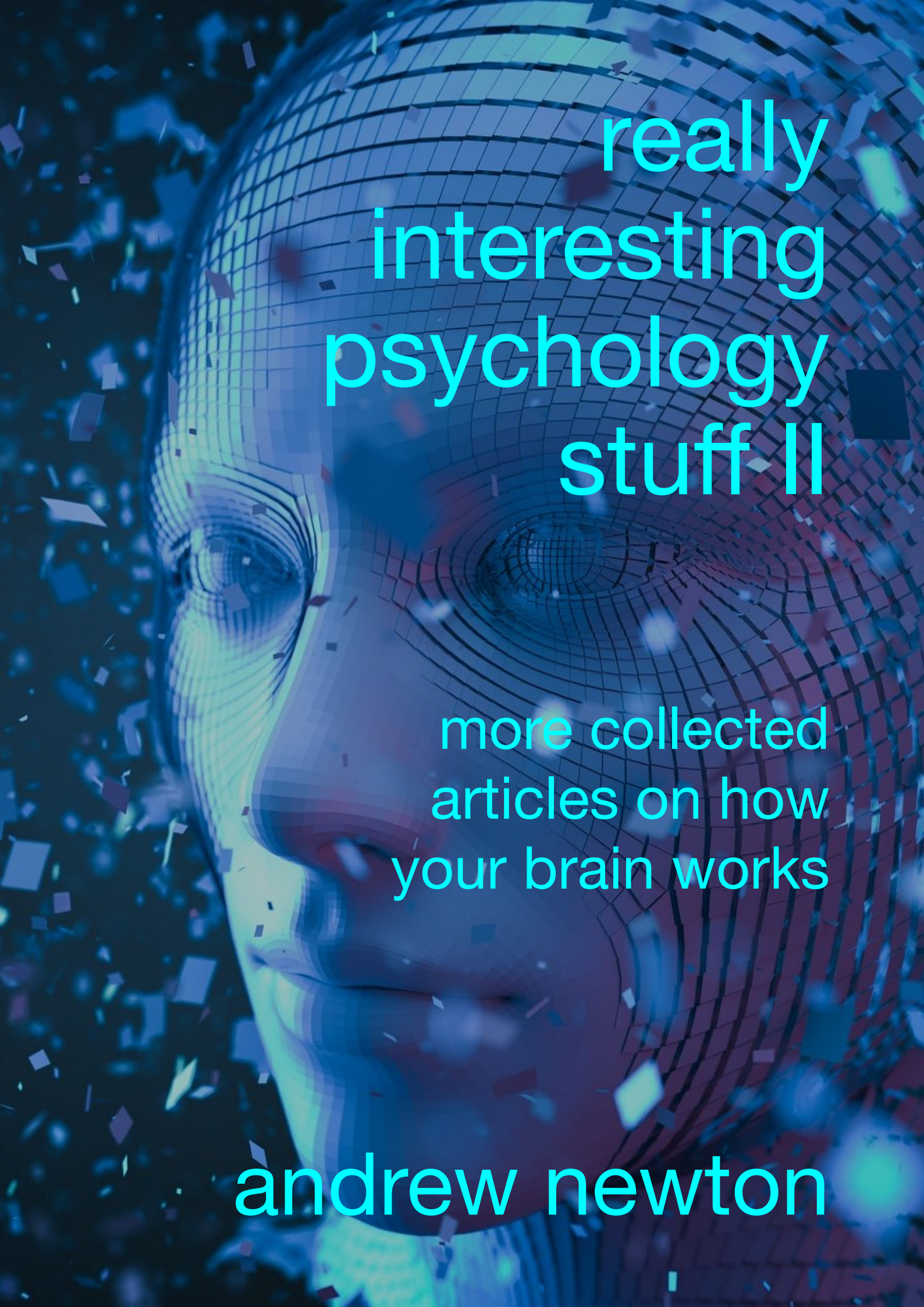


really interesting psychology stuff II

more collected articles on how your brain works

andrew newton

Contents

Always Look on the Bright Side of Life

Negative thinking can help us prepare for failures or setbacks, so when bad things happen we are prepared to deal with them.

Monty Python told us to ‘Always look on the bright side of life', but of course optimism isn't as ingrained in human nature as we think. I fact humans are not predisposed to optimism and most people don’t go around wearing rose-tinted glasses.

It’s past time we cast doubt over the old idea of the existence of 'irrational optimism bias’ which claims that humans have an innate feeling that everything will be alright, because it won’t!

Part of the problem is that we live in what is now a relatively safe world. A least in the West, we are relatively safe from war, invasion, disease, wild animals and murderers.

Irrational optimism bias is a state of mind where people look *too much* on the bright side of life, underestimating their chances of negative experiences while overestimating their chances of positive events. Irrational optimism bias can contribute to debt, failure to look after one’s health, or inaction over inevitable loss.

This over-optimistic bias is also taken into account by the UK government when planning large infrastructure projects. A new study has been carried out by researchers at the University of Bath, University College London, and Birkbeck, University of London, and scientists are now saying there are flaws in the research supporting the existence of irrational optimism bias.

The authors are not saying that irrational optimism bias doesn't exist, because we know it does — we see examples of it every day. But the assumption that it's an innate part of human nature may have affected the accuracy of previous optimism studies. Prior scientific studies have generated 'false positives' in the form of data patterns that seem as if people are being over-optimistic but where no such bias exists — ironically, something that was in itself a near perfect example of irrational optimism bias!

The new research shows that the method commonly used to evidence such optimism is flawed, giving rise to optimistic belief where optimism is not possible. This is not to say that optimism bias does not exist in the real world, but that new and better methods are needed as traditional methods return false positives.

The researchers conducted several experiments using a methodology widely accepted in optimism research, known as 'the update method' or 'belief updating'. This method involves participants estimating their chance of experiencing a life event and then re-estimating it after being provided with the average person's actual chance of experiencing the event.

Typically, this has been done with negative life events, like contracting a disease or getting a divorce. In other words, various forms of bad news cases that would, or at least should, elicit a strong emotional response.

For example, a participant might be asked to estimate their chance of experiencing a negative life event, such as getting divorced, to which they might reply 5%. They are then presented with the actual proportion of the general population that get divorced in their lifetime (45%) before updating their belief. The bad news of finding out the chances of divorce are higher than expected is a form of 'undesirable information'.

Tests where participants received desirable information typically elicited greater updates than trials with undesirable information. This is interpreted as evidence of optimism in belief updating.

For this new study, the researchers tested the same 'update method' but removed the emotional element, instead using neutral non-emotional examples, such as participants estimating the chances of the next passing car being red, or a thunderstorm in the next four weeks.

Despite changing the examples and removing the emotional elements in the questions, the same optimistic pattern was observed, proving that it wasn't the element of optimism that was changing their beliefs, but the extra information that led the team to challenge the validity of the methods used in other research claiming to prove optimism bias.

When emotional aspects are removed, there should be no optimistic patterns of changing beliefs. By definition, the removal of emotion makes it impossible to get good or bad news about the chances of life events. Because we still find beliefs changing about neutral events indicates that this task is not about measuring optimism but instead, more likely statistical reasoning.

Researchers argue that valence – whether information is good, bad, or neutral – is essential to the claims supporting the existence of optimistic 'belief updating'. The team don't deny evidence for optimism in certain situations, but that is not to say humans are generally optimistic. It's not that optimism doesn't exist, or that people are not overly optimistic in certain situations – e.g. sports fans for weak teams, it's that the research questions the general existence of optimistic bias as a default mode of human condition.

Irrational optimism bias can contribute to financial crises, people's failure to look after their health, or inaction over climate change. But researchers and policy makers have made careers based on the idea of optimism bias, so it might be time to reconsider the evidence for this psychological phenomenon.

Optimism bias is continually being used to guide large government projects, seemingly to manage projections about the time and financial costs of projects. But new research supports a re-examination of optimism bias before it guides policy further.

The study was published in the journal **Cognition**

Both positive and negative thinking can be very powerful. Positive thinking helps drive motivation, and keeps us working towards the goals we hope to achieve. Negative thinking can help us prepare for failures or setbacks, so when bad things happen we are prepared to deal with them.

Optimism on the other hand — thinking too positively — can make you lazy or complacent and thus less likely to reach your goals. Uncritical or simplistic positive thinking or fantasising about a positive future can be dangerous! It is possible to set yourself up for feeling shocked and distressed when the future doesn't turn out ass you had imagined it would.

A study carried out in 2020 by QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute in Brisbane, Australia, found that pessimistic people die earlier than people who don't have overtly negative or positive views. Researchers found that those with negative outlooks about the present or future died about two years earlier than the average person. Pessimists are less likely to look after themselves, resulting in earlier declining health.

However, being of an optimistic disposition was not found to increase life expectancy.

Previous studies discovered an association between optimism, pessimism and illness. Optimism and pessimism are not direct opposites, and a key feature of the QIMR results was that the researchers used two separate scales to measure pessimism and optimism and their association with all causes of death.

The researchers also used a questionnaire — part of the Life Orientation Test, which looked at the health of Australians between 1993 and 1995, together with follow-up information that was only made available at the end of 2009, and which involved more than 3,000 participants aged 50 or older.

All the participants were given a score on an optimism—pessimism scale based on how much they agreed or disagreed with optimistic and pessimistic statements, such as: ‘I'm always optimistic about my future' or 'If something can go wrong for me, it will.’

Those who scored higher as pessimists were likely to die two years earlier on average than those who did not rate as pessimistic. Pessimists were also more likely to die earlier from cardiovascular disease and other causes of death, but oddly, not from cancer. In addition, mood disorders such as depression did not appear to have an effect on the link between pessimism and mortality.

It's not clear why pessimists die sooner, but the researchers don’t believe that disease causes pessimism or pessimism causes disease.

It could be that people who are pessimistic don’t look after themselves and their health as well as hey might, or they might not think there's any point in following advice about diet and exercise.

There are indications that optimistic and pessimistic attitudes can have effects on brain and blood biochemistry, inflammation perhaps on the arterial wall.

The research team confirmed that high optimism scores did not correlate with a longer or a shorter life expectancy. Neither was there any statistical significance in optimism or pessimism scores between men and women.

The study was published in the journal **Nature**

It's OK to be selfish!

Ultimately, you are the guardian of your own happiness, so when the pressures from other people get too much you have the right to take the appropriate action.

Selfishness has always been thought of as a bad thing, on the same diabolical level as greed, dishonesty and egomania, but it doesn't havre to be.

If you're feeling stressed, anxious, or at your wits end, it's almost impossible to function at your best. So maybe sometimes it's OK to put yourself first for a change, because that might save your sanity!

The American psychologist Scott Barry Kaufman said that *'healthy selfishness is simply a matter of 'having a healthy respect for your own health, growth, happiness, joy and freedom.'* Kaufman also says that these things are important to our mental wellbeing and day-to-day lives.

Having had my share of stress in life, I can say with some authority that I believe Dr Kaufman is right. There are times when we *need* to be selfish, especially if we're exhausted as a result of always putting others first. It's OK to be selfish until you're back on your feet. By focusing on your own needs, you can even help others.

In the tumult of life in the 21st century, it's easily forget about our own priorities, so here's what to do if you're suffering from stress…

- Forget what society thinks - it's OK to ditch some of the traditional duties within families, even. So it's important to set boundaries to stop people taking advantage of you. There are always new ways of handling situations and doing things differently while maintaining boundaries.
- Make a list of your priorities, whatever they may be, and put them in order of importance.
- Learn to say 'no' and don't feel bad about it. If you need some 'me time', others must learn to understand that you too have important things to do.
- Boundaries need to be set in place. It's too easy to lose control of our boundaries, whether time or money related.

- It can take practice to construct reasonable and healthy boundaries, but that process starts by recognising when a situation, relationship or expectation is draining you.
- Don't suppress your thoughts or emotions when reasoning with friends or family. Be polite, but remain firm in your resolve. They will respect you more in the end.
- Take time process and understand your thoughts and learn how to handle them. Take time to step back to re-evaluate your priorities to make them clear in your mind. You will then be better able to express how you are feeling, instead of in the heat of the moment. Practice articulating your thoughts and wishes clearly.
- Learn to understand that when people are demanding too much of you, you have the right to say no. Whatever happens, don't feel guilty about putting yourself first! It is your right, and you shouldn't feel guilty about doing our best. Simply communicate your needs clearly.
- If necessary, you could 'buy time' by saying something like *"can I get back to you on that?"* or pointing them in he direction of someone else who could help them. Making time for yourself will do more for your physical and mental health than you realise.
- Don't dwell on past events, or try to predict the future. Whatever happens, don't become preoccupied with negative thinking! Instead… enjoy the present and focus on things that are within your immediate control and keep a routine and structure can help to boost your wellbeing.

Ultimately, you are the guardian of your own happiness, so when the pressures from other people get too much you have the right to take the appropriate action. Please try to understand that it really *is* reasonable to enjoy your own time, to listen to music, to go for a walk, tread, or even just to watch TV!

One last tip: Forget social media for a while! Remember, what was intended as a quick and convenient way of communicating with close friends has grown into an all-consuming monster!!!

No Means No!

Don’t make the mistake of comparing yourself to others. You are your own person and old enough and wise enough to make rational judgements.

Trying to explain why you are setting boundaries can be counter-productive.

The rule for setting boundaries is simple — the decisions you make must suit your own best interests. People won't always like your decisions, and that’s their right, but they must learn to respect those decisions.

It’s important to set boundaries in any relationship, even if people don't like them. It’s also important not to have to abase yourself by trying to explain your decisions to be liked by someone else because that will not make for a healthy relationship.

Sometimes it can be difficult to put decisions in place, but establishing boundaries is not selfish, it’s about giving your needs equal importance! Setting a boundary doesn't make you wrong!

True, sometimes it might feel difficult to do this, but if you think setting boundaries between yourself and others is a case of ‘all or nothing’, you’d be wrong, because the most likely outcome is that the other person will recognise the reason for your decision. If they don’t, then it will most likely be a waste of time trying to explain the reasons for it.

Having said that, it’s often better to say something like “it’ll be safer if you put the car on the drive rather than leave it on the road”, rather than just “put the car on the drive” because a little reasoning is often helpful. But either way, the car is going on the drive, not the road… end of story!

It’s simply a matter of putting yourself first. This is not selfish, it’s the way it should be, and there’s no need to feel selfish or embarrassed about it!

Having healthy boundaries doesn't mean you have to stop caring about other’s needs. It just means you have to start treating your own as equally important. Putting yourself in ‘people-pleasing mode’ when you have to say no is bad for your own confidence. Really… you don’t have to explain yourself!

If it feels uncomfortable to say no to something, you might find yourself going into 'people pleasing mode', and start to over explain why you can't do something. This happens when you think your own needs might not be good enough reason to disappoint other people.

Over explaining yourself chips away at your own self-confidence because it confirms your belief that other people need to agree with those reasons for them to be valid.

The word 'No' is not something that has to be explained.

Saying 'NO' is easier than you think

The first thing to remember is not to set yourself impossibly high standards of politeness. Learning to say 'no' to people is not only empowering, it's liberating. Giving in to other's demands — especially if those demands are unreasonable — is not going to benefit *you*, and it can even be self sabotaging, sometimes interfering with your own personal goals. Saying 'no' can actually improve your self esteem.

We can all feel uncomfortable saying 'no', but saying 'no' and sticking to your guns can earn you respect!

One problem is that saying 'yes' when you want to say 'no' because you don't want to upset the other person. Trust your own judgement to decide whether their request is reasonable. Taking on other people's problems can add stress to your own life and that's just not fair!

So one thing to consider is whether or not the other person's request is reasonable or not, and this will depend on your relationship with them. This can take some soul searching, but once you've made your decision, stick to it!

The more information you have about their request, the better able you will be to make a judgement about whether or not their request is reasonable. Saying 'yes' when you want to say 'no' because you don't want to upset the other person will only add to your own stress.

