

Women's Health

Great skin?
Sorted.

Viral brands your 40+
face will love

Your muscle
is power

So why are TikTokers
telling us to shed it?



Hannah Waddingham

on body politics, brain fog and betting on herself

**Rewrite
the rules**

▶ Sleep less

▶ Eat bread

▶ Under prep

...and be your
healthiest yet

Longevitymaxxing!

Lessons from the women
who took it too far

**+ Aroused, but
at what cost?**

The divisive new sex
therapy, uncovered



DESCRIPTION A body lotion with 42% oil. INDICATION Significantly increases skin moisturisation. PRESENTATION White fluid. FORMULATION Lotion with 42% occlusive ingredients and 14% humectants. INGREDIENTS Aqua, Dimethicone, Isopropyl Palmitate, Ethylhexyl Cocoate, Isododecane, Isopropyl Myristate, Urea, Polyglyceryl-2 Dipolyhydroxystearate, Glycerin, Pentylene Glycol, Dicaprylyl Carbonate, Polyglyceryl-3 Diisostearate, Sodium Lactate, Dipentaerythrityl Hexacaprylate / Hexacaprate, Gluconolactone, Rosa Canina Fruit Oil, Simmondsia Chinensis Seed Oil, Calendula Officinalis Extract, Butyrospermum Parkii Oil, Helianthus Annuus Seed Oil, Glycine Soja Oil, Isostearyl Isostearate, Bisabolol, Octyldodecyl PCA, Retinyl Palmitate, Tocopheryl Acetate, Linoleic Acid, Linolenic Acid, Tocopherol, Sodium PCA, Sodium Hyaluronate, Lactic Acid, Stearalkonium Hectorite, Propylene Carbonate. DRY SKIN CLINICAL TRIAL Trial centre: Complife Italia S.r.l., Italy. Objective: A clinical evaluation to test the efficacy of Bio-Oil® Body Lotion in improving skin moisturisation. Sample: Subjects: 30 healthy female participants with Fitzpatrick skin types II-V and clinically showing dry / very dry skin at the level of the outer lower legs. Test site: test product applied to an outer, lower leg of all subjects. Age of participants: 25–65. Methodology: Split body, evaluator-blinded, randomised and controlled clinical-instrumental study. Participants washed their legs with soap to induce dry skin over a 7-day period. Baseline clinical and instrumental evaluations were taken. Bio-Oil® Body Lotion was applied twice daily for 28 days to the assiged outer lower lateral leg, the opposite leg remained untreated. Clinical assessments and instrumental evaluations were conducted on days 1, 8, 14, 21, 28, 35, 42, 49, 56, 63, 70, 77, 84, 91, 98, 105, 112, 119, 126, 133, 140, 147, 154, 161, 168, 175, 182, 189, 196, 203, 210, 217, 224, 231, 238, 245, 252, 259, 266, 273, 280, 287, 294, 301, 308, 315, 322, 329, 336, 343, 350, 357, 364, 371, 378, 385, 392, 399, 406, 413, 420, 427, 434, 441, 448, 455, 462, 469, 476, 483, 490, 497, 504, 511, 518, 525, 532, 539, 546, 553, 560, 567, 574, 581, 588, 595, 602, 609, 616, 623, 630, 637, 644, 651, 658, 665, 672, 679, 686, 693, 700, 707, 714, 721, 728, 735, 742, 749, 756, 763, 770, 777, 784, 791, 798, 805, 812, 819, 826, 833, 840, 847, 854, 861, 868, 875, 882, 889, 896, 903, 910, 917, 924, 931, 938, 945, 952, 959, 966, 973, 980, 987, 994, 1001, 1008, 1015, 1022, 1029, 1036, 1043, 1050, 1057, 1064, 1071, 1078, 1085, 1092, 1099, 1106, 1113, 1120, 1127, 1134, 1141, 1148, 1155, 1162, 1169, 1176, 1183, 1190, 1197, 1204, 1211, 1218, 1225, 1232, 1239, 1246, 1253, 1260, 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Welcome to Women's Health



I've always considered myself someone who cares about being the healthiest I can be. Concerned, not obsessed. Before reading Lauren Clark's deep dive into the rapidly evolving longevity industry on page 78, I might have described myself differently.

But hearing from women about their pursuit of longevity made me reflect on my own habits – and realise my approach sits on the more balanced end of the spectrum.

I've not always got it right. I've taken more supplements than I can count, dipped in and out of trends claiming to be the ultimate fix and had phases where exercising for long periods daily felt non-negotiable. But over time, common sense has prevailed. These days, I move when I can, eat well most of the time and, like many of you, simply do my best.

But for some, the pursuit of optimal health can tip into something far more all-consuming. Take Daisy*, who told us she'd feel a surge of rage if one of her children woke her before she'd had nine hours' sleep. Her focus on longevity

became so intense, and her inner critic so relentless, that she eventually required professional mental health support. Extreme? Yes. But perhaps not as rare as we'd like to think.

Experts suggest women are particularly vulnerable to the pressure that can come with relentless health tracking and self-optimisation. Five years ago, I'd never heard of heart rate variability (HRV) and I assumed my biological age was simply my age. Now, I know exactly where my HRV 'should' be – and my biological age? I've never tested it. Quite frankly, I don't need another metric to measure myself against.

If you're reading *Women's Health*, the chances are you're interested in living well for longer. And that's no bad thing. The key, as ever, is balance – and my aim, always, is for us to arm you with strategies to help strike it.

Until next month,

Claire

CLAIRE SANDERSON
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
@clairesanderson

In the Women's Health world

Listen

I'm so excited for you to meet this month's cover star. It took two years of diary wrangling to bring Hannah Waddingham to *WH*, but she was more than worth the wait (page 22). She also joined me on our podcast, *Just As Well*, available now.

Win

We're offering one lucky *WH* member the chance to win a beauty box worth £400, filled with our beauty editor's top 2026 buys. For a chance to win, simply complete our membership survey – scan the QR code to start it now.





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Waddingham**

The acclaimed actor on her love of bacon, her daily callisthenics ritual and what's helping her embrace menopause head on

Women'sHealth

Just As Well

P O D C A S T

Gemma Atkinson & Claire Sanderson

Just As Well is the wellness podcast for women who want real science, practical advice and great chat.



 Listen wherever you get your podcasts





If you do one thing this month... **make micro modifications**

On the road to extending your years, micro steps go a long way. When researchers from The University of Sydney studied nearly 60,000 adults between 40 and 69, those who made tiny tweaks – such as sleeping for five minutes more, doing two extra minutes of moderate-to-vigorous exercise and eating an additional half-portion of veg or one-and-a-half servings of whole grains per day – lived, on average, one year longer than the least healthy. Over eight years, it appeared that combining good sleep, diet and exercise seemed

to go the same distance as a single change in one area, such as sleeping for an extra 25 minutes. For those with more mileage in the tank, tacking on four more minutes of activity, 24 minutes of sleep and one extra portion of veg could amount to an additional four years. This isn't just about lifespan either; that time would theoretically be free of chronic conditions such as dementia, cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes, meaning you're extending your healthspan, too. Payoff: tiny change, big difference.

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Women's Health
COLLECTIVE

News you can use

Want the latest health intel?
We've read the research
so you don't have to

18%

The reduced risk of dementia from those who consumed the most caffeine out of 131,000 study* participants, compared with those who imbibed little to none. They also performed better on cognitive function tests and had lower rates of mental decline, which researchers linked to antioxidants in tea and coffee. Two cups a day brewed the most benefits.

PRIME TIME

Not clocked your chronotype, or sleep-wake pattern? University of Barcelona research suggests aligning your circadian rhythm with your training could maximise your sessions, with larks performing best in the early afternoon. Night owls are better lifting late afternoon or evenings and should avoid eating their last meal close to bedtime. Regularity of sleep-wake times and a protein-rich, early-evening meal are wins for all.

MOOD LIFTER

Research* on nearly 77,000 people aged 10 to 90 showed that group aerobic activity such as swimming and dancing improved symptoms of depression, while, resistance, aerobic and mind-body exercise (such as yoga) moderately improved anxiety – postpartum mums benefited the most. If depressive symptoms persist, loop in your GP.

FALSE FRIENDS

Social relationships are our health's strongest allies – but the wrong ones age us. Research* on 2,345 volunteers found negative social ties sped up the ageing process by about 1.5%, making people roughly nine months older, biologically speaking. Hostile friends and family didn't just wrinkle moods, they increased inflammation and stress.

HEAD SPACE

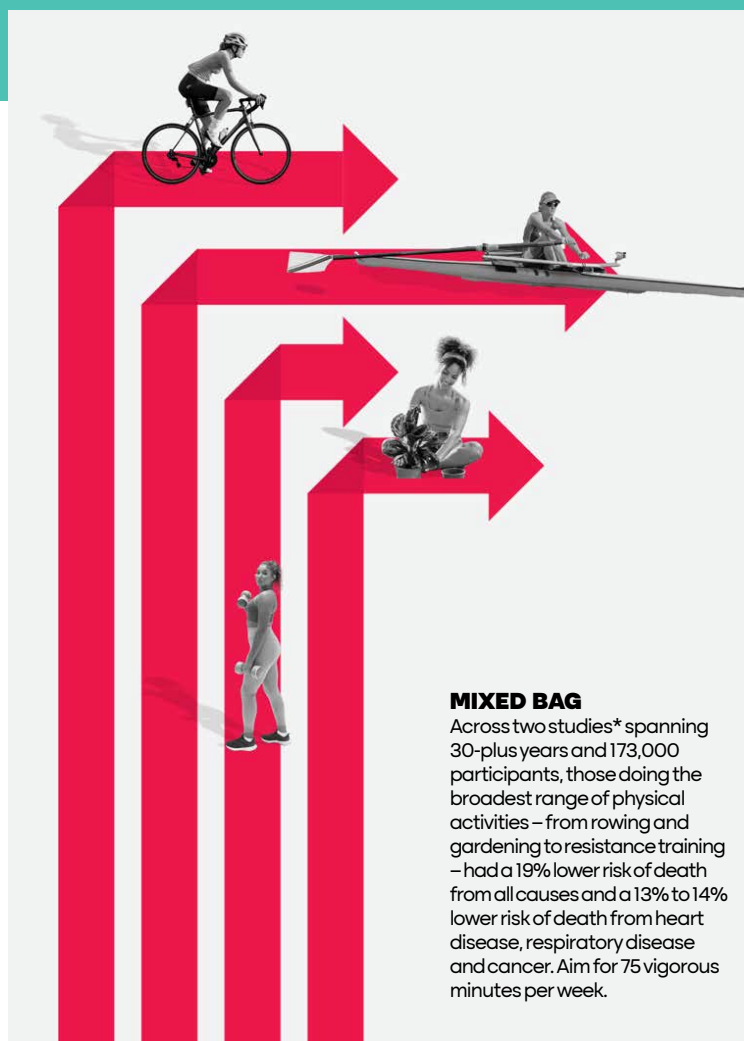
Feeling spiritually connected to surroundings such as forests and awe-inspiring cathedrals provides a sense of stability, significance and the breathing room to buttress daily challenges, according to a study* on 3,640 adults. But anywhere can be that anchor, from your sofa to a secluded park spot. Find your somewhere to retreat and rebuild.

42.5g

More than 20 years of research* found people who ate this many pecans – a large handful – saw improvements in total cholesterol and overall cardiovascular health. As a snack, they help break down fat post-meal and enhance antioxidant levels, preventing cell damage.

MIXED BAG

Across two studies* spanning 30-plus years and 173,000 participants, those doing the broadest range of physical activities – from rowing and gardening to resistance training – had a 19% lower risk of death from all causes and a 13% to 14% lower risk of death from heart disease, respiratory disease and cancer. Aim for 75 vigorous minutes per week.



The to-do list

READ

Menopause And ADHD
Menopause specialist and BBC Breakfast GP Dr Helen Wall explains how your hormones and ADHD influence each other.
Vermillion, £14.99

PARTICIPATE

Deka Strong: L19 Fitness, The Matchworks, Liverpool – 30 May
An indoor fitness challenge of 10 zones that progressively target more of your body, without any running. uk.spartan.com

SUPPORT

Skin Cancer Awareness Month – May 2026
Learn about the three main types, key causes, symptoms and sun safety tips. macmillan.org.uk

Well spent

What's new. What works. What's worth it



Body Scrub, £36, Jones Road

With natural ingredients for gentle exfoliation, caffeine to brighten and restore, and jojoba oil to hydrate, this formula meets the bathroom brief of being decadent and derm-approved.



Chocolate Ice Cream, £8.50, Snooz

Snooz has brought us a dessert designed to deliver seven to nine hours of sleep. With ingredients including magnesium and L-theanine, we're calling it sleep hygiene.



Soda Can, £5.75 for 4, Poppi

The viral sensation that is Poppi has made it to the UK. If your nutrition ambitions are rooted in reducing your daily sugar consumption, a prebiotic-packed alternative is just what you need.



Travel Kit, £15, Nudi

Users of HRT patches, sports tape or glucose monitors will be familiar with doing battle with adhesive on skin; residue that can lead to irritation. Enter: Nudi Spray. It's oil-free and gentle on sensitive skin.



Sunrise Blend, £44, Matter Wellness

This caffeine-free blend features natural ingredients, such as ginseng, adaptogens and functional mushrooms for that first-cup feeling, minus the caffeine crash.



Strength Workout Hair Mask, £20, HairGym

Designed to be used while you're in the gym, this hair mask – featuring lactic acid and hydrolysed wheat protein – infuses your locks while you lunge.



Intelliret 0.3+, £95, AlumierMD

Intelliret's bio-inspired formula combines microencapsulated retinol with a clever time-release delivery system, supporting a gentler experience for sensitive skin.



Ultimate Toss Team, £22 for 4, Toss
In an ideal world, we'd be making our own dressings, along with the rest of our meal prep. But when the sun is out and the park is calling, reach for these. Flavours include Green Goddess and Sweet Tahini Chick, but it's Miso Magic that's reliably levelling up our editor's salads this month.



WORDS: ISABELLE KOLEVETZ



**Bio Balance Toothpaste,
£29.85 for 3, Pärla**

This is formulated by dentists and features a blend of oral probiotics (Lactobacillus ferment) to deliver beneficial bacteria directly to your oral microbiome.



Vitals+, £40, Heights

A high-quality multivitamin can be a game-changer and a time-saver. Heights delivers essentials in their daily dose, with healthy fats, biotin and zinc for a hair and skin boost.



**Mango Sticky Rice Flowers,
£27 for 6, Kin + Deum**

Made with mango, sticky rice, coconut milk, coconut sugar and sea salt, this snack is designed to be consumed mindfully. Given the taste, it's easier said than done.



**Pure Micronised Creatine
Sachets, £19.99, MindByte**

MindByte's pre-measured creatine sachets are perfect to throw in your gym bag for on-the-go doses without fillers, flavours or unknown additives.



helped people fall asleep faster and improved sleep efficiency (read: the percentage of time in bed you actually spend sleeping).

I'm more of a bath gal. Can I just soak in darkness instead?

If the research is anything to go by, then yes. A recent study published in the *Journal Of Physiological Anthropology* actually found that people who had a long soak in the bath fell asleep faster than those who showered – they reported that it was both easier to fall asleep and that their sleep felt better. However, take to the tub and you'll be missing out on one key, calming ingredient – sound. 'Steady, repetitive sounds, such as running water, act like white noise,' confirms Dar. 'They mask sudden background noise and reduce sensory unpredictability, which helps the brain feel safer and less alert, making it easier to shift into a rest state.' So while dark baths are still good, dark showers are even better.

Sounds pleasant, but I fear I'm too clumsy...

It's not right for everyone, including 'people who feel unsafe in low light or who experience night-time anxiety,' Dar advises – nor is it a miracle cure for insomnia. But if you're someone who feels wired or overstimulated at night, she recommends giving it a go. 'The key is consistency. If it becomes part of a predictable wind-down routine, the brain starts to associate it with sleep.' Time to embrace the dark side, people.

Dark showering

The latest wellness hack to make a splash on socials? Showering in the dark. Fans say the combination of light, temperature and sound helps switch off survival mode – but do the health claims have merit or is this trend better off down the drain?

Washing in the dark. Really?

Look, no one said you need to cut the lights completely – you can keep a candle burning without it ruining the effect. But if you do switch to dark mode, the trend can be energy-saving in more ways than one. 'Most people move from bright office lighting to phone screens to harsh bathroom lights right before bed, which keeps the brain in alert mode,' explains Shelly Dar, a psychotherapist specialising in anxiety. 'Dimming the environment lowers stimulation and

signals safety to the nervous system.' This ultimately lowers stress (and those electricity bills) to help you rest.

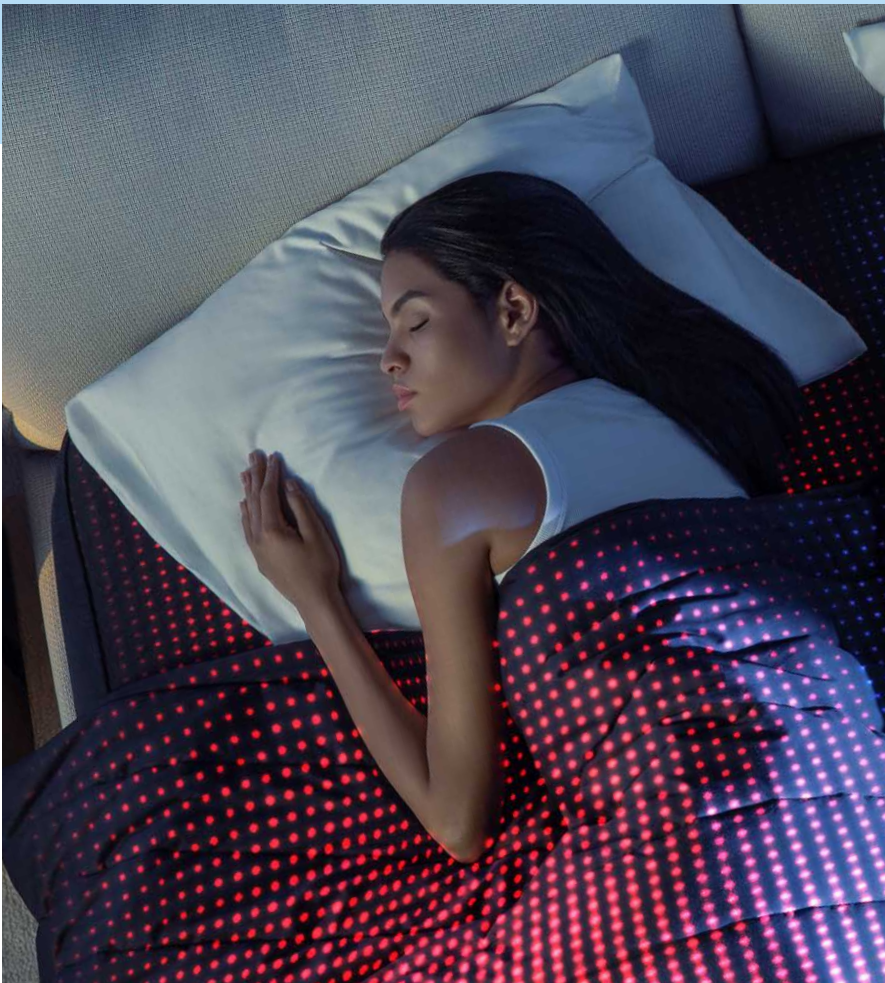
So the perks have been proven?

Not exactly. So far, dark showers haven't been objectively studied, but the principles of the practice – light, temperature and sound – have been. 'Light exposure is one of the strongest regulators of circadian rhythm,' says Dar. 'Bright artificial light in the evening suppresses melatonin, the hormone that helps us feel sleepy,

and research consistently shows that reducing light at night supports natural melatonin release and improves sleep onset.'

So all I have to do is dim the lights?

'Temperature also plays a role,' adds Dar. 'The body naturally cools as it prepares for sleep. While a warm shower can initially raise skin temperature, the drop in core temperature afterwards may help signal that it's time to sleep.' In fact, research published in *Sleep Medicine Reviews* found that having a warm shower or bath before bed



The 'smart' mattress topper

You may be tracking your overnight metrics like a mission circumnavigating the moon, but what good is it knowing that your body temperature is sub-par for snoozing if you can't do anything about it? One 7/10 sleeper looks beneath the sheets in search of sounder slumber

While I've always identified as a solid sleeper, my Oura ring's been telling me a different bedtime story. Hormonal fluctuations go some way towards my lower score on 'resting heart rate' during my period; a snoring partner and a trilling alarm clock explain my ailing 'sleep efficiency' the rest of the month.

But what if there was a way to level up my sleep as I slept? That's the dream of Alexandra Zatarain, who cofounded Eight Sleep in 2014. 'Back then, devices could tell you how bad your night was, but there was nothing that could

make your next night *better*,' she tells *Women's Health*.

In the years since, the Eight Sleep 'pod' – promising to help users fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer, thanks to a personalised cooling and heating system – has gained a cult following among Silicon Valley biohackers and A-listers alike (former *Women's Health* cover star Rita Ora told us that she's a fan).

So I had high hopes as I fitted the one-inch-thick cover of the latest iteration – the Pod 5 – over my mattress. And I wasn't disappointed as I bedded in that

night to a cool, soft layer designed to lower my body temperature as part of conducive conditions for nodding off faster than you can say 'sleepmaxxing'.

But if I was clocking off for the day, my mattress wasn't. While tracking my sleep stages, it enlists AI to automatically tweak the temperature. Come morning, I wake to find that the system has made 25 'autopilot adjustments', estimating a deep sleep upgrade of 37% and an REM boost of 21%. The ability to control temperature is why, in addition to the menstrual cycle, the pod can be useful during pregnancy and menopause.

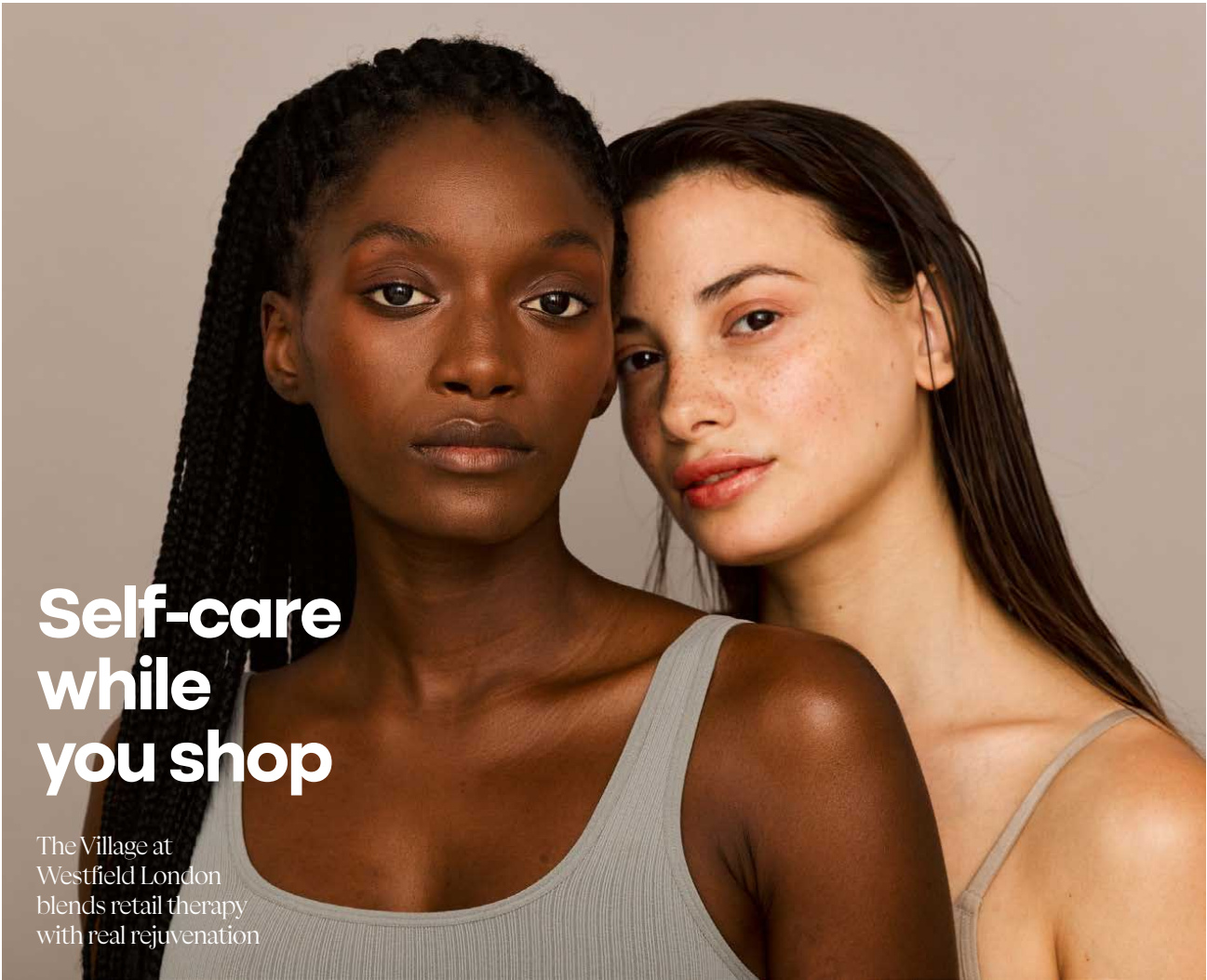
'Temperature dysregulation is one of the most disruptive factors in sleep, and women experience it with greater frequency and intensity than is acknowledged,' notes Zatarain, adding that a 3am hot flush doesn't just wake you up, but derails your entire 'sleep architecture'. Enter Eight Sleep, which peer-reviewed research has linked with reducing hot flushes by an average of 56%.

