WAGGING IDEAS



2 COMPANIONSHIP

Owning a pet gives us companionship, and this is one of the most important factors in improving our mental health. A recent review of 17 papers, published in *BMC Psychiatry*, showed companionship of animals to be highly beneficial to anybody struggling with their mental health. This is the kind of benefit I see every day; elderly widows with beloved pets that might be the only living thing they see for days – think how lonely they would be without that companionship!

3 MEETING NEW PEOPLE

Pets encourage us to get out into the world to have human interactions. Whether going to the vets, the groomer, or shopping for pet food, caring for our animals gets us out of the house. Personally, I've found that the number of people saying hello while on a walk is far higher when I have my dog with me, and sometimes we have lengthy chats because we have something in common – our passion for our pets.

4 A SENSE OF ROUTINE

The routine introduced with pet ownership is one thing researchers from Purdue University, Indiana, identified as being responsible for the mental health benefits of animals. In short, pets give us a reason to get up in the morning, and a schedule of feeding, play, and grooming to stick to. This gives us a sense of purpose and responsibility, which can be so important to help people with depression.

5 LIVE IN THE MOMENT

Animals don't think about the past, being judged, or worry about something that may or may not happen. They simply 'be', and their mindfulness is a lesson to us all. They enjoy their food, their walks, your return home. Each emotion is pure and fills the whole of them. If you've ever seen the video of the dog sliding down the snowy hill on his belly, you'll know how much joy an animal can display – and how much joy we feel by witnessing it.

Dr Jo is an experienced vet with a passion for the human-animal bond. She lives in the Channel Islands with her partner Ian and her rescue terrier Pixie.

Can't have a pet? Here's how you can still benefit!

Volunteer at a rescue centre
All rescue centres need their animals cared for and appreciate volunteers.

Walk someone else's dog
Borrow a friend's dog or consider volunteering for the Cinnamon Trust to walk dogs for old or disabled owners.

Help with lambing
Farmers are usually keen for help in lambing season, and it doesn't take long to learn.

Sign up for riding lessons
These give you a chance to spend time with the horses, and learn about their care.

Unusual ways to build confidence

There are countless books dedicated to confidence-building, but what about our other options? From boxing to wearing yellow, we explore some lesser-known ways to give yourself a boost

Writing | **Kat Nicholls**

Being able to truly trust in our abilities and recognise our worth is something we all aspire to. This confidence has the power to push us out of our comfort zones and take chances. And who knows what we might achieve then?

Linked to our self-esteem, how confident we feel has a huge impact on our lives. When we lack confidence, we can struggle to pursue our passions and, over time, this can feed anxiety, depression, self-harm, and eating disorders. The question is, how can we go about improving it?

Perhaps you've tried saying affirmations in the mirror, but it's not worked. We're all unique, and different techniques help different people, so don't despair!

Reaching out for more unconventional suggestions, our readers sent a host of unique ideas to help increase your resilience, become more mindful and raise your vibration. Let's dive in.



Fight self-doubt with boxing

Boxing has long been hailed as a sport that not only hones you physically, but mentally too. It's strategic, requires mental resilience, and is a powerful stress-reliever. Even Prince Harry has spoken about the power of boxing, saying it helped him after the death of his mother, Princess Diana: "During those years I took up boxing, because everyone was saying boxing is good for you and it's a really good way of letting out aggression. And that really saved me, because I was on the verge of punching someone; so being able to punch someone who had pads was certainly easier."

For 17-year-old Katie Woods, learning how to box changed her life. Seeing rising stars of female boxing inspired her to take her first step into the ring and when she did, coaches instilled a positive mental attitude.

She says the lessons she learns in the sport apply outside the ring too. "Resilience and perseverance are important skills in boxing." >>>



"Developing these allowed me to battle the depression I was experiencing," says Katie.

"If it wasn't for boxing, providing a place to let my anger out and developing a more positive mental attitude, I don't know if I would be in the place I am right now."

Katie hopes to become a sports psychologist, and is working with the charity Fixers on a campaign to promote self-confidence in young people.

Stand tall with posture training

Anyone who saw Amy Cuddy's TED talk on body language will know what a 'power pose' is – imagine Wonder Woman, standing with legs wide apart, hands on hips – and the science that says it affects our self-belief.

But what about our everyday posture? Can that affect our confidence? Abi Wright, owner of Inspiring Margot, a company teaching women the power of physicality, believes it does.

"Bad posture can cause us to have more physical tension, feel more fatigued, and struggle to breathe fully. With physical tension comes higher stress and anxiety levels, and it's difficult to feel confident when stressed.

"We also struggle to feel confident when fatigued and overwhelmed. Not being able to breathe fully has the biggest impact on our confidence, as it means we cannot be in a calm and present place."

Breathing has a profound effect on our stress levels and, as Abi explains, not breathing deeply enough can lead to panic.

"Bad posture and shallow breathing can trigger our fight or flight response. By relaxing, breathing, and owning our space, we can bring ourselves to a state where confidence can flourish."

QUICK POSTURE TIPS FROM ABI

1

LOOK UP

If you walk into a room looking up, and can see everyone, they can see you.

2

BREATHE

When you enter a room, or start a presentation, begin by simply pausing for a moment to breathe. It will have a huge impact not only on how you feel, but how others view you.

3

THINK ABOUT YOUR FEET

If you plant both your feet on the floor, weight evenly spread, you will naturally have better posture, and feel more grounded and present. From that, your confidence will grow, as will the confidence of those around you.

> **"We are not born with a certain 'level' of confidence, doomed to always feel the same way about ourselves"**

Shine bright with colour psychology

A suggestion that came up more than once was to wear yellow. So what does colour have to do with confidence? We spoke to colour therapist Lien Potgieter.

"Colour is all around: It's in our homes, our food, our clothes, in nature, and even our language," says Lien. "Have you ever been green with envy, or tickled pink? However, we take its healing, communicative, and positive effects for granted."

Lien explains how she believes it impacts our mood: "Every colour has a frequency, and our body is a complete energy system. So, everything that vibrates affects everything else that vibrates. Research shows blue calms us, and red gives us energy. Consciously or not, everything around us affects us, including colour."

When we understand the effect colour can have on us, we can harness this. So what colours can help boost our confidence? According to Lien, we should start with noticing what colours we're naturally drawn to.

"The best colours for boosting your confidence are those you feel good in! Be aware of how different colours make you feel, and wear those – whether as nail polish, clothes or accessories – when you need to feel a certain way."

In colour 'language', yellow and orange are good go-tos. "Yellow radiates happiness, warmth and self-assurance. If you want to feel more outgoing, try orange. People will perceive you as outgoing, and that, in return, will give you the specific energy you need."



Cracking the confidence code

The most important thing to know about confidence is that it's something we can grow. We are not born with a certain 'level' of confidence, doomed to always feel the same way about ourselves.

Yes, we may have certain personality traits that edge us towards one end of the confidence spectrum, and our upbringing will likely have a part to play. But, nothing is set in stone.

We all have the ability to improve our confidence, and there are lots of tools at our disposal; finding what works for you is key. And if you're struggling to find the right one, maybe it's time to think outside the tool box.

WE ASKED YOU: 'WHAT UNUSUAL TOOLS DO YOU USE TO BUILD CONFIDENCE?'

CRYSTALS
These powerful stones are believed to help change our energy. Spiritual mentor Lindsay Coldrick recommends carnelian to promote self-esteem, and blue chalcedony to help with communication.

DANCING IT OUT
Several of you recommended a good dancing session to give confidence levels a boost. Whether it's out in a club or in the safety of your kitchen, never underestimate the power of the booty-shake.

YOU-TIME
Founder of the mad and sad club, Jo Hooper swears by self-care for a lift in confidence: "Spending time on myself – skincare, makeup etc. all make me feel better. I think it's more the time invested on myself, rather than the things themselves."

KEEPING A SERENDIPITY JOURNAL
Note those serendipitous moments with this journaling technique recommended by writing coach Greta Solomon: "Doing so increases confidence, because it makes you realise that good things, and happy coincidences, happen to you all the time."



When you hold hands with someone you love, it can help alleviate physical pain, stress, and fear

Photography | Jakob Owens

Vacay vibes

It's time to slow down, ease stress, and be more mindful during your travels, with a little help from these five holiday essentials

Writing | **Kat Nicholls**

Noise-cancelling headphones

Travelling can be stressful at the best of times, but if you have a fear of flying or travel anxiety, it can feel like an impossible feat. Shutting out the world with noise-cancelling headphones can help when you're feeling overwhelmed. Whether you choose to listen to meditation, calming music, or white noise, use your headphones as a protective bubble for your mind. *We love the Active Noise Cancelling iTeknic Bluetooth 5.0 headphones (amazon.co.uk, £79.99)*





Aromatherapy rollerball

A change in routine and environment can easily trigger stress. To ground yourself in the present moment, activate your physical senses. A short-cut to this is to surround yourself with a calming scent using an aromatherapy rollerball. *We love the SOiL Remedy Rollers, (soilorganics.co.uk, £4.70)*

WIN!
A SET OF SOiL REMEDY ROLLERS
To enter, email **competitions@happiful.com** telling us about your dream holiday destination.
UK mainland only, entries close 17 July. Good luck!



Natural sunscreen

Being mindful can also mean being more aware of your impact on the planet. Some chemicals in traditional sunscreens can be harmful to the environment, so opting for natural, vegan varieties is an easy way to be more eco-conscious. *We love the Coola Eco-Lux SPF 30 Pina Colada Sunscreen Spray (spacenk.com, £36)*



Travel journal

Being more mindful while you're away can increase your enjoyment, and help preserve those memories. Encourage mindful habits with a travel journal, capturing the moments you might otherwise forget, like the way the air smells on a morning walk by the ocean. *We love Personalised Name & Destination Travel Journals by Partridge & Bell, (notonthehighstreet.com, £14.95)*

Neck pillow

Not getting enough sleep can take its toll on your mental wellbeing. If you're travelling long-haul and want to catch some Zs, invest in a neck pillow. Soft and malleable, these can give you that extra bit of comfort, whether you're on a plane, train or automobile. *We love the curved neck cushion (Muii.eu. £14.95)*




BISCUITS

No dog left behind

Dogs, as any owner will undoubtedly tell you, bring boundless joy to the lives of those who welcome them into their families. And yet countless dogs come to harm – from illness, road accidents, or at the hands of humans – only to then find themselves left behind when it comes to being rehomed.

Broken Biscuits is helping these dogs – from what started as a series of random acts of kindness to then becoming a charity – by providing custom-made wheelchairs, rehabilitation funding, and help with rehoming. It's a tail not to be missed

Writing | **Kathryn Wheeler**

Dogs Trust estimates that there are more than 65,000 stray dogs in the UK, but worldwide the figures are in the millions. After seeing the number of strays on the streets during a holiday to Europe in 2012, Cassandra Carney and her husband, Tim Giles, decided they were going to do something about it.

They began their mission by supporting spaying and neutering organisations, but soon were moved to help the disabled dogs that were being left in shelters; finding dog mobility companies, and buying and sending wheelchairs to centres.

"Back then it was the Broken Biscuits Craft Club, and my friends and family were just baking cakes, knitting things, and doing stalls at craft fairs to cover costs," Cassandra explains. "So it was all really small. It wasn't ever meant to be a massive charity, it was just me and my friends."

But it didn't stay small and local for long. Cassandra was sharing photos of the dogs in their wheelchairs on social media and, as they spread across the internet, people from all over the country got in touch to offer their help. So the Broken Biscuits Craft Club became Broken Biscuits – a charity and disabled animal advocacy organisation, devoted to giving dogs that have been left behind the freedom to live a limitless life.

HOMEWARD BOUND

From their home in Surrey, that they share with their daughter Lily and six rescue dogs of their own, Cassandra and Tim work on three core pillars: rescue, rehabilitate, and rehome.

Their mission begins with supporting dogs in rescue centres, continues as they fund and provide mobility equipment, and concludes only when the dogs are settled in their forever-homes. >>>



Double amputee Otto loves his new set of wheels

> **This desire to be able to do as you wish is interspecific; we all want to be able to choose which direction we walk, and what we do next**

"We were really chuffed to see the support the dogs got from people all over the world," says Cassandra. "But most importantly, the change in each dog's mood was instantly visible. The frames didn't just give them back mobility, but also the freedom to choose where to go. This desire to be able to do as you wish is interspecific; we all want to be able to choose which direction we walk in, and what we do next.

"I remember seeing our own double amputee, Otto, chasing a bee for the first time after getting his wheelchair," Cassandra continues. "He was ecstatic, jumping and howling, ears all a-flapping! I'd never seen him so enthusiastic about something before, and we had showered him with gifts and love."

But the dogs aren't the only ones who get a new lease on life. From what Cassandra has seen, as she matches dog to owner, the joy and freedom that is granted to the dog continues in the lives of owners.

BY YOUR SIDE

"In many situations, gifting the pet-parent with a wheelchair for their pet means that they get out of the house more," Cassandra explains. "We've had some really amazing calls from people who were recipients of our Norman Guntrip funding – which provides the wheelchairs – saying what a difference the frames have made to their own wellbeing."

As Cassandra and countless studies have found, owning a pet can have an incredible effect on our wellbeing. They become a reason to connect to others, breaking down the barriers that we so often build up around us.

"Sharing your life with a dog, or two, is a total blessing. They bring our family truckloads of joy," says Cassandra. "There isn't a day that goes by where Otto or Coco hasn't made us cry with laughter; they bring such happiness to our lives."

Dog-owner matches, like the ones Cassandra describes, don't happen by accident, and in order to get the perfect pairing, Broken Biscuits have a very personal approach to the rehoming process. The dogs stay under Broken Biscuits' care for at least a year before they are available for adoption. "In that time, we get to know the dogs, so then we know the perfect person for them," Cassandra explains. "I'm in no hurry to just drop them in somebody's lap. The balance has got to be about the personality."

Once the match has been made, Cassandra's husband Tim drives the dogs to their new families himself. "Even if it's in Scotland!" Cassandra adds. "He loves it, because he gets a couple of nights stay in a hotel on the way up."

Testament to the kindness the organisation was built upon, Cassandra tells us that the people who adopt from Broken Biscuits don't just sign on the dotted line and then move on, they become lifelong friends. They stay in touch, exchanging stories about the quirks of life with a disabled pet ("We talk a lot about pooping and weeing!"), moulding a sympathetic, supportive community.

And this crafting of a community is all part of Cassandra and Tim's big-picture plan, where they're challenging the barriers that leave disabled pets in rescue centres – something they do with their delightfully-named advocacy scheme: Roll Model. Taking three of their own dogs, Otto, Coco and Jasper, the team visit universities, schools, and clubs to open discussion and bring disabled animals into the public eye.

"The dogs adore the attention, and it gives kids and adults an opportunity to digest what a body without a leg is like," says Cassandra. "They can ask anything about how they move, or how they do day-to-day activities like toileting, and we can laugh about the questions with no judgement or anxiety."

> **We all want to be loved, and seeing the animals we take into care adapt and overcome such adversity is inspirational**

UNDERDOG

At the heart of it, this is what Cassadra and Tim want to tackle with Broken Biscuits: the unanswered questions that prevent people from adopting disabled animals, perhaps because of misconceptions about their quality of life, or maybe just a fear of the unknown.

"Feeling like you don't fit in, are overlooked, or left behind – like broken biscuits on a plate – hurts," Cassandra explains. "We all want to be loved, and seeing the animals we take into care adapt and overcome such adversity is inspirational."