It's also important to know where your assistance might lead and what sort of commitment you might be making. Whatever happens, try not to spend too much time procrastinating because this will add to your stress.

Try to remember that feeling guilty or putting yourself down because you said no, is also counter-productive, possibly even affecting your own self-esteem and negativity. Just be aware of your own feelings, thoughts, emotions and beliefs. Most important, don't compromise those feelings, thoughts, emotions and beliefs.

Finally, don't make the mistake of comparing yourself to others. You are your own person and big enough to make rational judgements.

Use your own life experience to make those judgements… and stick to them. Really… you'll feel a lot better.

Swearing is good for you!

Profanities create an emotional arousal in both the listener and speaker and can increase credibility and persuasiveness.

In the 21st century, swearing is no longer seen as vulgar or a sign of low intelligence. Swearing can enhance a joke, help relieve pain, reduce road rage and express joy, and it seems that swearing can also produce an emotional arousal more effectively than ordinary words. Even blasphemous words used in solidarity can exert a positive impact.

Swearing has long been dismissed as a subject of serious research because it was assumed to be a sign of aggression, poor language proficiency or even low intelligence, but there is solid evidence that challenges this view, and scientists are now reconsidering the nature — and power — of rude words and expressions.

Researchers from the Universities of Keele, Ulster and Westminster, along with colleagues in Sweden, examined the effect of swearing and found that the use of swear words may originate in a different part of the brain than normal speech. They also discovered that rude words were ‘undeniably different from and more powerful than other forms of language’.

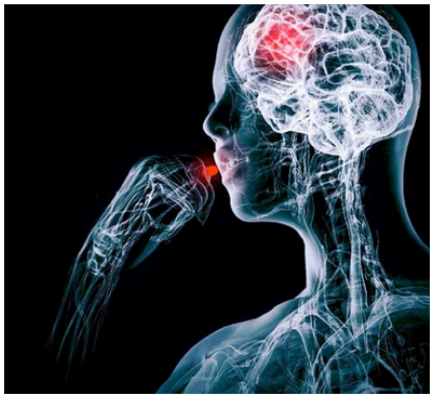
The positive side of 'everyday swearing' is that it can help people express emotions such as fear, joy, anger and excitement — as well as humour and solidarity. Explicit language has the capacity to exert an emotional force not shared by other more ordinary words.

Profanities create an emotional arousal in both the listener and speaker and can increase credibility and persuasiveness.

However, you still need to be careful who you swear in front of because some people may find it offensive, inappropriate and objectionable.

Harnessing the Placebo Effect

The latest data shows about 7.8million adults in England take antidepressants.



First… what *is* a placebo? In short, a placebo is like a ‘sugar pill’. It doesn’t actually do anything like a real medicine, it’s an inert substance given to a patient to make it *seem* as if they are being given real medicine. Placebos don’t contain any kind of active substance that will boost health or cure illness. But placebos *are* used in studies to help scientists understand the effect of new treatments for certain conditions.

For example, a study involved with finding a cure for the common cold would involve some patients being given a new experimental drug while others would be given a placebo (usually without being told it was a placebo) in order to compare the effect the medication has against the inert pill. The results allow researchers to compare the new treatment's effectiveness and check for any side effects. The placebo *effect* occurs when a person improves or experiences side effects after swallowing nothing more than an inert pill.

But studies have demonstrated that placebos can ease depression, pain, insomnia and even Irritable Bowel Syndrome, all of which are caused by psychological conditions. In other words, patients’ health improves because the *believe* they’re going to improve! In fact the placebo effect represents a classic example of the relationship between the body and the mind. Some patients have even experienced an increase in hormone levels that ease depression.

In other words, drugs can work better if you expect them to. A real-world example is that patients with appendicitis who believed antibiotics would help them were *substantially* more likely to see symptoms improve.

Researchers at the University of Washington led by Dr. David Flum, said it revealed the belief — the idea that your brain can convince your body that a treatment is making you better — and the power of the mind can help patients on the road to recovery.

However, although this belief can’t mend a broken bone or shrink a tumour, it can improve symptoms, such as pain, that are processed in the brain.

Hypnosis is partly based on the placebo effect: relaxation is the key that opens the door that allows the brain to process information in a new way, but a clients belief in the effectiveness of the suggestions given during hypnosis is also part of the cure.

Researchers at the University of Washington monitored 425 participants, mostly in their thirties, from 25 medical centres across America from May 2016 to February 2020. The participants were asked to fill out surveys before they were split into three groups — those who thought antibiotics would not work, those who thought they may help, and those who felt they would be successful — before they were prescribed antibiotics. The groups were then monitored for 30 days.

The results showed that those who believed antibiotics would cure their illness turned out to be 13% less likely to need surgery. In that group, 15 out of 111 adults (14%) went for the operation. The 24 out of 92 participants who had no faith in the drug, (27%) needed surgery. But those who believed in antibiotics were 15% more likely that persistent symptoms, such as like stomach pain, would ease and were 6% more likely to be satisfied with their treatment.

These results might suggest that patients who believed in the effectiveness of antibiotics were more likely to take their pills at the right times, but it could also mean that the belief in the drug makes it less likely they would experience pain.

This information might affect a doctor's decision as to whether or not an operation is needed. According to Dr. Flum, *"The experience and reporting of pain have been previously shown to be associated with patients' beliefs and expectations. Participants reports of worsening pain may very well have motivated the decision for surgery."*

The study found very few people who strongly believed antibiotics did not work and led to antibiotics being accepted as the first line of treatment for appendicitis rather than immediate surgery to remove the infected organ quickly, with recovery taking a few weeks. But more and more patients are now being prescribed antibiotics to fight the infection.

The paper was published in **JAMA Surgery**

Placebos vs Antidepressants

Doctors should stop prescribing antidepressants because there is no *real* clinical evidence that they work better than a placebo.

About one in six British adults take antidepressants but there is rising concern about their overuse as well as the risk of withdrawal symptoms and side-effects.

Experts at University College, London reviewed all existing evidence on common antidepressants and concluded there is 'considerable uncertainty about the benefits'.

They urged doctors to give the drugs '*to fewer patients, for shorter periods of time*' because so many people struggle when they stop taking them.

The study found that much of the evidence came from trials lasting just six to 12 weeks and the '*results don't meet the threshold for a clinically important difference*' between antidepressants and placebo pills.

The study was published in the journal Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin, and comes after the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) ruled that the NHS should offer patients with mild depression group therapy sessions before pills.

Lead author Dr Mark Harowitz said *"The prevalence of side effects may be even higher among those taking antidepressants for more than three years, and can include emotional numbness and mental 'fogginess…' Patients trying to come off their treatment often experience withdrawal symptoms. These can include anxiety, insomnia, depression, agitation and appetite changes, and can interfere with social functioning and professional life, particularly if treatment is stopped abruptly."*

Dr Harowitz said the findings in teenagers and children were 'even less convincing' despite the number of 12 to 17 year-olds on antidepressants had more than doubled since 2005.

The study said antidepressants may work for severe depression, but added that the cons may outweigh the pros in those with mild to moderate depression or with those whose symptoms don't yet qualify as depression.

The authors concluded that *"In light of this uncertain balance of benefits and harms, we should re-visit the widespread and growing prescription of antidepressants."*

The latest data shows about 7.8million adults in England take antidepressants.

The most common drugs are selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs) such as Sertraline. The number of prescriptions issued to women are also 50% higher than those for men.

Like all medicines, Sertraline can cause side effects in some people, but many people have no side effects or minor side effects. Some of the common side effects of sertraline will gradually lessen as your body gets used to it.

However, some patients prescribed Sertraline for panic attacks find their anxiety gets worse during the first few weeks of treatment. This usually wears off after a few weeks and a lower dose may help reduce symptoms.

Common side effects include occur in more than one in 100 people. They include Nausea, headaches, insomnia, feeling sleepy, feeling dizzy, feeling tired or weak, diarrhoea, dry mouth.

However, patients are usually advised to keep taking the medicine, but speak to a doctor or pharmacist if the advice on how to cope does not help and a side effect is still bothering you or does not go away.

Serious side effects can occur in less than one in 100 people. In women, it can cause a change in periods such as heavy bleeding, spotting or bleeding between periods.

It can also cause weight gain or weight loss, feelings of overwhelming happiness (euphoria), excessive enthusiasm or excitement, or a feeling of restlessness that means you cannot sit or stand still.

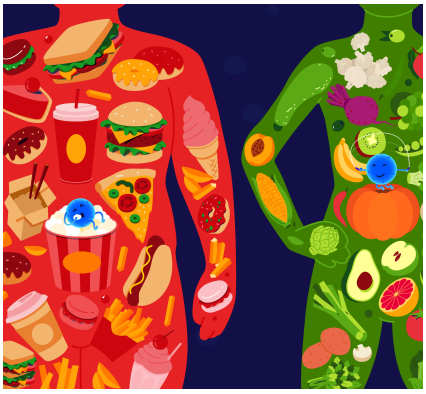
If the whites of your eyes turn yellow, or your skin turns yellow (this may be less apparent in people of brown or black skin) – these can be signs of liver damage.

In extreme cases, Sertraline could cause you to cough up blood or have blood in your urine, have black or red stools or blood in your vomit. These can be signs of bleeding from the gut. Sometimes it can cause bleeding from the gums, or bruises that appear without a reason, or bruises that get bigger.

Trust me… If you're depressed, don't take the take the drugs… get the therapy — it's a lot better for you!

Tips for Easy Weight Loss

Mind over mealtime is the secret formula… and there's an easy psychological trick you can try at home which will satisfy your hunger!



Just small modifications to your life and diet will help you lose weight. Crash diets and excessive exercise don't work – weight lost in the gym will reappear as soon as you stop going and research suggests even if you enjoy a short burst of motivation at the start, it will soon wear off!

One pound of fat is equal to 3,500 calories, so to lose roughly half a pound a week, you only need to reduce your intake by about 250 calories a day – something that can be achieved by a brisk 15 minute walk or avoiding an after dinner sweet or a sweet latte coffee at lunchtime. Doing this for a year means losing more than 20lbs! (10 Kg.)

Eating from smaller plates can help reduce calorie intake. In 2016, Cornell University researchers collated separate studies which examined the effect of smaller plates on consumption. They found that halving the size of your plate led to an average 30% reduction in the amount of food consumed. Eating is very visual – when you put smaller portions on a big plate, it looks like it's not going to be enough. But if you put the same portion on a smaller plate it makes the amount of food look bigger, and you don't feel as if you're being forced to diet.

It's no secret that portion control and the speed at which people eat is strongly linked to weight. Cutting the size of a dessert and using a smaller fork or teaspoon to eat it can also help. Remember, our ancestors didn't eat sugary desserts, and consequently, they weren't overweight! A 2018 study published in the **British Journal of Nutrition** found that people ate slower and bite sizes were smaller when using smaller teaspoons! People who used small spoons ate 8% less food than people using larger spoons. People who eat quickly are more likely to retain body fat, and up to 115% more likely to be obese than slower eaters.

Caffeine is a stimulant and it increases your metabolic rate, which can assist weight loss. Unsweetened green tea is loaded with antioxidants and active plant compounds which boost the effects of fat-burning hormones – a diet rich in antioxidants is integral to helping you shed pounds. Tea is also very low in calories, provided you don't add sugar!

Caffeine also helps to reduce your appetite, but too much can disrupt sleep, which is also important to personal health and weight loss.

Humans need water! We're mostly made up of water, so drinking sufficient amounts of water is key to weight loss. You should drink water every day because it's essential for good health *and* weight loss. The brain often confuses thirst (caused by dehydration) with hunger so staying hydrated throughout the day is an easy way to keep your appetite in check. Drinking water also helps the process of thermogenesis, which produces body heat. Increasing thermogenesis increases metabolism and helps the body burn more calories!

Ordinary exercise, such as walking, climbing stairs, or activities such as vacuuming will also help. A 15 minute brisk walk added every day to your routine will burn up to 250 extra calories per day. A walk won't make you break into a sweat, but the results add up. You could also get off the bus a couple of stops early!

You don't have to do 30 minutes exercise every day to lose weight. Just walking up and down a flight of stairs every hour will have the desired effect. Every day activities like that are just as good as going to the gym and will burn just as many calories. Remember… slow steady weight loss will mean keeping the weight off in the long term. Short bursts of moderate exercise will also boost your energy levels and improve your mood and has even shown to alleviate long term depression.

It goes without saying that fruit and vegetables are good for you and help ward off illness. Vegetables and berries are full of fibre that make you feel fuller because they are digested at a slower rate than foods that are lower in fibre. The high water content in fruits and vegetables also help to keep you feeling full for longer, which in turn discourages snacking on high calorie fatty foods. They also provide a gradual release of energy into the bloodstream, keeping blood sugar levels stable. Broccoli, for instance, helps to flush out toxins that cause inflammation that can lead to cancer. Blackberries contain high concentrations of antioxidants that protect you from conditions such as Alzheimer's, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and various other cancers.

Eating late at night or too close to bedtime causes weight gain. Late evening snacks are the ones that usually contain the most calories which then interact badly with the body's natural 24-hour internal clock that regulates and synchronises digestion and metabolism. When those cravings hit, you don't need to deprive yourself altogether – just exercise a little will-power and have a couple of mouthfuls… and stop at that! Or better still, slip into your pyjamas, have a nice cup of tea, and turn the TV off!

The amount of sleep a person needs changes as they age and insufficient sleep has been linked to higher body mass index and weight gain. An analysis of 20 studies involving more than 307,000 people concluded that adults who slept for fewer than seven hours had a 41% increased risk of obesity.

Insufficient sleep can also wreak havoc on hunger levels, raising the temptation of eating unhealthy high-fat high-calorie foods because sleep deprivation affects the hormones that regulate hunger. Lack of sleep sleep reduces the amount of leptin – the hormone that sends signals to the brain that help you feel full, while increasing ghrelin – the hormone that sends signals to the brain when your stomach is empty and needs food.

Finally, forget the 'five a day' diet because it was invented by a well known supermarket as a way of persuading people to buy more produce! It's important to eat *some* fruit and vegetables every day, and it doesn't matter whether they're fresh, frozen, dried or canned! Try to vary your diet by changing between potatoes, bread (ideally wholegrain), rice, pasta or other starchy carbohydrates but also ensure there's fibre (in fruit and vegetables) in your diet. Apart from all that, you can eat pretty much what you like, so long as you *stop eating the moment you feel full!*

As far as dieting is concerned, the golden rule is: Less in – More out. In effect your goal is to burn more calories than you consume. Typically, a *deficit* of around 500 calories is enough to lose about 1lb (half a Kg) per week. This is not as difficult as you might think. Subtract 500 calories from your diet and burn another 500 calories by doing *moderate* exercise.

This system and will ensure you lose body fat at a constant rate every week. It's safe, and it works!

Why a lot of diets don't work…

The UK has some of the highest rates of obesity in the world

The National Health Service's own Weight Loss Plan can be downloaded as a free App on any smartphone. But according to a recent study carried out by the University of Oxford, the results were disappointing.

The Oxford scientists recruited 512 patients with an average body mass index (BMI) of 35, which put them in the 'obese' category, and allocated them randomly to one of three weight-loss programmes — the NHS Weight Loss Plan, Slimming World Online (which offers standard calorie-control advice) and Rosemary Online (which no longer exists). In addition, there was also the statutory control group, who were allowed to continue as normal.

All participants were asked to stick to their particular programme for eight weeks, and then report back on how much weight they had lost.

The results were disappointing. People following the NHS plan lost an average of less than 3 pounds (1.3kg), which was roughly the same as the control group, while those allocated to Slimming World lost 3.7 pounds (1.7kg) and those following Rosemary Online lost 5 pounds (2.3kg).

In fairness, a loss of 5 pounds over eight weeks isn't too bad and certainly better than nothing. When people lose weight too quickly, usually by 'crash dieting', the body reels against this rapid loss and begins to store body fat. This is an age old survival strategy. Our ancestors stored body fat when there was famine or war. Evolution dictated that those unable to store body fat perished and thus did not pass on their genes to the next generation.