But it's the pod's ability to silence a snoring partner that's made a convert of this troubled sleeper. When it clocks that my partner is snoring, it raises the base of the bed and gently shakes him, causing him to shift his position. Come morning, I get a shake-up of my own when the system detects that I'm at the lightest point of sleep in a given window, raising the temperature and gently shaking me awake.

A fortnight of elevated energy later, I realise just how little I've been expecting of my shut-eye – and now that I know what 'well rested' feels like, I'm reluctant to have it any other way. Of course, at £2,499 for king size – along with a subscription that starts at £17 per month – well rested doesn't come cheap. But in an era of sleep divorces and a gender sleep gap that sees female sleep loss woefully under-researched, for those with the means, there are worst things to invest in than an optimised eight hours.



The guinea pig
Lauren Clark,
WH contributor



Self-care while you shop

The Village at Westfield London blends retail therapy with real rejuvenation

It used to be that facials and Hyrox classes were confined to spas and studios. Not anymore. With the launch of Healthcare & Wellness at The Village, Westfield London, you can incorporate a self-care stop into your next shopping trip – no detour required.

This shift mirrors how we're thinking about wellness in 2026: little and often, and woven into everyday life. And retail is taking note. Shopping centres are evolving into 360-degree destinations in their own right, offering opportunities to linger, not just to shop.

Located across the first floor of Westfield London, Healthcare & Wellness at The Village has been designed with one goal in mind: to make high-quality wellness accessible. It's a space that meets you wherever you are on your wellness journey, whether your priority is a serious strength session, a skin reset or simply taking an hour for yourself to get away from it all. Here's your guide to making the most of your time there.

Fit for life

If you're looking to sweat, Gymbox delivers. Famed for its regular DJ sets and neon-lit studios, it offers a wide range of sessions – from calisthenics and aerial hoop to its self-coined Bloody Good Workout, an innovative strength class created to align with different menstrual phases. Post-training, StretchLAB's expert flexologists offer assisted stretching sessions to gently soothe your aching muscles.

Flexible health checks

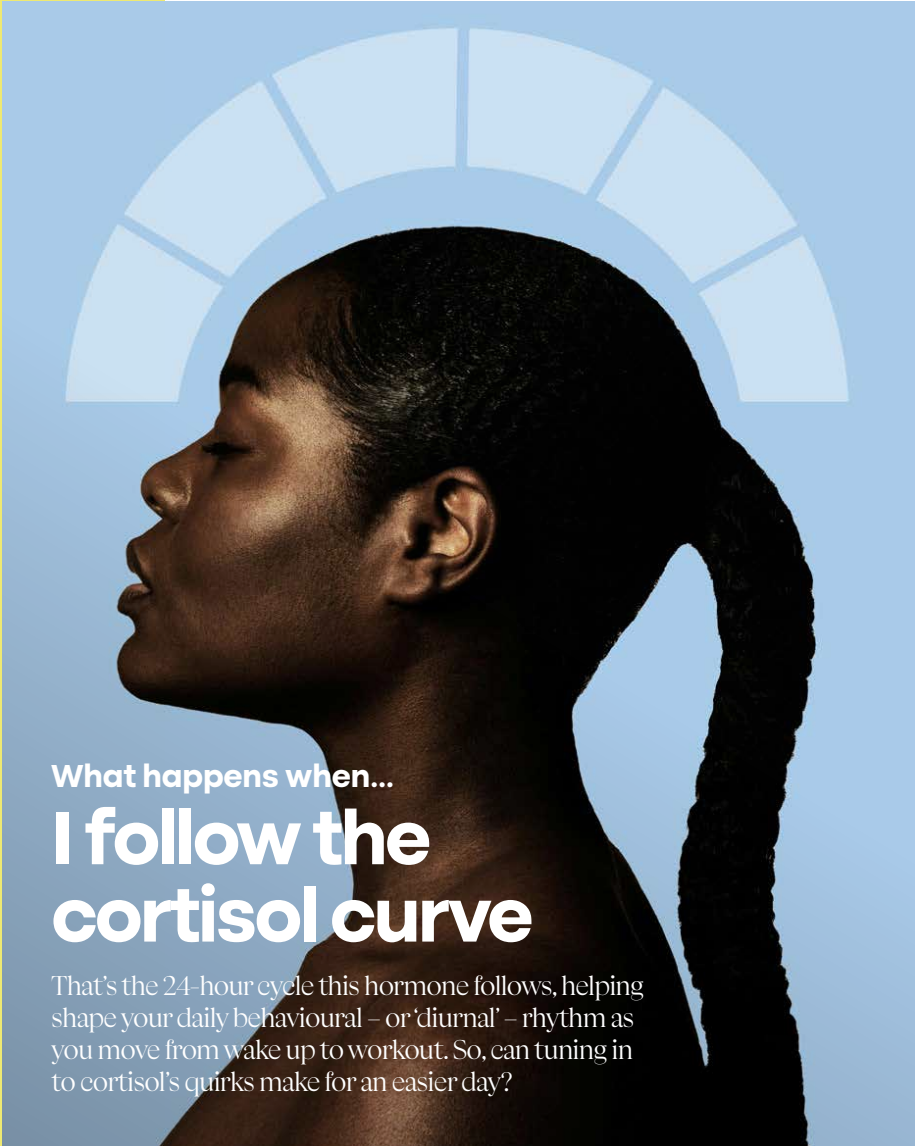
For a hydration hit with a twist, a trip to Waterdrop is worth a visit. Sample its fruity, sugar-free electrolyte cubes before picking up a stainless-steel water bottle (it's got to be the burgundy one for us) with an in-store personalised engraving to finish it off. Proof that even the most practical rituals can be made to feel pleasingly polished. On the same floor, you can tick off wellness checks: Effect Doctors, a personalised

healthcare clinic, offers screenings and blood tests with flexible availability, while laser-eye clinic EuroEyes lets you squeeze in a complimentary optical consultation between shops.

Perfect pampering

For premium skincare, Prince Pharmacy is a destination in itself: softly lit shelves lined with products and supplements from the likes of SkinCeuticals and Gold Collagen, a spa offering radiance-enhancing hydrafacials, and a health-concierge service providing personalised recommendations based on your skin's needs. Nearby, So.Shell delivers a smarter approach to beauty maintenance: nails, lashes and brows can be tended to simultaneously by different practitioners at once, meaning more precious shopping time. Feeling good has never been this efficient.

Visit Level One at The Village, Westfield London



What happens when...

I follow the cortisol curve

That's the 24-hour cycle this hormone follows, helping shape your daily behavioural – or 'diurnal' – rhythm as you move from wake up to workout. So, can tuning in to cortisol's quirks make for an easier day?

1 Ahead of the curve More than just 'the stress hormone', cortisol is multi-hyphenate – mobilising energy, regulating blood pressure and supporting alertness, allowing your body to respond effectively to physical and psychological stress. Its typical 24-hour trajectory is why it's nicknamed the 'cortisol curve'. 'Cortisol follows a predictable daily rhythm in healthy people,' says Dominic Greenyer, private GP and director of The Health Suite. 'Levels rise in the early morning, peak soon after waking for alertness and energy; then gradually decline throughout the day.'

2 Stress test Despite what popular opinion (read: TikTok) might tell you, your cortisol doesn't need to be curbed. It's key in the way your body responds to daily life. 'Often misunderstood as being solely linked to stress, it plays an essential role in metabolic function, immune regulation and maintaining stable energy levels,' says Dr Greenyer. The issue often isn't cortisol itself, but how stress, poor sleep and a lack of recovery can disrupt its natural rhythm. For most healthy adults, the aim isn't to reduce levels, but work with its natural rise and fall during the day.

3 Body moves As for workouts and the cortisol curve? High-intensity and long endurance sessions raise cortisol short term – supporting energy production and fitness gains. Problems arise when stress is already high – and intensity is added without recovery. That's where autoregulation comes in: adjusting training based on how recovered you feel. While there's no evidence to suggest workouts need to match the cortisol curve (ie, only doing HIIT in the morning), late, high-intensity sessions might make it harder to unwind before sleep.

4 Calm fuel The biggest determinants of well-regulated cortisol are meeting energy needs – and being aware of your macros. Mediterranean-style diets have also been associated with lower inflammatory markers, and may help buffer the physiological effects of stress – indirectly supporting hormonal regulation. Healthy wholegrains are key; sufficient carb consumption helps prevent exaggerated stress responses, while under-fuelling is far more disruptive to cortisol patterns than any specific food choice, meal frequency or timing.

5 Bright sparks While the cortisol curve feeds into your daily diurnal – aka behavioural – rhythm, your circadian rhythm is also one to pay attention to. It's the engine of it all and strongly regulated by light exposure. Morning daylight supports alertness earlier in the day, while bright light in the evening – hello, doomscrolling – can delay melatonin release and shift circadian timing. 'Consistent sleep patterns, regular physical activity and managing chronic stress all help maintain normal hormonal rhythms,' says Dr Greenyer. Simple, really.

Ask the COLLECTIVE

Want to run further, lift heavier or nail a pull-up? We put your questions to the Women's Health COLLECTIVE panel to help you make good on your goals



How often do I have to practise yoga to feel the benefit?

Sanchia Legister says: Like most movement practices, yoga rewards consistency over intensity. Many teachers agree that showing up regularly matters far more than the duration or level of each session. With steady practice over two or three months, you'll begin to notice improvements in strength, mobility and overall body awareness.

Research backs this up. A 2015 study* followed 71 Indian Air Force personnel who completed a daily, hour-long yoga practice for 12 weeks. By the end, participants were stronger and more flexible, with many also experiencing reductions in body weight.

Similar results show up in non-exercisers. In one Harvard-led study, previously inactive participants practised yoga at least twice a week for eight weeks (around 180 minutes total per week). The researchers found improvements in muscle strength and endurance, flexibility and cardiorespiratory

fitness – demonstrating that yoga can improve overall fitness, even without a traditional gym-based programme.

For me, the physical side of yoga felt challenging from the beginning. But the mental and emotional benefits showed up almost immediately. I felt calmer, less stressed and more in tune with my body. Yoga has a way of infiltrating everyday life, too: the more consistently I practised, the more I noticed shifts in the choices I made and how I responded to stress.

That experience isn't unique. Research published in *The Journal Of Alternative And Complementary Medicine* found that people who practised yoga three times a week for 12 weeks experienced greater improvements in mood and larger reductions in anxiety than those who walked instead. These changes were linked to increased levels of GABA – a calming brain chemical that plays a key role in regulating stress and mood.

In other words, the sense of peace that you've probably felt after a class isn't imagined; it's reflected in measurable changes in the brain and, over time, in how you feel, move and live. You'll be amazed at the changes you can observe once you begin to tune in to your body.



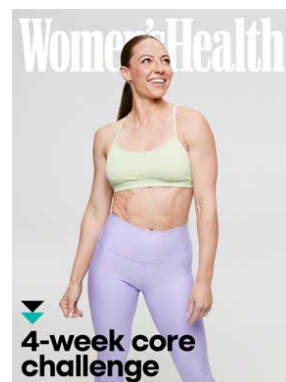
Train with the COLLECTIVE

Smash your goals with a plan from one of our COLLECTIVE trainers



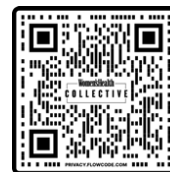
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Sanchia's two-week plan for beginners will help you to strengthen and sculpt your upper body with just one pair of dumbbells.



Build a functional core

Improve your power, posture, coordination and balance with Izzy's four-week core plan.



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'Overthinking is stealing your time, energy and health'

Clinical psychologist Dr Jessamy Hibberd takes aim at the thought pattern that's framed as a personality quirk or the hallmark of self-awareness, but is actually stealthily sabotaging women's wellbeing

Panic attacks. The crushing lows of depression. Compared with these acute expressions of psychological distress, the thinking patterns that fuel them get overlooked. Overthinking is brushed off as harmless, but from decades of research and hundreds of cases I've observed as a clinical psychologist, I know it's one of the most reliable drivers of anxiety, low mood and chronic stress.

Overthinking drains joy, magnifies problems and erodes self-worth. It strains relationships and sustains the body's stress response. Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, the Yale psychologist who spent her career studying overthinking, called it 'the secret to unhappiness'. It's linked to physical symptoms, from headaches and back pain to increased cardiovascular risk – and claims so much of our time. Especially from women, who are nearly twice as likely as men to experience anxiety disorders and to engage in rumination. Brain imaging studies show greater activity in areas linked to both emotion (limbic system) and focus (the frontal cortex), indicating that we're more likely to be focused, empathetic, collaborative and intuitive. Positive attributes, yes – but which also increase our susceptibility to these loops of unproductive, negative thought.

Self-reflection has its place, but there's a difference between thinking something through and becoming stuck. When you repeatedly circle your thoughts and emotions without resolution, the process becomes harmful. It's the problem that disguises itself as the solution, a faulty coping mechanism, developed in response to feeling vulnerable or exposed – that if we just think long enough, we'll uncover the answer, take control, feel better or be prepared. But overthinking isn't preparation, it just causes us to suffer unnecessarily. If the thing you're overthinking does go okay, the worry was pointless. And if it doesn't? Then you've suffered twice.

Ironically, overthinking traps us in the unpleasant experience – in the past, or some imagined future – that we're trying to escape. It causes real harm in the process, because whether threats are real or imagined, the brain is triggered in the same way, and those thoughts and mental images have a powerful effect on the brain



and body. The more this pattern is repeated, the more automatic it becomes, and feeling low, tired or stressed can quickly trigger this loop of overthinking and analysis.

I recognise this in my own thinking: when I'm overwhelmed, I can find myself questioning the way I work and live my life, comparing myself with some past version of me that never truly existed. When I see these thoughts as signals that I am having a bad day, or that I'm depleted with too much on, I'm able to shift my focus from self-blame to acknowledgement of the challenges, which allows me to focus on what I need – rest or support – not self-flagellation or spiralling.

Repeat after me: there is nothing good about overthinking. Once you see this clearly, it becomes much easier to take the next steps to stop it in its tracks and disconnect the programming that's made it an automatic response.

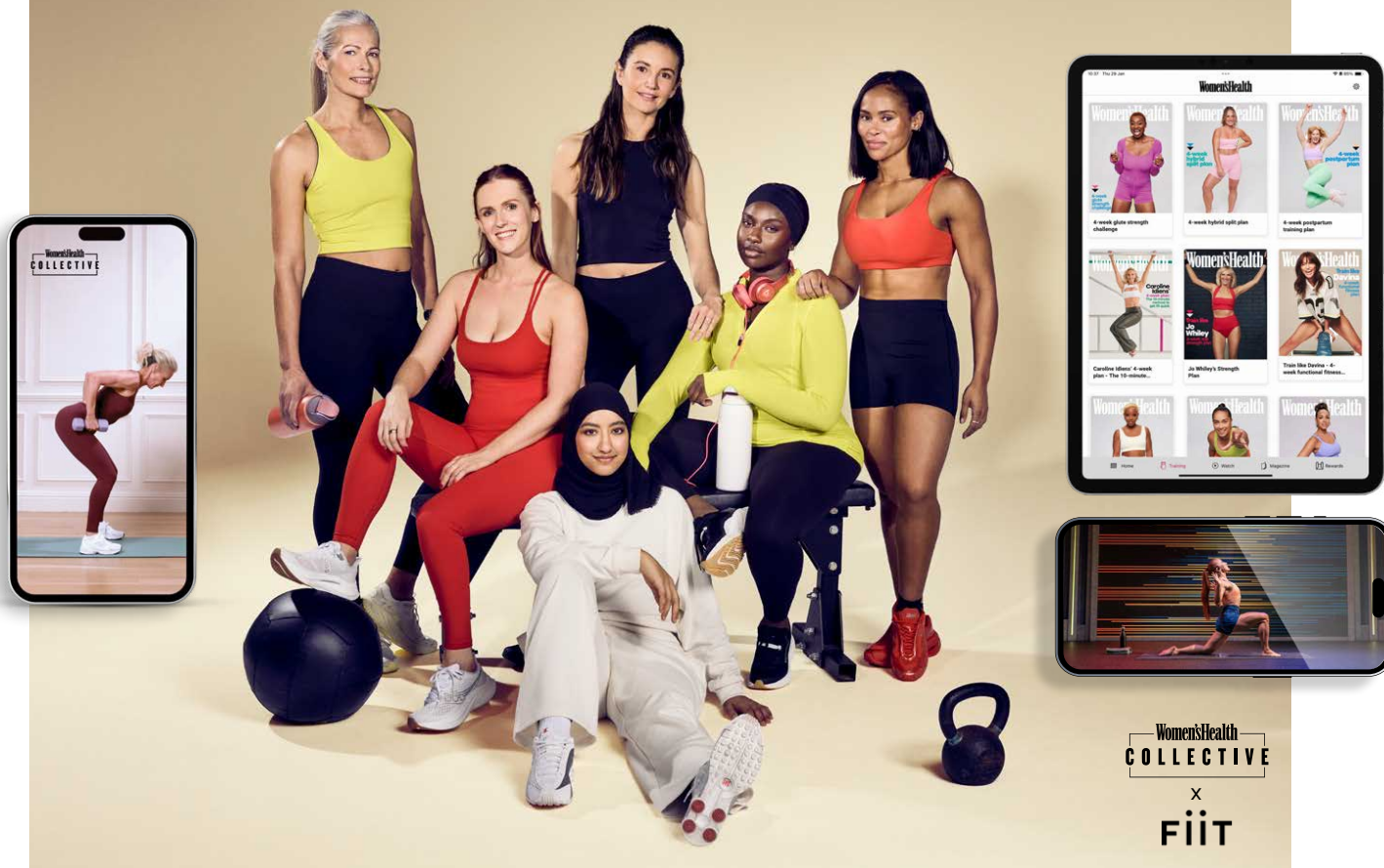
Create a rule that you'll avoid trying to think your way out of a negative emotional state – tempting, but you're fighting a losing battle. Instead, boost your mood before returning to the problem. It's also important to understand that you have a choice in what you think about. Ask yourself, 'Is this what I want in my awareness?' and remind yourself, repeatedly, that feelings are not facts.

I'm not suggesting that you refuse to reflect – avoidance creates its own difficulties. I am asking you to be selective about when and how you do so. I am also offering a reminder that thinking is not the answer to everything. The human brain has evolved over millions of years to be shaped by experience. Doing things – not anticipating the ways they could go or picking about how they went – is what matters most for emotional development. Action will be what helps you feel better – not overanalysis.

The Overthinking Cure: How To Free Your Mind And Focus On What Really Matters (£16.99, Hachette)
by Dr Jessamy Hibberd is out now

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Georgie Lane-Godfrey,
***Women's Health* membership director**



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'Seize who you are'

From her screen presence to effortless charm, it's no wonder everyone wants a piece of Hannah Waddingham. Now, with the new season of *Ted Lasso* landing later this summer, she talks to *WH* about single motherhood, saying a polite 'No, thank you' to Hollywood beauty standards and why menopause is a life stage best grabbed by the reins

PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID VENNI

WORDS ZING TSENG

STYLING SASKIA QUIRKE





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or some, it's the ability to dispatch some semi-skimmed into a cup of English breakfast, rendering it a shade best described as 'biscuit'. For others, it's a slice of white bread in a toaster for the 90 seconds it needs to give it that 'just back from Beefa' glow. But the way to Hannah Waddingham's heart is with a well-cooked bit of bacon – only, 'well' isn't the word she uses. 'Annihilated', she tells me, of how she likes her rashers. 'If it's not crisped to death, I'm afraid it's going back. My other half always laughs and puts his head in his hands because he's just like, "Oh my god, how many conversations can you have about bacon that shatters on the floor if you drop it?" But I just love it. That and avocado – if you sliced me open, I'm made of it.'

Having spent some 60 minutes in conversation with Hannah – and more watching her on screen –

I suspect breakfast foods aren't the only thing the platinum-haired, Emmy Award-winning stage-and-screen actor is made of. If directors found a way to bottle her blend of charismatic relatability and powerful poise, Hollywood would look different. Without such science, Hannah remains one of the few actors confidently straddling everything from blockbuster fantasy to heart-warming comedy with the kind of all-or-nothing gusto that leaves audiences willing her to succeed (and wishing she was their mate). And more than a love of toast-toppers, it's the 'f**k it' energy she brings to her latest project that makes her a perfect *WH* cover star.

'It mangled me senseless,' she tells me, of her decision to do her own stunts for the soon-to-be released Amazon Prime series *Ride Or Die*. In it, Hannah plays Judith, whose double life as an assassin-for-hire collides with the marital breakdown of her best friend Debbie, played by Octavia Spencer of *Hidden Figures* fame. As the pair go on the run, their loyalty is tested – think: the slick action of *Mr & Mrs Smith* meets the buddy road-trip drama of *Thelma & Louise*. 'I gave myself fully to the stunts,' she confirms, of a schedule that was 'a bit like *Strictly*' – six-inch heels included. 'I'd work on a stunt for a week and then shoot it, then the next day I'd have to learn the next one. I was like, "Guys, I'm mangled – can we just leave it a minute?"' What did being mangled look like, I ask? 'At one point, I had a fairly gnarly calf injury in my gastrocnemius muscle, which was horrific. [There were times when] I thought, "What on earth have you got yourself involved with, woman?" But when I watch it back, I can't believe I did it.' The secret to her stuntwoman success? Her theatre training – specifically, her ability to snap into character. 'Because I would balk at all the rehearsals. But when I was on set and they shouted "Action!", I was a *beast*.'

WEST END GIRL

Beast-mode is in Hannah's blood. Born to parents Harry and Melodie in south-west London, she was inspired to tread the boards thanks to her classically trained mother's long career as a mezzo-soprano with the English National Opera. 'It's taught me resilience and a muscularity with what I do,' she reflects, on what the stage has gifted her. 'Getting hold of a script, keeping myself well, keeping myself focused. And I'm a team player, always – that comes from theatre. When I was doing this shoot for *Women's Health*, the photographer said, "It's so nice to have someone come in and be interested in how we all pull together." But it just wouldn't cross my mind to *not* be like that.'

By the time she was cast in *Ted Lasso* as Rebecca Welton, the steely AFC Richmond club owner with a heart of gold, she was an Olivier Award-nominated veteran of the West End and Broadway stage, and had enjoyed much success on screen. But at 5ft 11in, Hannah towers over most of her co-stars – even more so in heels. 'It was almost like tall actresses were a dirty word for decades,' she tells me. 'People would be perfectly nice but they'd go, "We'd love to use her,



**PREVIOUS
SPREAD**

Jacket, Massimo
Dutti. Bodysuit,
Skims. Shoes, Zara

THIS PAGE

Body, Skims. Shirt,
Massimo Dutti

LEFT

Bra, Girlfriend
Collective.
Trousers,
The Fold



‘I’m not going to
sit in the corner
with a duvet over
my head... I’m
going to come
out fighting’

Body, Boss at
Zalando. Trench
coat, The Frankie
Shop. Shoes, Zara



but I'm afraid we've already cast the man, and he's 5ft 8in." It's a societal load of nonsense.' There were notable roles as the bell-wielding religious fanatic Septa Unella (aka the 'Shame Nun') in *Game Of Thrones* and tiger mum Sofia Marchetti in Netflix's *Sex Education*, but it was Rebecca that catapulted Hannah to the forefront of public consciousness; *Ted Lasso*'s most recent season has become the most-watched streaming original show in the US.

For Hannah, the job could not have come at a better time. 'It was a turning point in terms of being seen for the first time as not just a tall, bigger woman, but someone who has the same foibles, insecurities, vulnerabilities as anyone,' she begins, by way of explanation. 'But also the financial support I received in that moment... being able to stand on my own two feet with my daughter.' Hannah became a single mother after her relationship with her partner broke down when their daughter was two – circumstances that, she suspects, could have spelled the end of her career. Instead, the situation ended up lighting a fire in her. 'In that moment, your career could falter because you're left holding the baby. [But] I found in myself a strength. I thought, "No, I'm not going to sit in the corner with a duvet over my head and think, Oh, poor me." I'm going to come out fighting because I know that I have so much to give in my career.'



'Don't be fooled that I've got it all together – I haven't on any day'

BODY POLITICS

Eight years, three seasons and one Emmy later, Hannah describes herself as a ferociously protective parent to her now 11-year-old – an approach born of 'the buck stopping with me'. Her decision to discuss her experience of single motherhood is informed, in part, by what she sees as a societal misunderstanding of what it means. 'I talk about [single motherhood] all the time because it's not the same as two parents. I know that sounds ridiculous and obvious, but I think people forget it. People go, "Oh yes, I'm by myself most of the time." But that's not the same as being sole provider. She is undoubtedly my greatest achievement because of that.'