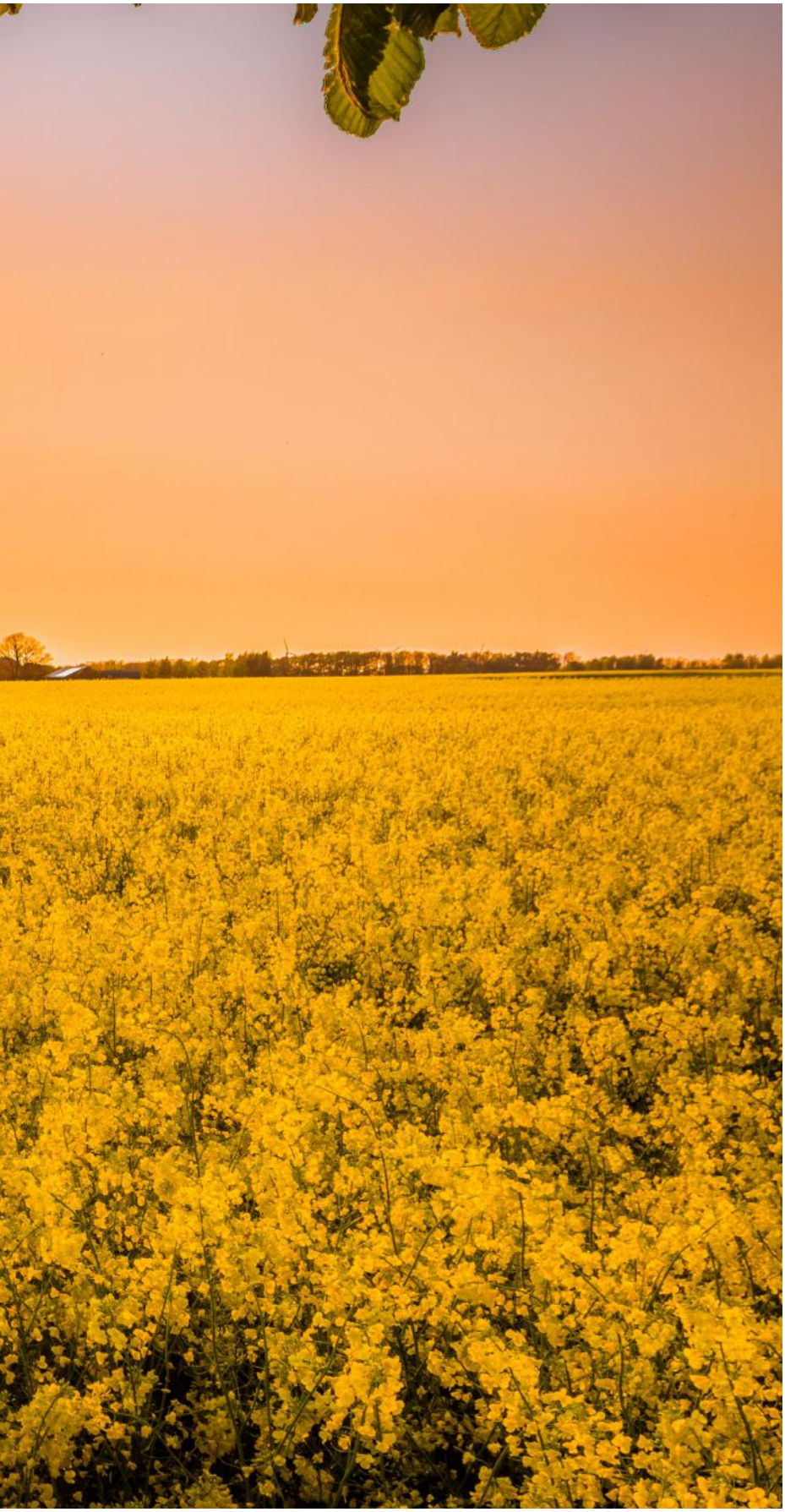
Dog-lover or not, the message is clear: with open-mindedness, love, and devotion, journeys through adversity aren't just aspirational, they're possible and monumental. Joy is a give-and-take business, and for Cassandra, Tim, and everyone else involved in Broken Biscuits, that joy can be found and nurtured in their vibrant, nifty, one-of-a-kind, unconditionally-loving canine friends.



For more about Broken Biscuits and to donate, visit ***brokenbiscuits.org***



Being imperfect makes us who we are





Overcoming anxiety, and embracing imperfections

Lucy spent 40 years trying to pretend her shyness and anxiety didn't exist. In embracing them, she's finally becoming more content with who she is

Writing | **Lucy Nichol**

Who else has that dream where you're trying to run somewhere, but you're battling some kind of invisible force that won't let you get there? Your limbs are flailing frantically but, despite the effort and attitude, you're simply not moving.

It pretty much sums up life for someone like me, who has anxiety and low self-esteem.

But it's not cool to be shy is it? Being the only kid at the Sooty Show who refused an invitation on to the stage was both relieving and devastating at the same time. Not everyone gets to meet TV's famous yellow bear.

I was as silent as Sooty throughout my earlier life. I was the child at a family wedding who wouldn't utter a word. >>>

The teenager who wouldn't leave the dance floor because she didn't know how to converse at the bar.

As an adult, my shyness made me appear snobby and aloof. And besides, I honestly couldn't hold a conversation with strangers. Being drunk and indifferent seemed so much easier than being rejected. Or tripping over my words. Or being found out for being shy.

I was the child at a family wedding who wouldn't utter a word. The teenager who wouldn't leave the dance floor because she didn't know how to converse at the bar

I had a great circle of friends, but I never felt good enough. It would only take one wrong, unexpected question to 'out' my social awkwardness.

I had some pretty outgoing friends and so I wanted to be the *most* outgoing. The most noticed. The one who took up the most space on the dance floor when The Prodigy came on.

And it's kind of followed me into my grown-up world. Although these days I'm more likely to be found running to 'Smack My Bitch Up' rather than dancing to it in a nightclub.

I was always super-slim when I was young. But recently I was filling out – you know, like a woman does. Visiting old friends only to find out that they'd all lost weight while I had piled it on (in my mind) made me seethe.

And what if I got a job at manager level, but a friend was working at director level?

My hair was thin and my skin pasty white; my sister's hair was thick and her skin a lovely olive.

Alongside all of this – worries about 'performing' socially, looking good, and achieving enough professionally – I endured phases of panic and anxiety.

The health anxiety was pretty severe. It landed me in A&E and at emergency walk-in centres several times.

If I was swimming, I could feel my heartbeat. If I was sitting, I could feel my heartbeat. If I was cooking, watching TV, catching the bus, or heading out on a run, I could feel my heartbeat.



'Having a tantrum because my sister got to be a Little Miss, and I had to be a Mr Man'



Lucy with her husband, Chris, and her stepson, Sam, on her wedding day

Now, if I'm not mistaken, that's a good thing. But for me, it was a sure sign of a heart problem, an imminent heart attack. A sense that my circulatory system was rapidly failing hung in the air and followed me like a persistent hawker, trying to sell me the idea of death.

My anxiety became less fussy over the years. It wasn't all about health. It could be about my husband being in a car crash, my cats getting locked in the washing machine, or panicking that I'd over-shared. Again (and yet, here I am...).

So fast forward to the final year of my 30s. I was seeing this new counsellor, and he suggested I embrace the beige in life and see that being just OK is a good thing, and that being great is the cherry on top of the cake.

Of course, a relentless drive for perfection not only wastes time (because it's impossible to find it) but it also makes you behave like a bit of an idiot. Contrary to my in-built beliefs, an overwhelming confidence is not what makes you endearing.

I am now going to harp on about something I have harped on about many times in my book and in my blog. It was the time I met blogger and author Claire Eastham, who has social anxiety.

She sat there at a 'Time to Change' event, looking effortlessly cool. And I thought: "I wish I was like that." And then she stood up and said: "I have to tell you, I am absolutely sh*tting myself."

And I liked her more and thought, I can be like that.

So let me tell you something, when you embrace all the parts that make you who you are, like Claire was doing that day by admitting she was nervous as hell, the anxiety levels drop.

Early in my career, I would sometimes give talks about the theatre company I worked for. I always wanted to appear strong and confident. But I had this terrible obsessive thought before and during all speeches that I was going to pee my pants.

So, this year, for my book launch, rather than pretend I was going to give this cracking performance as a self-assured woman, I told the store manager that I was scared of peeing myself. I said if it took over my mind, I would weave it into my anxiety story and escape to the loo for two minutes. She was fine (my book, after all, is about anxiety).

Of course, I got through the whole event with no nervousness whatsoever. Because I wasn't pretending to be something I'm not. I was sharing my flaws rather than trying to hide them. Oh, the relief!

Something else that happened when I hit 40, too. I stopped wearing so much make-up. It's as if turning 40 gave me some kind of validation that I could be who I am and be OK with that.

"Being imperfect makes us who we are. And more often than not, it's those little imperfections that make people love us, too"



Lucy with Jo Kowalski from Time to Change, at Buckingham Palace on World Mental Health Day 2017

And that's the thing, I guess. I still have days where I obsess about things I shouldn't – my weight, my appearance, how I come across in social situations – but it happens less and less. I can now comfortably admit to friends how awkward I used to be, and it feels so much better.

Being imperfect makes us who we are. It makes us unique. And more often than not, it's those little imperfections that make people love us, too – although my rendition of Bonnie Tyler's 'Total Eclipse of the Heart' is perhaps pushing my husband's love to the limit.

Imperfection. Embrace it. Life's far less exhausting when you do.

Lucy's book, 'A Series of Unfortunate Stereotypes – Naming and Shaming Mental Health Stigmas', is out now (Trigger, £11.99)

OUR EXPERT SAYS

Lucy emphasises the importance of being able to see the many different aspects of yourself, and to embrace them all. Perfection is an illusion; being real is far more engaging, both for yourself and for those you come into contact with. I appreciate Lucy's focus on accepting her anxiety, accepting herself, and accepting things as they are. It is a freeing message that I hope readers will take on board, and use to energise themselves, too.



Fe Robinson | *MUKCP (reg)*
Psychotherapist and couples counsellor

How to talk to kids about **parental mental illness**

We can all agree that teaching kids to open up about their mental health and wellbeing is vital. But it can be hard to practise what we preach when it comes to opening up about our own struggles

Writing | **Bonnie Evie Gifford and Wendy Gregory** Illustrating | **Rosan Magar**

According to NHS Digital, one in five women and one in eight men in England have reported experiencing common mental illnesses, while the Mental Health Foundation found around 10% of all mothers and 6% of fathers in the UK may be experiencing a problem with their mental health at any given time. Over the past week alone, one in six of us will have experienced a common mental health problem.

As a parent or carer for a child, our natural instinct is often to shield them from big events or changes that are new or scary. We can all struggle with our mental health and wellbeing from time to time. But by discussing our own struggles – big and small – with our kids, we can help to show them that there's nothing to hide or be ashamed of.

While there is no pressure for you to share before (or if) you feel ready, if you do feel comfortable to talk things over, it can help set a great example for children by reinforcing the idea that it really is OK to talk about how they (and others) are feeling.

With the insight of counselling psychologist and writer Wendy Gregory, here we share advice on how to tell children about your mental ill-health.

For many parents, there is a fear that having a mental health problem may lead to them being considered unfit or unable to take care of their children. However, in the vast majority of cases, this is simply not true; most people with such difficulties are perfectly functional parents, with ups and downs like everyone else. However, you may wonder when and how much you should tell your children about your mental health issues.



1 TAKE THEIR AGE INTO ACCOUNT

At around age seven, the average child can start to put themselves in the position of someone else, so ensure that what you say to them is age appropriate. Don't worry about trying to explain all the details to a very young child, as it's likely that they won't really understand, and they don't need to. All they need to know is that 'mummy or daddy isn't well today, but they will get better again soon'.

2 USE SIMPLE TERMS

Assuming that your children are old enough to understand, it's important for them not to feel a sense of shame or stigma – they don't want to feel different from their friends. Explain your illness to them in simple terms, and reassure them that lots and lots of people have mental health issues at some point in their lives, and that most are able to cope well and recover. Ideally, you want to provide them with a positive coping model, and to encourage them to seek help themselves if they need it.

3 KEEP THEM IN THE LOOP

Children have a very good imagination, and they can become intensely anxious if they don't know what is going to happen to you, so try to keep them informed. If you are unwell, then tell them, and be open to any questions they ask.

> **Provide them with a positive coping model and encourage them to seek help themselves if they need it**

4 EXPLAIN AND REASSURE

Knowing about your condition can result in them worrying about themselves. Explain that this is not their fault in any way, and that it doesn't mean that they will grow up to develop mental health issues. But if they do, you can address it together.

5 SIGNPOST FURTHER SUPPORT

Finally, if you are a lone parent, it is important that your children have someone they trust that they can talk to if they are concerned about you. Make sure they know who to contact – be it a relative, a friend, or maybe even a mental health nurse.

Wendy Gregory is a counselling psychologist and writer, as well as a regular guest psychologist on BBC Talk Radio.

FIRST STEPS

For more information and advice on talking to children about mental health, visit:

- *Rethink.org* – helping change attitudes and the lives of those affected by mental illness.
- *Mind.org.uk* – one of the UK's leading mental health charities.
- *Place2Be.org.uk* – providing resources for parents and carers on supporting the wellbeing and mental health of children and young people.
- *Counselling-directory.org.uk* – for information and articles on parental and children's mental health, or to find a therapist near you.

Ask the experts



Lohani Noor, sex and relationship therapist on BBC Three's *Sex on the Couch*, and Counselling Directory member, answers your questions on sex and intimacy

Q My partner and I have very demanding jobs, so it can often feel like we don't see each other. We love each other very much, but I can't remember the last time we had sex. How can we make time to reignite this part of our relationship?

A It sounds like you both need a date night. A scheduled night together will give you both something to get excited about. I recommend that you take turns at inviting the other and setting the scene. As a general rule, ban all technology unless it's in the service of the date (such as an erotic backdrop to your intimate encounter). Think about the sex you previously enjoyed together, and see if you can re-enact a version of this. If you enjoyed sex in the car, but now have young kids, consider moving the car to the garage and have sex in it there. Date night doesn't have to be costly, or even involve going out. Invite your partner to take a bath or shower with you, offer them a massage, and don't limit sex to the bedroom. Make full use of your kitchen counter so that erotic memories come alive while you are cooking your dinner.

Q When we have sex, it's great, but generally I worry that the intimacy in our relationship has gone. I know sex is just one factor, but I don't know what to do. How can we get our intimacy back?

A It sounds to me like you have focused on becoming sexual beings, but have neglected sensuality. I recommend taking penetrative sex off the menu, and instead focus on spending quality time together. Kiss each other for at least two minutes daily, without the expectation of it leading to sex – just indulge in the moment. Send flirtatious texts to one another to build excitement, and to let the other know you're thinking about them. Enjoy full body cuddles in the morning, allowing yourselves to really caress and hold one another – again with no expectation of it leading to sex. Offer one another tender loving care. Share fond memories from the past, and talk often about future plans.



Lohani | BBC Studios

You can find more information about Lohani on *counselling-directory.org.uk*
Watch all episodes of BBC Three's *Sex on the Couch* on BBC iPlayer, available now.



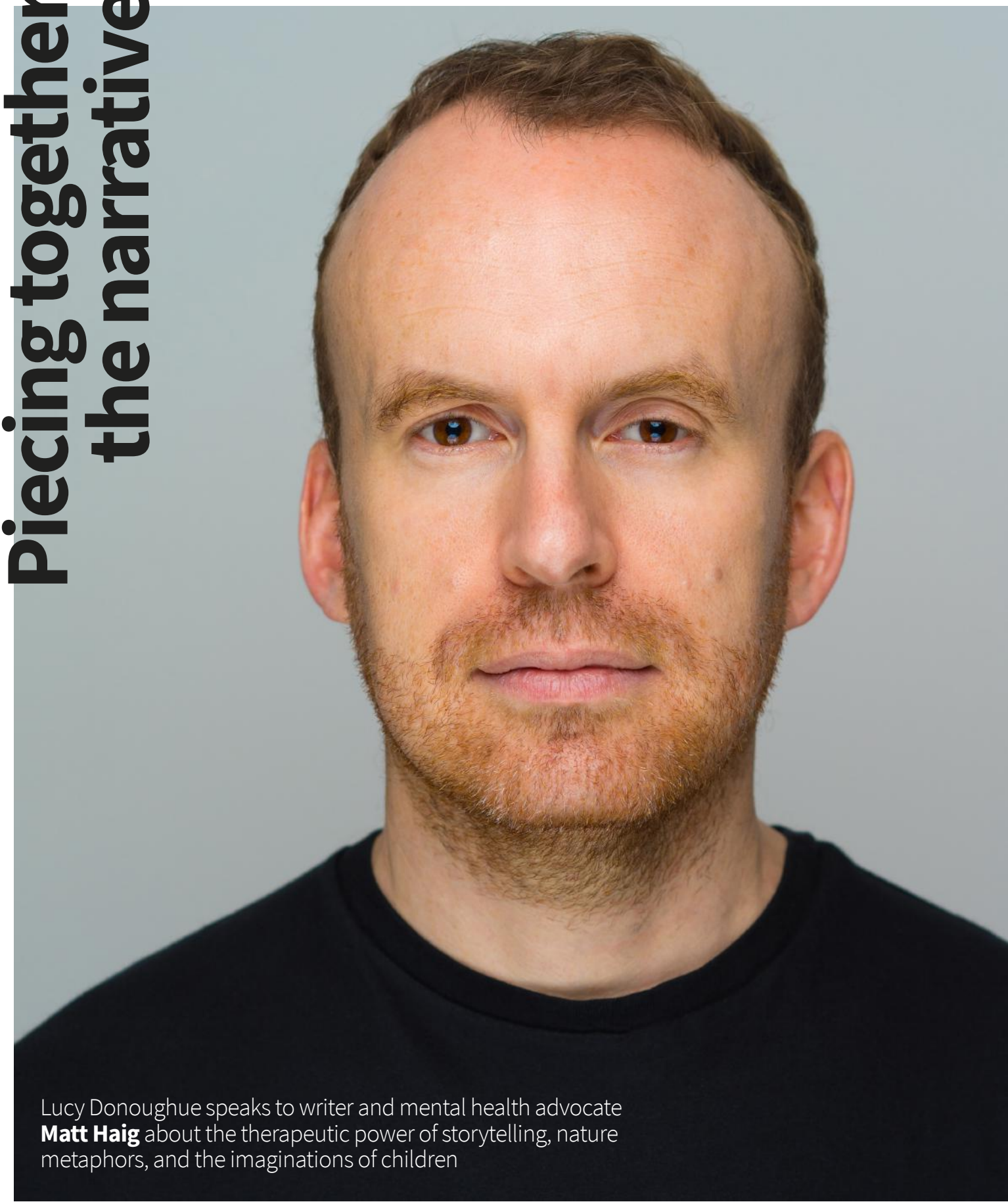
ASK THE EXPERTS

Brought to you by Counselling Directory

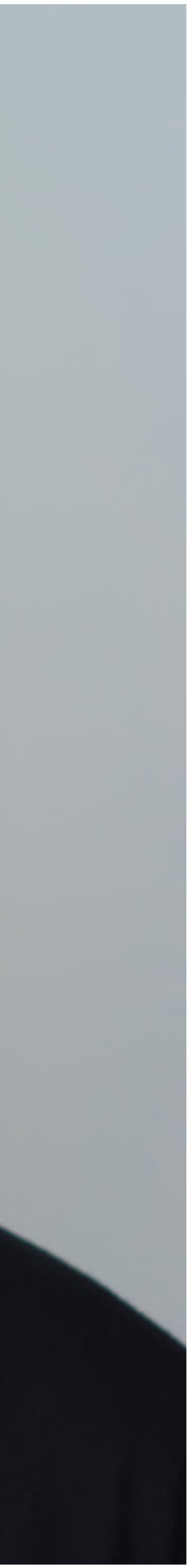
Q My sex drive has pretty much disappeared. I'm worried that it's not enough for my partner, but I'm embarrassed to talk about it with them. I'm so happy in my relationship, but why don't I want to have sex?