In addition, it is known that people who lose weight too quickly are more likely to put it on again, whereas gradual weight loss makes long-term success more likely.

According to he Oxford researchers, asking patients to do these programmes was, at best 'only marginally superior to no intervention'. Marginally perhaps, but extended over 12 months, the average weight loss would be 24 pounds (10.9 kilos) — a major achievement for most dieters.

The researchers should have looked at weight loss hypnotherapy. In particular, they should have looked at the 'Virtual Gastric Band' method, where clients visualise the surgical gastric band procedure while in hypnosis. This method has proved highly successful, partly because it does not recommend dieting as such, rather it encourages patients to stop eating the moment they feel full.

Combined with a little moderate exercise (three brisk walks of no more than 15 minutes a week) the weight is lost gradually over a longer period, but is more likely to stay off. The problem with most diet plans is that many of the recipes are low in fat and high in carbohydrates. Many plans recommend skimmed milk and zero-fat yoghurt, even though it is well known that low-fat diets are an inefficient way of losing weight.

In Spain, as part of a study called Predimed, 7,447 overweight people were randomly allocated to either a low-fat diet or a Mediterranean diet, providing only 40% of their calories in the form of fat — mainly oily fish, nuts, olive oil and dairy.

The trial was due to run for six years but was stopped early because those on the higher-fat Mediterranean diet were doing much better! Those participants had 30% fewer heart attacks and strokes and a 50% lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes, than those on the low-fat diet. Other studies have also shown the failure of the low-fat approach.

The Women's Health Initiative Dietary Modification Trial, which began in 1993, involved 48,000 American women randomly allocated either a low-fat diet or their usual food. Those on the low-fat diet were also provided with extensive counselling and support and they managed to cut their fat consumption significantly. But when the trial ended eight years later, those who had gone low-fat were no healthier than the control group when it came to weight loss, heart disease or cancer.

As for dairy products, there is no compelling evidence that low-fat versions are healthier. On the contrary, there is mounting evidence that full-fat versions are better for you.

In a Swedish study, researchers assessed the impact of eating full-fat dairy on more than 4,500 middle-aged volunteers. To accurately measure how much they were consuming, they had their blood tested for levels of two fatty acids — heptadecanoic acid and trans-palmitoleic acid — which are found almost exclusively in dairy fats.

These volunteers were monitored over a 16 year period, and again, the results showed that the biggest consumers of full-fat dairy had the lowest rate of heart attacks and strokes. These results are similar to those found in other studies carried out in countries including the U.S., the UK and Denmark and involving more than 42,000 people. Other studies show that people who eat full-fat dairy products usually put on less weight and have lower rates of obesity, probably because fat is more satiating than carbs.

So… if you want to lose a decent amount of weight — say ten pounds (4.5kg) or more — then it is becoming increasingly clear that embarking own a gradual, steady low-fat high carb diet is unlikely to be successful.

The Oxford research described above, where patients tried an 800 to 1,000 calorie low-carb approach, resulted in an average weight loss at eight weeks of one stone and 7 pounds (9.5kg) and large improvements in blood sugar levels. These changes were far greater than in the control group who were offered standard NHS healthy-eating advice, and Gastric Band Hypnotherapy makes it easier.

Worrying about your Body Mass Index (BMI) *is not* the way to lose weight! It's your waist-to-hip ratio (WHR) that really matters!

Doctors have known for years that BMI is an imperfect measure of obesity because it's calculated by dividing your weight by your height (in kgs & metres), but it doesn't take into

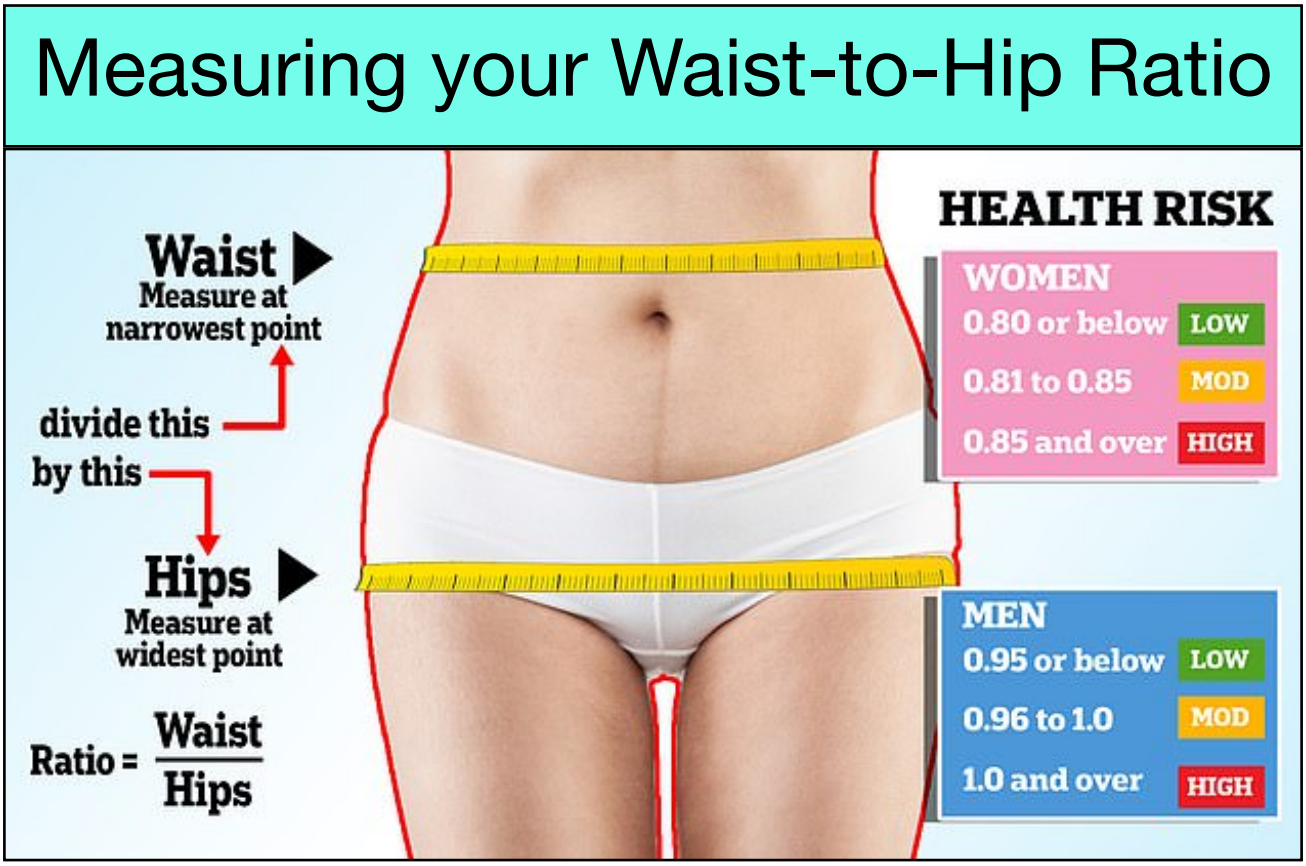
consideration fat *distribution.* Neither does you BMI reliably predict the risk of type 2 diabetes or heart disease.

The BMI was formulated in the 1830s, not by a physician, but by a Belgian mathematician, and doctors have relied on it without question ever since. It measures how large someone is but not how obese they are — so it's a measure of size, not health. But the BMI's major limitation is that it doesn't take into account differences in fat distribution, whereas the waist-to-hip ratio does, and it's calculated by dividing the circumference of your waist by that of your hips.

The NHS warned about BMI's flaws, saying it shouldn't be used for pregnant women due to the inevitable weight gain as a baby develops in the womb, and t doesn't pick up some obesity risks in people from differing ethnic backgrounds. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence says a person's waist measurement should be less than half their height to keep health problems at bay. So clinical recommendations and interventions should prioritise setting healthy WHR targets rather than general BMI targets.

The WHR is a more accurate measure of body shape that will reduce the risk of ill health such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease, and a better predictor of early death than any other kind of obesity measurement.

You can use a tape measure to find the circumference of your natural waist (which is just above the belly button) and do the same with your hips. It's easier to use centimetres and a calculator. Divide the waist measurement by the hip measurement to determine the ratio. The value of this score is different for men and women. For women, a healthy or low-risk score is 0.8 or below and a moderate risk is 0.81 to 0.85. For men, a healthy or low-risk score 0.95 or below. [See diagram.]



The European Association for the Study of Diabetes has also recommended replacing the BMI with the WHR because the WHR better reflects levels of abdominal fat, including visceral fat, which forms around organs deep inside the body. The lower the WHR, the lower the mortality risk and clinical recommendations and interventions should prioritise setting healthy WHR targets rather than general BMI targets.

The problem however is that the WHR changes little with modest weight loss, so it's still a good idea to rely on those scales to estimate how much weight you need to lose!

Mind Over Mealtime

There's an easy psychological trick you can try at home which will satisfy your hunger! Just close your eyes and think back to lunch, and imagine you ate twice as much as you actually did, because the memory of a meal, even if it's false, can make you believe you're full!

Researchers at the University of Cambridge gave 151 volunteers, split into five groups, a standard-sized lunch of rice and sweet and sour vegetables. One group were asked to imagine they had eaten twice the amount of food, so much in fact that they were so full they could hardly move.

They also listened to a recording of less than two minutes including the instructions: *'Recall the size of the rice and sauce portion you received. Now, imagine that it was twice as big… take a few seconds to imagine this. Now picture yourself eating both of these portions… Imagine physically doing the eating, the chewing and the swallowing… Remember what you felt like after you finished eating your rice… Imagine you felt very full, so full you could hardly move.'*

Three hours later, they were then given chocolate chip biscuits, chocolate fingers and digestives, and allowed to eat as many as they wanted. They were told it was so they could rate them on qualities like crunchiness and saltiness but the researchers secretly wanted to watch how much of the snacks they ate.

Other tasks, such as remembering lunch and imagining it moving on the plate, or remembering lunch in detail, including chewing and swallowing, or looking at a picture of spaghetti hoops or imagining the spaghetti hoops moving around on the plate, did not significantly reduce people's biscuit intake.

Those who imagined they had eaten a huge lunch consumed almost a third less biscuits, which saved them around 122 calories.

It seems that just thinking about lunch makes people more aware of the feeling that they are still full, and imagining they ate twice as much seems to trick them into eating less. So maybe the amount we eat can be controlled by our minds rather than our stomachs.

The exercise worked so well, some participants said they actually felt a bit sick after imagining eating a very large lunch.

The study was published in the journal Appetite

The Health Benefits of Walking

Helps with Weight Loss ~ Improves the Health of your Heart

Increases Lung Capacity ~ Lowers Blood Pressure

Speeds up Digestion ~ Lowers Sugar Cravings

Boosts Immunity ~ Delays Ageing

Improves Mood ~ Prevents Disability in Old Age

Decreases risk of Stroke in Women, Chronic Diseases, Diabetes, Cancer, Dementia, Varicose Veins

A 10 minute walk each day in old age reduces the risk of dying from any cause by 40%.

A study of more than 7,000 elderly adults tracked their exercise levels and death rate between 2009 and 2014.

Those who walk for just a few minutes every day are 40% less likely to die - from any cause - compared to those who were inactive.

Walking helps the oldest in society avoid inactivity, which increases the risk of death.

The NHS recommends adults aged 65 and over should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate activity, including walking, every week. About 20 minutes per day, at age 70

halves the risk of heart disease in your 80s, but this latest research suggests less than half that will still be beneficial as people grow older.

Light exercise strengthens the heart and also helps reduce the risk of heart attacks and strokes by lowering blood pressure and keeping the heart in good shape.

Men aged 70 to 75 who regularly garden, cycle, walk or take other exercise for that duration are 52% less likely to get cardiovascular disease compared to the inactive. Older women who exercise are also at a lower risk, although the reduction is just 8%.

The findings, published in the **British Medical Journal** reinforce the idea that it is 'better late than never' when it comes to exercise.

Previous studies have shown that walking can reduce the risk of death in over 60s by 28% for every extra 1,000 steps they take a day.

The central message is to keep walking throughout life. Regular physical activity is good at any age as it helps to maintain a healthy weight and reduces your risk of developing high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Moderate exercise also improves your general quality of life. It's never too late to get active. Even just doing the housework, gardening or even just walking to the shops is enough!

Memory trick

Our brains have evolved to remember what is meaningful, not what isn't.

Every day your brain performs thousands of small miracles: it sees, hears, tastes, smells, feels pain and processes a wide range of emotions. It plans things and solves problems. It keeps you from bumping into walls or falling down stairs. It comprehends and produces language. It mediates your desire for chocolate and sex, and your ability to empathise with the joy and suffering of others… and it can remember.

Of all the complex and wondrous miracles that your brain manages, memory is the most important. Memory allows us to have a sense of who we are and what we have achieved. But for all its miraculous potential, memory isn't always reliable.

Although forgetting is usually thought of as a failing, it can actually be very good for you – being a perfectly normal way to adapt to the onslaught of information that you receive all day.

Our brains have evolved to remember only what is meaningful. The brain isn't designed to retain routine or predictable information. Forgetting allows us to get rid of any unnecessary, irrelevant, interfering or even painful memories that might distract us or make us miserable.

The ability to perform a previously learned skill – muscle memory – is different, being your unconscious memory for motor skills and procedures such as driving a car.

Ultimately, an optimally functioning memory involves a finely orchestrated balancing act between data storage and data disposal: remembering and forgetting.

Now… where did I put my glasses?

The most common reason for not remembering facts and information is not having paid attention. Attention is the first necessary ingredient in memory formation. So, if you don't notice where you put your glasses, you can't form a memory of where you placed them.

As we age, we also become less able to concentrate on more than one thing at a time. So, if two things are going on at once, we'll be less likely to remember either of them, or possibly both.

But be reassured, all this is perfectly normal and not a sign of imminent dementia.

Your keys do not belong in the fridge!

There's a very clear distinction between ‘normal’ forgetting and dementia.

If you eventually find your lost keys on the table or in your coat pocket, that moment of forgetfulness is probably normal. Frustrating, yes, but nothing to worry about. Most likely, you simply didn’t pay attention to where you put them.

However, if you find you’ve put your keys in the fridge, that’s more concerning. More worrying still is if, when you find your keys, you wonder ‘what are these for?’ that could really *be* dementia.

It’s on the tip of my tongue…

A very common memory failure is called ‘blocking’. You’re trying to fetch a word, most often a pronoun (a person’s name, film title, city), but even if it feels as though it’s on the tip of your tongue, you can’t produce it. But, rest assured, blocking on a word is a normal glitch in memory retrieval and no reason for concern.

Sometimes it helps to get a sneak peek of the forgotten word by way of the first letter or the number of syllables. The elusive word often eventually pops into consciousness, usually thanks to a ‘retrieval cue’ that’s strong enough to trigger its activation.

My advice? Look it up on the internet. No need to be a memory martyr. You don’t think twice about augmenting your vision with spectacles, so why not your memory?

Memory is scattered throughout the brain as neural activity that was stimulated when the original smell, sound, sight or emotion was experienced. So the process of remembering is a scavenger hunt around all these disparate, but connected, parts of the brain.

If you stimulate one aspect of the memory (a smell or an image), you can trigger activation of the linked memory circuit, which then brings forth the whole memory.

That’s why you might be unable to remember a single word of Abba’s Dancing Queen until someone else sings the first lyrics. Then you can belt out the entire song.

A simple way to boost your memory:

Information isn’t held in the working memory for long. Indeed, it stays in this short-term ‘holding bay’ for just 15 to 30 seconds before being displaced by the next piece of information. What’s more, the working memory declines with age, and information evaporates faster as you get older.