Now on the precipice of parenting a teenager, she cites 'mum inferiority complex' and 'mum imposter syndrome' alongside the requisite 'mum guilt' that the role reliably delivers. 'Don't be fooled that I've got it all together – I haven't on any day,' she insists. 'But the most important thing now for me is keeping comms open. I check in with her much more than I did and I have always said that even if something shocks me in her life, even if I raise an eyebrow, I will always be in for all of it.'

It can't be an easy time to come of age, I venture, amid the refetishisation of ultra-slim bodies. 'We haven't quite tipped into that yet,' she begins, when I ask if body image is a topic on the table. 'But I do wonder if that's because she's always observed me and my friends who are all, you know, healthy looking.' How does Hannah feel about the ubiquity of GLP-1s on the red carpet, as someone who walks them regularly? 'You'd have to be blind if you didn't see it,' she acknowledges, with the caveat that she doesn't judge those who use the drugs. 'My concern is always what that is doing to someone's gut or nervous system. What is that doing to you down the line that's going to come back and bite you on the arse? But by the same token, I'm lucky that I've never – at the moment – felt the need to intervene in that way.' It helps, she jokes, that she's terrified of needles, which also rules out cosmetic injectables. Instead, she goes for collagen-stimulating facials with star aesthetician Shane Cooper every three to four weeks. 'I'm not one for the Band-Aid of something appearing to make you smoother for a couple of months,' she shrugs. 'It's just not for me.'

SET THE STAGE

In a world where women are encouraged to sandblast any sign of age off their skin when they're still tackling teenage acne, Hannah's gloriously expressive face – featuring *actual* laughter lines – is surely the most powerful argument for age positivity. But if she's a vocal



THIS PAGE
Bra, Girlfriend
Collective.
Trousers,
The Fold

LEFT
Body, Skims. Shirt,
Massimo Dutti

proponent for embracing the visible signs of ageing, she's every bit as outspoken on the ones we can't see. 'Sure as life, sure as death, there's menopause,' she begins, when talk turns to the stage of life. 'There has to be in order for us extraordinary female beings to bring life into the world. So I don't know why people brush it under the carpet.' It feels like one of those issues that women have been conditioned to feel embarrassed about, I posit. 'But that's what I mean – my brain genuinely doesn't compute the shame of it all.'

One of the thorniest issues in the menopause conversation is the way in which symptoms show up at work – a scenario Hannah is all too familiar with. 'While I was shooting on *Ride Or Die* out in Prague and doing all this very physical work, learning all these stunts, I could feel my mood dipping – and that's not me,' she recalls, of a symptom she later found a label for in the form of 'brain fog'. 'I feel like I was managing to do very little [that was] productive. I'm very much a glass-half-full kind of gal and I could feel that dipping. But you also get used to saying, "Oh, I'm run off my feet." We try to get through each day the best we can and, because it creeps in slowly, it's easy to not really notice until, like I say, the wheels have come off.'

At first, she brushed the symptoms off as tiredness, but her best friend wasn't having it – and it was on her insistence that she went to get her hormones tested. It was the best advice she could have been given. 'There's no one that's going to thank you for ignoring [those symptoms] and the only person that's going to suffer is you. If you can, squirrel away enough money so that if you have a problem, you can deal with it – just as you might if you have a problem with a muscle or with your mind. But don't stand on the periphery, doing very little. Get stuck in.'

Since doing just that, Hannah's found a protocol that works for her; namely, a combination of HRT and holistic support, including supplements from Ancient + Brave and Artah. And in news unlikely to surprise you given the muscles on show in this shoot, movement features, too. 'I'd be lying if I said I did a lot. Just callisthenics [with] my own body weight and some light weights for 20 minutes in the morning. But I've always said to my friends: activate your muscles – every day. People are very lovely; they talk about my arms. I just keep activated.' She pauses, before adopting her best headteacher voice. 'And never underestimate the value of doing squats the whole time you're brushing your teeth.' Does she have any advice for anyone in the thick of menopausal changes right now? 'I would say seize who you are and love every second of your changes. It's what I'm trying to do. Is it easy? No. Is it going to happen regardless? Yes. So take your own reins. Be the *master* of your own reins,' she says, calling to mind a football manager delivering a rousing speech to the locker room.

NEW SEASON

Speaking of locker rooms, we're about to be acquainted with a new one. In January, Apple TV announced that the latest season of *Ted Lasso* – due to land in summer 2026 – will follow an all-female football team. It's a canny move from showrunner and star Jason Sudeikis,



following the runaway success of the women's game on both sides of the pond, and a storyline Hannah – who played netball for Surrey in her youth – is delighted to see. 'I hope people take [this season] to their hearts as much as the first three seasons because the women in this season deserve people to lean in,' she enthuses. 'The cast are fabulous, too – they walked in and owned it immediately – so I'm very reassured by the younger generation of female actors coming up; they've got it and then some.'

If there's excitement on the work front, the contentment continues at home. She's now on good terms with her child's father and is in the first throes of dating someone – the aforementioned 'other half' and bacon-sceptic – although, she won't be drawn on the details. 'It's taken me eight years,' Hannah says, when asked about getting into a new relationship. 'I didn't really have the space mentally or emotionally for that. I've hunkered down and focused on my girl and me. [But] now I'm ready to stick my head above the parapet a bit more.' I hope it's a very good-looking parapet, I say. 'It is!' she cackles. 'And it's really lovely too, obviously, my relationship. But the best thing about it is, firstly, being happy and strong in myself.' And more than brittle bacon and bathroom squats, I suspect it's this self-possessed strength that Hannah is truly made of.

MAKE-UP: SOPHIE ROBERTS, AT BERLIN ASSOCIATES USING SHANE COOPER SKINCARE
HAIR: JAMES ROWE AT BRYANT ARTISTS USING FABLE & MAINE MANICURIST: ALYAH JOHNSON
AT CAROL HAYES MANAGEMENT USING ESSIE. TAILOR: KIM LAREAU FOR KAREN AVENELL



‘Sure as life, sure
as death, there’s
menopause...
I don’t know why
people brush it
under the carpet’

THIS PAGE
Bra, Bordelle.
Briefs, Triumph.
Dress, Victoria
Beckham at
The Outnet.
Shoes, Mango

LEFT
Jacket, Massimo
Dutti. Bodysuit,
Skims. Shoes, Zara



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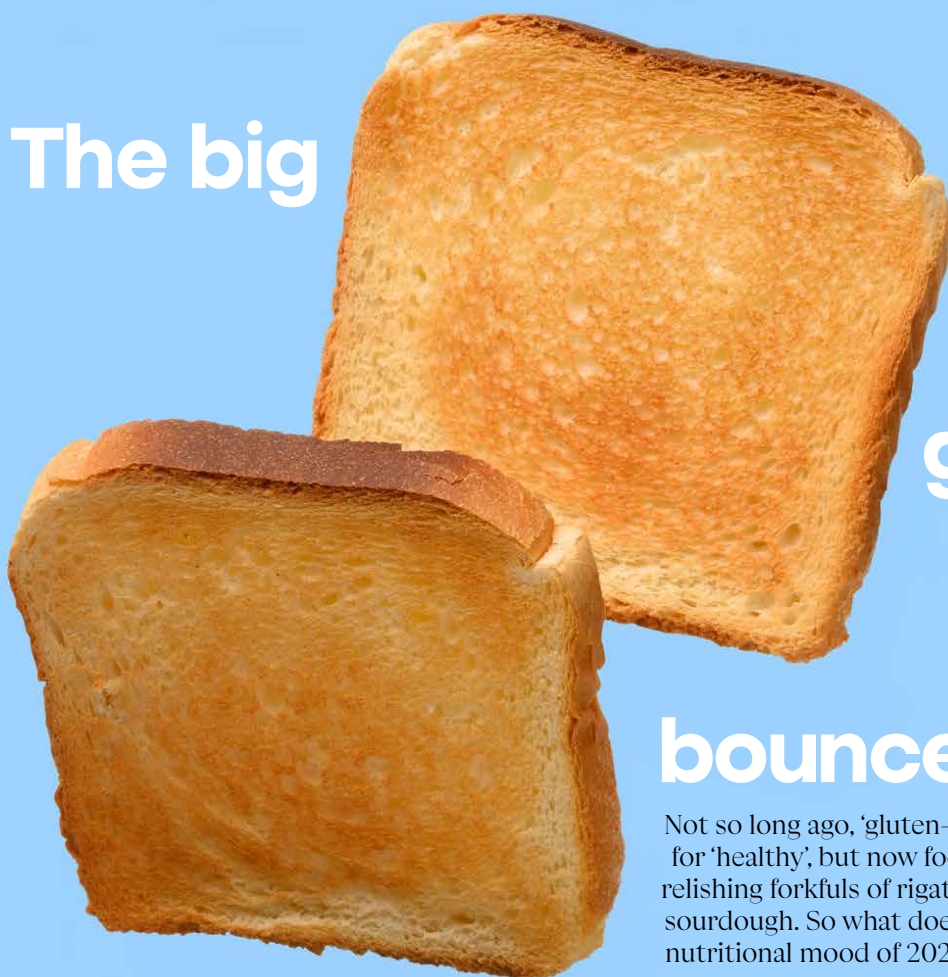
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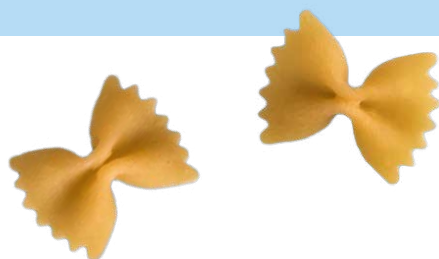
The big



gluten

bounceback

Not so long ago, 'gluten-free' was shorthand for 'healthy', but now food-aware types are relishing forkfuls of rigatoni and big slices of sourdough. So what does this say about the nutritional mood of 2026? *WH* investigates



For some people, a hastily mashed avocado spread on seeded toast is par for the course when it comes to a rushed weekday breakfast. But for Amber⁺, each mouthful is a moment to savour. That's how much of a delicacy bread now feels – because it was one of many gluten-containing kitchen staples off the menu for her from 2017 until last year. 'I didn't really have any symptoms,' recalls the 31-year-old Pilates instructor from London, on her initial decision to ditch gluten – the glue-like protein found in wheat, barley and rye – and send a prominent source of energy awol from her diet.

'People on my Instagram feed were describing it as "bad" – so I just stopped eating it.' Not that doing so required Amber herself to become glued to food labels, because, a decade or so ago, going 'gluten-free' was being newly catered for everywhere from supermarket chains to service-station cafes. A simple 'GF' badge seemed as of-the-moment as millennial pink, with the category's market value rising from £120.2m to £462m between 2010 and 2015.

It was the era when spiralisers were the cutting-edge kitchen gadget of the moment for their ability to churn out 'courgetti', and you could hardly scroll Instagram without finding a recipe for flourless beetroot brownies from the likes of Ella Mills, aka Deliciously Ella. The then-nascent wellness influencer – who penned the UK's bestselling debut cookbook ever in 2015 – had sent her follower count soaring

by sharing a diet devoid of gluten, among other things. Part of the allure of a gluten-free life, muses Amber, was how it seemed like an eating philosophy with roots in solid nutrition – not like faddy low-carb diets, such as the Atkins, that had dominated the healthy eating discourse in the years prior. 'I really thought I was being the picture of health,' she insists.

A decade later, however, Amber – still just as health-conscious – is part of a collective shift of people welcoming gluten back into their diets, with open arms. While the gluten-free industry still looks to be growing, research by Mintel suggests that's due to food inflation rather than increased demand – ie, less is actually being sold but at a higher price point. There was a 40% growth in sourdough sales at Tesco in the year to July 2025, and Gail's Bakery saw its revenue jump by 28% in 2024 – despite stocking





Gluten-free now feels as stale as a Valencia filter

just one gluten-free loaf among its roster of 16 and offering zero flourless pastries.

Its return is evident in other places, too – notably online, where once gluten-free conversation reigned supreme. Tagliatelle dishes go viral when spun out by Italian nonnas (see @pastagrannies and their one million fans) and no casual-but-not-really Instagram round-up is complete without a brunch shot, where a hunk of sourdough is the main edible event. Mills, poster girl for the free-from lifestyle, now sells five different types of wheat-based pasta within her Plants range, available in Waitrose. Then there's Gwyneth Paltrow, who made global headlines earlier last year when she said she was back eating sourdough bread and pasta again. In short, someone requesting a gluten-free tweak as part of their restaurant order feels as stale as a Valencia filter or saying 'hashtag' before making a quip.

Back to baked

It was the growing faff of eating out with loved ones, rather than a single moment succumbing to the buttery waft of freshly baked croissants, that nudged Amber to rethink the contents of her plate. What should have been soul-soothing catch-ups with friends began to take up an inordinate amount of headspace, as she scoured menus before approving restaurants or ended up reluctantly chewing plasticky gluten-free pizza bases. Reintroducing gluten, in a sense, gave Amber a fresh taste of freedom. She gradually added it back in over the space of six weeks, and realised that any bloating and digestive discomfort she may have previously experienced were probably nothing to do with gluten. 'I had been worrying all this time about an ingredient that I wasn't actually allergic to.'

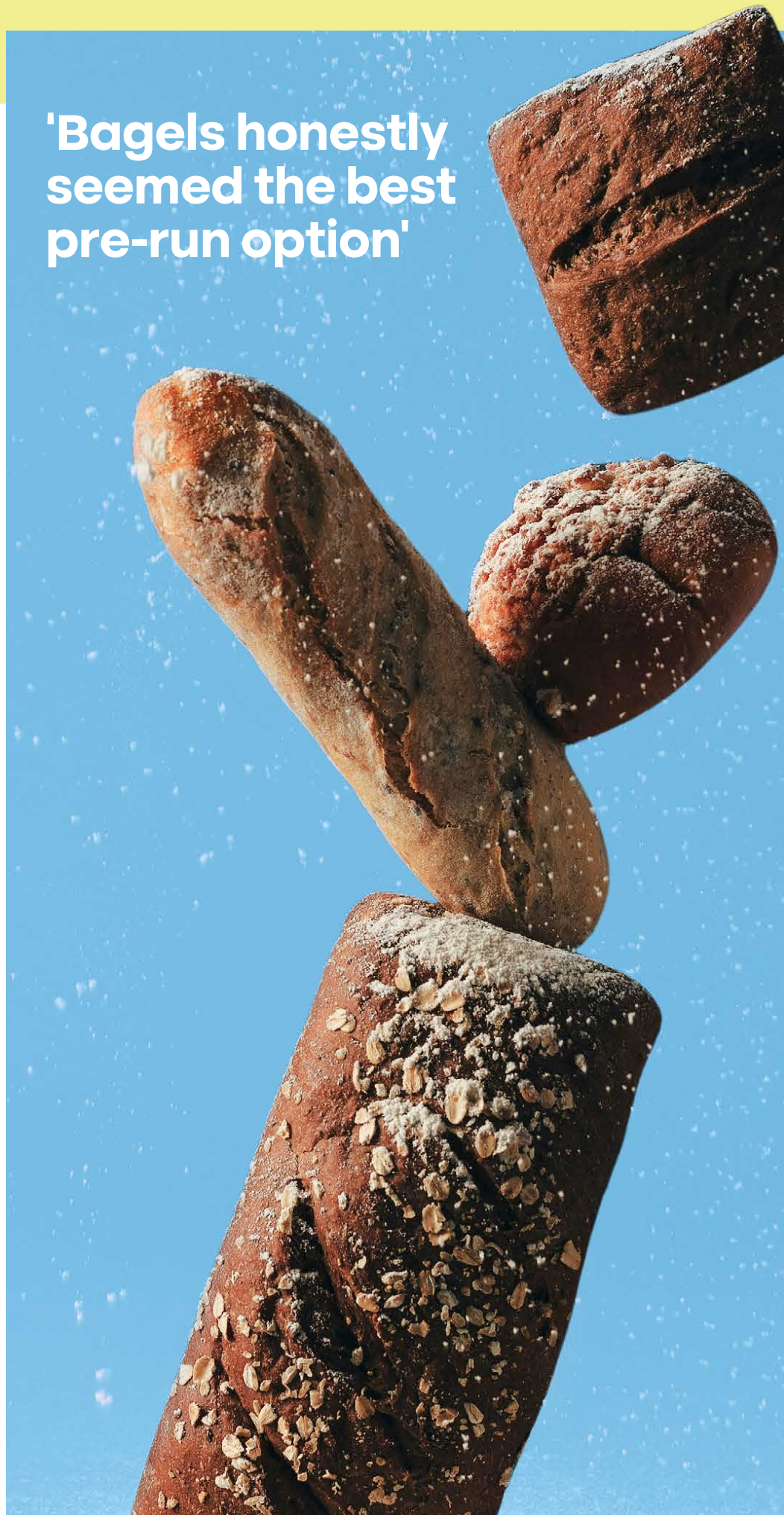
This is where, experts tell *WH*, the confusion often lies – because some people certainly should avoid gluten. ‘Coeliac disease is an autoimmune condition that means when someone who has it consumes gluten, their immune system attacks the lining of the small intestine,’ says Jasmine Bliss, a registered associate nutritionist. ‘This causes inflammation and nutrient malabsorption.’ While unlikely to be fatal, the health complications can be serious. However, according to Coeliac UK, the condition affects just 1% of the population. Studies* attribute the 7.5% increase in diagnoses per year over the past several decades to greater awareness and an increased health-consciousness. That being said, there is such a thing as non-coeliac gluten sensitivity (NCGS) – colloquially dubbed ‘gluten intolerance’. ‘This is not an autoimmunity or an allergy,’ explains Bliss. ‘It describes symptoms triggered by gluten consumption – such as bloating, fatigue, headaches and brain fog.’

Arguably, worries about gluten intolerance fuelled the rise of gluten-free in the first place. Yet it’s still unclear how many people actually suffer from it. Unlike coeliac disease, there’s no specific test for it – yes, even in those kits advertised on your feed, which are part of a global food intolerance test market valued at £11.4bn last year. ‘They can’t accurately diagnose it,’ insists Bliss – and the NHS backs her up. Despite this, research published in the journal *Gut* in October last year showed that self-reported NCGS more than doubled over three years, with significantly more women than men claiming to have the condition.

Gut instinct

Increasingly, researchers think something else could be at play. Another recent study by the University of Melbourne found that most people who believe they’re

'Bagels honestly seemed the best pre-run option'



sensitive to gluten are reacting to other factors, such as FODMAPs (a group of carbohydrates that are poorly absorbed in the small intestine) or brain-gut dynamics. Indeed, they suggested that people who think they have a gluten intolerance may in fact be experiencing irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) symptoms, such as diarrhoea, bloating and constipation. It's why sufferers are frequently recommended to try a low-FODMAP diet.

'Often gluten gets the blame when people are actually sensitive to FODMAPs,' notes Emily Leeming, a microbiome researcher at King's College London and author of *Fibre Power*, out on 21 May. 'These are types of fermentable carbohydrates that are often present in the same foods and can cause discomfort for some people.' The advice is to remove foods for around six weeks, then reintroduce them slowly to find how much you can tolerate – rather than removing them altogether.

It's why Katrina Lander has recently started eating gluten again after years without. For Free Mags Check sastatus.com 'I have IBS, so I've followed a low-FODMAP diet for a while,' explains the 33-year-old from Kent. 'The goal was never to be gluten-free forever, but reintroducing it always led to flare-ups – until I tried again earlier this year, and I'm now better able to tolerate it.' This tracks, says Bliss, because our guts are malleable and the composition of their microbiomes can change regularly. 'Many people with IBS find their tolerance of gluten-containing foods changes throughout their lives,' she elaborates. 'This means that people who once had trouble digesting bread may end up being fine with it years – or even months – later.'

That something else may be in the mix for the gluten-averse has been supported by more research, with a study published in *The Lancet* in September examining participants who believed that

gluten was behind their IBS symptoms. They were given cereal bars – containing either wheat, gluten or wheat- and gluten-free flours, without being told which was which – at various points over several weeks. In the end, the researchers found no difference in the symptoms experienced between the bars.

'NCGS is real, but likely for a smaller population than earlier research suggested,' says the lead researcher, Caroline Seiler of McMaster University in Canada. 'Unlike other studies, ours used a sham-controlled crossover approach – where participants received identical experimental and "sham" products to reduce bias – and found that expectations had a clinically significant effect on symptoms.' In other words, those who believed they were eating gluten had worse self-reported symptoms, regardless of what they were actually munching on.

Flour power

That we're not cutting out gluten unnecessarily matters because, as experts emphasise, the foods it is often found in are key for forming a nutritionally balanced diet. 'They contain fibre, vitamins, minerals and plant compounds that feed our gut microbes and support long-term health,' points out Dr Leeming. Additionally, while natural gluten-free options are plentiful – such as rice, quinoa, couscous and buckwheat – the hard truth is that many unnaturally gluten-free options now constitute that nutritional 'ick' of the moment: ultra-processed foods (UPFs). 'Many are lower in fibre and higher in sugar than the originals,' notes Bliss, of how bread made from just flour, water and yeast is likely better for most than something with a lengthy, unpronounceable ingredients list attempting to mimic the real thing.

Avoiding restriction of entire food groups should always be the

goal, insists Emilia Thompson, a nutritionist specialising in healthy relationships with food. 'It can become more difficult to obtain sufficient nutrient-dense energy when eating gluten-free, particularly for active people, to meet fuel and recovery needs,' she warns. This is also key for swerving disordered eating. 'Orthorexia can develop out of any rigid way of eating – including non-medically required gluten-free diets,' notes Thompson of the term for an excessive preoccupation with eating healthy food. 'What starts with good intentions can spiral into strict rules, guilt and anxiety around eating, and these patterns can cause nutrient deficiencies, food preoccupation and shame when the rules are broken.'

Indeed, gluten-free fever may arguably have masked a more insidious diet-culture relic: carb-phobia. 'The older women in my life would always talk about cutting them out,' remembers Amber. 'I think going gluten-free legitimised removing so many foods I was afraid of.' It was this year, when she began marathon training, that she realised just how important carbs actually were to her results. 'Bagels honestly seemed like the best pre-run option,' she shares. 'They were easy to digest and helped me go further.'

There is also a germinating distrust when it comes to nutritional advice shared online, such as that which originally influenced Amber. Research* published last year found that 66% of social media users find it hard to tell whether health information is true or false. 'People are suffering with information fatigue – particularly when advice is often conflicting,' says health psychologist Joanna Rodriguez. 'I'm seeing more people prioritise self-trust.' And while interoception – that quiet, sensing awareness of how your body feels – is becoming an increasingly spoken-about



health process, the gluten renaissance also comes at a time of growing awareness of the mechanics of the digestive system. 'It's completely normal and natural to get bloating when we eat – our bodies will change throughout the day,' insists Dr Leeming. 'As well as your stomach increasing in volume to factor in food and its waste, your gut bacteria are breaking down the meals you're eating – and a by-product of that process is gas.'

Of course, for those who have coeliac disease or a confirmed gluten intolerance – something that should be approached with the support of a healthcare professional, such as a doctor or dietitian – gluten remains out of bounds. For the rest of us, experts

WH spoke to are unanimous that a little bit of everything is the healthiest way to eat. 'The balance lies in not demonising foods. It's about the overall pattern of your diet and making sure that most of what you're consuming is fresh, varied and nutrient-dense,' adds Bliss. As for Amber? The voice in her head that once screamed that gluten was 'poison' – regurgitated from the post captions of wellness 'gurus' – will sometimes reappear when she takes a mouthful of fusilli. 'But, in the future, I don't want to refuse to eat a cupcake my kid made for me at school because it contains flour,' she reflects. 'I just want to feel grateful that my body functions to digest gluten when I know others that can't.'

Breaking bread?

Think you have an issue with gluten? Heed this expert intel

Listen to your body

'Experiencing persistent digestive symptoms – including diarrhoea, bloating and stomach aches – needs to be discussed with your GP to rule out coeliac disease and other conditions such as colitis,' says Bliss. 'Other notable symptoms to be aware of include nutrient deficiencies, fatigue, weight loss and mouth ulcers.'

Cut with caution

It's important, if you are concerned you have coeliac disease or NCGS, to talk to your GP to be referred for tests. 'It's crucial not to remove gluten from your diet before this,' insists Bliss. 'This is so that any antibodies produced by the immune system in response to it are present and you don't receive a false negative.' Also, any eventual removal should be done with the support of a dietitian or registered nutritionist to avoid nutritional deficiencies.

Reintroduce slowly

If you are inviting gluten back into your life, do so with care. Bliss suggests doing this 'blind' – meaning you don't know when you're eating it, so you avoid suffering digestive symptoms as a result of worrying about gluten. 'If you have a partner who cooks for you, ask them to start swapping your gluten-free spaghetti for a wheat-based one at random intervals,' she suggests. Try to prioritise wholegrain and low-UPF options where possible.