A There are many reasons why someone might lose their sex drive. Age – so the onset of the perimenopause for women, and reduced testosterone levels for men – and stress, being the two primary factors. Use of nicotine, alcohol, recreational drugs, antidepressants, and other medications, can create all sorts of sexual dysfunctions – such as an inability to orgasm, painful erections, poor or absent erections, dry vagina resulting in painful penetration – which can in turn lead to a loss of desire. If the dynamic of your relationship is not at fault, I strongly recommend that you see a medical practitioner to explore the cause of your loss of libido.

Piecing together the narrative



Lucy Donoughue speaks to writer and mental health advocate **Matt Haig** about the therapeutic power of storytelling, nature metaphors, and the imaginations of children



Writer Matt Haig is a generous storyteller. He's written a long list of books for both adults and children, fiction and nonfiction, and speaks regularly about mental health, using his own experience of a breakdown in his early 20s, and subsequent periods of anxiety and depression, to start the conversation.

Since then, Matt has continued to draw upon his experiences in his writing and mental health advocacy. He now helps a huge number of people to articulate and understand their experiences of mental ill-health, through his books, including *Notes on a Nervous Planet* and *Reasons to Stay Alive,* and the inspiring quotes he posts regularly on social media.

Happening across these quotes online, as someone who experiences anxiety and depression, always gives me a moment to pause and reflect. They are hopeful, relatable and, I'm sure, allow many others with mental health challenges to feel 'seen' at that moment too. 'You are not what you experience,' one of my favourite posts reads. 'If you are caught in a hurricane, you are not the hurricane. The weather will change. You will stay.'

"I feel like metaphor is massively important when talking about depression and anxiety, because they are invisible," Matt says. "So it's very hard for other people to see what's happening because it's all in your head.

"The frustration is that to be *seen* as needing help, you have to articulate what you are feeling, and quite often people who are struggling can't do that. I think that's why these quotes resonate."

For years, Matt struggled with this very same problem himself. "When I was in the depths of mental illness, I so wished I could explain to people around me what was going on – it's very hard to, when you're that low.

"I realise now, that by comparing mental illness with something we all experience, like nature, makes the concept easy to grasp for both people who have and who haven't lived with these conditions. I feel like it was so important to me to find a way to articulate the impact of mental ill-health, and it's probably why I spend so much of my time writing about it, now that I can."

> **The frustration is that to be *seen* as needing help, you have to articulate what you are feeling, and quite often people who are struggling can't do that**

Whether writing for others or recovering himself, words and stories have played a huge role in Matt's life. Reading, in particular, helped him when he had his first episode of mental ill-health. >>>



Matt with Emily Gravett, who illustrated his latest book

Photography | Kan Lailey

"When I had my breakdown, when I was very ill, I couldn't read at all. But when I was getting better, I read a lot; stories and fiction generally, can have a therapeutic effect. If you're stuck in a bad time in your life, stories can take you out of yourself," Matt says, referencing the escapism a good read can provide.

Reading a lot of fiction, Matt found the linear narratives, plot progression, and character arcs in these books helped him to recognise the possibility of forward motion from the dark place he was in.

> **"It's where a lot of our minds are – half in our reality, and half in our dreams"**

"I really saw the benefit of narrative, how it shapes understanding, and how we make sense of our own lives through the stories we tell about ourselves. We are a species that runs on stories."

Matt's own story was catapulted into the best-selling section in 2015 when he released *Reasons to Stay Alive*, a memoir based on his experiences, and the journey back from a mental health crisis. He has subsequently written *Notes on a Nervous Planet* ('inviting us to feel calmer, happier and to question the habits of the digital age') and *The Truth Pixie* (she can only tell the truth), among many, many others.

Evie and the Animals is Matt's latest offering for children, and was inspired by his daughter's love of animals. It's equal parts adventure, morality tale, and fantasy.

"My favourite kinds of stories are those with one foot rooted in the real world, and one rooted in fantasy," Matt says. "It's where a lot of our minds are – half in our reality, and half in our dreams."

While Matt's passion for writing is clearly evident, he reveals he really thrives from and enjoys, writing for a younger audience.

"The great thing about writing for children is that while their vocabulary and experiences might be smaller, their imaginations are much wider," he explains. "We lose that as we get older. Children will understand something isn't 100% real, but they will go with the daydream, unlike adults.

> **Your mental health is a garden, that you tend to and have to maintain, as it grows and changes**

"So now, even when I'm writing for adults, I try to pretend that I am just writing for children who happen to be old, to keep my own imagination open."

But it's not just the world of imagination that's important to Matt. A recurring theme in *Evie* is also our real-life environment, and specifically what we as adults are doing to harm the planet and it's other inhabitants.

"I think we've lost our way," Matt says. "We feel very removed from the natural world – even when we talk about 'saving the planet'. It's very tempting and easy to feel like the planet is something else we have to save, rather than *we* are the planet.

"One of the reasons we are destroying the world is because we see ourselves as separate from nature. It's come to a point where we live such unnatural lives that it's not only bad for our personal psychology, but it's also bad for the state of the world, and the future prospects of our species."

An element of the unnatural lives we live is our obsession with screens and social media, as opposed to the world outside our windows. As a writer and speaker, Matt is in the public eye, and has a major presence online too. How does he manage this?

"I used to be really bad, and would get into loads of long, pointless, drawn out arguments. Since then, I've learned more about how and when to engage with it – and when I need to ignore social media. I now take it all with a pinch of salt.

"Things can feel intense and heated in the moment, but a few hours down the line, it's gone.

"Obviously it gets to me sometimes, but you have to place things in context," he concludes. "People who are generally happy, calm and contented in their lives, aren't trying to make strangers online unhappy."

On a positive social media note, Matt was recently one of only 16 accounts followed by the Duke and Duchess of Sussex on Instagram, to highlight Mental Health Awareness Week (one of two individual's accounts, the other being friend and *Happiful* favourite, Bryony Gordon). This brought a slew of new followers, which Matt says was "nice and very flattering", but I don't get the sense it has changed his wary 'pinch of salt' perspective around social media.

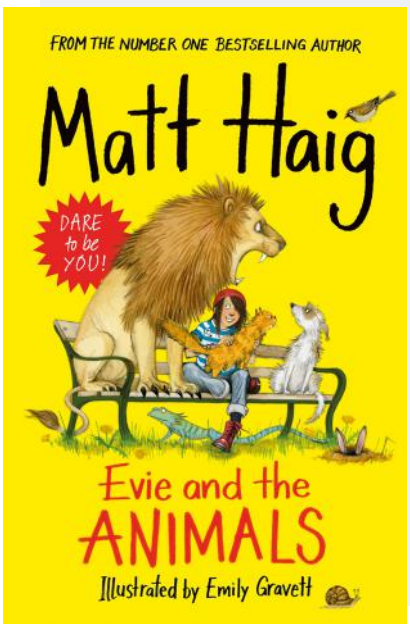
As we end our conversation, I ask Matt where he is in regards to thoughts on his own mental health? His response again shows his deep affinity with the natural world.

"I accept that, as with everyone's mental health, it's a changing landscape; your mental health is a garden, that you tend to and have to maintain, as it grows and changes."

"And as you get older you understand what makes you feel worse or better, and you start to piece the story together, almost like a detective – the reason why you've felt ill, and any patterns there are. It means that when you wobble, there's no panicking – you put your own coping systems in place.

"And remember," he says emphatically, "every time you've been ill you've recovered. You may have practice in getting ill, but that means you've also practised getting better."

Matt Haig's 'Evie and the Animals' is out now (£12.99, Canongate)



~~£57~~

£40

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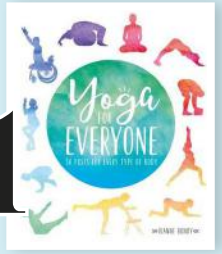
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Happiful TOP 10

JULY

Slide into summer with our recommendations for July. Listen to the podcast getting honest about the big questions, have a giggle over life's quirks with an online comic, and set course for a festival that's out of this world

1 PAGE-TURNERS



***Yoga for Everyone: 50 Poses For Every Type of Body* by Dianne Bondy**

A beautifully visual book that proves anyone can benefit from yoga. Working its way through different poses, and showing how they can be modified for any type of body, *Yoga for Everyone* opens the door for people of any age, size or ability to get involved. *(Dorling Kindersley Ltd, £12.99)*

2 GET GOING

Dog Jog

Running is better with a friend, especially when that friend has four legs and enough enthusiasm to get you through that last kilometre. Taking place from June to October at locations across the UK, Dog Jog is a 5K challenge where you and your furry friend get together to raise money for a good cause, which is sure to set some tails wagging. *(Find a Dog Jog near you at dogjog.co.uk)*

TREAT YOURSELF

Morgan Jost Candles

Take a moment for yourself with these natural oil, paraben-free, soy wax candles, hand poured in Henley-on-Thames. Coming in a range of soothing scents, 50% of their profits are donated to Mind, and every part of the packaging – from label to lid – is recyclable.

(£18, Visit morganjost.co.uk for more)

WIN!
Morgan Jost Eden candle!
To enter, email competitions@happiful.com telling us about your favourite way to relax. UK mainland, entries close 17 July.

3



OUT AND ABOUT 4

World Snail Racing Championships

Hold on to your seats for the annual World Snail Racing Championships in Congham, Norfolk. In a nail-biting race, the snails make their way across 13 inches to be crowned the winner. The world record was set in 1995 by a snail called Archie, who did it in 2 minutes. But will this be the year his reign is toppled?

(20 July, find out more at snailracing.net)

5 TECH TIP-OFFS

One You Couch to 5K

If you want to improve your fitness levels, this tried and tested app from Public Health England could be a great first step. The app builds you up over nine weeks with step-by-step instructions that mix up running and walking until you're able to fly through a 5K.

(Available for FREE from the App Store and Google Play)



6 SQUARE EYES

The Lion King

Featuring a star cast – including Beyoncé, Donald Glover, Seth Rogen, James Earl Jones, and John Oliver – and released 25 years after the original Disney film, get ready for the live-action remake of the story of a young lion prince and his journey back to his pride.

(In cinemas 19 July)

7 THE CONVERSATION

International Day of Friendship

Through difficult times, friends are often the force that holds everything together. International Day of Friendship is a time to recognise the relationships, bonds of trust, and love that flourishes throughout our lifetimes.

(30 July, head to un.org for more information on the day and how you can celebrate)



8 LEND US YOUR EARS

Radio 1's 'Life Hacks'

Hosted by broadcaster Katie Thistleton, and medical doctor Dr Radha Modgil, this podcast comes with an honest chat about the topics you're scared to ask about. From childhood grief, to burnout and harassment in the workplace, 'Life Hacks' tackles the big things in a safe, friendly, non-shaming way.

(Available on the BBC Sounds app)

9 PUT ON A SHOW

Bluedot Festival

Be transported to another world at this space-themed festival that offers a packed programme of scientific experiments, alongside talks, immersive art, and live music. Set at the Jodrell Bank Observatory in Cheshire, celebrate the wonders of the universe and the way it can be captured in art.

(18–21 July. Buy tickets at discoverthebluedot.com)

10 PLUGGED-IN

Strange Planet

Read the adorable digital comic that features aliens working their way through the quirks of human life in a hilariously literal and tender way. From the strange ceremony of meetings, to the unique relationship we have with our neighbours, these simple comments will have you looking at everyday rituals in a whole new light.



(Follow @nathanwpylestrangeplanet on Instagram)

Images | *The Lion King*: Fairview Entertainment and Walt Disney Pictures, Strange Planet: *@nathanwpylestrangeplanet*

Alcohol addiction

Booze is one of the biggest risk factors for death, ill-health, and disability in the UK, yet signs of its serious misuse can be hard to identify

Writing | **Fiona Thomas** Illustrating | **Rosan Magar**

While there's nothing wrong with enjoying a glass of wine after a stressful day, evidence suggests many of us are unable to make sensible choices when it comes to booze.

In fact, alcohol misuse is the biggest risk factor for death, ill health, and disability among 15 to 49-year-olds in the UK. While both sexes are at risk, 65% of all alcohol-related deaths in the UK in 2014 were male.

In England alone there are an estimated 595,131 dependent drinkers. But alcohol addiction can be difficult to spot. The sliding scale ranges from needing to get drunk every Friday night, to risking everything to get a daily fix. Alcohol is a drug, and people can easily become addicted. Unfortunately, the signs can often go unnoticed, as those affected are often extremely skilled at covering their tracks.

1 BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES

Quite often people who are addicted will not act like themselves. For example, they may have extreme mood swings or appear irritable. They might become angry if they are unable to get access to alcohol, or if others don't want to join in. They may even become secretive as they feed their addiction in private, or make excuses to justify their excessive drinking – such as a bad week or a break-up. They are likely to become increasingly isolated.

2 LIFE CHANGES

Alcohol can become the most important aspect of an addict's life, and they may risk losing things in order to drink. You might notice they regularly miss work, or get in trouble as their performance dwindles for no apparent reason. They may constantly argue with friends and family members, or have a failed relationship as a result of their erratic behaviour.



4 SIGNS TO SPOT

For support, contact your GP or try:

Al-Anon
0800 0086 811

Alcoholics Anonymous
0800 9177 650

Drinkline
0300 1231 110
drinkaware.co.uk

3 PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

Dependent drinkers are likely to have a higher tolerance, meaning over time they'll need to drink higher quantities to achieve the desired effect. When unable to drink they may show signs of withdrawal, because their body has become accustomed to functioning with a certain level of alcohol. Symptoms can show six hours after the last drink, and include anxiety, shaking, vomiting, headaches, and insomnia, and stop when alcohol is consumed.

4 PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS

Anxiety, depression, and suicidal feelings can develop in those who are alcohol-dependent. This is because regular, heavy drinking interferes with neurotransmitters in our brains that are needed for a healthy mind. These symptoms can also appear during withdrawal, which means that the person affected is likely to drink more to alter their mood. This is one of many reasons why the cycle of alcohol addiction can be so hard to break.

WHAT NOW?