If you want to memorise a phone number, you’ll have a better chance if you repeat it, either aloud or in your head. This resets your working memory timer for another 15 to 30

seconds. Repeat it enough times and the information will be consolidated via your hippocampus (the part of the brain that controls long-term memory).

Master the 3Rs – and ignore the pain:

If you don't revisit a memory, it'll erode with the passage of time so, to retain it, you need to keep activating it with the 3Rs: reminiscence, rehearsal, repetition.

And if you want to forget a painful memory, don't repeat the story of what happened, either with others or in your thoughts. If you discipline yourself to leave those memories alone, they'll fade.

I know I came in here for something…

Often, you may find yourself having walked into a room but don't know why you went in.

Instead of standing there, trying to force the answer into your conscious brain, return to the previous room – either physically or in your mind's eye – to revisit the context. It should deliver the answer.

Stay active… and avoid the donut diet:

An unhealthy life is bad for your brain. You risk accelerating its ageing process by doing insufficient exercise, eating too many doughnuts or not getting enough sleep.

But some are more affected by age than others when it comes to memory power.

One way to build Alzheimer's resistance is to build what is known as 'cognitive reserve' (an abundance of neural connections in the brain).

Studies show people who have more years of formal education and who engage in socially and mentally stimulating activities have more cognitive reserve.

So even if Alzheimer's cuts off some parts of your brain, you'll have numerous back-up connections to act as a buffer.

Running will help job memory:

If you do nothing else to lower your risk of Alzheimer's, exercise. Many studies show that aerobic exercise is associated with a significantly reduced risk of dementia.

It improves sleep (decreasing the time it takes to fall asleep, increasing sleep quality and decreasing the number of times you wake up in the night) and improves normal memory.

Even a daily walk has been correlated with a 40 per cent decreased risk of Alzheimer's.

How much do you recall of last year?

Most people recall an average of only eight to ten days, in full, specific detail from the previous year. That's not even 3% of what you experienced.

So that's why a first kiss is so special:

Our brains have evolved to remember what is meaningful, not what isn't. So, can you remember these?

Your first kiss.

The day your grandmother died.

The colours of the rainbow.

… or these?

Your tenth kiss.

What you ate last Wednesday.

Your sixth-form teacher's name.

Crunch the numbers into small groups:

We can remember only seven – plus or minus two – things for 15 to 30 seconds. The number can be increased, though, by bundling information into groups. It's easier to remember the phone number 02075554062 as 020-7555-4062. Partly, that's due to the rhythm and melody to the sound of the number in your head. Similarly, 06122007 is much harder to memorise than 06/12/2007 or December 6, 2007.

How to retain memories:

1. GET OUT OF YOUR ROUTINE

Familiar patterns are the kiss of death for creating new memories, so plan a holiday to a new destination, rearrange the furniture or eat at a new restaurant.

2. GET OFF YOUR PHONE AND LOOK AROUND YOU

We can't remember what we don't notice – so live in the three-dimensional world rather than having your eyes glued to your phone.

3. FEEL IT

Emotional experiences are better remembered than neutral ones. If you want a stronger memory, get in touch with your feelings.

4. REHASH IT

Repetition makes your memories stronger. Reflecting over what happened, chatting about it with friends and regularly reminiscing will help you retain memories.

5. KEEP A JOURNAL

Not only does jotting down even one of today's experiences increase the likelihood that you'll remember the experience, but also the information you record can serve as cues for triggering recollection of whatever else happened today.

6. PHOTO ALBUMS

These can offer lovely strolls down memory lane, with each photo serving as a cue, triggering recall.

How to remember to remember:

Our brains are not designed to remember to do something in the future, so writing down what you need to remember is not a sign of weakness – it's just good sense.

1. MAKE TO-DO LISTS

Don't trust that you'll remember something. You probably won't. Write it down.

2. USE A CALENDAR

Make a habit of entering anything you need to do in the future, and check it regularly or set alert messages to remind you to check it.

3. BE SPECIFIC

You need to build into your brain cues to trigger activation of what you plan to do. For example, rather than saying 'I want to exercise later today', say: 'Yoga at noon.'

4. USE PILL BOXES

It's easy to overcome forgetting to take medication by using pill boxes, which have sections for each day of the week (or times per day).

5. PLACE YOUR CUES IN HARD-TO-MISS LOCATIONS

Put your yoga mat by the door and your pill box next to your toothbrush so you notice them.

We don't remember what we don't pay attention to:

Unless you're a coin collector, you probably can't recall exactly what a penny looks like from memory. Does the Queen's profile face right or left? Because pennies hold no meaning for you and don't affect your ability to spend them, you never paid close attention to them.

12 ways of improving memory:

Memory is affected by meaning, emotion, sleep, stress and context. So you can influence what your brain remembers and what it forgets.

1. PAY ATTENTION

This means decreasing distractions (TV, radio and phone) and stop multi-tasking. Be present to the sensory, emotional and factual information in front of you: try yoga and mindfulness.

2. FORM A PICTURE

Ensure you can see what you're trying to remember in your mind's eye. A mental picture adds more neural connections, deepening the associations and making that memory more robust.

3. MAKE IT MEANINGFUL

Taxi drivers can recall more streets if they are listed in an order that can be driven. So create a story about the information or event you're trying to remember and relate it to something you care about.

4. USE YOUR IMAGINATION

People with the best imaginations have the best memory. So visualise the memory – attach bizarre, surprising, sexy, vivid, funny, interactive elements to ensure it sticks.

5. LOCATE THAT IMAGE

Your brain is wired to remember where things are located. Take a moment to attach a special image to what you want to remember.

6. IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU

You're more likely to remember a detail about yourself or something you did. So associate things with your personal history and opinions.

7. LOOK FOR THE DRAMA

Emotionally charged, pulse-zapping life experiences – both good and bad – are more likely to be consolidated and to be resistant to forgetting.

8. DITCH THE DULL

The memory system isn't interested in the dull. If you want to remember more, step out of your routine and look for ways to make your day special, different or unusual.

9. USE STRONG CUES

Create multiple strong neural pathways (such as smell and emotion) that can lead to your memory's activation.

10. BE POSITIVE

People who use negative words perform worse on memory tests. Your memory will function better if it has high self-esteem.

11. CHILL OUT

Chronic stress is no good for our ability to remember. Train your body to be less reactive to stress through yoga, meditation and exercise.

12. GET ENOUGH SLEEP

You need seven to nine hours a night. Sleep is critical for locking in long-term memories.

False Memories

Hearing things on the news, talking with friends afterwards, associating snippets of information from films, magazines, holidays, gossip, shopping malls… all conspire to add details that are not based on truth.

Thousands of people all over the world (particularly in America) claim to have been abducted by aliens. But believing you've been abducted by aliens could be as bad for your mental health as *actually* being kidnapped by aliens.

A new study has found almost half of 'alien abductees' meet the criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder — PTSD — and that proportion is only slightly higher than in people who have been kidnapped by humans.

Researchers were only able to examine 19 people who claimed to have been abducted by aliens, as they are not easy to find — that's the people, not the aliens, who are more difficult to locate.

The group of people claiming to have been abducted scored more highly on the PTSD scale than the 32 people they were compared with.

The findings provide interesting evidence that people can be traumatised by something which almost certainly exists only in their imagination and did not actually happen.

The authors of the study, which involved Zaragoza University in Spain, stated *"The emotional reaction to memories of an implausible experience can be similar to an individual's response to a genuinely traumatic event… 'Abductees' can have an emotional reaction analogous to PTSD because, regardless of whether their recollections are true or false, their fear is real."*

Among the volunteer alien abductees in the study who reported alien abductions, five reported seeing 'strange' lights in the sky, while 15 reported a spaceship and various alien life forms. Interferences with electronic devices like the radio or television were described by two people, and six remembered a 'bedroom visitor'. More than half suffered memory loss from their 'abduction', typically lasting one to three hours, and one abductee said their memory was blank for a whole day-and-a-half.

All the participant abductees were asked to complete a questionnaire which measured PTSD, rating the frequency and severity of issues such as nightmares, being nervous or

easily frightened, feeling as if they were reliving their abduction, or having physical symptoms triggered by memories, including sweating and dizziness.

The study, published in the journal ***Explore***, found 9 out of 19 people met the criteria for a diagnosis of PTSD — the same rate seen in kidnap victims. Another 7 people who reported a close encounter with an alien also had some symptoms of PTSD, such as intrusive thoughts and negative mood swings. The remaining 3 had no trauma, with some people saying that the contact with aliens had 'changed their lives for the better'.

The nine women and 10 men abductees in the study were actually less 'suggestible' — a scale including gullibility and being easily led — than ordinary people.

However… the study authors say there are alternative explanations for people believing they have been taken by aliens, including 'sleep paralysis' — a state between sleeping and being fully awake where people can suffer hallucinations or feel like they are floating or are often unable to wake up properly.

Another explanation may be that an 'alien abduction' is a distorted recollection of medical procedures under anaesthetic, which could explain the memories of a round, bright light, nudity, pain and loss of control and unfamiliar figures that are similar in colour.

Because of the small numbers, the study was too small for the results to be statistically significant.

More likely, the participant's evidence may be a text book case of false memory syndrome.

False memory syndrome is a hugely controversial subject within psychology, and it is often used as a way of introducing doubt into the minds of complainants, witnesses and juries, especially in cases of sexual assault.

There is no doubt that our memories of events can be surprisingly bad, and this is very well supported by evidence. For instance, you could get hold of a book you really enjoyed reading thirty years ago and read it again. I can assure you, it will be a very different book!

Despite what we may think, our minds are far from infallible and we are often appalling at accurately recalling details. The fact is, memory is malleable… and thus unreliable. Any psychologist will tell you, more fool the person who absolutely, unquestioningly believes their own recollection of events. Study after study shows that our memory is in reality, atrocious. We forget things, invent things, exaggerate and mix up the chronology events in our minds. Our recollections are routinely flawed, and the more distant the event, the more likely we are to mis-remember it.

One study was conducted after 9/11. Researchers interviewed people, asking them to recall where they were and what they were doing at the time of the terrorist attacks. Years later, the researchers went back and interviewed the same people again, asking the same questions. But the answers were astonishingly different — around 60% of the details had changed.

So more than half of what people recalled was wrong, yet they swore blind that this is what they had experienced and, indeed, what they had originally told the researchers. But — and this is the incredible part — when the researchers confronted the interviewees with this, they were adamant that the most recent version of events they had shared with the researchers was, in fact, the correct one.

When they were played back recordings of the first interviews, the participants sat stunned and confused and said things such as, “I don’t know why I said that… it’s not true” and stuck to their new version of events.

False memory syndrome draws on the notion that our memories are fallible, but takes it one step further. Rather than recalling events incorrectly, the theory goes, the memory itself is a fiction.

In the 1990s, a type of therapy, called recovered-memory therapy, where therapists would attempt to retrieve repressed memories of traumatic events, became popular. It was thought individuals who had experienced severe trauma sometimes dealt with this by repressing it to the extent they forgot it had even happened.

The role of the therapist was to try to uncover these hidden memories and explore the related trauma. What this therapy failed to take into account was how suggestible people are, and how easy it is to conjure up memories of events that never actually took place.

The practice was widely condemned as unreliable, and traumatic, especially for the innocent people who were being wrongly accused.

The term ‘false memory syndrome’ was used to describe these ‘recovered’, but entirely untrue, recollections. Now, however, it’s more broadly used as a term to discredit testimonies of victims of abuse.

Professor Elizabeth Loftus, a psychologist and well-known expert in memory, and someone I have shared the platform with at a psychology conference, agrees that people ‘can be subjected to post-event suggestion’. This is certainly true. Hearing things on the news, talking with friends afterwards, associating snippets of information from films, magazines, holidays, gossip, shopping malls (the list is endless) all conspire to add details that are not based on truth, and we edit and mould the memory to suit our understanding of an event, often to portray ourselves more favourably.

However, Professor Loftus also says that while ‘peripheral memories’ from a traumatic event may be forgotten, the event’s ‘core memories’ — the recollection of the actual, key event, as in the case of the attack on the twin towers — may even become stronger.

There’s no doubt there are people, that for a variety of reasons, confabulate and lie about being the victims of abuse. There’s no doubt that memories, even memories of ‘peak experiences’ are often inaccurate, vague or confused.

Elvis Presley claimed he saw UFOs throughout his life, claiming that when he was eight years old, he was visited telepathically by aliens who showed him a future vision of 'a man wearing a white suit singing to a crowd’. Popular singer/songwriter David Bowie, known for his song Life On Mars, said he saw so many UFOs as a child that he 'simply got used to them’… or it might have been the drugs.

How suggestion can affect your immune system

If it's normal to avoid contact with sick people, then maybe it's normal for the immune system to kick in when we see evidence of infection in others!

If you find yourself surrounded by people with illnesses your own immune system will start to gear up for potential infection.

According to research by Dr Patricia Lopes, an assistant professor at Chapman University in Orange, California, and **published in Neuroscience News,** uninfected animals - including humans - have built in mechanisms to avoid being infected with parasites.

When a person sees other sick people around them, they will unconsciously interpret that information in a way that gears up their immune system for to fight a possible infection of their own. This means that parasites and viruses have more of an impact on your physiology than you might realise because your body automatically will start to expending energy on preparations for illness. Such encounters also have drastic impacts on epidemiology and how viruses actually spread.

Because this research is still in its early stages, it's hard to determine whether seeng another sick person can significantly reduce a someone's chance of catching a virus.

Uninfected animals attempt to prevent parasitism in many ways - behavioural avoidance of other parasite infected animals has already been documented in several species. There is some evidence that a human's physiology changes when they see another sick person. Our brains process information from diseased people and that information then causes changes to our physiology. Simply looking at images of sick people can trigger immune system activation.

However, there is a gap in knowledge that is preventing people from understanding just how the mechanism works, and how it can affect a person. What seems likely is that our unconscious mind processes the information and the body reacts accordingly, similar to the 'fight or flight' behaviour where the body prepares itself to deal with perceived threats.

At this stage, it is no known whether this sort of 'gearing up' for sickness is actually reducing infection. In the context of a large outbreak such as COVID-19 or monkeypox, the increased awareness of parasites around them helps them avoid infection. This makes

sense if you think about avoiding getting too close to someone who is continually coughing.

Understanding how disease experienced by animals impacts their physiology, survival and reproduction has major implications for our knowledge of how parasites affect humans. If the physiological changes triggered in uninfected animals helps to reduce disease and/or speed up recovery, this is also important information for humans. We already know that humans naturally see illness as something that is disgusting and repulsive and self-preservation will persuade us to avoid them.

Research from the University of British Columbia published in 2010 found that people who were shown pictures of sick people had elevated levels of interleukin-6 (IL-6), which is secreted by white blood cells as a defence mechanism. It makes evolutionary sense that the immune system would respond aggressively when it's needed.

If it’s normal to avoid contact with sick people — especially in a pandemic — then maybe it’s normal for the immune system to kick in when we see evidence of infection on the news!

Having sense of purpose can cut the risk of dementia

Unlike other factors thought to protect against memory decline, such as exercise or specific diet, language and communication exercises our brains all the time.

Dementia is an umbrella term used to describe a range of progressive neurological disorders which impact memory, thinking, and thus behaviour. Dementia appears in many forms, of which Alzheimer's is the most common. Some people suffer from different types of dementia. Every person will experience their dementia in their own unique way.

Dementia appears to occur most often in wealthier countries, where people are likely to live longer. Astonishingly, dementia is the leading cause of death in the UK, with 900,000 Britons struck down with the condition.

The Alzheimer's Society estimates that the number of people living with dementia in the UK by 2025 will rise to over 1 million, and around two thirds of those will have Alzheimer's. In the US, there are 5.5 million Alzheimer's sufferers. Many people with dementia are thought to still be undiagnosed.

Currently there is no cure for dementia. New drugs can slow down its progression and the earlier it is spotted the more effective treatments are likely to be.

The good news is that a more natural approach seems to be working best. Feeling a sense of purpose or meaning in life can lower the risk of developing dementia.