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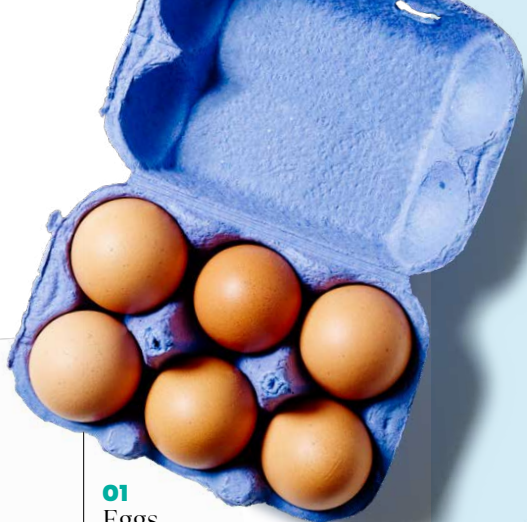
The cost of the macronutrient has risen more than the rest of your shopping. As global crises threaten to drive costs higher, *WH* goes in search of affordable alternatives

The cadence of the bleep of the self-service scanner. The tone of the voice that tells you there's an unexpected item in bagging area. The widening of your eyes as you clock the double-digit total of the five items in your basket. Yes, inflation-based anxiety now feels as familiar an emotion as queue-jump rage and dinner indecision. And if there's a macro leaving more of a dent in your budget than any other, it's the one that health-conscious women like you have been primed to prioritise.

The cost of UK food and non-alcoholic drinks rose by nearly 40% between 2020 and 2025, according to the Office for National Statistics, with major sources of dietary protein among the items that saw the biggest spikes. And that was before the shock to the global food supply caused by the US-Israel conflict with Iran.

The situation has sent shockwaves around the world and the crisis has left those that are charged with putting food on the British table concerned. 'Even in the best-case scenario, the conflict is likely to prolong the timeline for recovery from the cost of living crisis,' warns Michael Freedman, head of economic and consumer insight at the Institute of Grocery Distribution, adding that a severe energy shock could see food inflation rise to over 8% by June and add more than £150 a year to the average household grocery bill.

But while the experts *WH* spoke to for this piece confirmed that you're most likely to feel inflation in animal products such as meat, dairy and eggs – all of which are more exposed to rising feed, energy, labour and regulatory costs than other diet staples – being priced out of some products doesn't have to mean compromising on nutrition. 'Many plant protein sources, such as beans and pulses, haven't risen as sharply in price as animal products have,' says sports performance nutritionist Kate Neudecker. 'There are also certain types of meat and dairy that aren't so expensive. The key is choosing the right animal-and-plant-based quantities and combinations so that you're shopping within your budget, while still getting the full spectrum of amino acids needed to support muscle growth.' Here, Neudecker scours the shelves to bring you the best-value protein sources to reach for on your next shop.



01

Eggs

Approximate cost:
2p to 4p per gram
of protein

They might typically be associated with breakfast, but eggs remain a bargain choice for any meal, such as WFH lunches (frittatas and omelettes are great options) and dinners, too. 'They also have a high leucine content, to support muscle-protein synthesis,' adds Neudecker. 'And because eggs provide a full amino acid profile, they're an easy on-the-go protein, so you don't have to sacrifice your gains.'



02

Greek yoghurt

Approximate cost:
3p to 5p per gram
of protein

'Greek yoghurt offers a higher protein density than standard yoghurt as it's strained,' says Neudecker, adding that the straining process removes lots of water, lactose and minerals, leaving behind a higher concentration of protein. This fridge staple is also a complete protein, meaning it contains all nine essential amino acids. Neudecker suggests it as a breakfast base, with fruit, or to make curries and stews creamier.

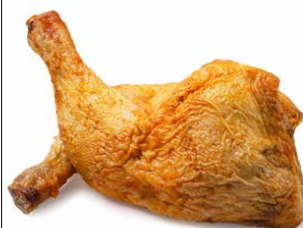


03

Lentils (dry or tinned)

Approximate cost:
1p to 2.5p per gram
of protein

'Lentils are one of the most affordable protein sources going, especially if you're cooking them from dry,' notes Neudecker, adding that they also overdeliver on both fibre and iron. She recommends cooking them in curries, daals and stews, or adding them to salads. 'Like other pulses, lentils aren't a complete protein on their own, so combine them with grains or dairy to cover your amino acid needs.'



04

Chicken thighs and mince

Approximate cost:
2p to 4p per gram
of protein

It's a protein cliché for a reason. 'Chicken thighs and mince are cheaper than breast meat, but still deliver high-quality protein, so they're ideal for cutting food costs,' says Neudecker. 'As complete proteins, they are also reliable diet staples for supporting muscle gain.' She notes that thighs are full of flavour, while mince, of course, works well in chillies, bolognese and batch-cooked meals.



05

Milk

Approximate cost:
1.5p to 3p per gram
of protein

The lifters of yesteryear were on to something when they popularised the GOMAD diet (a gallon of milk a day). And while we don't recommend necking it in such huge quantities, milk is 'one of the cheapest sources of complete protein per gram and provides whey and casein, supporting muscle repair and recovery', confirms Neudecker. Add it to porridge, blend it into smoothies or drink it on its own after a training session.



06

Turkey

Approximate cost:
3p to 5p per gram
of protein

Popular among those seeking to manage their body composition, it's also a solid choice for those in the market for muscle. 'Use turkey mince as a substitute for beef in burgers, chillies, meatballs or pasta sauces, or add it to wraps and rice bowls,' suggests Neudecker. While it can be slightly pricier than chicken, she notes, it still offers good value compared with many other meats.



07

Tofu

Approximate cost:
3p to 6p per gram
of protein

Cheaper than most meat (it's much more price-stable) and very versatile, tofu is worth having in the fridge for midweek meals. 'It's one of the most affordable plant-based proteins that provides a complete amino acid profile, thanks to its soya base,' says Neudecker. 'It absorbs flavour well, especially when fried, baked for meal prep or in stir-fries and curries. It's a more sustainable option, too.'



08

Tinned beans

Approximate cost:
2.5p to 4p per gram
of protein

'Tinned beans are one of the most cost-effective ways to add protein to meals, while also delivering fibre, complex carbs and key minerals,' observes Neudecker. They last for ages in your cupboard, so you can throw them into batch-cooked soups and stews. 'They don't provide a full amino acid profile on their own, but pairing them with grains or dairy across the day easily fills the gaps.'

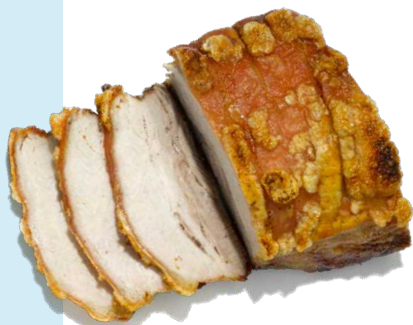


09

Chickpeas

Approximate cost:
2.5p to 4p per gram
of protein

Perhaps more renowned for their fibre content, chickpeas are also a great source of protein – one you can build whole meals around. 'They're not a complete protein on their own, but pairing them with grains or yoghurt makes them a solid option for supporting training,' says Neudecker, who roasts them as a salad topper and blends into hummus to elevate the protein content of other snacks and meals.



10

Pork loin
or pork mince

Approximate cost:
2.5p to 5p per gram
of protein

So much more than just Sunday roast fodder, pork's complete protein status and affordability means it's a smart option for other days, too. 'Choose pork loin and mince to cut costs while keeping calorie content low,' advises Neudecker. She puts pork loin into stir-fries and wraps and uses pork mince for meatballs, burgers or in a bolognese sauce.



11

Peas (fresh or frozen)

Approximate cost:
2p to 3p per gram
of protein

Often overlooked and frequently underrated, peas are an inexpensive and convenient way to increase your protein intake while also adding fibre. 'Although they aren't a complete protein, peas work really well alongside protein sources such as eggs, dairy or grains,' says Neudecker. Stir them into pasta, risotto or fried rice, blend into soups or add to omelettes.



12

Tinned sardines
or mackerel

Approximate cost:
3p to 6p per gram
of protein

Tinned fish is now back in vogue. 'Tinned sardines and mackerel are much cheaper than fresh fish and deliver both high-quality protein and omega-3 fats,' adds Neudecker, who notes that they are also complete proteins. Toss tinned fish through pasta with olive oil and garlic, or mash them on to toast with lemon and chilli for a fast protein hit.



13

Cottage cheese

Approximate cost:
3p to 5p per gram
of protein

There's a reason this is a regular feature in the dietary advice of nutrition professionals. 'Cottage cheese is a budget-friendly protein that will bolster your muscle-gain goals,' says Neudecker, remarking that it's high in slow-digesting casein, so it's a useful snack for between meals or before bed. Spread it on toast, stir it into pasta sauces or eat it on its own as a quick snack.



Coenzyme Q10

Said to support everything from heart health to fertility, Coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10) is the latest hero supp to enter the stack, but has it earned its place? The experts give their verdict

What is Coenzyme Q10?

A powerful antioxidant molecule, CoQ10 plays an essential role in your cells' energy production process, along with 'the health of pretty much all human tissues and organs', says registered nutritional therapist Emily Barker. It's most abundant in vital organs such as the heart, liver and kidneys, and has anti-inflammatory properties, too. That production decreases with age – and potentially illness or certain medications, such as statins, too – is one reason it's entered the stack chat.

So should I be supplementing?

The predictable answer? It really depends. Most healthy people who eat a balanced diet should be able to adequately top up from food, says Barker. Think: oily fish, whole grains and organ meats such as liver. However, plant-based diets typically contain significantly less CoQ10. 'As with many food supplements, the biggest health benefits tend to be seen in people who are deficient – and primary CoQ10 deficiency

is a rare genetic disorder,' adds registered dietitian Sammie Gill.

What about the claims that it can manage certain health conditions?

It's true that there's a growing conversation around the role that CoQ10 could play in condition management, says Dr Gill. Indeed, most of the research explores supplementation in people with existing health conditions. But it's stronger in some areas than others. '[The research] ranges from lab-based, test-tube experiments and animal studies to trials involving people,' adds Dr Gill. 'And so far CoQ10 has certainly emerged as a promising and complementary therapy option to support the management of health conditions.' Type 2 diabetes, migraines, chronic fatigue syndrome, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) and heart failure among them. Given that modern conditions such as stress and suboptimal sleep can increase the demand for antioxidants, adds Barker, a supplement could be

beneficial, particularly if you're regularly training. One Japanese study of healthy people found that supplementation reduced self-reported fatigue and improved physical performance during exercise-bike sessions.

What about the fertility claims?

Those have some merit, too – but research is still in its infancy, and more studies support its use *before* conception than during pregnancy, which isn't well studied. 'Animal studies suggest it may support fertility, especially in cases such as ovarian dysfunction or PCOS, by regulating oxidative stress and reducing free radicals,' says Dr Gill. 'As for male fertility, a larger body of research suggests CoQ10 may improve sperm quality, quantity and mobility.' Barker, who specialises in couples fertility, regularly recommends the supplement to clients experiencing fertility challenges, particularly those aged 35-plus. 'CoQ10 is key for energy production in the mitochondria [the powerhouses of cells],' she says, adding that egg cells have a particularly high mitochondrial load, reflecting the high energy demands of reproduction. With age, your eggs become less efficient at producing energy, and CoQ10 levels inside the cell drop sharply. A supplement, she says, may help 'top up these levels and may improve egg quality – and the chances of that egg going on to make a baby.' Indeed, a recent meta-analysis* found that CoQ10 significantly increased clinical pregnancy rates in women with diminished ovarian reserve undergoing IVF treatment.

And is it safe?

The British Heart Foundation warns CoQ10 may interact with blood pressure meds and the blood thinner warfarin – so talk to your doctor if you take these. Generally, though, Dr Gill says it's well tolerated – with side effects (stomach upset, nausea, insomnia at high doses) occurring rarely.



Why Women Are Taking Creatine

No longer just a gym supplement, creatine is becoming a daily staple for women's strength, mental clarity and healthy ageing.

It's 6:30am and the day is already moving. Work, family and training are squeezed into whatever time is left. For many women, the challenge is not motivation. It is keeping up with the physical and mental demands of everyday life.

When "doing it all" catches up

Emma, 45, a London-based marketing director, is like many women balancing work, training and everything in between. At work she was noticing mid-afternoon mental fog and after the gym she felt completely drained, assuming that was normal. She discovered Longevity Creatine Gold™ Gummies at Holland & Barrett after a friend recommended them. "I didn't want anything complicated, just to feel stronger, think clearer and recover better. After a few weeks, I noticed a real difference in my day. It's amazing!"

The Cognitive Link

Creatine is a well-researched compound involved in the production of adenosine triphosphate (ATP), the body's primary energy currency, which fuels both muscle and brain function. Research suggests creatine may support aspects of cognitive performance, including memory and mental fatigue, especially during times of stress or sleep deprivation.

Once primarily associated with gym use, it is now being explored for its potential role in supporting both physical and mental performance.



Why creatine, why now

You may have seen creatine everywhere lately, from podcasts to social media feeds. Once reserved for athletes and gym-goers, it is now being talked about more widely for women, supporting both physical and mental performance. In a market full of complex supplements and bold claims, creatine stands out for its simplicity and its ability to support everyday performance in more than one way.

Simple daily support

That's why it's becoming a non-negotiable for many women, supporting strength, sharper thinking and better recovery in one step. New Nordic's Longevity Creatine Gold™ Gummies deliver a 3g daily dose in an easy, no-fuss format designed to fit seamlessly into modern life.



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- ✓ Increases physical performance in successive bursts of short-term, high-intensity exercise.
- ✓ Helps support mental performance during exertion
- ✓ Easy-to-take with a delicious citrus flavour



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a mind as
strong as
your body



The curious case of the short sleepers

While most of us are seeking our seven to nine hours, some are surviving (and thriving) on much less. *WH* meets the researchers studying their every sleeping movement

Words **Amy Wilkinson**

Lindsey Hudson began to suspect her sleep habits weren't the norm during her first year at university. An active teenager – busy with daily training sessions and homework – she would often delay bedtime until 2am, only to wake well rested at 6.30am after just four and a half hours' sleep. Her mum, a nurse, adhered to a similarly brief sleep schedule, 'She only ever slept, at most, four to five hours a night,' Lindsey, now in her early forties, recalls. 'Anything more than that and something was wrong.'

When Lindsey moved out of her mother's home and into halls, she started to notice some strange occurrences. Like how her roommate, Dalene, would sleep until noon at the weekend. Or take naps most days of the week. In nursing school, when other students were struggling at 6am clinicals, she felt energised and alert. And when she met and married her husband, Brian, it soon became clear they had kept wildly different schedules: he preferred to be under the covers by 9; she didn't like to be in bed before midnight. And while she dabbled with sleeping in, the effects weren't pleasant. 'If I sleep more than seven hours, I feel hungover,' she shares. 'I feel foggy. I feel like I don't completely wake up.'

Lindsey is what's known in scientific parlance as a 'natural short sleeper', an individual who thrives on about four to six hours of sleep per night. Those studying the phenomenon aren't sure how many natural short sleepers there are, and as a percentage of the population, they're likely less than 1%. But their very existence is calling into question what we've long thought we knew about sleep – not to mention the multibillion-dollar industry premised on

selling us tech that promises more of it. So, could the DNA of short sleepers hold the secret to a better night's rest for us all?

Rest assured

Google, 'How much sleep do I need each night?' and you'll find similar advice from major health authorities. In the UK, the NHS states that most adults need between six and nine hours of sleep a night, with around seven to eight hours considered optimal for good health. Similarly, guidance endorsed by the NHS and based on expert consensus from bodies such as the British Sleep Society suggests that regularly getting fewer than six hours is associated with poorer physical and mental health outcomes.

'The vast majority of adults truly need somewhere between seven and nine hours,' says Rebecca Robbins, a sleep scientist at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, USA. 'We offer that range because there is a lot of individual difference that is, in part, genetically determined.' Sleep needs diverge along gender lines, too; women require about 11 minutes more per night than men*.

As for what's driving that disparity, it's not exactly clear, but women also tend

to suffer from higher rates of insomnia, largely due to hormonal fluctuations during menstruation and pregnancy – along with perimenopause and menopause. Higher rates of anxiety and depression may play a role, too. All of which could lead to women requiring more time in bed in order to log the same amount of quality sleep as men.

That phrase, 'quality sleep', is key. Focusing on the behaviours that surround sleep – managing stress, not eating too late, relaxing and unwinding close to bedtime – and not just the duration, can help optimise our rest periods. 'Restorative sleep is waking up and feeling refreshed – almost improved – from your time asleep,' adds Dr Robbins.

Restorative sleep is also key for supporting nearly every function and system in the body. Each sleep stage offers its own benefits; during the early, non-REM (rapid eye movement) stages, your blood pressure and heart rate are at their lowest – a boon for your cardiovascular health. REM sleep, on the other hand, supports cognitive functions, such as learning and memory. Adequate sleep also supports the production of important building blocks of the body's immune system and allows the brain to flush out toxins.

Fall short on quality sleep and you'll suffer a myriad of short- and long-term consequences: brain fog and drowsiness from lack of sleep not only make crafting that presentation deck at work more difficult, but can actually increase the risk of bodily harm (think: falling asleep at the wheel of a car). Meanwhile, sleep deficiency – not getting enough sleep or getting poor-quality sleep – has also been linked with a number of chronic conditions, including heart disease, stroke and Alzheimer's disease. (Interestingly, this doesn't seem to apply to natural short sleepers, who don't suffer health effects from getting less sleep.)

But despite how much researchers know about sleep today, there's still so much they don't know. It's a notoriously tricky field of research, given the many ways modern life interferes with our natural sleep cycle – everything from the electric lights in our homes to a



**On average, women
require 11 more
minutes of sleep
a night than men**



caffeine-stocked Starbucks on every street. Few of us actually let our bodies be our guide when it comes to getting the rest we need. Except, perhaps, natural short sleepers – who are often derided for not following the sleep status quo.

Call it a night

Natural short sleepers are called so because they sleep for four to six hours per night – an amount that feels best for their bodies and brains. They haven't trained themselves to snooze for minimal hours in order to be more productive or meet the demands of

a work schedule (a shift worker, for example). And if given the opportunity to sleep longer, they wouldn't want to – nor would they need to.

History is full of people who've claimed to require very little sleep – Martha Stewart and Margaret Thatcher among them. Thomas Edison, the inventor of the snooze-disrupting light bulb, famously said he slept just three to four hours a night. 'What's not widely known is that he also had a bed in his office and would take extremely long naps of two to four hours at a time,' adds Dr Robbins.

That's one factor that differentiates natural short sleepers from what researchers call 'facultative short sleepers' – those who've hacked their sleep schedules because of professional drive or life circumstances. Natural short sleepers rarely, if ever, take naps. They also don't 'catch up' on sleep over the weekend, either. The hours they log at night are sufficient to keep them alert throughout the day. (Sorry, Thomas.)

Another factor that's more challenging to measure is genetics. In 2009, a group of researchers discovered the first short-sleep gene. Led by Ying-Hui Fu, a professor of neurology, the study found that those with a mutation on the DEC2 gene averaged 6.25 hours of sleep per night, while participants without it averaged 8.06 hours. That this mutation runs in families means parents may pass it on to multiple children. (While Lindsey hasn't participated in any studies to confirm she carries the short sleeper gene, the fact that her mother and father were both short sleepers and that her son also appears to be a short sleeper seems to indicate that it runs in her family.)

It would be another decade before Dr Fu and study co-author Louis Ptáček, professor in neurodegenerative diseases at the University of California, San Francisco, discovered a second and third short-sleep genetic mutation. To date, they've published findings on a total of four short-sleep genes, with a few more pending publication. How these mutations affect a person's sleep cycle is still largely unknown; however, in the case of the DEC2 gene, Dr Fu says that the mutation leads to an increase in a neuropeptide called orexin, which plays

Time's ticking

Understanding short sleepers is opening up a new world of sleep research.



If given the opportunity to sleep longer, short sleepers wouldn't want to



How to rest better

What insights from short sleepers can tell us about how to sleep more soundly

1

Respect your body's rhythm

Being highly attuned to sleep demands is a quality of natural short sleepers. And given the wide range of requirements (as little as four hours a night for some short sleepers to as much as 12 for some natural long sleepers, says Dr Ptáček), honouring your own needs will ensure you get the most out of your time under the covers.

2

Prioritise rest as you would other health habits

Natural short sleepers don't shape their sleep schedules around their lifestyles; rather, they shape their lifestyles around their sleep schedules. 'Everyone has some degree of control over their sleep,' says Dr Fu. 'Just as many people prioritise exercise, one can choose to prioritise sufficient sleep to support their long-term health.'

3

Swerve caffeine

Another interesting fact about Joanne, the natural short sleeper, is that she doesn't drink coffee – mostly because she doesn't need it to stay awake. Caffeine consumption can create a never-ending cycle of reduced sleep quality, studies show, so if you're not feeling well rested, that mid-afternoon americano might be to blame.

a role in regulating the sleep cycle – more orexin results in more wakefulness.

That doesn't mean this story is complete; Dr Fu is convinced there's more at play than just orexin. Still, for all the lingering question marks, researchers have identified several traits shared by natural short sleepers. For one, they don't seem to suffer the ill side effects common among those who are chronically sleep-deprived. That's notable: it means that the seven-hour standard may, in fact, not be the minimum for all adults to stay healthy and happy.

We also know that natural short sleepers don't tend to experience jet lag and have higher pain tolerances. There's even anecdotal evidence that they may live longer. Dr Ptáček notes that many of the natural short sleepers he's aware of have lived into their nineties; even then, they remain in good health. Dr Fu hypothesises that natural short sleepers are simply meeting their bodies' needs, while sleeping more efficiently.

Not everyone agrees. Dr Fu and Dr Ptáček admit that their findings are controversial in the field of sleep research, and many in the medical community still dismiss the phenomenon of natural short sleepers. Lindsey, now a nurse practitioner, says that her own primary care providers typically don't believe her when she says she needs just four or five hours of sleep a night, reiterating that the literature recommends seven to eight.

Wake-up call

Like Lindsay, Joanne Osmond didn't realise her nocturnal routine was unusual until she went to university. The 78-year-old – one of the dozens of participants in Dr Fu and Dr Ptáček's studies – is now a confirmed natural short sleeper, a trait shared with her dad and siblings (her mum deemed the oddball who needed a full night's rest). To ensure she remained undisturbed, Joanne and her siblings stayed in their rooms until what was deemed an appropriate hour to get up, passing the pre-dawn hours reading every book they could get their hands on at the library.

As Joanne got older, reading remained her companion. She and her husband would climb into bed together at night, and while he would fall asleep right away, she would stay up until midnight, before

rising anywhere between 3.30am and 4am. As the years wore on, she began to expand her nocturnal to-do list – using the time to mark her students' essays or support the ones who lived in a different time zone. She created community, too – befriending short sleepers in her area and working on projects together.

This fellowship, she believes, has been vital. 'Being a short sleeper is extremely lonely. Even though there were people all around – my husband, my children – I couldn't wake them up if I wanted to talk to them. Here I was with all these ideas: things I wanted to do and places I wanted to go, and I was restricted because everyone else was sleeping.' Today, one of her night-time habits is taking a trip to an all-night supermarket at 6am; this, too, is a ritual rooted in community. 'It's dark out, and most people aren't up yet, which makes you feel like you're alone. But I know everyone at the [supermarket] and I'll always say good morning.'

For Lindsey, who considers herself more of an introvert, there have been few downsides to her short-sleeper status. Working 12-hour shifts for a telehealth company, she finds that the extra wakeful hours allow her to decompress after a long day of caring for patients and tending to the needs of her two children. 'It's my sanity,' she says, of her evening alone time, which she'll spend reading dark romances or catching up with the TV shows her husband doesn't watch. And on the question of what she would change about her sleep situation, she's stumped. 'I don't have a problem falling asleep, and I stay asleep,' she says, simply.

If only we could all be so lucky. An estimated one in three adults have insomnia – defined as having regular problems with sleep, difficulty nodding off, waking up in the night and struggling to get back to sleep – according to the NHS. And it's this concern that Dr Fu and Dr Ptáček hope to remedy with their research. 'There's hope that we might be able to develop a medication that doesn't cause problems or side effects, but improves the quality and efficiency of sleep,' Dr Ptáček explains. 'The goal is to help everyone to get the best sleep they can,' adds Dr Fu. Whether that's four hours or eight hours, we can all raise a mug of camomile tea to that.



Is crashing out the new burning out?



As the digital world gifts us another term for the phenomenon formally known as burnout, *WH* consults the professionals to ask how helpful the memeification of mental health really is

Words **Amy Wilkinson**

Perhaps you stormed out of your boss's office after receiving a decent, if not perfect, performance review. Maybe you dissolved into a wet mess of tears when your partner's snoring woke you up at 3am. And that's not you flinging your pen across the conference room when Kevin interrupts you during a meeting. If any of this sounds familiar, you may be crashing out – the latest, albeit more bombastic, iteration in a long line of rebrands for what amounts to emotional and energetic depletion. See also: burning out, quiet quitting and bed rotting.

Yes, if you spend any time on TikTok or Instagram, some iteration of a breakdown – personal, professional or both – is basically 'a mood'. That we've found new – and shall we say, interesting – ways to contentify our collective mental health, along with general feelings of dread, is evidence that we've come a long way in normalising the conversation around mental health. But are the oft-unserious methods by which we process mental health online helping us alleviate our suffering – or just anaesthetising it?