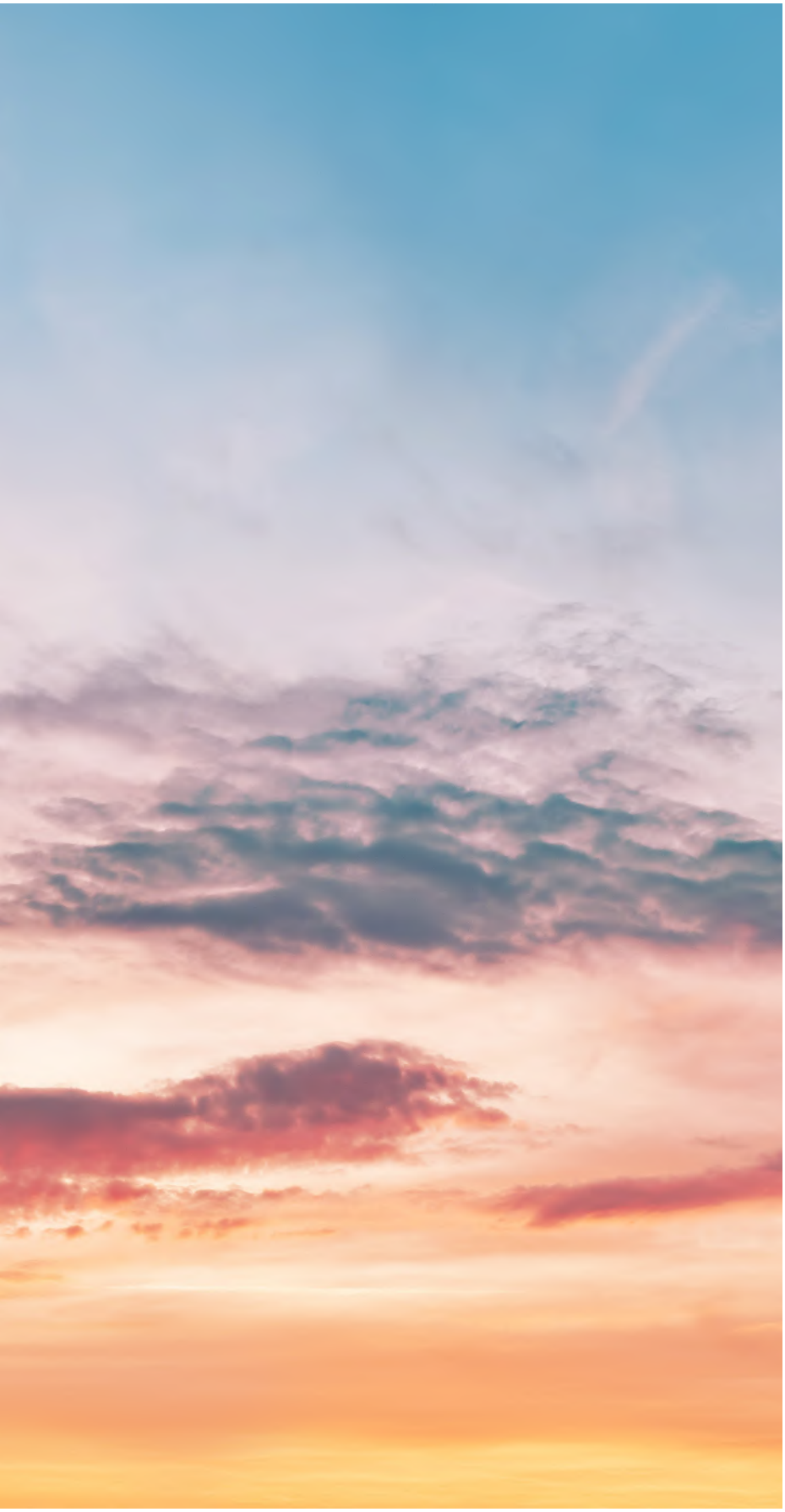
Approaching the subject with someone you love is probably going to cause some friction, so choose your timing wisely. Make sure both you and the person in question are at ease. No one wants to feel attacked, so be kind and sympathetic with your wording. Maybe start with an open question such as: "How are things going at work? Are there are any changes you can make in your personal life to improve how you're feeling?"

It's best to avoid accusatory wording such as 'addict' or 'alcoholic', and instead use a caring tone: 'I'm concerned. How can I help?' It's likely the person will take the problem more seriously once they speak to a professional, so encourage them to speak to a doctor or visit the Drinkaware website, where they can complete a self-assessment form. The website also offers advice on how to cut down on drinking, with hints and tips tailored for festivals, university, work and more.





I really don't have a choice – making it is my only option





My escape to an incredible new life

A Liberian refugee forced to flee from her tyrannical father and shattered homeland as a child, Annprincess has launched a career in music, inspired by her traumatic experiences

Writing | **Annprincess Johnson Koffa**

I was born in war-torn Liberia, but my mother and I were forced to flee to survive.

We lived with my father, his eight other women, and their children. But this was not the life my mother wanted for us.

We fled Liberia when I was only six. I remember the house we lived in was huge and white, and always guarded by police officers. Life there with my father was very difficult. He was a politician and had been a rebel warlord in the Liberian civil war in the late 1980s.

My mom never knew my dad on a personal level. She only knows the military side. But I don't remember him being unkind to his children. I think he loved us; I just come from a family that showed love differently. >>>



'I still remember the day my mother decided she couldn't take it any more'



Annprincess and her mum

His relationship with my mother was a bit different though – I remember my father always sending her to jail because she stood up to him. When my mom was taken away, which happened quite frequently, I was very much alone. The other women in the house didn't want to live together, and so naturally did not care for anybody else's children.

I remember, around the age of four or five, having to put myself to bed. I was scared of the dark, so I slept with my back against the wall to pretend it was my mom.

I still remember the day my mother decided she couldn't take it any more. My father had been arrested for becoming aggressive with the police when they refused to arrest my mother again. While he was away, my mother saw this as our opportunity to escape. She took me outside and explained that we were leaving. Being a child, I didn't know that life wasn't supposed to be like this, so I didn't understand that we were leaving forever.

When we got to the large fence that surrounded our house, she told me to jump over. I was too scared – it was pitch black on the other side, and I thought I saw something moving. But my mother told me to listen to her and jump, so of course I trusted her.

We came to Norway with the help of the UN in Nigeria. They had a programme that helped single mothers get away. It took us years to get on the programme, and when we did, we thought everything was going to be OK. But the countries we applied to kept rejecting us.

Finally Norway accepted us, and so began the start of an incredible new life, with some different challenges – but we had escaped and were happy.

Growing up in Africa, the colour of my skin was not really something I thought about. It took Norway to make me aware of it – not just aware, but ashamed. Comments from strangers, and even my so-called friends, about the differences between their skin and body and mine, made me ashamed when looking in the mirror. For a long time, I wished I looked like them, just to fit in and be liked.

> **I am now even more determined than ever to continue with my music career, as I believe in myself – and so do many others**

The one thing that began giving me self-confidence was singing, after a friend of mine told me I had a good voice. So at the age of

13 I started practising and writing songs, trying to hit those Celine Dion high notes.

At the time, singing and writing music wasn't an emotional thing for me; I wrote and sang because people around me told me I could, and I've always loved writing stories and poetry, so I did because it was fun.

But as I entered my teenage years, things started getting more difficult. Hormones started kicking in, and the guys started dating these blonde, blue-eyed beautiful girls. I didn't seem to fit in. Reflecting on it now, I realise that I started doing music so that people would like me. I thought I would be more popular if people thought I could sing.

I played football, and being a tomboy became more my thing. I started when I was around 10 and played seriously until I was around 20. Becoming part of the football team really helped me interact with other people. Joining a team gave me the chance to make good friends in a sport I loved.

But I never really learnt how to communicate my feelings or emotions very well, so I didn't know how to talk to anyone about the loneliness I was feeling. I cried a lot by myself and also felt so angry.

With all these emotions in my head, I think music then became a way to express my feelings. To sing about the emotions I was feeling inside was easier for me than to talk about them. It's still fun to write music, but for me music now means more – it's about expressing my emotions.

I also decided to challenge myself, and so I signed up for *Norwegian Idol* four times. Unfortunately, each time I was told I was not good enough. One judge even told me that singing wasn't something I could do for a living. But I was not going to give up on something that I loved. After getting so many nos and so many people telling me to do something else, music became my therapy.

I'm now more determined than ever to continue my music career, as I believe in myself – and so do many others. I look to my music to help improve life even more for my mother and me. I want to be able to finally give my mother a comfortable and stress-free life.

I'm currently focusing on performing, and am going to be playing at festivals this summer. I want to find a label to work with, performing everywhere I can, and continue to work really hard to build my fanbase.

Annprincess' single 'Survive' is out now. You can listen to her music on Spotify and YouTube



Annprincess uses music to express things words can't capture

> **To sing about the emotions I was feeling inside was easier for me than to talk about them**

I'm also working on my EP, featuring about four or five songs.

Looking back on how far we've come, I know my mother and I are in a better place now. I am so thankful that my mother saved us, and gave me the opportunity for a new life, and to pursue music.

From feeling like the underdog, I now feel I am making good progress. I balance two jobs alongside my music career, and hope to inspire others to never to give up in pursuit of their dreams.

I don't have a choice – making it is my only option.

OUR EXPERT SAYS

From a remarkable childhood, Annprincess went on a journey few of us can imagine – feeling like an outsider, struggling to communicate, and trying to find her way in the world. Through music, Annprincess found not just a release, but her passion in life. Her determination to use her experiences in a positive way is truly inspiring. Sometimes our struggles may seem insurmountable, but as Annprincess shows us, we just have to believe, make a plan, and follow our dreams!



Rachel Coffey | *BA MA NLP Mstr*
Life coach looking to encourage confidence and motivation

Fruity and Fabulous

Cool down and stay sweet with three family favourites

Writing | **Ellen Hoggard**

I'm keeping this one short and sweet (pun intended) so you can jump right in to satisfy your sweet tooth this summer. These recipes are perfect for kids, impressing your guests at a picnic or BBQ, or simply for those days where you need something to tickle your tastebuds.

Dessert doesn't have to be complicated. Of course, there are the days when only the richest, most decadent dessert will do, but during the summer months, simple is often best. Enjoy!



SIMPLE BERRY 'ICE CREAM'

Serves 6

Ingredients

250g Greek or natural yoghurt
450g frozen mixed berries

Method

In a blender, add the berries and blitz to a crumbly texture. Add the yoghurt a spoonful at a time and blend until smooth but still thick. If you would like a sweeter taste, add a drizzle of honey or maple syrup. Serve immediately.



FROZEN FRUIT KEBABS

Makes 8

Ingredients

4 small mangoes
1 small pineapple
2 limes
120g white chocolate, melted
8 skewers

Method

- Cut the mangoes from the stone, peel and halve. Cut each half into four slices. Set aside. Peel the pineapple, slice and cut each segment into triangles.
- Start threading the fruit on the skewers. When complete, place on a lined baking tray.
- In a separate bowl, finely grate the lime zest. Set aside. Halve the limes and squeeze the juice over the fruit. Add a sprinkling of zest. Freeze for four hours.
- When ready to serve, melt the white chocolate in a small microwave bowl. Transfer the frozen fruit kebabs to a serving plate and drizzle over the chocolate.

CHOCOLATE DIPPED BANANAS

Makes 8

Ingredients

4 medium-ripe bananas
8 lollipop sticks
170g dark chocolate, squared
3 tbsp chopped nuts

Method

- Peel and halve the bananas. Insert a stick into each 'banana pop' and place on a tray. Freeze for three hours.
- Pour the chopped nuts (I like hazelnuts) on a plate and set aside. Melt the chocolate in a heatproof bowl. When smooth, pour into a tall glass. Dip each frozen banana into the chocolate, remove and roll in the nut coating. Leave to cool.
- Serve immediately or wrap in baking paper and freeze until ready to serve.

Find a nutritionist near you at *nutritionist-resource.org.uk*

OUR EXPERT SAYS...

SIMPLE BERRY 'ICE CREAM'

Frozen fruit, especially red and purple berries, are nutritionally as good as fresh, and bursting with antioxidants. Add mint or basil to bring out their flavour. The yoghurt has pre- and probiotic qualities – great for gut health – plus bone-building calcium and protein. For vegans, substitute the yoghurt with a plant-based version.

FROZEN FRUIT KEBABS

Mangoes and pineapples are good sources of fibre. You could also use watermelon, which contains less sugar, but high levels of antioxidants to keep the immune system in top condition. Drizzling 15g of chocolate per portion is a great way to keep the sugar content low. To make it vegan-friendly, opt for dark chocolate instead.

CHOCOLATE DIPPED BANANAS

Every year in the UK, we each eat around 100 bananas! They provide filling fibre, and lots of potassium to balance fluid levels and regulate heart function. You could coat the bananas in sesame seeds for a hit of calcium, or chopped pumpkin seeds. Like nuts, they add protein plus omega-3 fatty acids.



Susan Hart is a nutrition coach and speaker. As well as delivering healthy eating advice to individuals, Susan hosts regular workshops and runs vegan cooking classes. Find out more at nutrition-coach.co.uk

MAKING HEADWAY

Migraineurs, as migraine sufferers are known, are familiar with taking a tablet and retreating into the darkness to wait for the pounding pain, throbbing temples, nausea, vomiting, and increased sensitivity to pass. Thankfully, as research progresses, an end to the pain may be in sight. Nutritional therapist and nutritionist Sally Parr explores how a multifaceted approach could help manage the 200,000 migraine attacks that occur each day in the UK

Writing | **Sally Parr**

If you're a migraine sufferer, you're in great company. Whoopi Goldberg, Ben Affleck, Elle Macpherson, and Sharon Stone are just some of the famous faces who've spoken about life with this common neurological condition. Delve deeper into the past and Lewis Carroll is thought to have used his own experience of migraines, with its resultant hallucinations, to inspire his *Alice in Wonderland* books.

With research estimating that migraines cost the NHS around £150 million each year – although the total financial burden on the economy is believed to be a staggering £3.5 billion annually – and more than 50% of sufferers unhappy with their treatment, understanding the condition and what we can do to manage it, or potentially prevent it, is of paramount importance.

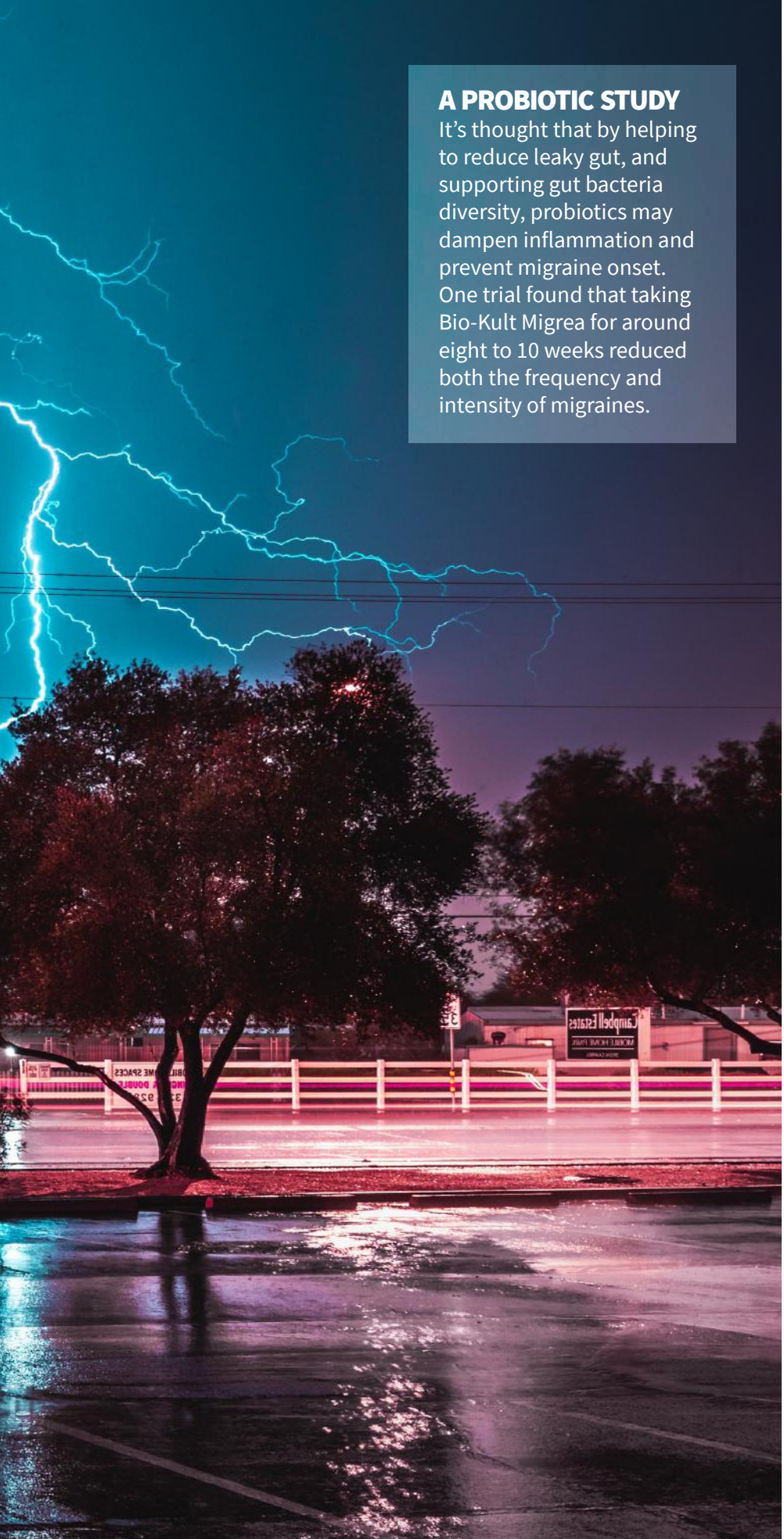
Here, we'll explore exactly what a migraine is, the factors that can contribute towards experiencing them, as well as the options for managing them, and lifestyle changes that could help stop migraines in their tracks.

What is a migraine?

As the most common neurological condition affecting the developed world, the name 'migraine' derives from the Greek 'hemicrania', which means half-headed, and refers to the throbbing sensation and excruciating pain often felt on one side of the head of those experiencing it.

Although health professionals originally believed migraines to be





A PROBIOTIC STUDY

It's thought that by helping to reduce leaky gut, and supporting gut bacteria diversity, probiotics may dampen inflammation and prevent migraine onset. One trial found that taking Bio-Kult Migrea for around eight to 10 weeks reduced both the frequency and intensity of migraines.

the result of a blood vessel disorder, due to the pulsing sensation often felt, it is now considered a sensory perception problem instead.

While what acts as a trigger might vary from person to person, people suffering migraines often experience a sensitivity to light, smells, or noise.

This hypersensitivity to external stimuli can impact our ability to sleep, focus, and concentrate, along with disrupting appetite and mood (which is no surprise when we consider the accompanying nausea and vomiting).