The idea that being able to speak at least two languages (together with other factors such as family history or lifestyle) can prevent dementia has been widely discussed in recent years.

Led by Dr Joshua Stott at University College London (UCL), researchers examined evidence from eight previously published papers comprising of data from 62,250 older adults from three continents. The researchers found that higher purpose or meaning in life was *significantly associated* with a reduced risk of dementia and cognitive impairment.

Notably, having a sense of purpose was linked with a 19% reduced rate of clinically significant cognitive impairment. In other words, they were almost a fifth less likely to have experienced concerning declines in memory, language and thinking abilities. This level of cognitive impairment is not as serious as dementia but it does increase the risk of succumbing to the condition.

Evidence suggests that feeling a purpose in life is beneficial to recovering from stress. It is also associated with reduced inflammation in the brain – both of which are associated with a reduced risk of dementia.

People with a higher sense of purpose are also more likely to engage in activities such as exercise and also to involve themselves in social activities.

Dementia prevention programmes for at-risk groups that focus on wellbeing could benefit by prioritising activities that bring purpose and meaning to people's lives, rather than just hedonistic activities that increase positive mood states. For example, if music is important to someone, they might benefit from joining a choir or an amateur orchestra.

It has long been known that meaningful living improves mental health and reduces the risk of disability and heart disease. It also reduces loneliness and depression.

Published in the journal Ageing Research Reviews

Research suggests that learning to speak another language – even partially – could help stave off dementia by up to seven years. Speaking a foreign language exercises the brain and provides the mental stimulation that helps to ward off cognitive decline.

Unlike other factors thought to protect against memory decline, such as exercise or specific diet, language exercises our brains all the time.

An analysis of existing studies found bilingual people are diagnosed with dementia on average five to seven years later than those who speak only one language. The same can be said for people who read and play music.

Another study looking at cognitive ability showed that the longer and more fluent someone is in a second language, the better the protection. Again, the same can be said of those who practise their musical ability. Communicating, watching movies, reading books, playing and even just following musical scores means that our brains are constantly being exercised.

As people age, cognitive abilities generally deteriorate, so researchers at Northumbria University and HSE University in Moscow conducted a number of experiments to assess participant's cognitive skills such reaction time and the ability to quickly decipher patterns.

Participants were also asked to fill in a questionnaire as part of the study, which asked how long they had spoken a second language and their level of proficiency. People who had spoken a second language for longer, and considered themselves more fluent, performed better – proficiency in a second language noted as playing a greater role in better test performance than the length-of-time knowing it.

The development of new pharmaceutical treatments is both lengthy and extremely expensive, requiring test groups, peer reviews, government regulation, distribution networks and cost to the patient, so alternative and more natural drug-free ways to slow down cognitive ageing should be a priority.

The research was published in Frontiers in Psychology & Frontiers in Human Neuroscience.

My Achy Breaky Heart

When it comes to heartbreak, take time to learn from it and view what happened as a positive learning experience!

How do you mend a broken heart? One way, and perhaps the best is to learn ‘mental toughness’.

I know that’s easier said than done, but here *are* some practical steps you can take to reduce those feelings of loss, of being cheated, and above all, those feelings of self-doubt.

Mental Toughness can be learned, and it determines how we deal with stress, anxiety, life’s challenges and life’s unexpected twists and turns. It just so happens that heartbreak is no different. You can learn coping strategies and resilience in the face of grief and learn to cope with hard emotional challenges and not only overcome them and to develop as a stronger person.

Mental toughness can give you the strength to not only recover, but to flourish, no matter what challenges you face. So here are some things you can do to recover:

1. First, and possibly most important, is to put yourself first for a change. If you’ve been ditched, trust me… you had a lucky escape! They weren’t worth your tears in he first place, and they’ll be moving on to their next conquest without a care (or even a memory) for you.

2. Don’t get trapped in a ‘comfort zone’. Retreating into your own safe lonely space is just playing it safe — and it never works. I understand of course that going out on your own again can be scary, but opening up to new possibilities is healthy and it will help you move on a lot quicker. Meeting up with friends or even getting to know new people today will save you from being on your own tomorrow. So open your mind to new possibilities. There’s nothing to lose stepping out of your comfort zone… more likely you’ll succeed! If you don’t like water, then learn to swim! It will make you stronger!

3. Think of every challenge as an opportunity to learn new things.

4. Exercise your imagination by visualising (imagining) situations is a good way of ‘rehearsing’ them. Doing this will give you a sense of control because it will help to prepare you to respond to any situation before it even happens. It will also help you to achieve your goals in life. For instance, actors and musicians prepare for their appearances in public.

There’s no reason you shouldn’t do the same! As a former professional stage hypnotist, trust me… it works!

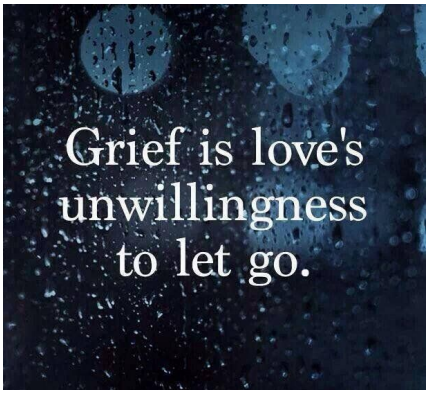
In reality, there are always things to be learned no matter what happens. So when it comes to heartbreak, take time to learn from it and view what happened as a positive learning experience. Accepting that you can learn from every experience, even heartbreak, will get you to move on in double quick time.

Even when you’re feeling like you’ve hit rock bottom after a break up - and you’ve "crashed" - there are things that you can learn from - you can pick up the pieces, rebuild and move forward having learned something new.’

5. Whatever happens, don’t allow yourself to wallow in your own misery. Instead, try to understand that life isn’t always fair. Life doesn’t always get easier, but that doesn’t mean you won’t get stronger and more resilient. Resilience helps us to adapt, to recover, and to bounce back when things don’t go as we’d planned or hoped. Resilient people don’t dwell on failure and the same applies to heartbreak: you really can bounce back and enjoy life *and start planning for the future*.

Letting Go of Grief

Accepting your loss and the natural sadness that follows… acknowledging your feelings and expressing your emotions… allowing yourself to have these feelings will eventually allow them to resolve themselves.



Losing a loved one is a life-changing event, and it can take a long time to get over that loss. Grief and loss can be debilitating as we are forced to accept the life altering change. However, there is a difference between 'normal' grief and the kind of grief that affects your ability to function.

Of course, grief is a natural response to the loss of a loved one, but it affects everyone in different ways.

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) defines and classifies mental disorders and publishes them in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). In March 2022, the DSM officially recognised Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD).

PGD applies to anyone consistently unable to cope with their loss 6 to 12 months after bereavement. There is no limit on how long PGD can last.

For a minority of people, grief does not lessen with time. For these individuals, the inability to come to terms with grief can interfere with their ability to function normally in everyday life. In extreme cases, they can experience persistent difficulties associated with their loss that exceed expected social, cultural, or religious expectations.

Symptoms of Prolonged Grief Disorder:

Feeling like part of you has died

Some people can focus on getting on with life. Others find it hard to accept that death is permanent. They may also blame themselves in some way for the person’s death. Some may feel as if they have lost a part of themselves and no longer feel like a whole person.

What is Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD)?

PGD was recently added to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.

With PGD, the bereaved experience intense longings for the deceased and even preoccupation with thoughts of the deceased. In children and adolescents, they can become obsessed with the circumstances surrounding the death. These reactions occur nearly every day for at least a month. The individual experiences significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, and other important areas of functioning.

They will no longer find joy in the things they once enjoyed with the deceased. In extreme cases they will find daily life difficult. Some may even start to withdraw from life altogether.

A sense of disbelief

Disbelief is the refusal to accept that something real has actually happened and is often caused by shock. This disbelief is an adaptive and temporary response and people may react like this if the death of a loved one was unexpected. This response protects a person from the pain of loss and allows them, to manage after bereavement.

Embracing the reality of bereavement does not happen quickly or easily. It can be an exhausting process. However, accepting reality should come in time… if it doesn't, the bereaved will need additional help.

Avoidance of reminders that the person is really gone

When a loved one dies, those left behind have only memories and emotions. They are also likely to have practical and logistical issues, and also secondary loss, which can be overwhelming and all-consuming. To protect themselves from painful memories, they may seek to avoid triggers.

There is a danger of becoming withdrawn and socially isolated and afraid to enjoy the things they used to do together, such as going to the theatre, or even keeping contact with old friends.

This trigger avoidance is a way of keeping emotions at bay.

Strong emotional pain, such as anger, bitterness, sorrow…

Grief affects people immediately and often forcefully, often resulting in tears or being unable to cope. Sometimes feelings can be overwhelming, sometimes resulting in anger and frustration.

While the individual knows the object of their anger isn't to blame, their feelings in that moment are too intense to suppress. When the anger subsides, other emotions will surface.

Difficulty moving on

Some people may find it hard to continue with life or enjoy the things they used to like. They may distance themselves from social situations, family and friends, and become increasingly isolated.

They may feel guilty about moving on, even fearing they will forget their loved one, although this never happens.

Feeling emotionally numb

Emotional numbness manifests itself in an inability to fully participate in life, often making you feel detached from others, as well as feeling flat both physically and emotionally. For

most people, this part of the grieving process. For most people this stage in the process is temporary, but for some people, emotional numbness becomes a strategy to protect themselves from further emotional or physical pain.

While this may provide temporary relief, if an individual can't learn to cope, it can lead to denial and other avoidance behaviours. The main problem with emotional numbness is that the person might start to prefer isolation and increasingly withdraw from society.

Feeling life is meaningless.

Bereavement can result in a cascade of thoughts about the meaning of life and what happens after death. Life can appear fleeting and even pointless as the pain of bereavement raises questions about its meaning.

When someone experiences such a mix of strong emotions, these questions can conjure up strange answers. The inability to answer existential questions such as the meaning of life, can lead people to think that life is meaningless and pointless.

Extreme loneliness

Extreme loneliness occurs when social isolation lasts for a long period of time. It is characterised by constant unrelenting feelings of being alone, separated or divided from others. It can be accompanied by profound self-doubt, low self-esteem, and/or social anxiety. This can be extremely debilitating and impact on all areas of a person's life.

Even if they do try to socialise, they may experience social burnout and quickly become drained of energy and even the will to live. It can lead to difficulty sleeping and a weakened immune system.

How to cope if you or a loved one is experiencing prolonged grief

1. Grief is nature's way of ensuring we remember those we have lost. In fact, grief is normal! So it's actually a good idea to put aside just a few minutes each day to remember the deceased.

2. Identify supportive people in their lives and try to stay involved with them: This will help to assuage the sense of loneliness or isolation that can follow the loss of a loved one.

3. Set clear boundaries: This will include the acceptance that you may not feel able to keep up your usual commitments, in work or social life. It is also important to be kind to yourself and make your own emotional well-being a priority.

4. Consider pursuing a new hobby or interest: It might be difficult a first to maintain activities you once enjoyed without the company of your loved one. It might be better to find a new hobby or activity. Anything that involves meeting other people is going to be beneficial.

5. Be mindful of any wishful thinking about the deceased: it is natural to miss a loved one, but it isn't helpful to dwell on what it might be like if they were still with you.

6. Honour the deceased at particular times of the year, such as their birthday, the anniversary of their death etc: Establishing grief rituals such as lighting a candle or hanging an ornament on the Christmas tree… this can be a way of keeping them in your memory and continuing the emotional bond at special times, while also moving on with your life.

7. Accept your loss and the natural sadness that follows: Give yourself safe times and places to grieve, acknowledging your feelings and expressing your emotions, rather than trying to avoid them. Letting yourself have these feelings will eventually allow them to resolve themselves.

There are 7 different types of relationship grief, from feeling like a failure because a relationship has ended, to processing that someone close has become a stranger.

1. Feeling alone.
2. Geting used to
3. Difficulty letting go of the idea of how you thought your future would turn out.
4. Coming to terms with no longer being able to rely on your partner or ex partner.
5. Feeling like a failure because the relationship did not turn out how you hoped it would, or the relationship ended.
6. Accepting that someone who was once your best friend and intimate partner has moved on and you are now strangers.
7. Separating from a partner with whom you have children and letting go of your ideas or vision of how family life would have been.

Relationship Grief doesn't just happen as a result of bereavement; clients can experience grief when a relationship ends or changes. This grief is a natural part of relationships ending or even just changing form.

Those suffering from relationship grief should be kind to themselves.

Relationships always evolve as both parties grow and develop. This can sometimes mean needs can change and this is why communication and understanding it is important.

Grief is very personal. It's never logical and it doesn't follow any timelines or schedules. You may feel uncertain, confused, empty, angry, pain, or even cry or become withdrawn. None of these are in any way unusual or wrong. It takes time to process these emotions.

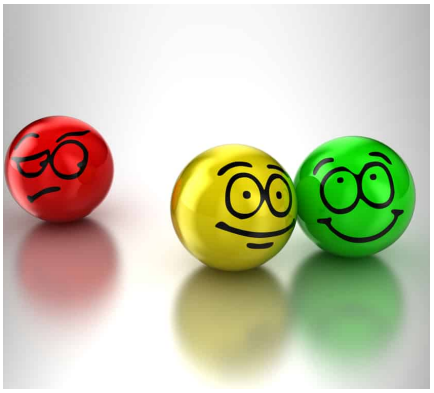
Everyone grieves differently, but there are some common patterns in the stages and order of feelings experienced during grief.

Getting over it

1. The grief *will pass* eventually… time is a great healer.
2. You will meet someone better, probably when you least expect it.
3. In the meantime, try to concentrate your energies on other things.
4. Whatever happens, don't get trapped in a downward spiral of self pity — he/she wasn't good enough for you anyway.

Green With Envy — Understanding Jealousy

The best cure for jealousy is self reflection. Examining our own emotions with compassion and understanding will help.



Jealousy is not an illness — it's a complex emotion which exists only in the imagination. The problem is, the imagination can trigger physical feelings of anxiety and even anger, resentment and hatred.

Contrary to popular belief, jealousy has nothing to do with insecurity. In fact jealousy is a normal emotion that is part of the human survival strategy. It's normal for people to experience jealousy when they want to protect someone or something important to them.

However, some people may be prone to stronger feelings of jealousy as an adult if, during childhood, they felt they were overlooked while others seemed more loved, acknowledged, or recognised. This may cause individuals to feel flawed and perhaps undeserving of love.

Jealousy can also stem from a fear of being rejected or abandoned by someone who is loved or useful. Jealousy can also be caused by grief or loss… or it might be triggered by encountering others who have more in terms of wealth or relationships. In the case of jealousy caused by grief or loss, grief and loss will still need to be processed in such a way that it can be put it in perspective.

Self-limiting beliefs or unmet needs can also trigger feelings of jealousy. After all, why should other people be so happy or have so much when happiness or success or wealth or fame eludes you? If someone *thinks* they don't deserve the life or the nice things other people seem to have, there is a danger they will project this belief onto others and believe they don't deserve those things either.

If that is the case, recovery can be accomplished by exploring, understanding, and resolving this negative way of thinking. People who suffer from jealousy should look for ways they can nurture the things that are truly important and ask what they have to do to meet unfulfilled needs instead of letting jealousy dominate their lives.

The best cure for jealousy is self reflection. Examining our own emotions with compassion and understanding will help. Counselling is one route, but I would also recommend hypnotherapy. However… this is not something that is likely to be put righty in one session.

Anxiety — Causes and Cures

Anxiety can be extremely uncomfortable, but it's *meant* to be, because it's part of the human survival strategy, there to get us to take action if we find ourselves in tricky situations! But when we avoid situations that make us anxious, the cost of that short term comfort can be long term anxiety.

We know that stress can have very real, consequences for our physical and mental health, and over the last three years, we've had first Covid, then rampant inflation, job uncertainty, illness and loneliness, to making and remaking plans according to new, ever-changing draconian rules, has made life more stressful for us all. So it's not surprising that more and more people are reporting chronic stress and even burnout.