Crash and burn

It probably goes without saying that you won't find an entry for 'crashing out' while flipping through the *Diagnostic And Statistical Manual Of Mental Disorders* (aka DSM-5, the standard guidebook for mental health professionals). The term – amplified by rapper YoungBoy Never Broke Again – has gained traction online, largely among Gen Z. As such, there's no one definition, says therapist Madeline Eggenberger. 'I describe it as an umbrella term for any time someone's emotionally

dysregulated – upset, anxious, overwhelmed, or even depressed,' she tells *Women's Health*.

While the more familiar term 'burnout' refers to a prolonged or sustained state of being, Eggenberger explains that crashing out is usually a singular event – what she describes as the 'boiling-over moment'. And the ways in which this moment manifests varies across diagnoses and life experiences. 'A crash out for someone who's anxious might look like impulsive behaviours or rumination, whereas for someone who's depressed, it might mean they're really upset, sad and struggling to get out of bed.'

While a crash out may seem sudden or unexpected to a person witnessing it (or on the receiving end of it), feelings and resentments have likely been stewing for a while, adds Eggenberger. 'If you've been sitting on something and haven't taken action, you're probably going to burst at some point.' That 'something' could be anything from a conflict with your partner to a to-do list that feels, well, undoable. Burnout left unchecked, says psychotherapist Michela Tripp, can also lead to a crash out. 'What I see with people who tend towards burnout is that there's an ignoring of the body's signals,' she says, adding that can include things such as a knot in the stomach, tension in the shoulders and persistent headaches. 'If it happens for too long, eventually that signal becomes a siren.'



Memeification

Tripp doesn't use the word 'siren' lightly. Yet, engage with crashing out content online and you'd be forgiven for thinking it's little more than meme-fodder – a video of a Karen having a meltdown or an astrology account sharing which signs are more prone to a crashing out. In many cases, says Eggenberger, humour can be a useful tool. 'It's probably easier to say, "I crashed out" over, say, "I had a panic attack",' she says, adding that the language of mental health can, for some people, feel daunting.

For therapist Margot Joy Stephenson, this can be seen as the evolution of the mental health conversation, 'and one of the ways

that we're trying to connect with each other over difficult things'.

Where this irreverent emotional language can become a slippery slope, cautions Tripp, is when it begins to desensitise us to the issues it's meant to elucidate. 'If I'm on TikTok and the algorithm knows that I'm a burned-out mum and it keeps showing me burned-out mum memes, and I'm like, "Oh yes, lol, me too!" then we start to feel numb to it,' she shares. 'We're not checking in and saying, "I'm resonating with this mum who's breaking down, too." That's something to pay attention to.'

That's before you consider that you may be deflecting from dealing with the issue. 'If I noticed a pattern of a client never being able to be serious about negative emotions, I'd explore that,' Eggenberger says. 'Why is talking about negative feelings or experiences so uncomfortable? How can we help you access those feelings or be more accepting of those experiences?'

Ultimately, our inclination to be playful – flippant, even – about the things that plague our hearts and minds can be taken as a sign of our continuing evolution. 'We've made progress, if you think about where we came from,' adds Tripp, referring to a time, not that long ago, when the stigma that surrounded mental health felt impenetrable. 'At the same time, we're still not [reaching] that real layer of vulnerability and shame.' With that in mind, consider this a crash course in how *not* to crash out – and how to minimise the fallout if you do.



How not to crash out

Crashing out isn't a foregone conclusion – even when you're facing big feelings you may not have the tools to handle on your own. The key, say the mental health professionals we spoke to for this piece, is heeding the signals your body is sending – and acting before they act on your behalf

1

Set clear boundaries

If you're at an earlier stage of burnout, one of the best things you can do is set boundaries, notes Stephenson. While that's advice you've likely heard before, she emphasises that it should be approached as a process, not a one-and-done situation. 'Most of the time, setting boundaries isn't commonly practised, and it can mean taking up a lot more space than we're used to,' she says. 'It might take a handful of times of reaffirming them and being forgiving of people who overstep them.'

2

Take care of your physical wellbeing

The solution may be as straightforward as making sure your body's physical needs have been met, says Eggenberger. 'Have I been moving my body? Have I been eating well, sleeping well and hydrating? For a lot of people going through difficult mental health periods, focusing on those things can be the motivator to get through it.' Movement can also be a powerful tool in the midst of a near crash out, releasing pent-up tension and emotions in the body – it can be as simple as a walk. 'Find outlets that get this frustration and anger out of the body and into action,' adds Stephenson.

3

Turn to mindfulness

If you've tried engaging with the concept more times than you care to count, Eggenberger is a big fan of the 5-4-3-2-1 method of fostering a state of mindfulness. The technique is straightforward: Pause and note five things you can see, four things you can touch, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste. Focusing on this small mental task will help ground you and bring you back into the present moment. Think of it as your new five-a-day.

4

Seek out support – and apologise sincerely

If you've veered past burnout into crash out territory, Eggenberger advises reaching out to your support system, be it your therapist, family or friends. If all else fails and you do crash out, Eggenberger recommends making amends to anyone who was in the line of fire by apologising and showing that you're working on the behaviour. Ultimately, when it comes to crashing out, says Eggenberger, allow yourself a little grace and empathy. 'We all make mistakes,' she says. 'We all say things we don't mean or react in not the best ways when we're upset. That doesn't mean we're bad people.'

GET LIPPY

For too long, gynaecological health has been shrouded in shame.

Join us to Get Lippy and help break the silence around gynae health.

We want everyone to know their body, so they can spot changes and feel confident getting checked by a doctor.

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Get Lippy is a campaign from The Eve Appeal, the only UK charity dedicated to funding research into the prevention and earlier diagnosis of the five gynaecological cancers. Registered charity no. England & Wales 1091708.



'I had everything to live for – but menopause symptoms made me want to end it all'

Suicide rates have increased among women by a third in the past decade, peaking in the 45 to 49 age group. Here, one single mother – who was in the agonising first throes of menopause during these years – shares how it feels when you think you have nowhere to turn

Even when times have been tough, my happy-go-lucky, grounded, kind-hearted personality has always seen me through – including when I found myself a single parent just 10 months after giving birth to my son, Jayden, at the age of 36.

Life was good in those first few years of motherhood. I was balancing a part-time job as an office administrator – where I still work – with childcare and volunteering at the local Scouts. When the weather was kind, Jayden and I would go down to my mum's caravan in Wales, food from home packed into the car.

Things began to change when I entered my early forties. My menstrual cycles got closer together and I felt pressure around my head – a kind of headache that made it feel as if my head was in a vice. Then there were the intense migraines that would leave a 'hangover' for weeks. I floated the word 'perimenopause', but was told by doctors I was still too young, even at 43.

As the months – and then the years – went on, I was on a slow, hard decline; at times, it felt like I was pushing treacle up a hill. I saw countless healthcare professionals, but all my symptoms were treated in isolation and never linked back to what I would later come to learn was, as I suspected, perimenopause – which is when midlife hormonal changes occur around your early to mid-forties.

Worse than the inability of doctors to join the dots was the fact I was routinely dismissed – the cruelest encounter being with a female doctor who attributed my debilitating pain to anxiety, suggesting that I simply wanted her to give me a name for my mental and physical symptoms.

At various points, I was prescribed SSRIs (medications most commonly prescribed to treat depression), such as fluoxetine and sertraline. For the migraines, a neurologist prescribed gabapentin, topiramate, sumatriptan and beta blockers. I even had steroids injected into the base of my skull by a headache specialist. Nothing worked and the side effects from some of the medications left me feeling even worse.



The case study
Debbie Hickman, 54, office administrator in the steel industry, based in the Midlands

'When I look back, the memory of that time makes me want to cry'

By my mid- to late-forties, my quality of life was declining fast. Joining the now-daily, virtually unbearable head pressure and migraines were other physical and psychological symptoms of menopause – there was burning mouth syndrome (exactly what it sounds like), body aches and fatigue, alongside crying, mood swings and an overwhelming feeling of fear.

As the years passed, I became a ghost of my former self; when I look back now, the memory of that time makes me want to cry. Somehow, I was still hanging on to my job – I couldn't quit; I had to keep a roof over my head – and raising my son, who was now at primary school. I was coping – until one day, I wasn't.

It was like a virus had infected me and taken over my brain. I could barely get out of bed and I was only dragging myself through each day for the sake of my son. I was spiralling to such an extent that suicidal thoughts were starting to creep in, as my serotonin had nosedived due to plummeting oestrogen. I even planned how I was going to end my life. Before I knew it, I was signed off work – and under the care of a crisis support team.

While all of this was happening, I connected on Instagram with Diane Danzebrink, menopause educator and campaigner, and founder of the not-for-profit Menopause Support (menopausesupport.co.uk). She, along with my local Menopause Cafe, connected me with people who helped me through my darkest times.

I changed my GP surgery and, on the advice of my new GP – as well as

Diane – started trialling oestrogen patches, combined with a nightly progesterone tablet. The doctor also suggested a low-dose antidepressant to restore my low serotonin. I didn't know what to expect, but it turned out to be the cocktail I needed.

I wasn't surprised to hear the recent statistics – that female suicide rates have increased by a third during the past decade, peaking among those aged 45 to 49. The gut-wrenching truth is that if I'd received the right kind of support when I'd originally gone to the doctor, what turned into a living nightmare could have been sorted within months.

We don't need 'miracle' supplements on our social media feeds – we need systemic change, including more specialised menopause training integrated into the NHS so that women like me can access the right support quickly. I think it should feature on the school sex education curriculum and in biology lessons, too.

Now, almost a decade after returning from the brink, I'm back to the old Debbie and I'm so grateful to be here. I still have the physical symptoms of menopause, but since using HRT I can manage them better. It's not one-size-fits-all, but it helps me. Now 19, Jayden is thriving at uni as he pursues a career in politics. His love kept me crawling through the worst time of my life, along with the support of a great GP, as well as Sam at the Menopause Cafe – and the fantastic ladies who attend – and, of course, the lovely Diane. The right support is key.

goals get you out there

photo @outandbackstore



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best body

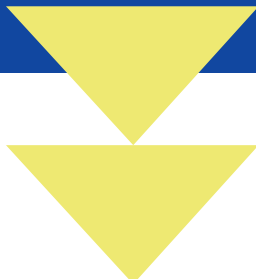
For training tools
that give your
workouts a lift



The Brazilian jiu-jitsu boom

From stress-busting sparring to self-defence, more women are making moves in martial arts. With evidence pinning Brazilian jiu-jitsu to greater resilience, grit, overall wellbeing and even a new type of therapy, could it get you in fighting form?

Words Bridie Wilkins



Lying on the padded floor, fluorescent lights spotlighting her sweaty skin, Samantha McGowan is quietly calculating how to throw off the adult man currently straddling her hips. Despite his attempts to hold her in place, she isn't afraid – she is exhilarated. 'In almost any other context, this would feel confronting,' says the 34-year-old PT from London. 'But it's strangely neutral.'

Welcome to Brazilian jiu-jitsu. A decade ago, the idea of swapping your barre class for BJJ (as fans refer to it) would have raised an eyebrow, if not a laugh. But with tactics and technique more powerful than brute force, the discipline dubbed 'human chess' is becoming the latest frontier of female fitness empowerment.

While the sport is considered a more modern version of Japanese jiu-jitsu (which still uses throws and strikes, like punches and kicks), when BJJ arrived in the UK in the early 1990s, it was widely pigeonholed as a niche martial art – male-dominated and practised only in underground gyms or specialised halls called dojos.

Then pop culture began showcasing its role as an ally to women's fitness; Margot Robbie trained intensively in BJJ for her supervillain role in 2016's *Suicide Squad* and Keira Knightley used the martial art while combat training for her eye-wincingly agile fight scenes in 2024's spy thriller *Black*

Doves. By the time 31-year-old Ffion Davies became the first Welsh/British athlete to win at BJJ's highest levels, the sport had its poster woman.

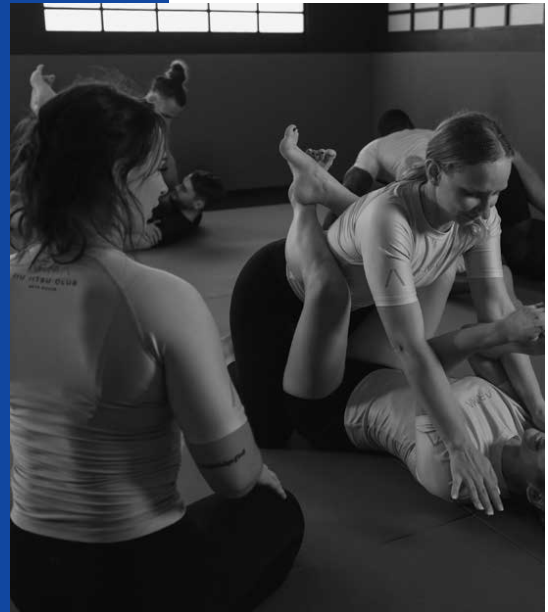
State of the arts

Today, there are 200% more clubs than there were a decade ago, making BJJ one of the UK's fastest-growing sports. Cue a wave of boutique studios elevating the discipline out of dojos and cementing women's place on the mat. Six months after opening, ARMA – a luxury Brazilian jiu-jitsu club in Clapham, London (which also offers a sauna, cold plunge, speciality coffee and Dyson hair tools) – reports a 60/40 split between male and female members and hosts multiple women-only classes a week.

It's no coincidence that more women are taking up the sport, says Shanti Gorton, black-belt fighter and co-founder of jiu-jitsu community Women Who Fight. While boxing, kick-boxing and Muay Thai are all about speed and power in punches and kicks (making physical strength and size advantageous), BJJ uses leverage. As opponents 'grapple' – wrestling your rival on the floor without punching or kicking – you can get a larger, heavier and stronger contender to submit simply by using smart positional control, such as joint locks (applying pressure to a joint in an unnatural direction) and chokeholds (restricting the neck). In other words, control, quick-thinking and problem-solving matter more than the 30% muscle mass deficit women typically have compared to a guy of the same weight.

That's not to say that jiu-jitsu has fewer fitness benefits – as anyone still wincing at the word 'chokehold' can imagine. One study found that the dynamic nature of grappling *significantly* boosts VO₂ max – the maximum rate of oxygen your body can use during intense exercise, and a key indicator of heart health.





Grappling in jiu-jitsu brings you up close and personal like few other forms of exercise

As almost every movement involves your whole body, it's one of a handful of sports that's been shown in research to recruit every muscle group, leading to improved strength, endurance, flexibility, mobility, balance, physical performance and injury prevention. Though for many women, the pull of the practice goes beyond its impact on the body and into the brain.

A head start

'Rolling' – Brazilian jiu-jitsu speak for grappling – requires complete focus. Lose attention for a split second and you'll find yourself pinned to the ground, if not injured. For McGowan, who started the sport in 2024 after her curiosity was piqued on social media, this meditative quality has been revolutionary for managing the overwhelm, anxiety and stress she struggles with as side effects of her ADHD.

'You can't think about anything other than what's happening in that moment,' she explains. 'You're trying to solve a human puzzle as you figure out how to trap your opponent in a position.'

Sports psychologist Josephine Perry says this is due to entering a flow state. 'When you're constantly pre-empting your opponent's next move, you're not



able to ruminate or worry about day-to-day stresses. That leads to a mental state of complete absorption, where movement feels effortless and your focus is fully on what you're doing.' Beyond accessing flow, Dr Perry is seeing growing interest in how the sport can help women build stress tolerance; learning to stay calm while physically constrained trains your nervous system to respond to pressure with more composure. It seems they're on to something.

Last year, a questionnaire-based US study of 420 Brazilian jiu-jitsu athletes aged 18 to 60 (21% of whom were female) examined psychological traits across different belt ranks, from beginner (white belt) to elite (black belt). The higher-ranked and more experienced athletes reported better self-control, resilience, grit and life satisfaction – something the authors attribute to persisting through the discipline's vigorous physical nature and inevitably

Women are discovering a raw and real community at jiu-jitsu clubs, where they can develop strength, resilience and a great sense of liberation

frequent defeats (each sparring or match bringing a 50/50 chance of loss). Meanwhile, at the University of Bath, Jeff Lambert, senior lecturer in health and exercise psychology and a BJJ martial artist himself, is currently studying the mental health effects on British BJJ participants.

Indeed, as robust research builds, so does the argument for Brazilian jiu-jitsu's legitimacy as a form of therapy. Published in December, a University of Brighton study found that a 60-day training programme in BJJ improved anxiety, depression, PTSD, sleep quality and overall wellbeing in emergency services personnel and military veterans. One review has even gone as far as to propose BJJ training as a public-health intervention, crediting its undeniable impact on developing



How to find a BJJ club

'Check the club is registered to a governing body, such as the UK Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Association, or an affiliate to a reputable source, like Roger Gracie's Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Academy or Andy Roberts' BJJ,' says Shakira Akabusi, a pre- and postnatal PT. 'This means the instructors will be qualified and insured, the gyms follow safeguarding and safety standards, and there's quality control around coaching.'



resilience (something we could all do with a bit more of during these wild times).

Fighting spirit

Of course, if resilience in the face of a tricky opponent is satisfying, the head-on assault on long-held gender norms is even more so. While contact sports have historically been framed as unfeminine or risky for women, Brazilian jiu-jitsu represents an opportunity for women to showcase their strength and aggression in a controlled, consensual environment. 'It dismantles the "fragile woman" notion,' adds Gorton, on what she believes is drawing women to the sport in their droves. 'A decade ago, only 30 women in the UK had a black belt. Now it's 115.'

After decades of women being socialised to appear 'careful and

accommodating', Brazilian jiu-jitsu does the opposite, says Gorton. It puts paid to the perception that women are only built for low-impact exercise with pale-pink weights and it offers a form of fitness that doesn't make women adapt around male expectations. This is particularly liberating in light of other combat sports; take boxing, where intimidating, male-heavy and unwelcoming gyms still relegate many women to 'fitness boxing' in group classes.

And yet, for every woman that arrives on the mat with the goal of taking up more space, there's another who's coming from a place of fear. Violence against women and girls makes up 20% of all police-recorded crime, according to the Office for National Statistics and the National Police Chiefs' Council; and in the year ending March 2023, over 1m incidences

had been recorded in England and Wales – that's around 3,000 per day.

'Fundamentally, doing jiu-jitsu means you can handle yourself on the street,' adds Gorton. 'It means that you actually have a chance of helping yourself – especially if the perpetrator is heavier than you.'

Self-protection was the driving force for 38-year-old Shakira Akabusi, a pre- and postnatal PT from Portsmouth. 'I suffered with extreme anxiety after having children and felt extremely vulnerable as their main caregiver, so I wanted to learn how to protect them,' she shares, on what led her to the BJJ classes that she's been attending two to three times a week since 2023. She's achieved her goal. 'Brazilian jiu-jitsu is a really practical form of self-defence; I feel stronger, safer and more capable than ever.'



United front

Beyond reclaiming power on an individual level, it's the feeling of collective unity and connection that keeps all the women *WH* spoke to coming back to class. Particularly the relationship with your training partner. 'I can't think of another time you'll be so close and intimate with someone unless it's sexual,' admits Gorton. 'Rolling with someone is a trust exercise: when they're on top of you trying to choke you or break your arm, you have to trust that they'll stop when you say stop.' This mutual dependence forges strong bonds. 'All barriers are down – you can't pretend to be someone else when you're trying to protect yourself.'

Akabusu agrees that the sport allows you to show up as yourself. 'There's no space for masks or fake personas. Everyone is make-up free, sweating buckets and there to learn something new – there are no expectations to be a certain

way,' she describes, adding that absolutely everyone is welcome. 'My five-year-old daughter attends classes, and my 70-year-old mum sometimes joins me.'

Considering that research consistently shows that women are more likely to sustain fitness habits that marry community and meaning, it isn't hard to see why BJJ packs a punch.

It all adds up to a compelling case for adding Brazilian jiu-jitsu into your training week. But if you take just one thing from the women *WH* interviewed, make it this: the sport is so much more than a workout. It's a skill, a community and a re-education into what the female body is capable of. 'As more women step on to the mat, they're not only changing the face of Brazilian jiu-jitsu,' adds Gorton. 'They're helping define the future of fitness.' One where capability, confidence and connection are no longer concepts that we have to grapple with.



A beginner's guide to Brazilian jiu-jitsu

Exactly what to expect, by world champion and ARMA head coach Ffion Davies

■ What does a class involve?

'Class starts with a warm-up, including functional movements, specific to Brazilian jiu-jitsu (like bear crawls and crab walks), to build coordination and awareness. Then you'll move on to a 20- to 30-minute technique portion, where you'll learn and practise submissions including armbars [extending your opponent's arm by pressuring the elbow joint], chokes and triangles [using your legs to encircle someone's neck] without any resistance. After that, you'll go into five-minute sparring rounds, where students add controlled resistance and apply the moves from the technique session on one another.'

■ What do you wear?

'The traditional uniform is a kimono-style jacket and trousers, usually worn with a rash guard and shorts or leggings underneath. The key is to wear fitted athletic clothing that allows you to move freely and won't get in the way during close-contact training.'

■ How often should you attend?

'To build skill and fitness, I'd recommend two to three sessions per week. This gives your body enough stimulus to improve strength, endurance and mobility, while still allowing you enough time to recover.'

'Aqua aerobics makes movement feel like joy'

For 46-year-old DJ Jemma Yoloye, aka DJ Mystikle Blue, from Birmingham, getting in the pool made fitness less like punishment – and more like pleasure

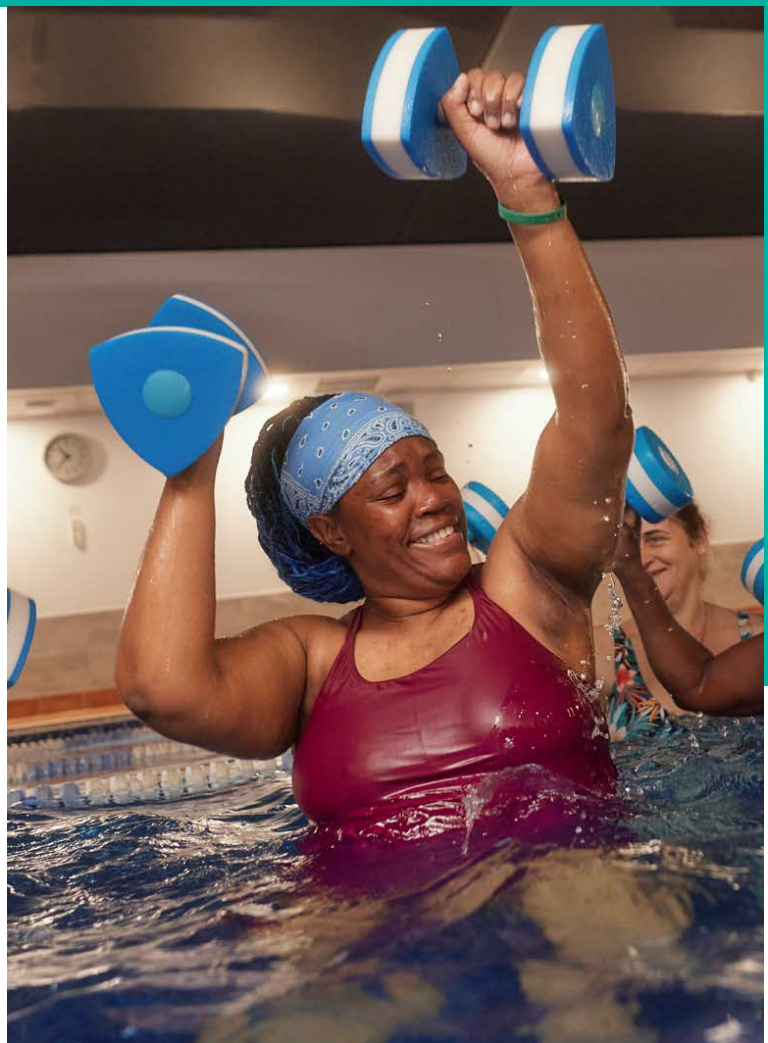
Swimming has always felt like an escape for me. I've been going sporadically since I was seven, but never regularly enough to maintain my fitness

– I'd go and do a few laps once or twice a month. Despite having a gym membership for years, I never used it; as someone with ADHD, I lack dopamine, and tasks I perceive as mundane – such as going to the gym – are especially difficult to start. Couple that with using junk food for comfort and spending all my time caring for my autistic seven-year-old son, my neurodivergent husband and my elderly mother and aunt, and it's hardly surprising that, at 45, I weighed my heaviest ever at 96kg.

That was when I realised I needed to make a change in order to stay fit for my family – and it was my son who inspired me to try aqua aerobics. Watching him splash around joyfully in the water, not caring who was watching, is what inspired me to book a session. I'm also a freelance DJ, and the idea of dancing to music in the pool sounded tempting.

It wasn't easy; that first session was extremely uncomfortable. I felt out of place as I could see that I was clearly the youngest in the class, and I worried that I wouldn't be able to remember all the moves. Then the music started and my fears instantly faded. Everyone in the class was focused on themselves and the hour flew by.