The specific stages and symptoms include:

Prodrome:
Experienced by up to 40% of people with migraines, with warning signs including constipation, cravings, changed mood, stiffness, thirst, and needing to urinate more than usual.

Aura:
Around 25% of people who have migraines experience this stage, which can occur before or during the headache. Sufferers may see lights, shapes, experience dizziness, and feel tingly or numb. Some people also hallucinate smells and sounds.

Headache attack:
Sometimes lasting up to 72 hours, this is characterised by throbbing, one-sided pain, sensitivity to light, sound and smells, sickness and nausea, dizziness, or blurred vision.

Postdrome:
This is often described as the 'hung-over' feeling following a migraine, with either euphoria or low mood, fatigue, confusion, weakness, dizziness or continued sensitivity. >>>

Migraines can be quite a unique experience, with people affected by some stages more than others, and experiencing symptoms to different degrees.

Cause and effect

Peter Goadsby, professor of neurology at Kings College, London, and trustee at the Migraine Trust, notes that migraines can be a result of "an instability in the way the brain deals with incoming sensory information, with that instability affected by physiological changes like sleep, exercise and hunger".

The name 'migraine' derives from the Greek 'hemicrania', which means half-headed, and refers to the throbbing sensation and excruciating pain

It's worth noting, however, that in 90% of cases, experiencing migraines runs in the family – with women three times more likely to be affected than men, due to hormonal fluctuations (most notably with oestrogen).

With this potential genetic link at play, researchers have identified mutations in four genes which could explain it. These genes provide the 'codes' that ensure nerve cells in the brain and wider nervous system can 'talk' to each other, via neurotransmitters. These mutations are thought to lead to the onset of a migraine, with symptoms including aura – seeing double, experiencing flashing lights or zig-zags in the field of vision, and one-sided weakness which may precede the actual migraine onset.

Managing migraines

While genetics may play a part, there are many factors that can result in migraines which can be modified. Being a smoker, taking the oral contraceptive, poor sleep, and obesity are all thought to make migraines more likely.

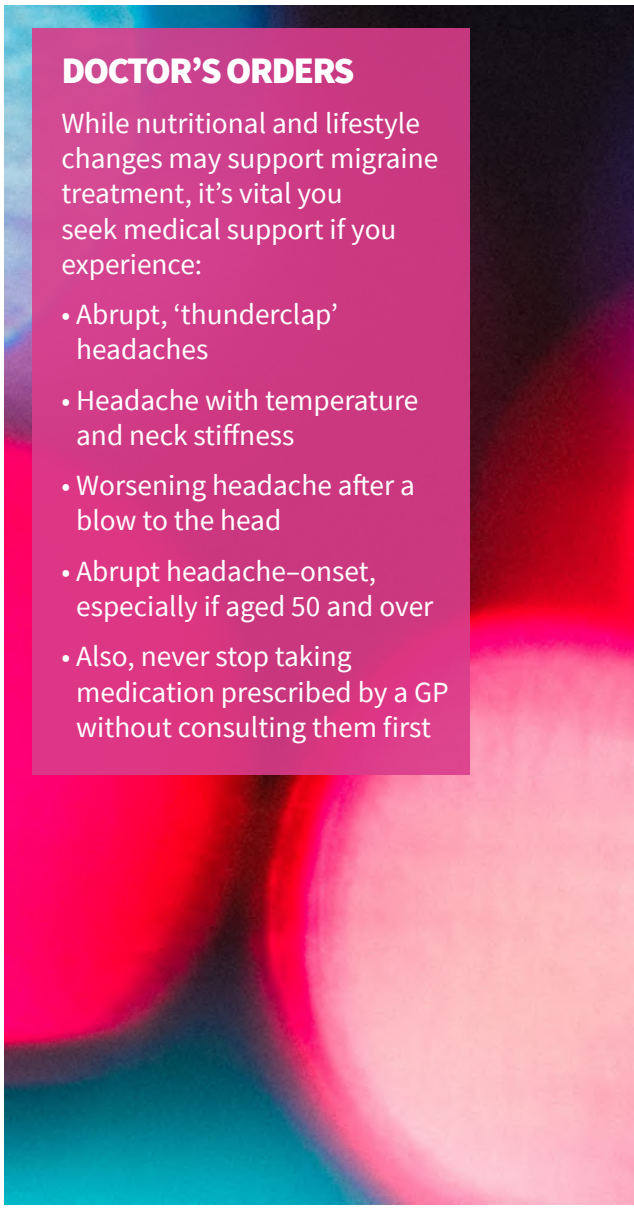
For some people, painkillers can alleviate the symptoms of a painful migraine attack. However, for others, these may impact digestive function, and actually make it more difficult for them to digest and absorb nutrients. This can make matters worse since it can lead to increased sensitivity, and reduce the sufferer's ability to support efficient energy function, meaning that looking to our lifestyle and food remains essential.

Nutritionally speaking

Gut bacteria is thought to play a significant role with migraines, due to its ability to impact neural, endocrine, and immune signalling. Recently, a subset of migraines has been identified that may be fuelled by gastric issues promoting inflammation. Conditions such as 'leaky gut' and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) may lead to nutrient malabsorption, compounding matters, while new evidence suggests that IgG – mediated food intolerance – can also impact the condition.

Fluctuating hormones – at any age and stage, or because of medication – may result in symptom onset, or worsen an attack. Consequently, it's important to support digestive health, since this encourages efficient hormone elimination, and improved nutrient absorption.

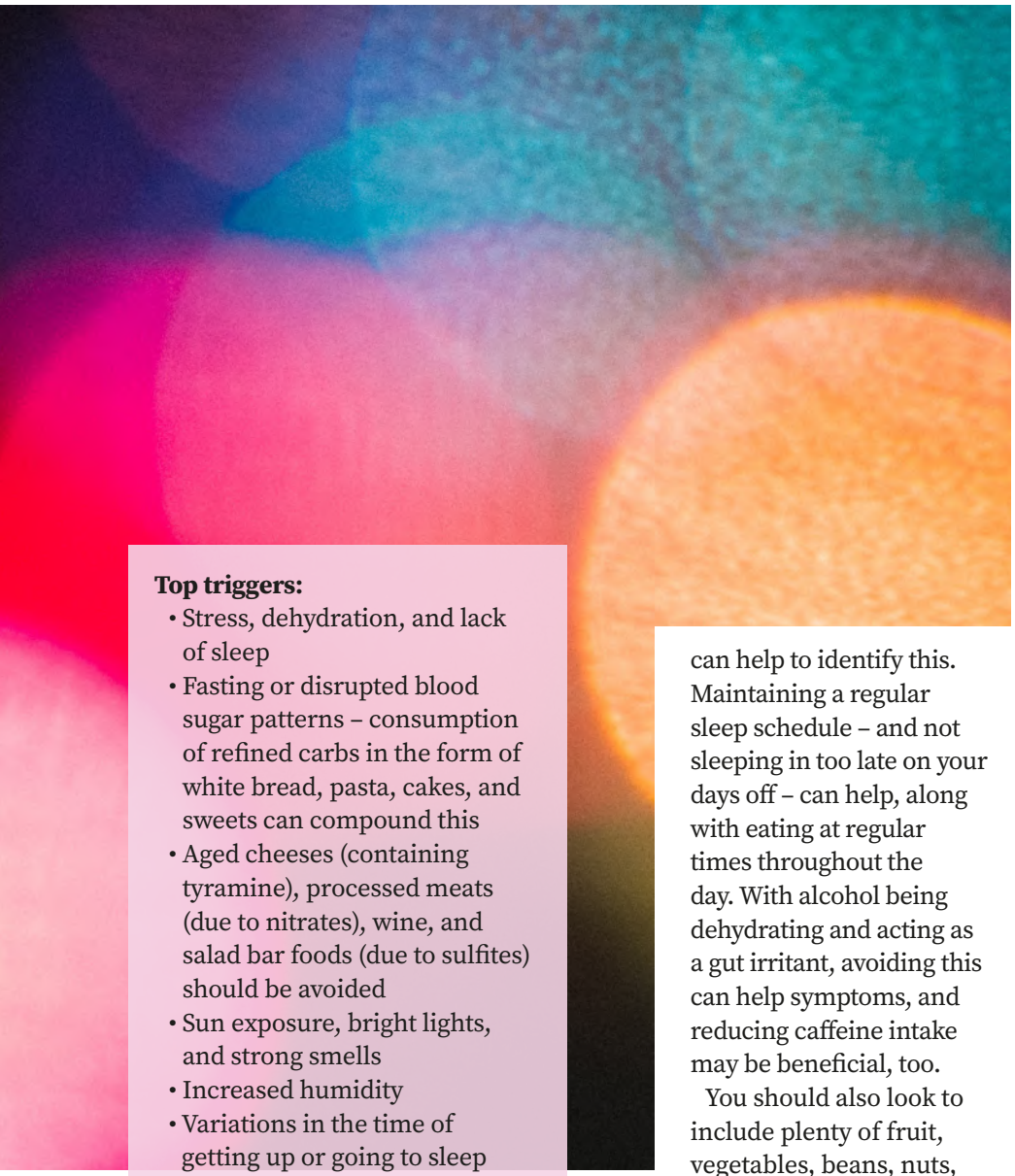
Eating a wide range of different plant-based foods every day, and removing irritants including gluten, alcohol, caffeine, and sugar (even for a month or two) can encourage the gut to heal.



DOCTOR'S ORDERS

While nutritional and lifestyle changes may support migraine treatment, it's vital you seek medical support if you experience:

- Abrupt, 'thunderclap' headaches
- Headache with temperature and neck stiffness
- Worsening headache after a blow to the head
- Abrupt headache–onset, especially if aged 50 and over
- Also, never stop taking medication prescribed by a GP without consulting them first



Top triggers:

- Stress, dehydration, and lack of sleep
- Fasting or disrupted blood sugar patterns – consumption of refined carbs in the form of white bread, pasta, cakes, and sweets can compound this
- Aged cheeses (containing tyramine), processed meats (due to nitrates), wine, and salad bar foods (due to sulfites) should be avoided
- Sun exposure, bright lights, and strong smells
- Increased humidity
- Variations in the time of getting up or going to sleep
- Extreme physical exertion, though gentle workouts are recommended if they can be tolerated
- Hunger
- Alcohol
- Caffeine

The good news is, a lot of these triggers can be controlled and managed. If you are concerned that an intolerance might be contributing to your migraines, keeping a food and symptoms diary can help to identify this. Maintaining a regular sleep schedule – and not sleeping in too late on your days off – can help, along with eating at regular times throughout the day. With alcohol being dehydrating and acting as a gut irritant, avoiding this can help symptoms, and reducing caffeine intake may be beneficial, too.

You should also look to include plenty of fruit, vegetables, beans, nuts, and seeds in your diet as these promote diversity of gut bacteria, while increasing healthy fats (found in wild trout or salmon, olives, avocado and their oils) that may help to counter inflammation.

Increasing magnesium levels may help to relieve constipation, cramps, fatigue, low mood and anxiety. Known as the relaxation mineral, it may also help with blood sugar regulation, to prevent energy highs and lows, which can make migraines worse.

In 90% of cases, experiencing migraines runs in the family – with females three times more likely to be affected than men

Good sources include dark green leafy veg, almonds, brown rice, avocado, and black beans, as well as natural yogurt and kefir (and protein-rich foods may enhance absorption).

Speaking to a registered nutritional therapist can be really beneficial, as they can advise on your diet, check out supplement interactions with medications, and ensure that excluding certain foods won't leave you nutritionally deprived.

While the impact of migraines may differ for all sufferers, combining nutritional strategies with relaxation, getting adequate sleep, knowing your triggers, taking gentle exercise, and remaining well-hydrated, may be as useful as popping pills when it comes to managing the condition.

Sally Parr is a registered nutritional therapist and nutritionist. She regularly contributes to the national press on wellbeing, and nutrition topics. Visit vivavitaenutrition.co.uk

Nine to Thrive

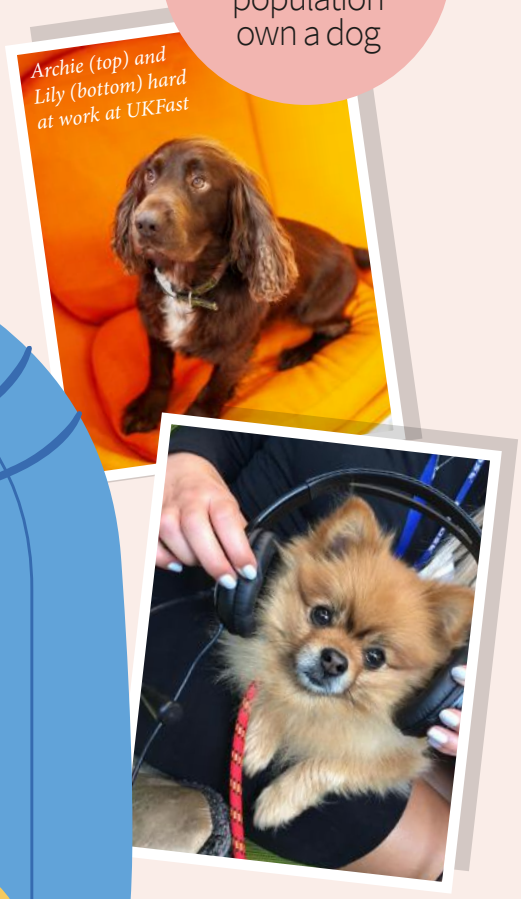
Writing | **Kathryn Wheeler** Illsutrating | **Rosan Magar**

Whatever way you make a living, you shouldn't have to sacrifice your mental health for it. As the conversation around workplace wellbeing continues, organisations across the country are loosening their ties, breaking the mould, and re-thinking what it means to go to work. And they're clocking in right on time





24% of the UK population own a dog



Workplace wellbeing is *en vogue* at the moment – and so it should be. The NHS found that one in three of the UK workforce will be formally diagnosed with a mental health condition in their lifetime, and work-related stress and mental illness account for more than half of all sick-days.

With greater awareness of how mental health affects us all daily, a new wave of forward-thinking organisations are surfacing. We spoke to four companies who are putting workplace wellbeing on the programme.

BRING YOUR DOG TO WORK DAY, EVERY DAY

With 24% of the UK population owning a dog, the juggling act of balancing work with pet-care is no easy feat. Consider that, alongside the wellbeing benefits of spending time with dogs, and a solution may just start to appear.

Two years ago, Lawrence Jones, CEO of UKFast – a cloud hosting firm – began noticing that a number of dogs had begun visiting them in the office.

"They were no trouble, and we quickly realised how much of an energy boost they brought," Lawrence explains. "People light up when they see a pet sleeping under someone's desk!"

So UKFast made the gutsy decision to create an open-door policy for employees' pets. To keep things in check the policy came with a series of guidelines, including the requirement that all pets must be fully vaccinated and >>>



Plants in offices can increase productivity by 6%, and creativity by **15%**

> **People light up when they see a pet sleeping under someone's desk**

insured, must be supervised at all times, and that the team must sit down and have a chat to ensure everyone is comfortable before any new canine co-workers arrive at the office.

"It wasn't long before more pets appeared – we even had a lizard in our finance office for a day!" says Lawrence. "While it would be easy to assume that dogs become a huge distraction from the work that needs to be done, there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that having them around improves people's moods and boosts productivity."

CO-WORKING COMMUNITY

Freelancing can be a lonely business. While freelancers are free from some of the pressures that may accompany traditional employment, they can also miss out on structure and socialisation.



LABS co-working space in London

With the advances in technology, a lot of us can now take our work with us anywhere, and in a bid to cater to the growing pool of remote freelancers, co-working

spaces have been springing up in our towns and cities.

"We are inherently social animals, hard-wired to be happier in a group," says Chantal Robinson, Operations Director at LABS. "Co-working offers the opportunity to be part of a community."

LABS is one such co-working space, but with a difference. With three locations across London, each set in a beautiful modern building, flooded with natural light, LABS have decided to put the emotional wellbeing of the people who come to work in their spaces at the top of their agenda.

In addition to providing serene spaces for people to settle down and get on, LABS host a number of wellbeing initiatives including group breakfasts, weekly yoga sessions, community socials, and even on-site osteopathy.

"Burnout and stress are serious issues among professionals, and I'm pleased to see the glamorisation of the 'always on' attitude is coming to an end," Chantal says. "People often do their best work when they feel their best, and that's what we want for our members."

FUN FOUNDATIONS

Our environment has a huge effect on the way that we feel, with a report from CMI Workplace finding that strong workplace design can boost employee happiness by 33%.

With that in mind, Liftshare – a site that helps people find carpooling buddies – made the decision to do things a bit differently when it came to designing their office.