There is a difference between anxiety and depression. Depression refers to a single condition, although it has lots of different symptoms. It may feel very different to different people. Anxiety is a term that can have a few different meanings. We all feel anxious sometimes and 'anxiety' can be used simply to describe that feeling. But when we use anxiety in a medical sense, it actually describes a group of conditions, including some less common conditions. These include phobias and panic disorders. But the most common is Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD), which may affect around 5% of every 100 people [in the UK.]

Many people suffer from Anxiety and adopt coping mechanisms which do more harm than good. These include Comfort and Avoidance.

Anxiety can be extremely uncomfortable, but it's *meant* to be, because it's part of the human survival strategy, there to get us to take action if we find ourselves in tricky situations! But when we avoid situations that make us anxious, the cost of that short term comfort can be long term anxiety.

Trying to control every facet of your life to stop ever feeling anxious is merely a short term solution to a long term problem. The truth is that sometimes, life has to be met head on, no matter how uncomfortable that might be. But meeting things head one can actually be uplifting!

Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) is a common condition, estimated to affect up to 5% of the UK population. GAD is a long-term condition that causes people to feel anxious over a

wide range of situations and issues, rather than just one specific issue, and people who suffer from GAD spend most of their waking hours feeling anxious and often struggle to remember the last time they felt relaxed, or happy, or even fulfilled in life. As soon as one anxious thought is resolved, another appears over a different issue.

There's a lot of things in life that we have no control over and we have to accept that. Avoidance of issues can actually hinder attempts to reduce anxiety. Avoidance anxiety is normal whenever you try something new, but if you get into the habit of avoiding anything that might make you anxious, the fear of doing anything new can increase and stop you enjoying life. A major problem is getting stuck in a rut, losing social contact and missing out on so many of life's good things. Locking oneself away from the world is not the answer!

This discovery suggests that less complicated treatments might be beneficial in treating anxiety than drugs and therapy, which are costly and often ineffective. I would suggest that a good way of treating anxiety is to get out into the world, spend time socialising, indulge yourself in an interest or hobby (joining a choir is a great way of reducing anxiety and depression) or simply reminding yourself of the fact that the worst never happens!
One study at Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons in the U.S. found that stress really does turn your hair grey! Perhaps surprisingly, reducing stress may reverse the process!

A second study, published in the journal Cardiovascular Research, suggests that high stress levels make it more likely someone will develop 'broken-heart syndrome' and also a form of heart disease that occurs after a severe emotional shock such as a bereavement.

In general terms, stress is where demand exceeds our resources and our perceived ability to cope with that demand. This may seem concerning, given that this feeling — of having to keep too many plates spinning at once or having too few hours in the day — is one we are all familiar with.

But a certain amount of stress is a normal part of the human experience. Stress has been present throughout human history. Some of the most important and exciting things we do in life are stressful, from starting a new business to going on a fairground ride! In fact our bodies are designed to cope with short bursts of stress.

We all have a stress response system which has evolved to deal with the sorts of stresses we might have encountered in our evolutionary past — protecting ourselves from predators or even other humans. But when the crisis is over, our stress levels return to normal.

However, there comes a tipping point. Too much stress for too long, is associated with almost everything bad — depression, poor immunity and even cancer. This seemingly endless kind of stress is increasingly (and, according to some leading scientists) unhelpfully, being labelled 'burnout'.

The body's main stress-response system is the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. It consists of two areas of the brain, the hypothalamus and the pituitary gland, as well as the adrenal glands, which are situated above the kidneys. They communicate with each other to control the release of cortisol, sometimes called the 'stress hormone'. We need cortisol for regulating functions such as blood pressure and blood sugar levels, but more of it is released when we become stressed.

In response to something stressful, the brain sends signals to the adrenal glands to secrete more cortisol into the bloodstream. It permeates cells all over the body, promoting functions that help us escape from or overcome perceived threats. It increases your heart rate and releases energy stores, while also suppressing functions that aren't as immediately essential, such as digestion, all of which are integral of the 'fight or flight' response.

In the short term, this response is useful because it primes the body to be able to run faster, concentrate harder, or brace for physical attack. The problem in the modern world is that the problems we encounter now are long-term stressors that don't go away, such as money troubles, stress at work or family issues. The result is that the stress response is present for a longer period of time. It is this sustained exposure to cortisol that has negative effects on physical and psychological health.

Excess exposure to cortisol starts to damage the stress-response system's feedback loop, with the brain becoming less able to detect exactly how much cortisol the body needs. Our cells have two types of receptor for cortisol, and the effect cortisol has depends on how much cortisol is bound to the two different types.

If there's too much cortisol in circulation, it upsets the balance that helps cells work correctly. Also, the effect of too much cortisol on the receptor itself is toxic and sustained high levels of cortisol prevent the receptors from working properly.

Normally, once cortisol reaches the high level, the brain receives a signal and shuts down the whole system, stopping the secretion of extra cortisol. But when receptors aren't working properly, they are loaded with higher levels than would be optimal.

So how do we know when normal, day-to-day stress has become something unhealthy?

First, there are psychological markers, such as feeling less enthusiastic or socially withdrawn; there are physical markers, such as stomach ache, general tiredness or a general feeling you're not in the best of health. The can also be behavioural changes, such as sleeping too much or not enough. Different people are vulnerable to different signs and symptoms. Stress can affect people in many different ways.

Even so, some people can work 70-hour weeks and not feel stressed if, for example, they enjoy and get meaning from their work, feel appreciated and have good supportive relationships. Alternatively, feeling as if you've lost of control is universally stressful.

It's not always the people at the top of the work pyramid who suffer the potential consequences of stress, it's usually the lower and middle rank workers.

A landmark research project tracked health data from 10,000 British civil servants from the 1960s and found that lack of control at work was linked with an increased risk of heart disease.

During the Covid pandemic there has been even fewer opportunities to escape or recover from everyday stresses. In recognition of the peculiar stresses of those 18 months, Nike shut down its global headquarters to give staff a chance to 'de-stress' and recover. The dating app Bumble also closed for a week of company-wide paid leave to allow its staff to recover from 'collective burnout'.

'Burnout' is a word being used more and more to describe our mental health. But while it may sound like a good description for how many of us feel, it is not recognised [yet] as a psychological condition.

The social psychologist Christina Maslach is one of the pioneering researchers into burnout. Maslach says that ‘burnout' was becoming increasingly popular, but was also being “misused and misunderstood”.

In the 1980s she developed a now widely used questionnaire tool, the Maslach-Burnout Inventory, to assess levels of it. But writing in the Harvard Business Review earlier this year, she explained that while this tool was designed to define and measure burnout in a scientific way, it was never intended to diagnose an individual health problem. Indeed, from the beginning, burnout was not considered some type of personal illness or disease. Instead — its purpose was to spot workplace organisational problems such as excessive workloads.

Maslach explained that this misuse is a problem because it can lead to people being labelled as burnt out, when really they are simply over-tired or even depressed. It also implies that ‘burnout’ is a condition that can be fixed with individual treatment, such as therapy or relaxation techniques, yet there is no evidence for established treatments for it.

Allen Frances, Emeritus Professor of psychiatry at U.S. Duke University, who helped compile the Statistical and Diagnostic Manual used by psychiatrists around the world, has also recently pointed out that burnout is ‘not a psychiatric disorder’, which is why it was not included in the manual.

Professor Francis said “The history of psychiatry is filled with fad diagnoses that lead to fake epidemics.”

Adding the the confusion, in 2019 the World Health Organisation (WHO) included burnout in its International Classification of Diseases. Under the WHO definition, someone has to have all three of the following — over-tiredness, cynicism and lack of productivity — to qualify as truly burnt out.

Crucially, as Christina Maslach has also pointed out, the WHO said responsibility for preventing burnout shouldn’t be placed on the individual — their suffering doesn’t stem from some kind of a flaw or lack of a skill, it’s really a problem that employers need to fix.

According to Dr Nic Hooper, author of The Unbreakable Student: Six Rules For Staying Sane At University, there are no universal stress-busters. Dr Hooper says that *“too often ‘tokenistic’ mindfulness or well-being programmes are put in place by workplaces with high levels of staff ‘burnout’. This essentially sends a message to people that they are not someone who manages stress well, that they are somehow abnormal… when, in fact, what usually contributes to burnout in the workplace is the way its systems such as the expectation to work long hours, shift patterns, or poor feedback from management have been set up… and it’s that that needs changing.”*

Dr Hooper believes a drive to eliminate stress from our lives can actually backfire. *“We’re looking for easy answers to reduce stress… but what if the thing we think is a problem is actually just a normal part of life? Often, a vicious cycle arises when we do things to try to not feel stressed or get rid of certain feelings, such as drinking a bottle of wine or eating lots… Psychologically healthy people tend to exercise, they tend to challenge themselves, they connect with others, they give to others, they tend to embrace the moment and they tend to self-care… Of course, these are exactly the behaviours that go out of the window when you’re stressed. Often, the last thing you want to do is exercise or meet other people… but those might be the very things that will reduce stress and anxiety.”*

Unlike burnout in its strictest, scientific sense, chronic stress is something we may individually have more power to remedy. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Covid has been a huge boost for all manner of ‘stress-busting’ products. According to Digital & Mobile Analyst company Sensor Tower, there were two million more downloads of the ten most popular meditation and ‘mental wellness’ apps in April 2020 compared to January 2020.

Meanwhile, companies selling cannabidiol (CBD) products reported sharp increases in sales. Data from CBD supplier and retailer Alphagreen shows that Britons spent £150million on CBD products in the first four months of 2020 alone.

Exercise in particular can have a dramatic effect on cortisol. People who are physically fitter have a smaller stress response to a public speaking task. [Public speaking tasks are often used to measure stress responses.] But even people who did not take regular exercise, any physical activity also seemed to reduce the stress response.

Even just taking a walk in the countryside has been shown to work very quickly on cortisol levels in people who are chronically stressed. Even just a short walk, or tidying up the garden, or looking around an art gallery, or even getting rid of all the junk from the garage can rapidly reduce cortisol levels in less than 15 minutes.

So maybe we should look at some more natural, more simple, and easily available ways of beating stress.

Exercising as hard as you can is better at alleviating chronic anxiety than drugs or therapy.

Researchers at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden examined how anxiety symptoms fell over the course of 12 weeks as a result of both moderate and strenuous exercise. The results suggest that more natural treatments may be better for anxiety than drugs and therapy, which are costly and sometimes ineffective for patients.

A 12-week group physical exercise program proved an effective treatment for patients with anxiety. Researchers recruited 286 patients with anxiety from primary care services in Gothenburg and the northern part of Halland County on the western coast of Sweden. Participant’s average age was 39 years, and 70% were women. Around half of the participants had lived with anxiety for more than 10 years.

Participants were randomly assigned to either moderate or strenuous group exercise sessions for a period of 12 weeks. Under the guidance of a physical therapist, both groups too part in a 60-minute training sessions three times a week based on recommended physical activity in line wih public health recommendations.

Severity of anxiety symptoms, which include nervousness, rapid breathing, increased heart rate and trembling, were then self-reported by the participants.

Even when their anxiety had been recorded as chronic, most participants went from a baseline level of 'moderate to high anxiety' to a low anxiety level by the end of the program. For those who exercised at relatively low intensity, the chance of improvement in terms of anxiety symptoms rose by a factor of 3.62. The corresponding factor for those who exercised at higher intensity was 4.88. This represents a significant reduction in anxiety symptoms. Not only that, but the more intensely they exercised, the more their anxiety symptoms improved, according to study author Malin Henriksson.

Today's standard treatments for anxiety are cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), usually involving sessions with a therapist a couple times a week, and psychotropic drugs. But

CBT can be expensive and psychotropic drugs carry with them side effects, such as weight gain, dizziness, fatigue and even cardiac issues.

Frequently, patients with anxiety disorders do not respond to medical treatment. Long waiting times for CBT can also cause delays whisker symptoms worsen. Doctors engaged in primary care need treatments that are individualised, have few side effects, and are easy to prescribe. In this respect, exercise is the perfect tool and should be made immediately available in primary health care for people with anxiety issues.

Previous studies of physical exercise in depression have also shown clear improvement in symptoms. The problem is that a clear picture of how people with anxiety are affected by exercise has been lacking up to now.

The study was published in the **Journal of Affective Disorders.**

FOUR tell-tale signs of burnout

If you're experiencing physical and emotional exhaustion, you may be heading towards burnout.

If you're experiencing physical and emotional exhaustion, you may be heading towards burnout.

We all get overworked and tired sometimes but burnout is more than just feeling constantly tired. Burnout is when chronic stress starts to have a detrimental effect on your life. The signs are chronic exhaustion, restlessness, trouble sleeping, and general low mood.

Other signs include repeated emotional distress, such as anxiety, low mood, or outbursts of anger.

Your performance at work may suffer even though you may be working harder than ever. You may start feeling disconnected from loved ones and struggle to get on with them as well as you normally do. You become disconnected from the people who are close to you, arguing more with your partner or your friends. Sometimes you feel you might explode explode.

You may find you're procrastinating more and putting off even the smallest of tasks because they now seem overwhelming.

You stop caring for yourself when it comes to exercise, diet and sleep.

You start suffering from physical and emotional exhaustion, or feel tired all the time, but at the same time feel hyper or find it difficult to sleep at night.

The good news is that it's possible to overcome all these things and relaxation hypnosis and self-hypnosis can help enormously.

Narcissist Alert!

To the narcissist, you are nothing… and they will replace you at the bat of an eye…

Emotional instability, borderline personality disorder, histrionic personality disorder, and narcissism.

How many people do you know with a personality disorder? Perhaps no one?

In reality these conditions are very common — they're just not talked about. In fact, personality disorders are so hidden that many people are not even aware they exist. Yet one in 20 people have one.

In the last few years, partly due to media interest and there 'awareness' of certain younger members of the Royal Family, mental health has received increasing coverage. Even so, p-ersonality disorders still lurk in the shadows. Unlike other mental health conditions, for example depression and/or bipolar disorder, celebrities don't want to admit to personality disorders. Nonetheless, the stigma surrounding these disorders is very much present in modern life.

Personality disorders are shrouded in secrecy and shame, yet they need our attention, understanding and compassion… the same as any other mental health condition.

One sign of Personality Disorder is that sufferers are overly concerned with their public image and often play the role of victim or 'princess'.

They often appear full of rage and demonstrate extreme discomfort if they are not the centre of attention. They often make up stories and even tell blatant lies In order to turn others against those they consider to be a threat.

Mental health issues are often used against anyone they perceive to be a threat to their own reputation, or their own wishes.

I have spent years studying people with personality disorders and my experience is that such people are mentally unstable. They appear to reject love and support. Their behaviour is often dramatic and they often publicly fantasise (ie, lie) when they've been found out.

There are ten recognised types of personality disorder, but broadly speaking, they are defined as ‘deeply ingrained, inflexible pattern of relating, perceiving and thinking, serious enough to cause distress or impaired functioning’.

People with personality disorders sometimes self-harm or resort to alcohol or drugs to manage their feelings and emotions. They can also become delusional.

They are often dramatic, over-emotional or display erratic behaviour and pretend to be anxious or fearful. These symptoms are often recurring and ingrained, and the disorder has a serious effect on the person’s life. Lots of people have aspects of a personality disorder, but unless it’s causing serious problems, these are often dismissed as ’traits’ and not the full-blown disorder.

Personality disorders are normally diagnosed by a psychiatrist. The part of the brain thought to be responsible for our personality is the prefrontal cortex, which continues growing until the mid-20s. Because of this developmental process, a personality disorder is difficult to diagnose in a child — most physicians avoid such diagnoses until their patients are in their twenties.

Those with personality disorders are often dismissed as just being odd, annoying or overly emotional. This is probably the safest way to deal with the issue as often, people take time to just ‘grow up’.