From there, I committed to going once a week and, within a month, my energy levels soared. I could keep up with my son when he was running around, I could walk upstairs



without feeling breathless and I slept much more deeply. Aqua aerobics works for my brain, too. I look forward to going every week, which means it's easy for me to maintain, despite the lack of dopamine.

Feeling good then motivated me to change our household's diet. Every meal now features lean meat, vegetables and a complex carb, such as bulgur wheat – they're slow release, meaning you avoid blood sugar spikes. I don't drink fizzy drinks or squash any more and snacks are always nuts or raisins.

Since August last year, I've lost 20kg – but the benefits can't be captured in numbers. This is the first form of fitness I've found that works for me and fits around my very busy family schedule, and it's truly transformed my energy and confidence. Even better: it doesn't feel like exercise. Sure, the water provides a gentle resistance and gets your heart rate up, but I often forget I'm working out. It's an hour of pure fun.

Jemma features in the This Girl Can campaign, We Like the Way You Move, championing women from under-represented groups



Current workout routine

One or two aqua aerobics classes, one body pump class, two long walks, one weighted home workout.

Most surprising myth about aerobics

That it's just for older women – plenty of young women do it, too.

Go-to pre-workout snack

An apple, a banana and a handful of grapes.

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Puma x Modibodi
collection, from
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The kit list

As the mercury rises, there's only one place we want to be. And whether you're lapping your local lido, surfing Cornish waves or heading for the Med, we've got you covered. Come on in, the water's lovely

Words Isabelle Knevett



Wave wearable

*Encinitas Bikini Top,
£75; High-waisted
Bikini Bottom,*

£85, both Vuori

If your beach days are a blur of shoreline runs, sandy volleyball matches and sea dips, this set is your new go-to. The U-shaped neckline is supportive as you move, while an interior mesh layer adds extra security.

Equal parts sport and swim, it understood the WH holiday brief.





A work of art
Sculpture Collection, from £25, Speedo
 Designed to honour every curve, the Sculpture Collection from Speedo shifts the focus from how you look in swimwear to how you feel in it. Think: contouring silhouettes and trademarked Lycra Xtra Life tech that moves with you.



In the bag

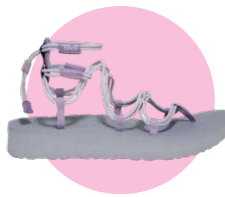
Straw Tote with Charm, £119, Whistles

This summer, we're taking notes from Jane Birkin and leaning into baskets. Effortless, a little undone and eternally chic, there's nothing quite like arriving beachside with a raffia tote in tow, brimming with books, SPF and all the essentials that turn a day by the sea into a ritual.



Heatwave hero

Vacation After Sun Gel, £12, Goodhood
 We've all overdone it in the sun at some point, which is why a solid aftersun is a beach bag essential. This nostalgic take from Vacation reimagines a childhood classic – it's lightweight, non-sticky and packed with fast-absorbing aloe vera to take the edge off sun-damaged skin.



Best foot forward

Midform Infinity Sandal, £65, Teva
 A summer classic with good reason, the latest offering from Teva more than meets the brief. The brief being a pair that will take you from continental cobbles to festival fields. Expect cloud-like comfort with an aesthetic that looks as good with a maxi dress as it does with a bikini.



Wild side

The C One-piece, £204, Tropic of C
 Animal print is having a moment and leading the pack this season is the quietly cool ocelot (us neither, but it looks like a cross between a cat and a cheetah). Turn your local lido into a catwalk in this sculpting one-piece from Candice Swanepoel's Tropic of C.



Sartorial speed

Speed Pro Sunglasses, £69, Hystride
 Whether you're horizontal on a pool towel or in motion on the track, some good shades are your salvation. If you're looking for a pair with personality, these pink Speed Pros provide full UV protection with photochromic frames that don't budge.



Crystal clear

Vector with FormFit, £75, *TheMagic5*
Leaky goggles can turn a leisurely lap into a washout. It's this frustration that led Danish triathletes Bo Haaber and Rasmus Barfred to create *TheMagic5*. Custom-fitted using a 3D face scan, they promise 15% less pressure, zero leaks and no fog – leaving you locked in, lap after lap.



Nauti-cool

Cove Capri Shorts, £48, *Damson Madder*
The swimwear scene is in its playful era. A little retro, a little tongue-in-cheek and completely irresistible, these swim capri shorts bring just the right amount of coverage with a polka dot that feels joyfully nostalgic. Proof that sometimes more really is more.



That's a wrap

Changing Poncho, around £51, *Nomadix*
There's a certain kind of chaos reserved for sand everywhere post-sea dip. This quick-drying poncho changes the game. It shields from curious eyes and coastal gusts, while UPF50+ protection, odour resistance and a barely-there weight will make you wonder how you ever managed without it.



All aboard

Loli Jute Hat, £119, *Wolf & Badger*
SPF is non-negotiable, but a great hat is the unsung hero of any summer wardrobe. Woven from 100% natural jute, this classic boater delivers generous shade with a side of old-school chic. Bonus points for the necktie that keeps it in place when the breeze picks up.



A head of the curve

Swim Scarf, £130, *Arakkii*
The printed headscarf has been the accessories trend du jour since Q1 and it isn't taking any annual leave yet. This swim scarf – cut from the same cloth as the brand's swimwear – adds extra drama (or modesty) to poolside lounging.



Soul surfer

Cynthia Rowley Colorblock One-Piece Wetsuit, £328, *FP Movement*
Short wetsuits will be everywhere this summer and this one is making waves. The 2mm thickness hits that sweet spot for early-season dips – keeping the chill at bay without compromising on movement. Added UPF protection means you're protected from more than the chill, too.



Serious staple

Pink Beach Towel, £40, *Dryrobe*
Not content with having earned a place in the workout wardrobe of swimmers across the land, the good people at Dryrobe are coming for your towels. Crafted from 100% cotton with a plush, velvety finish – and available in many shades (we're in our bubblegum pink era) – this towel is here to level up your beach game.



Support system

Summer 2026

Collection, from £69,

Monday Swimwear

Finding chic

swimwear for fuller

busts shouldn't feel

like a full-time job.

Here to cut down on

your body-based

overtime is Monday

Swimwear, rewriting

the rules with

trend-led pieces,

with inclusive sizing

from UK size 00 to

20 and cup sizes

that run up to G.



Match point

With big dreams of Grand Slams, *WH*'s fashion editor takes to the court in Adidas's newly launched tennis collection to swing, slice and serve



Adidas Paris Apparel Collection, from £55; Adidas Barricade Clay, £140

Strawberries and cream, Pimm's filled to the brim. When Wimbledon rolls around, I transform from professional spectator to delusional future-title contender. This summer, I'm making it official. Never mind that my mother pulled me out of my tennis lessons aged eight after I watched Wimbledon from home and asked what the lines on the side meant. Twenty years later, I'm back, in brand-new kit, ready to swing, grunt and volley my way to glory.

Said kit is Adidas's SS26 Paris collection, and it earns its place on court. Inspired by the city's sport and street culture, the pieces blend elegance with football-inspired motifs that nod to the iconic 1990s jerseys that we all grew up coveting.



The guinea pig
Isabelle Knevett, fashion features editor

Bougie dress codes are absolutely covered. But the real talking point is what you don't see. Adidas's Climacool technology actively wicks sweat and regulates temperature so efficiently that while my sparring partner was drenched, I remained genuinely, noticeably cool.

On my feet sit the just-launched Barricade 14 Clay Court, set to debut at Roland Garros alongside the collection. Lighter than you'd expect, the engineered mesh uppers keep feet ventilated while the Repetitor technology delivers a noticeable energy return with every leap. The deep herringbone sole means I can slide dramatically around the court, which is half the fun when you're not playing for points. If 2026 is calling for a tennis revival, consider me its most stylishly prepared participant.



Micro trend

When the day calls for all hands on deck, we're trusting these handy packers to do the heavy lifting for us



SAVE

£35, Cotopaxi
Made from 100% recycled materials, this retro-cool colour-blocked hip pack can fit in all of the essentials for a day out.



Spend

£55, Topologie
The company was founded by a climber, but its pieces are for everyday wear. This metallic pack pairs utility details with post-climb polish.



Spurge

£95, Peak Performance
This brand easily balances style and substance. Here is your new companion for rides, runs and alpine adventures.



The imperceptible rise of undetectable aesthetics

She smiles, she frowns (a little) and she insists that her glow comes from green juice and gratitude. The latest beauty ideal we've been told to aspire to? Looking like you've had nothing done...

Words Lia Mappoura

There was a time, not too long ago, when bigger and bolder was seen as better. Gone were the thin lips and slim hips of the 1990s; in came injectables you could spot at 20 paces. The brows. The pouts. The cheeks (both on and off your face).

Only now, Hollywood has a new beauty ideal. From the red carpet to the front row of fashion week, one look features on every face – one imperceptible to anyone who isn't searching for it: the *natural* look.

In recent years, those with the means to do so have been quietly dissolving, lifting and microneedling their way to a new aesthetic. And, let's be clear, they look great. Lindsay Lohan is radiant, Kris Jenner looks like a Kardashian sister and speculation swirls over exactly how Emma Stone looks *that* fresh. But while nobody owes us – or anyone else – an explanation, when they set the beauty standards for society, it's hard not to ask: how attainable is this 'natural' look, really?

New look

If the new pared-back aesthetic looks like just another social media sleight of hand, it's not merely smoke, mirrors and soft lighting. Those behind the scalpel are also recognising the shift. Maryam Zamani, oculoplastic surgeon and founder of MZ Skin, notes that while the number of aesthetic and cosmetic procedures has increased globally, the type of procedures that people are opting for is changing. 'The mix is shifting towards more definitive surgical solutions (starting at a younger age), while non-surgical treatments remain extremely common,' she explains.

A 2023 global survey by the International Society of Aesthetic

Plastic Surgery reported similar findings. Roughly 35m aesthetic procedures took place worldwide that year, with both surgical and non-surgical numbers rising. There was also a 40% increase over four years in terms of overall activity. In the UK, Dr Zamani says she's seen a noticeable rise in procedures such as blepharoplasty (tightening eye-lift surgery and removal of excess skin) and facelifts, 'driven by demand for longer-lasting results that are dramatic yet subtle, social media influence and secondary effects such as rapid weight loss from GLP-1 drugs'.

Aesthetics doctor Munir Somji and plastic and reconstructive surgeon Ash Soni have also noted this changing tide. 'We're seeing

The new natural isn't about doing less; it's about doing everything, just differently

a rise in "subtle lift" procedures: deep-plane/SMAS facelifts (an aesthetic lift and repositioning of the face), neck refining and upper/lower blepharoplasty,' says Dr Somji, of a transition he dubs 'the undetectable era'. The numbers speak for themselves: the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic

Surgeons 2023-24 audit showed overall surgical numbers up 5%, with facial rejuvenation leading the rise; blepharoplasty is up 13% year-on-year and facelift surgeries are also increasing.

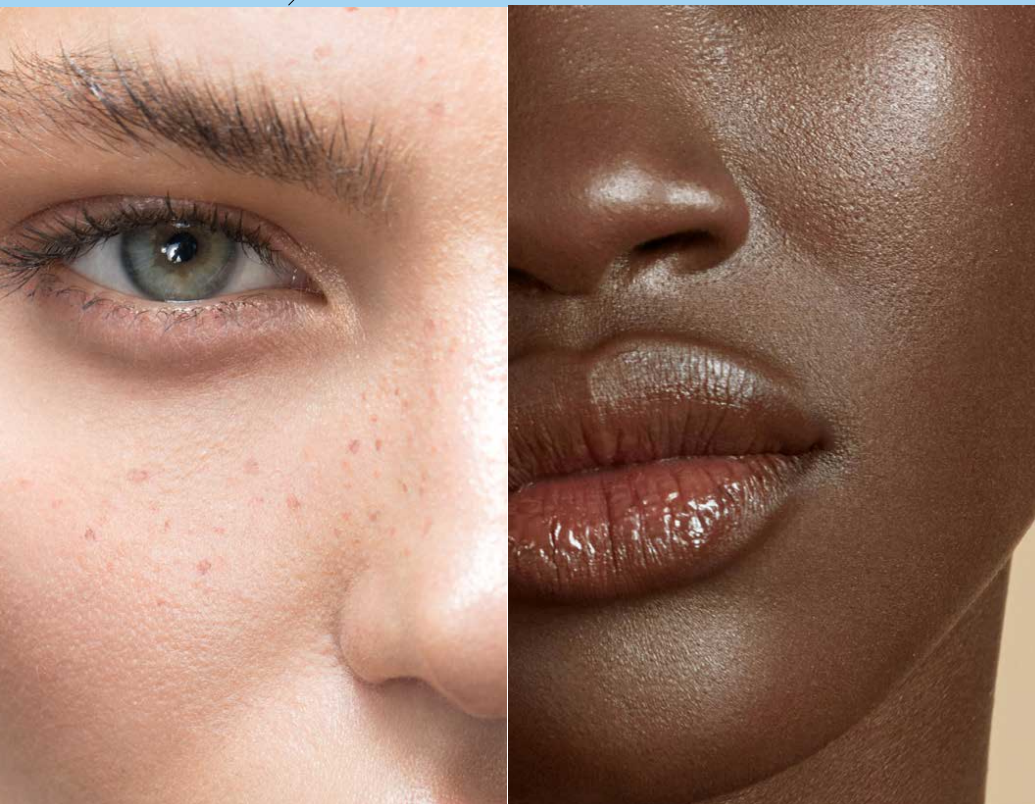
'Biostimulators such as Sculptra and polynucleotides are also trending,' Dr Somji adds. This is what the industry refers to as 'regenerative aesthetics'. Think: less plumping, more priming. Instead of filling lines or freezing movement, many treatments now work by improving skin quality and elasticity from within – injectables such as Profilllo or polynucleotides that stimulate collagen, laser facials that resurface texture and exosome treatments that claim to restore cell health at a genetic level. All of which means the new natural isn't about doing less; it's about doing everything, just differently.

Turn back time

So what becomes of those who've already dabbled in treatments to suit the old aesthetic? Interventions might be billed as reversible, but revisions can be painful and inconsistent in outcome, says Dr Zamani. 'Most cosmetic surgeries aren't truly reversible in the sense of returning tissue to a preoperative state without

consequence,' she cautions. 'Some procedures can be revised or partially reversed, but revisions carry additional risk, scarring and variable outcomes.' As for filler? 'Reversal with hyaluronidase is generally safe when performed by experienced clinicians. But repeated injections and revisions





over many years can increase the risk of scarring or textural change in some patients.'

It means that once you start altering your face, there's no reset button to take you back to your original one. This realisation is provoking a powerful counter-narrative to the one that demands you update your face with the same frequency you update your wardrobe; woman, often young, are now articulating the impossibility of undoing their once-desired plumped-up look. Chloe Ferry is one of them. Years after undergoing numerous procedures, the reality TV star turned influencer has gone public – via her three million followers – about her journey to reverse many of them.

'I was ridiculed for my looks and my weight, among numerous insults through social media and the press, which affected my mental health and confidence massively,' she wrote in an Instagram post in January 2025. 'The young woman I once loved being became self-conscious, looking for perfection.' Alongside the attention came offers of cosmetic surgery. Convinced these procedures would reunite her with

her 'spark', she accepted them. Now, as she tries to find her way back to her former face, she's speaking out about the process to raise awareness of just how hard it can be to reverse invasive procedures.

But while it's true that reversals can form part of the new natural narrative, for those with bottomless bank balances, they're one of

reinvention rather than regret; the A-list beauty equivalent of quietly swapping acrylic nails for builder gel and calling it minimalism. For the majority, though, here's the uncomfortable truth: the 'natural' aesthetic is anything but democratic. At Dr Soni's clinic in London, The Soni Clinic, a Profhilo treatment (or skin booster) can cost around £500 per session, an upper blepharoplasty from £8,500, dermal filler from £800 and revision from £700. Add in the maintenance, skincare and recovery, and your 'natural' glow is coming in at upwards of £10,000.

It's ironic, really. While the 'natural' ideal sounds freeing, it's still rooted in both perfectionism and privilege. We've replaced one unattainable beauty standard with another – and while the aesthetic approach of old was honest about what it required, the new natural beauty is high maintenance masquerading as low. As for the rest of us? We're between a rock and a hard-to-achieve place; craving authenticity while still chasing that impossible glow. But therein lies the lesson: if we can't stop caring, we can care differently – reminding ourselves that every face, no matter how filtered or filler-free, has its own story to tell.

Facing up to the new natural

Ask the right questions

If you're thinking about injectables or surgery, do your research and book a consultation. Clarity is essential, so ask your practitioner about the next steps: what happens if you don't like the result? How long will it realistically last? And what does maintenance look like – in both time and money? A good practitioner will be open and honest, even if it results in you walking away.

Consider low-commitment options

Skin-boosting facials, LED light therapy, peels and facial massage can temporarily lift, de-puff and brighten without altering your face – as can a good skincare routine. And while less-invasive interventions will never replicate the result of surgical procedures, they can help you feel more like the 'after' version of yourself, without locking you into a long-term tweakment plan.

Your face, your pace

Most importantly, know that you don't owe anyone a 'natural but better' version of your face. Whether you choose to tweak, reverse or do nothing, the only person who gets to decide what you 'should' look like is you. Talking to friends about your feelings – or a professional, if that's within your budget – can help you to work through them and understand that you're not the only one struggling to navigate aesthetic culture.

Behind the mask



L'Oréal Paris Glass Skin Hydrogel Glow Mask, £15.99 for 4

Along with top-tier moisturisers that provide intense hydration, this hydrogel mask also contains adenosine to improve skin's barrier function.



Reome Hydra-Plasma Veil Bio-Cellulose Mask, £98 for 5

Made from fermented coconut to mirror the skin's network that gives skin its elasticity, it also sticks seamlessly and transports ingredients with precision.



Biodance Caviar PDRN Real Deep Mask, £14.90 for 4

Infused with PDRN, an ingredient sourced from salmon sperm, this mask helps support the skin's natural moisture barrier.

Q: Hydrogel masks – worth the hype?

Serum-soaked and slippery, the latest iteration of sheet masks are ubiquitous among the beauty set. Here's what they can, and can't, do

A hallmark of Self-Care Sunday and backstage skin prep alike, sheet masks were propelled into the mainstream by K-beauty (much more of which on p84) whose innovators championed formulas from snail mucin (aka slime), green tea, collagen and charcoal. But it was in 1980s Japan that the sheet mask started life, when brands began soaking cotton sheets in toner or essences and cutting them into face-shaped silhouettes for convenient, single-use application.

Fast-forward to today and a new generation of sheet masks have landed. The main pull of the new cohort? Hydrogel, a jelly-like polymer that can hold hundreds of times its weight in water or serum. Their resurgence has been driven, in part, by social media; specifically, glass skin – an intensely hydrated aesthetic that looks almost translucent. That the jelly-like masks

look better on camera than messy clay or dripping paper masks is another reason they're thriving in the selfie age.

But their rapid ascent isn't without substance. Unlike cotton or paper sheet masks, hydrogel fits snugly against the contours of the face, creating a seal. By blocking the air, the mask prevents the active ingredients from evaporating, forcing the hydrating serum deep into the epidermis. As a result, they deliver an intense surge of hydration and a visible (albeit temporary) plumping and brightening effect.

As for whether it's worth buying into the hype, yes, I believe it is – but only if you're using them correctly: as a temporary cosmetic boost before an event or make-up application – they're not preventative dermatological care. It's worth noting, too, that the hydrogel material itself is just a delivery system, meaning a mask's efficacy depends entirely on the serum it's soaked in. Look for evidence-based, water-binding ingredients, such as moisture magnets glycerin and hyaluronic acid, barrier-fortifying ceramides or brightening actives, such as niacinamide. If the serum is mostly made of water and heavy fragrance, the mask is a waste of money.



The expert
Dr Anjali Mahto,
consultant
dermatologist,
founder of Self
London clinic



Skin shelfie

Barb Stegemann, CEO and founder of The 7 Virtues



A typical day: I don't use an alarm as I prefer to wake up naturally, which I do between 6.30am and 7am. I work out daily and still enjoy old-school step-and-weights videos, alongside walking, swimming and strength training. My best ideas always come to me during a workout. I'm pescatarian, and living by the ocean in Nova Scotia means I eat lots of fresh fish and greens. I also love to cook for my family and enjoy evenings out with our four adult children, who keep us laughing. I spend evenings with my husband, who's the general manager of our fragrance company; we work in different areas of the brand, so we'll often share what's happening with our teams, projects and kids. After dinner, I'll take a book to the bath – a ritual that's as important for my skin as it is for my spirit. I'm currently rotating between Rumi's *Where Everything Is Music* and Epictetus' *Whatever Is Rational Is Tolerable*. I also take that moment to feel grateful; being raised by a single mum on [benefits], I'm thankful for the brand I've built, the jobs we have created and the joy of being back on *Dragons' Den* in Canada.

Day

Matter Of Fact 20% L-Ascorbic Acid Vitamin C Serum, £85

Made with 20% L-Ascorbic acid and powerful antioxidants, this serum brightens and firms without causing irritation. It's great for helping to even out my complexion and gives my skin a lovely glow.

Supergoop! Unseen Sunscreen SPF30, £36.50

I love the matte finish of this SPF and how it doubles up as a primer. It feels silky on the skin, works beautifully under make-up and doesn't leave a white cast. Plus, the coverage is brilliant, offering long-lasting protection.

Skinfix Barrier+ Barrier Balancing Water Cream, £52

There is nothing quite like this product elsewhere on the market. Made with peptides, hyaluronic acid and ceramides, it hydrates and strengthens the skin barrier, leaving my skin plump and radiant all day.

Night

Skin Rocks Retinoid 1 Vitamin A Face Serum, £70

This is my go-to for skin renewal as vitamin A is king when it comes to helping promote collagen and elastin production. Applied nightly, it keeps my complexion smooth and helps minimise fine lines.

Skinfix Barrier+ Triple Lipid-Peptide Cream, £52

This is a deeply replenishing formula that helps restore and fortify the skin barrier while I sleep, and is clinically proven to increase skin lipids by nearly 1% each day. I always wake up with my skin feeling calm, hydrated and restored.

The Ordinary 100% Organic Cold-Pressed Rose Hip Seed Oil, £9.70

I'm in love with this oil. I apply it every night and use it with my jade roller. It's become a relaxing ritual, locking in hydration and giving my skin a natural glow.

Mood-boosting make-up

Victoria Beckham Beauty Vast Lash Mascara, £33

I love this mascara as it makes me feel like I have fake eyelashes on. It delivers on drama, while still being gentle. Plus, it doesn't irritate my sensitive eyes, which makes it a winner for me.

Ilia Super Serum Skin Tint SPF30, £42

This is my holy grail for good base make-up. I love how it feels like skincare and provides an even and lightweight coverage. It's a great way to wear foundation without worrying about my skin health.

Laneige Lip Sleeping Mask, £21

I wear this both at night and during the day. It keeps my lips hydrated and smooth, thanks to a blend of murumuru butter, coconut oil and shea butter. It strikes the perfect balance of comfort and shine – I never leave home without it.

Signature scent

The 7 Virtues Vanilla Woods, £85

This scent is sexy, sweet and comforting, all at once. It has qualities of aromatherapy, too: vanilla notes have been shown to reduce stress, while pear and rose are uplifting. It also lasts for up to 24 hours, so I can trust it to carry me through long days, from early workouts and board meetings to evenings with my family, without ever needing to reapply.

Skincare philosophy

Sleep is one of the most important things I do for my skin because it shows when you are rested. Nourishing my body with whole, simple foods has always made my skin healthier, too.

Main skincare concern

Rosacea runs in my family and I've had to get treatments from my GP, as it affects my eyes. For that reason, everything I use must be safe for sensitive skin. I also ensure our perfumes are hypoallergenic.

Skincare non-negotiable

Fragrance and skincare are connected. If I'm conscious about what I put on my skin, my perfume must align with that philosophy. Both must contain no phthalates or harsh chemicals, be cruelty-free and safe for sensitive skin.



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The trouble with longevity



The allure of **living your best, longest life** has proven to be **a health goal with staying power**. But with warnings of burnout from unattainable routines, horrors at the space's misogynistic links and **fears that 'longevity fixation syndrome' is the orthorexia of the 2020s**, some women are questioning their future focus

Words Lauren Clark

With every inhale and exhale, Georgia Smith tried her very best. Cold plunging was, after all, good for her – right? The London-based 31-year-old had read the science about the purported benefits – including an ability to dial down disease-driving inflammation, which meant it had plopped with a splash into the overflowing bucket of longevity wellness trends. ‘I was really trying to make it work, but it just left me feeling worse,’ she recalls, noting how it did nothing for her present-day stress levels. Georgia, a women’s health coach, isn’t the only one to reconsider how she’d found herself doing things that don’t feel beneficial in the here and now, in pursuit of a lengthier, healthier life. ‘Many of my female clients are coming to me after trying intense, unsustainable regimes. They have often been deep in the world of “optimisation” – fasting, supplementing, tracking everything,’ she says – ‘but they’re exhausted.’ It’s with the same fatigue that she encounters viral reels of 15-step routines so excessive that she, and the comments section, believe they’re satire.