"When we had the opportunity to turn a derelict building into something creative and stylish, we wanted to ensure it was a positive working environment where our staff were encouraged to feel part of the Liftshare family and thrive," Candice Herring, Liftshare's HR and Office Manager explains. "We needed a space >>>



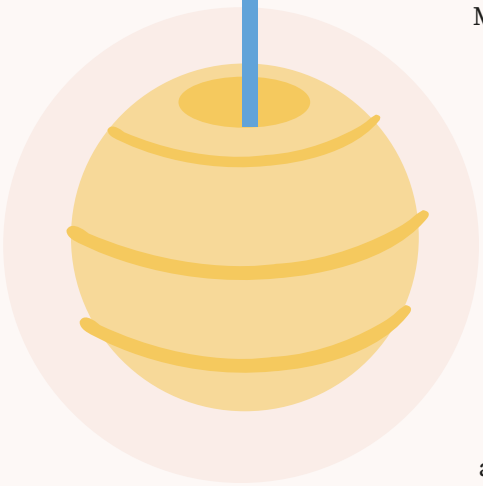
Liftshare CEO Ali Clabburn getting from A to B

> **Being a sustainable transport company, we simply had to find a way to get from A to B in a fast, fun way**

that was comfortable, agile, and fun! We achieved this with a combination of an open-plan collaborative workspace, together with several homely breakout areas."

All this is topped off with a slide that runs between floors. "Being a sustainable transport company, we simply had to find a way to get from A to B in a fast, fun way!" Candice adds.

And the team at Liftshare know that it's working. Six years ago they moved from a turkey shed in Attleborough, Norfolk, to their current office in Norwich, and they noticed an instant shift in staff morale. Performance and productivity were steadily rising, and within four years their profits had increased more than tenfold.



"We find it's the little things that count; the healthy snacks on tap, Pilates classes every week, a bench outside to make use of when the sun shines, and three of our staff are mental health first aiders," says Candice. "We believe we have successfully fostered a healthier workforce of committed, motivated, and loyal staff of whom we are extremely proud."

GENDER-BLIND PARENTAL LEAVE

When you're starting on the monumental journey of having a family, the last thing you should have to worry about is the implications it will have on your career, or whether you will be able to make ends meet. But navigating parental leave can be a bump in the road.

Mothers can feel under pressure to return to work much sooner than they would like, and fathers are often offered the bare minimum for paternity leave.

Online handmade marketplace Etsy is one of the companies leading the way in introducing a parental policy fit for modern families, not just by offering the same policies for mothers and fathers, but by also including those who are adopting.





FREE DOWNLOAD

Take a stand for better mental health with our workplace wellbeing plaque.

"At Etsy, we are proud to be a leader when it comes to employee benefits," says Raina Moskowitz, Etsy's senior vice president. "Our 26-week, gender-blind, parental leave not only helps us attract and retain talent, but also enables us to support employees wherever they are in their personal or professional life."

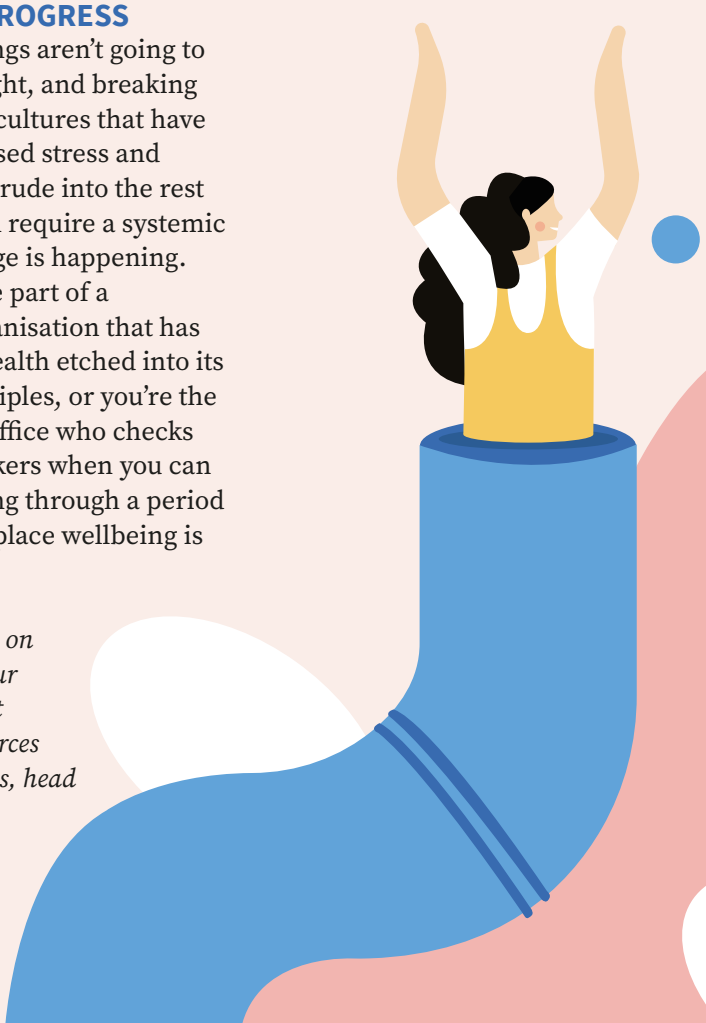
It makes sense. For many people, raising a family comes before most other things, and workplaces that take the time to recognise this are head and shoulders above institutions who have neglected this huge detail for so long.

"We want to support and enable parents, regardless of their gender, to play equal roles in building successful companies and nurturing their families," Raina explains. "This fits squarely within Etsy's mission to keep commerce human."

A WORK IN PROGRESS

The fact is, things aren't going to change overnight, and breaking the workplace cultures that have for so long caused stress and anxiety that intrude into the rest of our lives will require a systemic shift. But change is happening. Whether you're part of a innovative organisation that has good mental health etched into its founding principles, or you're the person in the office who checks in with co-workers when you can see they're going through a period of stress, workplace wellbeing is on its way in.

For information on looking after your mental health at work, and resources for organisations, head to mind.org.uk/workplace







DISCOVERING *clarity*

From hitting the high notes in the music industry, to the crushing blows of singles falling flat, and being diagnosed with two brain tumours in the past seven years, John Newman has been through a hugely emotional, and testing journey. Here, the singer-songwriter shares how he's turned the biggest mistakes in his life into the greatest lessons he's learned along the way

Writing | **Gemma Calvert**

Two days before *Happiful* meets John Newman in a glass-walled office at the Universal Music Group HQ in north London, the singer-songwriter was on a coach travelling through Siberia, Russia.

"We'd just done a gig and everyone else was sat on their phones, but I was looking out the window, glued to the landscape outside," he recalls. "I'm now completely more present, more appreciative. I don't take anything for granted. It's about smelling the roses."

For John, 28, who was raised in Settle, North Yorkshire, by his single mum Jacquie, it's been a profoundly transformational two years.

In 2017, the year after being diagnosed with a brain tumour – the second of his life – John found himself musically lost following a series of disappointing chart performances, which sabotaged his self-confidence and left him on the verge of quitting the industry.

Thankfully, though, John has come full circle. Last August, he wed former flight-attendant Nana-Marie Bergqvist, and says he has since been inspired to write "some of the best music of [his] life". He's also embarked on therapy for the first time.

Ahead of the release of his eagerly-awaited third album, John reflects on his evolution, and pinpoints the seven life mistakes that have taught him the most valuable lessons of all...

HOLDING ON TO THE PAST

I was bullied as a teenager, because I was vulnerable, or because I didn't have a dad, or because I was a bit different for dreaming of being a musician. When I turned 18 I enrolled at Leeds College of Music, I always felt at risk – like somebody was going to start a bad rumour about me.

I've forgiven the bullies but I still dream about that time. >>>

> **About a year ago I went to see a therapist for the first time. It was amazing to sit and talk to somebody without an opinion, to feel like I was understood**

I dream of my childhood in loads of ways, including my best friends Ben and Tom who died in a car crash when I was 19. I dealt with my grief the wrong way, by skipping college, drinking too much, and smoking a lot of weed.

About a year ago I went to see a therapist for the first time, because I was doing addictive things in terms of eating and smoking. It was amazing to sit and talk to somebody without an opinion. It's a weird world we live in. Every time I talk to someone about my problems, I feel the response is 'man up'. What is 'man up'? What's wrong with a man expressing his emotions?

NOT BEING SELFISH

'Blame', which I recorded with Calvin Harris in September 2014, obliterated Spotify and was the biggest record globally for a month. By the end of the year I was living in LA, flying all over the world, and the success felt amazing. I wanted to give that success to others, so I started signing artists and writing for other people, but I was working so hard that every time I stepped inside a studio for myself I was burnt out.

Last year I ripped out my studio, sold all the equipment on eBay, and it's been the best thing I've ever done. Feeling under pressure to create a huge music empire just caused me stress and anxiety, because I wasn't focusing on the thing that got me here in the first place – my own music.

BELIEVING I HAD TO CHANGE

Calvin inspires me hugely, and once advised me to 'do something different' musically. It played on my mind so much that every time I thought of making a John Newman-style record, I backed away from what felt authentic, and lost myself in the process.

Meeting my wife, Nana, was an epiphany moment. She started giving me advice about my career, from an outsider's point of view and said: "You're overthinking everything." Even talking about this now makes me feel horrible inside, because it takes me back. Now I'm writing music that feels true to me, but I still experience anxiety. I put a thing up the other day saying: "Please stream my songs so I can stop sh*tting myself."



FORGETTING CHRIS MARTIN'S WORDS OF WISDOM

A few years ago, [Coldplay frontman] Chris Martin advised me to 'stay cool, stay humble, stay simple'. But then I moved to LA and got too big for my



Photography (Right) | Steve Schofield



Feeling under pressure to create a huge music empire just caused me stress and anxiety, because I wasn't focusing on the thing that got me here in the first place – my own music

boots. I didn't like the person I'd become.

I was living my dream, working on my second album with incredible musicians, but mistakenly presumed it would do well. As a kid I'd stand in front of my bedroom mirror in our council house, dreaming of success and singing to thousands of people. When I achieved that, I dreamed higher, and when the album didn't chart as well as my first, I felt like I was in a nightmare – looking up, trying to grab success while falling.

Last year, when my single 'Fire In Me' failed to chart in the UK, I started to question my future. I called my manager, saying: "I think I quit. What's the point of all this pressure, stress, and emotion?" The second I realised I could do that, the pressure was lifted from me, because I now knew I had a choice.

BREAKING BOUNDARIES AS A KID

My dad was always overpowering me, putting me down and telling me 'don't do this and that', so when my mum and dad split when I was four, I got a taste of freedom because he was no longer there to control me. Mum never told me what to do; she gave me the freedom to let my mind experiment.

She let me play in the countryside and get into fights to work out what I shouldn't say to people.

I've learned from my mistakes. But I got it out of my system at the right time. When I have kids, I'll let them do the same.

OVERTHINKING MY HEALTH

In 2012, the year after signing my first album deal, I started going blind, and doctors found an egg-sized tumour in my brain, which was later removed through my nose. In 2016 I discovered the tumour had returned and, as it stands, it's stable. It's still in there, but they don't believe there are cancerous cells in it. Day-to-day, I've learned to not overthink the fact I've got a brain tumour, because there are people clinging on to dear life out there, who need urgent medical help. I don't. I'm very, very fortunate.

WONDERING WHETHER MARRIAGE WAS FOR ME

After the demise of my parents' relationship, I questioned whether I wanted marriage myself, until I met Nana. We got engaged after a year, when Nana was still living abroad, so we didn't know each other that well, but it felt right. Now we live together, we're best friends, and know everything about each other. I was so right to trust my instincts.

I 100% want children. Right now, we're not planning to, and we're not planning not to either, but my mind is focused on work. I know what I want, I know how to get it, I've got clarity. Now I'm going to go and get it.

Get tickets for John's 'Out Of The Blue' tour from johnnewman.co.uk/live



Do you hear that?

Videos of people whispering, tapping, and chewing have become a YouTube phenomenon. But what exactly is ASMR, and can it promote mental wellbeing? Let's dive into the wonderful world of brain tingles

Writing | **Kat Nicholls** Original artwork | **Charlotte Reynell**

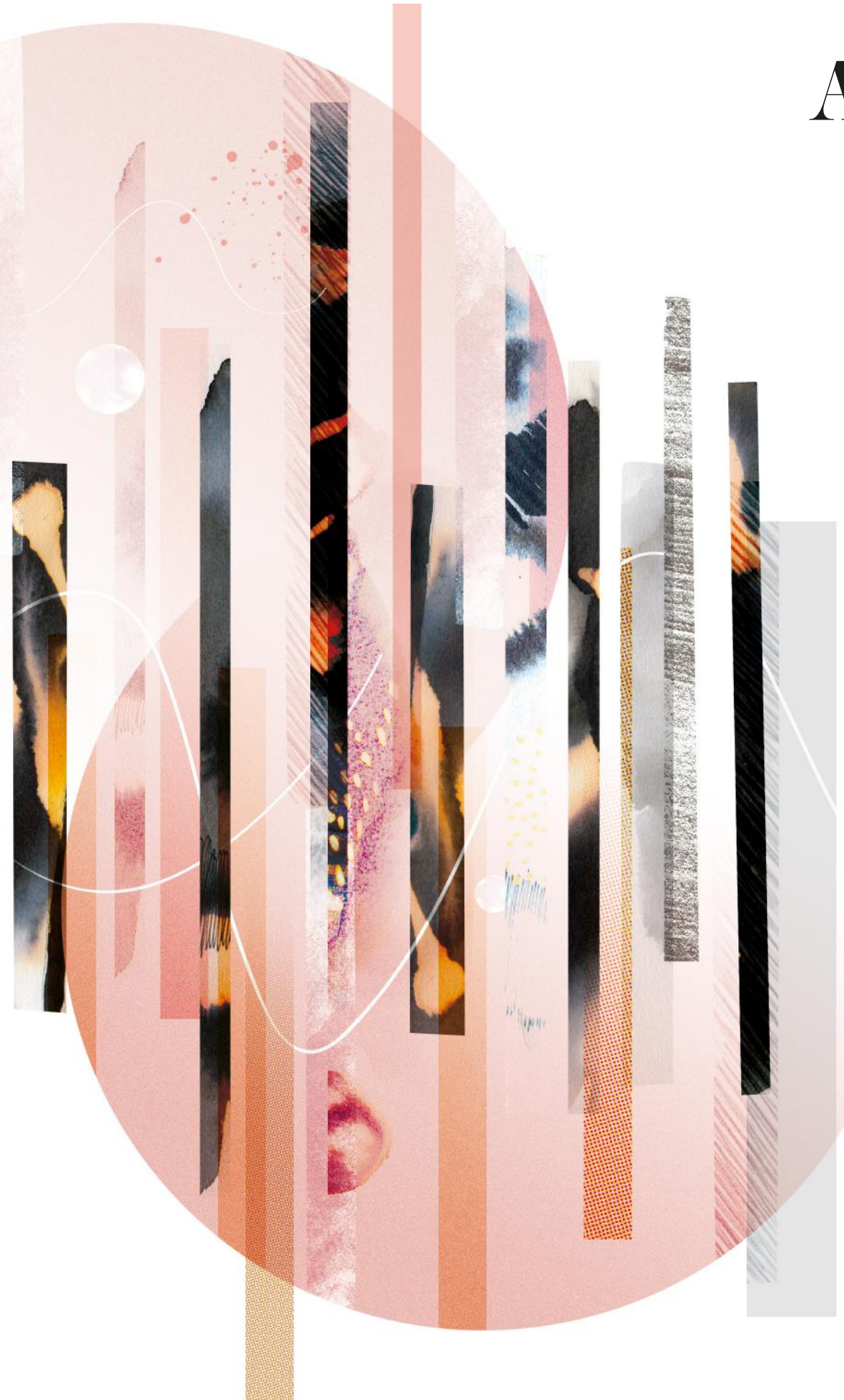
As I write this at work, my colleague next to me is tapping away at her computer, like she does every day. I feel a pleasant tingling sensation starting at the crown of my head, travelling down my neck, and spreading over my upper back. This strange and often wonderful feeling is known as an Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response – or ASMR.

When I was younger, I would notice these 'tingles' from time to time. Triggered by tapping noises and music, I thought it was something just *my* body did. I had no idea it was an experience shared by millions. Today, the term ASMR is widely known and has gained real traction.

Sending shockwaves

Video-makers have found lucrative careers through ASMR. Buying custom-made microphones and performing various acts (from soft whispering and hair brushing, to slime squelching and food chewing), these ASMR stars amass subscribers in the millions.

Despite this growth in awareness and popularity, the scientific >>>



ASMR

Autonomous
Sensory
Meridian
Response



Relaxation videos are up 70% on YouTube, with yoga, meditation, and ASMR videos trending between July 2017 and June 2018

community still knows relatively little about the phenomenon. One peer-reviewed paper from Swansea University suspects a link between ASMR and synesthesia, where people have one sense perceived at the same time as another sense (for example seeing music as colour).

It is thought that synesthesia is at least partly determined by genetics, so genes could have a part to play in ASMR.

There are now more than 13 million videos on YouTube dedicated to the sounds of ASMR

The number of studies into ASMR is picking up though, with one 2015 study published in *PeerJ – the Journal of Life & Environmental Sciences* finding different people have different triggers – the most common being whispering, tapping, slow movements, repetitive movements, and personal attention.

In many ASMR videos, you'll notice the presenters give the watcher a great deal of attention – speaking in a caring manner, and even role-playing scenarios, like having a haircut at a salon. It could be this in itself that triggers a sense of safety and wellbeing for viewers.

There's still a lot about ASMR that's unclear and in the *Happiful* office, opinion is divided. Some find it relaxing (one team member has made a playlist of tingle-inducing tunes), while others are very much opposed. "It makes me cringe and feels very unpleasant," says fellow writer Bonnie.