It used to be thought that those with a personality disorder were stuck with it for life, and there was little that could be done to change them, but we now know this isn’t the case.

Research has shown that psychotherapy can help address the imbalance, but this can be time-consuming and costly. Most NHS trusts have special personality disorder services which offer intensive treatment, but as with any other kind of mental health treatment, the cooperation of the patient/client is paramount. The problem is, cooperation is often withheld, in which case the personality disorder can develop into narcissism. And that’s when the real trouble starts.

To the narcissist, you are nothing…

Dr Sam Vaknin is an expert on narcissists, mainly because he is one himself. His book, *Malignant Self Love: Narcissism Revisited*, was published in 1999. Dr Vaknin collated the world's largest database on narcissism which is now regarded as a seminal work on the subject, and used in studies worldwide.

Narcissists can be male or female, but according to Dr Vaknin, a narcissist is just a 'child trapped in an adult's body…’ who has issues with their mother.

According to Dr Vaknin, narcissism has its roots in mother issues in childhood — mothers who can't let go of their child, who idolises them, or even neglects them… even making the child act like a parent, or not allowing them to detach naturally from them as a mother should.

Mothers can idolise or use the child to fulfil their own needs, the child becoming an extension of the parent and not allowed to grow into an individual. Subsequently, this causes rage, depression and grief in the child because they feel smothered.

So then when someone with Narcissism Personality Disorder ventures out into the world, they are grandiose, like a toddler, but with none of the coping mechanisms to go with it. It's like a two-year-old with muscles and an attitude.

When seeking an intimate partner they also seek to detach from the mother figure, hence they first idealise and then devalue and discard the people they become socially intimate with.

The mother is ideal, so the narcissist idealises partners in the same way. The narcissist needs to grow up to be with a partner and to be an adult, so he converts his partner into his mother.

The narcissist then needs to degrade the partner in order to detach from the mother, so the narcissist then goes on to destroy you.

In the case of female narcissists, it is father issues that exist. They simply have to break you down and detach from the mother [or father] by using, and then discarding you. Despite what experts claim, the narcissist isn't choosy who their partner is. To the narcissist, you are nothing…

Narcissistic Personality Disorder: the character traits commonly associated with narcissism.

Not all the traits below have to match for a person to be a narcissist:

- Lack of humility. True narcissists are never wrong and never feel remorse. Although they may apologise for a situation, this will almost always be accompanied by excuses with the blame firmly pinned on the victim.
- Since they believe they are never wrong, narcissists often react angrily when criticised.
- Narcissists are skilled at commanding the attention and admiration of others, often boasting about their achievements.
- Narcissists are so disconnected from themselves that they can't even begin to relate to others on an emotional level. Empathy and, by extension, love are alien concepts to them, although they are often able to put on an act to cover up this deficiency
- Narcissists will often call and/or text their partners excessively. This controlling behaviour is often misconstrued as a sign of love and commitment.
- Narcissists without attention will become depressed or angry.
- Narcissists despise normality and see themselves as above everyday concerns (which rarely provide them with the special attention they crave).
- This can mean they fail to hold down a job or handle finances responsibly, often deliberately engineering crises to direct attention onto them.

Narcissists need the four S's — *Sex, Supply, Safety* and *Services*. If you provide two of those, you will do. From he victim's point of view, one of the most dangerous concepts is that you are somehow special or talented in the eyes of the narcissist. But your hopes, dreams and life mean nothing. You could be a raging psychopath, a serial killer, even an insect — the narcissist will go for you as long as you are willing and able to provide two out of the four S's.

Narcissists see you as weak

A long relationship with a narcissist does not equal loyalty on their part. They know exactly what they are doing and can stay with you for years, idealising and devaluing you again and again. As long as you are giving them at least two of the four S's, it doesn't matter who you are… as long as you provide these things.

It starts with love bombing and then moves onto a phase of shared fantasy where the victim and the narcissist congratulate each other on being so special. It's intoxicating for the victim — you see yourself as you've never seen yourself before, and that can be addictive. Some people even want to stay with the narcissist for that reason — and others want to help them, seeing the lost child within. But under that there is nothing, no empathy.

Then the devalue happens — and this, as the narcissist is also aware, they need to do as part of their mental process. And while the devalue stage is devastating for the victim, your emotions do not trigger empathy in the narcissist, as they would an ordinary person.

When you are emotional, you are seen as weak and this is a bad reflection on the person with Narcissistic Personality Disorder. The narcissist feels that if you are weak and emotional, then so are they, even if they intentionally made you that way.

They will replace you with someone else at the bat of an eye

'No contact' is the only way to go when dealing with someone with NPD. This is because they can 'hoover you' once you have been discarded and 're-idealise' you all over again if they are in need of a supply. Hoovering is a term commonly used by psychologists when describing how a narcissist will try to suck you back in once they have discarded you. This could be via text, phone or other forms of love bombing.

But as soon as they are done with you, they will find someone else. It is of little importance who that person is… they will be just another supply to use up, nothing more. It doesn't mean they are better than you, they are just a shape, a nothing, a void to fill with trauma.

Dr Vaknin makes it clear… Narcissists need people — they need supply.

One criticism I have of Dr. Vaknin's theory is that he's revisiting Freud's idea of the mother figure, an idea that has been thoroughly discredited. Both Freud and Vaknin are Jewish, and as we all know, Jewish boys are obsessed with their mothers! However, I believe the rest of his reasoning is sound.

Much of the information in this auricle are taken from Dr. Vaknin's book, *Malignant Self Love: Narcissism Revisited*.

How narcissistic mothers harm their children

It can be uniquely painful to be a narcissistic mother's son.

Narcissistic mothers are likely to view children as extensions of themselves, taking on achievements as their own and seeing 'failures' as a reflection of their parenting. Children of narcissistic mothers expect they will be loved unconditionally for who they are as individuals.

We all expect our parents — especially our mothers — are going to love us unconditionally and bring us up to have a sense of worth. But narcissistic mothers you might find your achievements are viewed as an extension of her own. She may be highly critical, she may be demanding, or expecting you to become the caretaker of her needs.

Narcissistic Personality Disorder Diagnosis

The American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic & Statistical Manual DSM-5 diagnostic manual for mental disorders, defines Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) as "characterised by a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behaviour), need for admiration, entitlement, and lack of empathy".

According to the DSM-5, an individual can be diagnosed with NPD if they exhibit five or more of the following nine traits. The traits should be stable across a person's lifetime and within different contexts.

1. Has a grandiose sense of self-importance, e.g. exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognised as superior without commensurate achievements;
2. Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love;
3. Believes that he or she is 'special' and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions);
4. Requires excessive admiration;
5. Has a sense of entitlement, i.e. unreasonable expectations of especially favourable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations;
6. Is interpersonally exploitative, i.e. - takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends;
7. Lacks empathy — is unwilling to recognise or identify with the feelings and needs of others;
8. Is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her;
9. Shows arrogant, haughty behaviours or attitudes;

Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is a personality disorder in which individuals are said to have a grandiose sense of their own importance, even though individuals with NPD are said to also suffer from vulnerable self-esteem, feelings of inferiority, emptiness, and even boredom.

Nonetheless, it is important that those affected by a narcissist's behaviour, and this is usually those closest to them, should not fell responsible for it. Deep-rooted shame or

often a sense of missing out on things they feel entitled to but have been denied, lie at the core of a narcissist's behaviour. They find it difficult, if not impossible, to accept themselves.

No human being is perfect — we are all flawed in some way — but people who score highly in narcissism think that to be accepted they have to be extraordinary. They don't want to be seen as the ordinary, flawed, imperfect human beings they actually are, with strengths and weaknesses. The consequence of this need is that they often perform in extraordinary ways.

The children of narcissists often suffer from a number of difficulties, such as low self-esteem, being a people-pleaser, and having codependent relationships.

While it is difficult to improve a relationship with a narcissistic mother, it is possible. Recovery requires getting the narcissist to know and accept themselves.

The children of narcissists are unaware of all this and can themselves grow up thinking this behaviour is normal and that self absorption and demanding self-entitlement are normal. They may also eventually discover that their parent is difficult to deal with. They may also find it difficult to win their approval by striving for a perfection that will never be good enough, and in the process turn out to be overly self-critical. Conversely, they may learn to live in fear of outshining them and being accused of being a show off.

If any of those traits are part of a child’s relationship with their parents, then even in adulthood, it’s likely nothing’s going to change! Such control is bound to affect the child’s relationship with their future partner, as the ever present shadow of the parent continually looms over their own marriage.

It’s important that the child develops into a healthy adult, but this demands change in the parent/child relationship, but this requires engagement — adult to adult — with the parent. Only then will the relationship change. But be warned… the relationship will not necessarily change for the better… in fact it may become more distant, but hopefully it will become more manageable and less fraught.

The real downside however, is that the parent is unlikely to accept a lesser role in their child’s life and future development and direction. Most narcissists will always need an element of control over their child. For such a relationship to become healthy and ‘normal’, there may well have to be some sacrifice and distance on both sides. But better that than a life spent in their shadow.

Horoscopes and Narcissism

Researchers and psychologists from Lund University in Sweden questioned more than 250 people about their beliefs in astrology. They discovered that those with strong beliefs in astrology and horoscopes tended to be more narcissistic and less intelligent. They also found that belief in horoscopes was linked to traits of agreeableness and extroversion.

Narcissists may be more susceptible to horoscopes because they are more 'fact-resistant' and find the positive outlook horoscopes disseminate appeal to their grandiosity.

The study was undertaken by psychologist Petri Kajonius and his colleagues because astrology is increasing in popularity in Sweden, despite the absence of any scientific support.

The big question is why this nonsensical study of the movement of the stars and planets, and its influence on human behaviour is going through a revival.

So 264 people were recruited via social media and were asked to complete a series of questionnaires. One possibility is that people who send a lot of time on social media may be narcissistic to begin with!

The first questionnaire explored the extent to which each participant believed in astrology and whether they thought it was supported by scientific research. Subsequent questionnaires were designed to asses general personality type, and further tests were carried out to ascertain levels of intelligence — and narcissistic traits. The results revealed the higher the narcissism, the higher the belief in astrology.

Further research is needed to explore the reasons for this association, but the team do have theories that may explain their findings.

Since astrological predictions and horoscopes tend to be positively framed, this reinforces grandiose feelings and so may appeal even more to the narcissistic temperament. Narcissistic traits correlated with the belief ‘astrology is supported by science’ might mean that narcissists may be more fact resistant. After considering all potential variables, the team discovered that the higher the level of intelligence, the lower the belief in astrology.

Similar positive correlations exist between belief in astrology and higher levels of agreeableness and extroversion. Previous research also concluded that people are more likely to put stock in astrology during times of personal crisis, something that could explain why the popularity of astrology appears to be on the rise.

At this point in human history, we are surrounded by stressors such as climate change, Covid, the Russia/Ukraine war, spiralling inflation, increased living costs and higher than ever pressures from political correctness, to name but a few. These pressures have created a breeding ground for strange beliefs and non-scientific solutions to problems.

It is thought that embracing astrology may be an innocent pastime, but it is also possible that it facilitates uncritical and biased thinking. Furthermore, belief in astrology fosters belief in other pseudoscientific nonsense and in conspiracy theories which indicates that it might not be all as harmless as people may think.

According to a 2015 article in the journal Social Psychological and Personality Science, people who doubt the moon landings were also found to be more likely to be selfish and attention-seeking. Researchers at the University of Kent found strong links between the belief in conspiracy theories and negative psychological traits, including the endorsement of conspiracy theories to low self-esteem.

202 participants completed narcissist scale and a self-esteem assessment questionnaires on conspiracy beliefs which asked how strongly they agreed with specific statements, such as whether governments carried out acts of terrorism on their own soil.

The results showed that those people who rated highly on the narcissism scale and who had low self-esteem were more likely to believe in conspiracies.

The findings were published in the journal Personality and Individual Differences.

Dealing with Narcissism

Narcissistic people are obsessed with power and success and they will do anything to get it, and they will have no hesitation in employing underhand tactics, lying, controlling and even destroying their victims for their personal gain.

Like peacocks, narcissists show off to get attention and more important, admiration from others. They have an inflated sense of their own self-importance often and employ a range of attention seeking behaviours to get the attention they believe they deserve — everything from wearing expensive attire to driving expensive cars. The purpose of this attention gathering is in reality a ploy designed to hide their fears and inadequacies.

Narcissists use self-doubt as a weapon. They will question or criticise to create doubt in order to gain power, playing on insecurities and weaknesses. They will note things you mention and play on this at a later date to belittle you.

Narcissistic people lack empathy for others and they have trouble understanding or connecting to other people's situations. In truth, the narcissist simply doesn't care about anyone else's thoughts or feelings. Forget getting any support from a narcissist — they're too wrapped up in themselves to even recognise they need to support even those close to them.

If you share a story or even a joke around a narcissist, they will endeavour to make the conversation about themselves. This self-referential behaviour is another weapon of control and attention seeking. Once they have taken control of the conversation, It will be impossible to even get a word in edgeways.

If you get to know a narcissist well, and this is especially true where the relationship is of a romantic nature, they will gaslight you. This will involve bullying and making you question your own reality — even question your own sanity. They will challenge your version of the truth, distorting facts in order to create a false narrative.

Narcissists believe they deserving of special treatment. They are preoccupied with their own special abilities and talent, and these they are prone to over-celebrate. They have an unshakeable self-belief in their own importance and superiority.

Narcissists also make sport of destroying others. They are always right and always ready to judge, especially if they feel challenged or slighted, and will not hesitate in setting out to destroy your self image.

When it comes to relationships, narcissists often engage in 'future faking'. They will make unrealistic promises after knowing you for only a short time, convincing you that your life together will be wonderful and rewarding. The truth is, you will eventually be dropped.

Whether you are a friend, a co-worker, or a lover, you will find that you are constantly serving *their* needs and receiving nothing in return.

Being in a relationship with a narcissist is always thankless. You might offer emotional support or shower them with love, but don't expect anything in return. The narcissist will take, take, take without stopping to even say thank you.

There are ways to protect yourself from becoming a victim of a narcissist:

1. Know thyself.

Try to understand and hold onto what really matters to you. Remember, your values, interests and opinions count just as much as theirs! You should also remember that you too have self-worth that shouldn't be questioned. This will allow you to be aware when a narcissist is questioning your reality or trying to make you doubt yourself.

2. Set boundaries.

Get to know your limits and learn to recognise when they are being questioned or ignored. Determine what you're willing to do and how far is too far. Knowing your boundaries allows you to stand your ground without any self-doubt or feelings of guilt. Most important is to understand that it is your absolute right to say 'no' if a narcissist attempts to take advantage of you or push you too far.

3. Don't share your feelings.

A good tip is to never share your feelings with a narcissist because sharing your feelings will be taken as a weakness. The narcissist will ignore the point you're trying to make anyway, so speak from a place of strength by putting yourself first for a change! So instead of saying '*I feel unhappy because you keep putting me down so I have to protect myself and pull back,'* take the feeling out of it and just give it to them straight: '*I choose to distance myself from you because t's not working for me. Because you are a selfish, self-absorbed, narcissistic asshole.'*

Hypnotherapy can help you to achieve greater self-awareness and learn how to hold your own.

Narcissists and relationships

Narcissists tend to use common phrases that narcissists to manipulate others… particularly in relationships! In fact all narcissists operate using similar, if not identical methods and tactics. But these skills are not learned, they come naturally and are a product of both nature and nurture, and there are significant gender differences when it comes to the prevalence of the condition. Studies suggest that around 75% of narcissists are men.

There are three stages in an emotionally abusive relationship.

1. Idealisation

Relationships with narcissists will move very quickly at the start. Idealisation includes 'love-bombing' when the narcissist showers their new partner with romantic gestures and paints a picture of a beautiful future. This can happen when the pair have only known each other for a few weeks or even a few days. If it's going too quickly, that's a big warning sign, as is a rush to intimacy.