‘Longevity’ remains the buzziest focus of the health space, with an allure spanning genders and generations. You’ll now find the term on packets of green powders and pots of skincare, enlisted to describe wearables and members’ clubs, and signposted in the bios of doctors and blurbs about clinics. It’s thrown into attention-grabbing headlines about new studies – ‘Got a “hassler” in your life? It may be bad news for your longevity’ – while ‘biological age’ and ‘heart rate variability’ are now everyday lingo. It’s rapidly morphed from early advances in the field of gerontology to a fully fledged \$610bn (around £460bn) global industry extolling eternal youth – by way of a pandemic-induced brush with mortality and Hailey Bieber’s penchant for NAD+ drips.

Whether or not what you’re being sold constitutes ‘longevity washing’ – something *WH* was one of the first to report on – buying into age-resistant physiology isn’t a hard sell in 2026. Part of the eternal draw is that health feels like one of the few areas within your grip strength in an increasingly uncertain world. But its ubiquity – from the shelves of Boots to the lips of lifestyle influencers – and extreme nature seems to be turning some women off.

Take the debate earlier this year over writer and influencer Laura Reilly’s ‘routine’ shared on Substack. In addition to three professional skincare treatments and check-ins with her orthodontist, cardiologist, GP, gynaecologist, ophthalmologist, dermatologist, plastic surgeon, PT and Pilates instructor, she drew blood three times and gave two urine samples. She maintained a daily supplement stack of 17 pills (20 on Mondays), took a subcutaneous peptide, used five tools from her home device library and tracked every meal, macro and micronutrient. Rather than be impressed by her efforts, readers told her to ‘touch grass’. But, what happens if the commendable pursuit of living a longer, healthier life morphs beyond curiosity or eyeroll into something darker?

Old news

Regardless of the virtues of individual longevity ‘hacks’ – many of which have a question mark hanging over their validity (see: blue zones) – it’s their sheer volume

that’s driving a fresh kind of wellness burnout forcing women to down their supplement stacks. ‘There’s a new product or ritual every week,’ says Georgia of the current longevity consumer frenzy. However, Nancy Best, a London-based PT and founder of fitness platform Ladies Who Crunch, flags growing consumer scepticism. ‘Remember the huge initial popularity of collagen?’ she says, noting how she has dropped the term ‘longevity’ from conversations with clients. ‘Then the dust settled and people went, “Hold on”.’ If your budget affords some experimentation without ROI, fine. But there’s growing unease at money down the drain at a time when the Institute for Fiscal Studies warns of stagnating levels of disposable income amid soaring living costs. Longevity is no longer the domain of the few with pockets deep enough to comfortably blow £70,000 on an annual membership at a Harley Street clinic; it’s the monthly creep of supplements, saunas, sleep aids.

The knock isn’t just felt financially. In February, a study by New York University revealed that anxiety around ageing can actually leave a biological mark. Women who self-reported the highest levels of stress about growing older showed accelerated signs of ageing at a cellular level. Researchers noted women may be especially susceptible to this anxiety owing to social expectations to maintain a youthful look, concerns about fertility’s finite nature and caring for older family members – which confronts you with a face-on image of your older self. It’s something Kasim Usmani, London-based GP and founder of Dr Kas Clinics, has witnessed in practice. ‘Some are even slipping into obsession,’ he says.

A new body of work

Daisy* has a vivid childhood memory of her father, a successful businessman, telling her she’d make a great trophy wife. ‘I always understood my body as something of a job,’ recalls the UK-based 34-year-old who grew up with bouts of disordered eating. When her father died of a heart attack in 2022, aged 72, she was completely destabilised. ‘I felt deep resentment towards my husband and our two young children for still needing things from me,’ she explains to *WH*.

With people-pleasing tendencies ingrained so deeply that she couldn’t verbalise her needs, she found solace in cultivating her own longevity. ‘I started doing vitamin infusions to deal with the fatigue that came with grief and almost immediately felt like the version of myself that could function, care for others and meet their expectations.’ But things escalated. Daisy’s gym sessions grew to 90 minutes every day and she began tracking ‘all the metrics’: sleep, recovery, body composition, at least 15,000 steps. ‘My day started to revolve entirely around maintaining those numbers,’ she says.

Sleep spiralled into fixation. ‘I needed nine hours and if one of my children woke me, I’d feel a surge of rage, like they’d ruined something essential. The entire next day, even the next week, had been compromised.’ The self-berating became unbearable. ‘Everything had to be done and done properly. If it wasn’t, the internal response was so harsh that I started to look for ways





'If one of my children woke me, I'd feel a surge of rage'

to interrupt the voice,' she says. 'That's when the self-harming started.' It was only when her husband caught her that she agreed to seek help.

Yet even after checking into Paracelsus Recovery, a Swiss mental health treatment facility, she didn't view her longevity practices as problematic. 'The routines, the tracking, the discipline, I thought that was me doing well. I was proud to tell the team. I thought they'd say, "Oh, wow, you don't need treatment. You're amazing."' It took Daisy time to realise that she'd been replacing her own needs with a rigid system of controlling her body.

Daisy is one of increasing numbers being diagnosed with longevity fixation syndrome, a term coined by Paracelsus Recovery's CEO and founder, Jan Gerber, wherein an obsession with extending healthspan goes from preoccupation to pathology – and it's been called the orthorexia – an unhealthy fixation on eating only

'pure' food – of our time. 'Clients are presenting with something more complex than old-school health anxiety. It's not that they're afraid of illness, they're driven by a need to get everything right,' he explains, of an uptick he's seen over the past two to three years. While affluence can raise the risk, the advanced testing and tracking tools that amplify overfocusing on optimisation are very much mass market. 'We have unprecedented access to data about our bodies, and longevity practices are so idealised that people can become unwell while being told they're doing everything right.'

Awaiting approval

Women are especially vulnerable to the obsessive metrics monitoring that's integral to the industry. Gerber frequently sees the female body, even in its future form, become something to perfect. 'It's due to social conditioning – having been taught, explicitly or implicitly, to view themselves as objects to be evaluated.' But while longevity fixation syndrome may sit at an extreme end of the spectrum, the milder end can be just as detrimental over time – even if it's inexplicable guilt for skipping an ice bath. 'The problem is where an encouragement to simply be healthier becomes pressure to always be striving towards the "best version" of

ourselves,' says clinical psychologist Dr Sheena Kumar. It doesn't help that swathes of longevity advice requires the spare time that busy, stressed-out women don't have – Office for National Statistics research has found that men enjoy five hours more leisure time per week.

There are other ways in which it doesn't feel that longevity is always serving women. Kayla Barnes-Lentz, a 35-year-old Texas-based longevity researcher, speaker and entrepreneur – arguably the most famous woman in the space – believes many longevity recommendations don't work for women's bodies. When she tried a 20% to 25% calorie restriction – linked in trials to a potential slowing of the ageing process – it dysregulated her hormones. 'It might be a gold-standard longevity intervention for men, but for women it doesn't make sense,' she says, pointing to research showing that women's hormones are very sensitive to energy availability. It was the moment that prompted her to hire a team of female researchers to properly look at all the literature.

Barnes-Lentz has made it her mission to be a part of the solution to a historic lack of research into women's bodies. 'I'm simply trying to help correct a female research gap here,' she says. 'That's why I don't really identify myself as a "biohacker".' Experts tell *WH* that it's not longevity as a core concept that is the issue, but rather the PR that surrounds it that is off-putting to some women. That's what David Vioque and Arnold Fomété, who co-founded London-based preventative health and wellness company Unbound because they felt like the space was missing balance and inclusivity, have heard from female clients. 'They just don't feel like this idea of "biohacking" speaks to them,' says Vioque.

Indeed, there's the sense that 'biohacking bros' often dominate what can feel like a decidedly male-centric dialogue in the space, which becomes murkier still with the frequent appearances of longevity figurehead and researcher Peter Attia, author of *Outlive*, in the Jeffrey Epstein files. Emails revealed a friendship in which Attia had turned to the convicted paedophile when searching for employees and patients for his medical practice, as well as giving Epstein flagrantly misogynistic pseudo-medical advice. In February 2016, Attia told Epstein he would love to add '5 years or more to your life [...] even if the only reason to do so is to have more sex.' Attia also declared that 'pussy is, indeed, low carb'.

With male supremacism rubbing up alongside health advice, some experts are disturbed. Could the men intent on dominion over their physical health then take that same approach to women? 'Absolutely,' believes

There's the sense that 'biohacking bros' often dominate





Dr Tim Ellis-Dale, senior lecturer in history at Teesside University, whose research focuses on gender and masculinity. "Throughout history, gender has been a way of signifying and symbolising power relations in society. Longevity also intersects with a concern about ensuring one "lives on" – the desire to control and dominate women for reproductive purposes.' A prospect so sinister that it's no surprise some women are feeling suss.

Back on track

If longevity has lost its way, there are, thankfully, female voices determined to reroute its GPS to a more gender-neutral place. Take the two London-based sisters behind the first potential longevity drug. 'It's about tackling the loss of dignity in older life,' says Serena Kern-Libera, who, in 2023, co-founded LinkGevity with her scientist sibling, Dr Carina Kern, whose AI-aided research focuses on necrosis – or premature cell death. Investors include the UK government and Nasa, with human trials imminent.

Barnes-Lentz, meanwhile, has become the first woman to have her ovarian age measured by female-founded company Timeless Biotech. Its MenoTime test analyses weight, height, last menstrual period and hormone levels, then uses a model trained on 40,000 clinical data points and 100,000 conditional pathways to predict the speed someone's ovaries are ageing and their menopause onset age. Biotechnology bioengineer Kiran Kumar designed the test after realising the ovary 'has been clinically invisible'. With Barnes-Lentz's results showing she's on track to enter menopause five years later than her mother and grandmother, she's now focused on deciphering why.

But while Barnes-Lentz is known to have had a routine – regularly shared with her 620,000 Instagram followers – that includes red light therapy, peptides and stints in a hyperbaric oxygen chamber, she emphasises the importance of the healthy fundamentals. The likes of sleep, nutrition, movement, stress reduction and social connection that will leave you healthier than the majority of the population are also, she points out, what current research says will really move the needle on longevity. What won't? 'Internet claims that "this is going to work for everyone",' she says. When people ask what supplements she takes, 'my answer is that I take a micronutrient test that shows me what I'm deficient in'.

As for the possible harm in framing your pursuit of health in longevity terms? The experts *WH* spoke to suggest asking why it appeals to you. It might be to spend more time in peak health with loved ones or feeling strong in later life: if so, great. But it also might be based on what society has conditioned you to value, like showing no visible signs of ageing. 'Or it might be yet another productivity project in which self-worth is wrapped up in performance,' says Georgia, referencing the women she sees who have a to-do list under more pressure than pores in a cryotherapy chamber. See right for signs your healthy consideration might be slipping into fixation – and remember, in all your accounting for future you, the wants, needs and joys of the present version are just as valid, and healthy, to satisfy.

Reset the clock 4 signs longevity is cutting you short

Waning flexibility

Can't enjoy the climax of a TV show because you're obsessing over target sleep hours? Dr Kumar warns that creating rigid rules, limiting what you do and difficulty relaxing or being spontaneous are all warning signs. 'If you're feeling guilty or stressed if you can't follow routines – that may be a red flag.'

Fading social life

'Social interaction and connection triggers the release of endorphins and has huge benefits for quality of life, so notice if you start cancelling plans in order to do a workout or avoid going out for a meal because you're on a specific diet,' says GP Dr Alia Fahmy, medical director at Concierge Medical.

Black and white thinking

'Prioritising metrics over relationships, work or enjoyment may suggest things have gone too far,' warns Gerber. Signs include rigid thinking around what is 'right' or 'optimal' and harsh self-criticism when you fall short of your standards.

Increased fear

Gerber has a question to identify if you're using health practices to avoid difficult emotions: "Do I want to do this activity because it will make me feel better or because I'm afraid I'll feel worse if I don't?" True health expands your life. When it shrinks it, that's often a signal that something more complex needs attention.'



SEOUL SEARCHING

In the decade since Korean beauty piqued western beauty nerds' attention, it's become so ubiquitous that you can pick up a 'glass skin' mask while grabbing a pack of M&S High Legs. But is it the curiosity-spiking innovation (liquid microneedling, anyone?) driving sales east – or the allure of rigid beauty standards?

Words Perdita Nouril

It might surprise you to learn that the first person to accumulate a billion views on YouTube wasn't a beauty influencer or a vlogger streaming madcap stunts, but a South Korean man whose music you'll know if you attended any wedding receptions circa 2012. K-pop singer Psy's earworm *Gangnam Style* awakened both a collective impulse to lasso in public and cross-pollinated buzz about Korean culture.

This unlikeliest of tastemakers paved the way for a slew of novel imports that piqued interest in the conventionally unpalatable: fermented cabbage (kimchi) for gut health, *Squid Game* for a game-show-turned-dystopian-horror-story, and beauty products made from the sticky gloop that snails secrete.

Now a key pillar of the phenomenon called Hallyu – meaning the wave of Korean cultural influence since the 1990s – K-beauty has developed from niche curiosity into a full-blown industry juggernaut. In the first half of 2025, South Korea became the world's second-largest cosmetics exporter after France. Some 5,500 miles away, down at your local Boots, one Korean skincare product is sold every 11 seconds. In February, Marks & Spencer expanded its Korean offering out of the Foodhall into a dedicated K-beauty edit, while Pureseoul, a standalone Korean beauty boutique, has rapidly scaled up from a single UK location in 2022 to 14 stores.

'South Korea excels at blending creativity, innovation and quality across its cultural exports,' says Christine Hall, an aesthetic specialist in K-beauty, who is also of Korean heritage. Certainly, K-beauty's legitimacy has been bolstered by multi-genre Korean successes. In 2024, Han Kang became the first Asian woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. *KPop Demon Hunters*, the animated film about a K-pop band, recently won two Oscars. In Waitrose, sales of gochujang paste (a sweet and spicy Korean fermented chilli condiment) are up 71%.

Experts believe there's a common, catchy thread catapulting K-beauty, K-pop and K-dramas. 'Designed for instant impact, with striking visuals that translate seamlessly online, this content is highly shareable and globally accessible,' explains Dr Hall. It's why the comeback concert by K-pop group BTS, widely considered the biggest boy band in the world at the moment, was snapped up by Netflix for live-streaming (during which time, it topped the movie chart in 77 countries). And K-beauty is ruling the social media charts – where dramatic before-and-after transformations towards luminous, poreless 'glass skin' generate millions of views each week on TikTok.

Crediting innovative formulas, unusual ingredients and an unwavering commitment to hydration, Korean skincare has become shorthand for results. But with said routines anything but short – see the viral 10-plus step product regimen – and critics noting that South Korea is home to some of the world's most rigid beauty standards, is it efficacy that's making K-beauty the cream of the crop? Or is its popularity a byproduct of the toxic pursuit for facial perfection?

Strong foundations

If fandom culture runs deep in South Korea, skincare was the original obsession. Beauty rituals were integrated as far back as 57 BCE to 668 CE, also known as The Three Kingdoms era, when Korea was divided into the Goguryeo, Paekche and Silla provinces, rather than the North/South split today. 'There was a belief that beauty and virtue were closely connected and a beautiful appearance reflected inner wellbeing. Skincare wasn't reserved for the elite,' explains Dr Hall. 'It was practised across genders and social classes – presentation considered a way of showing respect for others.'

Historical records show early skincare rituals were surprisingly sophisticated: face powders ground from rice and millet; safflower used as blush; mung beans turned into cleansing powders. Today, the face continues to have a high value – South Koreans spend more per capita on skincare than any other country. A consumer base which is well-informed about formulations has pushed innovation so far forwards that South Korea is estimated to be 10 to 12 years ahead of Europe and the US in terms of beauty tech, ingredients and treatments.

Take PDRN (or polydeoxyribonucleotide), the trending ingredient derived from salmon DNA that's used to repair damaged skin, boost collagen and reduce inflammation. First developed in Italy in the 1990s to medically treat burns, ulcers and wounds, it was South Korea that, in the mid-2000s, took the ingredient and started researching its use in aesthetic medicine. Rejuran, an aesthetic injectable released in Korea in 2014, is only now arriving in UK clinics – and you'll need to be in the capital to take a stab at it.

With PDRN increasingly available in topical form, a novel-to-us delivery system called spicules – microscopic needles made from marine sponges – had already appeared in Korean face creams around a decade ago, estimates Dr Hall. In this new form of liquid microneedling, you rub the spicules in to your skin, then they embed and create temporary micro-channels through skin layers that enable large molecular ingredients in serums (ie, peptides) to penetrate deeper. Imagine tiny letterboxes, without which that package of good stuff would never get to you.

Fair skin's historical association with higher social status (darker skin implied outdoor labour) means that, while their sticky origin story may be thankfully in the past, Korean sunscreen formulas are also hailed as more effective. Think: advanced filters that extend protection further into UVA rays, nifty application methods such



On TikTok, #GlassSkin has accumulated over 3.9 billion views

as cushion compacts, toner-like textures, sticks for reapplication over make-up and even physical sun patches – clear silicone stickers, usually infused with zinc oxide, that physically block up to 99% of UVA and UVB rays. What differentiates Korean suncreams from western counterparts is ‘sensory experience’, says Dr Hall. ‘They’re lightweight and often impart a subtle luminosity, which encourages consistent daily use and is ultimately more clinically significant than marginal differences in SPF.’

Korea also goes where others won’t. Be that in adopting unconventional ingredients such as snail mucin – the viscous fluid secreted by snails that

studies show creates a protective barrier between skin and air pollution – or a willingness to experiment with new technology. Smart AI tools allow for individual customisation, such as analysing skin hydration and undertone to dispense a bespoke lip colour or create custom-blended foundation. While at-home gadgets offer multi-tool rather than single functions – one device can emit LED light to boost collagen production, EMS (electric muscle stimulation) for skin sculpting, as well as electroporation – electrical pulses that increase skin permeability to boost product absorption. ‘Not every innovation translates globally,’ evaluates Dr Hall. ‘But the speed of iteration and consumer responsiveness in Korea remains striking.’

The price of perfection

Behind the cutting-edge formulas, however, Korean beauty culture has been at the sharp end of some controversy. One of the most widely promoted K-beauty ideals is ‘glass skin’ – a complexion so smooth, luminous and reflective that it appears almost translucent. On TikTok, #GlassSkin has accumulated over 3.9 billion views, but not everyone is convinced the trend radiates healthy ideals.

‘The concept of glass skin is fundamentally flawed,’ argues consultant dermatologist Anjali Mahto, who sees the trend contributing to rising levels of skin anxiety. ‘Skin is a living organ: it has pores, texture and fine hairs, and isn’t supposed to look like a pane of glass. A lot of what people see online is lighting and heavy layers of occlusive products [waxy or oily balms that seal in moisture – a heavy-duty example being Vaseline],’ she explains. ‘It can look beautiful under a ring light, but it doesn’t necessarily reflect what healthy skin looks like in real life.’

What glass skin does reflect is a glimpse of South Korea’s ultra-demanding appearance norms. An intensity around beauty has driven extraordinary innovation, but its development exists in a societal framework that places undiminishing emphasis on looks. Frequently described as the plastic-surgery capital of the world, South Korea has one of the highest numbers of cosmetic surgeons per capita. ‘Procedures [such as double-eyelid surgery to create larger-looking eyes] are commonly gifted at graduation, CV photographs are frequently required in job applications and expectations of grooming remain high,’ details Dr Hall. Factor in a highly competitive education system, in a country with one of the highest suicide rates in the developed world, and beauty standards exist within a broader culture of performance pressure.



'Gifting surgery to teenagers normalises invasive procedures'

While Dr Mahto sees both the UK and South Korea suffering from a homogenisation of beauty, where a single, specific facial template is idealised, she believes Korean standards exacerbate the pressure to conform. 'Gifting surgery to teenagers normalises invasive procedures as a prerequisite for adulthood and professional success,' she believes.

Elise Hu, a journalist and author who vocalises such appearance pressures in her book *Flawless*, points out that the country's global beauty success is also deeply tied to economics and national branding – rather than simple product efficacy. The South Korean government has actively supported K-beauty as part of its cultural export strategy, recognising its potential to boost the country's global influence via a form of 'soft' power. Which, pardon the cynicism, means that aforementioned second viral Korean beauty trend – the double-digit skincare routine – may not have your skin's best interests at heart, but is instead keeping company bank balances in plump health. 'K-beauty became synonymous with the 10-step skincare routine, but this is an American marketing term developed to upsell products. Ask a Korean person and they won't know what you're talking about,' debunks Dr Hall.

Raising the barriers

While questions remain over the forces propelling Korean skincare to global prominence, there are small signs of attitudes to aesthetics evolving. Feminist movement 'Escape the Corset' encourages Korean women to reject rigid beauty expectations by cutting their hair short and abandoning heavy make-up routines. Dr Hall sees it as a generational shift creating a 'conversation around autonomy and self-expression'.

She also believes, as do the dermatology experts *WH* spoke to, that Korean routines are worth exploring for one fundamental reason – their refreshing approach to the skin barrier. 'While western skincare spent the past decade aggressively exfoliating with strong acids, K-beauty focused on deep hydration, calming inflammation and barrier repair,' she says. It's why many purveyors of Korean skincare argue its real innovation is a philosophical one – skin health above quick fixes.

The outermost layer is your skin's first wall of defence against pollution, bacteria and dehydration. Picture skin cells as the bricks, with lipids and proteins the mortar holding everything together. 'If that barrier becomes damaged,' says Dr Hall, 'moisture escapes and irritants get in, leading to inflammation, sensitivity and breakouts.' Western skincare often goes straight for the jugular by resurfacing with retinoids and acids. Korean routines prioritise hydration and repair: the herb Centella Asiatica (or cica), ceramides, ginseng, the humectant beta-glucan (found in yeast, bacteria and oats) and even snail mucin are used to soothe, strengthen and support. For anyone with sensitive skin, or who has pushed their barrier too far, this approach finally takes the sting out of the industry.

Even Korean formulations that do include exfoliating acids, retinoids or vitamin C are intentionally gentle. 'They are effective, but often slower-acting,' notes Dr Hall. A philosophy called 'slow ageing' – which prioritises constant hydration and gentle, consistent routines to build a strong skin barrier rather than erase every wrinkle overnight – is so popular that retailers in Korea, such as Olive Young, dedicate entire sections of stores to it.

Ultimately, trends such as glass skin are indicative of skin-based appearance pressure that's playing out wherever you are in the world. But there's a straightforward lesson that South Korea gets 100% right: healthy skin first, everything else second. Ultimately, K-beauty's brilliance lies not in hype or spectacle, but in its commitment to long-term skin health – a philosophy that, in a world awash with gimmicks, is worth remembering.

The micro-step K-ROUTINE

You don't need 10 steps when Korean skincare is so efficient that it pioneered the concept of hybrid products – serum and moisturiser, plus SPFs with skincare benefits. Try these smarter buys

1

The liquid microneedle

Erborian Ginseng Micro Shot, £42

Containing 150,000 microneedles that help to funnel Korean red ginseng extract deep into the skin, after three days' use, clinical tests show that collagen levels are boosted and skin appears smoother.

2

The salmon serum

Anua PDRN Hyaluronic Acid Capsule 100 Serum, £20

This highly restorative serum, containing PDRN (salmon DNA) and 3% hyaluronic acid, helps to plump lines and improve skin quality, with regards to hydration and elasticity.

3

The skin-boosting SPF

Beauty of Joseon Relief Sun: Rice + Probiotics SPF50+, £13.95

Infused with rice extract, a long-celebrated ingredient in Korea for its brightening and hydrating properties, this formula protects skin, enhances its natural glow and supports the microbiome via probiotics.

4

The barrier builder

Aestura Atobarrier365 Cream, £17

A saviour for dry skin, this mega-hydrator is powered by 1 million ceramide capsules and a delivery system that keeps essential lipids locked within gaps in the skin barrier, creating hydration that lasts up to 120 hours (five days).