Tapping into our mental health

Regardless of where you stand on the ASMR debate, what's not in doubt is the number of people it helps. Those who struggle to sleep, and those with conditions like depression and anxiety, are starting to tune in to ASMR as a way to help manage symptoms. In fact, in the same 2015 study, those with depression reported an improvement in mood lasting a few hours after watching ASMR videos.

Psychotherapist Nicola Vanlint says utilising the senses through ASMR could also be helpful when treating anxiety.

"I tell clients that if they can activate one of their five senses when anxious, this can facilitate

"Those who struggle to sleep, and those with conditions like depression and anxiety, are starting to tune in to ASMR as a way to help manage symptoms"

the nervous system to calm and distract the brain from unwanted thoughts. I believe ASMR works under the same principle, using sound to overcome insomnia by calming the brain and body, so this would also be a helpful technique to use for anxiety."

Looking closer into the way ASMR relaxes us, Nicola tells me how sounds have the ability to calm our nervous system.

"Our brains are wired to activate our survival instincts through certain sounds like loud voices, crashing, and bangs. Perhaps ASMR facilitates the opposite, by calming the nervous system.

"Similar to the ancient practice of 'gong/sound bathing', a tool that allows the body and mind to relax, sound can activate the parasympathetic nervous

Get your ASMR on

Our top tingle tips:

Gentle Whispering ASMR – Maria has 1.6 million subscribers to her Gentle Whispering channel on YouTube. Follow along for a great variety of sounds; we particularly like her 'Wood you like to fall asleep?' video using different wooden tools.

Gibi ASMR – another big name in the ASMR world, Gibi has nearly two million subscribers on YouTube. Her Billie Eilish tribute video (where she gives Billie's album the full ASMR treatment) has had nearly two million views.

Bob Ross – legendary host of *The Joy of Painting*, Bob Ross' soft speaking voice combined with brushes tapping canvas makes for an ASMR dream. You can watch old episodes on YouTube – just search 'Bob Ross'.

The French Whisperer – if you use the Calm app's sleep stories, you may have already heard the dulcet tones of The French Whisperer as he discusses the myth of Atlantis and the theory of relativity. If you don't use the app, you can find more from The French Whisperer on YouTube.

system which slows our heart rate, lowers blood pressure and regulates breathing. Relaxing sounds bring about a meditative state."

As with mindfulness meditation, when watching an ASMR video, viewers are engaging sight, sound and sensation, bringing them fully into their body and the present moment.

A 2018 study published by Beverley Fredborg, James Clark, and Stephen Smith, looked into the relationship between mindfulness and ASMR. Their findings suggest that mindfulness training could enhance the effects and benefits of ASMR. So, if you want to feel even more tingles, try honing your mindfulness skills.

Some sound advice

Nicola does point out that ASMR may not work for everyone: "Some people have misophonia, a condition where negative emotions, thoughts and physical responses are triggered by specific sounds." Usually, the sounds that trigger misophonia are mouth sounds like chewing (the same sounds that give some people brain tingles).

If you do have misophonia, you may, therefore, want to avoid 'mouth-sound' ASMR videos – just don't discount the medium altogether immediately. A few people in our office say they have misophonia, but also experience ASMR, so it could be worth trying other sounds like tapping.

The good news for those who do experience ASMR is that there's a huge variety of content out there. Search around and see what helps you feel relaxed. Make a note of what sounds trigger your tingles, and add them to your self-care toolkit for sleepless nights, moments of high anxiety, or whenever you just need a moment of relaxation.

And hey, if (like me) your ASMR is triggered by the tapping of keyboards, get yourself an office job, sit next to some writers and enjoy moments of relaxation all day long... *sigh*

Nicola Vanlint works alongside mindfulness trainers and nutritionists at Greenwich Wellness Rooms. Find out more at greenwichwellnessrooms.co.uk. For further information on anxiety treatment, visit counselling-directory.org.uk

Book Review

How can beauty be so ugly?

Fast-paced, enthralling, and as grimy as it is glamorous, award-winning author **Juno Dawson** explores the highs and lows of the fashion industry, from the perspective of one of its most vulnerable players

Writing | **Bonnie Evie Gifford**

When a copy of Juno Dawson's latest book appeared in my intray, I had a bit of a fangirl moment. From *The Gender Games*, to her acclaimed best-seller *Clean*, you could say I'm a pretty big fan of her work.

Young Adult (YA) fiction is my guilty pleasure. As someone in my late 20s, I'm 'meant' to be reading serious literature, career-advancing books, and self-help guides that answer all of life's woes. Yet, there's something magical about YA fiction; exploring the boundaries between taking on the responsibilities of being an adult, without always having the power to back up your choices.

What's it about?

A modern take on the classic rags-to-riches story, *Meat Market* follows 16-year-old Jana's rise from a council estate, to making international headlines.

Tall and gangly, Jana's uncomfortable with her androgynous look when she's scouted by a modelling agency. Soon, thanks to an act of kindness during London Fashion Week, she's thrust into the spotlight – but also discovering that the word of modelling isn't as glamorous as it might first appear.

From classmates who assume she has an eating disorder, and friendships affected by jealousy, through to the competitive world of casting, vile articles ripping people apart for their appearance, and the surrounding media circus, Jana's journey feels fast-paced without seeming rushed. Engaging, enthralling, and a touch overwhelming at times, Dawson takes us through the ups and downs of being a young woman in an industry that has historically failed to protect them.

'Real women have curves'

It's a phrase that's become common, countering the largely singular portrayal of beauty that has been

> **"We all have more power than we might think; it's time we started using it"**

plastered across the media for decades. Yet for the women who don't fit this mould – tall, thin, flat-chested, androgynous – this messaging doesn't feel like the welcoming sisterhood it was originally intended to be. In *Meat Market*, we see how Jana struggles with the reactions and words of those around her, judging her purely

on her androgynous, slim frame. We are reminded just how cruel teens can be – even to those who fit the latest beauty trends.

Jana's, and other young women's, relationship with food is an underlying thread throughout. Handled in a sensitive but frank way, Jana's unique perspective gives us a glimpse into what it can look like to slip into the throes of an eating disorder.

Responsibility, protection and exploitation

From early on, we feel a sense of unease as we're drawn into an industry that employs more than 600,000 people across the UK alone, generating £66 billion for our economy. Yet we're shown how unthinking an industry it can be for some of its most vulnerable individuals – children scouted as models from a young age.

Through Jana's account, we see first-hand how the lack of boundaries seen as the par for the course there – from teens going to casting shoots alone, to undressing in a room full of strangers – can quickly become the norm for these young women.

The precarious situations Jana finds herself in aren't limited to working beneath the spotlight. Weaving in the danger and pitfalls these girls face behind the scenes, readers are asked the uncomfortable question: in an industry that values youth and beauty above all else, is enough being done to protect these young women?

Should I read it?

Dawson's book is heartbreaking, painful, and worth every second. It's an uncomfortable read, but it's something I would urge you to finish if you find yourself faltering. It encapsulates so many issues all in one big, confusing whirlwind of emotion, that you won't be able to put it down as you get drawn into Jana's world.

This book doesn't try to sugar-coat things. *Meat Market* is a book about responsibility; the responsibility of the fashion industry, of those in power, to speak up when they see something that is making others uncomfortable, and of us as consumers to make our voices heard when things clearly aren't right. We all have more power than we might think; it's time we started using it.



Meat Market
By Juno Dawson
(Quercus, paperback £7.99)

GREAT FOR...

- Fans of gritty, dark, young adult fiction.
- Readers looking for insight into eating disorders or addiction.
- Those interested in fast-paced, meaningful novels.

If you liked this, you'll love...

Must Reads



Clean by Juno Dawson

When socialite Lexi almost overdoses, she thinks she's hit rock bottom. Forced into an exclusive rehab, she soon realises she's wrong. It's a dirty business getting clean.



The Devil Wears Prada by Lauren Weisberger

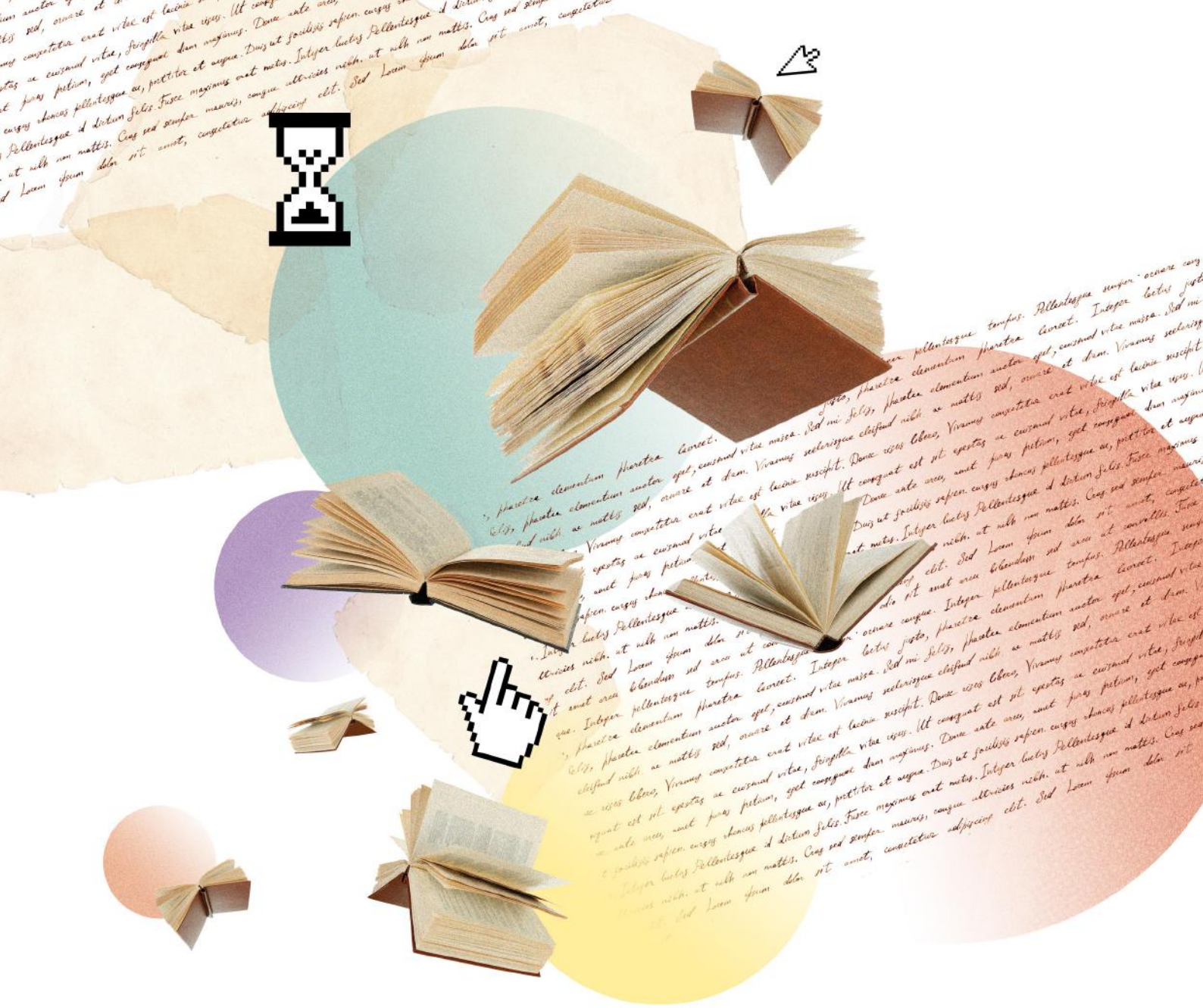
High fashion and the boss from hell, when Andrea starts at the world's most fashionable magazine, she knows little about it. But this is her big break; it's going to be worth it in the end... isn't it?



Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson

After calling the police during a party, no one is talking to Melinda. But she can't get out the words to explain why. Determined not to think about it, she can't forget that night.

Book covers | *Amazon.co.uk*



5 WAYS **YOU** CAN master storytelling

Scrap the jazzy PowerPoint slide transitions – when it comes to delivering a presentation at work, it's your ability to tell a story that's the key to magnetic communication

Writing | **Lindsay Maclean**

As humans, we've been telling stories since the Stone Age – they've been a primary form of communication for us, especially with people's love of books to engage and evoke emotion, with soap operas depicting characters' daily lives and relatable problems, and cinema prompting us to laugh or feel inspired.

Why, then, do we so often abandon stories when at work or delivering a presentation, and rely on throwing facts on to PowerPoint slides instead?

Communication relies on people feeling engaged and wanting to listen. By telling a story, you are creating anticipation, and painting a picture in your listeners' minds. Most of us will often relate more to a story, and it can help us to receive and understand messages.

With that in mind, here are some top tips for becoming a truly magnetic storyteller:

1 SHOW SOME EMOTION

At the heart of a good story lies emotion, but it has to be real. When listening to someone speak, who suddenly starts to laugh or cry, we're likely to be affected by what they're saying. They influence how we feel.

Stories stir up emotions through their movement. They are not static like bullet points. If you feel inspired and energised by your content, your audience will feel the same. It's emotions that prompt us to act. By uncovering and revealing the emotion, you'll build a relationship with the listeners.

2 OWN YOUR EXPERIENCE

When we present information, people often use 'we', which can feel like they don't want to take responsibility for their opinion – so it's important to define what you mean when you use this. But when you think about it, do you not find you relate to a story more if you hear about someone's individual experiences? Using 'I' makes a story more personable and relatable.

> **Stories stir up emotions through their movement**

3 AVOID THE JARGON

Last year, I found myself on the phone, drifting off while a solicitor was spilling out a trail of information I needed to know for purchasing a house. I put the phone down and realised I'd stopped listening halfway through.

In a world where we're often overloaded with data, if someone is flooding us with words, industry jargon and information, it's easy for our minds to wander. Being human – and being you – will impress people a lot more.

4 USE STORIES OF PEOPLE

One of the best ways to bring your stories to life is through threading people and images into your story. Rather than explaining what happened, try to describe. When you hear about a person or someone's experiences, you'll often find you relate more to the story being told.

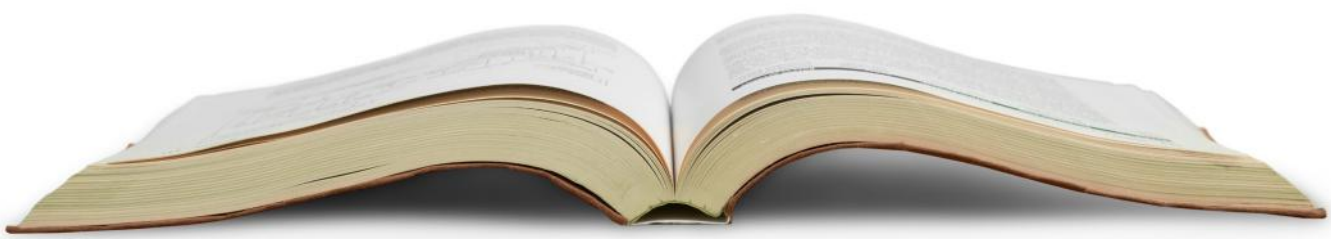
5 DON'T TAKE YOURSELF TOO SERIOUSLY

This is a big area for me. I always say take your work seriously, but not yourself. If you can laugh at yourself, smile and enjoy your story, people will get to see character and personality, which is essential if you want people to sit up and listen.

Recently I was reading *Becoming* by Michelle Obama, where she discusses how she was initially perceived by the press. This prompted her to seek support for speaking to large audiences from a communication specialist called Stephanie Cutter. She said she was advised not to hold back on humour, to talk about what she loved, and it was OK to be herself.

She said she began to enjoy herself and "felt a new ease, a new ownership of my voice", and consequently she invited a more positive response.

Discover more communication tips in Lindsay's book 'Speak Up & Be Heard' (iElevate Educate, £10.99).





With a series of movements, horses remove all tension from their bodies





Galloping towards recovery

After conventional therapies had failed, it took the help of two very special four-legged companions to finally end Joanna's 30-year battle with eating disorders

Writing | **Joanna Corfield**

For as long as I could remember, I lived in a world that was shadowed by fear. It clouded everything – my thoughts, perceptions, feelings about myself, and my judgements of others.

After living with anorexia and bulimia from the age of 15, they had become so much a part of my life that I couldn't imagine living without them – and that thought was just as terrifying. I believed that I didn't deserve to be free and happy. I felt intense self-hatred and feelings of failure and worthlessness. My mind was a battleground of negative and destructive thoughts.

Then, 18 years ago, a small, flame-coloured pony called Gus entered my life and began to change everything. >>>



With Bronwen's help, Joanna faced her biggest fears



Joanna with her friend Raul

He came to us because no one else wanted him. It wasn't long before I understood why. Our relationship was shaky from the moment we laid eyes on each other. I was petrified of him, and he thought I was a complete waste of space. He showed his contempt by biting my ankles or kicking out his back legs. He was scary, especially if – like me – you believed his opinion that you were worthless.

Everyone told me Gus needed a companion. Unsurprisingly, the new horse, Bronwen, evoked the same set of terrifyingly disagreeable emotions triggered earlier by our little ginger friend.