Below are the sort phrases uttered in a new relationship that should set alarm bells ringing:

- *You're my soul mate*
- *I've never met anyone like you before*

- *You understand me more than anyone else*
- *It's fate that we met*
- *I've never felt this way about anyone before*
- *You're my only real friend*
- *We don't need anyone else*
- *You're so lovely, kind, beautiful, and perfect*
- *We'll be together forever*
- …and of course the greatest lie of all… *I'll never hurt you!*

2. Devaluation:

Once their victim is hooked, the narcissist's true character will begin to emerge. The honeymoon period is now over! Criticism will be added to compliments, but in such a way that the victim will believe the relationship is still worth it. The narcissist still wants to keep their partner close but now begins the process of undermining their confidence, chipping away at their self-worth, eventually making their partner think that any wrongdoing is their fault, seizing any opportunity to employ their superiority to subvert the other person, keeping them in a constant state of stress.

Red flag phrases might include:

- *You're crazy*
- *You're too sensitive*
- *No wonder nobody else likes you*
- *You're so insecure*
- *What's wrong with you?*
- *Are your friends more important than me?*
- *Why are you crying?*
- *You're being manipulative*

The narcissist will try to devalue everything their partner likes, including their hobbies, their interests and especially their friends, but if challenged, they will explain away their poor behaviour by deflecting any conversation, instead turning themselves into the victim, and finding someone else to be the scapegoat. Often, they will claim their bad behaviour is a result of how they were treated by their or ex.

3. Disposal:

Narcissists soon tire of wearing their victim down, and it is during this stage that the selfish behaviour will be at its worst. While they're preparing to end the relationship, they will often make a last-minute play to emerge from the disastrous relationship as the victor.

Some of the most shocking blame and insults may include:

- *Everybody hates you*
- *You're a bad person*
- *Nobody else will ever love you like I do*

- *I'm the best you'll ever have*
- *Enjoy the rest of your lonely life*
- *You brought this on yourself*
- …and of course the second greatest lie of all… *It's not you, it's me!*

The only way to truly free yourself from a narcissist is to leave them for good. They will never change, because this kind of selfish, self-absorbed and loveless behaviour is part of their DNA. So get rid of all the souvenirs, the gifts, the photographs etc., and see your tormentor for the soulless, selfish, two-timing, lying pig they actually were.

Sleep and Rapid Eye Movement

The same parts of the brain coordinate when you’re asleep as hey do when you’re awake, supporting the idea that dreams are a way of integrating information.

Rapid eye movement (REM) during sleep has baffled scientists since 1953 when it was first linked to dreams. In reality, these eye movements are not random, as previously believed, but are simply you looking around in the dream world.

A team of researchers from the University of California, San Francisco, looked at 'head direction' cells in the brains of mice — neurons that fire in the brain in relation to where the mouse is heading. They are also found in various regions of the human brain.

After comparing the sleeping mouse's ‘heading directions’ with its eye movements, the results showed that these brain cells were also precisely aligned during REM sleep, just as they are when the mouse is awake and moving around.

Human eye movements during sleep travel in the same way their gaze shifts when awake.

The first evidence of dreaming in humans date back to 3100BC when the Babylonians attempted to interpret their dreams by etching them on stone tablets. Since then, humans have tried to understand what dreams mean and how they form. REM is a characteristic feature of this state.

The Stages of Sleep

Stage 1: Light sleep

Stage 2: Brainwaves slow down

Stage 3: Delta waves begin to appear

Stage 4: No eye movement or muscle activity

REM Stage: Breathing becomes more rapid and irregular

REM sleep is one of the several sleep cycles the body goes through each night. It begins about 90 minutes after falling asleep, and repeats during the night, with longer periods of REM sleep occurring with each successive cycle.

However, this stage of sleep is not only characterised by rapid eye movement — REM sleep also leads to increased heart rate, body paralysis, awake-style brainwaves and vivid

dreams. In this phase, brainwave patterns are similar to those seen during wakefulness and dreaming.

Rapid Eye Movements were first defined by Eugene Aserinksy, a graduate student credited with having the first sleep research laboratory that discovered the ‘rapid, jerky, binocularly symmetrical movements.'

Aserinksy’s discovery however, was only a hypothesis until the University of California, San Francisco confirmed the results. We now know that these eye movements aren't random, they are coordinated with what's happening in your dreams. It gives us more insight into the ongoing cognitive processes in the sleeping brain and at the same time, solves a puzzle that's excited the curiosity of scientists for decades.

The California team found that the same parts of the brain — and there are many of them — coordinate during dreaming and wakefulness, lending credence to the idea that dreams are a way of integrating information gathered throughout the day.

How those brain regions work together to produce this generative ability is however, still a mystery. Understanding how the brain updates itself based on accumulated experiences is still to be discovered. A more detailed understanding the mechanisms that allow us to coordinate so many distinct parts of the brain during sleep will also help us to understand how those experiences become part of our individual comprehension of life itself.

Why we’re addicted to food…

Everything you eat is decided for you by the food industry, a complex, global network of diverse businesses that supply most of the food consumed by the world's population.

Here’s an inconvenient truth… Choosing the kind of food you eat is not a matter of choice, because the food you eat actually chooses you! And the reason you feel guilty is because you really can’t help it! Why…? The bad news is because when it comes to food, you’re just a pawn in a vast, complex and powerful game. In fact the game is so complex and powerful you don’t even know you’re part of it.

Everything you eat is decided for you by the food industry — one of the most successful and innovative industries on Planet Earth — and it’s having a terrible effect on your health. More than 80% of the food sold in the UK is unhealthy… low in fibre, high in salt, refined carbohydrates, sugar and fats.

Humans are preprogrammed to consume anything that has high fat and sugar content because we evolved in a world where calories were hard to come by, and that’s why unhealthy, fatty and sugary food is easier to sell, and why companies invest in developing and marketing it.

The larger the market, the bigger the economies of scale, which is why highly processed foods are around a third of the price per calorie to produce than healthy food… which is why supermarket shelves are stacked with hard to resist, cheap, unhealthy, processed foods.

The food industry is making us ill, which makes us less productive. A 2022 report from the Institute for Public Policy Research found that every year, 2.5 million people take time off work. Almost every long-term illness, from obesity to cancer to depression, is either caused or made worse by poor eating habits.

In 1950, less than 1% of the UK population was clinically obese. Today, it’s 28%. This change isn’t because we’ve all suddenly lost our willpower, it’s because the food we eat has changed. In the decade following the end of World War II, when populations started to increase exponentially, the world faced an huge problem… how to grow enough food to avoid mass starvation…

But then along came American botanist Norman Borlaug. Borlaug, via the miracle of genetic engineering, managed to breed a rust-resistant, short-stemmed wheat that produced three times the grain from the same area of land. Borlaug's invention saved billions of people from starvation. This was the start of the so-called 'Green Revolution' and as with any other kind of revolution, its primary effect was to make people seriously ill. Almost overnight, we started to prioritise quantity over quality. In less than 50 years our diet has changed to fit this new system, and the abundance of food has created a disaster.

Humans are still hunter-gatherers, but instead of hunting and gathering ourselves, we have factory farms and sophisticated machinery to do it for us and put it on supermarket shelves. Hunting and gathering has never been so easy! When we foraged for our own food, we searched for plants and animals that provided more calories than we spent.

Honey contains six times more energy than the equivalent weight of berries. Honey tastes delicious, so we're reward for finding an efficient source of energy. But when fat and sugar are combined in a ratio of 1 to 2, as it is in natural breast milk, the feeling of reward is much greater. Food manufacturers use this formula in their ice creams, milk chocolate and biscuits because they know it makes them irresistible. Even savoury products, including most 'ready meals' are packed with sugar and fat to give them more flavour. They're also cheap to manufacture and sell in larger quantities.

The Green Revolution has created an abundance of sugar, flour and vegetable oil. For good commercial reasons companies invest huge amounts of money in research, development and promotion of foods that are rich in these ingredients. The millions spent on research is not just to capture a bigger slice of the market, it's also designed to increase the market! The aim of this 'consumption effect' is that consumers who have more food in their kitchen cupboards will inevitably eat more of it.

BOGOF (Buy One, Get One Free) promotions are designed to persuade shoppers to buy more than they need. BOGOF deals increase purchases of a product by an average of 15%… excepting chocolate, when BOGOF customers will buy nearly twice as much.

We now consume five times more potato crisps and eat one-and-a-half times the amount of sugary breakfast cereal than we did in 1972. In 1980, 57% of the average UK household budgets was spent on fresh ingredients. By 2020, it had fallen to 35%. We now get 55% of our total calories from ultra-processed foods.

In most modern households, both adults work, so the average time spent preparing evening meals has gone from one-and-a-half hours to about 30 minutes. The result of this lifestyle change is that we cook less and are less likely to learn to cook, which in turn has made us even more dependent on convenience food. We also eat in restaurants a lot more and eat fast food takeaways crammed with fats and sugar.

The fruit and vegetable market in the UK has declined to £2.2 billion per year, whereas confectionery alone — a small section of the processed food market — has grown to £3.9 billion a year.

The World Health Organisation has created a 'Nutrient Profile Model' to score how healthy or unhealthy products are. The WHO suggested a cut-off time before which certain products should not be advertised to children. A massive 85% of the products advertised by the 18 largest food and drink companies are broadcast before this time, and social media platforms, where kids now spend most of their time, are completely unregulated. Those 18 companies make nearly all their profits from ice cream, sweets, sugary drinks, crisps, biscuits, cakes and high calorie, sugary and fatty ready meals and sauces.

They know that what they're selling is bad for their customers, but they also know that if they stop selling unhealthy food, someone else will!. Profit is the rule that rules all industry. Much food processing includes closely guarded secrets and any company CEO who called for tighter controls on junk food would soon be joining the ranks of the unemployed… and unemployable.

For almost all of human history, it was hard to satisfy a big appetite because there wasn't the same easy access to food. But since the Green Revolution, we have another problem — cheap, instantly available high calorie food that we struggle *not* to eat.

Fat stores lots of energy and keeps us warm… we need some fat on our bodies, but too much of it makes us less mobile and more prone to illness. Over the past half-century we have become heavier. Even naturally thin people have put on weight and more people are being diagnosed as clinically obese. Obesity makes us miserable, causes depression, anxiety, infertility, high blood pressure, physical pain, breathlessness, sleepless nights, increased risk of cancer, dementia, heart failure and type 2 diabetes. By the time we realise what's happened, it's too late.

The Government solution of 'better education on diet and exercise' is counter-productive because it's based on the belief that we're getting fat and ill because we're too lazy to take exercise, and too ignorant to eat well. If only we were better informed about healthy eating, the obesity crisis would melt away… But that thinking is demonstrably false. *The truth about exercise is — it's great for improving muscle tone, lowering blood pressure, protecting against heart disease, but it's no good for bringing down weight.* Going to the gym doesn't work because when the scales don't move, people become disheartened and give up.

As for education, many studies have shown that the British public already know what a healthy diet looks like. Most of us know we should eat our 'five a day' of fruit and veg and restrict our intake of foods that are high in fat, sugar or salt. We don't need to be educated on this! *The real reason we are getting larger is because we live in a terrible food system. Over the last seven decades, the abundance of salt and sugar in processed food has become so addictive, we now expect it in everything we eatI Adults in this country consume an average of 50g of sugar a day — 20g over the recommended limit.*

Food in restaurants, ready made food and fast food outlets contain ingredients rarely used in ordinary kitchens, such as soy protein and dextrose. In addition, colourings, emulsifiers, flavourings and other additives are used to make the food appear more attractive. Foods in this group include most shop-bought biscuits and cakes, mass-produced bread, mass-produced desserts, reconstituted meat products, the majority of ready meals, and even some vegan sausages and burgers!

The long-term effect of all this ultra-processed food on your body is profound. For starters (excuse the pun) it's known to have a disproportionate effect on weight and health, compared with the same food cooked from scratch. But ultra-processed food tastes delicious, which means we unconsciously choose to eat more of it.

Globally, the average person eats an average 35 tonnes of food over a lifetime. Americans eat more than twice that amount (no big surprise there) but we Brits are not far behind.

In Britain, diet is one of the clearest markers of inequality. Children from the least well off 20% of families consume around a third less fruit and veg, 75% less oily fish, and a fifth less fibre than children from the most well off 20%. Children from the most deprived 10% of the population are three times more likely to have tooth decay by the age of five,

compared to those in the wealthiest 10%, and nearly twice as likely to be overweight or obese by the age of eleven. Worse, their parents are almost twice as likely to die from a diet-related condition.

People who want to lose weight often find themselves trapped in a vicious circle of dieting and weight regain. This is why the food industry has responded by selling products marketed as ‘healthy’ or ‘slimming’, but it’s a straightforward con. ‘Low fat’ usually means it’s high in sugar or starch, information noticeable by its absence on the packaging. A dessert filled with concentrated fruit sugars can still boast ‘free from added sugar’. ‘Nutritional values’ — another term for calories, salt and sugar — are shown only on a ‘per portion’ basis only.

If all food manufacturers were subject to the same regulations, good food would become more profitable, because they would save on artificial sweeteners and colourings. Banning advertising of junk food to children before the 9pm watershed might also help. The Government promised to do this in 2020 but as of 2023, nothing has changed, despite 83% of the British public wanting these measures. The food industry argues that junk food adverts don’t actually influence what a child eats, but that argument is dishonest. Why would they spend money on advertising to children if it doesn’t work?

The truth is, the Government is pressurised by food companies, which is why the Government promises to do something, but actually does nothing. Legislation has been delayed three times, buried under an avalanche of woke transgender and diversity propaganda.

Therapy is the new religion

Eventually, it is the client who must start making changes.

There was a time when the way of dealing with trauma was the simpler advice ‘pick yourself up, dust yourself down, and start all over again’. Today however, we are told to spill our guts out to a counsellor or a therapist – so much so that therapy is seen as a normal and essential part of any healing process.

Celebrities like Jennifer Aniston, Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie, Ellie Goulding, Fearne Cotton and the ginger whinger himself, Prince Harry, who has admitted having therapy for the last five years. In an effort to encourage others to speak out about their 'trauma' the Prince has publicly aired his wife’s dissatisfaction with the Royal Family. Or something like that. However, five years of therapy means it isn’t working – there is such a thing as too much therapy!

Maybe the Prince is suffering from 'analysis paralysis' and far from helping, too much therapy has made him unable to accept the past or move on, or worse, rather self-absorbed.

Having multiple therapy sessions for years is not helpful. The more sessions, the less likely they are to be effective. Therapy overload can make things a lot worse, especially as most therapies concentrate not win putting things in perspective, but on a patient’s innermost feelings and emotions. Worse, some therapists see their clients as cash cows – especially the wealthy ones.

Whatever happened to the common-sense and true adage ‘Time is a great healer’?

The truth is that clients recover from trauma or loss in their own time anyway, without therapeutic intervention. Therapists – especially those who use hypnosis or hypnotherapy – can speed the healing process up, but it is the client who dictates the speed of recovery, not the therapist.

Therapy that involves the client reliving past experiences can prolong the agony. The idea is to get a client to move forward with their lives. Therapy provides an opportunity to talk about problems but the conversation must include some solutions. Maybe the money would be better spent on a holiday or a hobby or a set of new clothes – those things can also be beneficial. Finding personal solutions rather than ruminating about problems produces much better results.

People can easily become dependent or even addicted to their therapist. Talking can make clients feel better but it doesn't tackle the root cause of the problem. Eventually, it is the client who must start making changes. Negativity simply cannot be allowed to become a life sentence. It’s much better for the client to kick down the cell door and simply walk out into the fresh air and the sunlight, leaving all the negative thoughts and emotions behind.

Just three or four sessions, interspersed with periods of reflection which give the client an opportunity to put things in perspective and think more about the lessons they’ve learned and what they would like to achieve in the future are going to be far more productive than going over and over the same ground. Again, hypnosis can provide a short cut to major personal change.