However, this time it was for very different reasons. Bronwen seemed to eye me nervously – and with fears that looked remarkably similar to my own. I found Bronwen's response uncomfortably disconcerting, and it left me flummoxed. I couldn't see why she was so afraid of me. No one was scared of me – except me.

Every time I went near her, she turned tail and headed off to the furthest corner of her paddock. When I finally caught up with her, her eyes would harden with fear.

It was obvious that something was wrong. In her previous home, Bronwen had been delightful and well behaved. All that changed when she came to live with us, and I could only conclude that I was the catalyst for her dramatic change. I was so miserable, and felt such a failure.

Still unaware of the mirror being held in front of me, I realised some outside help was needed. About three months after Bronwen's arrival, a possible solution presented itself. A man with a reputation for being a true 'horse whisperer' was prepared to help us.

I watched in amazement as the man held Bronwen mesmerised. Within minutes, she loved him. He barely moved, yet with the tiniest signals he had her moving in circles around him, backing, stepping sideways, and listening, with both ears and eyes fixed on him the entire time.

His assistant explained that he had been emulating the way horses communicate with each other. By speaking to Bronwen in her own language, they could understand and respect each other as equals.

> **"I couldn't see why she was so afraid of me. No one was scared of me – except me"**

At last, I saw how I appeared through Bronwen's eyes. I saw with clarity the image she was mirroring back at me. To change that reflection I had to alter my whole way of being – my body language, thoughts, beliefs, and

my defeatist attitude. It finally dawned on me, too, why Gus treated me so badly – he was simply mirroring another part of me, the part that had no self-respect or positive expectations.

If Gus was ever going to behave respectfully, and Bronwen feel safe in my company, I had to let go of my fears and become someone very different – someone with self-belief, inner strength, and self-respect.

I was even more interested in what was going on within me to cause her to react as she did. My body was a foreign land; I hated it and felt no connection with it whatsoever. Becoming aware of it was like learning a whole new language. When I tuned in, there were parts of me that felt like they didn't exist. Other parts felt dark, heavy, and rock solid. My feet were rarely in touch with the ground, and my head and neck belonged to someone else – not part of me at all.

Slowly, over many months, I was able to notice what was happening in my own body with the same precision I had learned by watching Bronwen.

This, I have now learned, is exactly what we need, to deal with the emotional impact of trauma or negative memories. The effect of past traumatic events, or developmental trauma, becomes locked in the body and can only be released when we become aware of its existence and cause.

I went to great lengths to become familiar with every sensation, muscle contraction, pain, discomfort, and movement felt in my body.

We'd made a huge step forward, but change was only going to happen when I worked out how to bring this recognition of our mutual fear into balance.

Horses in a herd do this naturally, by fully grounding themselves and lowering their energy. They take a deep breath, breathe out, and with a series of movements release all physical tension from their bodies. The herd remains harmonious by rebalancing each other in the same way. They become still and quiet in mind, body, and soul to counteract the heightened energy of a member of the herd struggling to do this for itself.

I needed to learn how to quieten my mind, calm my nervous system, and lower my energy. But my teacher, Bronwen, with her loving forgiveness, patience and gentle encouragement, gave me all the incentive I needed.

> **I had to let go of my fears and become someone very different – someone with self-belief, inner strength, and self-respect**

My fear-driven obsession, and addiction to my body and food, was being replaced with something so good, so healthy, and so healing.

As the months stretched into years, I noticed things no longer affected me the way they used to, and food stopped being such an obsession.

Two years became three, Bronwen had foals and we collected more and more horses and ponies. Every animal contributed its own unique wisdom.

Through them I realised the concept of recovery is an unknown quantity. When are we recovered, or are we are all recovering all the time? It's a process that, if we want the highest quality of life, we can keep working on until we choose to stop.

Feeling good is a wonderful addiction. Addiction can be positive, and my addiction to the beauty and sentience of horses has certainly turned my life around completely. Now, 18 years down the line, I am so lucky to be able to appreciate the stark contrast between a life of fear and one of inner peace and fulfilment.

My life's purpose now is to teach others that they can experience what that means, too.

Learn more about equine involvement therapy at hopethruhorses.com

OUR EXPERT SAYS

Disordered eating had taken the joy from Joanna's life, as she struggled with feelings of self-loathing. Then when the two ponies entered her life, there was a dawning realisation that the animal reflected her lack of value for herself. Although it was a slow process, she came to understand herself better, and began to discover love and respect herself. Often taking time to listen to ourselves seems indulgent, but it is critical to finding balance in our lives.



Graeme Orr | *MBACP (Accred) UKRCP*
Reg Ind counsellor

10

Health anxiety myths debunked

Think how frustrating it is when people don't believe you about something. Now, imagine not being taken seriously when it comes to your health, when you are convinced you have the symptoms of a serious illness… Here we push through the 'hype' around hypochondria, and burst the bubble of health anxiety misconceptions

Writing | **Hattie Gladwell**

Who hasn't woken up with a sore throat, or had a bad headache, and spent ages Googling your symptoms, going down a dangerous rabbit hole of internet diagnosis – discovering that you potentially have a life-threatening condition, and working yourself into a state of panic? Now, imagine feeling like that constantly.

Health anxiety is a serious and often crippling condition, whereby sufferers develop an obsessional preoccupation with the idea that they are currently, or will eventually be, seriously ill with a physical illness.

For someone with health anxiety, not only are you in the scary position of fearing the worst about your health, but you often lack the reassurance of being taken seriously. You may have heard the term 'hypochondriac', which has been used for years, as a joke towards those who worry about their health. People don't see it to be the debilitating illness that it is, and instead deem a person to be 'overreacting'.

But the fact is that many people with health anxiety fear that they are actually going to die from an illness, and this fear can go on to ruin the lives of sufferers. Therefore it's important that we understand it, and encourage those living with it to seek help.

And to help you do that, here we've debunked 10 myths about health anxiety.

One in 20
Google searches are health-related

1 It's not just being a 'hypochondriac', it is an illness

There is a common misconception that health anxiety is just someone being dramatic or over-exaggerating about their health. But this is not the case. Health anxiety is an anxiety disorder often housed within the obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) spectrum – with both sharing a common symptom in reassurance-seeking.

People with health anxiety obsess over an illness, to the point where every little symptom could be a sign of becoming seriously ill – or even dying. Senses become heightened, and while the symptoms are often actually caused by the anxiety itself, the obsession – much like in OCD – reinforces the fear.

To get reassurance, the sufferer may repeatedly go to the doctor and ask for tests. If they don't get the answer they want – or don't feel reassured enough – they seek opinion after opinion.

> **It is more common in women, and occurs in about 5% of patients attending a GP surgery**

2 It isn't all in your head – it affects you physically, too

Health anxiety is not just in your mind. A person with a fear of an illness may become convinced they have it due to actual physical symptoms, which are caused by anxiety. This can include headaches, dizziness, fatigue, nausea, sweating, shaking, blurred vision, and more. One particular problem with health anxiety is that it can also cause panic attacks – which have, in the past, been likened to the feeling of having a heart attack. Imagine a person with a fear of heart attacks having a panic attack. It's terrifying, and it can be hard to calm yourself down when you are having – though unknowingly unrelated – physical symptoms to accompany the thoughts.

3 It affects not only your mental health, but your life, too

Health anxiety can have a massive impact on your life, stopping you from enjoying things you used to love. For instance, a person with health anxiety may stop watching TV shows, films, or reading books that reference bad health. They may even avoid anything to do with physical illness – such as doctors' surgeries or hospitals. It can be so controlling that people with the disorder may avoid everyday events out of fear of being contaminated and falling ill.

> **It can be so controlling that people with the disorder may avoid everyday events out of fear of being contaminated and falling ill**

4 It doesn't just affect millennials

Some people assume it's only young people who experience health anxiety, with claims that millennials are 'more delicate' and therefore complain more. But this isn't the case. Although it does commonly start when you are younger, people of any age can have health anxiety. It is more common in women, and occurs in about 5% of patients attending a GP surgery – which goes to show just how common it is. >>>

5 You don't always worry about absolutely everything

There's an assumption that people with health anxiety worry about anything and everything to do with their health – that they worry about a cold being meningitis, or blurred vision being a brain tumour. And while this is the case for some, others have a chronic health anxiety fear – meaning they have one fear in particular. Cancer is a big one, and others include sepsis and heart attacks. So, instead of panicking about all sorts of illnesses, their 'symptoms' tend to scare them into thinking they have their main fear all the time.

6 It doesn't always just happen randomly

While yes, for some, health anxiety can just spring up, for others it can come from trauma. For example, someone may have fallen seriously ill and had a near-death experience, and though they have recovered, they live their lives panicking they are going to become ill again. This is a common theme in misdiagnosis – such as if a patient has been misdiagnosed and gone on to become seriously ill, they then feel, when they are unwell in the future, that they need a doctor to look at every little symptom to ensure that nothing can be missed again.

7 It can flare up

Health anxiety is a debilitating illness that can deeply impact lives. But there are times when the anxiety is lessened and more manageable. Professor David Veale, who specialises in health anxiety, says it can come and go depending on various stresses in life.

Health anxiety is known to affect **4–5%** of people

8 There are other symptoms besides panicking

Intrusive thoughts, which are also a symptom of OCD, can affect people with health anxiety – whether its thoughts about themselves, or people they love, becoming unwell. These thoughts can be incredibly distressing and hard to live with.

9 It doesn't just affect the sufferer

People think that a person with health anxiety only worries about themselves, but this is not the case. Some people have health anxiety over other people. Parents, in particular, may become obsessed with the idea that their child is getting sick. Instead of checking their own body over and over again for symptoms, they will check their child's – and book them in to see a doctor or other health professionals more than they would themselves.

10 It is important enough to treat

Sadly, people don't really take health anxiety seriously, because to many people, it's just worrying too much about a cold (sigh). But health anxiety is a serious mental illness, and it most certainly is important enough to treat. If you think you may be suffering from health anxiety, it is important that you see your GP and explain to them what is going on, so that you can receive appropriate support.

Exercise it's child play

Pounding the treadmill and pumping iron under halogen lights; when did exercise get so sluggish? Remember the days when we would do a mid-morning HIIT workout followed by cardio after lunch? Probably not, because we weren't on some strict goal-smashing workout plan, we were just playing 'Stuck in the Mud' with our friends. For Charlotte Roach, founder of Rabble – the fitness group bringing people together for playground games – to create a healthy future, we have to go back to our roots

Writing | **Kathryn Wheeler**

"I was always the kid in the playground making up games, and trying to get the other kids to join in. I loved the freedom of losing yourself in the game – can't say I've changed much since then," Charlotte Roach tells us, reflecting on where it all started.

Growing up, athletics was at the centre of Charlotte's life, and she had high hopes of Olympic glory after being invited to join the training programme for the 2012 Olympics triathlon squad. But everything came crashing down around her in 2009, when a near-fatal cycling accident left her with two collapsed lungs, and her back broken in 12 places.

In time, she made a full recovery. But it was during the >>>





Founder Charlotte Roach living by Rabble's motto: play hard

To read more and to find a Rabble class near you, visit joinrabble.com

long days at the gym throughout her rehabilitation that Charlotte's attitude towards exercise was changed for good. It was then that she decided she had to tackle the 'no pain, no gain' culture that sucked the fun out of fitness – and Rabble was born.

A DIFFERENT BALL GAME

"I was so used to exercising outside with friends, where we all motivated each other in the fresh air, that suddenly being alone, and staring at the wall while jogging on a treadmill, made exercise so dull – I didn't want to go back," Charlotte says, musing on the monotony she experienced during rehabilitation. "Nobody talks to each other, nobody's smiling. It's like a job you hate; you do your hour, then leave."

> **"It's about the nostalgia and freedom to make up rules as you go – it doesn't really matter who wins"**

Charlotte had a hunch that she wasn't the only one who felt that way. Thinking about how easy, joyful, and natural exercise was when we were children, in January 2014 she put a call out for the first ever Rabble session on events site Meet Up.

For that first event, 15 people turned up, and from there Rabble took off. Today there are groups all over the UK, and others in Australia, Denmark, Spain, and the United States.

"I realised that the issue was massive," says Charlotte. "In the UK, 80% of adults do the minimum level of exercise on a weekly basis. Looking at it simply, why would you want to? What's exciting about running on the treadmill by yourself for a long period of time? This was the demand I was looking to serve."

THE NAME OF THE GAME

From traditional playground games like 'British Bulldog', 'Capture the Flag', and 'Stuck in



Who says playtime is just for kids?

the Mud', to games of Charlotte's own creation, the whole goal of a Rabble session is to engage people in HIIT (high-intensity interval training) workouts, without even noticing they're doing it.

The sessions are an hour long, and cleverly mix up the games included to work on speed, endurance, coordination, agility, and strength, and by the time the games have come to a close, Charlotte estimates that participants would have all run up to 8K.

"It's about the nostalgia, the freedom to make up rules as you go, and it doesn't really matter who wins, but that everyone is having fun," Charlotte explains. "Playground games level the playing field when it comes to ability. Nobody is born in a way that makes them excel at these games. As a kid you may have been rejected from the school sports team, or told you weren't good enough, but at Rabble everyone is good enough because the aim is just to have a great time."

> **"Rabble became my new life. I believed in the idea of Rabble more than I believed in myself to deliver it"**

GAINING GROUND

It's this sense of fun and accessibility that has been drawing people to sign up ever since. Samantha Dove is a digital marketing manager who, four years ago, moved from Essex to London to start a new job. When she arrived, she found it difficult to make new friends, and started feeling lonely, until she decided to take action.

"I'd read about Rabble and thought it looked like fun, so I headed over to Finsbury Park. On arrival, the heavens opened, but I could see all the hi-vis vests and I had such a wonderful welcome from Charlotte."

Samantha was one of a dozen new people that had turned up that day, despite the mud and rain. Two years later, Charlotte asked Samantha whether she would like to become a Rabble instructor, and now she runs one session a week throughout the year.

"It's my favourite part of the week," Samantha says. "We've developed a real community and friendship. After every session, we go to the pub or a café, and even have board game tournaments."

THE CLOSE OF PLAY

"I tried the 'no pain no gain' mindset, and I can tell you that all it leads to is burnout," Charlotte tells us.

"After the accident, I was teetering on the edge of a dark place," she explains. "Rabble became my new life. I believed in the idea of Rabble more than I believed in myself to deliver it."

But Charlotte did deliver it. And what she created has become so much more than just a novelty exercise class. She has forged a space for people to revisit the joy and energy they left in the playground, and discover the bonds and friendships that come with it.

All things considered, perhaps the most salient aspect of Rabble is the reminder that exercise and fitness don't have to be a chore. If sweating in a gym isn't right for you, slipping through the mud during a game of 'tag' could be. But the lesson here is, whatever it may be, do it with joy.

Mental health matters

For blogger **Alexandra Saintamour**, being open about her mental health with her audience was a given, and something she's extremely passionate about. Now, she shares with us the things that have helped her through the hardest of times



Follow Alexandra on Instagram @alexandra.saintamour

Alexandra is represented by KMPR_Publicity

Mental health matters to me because… I know how hard it is to speak up, to fear judgement, and be met with a lack of understanding. It matters to me because it needs to change. I know all too well how people can categorise you negatively because your illness is not visible, or is misunderstood, and can be used as a weapon to hurt you.

When I need support I… call the crisis line, or speak to my GP. It's terrifying to talk to professionals, but I know from experience that they were the only people who could help me productively initially. I then tell someone I know will listen, and who makes me feel supported. I try to not put too much information on social media initially, because it can be counterproductive to your welfare, but I always encourage talking afterwards, as someone else may need to hear how you got through it.

When I need some self-care, I… imagine I'm talking to my younger self. The things I say to myself, sometimes, are so nasty. "I don't matter, I'm not worth anything, I'm unlovable." I imagine if I would say that to a child, and I wouldn't. So, I switch the conversation: "You are capable, strong and brilliant. You are so loved, and you are worthy of love, and success." And most of all: "You can get through this."

The books I turn to time and again are… the Felix Castor series by Mike Carey, *Blood Meridian* by Cormac McCarthy, and I've really found myself relating a lot to Lily Allen's biography. How Lily takes responsibility for her decisions, not just as a woman but as a mother, is really endearing.

People I find inspiring online are… Munroe Bergdorf: an articulate, intelligent and beautiful LGBTQ+ activist who is constantly standing up in the face of adversity, and educating people. Professor Green: talking and sharing his own experiences with his father's suicide, I really believe he's changing the way men approach mental health. And my friends at *@play5asidechess*, who are going to educational institutions and other events, to get people talking about loneliness, social isolation, and suicide, while playing chess.

Three things I would say to someone experiencing mental ill-health are… get professional help; remember to breathe (through your nose with your mouth closed, as breathing from your mouth actually stimulates your fight-or-flight response); and you will get through this – don't underestimate your power.

The moment I felt most proud of myself was… starting my own business, when I had been told many times I would fail. Selling out the first batch of T-shirts I made. Giving birth to my daughter, who makes every single hardship worth living for.



Photography | Svetlana Pochatun

“Everything you can imagine is real

– PABLO PICASSO

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