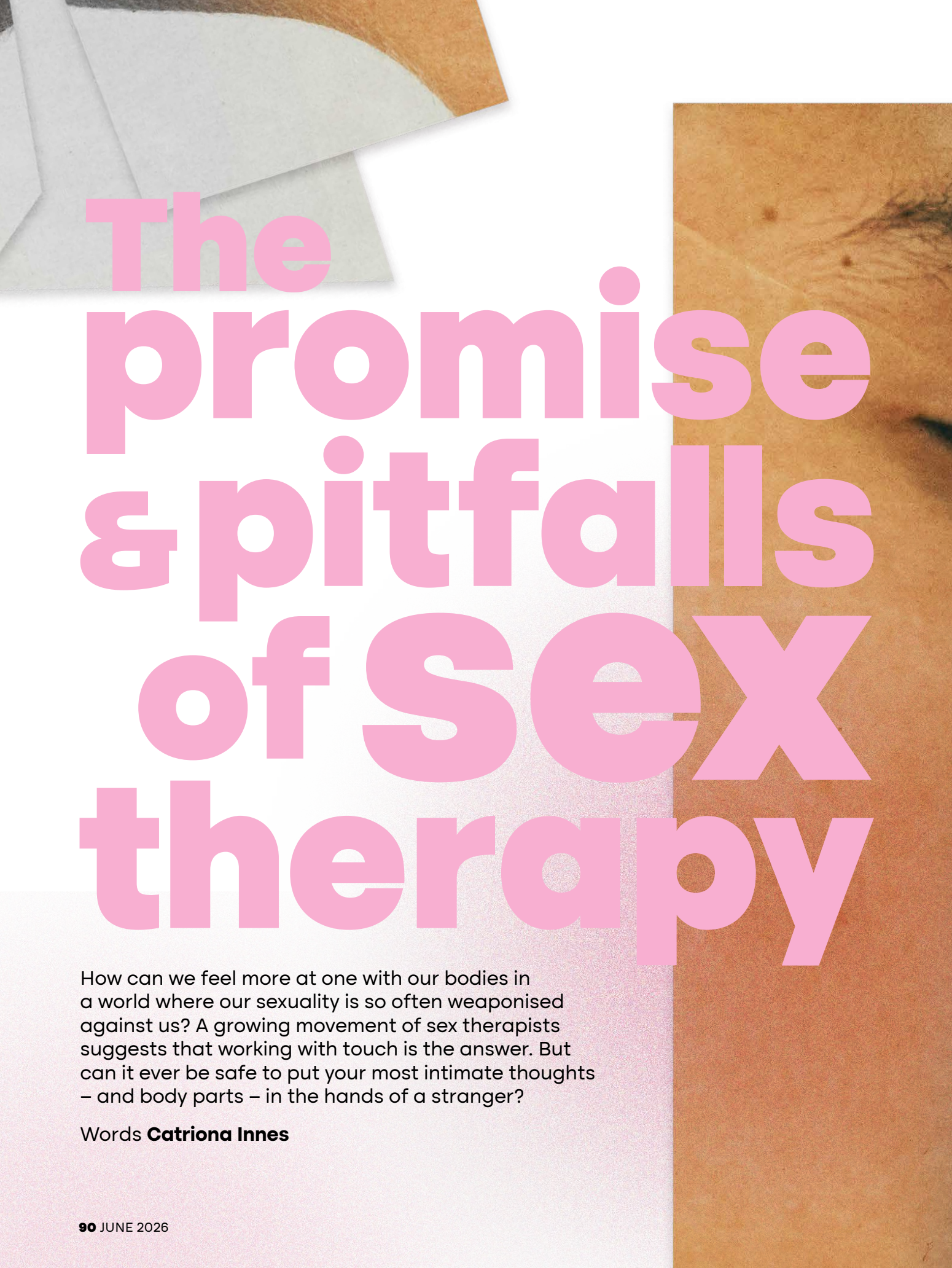
5

The multitasking gadget

Medicube Age-R Booster Pro, £289

Korea's bestselling six-in-one facial tool integrates microcurrent for firming, EMS for sculpting, LED light to boost collagen production, sonic vibration for relaxation, electric needling to improve elasticity and electroporation (electric pulsing usually only seen in clinics) to increase product absorption.



The background of the page is an abstract composition of layered textures. On the left, there are overlapping pieces of light grey and off-white paper. On the right, there is a vertical strip of brown, wood-grained paper. The main title is printed in a large, bold, pink sans-serif font, centered across the middle of the page.

The promise & pitfalls of sex therapy

How can we feel more at one with our bodies in a world where our sexuality is so often weaponised against us? A growing movement of sex therapists suggests that working with touch is the answer. But can it ever be safe to put your most intimate thoughts – and body parts – in the hands of a stranger?

Words **Catriona Innes**



In a five-star hotel room, Chiara* lies on a massage table, her body under a soft white sheet. The 30-year-old financier from London isn't about to get a massage, but she is here to be touched. The woman in the room with her this afternoon is a confidant Chiara turned to hoping to address a growing sense of disconnection from her body. And together, in this space, they're beginning to make breakthroughs. But while their

discussions pay dividends, sometimes, Chiara needs the therapist to go further. That's when she instructs the woman to put her hands on her.

'At first, she was holding my hips,' Chiara recalls of their most recent encounter. 'Then, gently, she began to penetrate me [with her fingers], going slowly, before going deeper.' As Chiara focused on the sensations, the woman told her to listen to her body, before asking her, 'What would you like?' Never in her life had Chiara known how to answer this question. But in that hotel room, after months of work, she did. 'I came to the realisation that my body held power and I was in control of it.'

If you feel like you've walked in midway through a Channel 4 reality show with a splutter-your-tea-out volume of nether regions, let's consider the origins of bodywork. You probably know what a sexologist is: a professional with whom you talk through sexual issues. Adding a somatic element – meaning 'of the body' – involves a therapist sourcing information from the body, sometimes through touch. If the body keeps the score, this technique 'reads' what the body is trying to say.

The helping hands that enabled Chiara to no longer feel 'as if my vulva was a separate part of myself' belonged to Aisha Paris Smith, a London-based sexological bodyworker and somatic sex coach. Around a third of her sessions involve touch-based coaching – a hybrid form of healing where sex and therapy work in symphony. 'Many people's early experiences of their body are being told they shouldn't explore themselves – and that shame gets stuck in the body,' she explains. For those who've suffered trauma, Paris Smith believes bodywork practices offer 'the opportunity for awareness of sexual sensation, safely'.

Lending a hand

Reasons for seeing a sexological bodyworker vary as much as the people seeking support. Some, such as Chiara, seek help for healing; others for anxiety or shame surrounding sex, trouble reaching orgasm or physical issues such as vaginismus (pain on penetration).

The work is associated with yoni massage – an ancient tantric vulva massage designed to release tension, awaken sexual energy and promote healing. But while yoni massage practitioners typically lead the touch, sexological bodywork is self-led, meaning the practitioner works with your desires. Neither are regulated by law, nor do they have statutory governing bodies in the UK – though sexological bodywork has accrediting organisations. It means the legal position can sometimes be hazy. With yoni massage, it depends whether the practice is framed as therapeutic or sexual, while sexological bodywork is legal as long as the practitioner doesn't focus on sexual pleasure.

Formalised as a discipline in 2002 by sex educator Joseph Kramer, somatic-sexual therapy is gaining a mainstream audience. Perhaps the most famous example is Gwyneth Paltrow's 2021 Netflix series, *Sex, Love And Goop*, in which we met, among others, couple Camille and Shandra; Camille struggled with body image and had difficulty verbalising her desires, while Shandra was raised among Jehovah's Witnesses, who told her that sex was bad and lesbianism 'gross' – shame that manifested as pain during intercourse. During somatic therapy, we saw Shandra weep when she finally felt safe enough to receive penetrative touch without pain (via the therapist's gloved hands). In the UK, topping the list of shows you don't want to watch with your parents is *Virgin Island*; so intriguing was the use of somatic bodywork to help unblock the intimacy barriers of 12 adult virgins that an average of 1.4 million viewers tuned in per episode, making it one of Channel 4's biggest hits of last year.

So why the collective curiosity around an alternative approach to sexual wellbeing? Look no further than society's screwed-up messaging. Businesses are lining up to sell women orgasm-boosters under the umbrella of self-care – stimulating a global sexual

'My body held power and I was in control of it'



wellness market set to reach \$110.33bn (around £81bn) by 2030. And yet, the knowledge gap surrounding women's bodies means nearly one in 10 British women still find sex painful; the reasons behind this have scarcely been researched. Consider, too, the horrifying reality that one in four women will be raped or sexually assaulted – with shamefully low rates of charges and convictions for perpetrators feeding a sense of injustice. Is it any wonder, then, that when it comes to our sexual selves, women are venturing outside conventional circles?

Grey area

'They're told to push through the pain,' says Emily King, 'that their body is the problem, penetration the goal.' The Edinburgh-based somatic sexologist and bodyworker tells *WH* that many of her clients have gone through multiple rounds of traditional NHS psychosexual therapy before coming to her. Her sessions – 'led from a place of safety, pleasure and exploration' – explore a client's history with sex and their body. Results can be transformative. Stephanie Seymour sought somatic sexology and holistic pelvic care with King to understand why she'd suffered from recurrent UTIs since childhood. The pair have two separate sessions – one surrounding pelvic care (involving touch) and a sexology session, where they talk. 'The sessions translate into each other,' the 30-year-old feminist life and career coach says. 'Physically, as I know when a flare-up is coming and what to do, but I also know how to advocate for what I want during sex now.'

But if this therapeutic work represents a salvation to some women, not everyone shares that perspective. Take the situation in Scotland, where there's been a recent push to clamp down on sex work by implementing the Nordic Model (so-called because it was instituted in Sweden in 1999 and Norway in 2009), which criminalises the purchase of sex services. The objective is to abolish the industry, yet sex workers argue that more restrictive laws would simply drive it underground, increasing risk – which is why many organisations supporting sex workers' and human rights are against it. The bill, which would also have repealed the existing offence of soliciting for sexual services, was rejected by the Scottish Parliament in February, by a vote of 64 to 54, but intense debate remains – and while somatic practitioners aren't sex workers, the conversation is affecting their work, from how they advertise to how they're viewed if anything happens on a job that they need to report to the authorities.

The legal grey area also means the industry is ripe for exploitation. As King puts it, 'Ninety-five per cent of clients tell me they feel broken. And if you feel broken, you feel desperate – just think how easily manipulated you can be.'

God complex

In recent years, grim stories have exposed exploitation. In the mid-2000s, OneTaste was *the* trending sexual wellness firm, which hosted 'orgasmic meditation' classes that involved the clitoral stroking of partially nude women – often by clothed men – in front of a paying audience. Suss, surely? Yet everything was thrown at delegitimising doubts: a wellness-orientated name, a female founder and an aggressive marketing strategy. Ultimately, founder Nicole Daedone was sentenced to nine years in a US prison. Last year, Daedone and OneTaste's former sales director, Rachel Cherwitz, were found guilty of forcing OneTaste members – many sexual trauma victims – into sex acts in order to obtain 'freedom' and 'enlightenment'.

'The industry is facing a reckoning,' explains sex coach and sexologist Lucy Rowett. 'There's always been a whisper network [within the industry] of "this person is dodgy, stay away from them".'

Still, abuse accusations haven't always resulted in repercussions for the accused. Take Agama in Thailand, the world's biggest tantric yoga school, which closed in 2018 after *The Guardian* published allegations of yoni massage being used to rape and abuse 14 women over 15 years. Sixteen former pupils and staff alleged that Agama was a sex cult. A year later, Agama reopened – with the accused leader still appearing to be involved. (Agama Yoga denied the claims, saying the school doesn't offer yoni massages or group sex rituals. 'Agama Yoga is a spiritual university whose core principles are rooted into the authentic yoga tradition,' read their statement to *The Guardian*. 'Sexual tantra is a limited part of the authentic tantric tradition and a limited part of our teachings. It is clearly separated from the main curriculum.')

Saskia Mahler, 34, went to Agama aged 22, after escaping an abusive relationship. '[I was told] the only way to heal myself after domestic abuse was with yoni massage,' she recalls. 'There was no explanation of what was going to happen.' The practitioner, she alleges, directed her to the bed. Then, during the massage, he told her he could only reach a certain point with his finger; that the 'perfect instrument' God had given him was his 'Lingam'. His penis. 'And then he was on top of me.' It was only months later, while recounting the experience to a girlfriend,

that Saskia landed upon the language for what had taken place. 'She said to me, "Girl, you've been raped."' (In response to the allegation, Agama said in a statement that "yoni massage" is not an activity advertised, promoted, or taught by Agama.)

Body politics

For those within the industry, it isn't hard to see why the conditions are ripe for abuse. 'It's very easy for the idea of being a "sexual healer" to go to your head,' says Rowett, on her belief that bad actors working within

flimsy regulations can develop a God complex. 'In traditional therapy, you're taught about erotic transference, where a client might feel attracted to you. For touch-based therapies, it's not the same training and abuses are committed when this dynamic goes unchecked.' The fact that many somatic practitioners aren't equipped to handle clients' complex needs, particularly in trauma recovery, adds another layer of vulnerability. 'The experience of every sexual survivor is different, but trauma can affect survivors



'All bodies work differently – we offer help on your terms'

in the long term, which is why the right therapeutic path is essential,' says Jennifer Cirone, director of services at Solace Women's Aid, adding that many survivors experience flashbacks; these can occur even when being touched in a safe setting by someone they trust.

The problem is magnified when practitioners promote the healing benefits of their work – not because they're trained, but to legitimise themselves. Doing so, experts tell *WH*, could result in PTSD emerging from their touch, an outcome they're not trained to be able to respond to. Take vaginal mapping – a

technique used during sexological bodywork that involves gently touching points in and around the vulva to see how the client responds. 'Working with trigger points can bring up a sensation or memory,' says King, whose professional background is in gender-based violence. 'So, if you don't have the resources or capacity to support the client, it [can be] retraumatising for them. I was working with trauma for four years before I started touching bodies. But I've seen online courses that teach you how to touch in and around the vagina.' The result is that the UK's College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists advises against sexological bodywork in its code of ethics.

That the industry needs regulation is a point of consensus among the experts *WH* spoke to for this piece. But what that regulation might look like – and who would be consulted

to create it – is harder to untangle. It means that, for now, the onus remains on those seeking out sexological bodywork to keep themselves safe (see below for expert-led guidelines). For Saskia – who's since earned qualifications and now works with yoni massage – a safe approach is one in which women are guided on how to touch themselves. 'It's the safest, most efficient way for women to reclaim their power,' she says, adding she wishes more practitioners would focus on giving women literacy about their bodies. King agrees. 'The body is a very protective, very intelligent mechanism,' she says. 'Unless you're working with it and listening to it, you're going to be in constant conflict.'

Both are clear that when touch is administered professionally, in line with a client's consent and in response to their individual needs, it can deliver benefits beyond the physical. 'It's been as much a journey of reconnecting to myself sexually as it's been learning how to listen to my body in all aspects of my life,' explains Chiara about all the ways this work has helped her. And more than the ability to put you back in your body in the moment, perhaps it's this that explains why women are turning to this work right now. 'So often, women are told, "This is how your body works,"' says Paris Smith, of a culture in which women's symptoms are routinely dismissed and research is conducted on men. 'But all bodies work differently – and what we do is offer help on your terms. The whole point is for you to live a more sexually expressed and empowered life, with what *you* like, not what anyone tells you to like.' As far as sexual liberation goes, that sounds like the finishing touch.

Where to seek sexual support

Struggling when it comes to intimacy? These are safe places to turn

Medical or psychological?

'If the former, seek advice from your GP or at a sexual health clinic,' says Hannah Jackson-McCamley, a psychotherapist. The latter? A psychotherapist or counsellor can help.'

Official channels

'Look at directories, such as the one compiled by CORST[®], for accredited psychosexual therapists.' See Pink Therapy for specialists in gender, sex and relationship diversity.

Do solo work

Jackson-McCamley, a Counselling Directory member, advises sourcing further clarity from books. She recommends Emily Nagoski's *Come As You Are* and Dr Karen Gurney's *Mind The Gap* to clients.





Is Pilates coming for your muscle?

Influencers who once pushed the health case for lifting heavy are dropping down to 1kg dumbbells and Pilates-only routines in a bid to shed their muscle. As 'bulk' is vilified, writer Chloe Gray asks why size – not what you do with it – has returned as the latest fitness obsession

I spot her on my Instagram Explore page: tiny dumbbells in her palms, elbows pulsing in and out against the sides of visible ribs. The small waves of muscles in her arms are dappled in light from the Pilates studio window. Her body is petite and lean – exactly the type I idolised when I was younger, and one I feel embarrassed to say I’m still envious of now.

‘No one talks about how hard it is to lose muscle and debulk after years of heavy lifting,’ reads the video’s text. Some comments call it out as osteoporosis propaganda, but many others laud the leanness. Intrigued, I scroll her profile. To 37,000 followers, she posts videos on Pilates mats and reformer beds accompanied by stories of losing weight. Just over a year ago, though, she stood next to weights 10 times the size. The captions have been deleted, but the photos follow the iconography of gym creators who share their highest number of barbell squat reps and how empowering it feels to carry your own body weight.

This lifting-to-Pilates pipeline is something you’ll probably recognise from your own For You Page or interactions. The same people who used to preach about building flex-worthy muscles are not only backtracking on their advice, but claiming those heavy-metal routines damaged their health, hormones and hotness. Now they’re all about ‘debulking’, rationalised by an assembly of modern-day wellness terminology – that it’s anti-inflammatory, de-stressing, de-puffing and regulating.

If the inclusion of women’s weightlifting in the 2000 Sydney Olympics spearheaded the female resistance-training revolution, social media raised the game. By 2014, YouTube gym girls such as Grace Beverley, Krissy Cela and Alice Liveing went viral for their bodybuilding routines while kitted out in Gymshark Scrunch Bum leggings, and the #strongnotskinny hashtag hit its peak. Academic research gave the movement fierce legs as it confirmed the health case for women needing muscle. When the menopause industry boom posited muscle building as an effective strategy against loss of bone density, the intergenerational female fitness dialogue flexed away from cardio and yoga. Before long, experts promoting strength training had become the new influencers; take Dr Stacy Sims, who reaches over a million followers on Instagram. The UK population listened and lifted: in 2000, only 10% of women regularly strength-trained, according to Leeds University research. By 2024, that number had risen 170% to 27%.

But fitness crazes cycle like fashion trends, and Pilates – the 80s’

favourite of an older, richer demographic – pulsed back into the spotlight around 2020. ‘There was a post-Covid moment of embracing gentle exercise instead of CrossFit (and the like), probably because everyone was stressed and didn’t want to be stressed from exercise as well,’ reasons writer Mikala Jamison, whose *Body Type* Substack examines cultural influences on body image. Pilates became ClassPass’s most-booked workout in 2023, 2024 and 2025 – and bookings still rose by 66% last year, bolstered by new branches, such as Lagree and Hot Pilates. With poster girls Hailey Bieber, Kendall Jenner and model Lori Harvey praising the workout, the Pilates Princess aesthetic was born – class-to-matcha matching sets, dainty equipment and a lean physique dubbed ‘Pilates Body’.

Like for lithe?

After being drawn to the weights room over 10 years ago to build strength, I’ve recently added Pilates staples such as clamshells and roll-ups to my routine of split squats and hip thrusts. The change came from injuries (I started running and picked up joint niggles that Pilates’ moves promised to aid) but curiosity, too. Friends started telling me how their bodies were responding better to lighter, higher-rep workouts. I also noticed that the influencers who’d previously preached their love of lifting were transitioning away from the gym.

Zoe Antonia, a creator with nearly 400,000 TikTok followers, documents her physical changes since quitting the gym for low-impact workouts. The videos of PT Adriana Blanc, who has a 300,000-plus audience on Instagram, detail how transitioning from lifting weights and HIIT to Pilates and strength training has reduced her appetite, puffiness and body fat. At the more extreme end, Riley Jourdan, a gym-quitting TikToker with over 40,000 followers, has ‘helping girls debulk’ in her bio.

I’m not alone in noticing these ‘Likes for lithe’ stories. Hannah Cartwright, a 28-year-old nutritionist from London, was sold



‘I recover better and I’m **not getting that** wired-but-drained feeling’

on the purported anti-inflammatory benefits of Pilates. Suffering from endometriosis and PCOS, both inflammatory conditions, she found intense strength sessions or doing HIIT several times a week left her ‘inflamed, puffy and exhausted’. Two years ago, Hannah switched to Pilates via the wellness app she co-founded, The Aloha Girls. Today, she does three to four Pilates classes a week, plus one strength session. ‘My energy is more stable, I feel less inflamed and my core strength has improved massively. I’m also recovering better and not getting that wired-but-drained feeling.’

While Hannah was chasing feeling better, 33-year-old Rebecca MacSwiney, a consultant from London, was interested in physical changes. Inspired by influencers raving about Pilates, three years ago she swapped running and weights for three reformer classes a week. ‘I’m naturally very muscular, particularly my legs and arms, and I didn’t like how big they grew with higher-impact training. The language of Pilates – toned, lean, long – were things I’d always aspired to be and a big reason behind making the switch.’ At first, some of her muscular body parts shrank. But the ‘success’ didn’t last. ‘I hit

a plateau where the promised weight loss and muscle toning stopped; I’d even say I gained weight. I also really missed the endorphins from getting my heart rate up.’

The science of sculpting

Created by Joseph Pilates in 1918 to rehabilitate injured soldiers, Pilates was originally named Contrology because it was built to develop mindful control of the body. Since then, the practice has been plucked apart, redeveloped and reimagined, but the set-up is the same: high repetitions of body-weight or lightly loaded movements, focusing on core muscles and mobility. ‘Pilates is about stabilising small muscles – control, precision and coordination involving neuromuscular activation (mind-to-muscle connection) and body awareness. Weight training, on the other hand, focuses on the muscle’s ability to overcome a specific external load,’ explains Pilates instructor and PT Rachel Lopez.

According to Strava’s Year in Sport Trend Report 2025, 38% of women are still scared to lift weights because of the much-maligned idea of getting bulky. While much viral content implies there are two types of muscle – the lean type developed by Pilates and the big, bulky type built from heavy weights – there is, fundamentally, no difference in how muscle is built. Both lifting weights and Pilates strengthen muscles because they work the body against resistance. ‘To effectively increase muscle size or strength, you need to push a muscle close to failure, where it can no longer withstand more resistance,’ says PT Sam McGowan, who’s so concerned and frustrated about the trend for criticising weights-based workouts that she’s made YouTube content debunking the myths. ‘A “worked” or “failed” muscle breaks down and

rebuilds in the same way whether you're pulsing through high reps or lifting a heavy barbell three times,' she continues. Arguably, though, it's easier to achieve muscle growth with weight training because you can exhaust a muscle faster with a 40kg bar than a 1kg dumbbell.

PT Laura Hoggins, a competitive weightlifter who took up Pilates two years ago, explains there are physiological reasons why people might report physical changes when switching workouts. 'In Pilates, less muscle damage might lead to less water retention, glycogen depletion and short-term inflammation, compared with intense weight training,' she says. It's why for Hannah, with pre-existing inflammatory conditions, too much weight training could feel stressful.

But experts are convinced that the much-hyped 'Pilates body aesthetic' isn't solely a result of the discipline. Ironically, the chiselled physiques of former gym-loving influencers probably result from muscle built while weightlifting. 'How much muscle someone has typically comes from their history of movement, genetics and body fat,' explains McGowan. 'Would these people be as lean if they never had a lifting background? It's possible. But they're far less likely to have the amount of muscle that gives the lean and long look people associate with Pilates influencers.' Jamison agrees that the Pilates Princess physiology is something of a myth. 'A lot of women who are already tall and thin, or who were dancers, do Pilates and talk about its benefits, but I see [their physiques] as more of a correlation than a causation.'

Don't move a muscle

But if scientific evidence supporting strength training hasn't U-turned (arguably the opposite), why are women no longer in the market for

muscle? 'People gravitate towards forms of movement associated with the currently rewarded physique,' confirms Phoebe Gray, a PT and psychologist researching body image within exercise environments. It's no coincidence, then, that gaining muscle found favour against a backdrop of body positivity, and Pilates is thriving in the GLP-1 saturated era.

Politically, too, the Pilates Princess trope leans into resurgent ideals about the gentleness of womanhood, while the sinister idea that smaller is better can be interpreted as a determination to control our size in the world. 'The rise in Pilates can be seen in relation to the movement to the right: the tradwife wellness

aesthetic and the push away from masculinised activities,' believes Dr Bethan Taylor-Swaine, a sociologist at The Birkbeck Sport Business Centre who specialises in representations and identities of women in sport.

Praising fat loss is a familiar chokehold, but some lifting-to-Pilates content encourages muscle atrophy – the wasting away of muscle tissue. Atrophy won't just shrink your size, though. Muscle is arguably the most protective organ in your body: against heart disease, cancer and diabetes, as well as improving mobility and metabolism. A study of 22,000 people found that muscle mass in participants' arms and legs correlated with mortality – those with the most muscle lived longer. On the other hand, many creators who quit lifting explain that they simply don't need their old level of muscle mass to function well.

'When we normalise women getting smaller by intentionally losing muscle, we're encouraging women to undo one of the best things for long-term health. Wanting a certain look is human,

'Being strong isn't a gym phase, **it's a health strategy**'



but being strong isn't a gym phase, it's a health strategy,' says McGowan. We lose muscle with age anyway – from 3% per decade over 30 – due to reduced activity, hormonal changes and anabolic resistance, where the body becomes less efficient at repairing muscle. At menopause, the sharp decline in oestrogen doubles the speed of atrophy (6% per decade) unless muscle is maintained or grown.

Which is why Hoggins believes it's so important to reclaim bulk through a neutral lens. 'My millennial generation has been constantly taught to shrink, but strong doesn't have to mean masculine – it means capable.' That proved true for teacher Christina Pina, 37. Feeling fatigued after years of lifting five to seven days a week, she switched to Pilates on influencers' advice. 'But after a few months, I noticed my clothes weren't fitting as well, my back ache hadn't improved and the results weren't what I was promised online.'

Disillusioned, she adopted a hybrid approach – a strength focus, with one Pilates class a week – and uploaded an innocuous TikTok video of herself loading heavy plates on to a leg press machine: 'Me back in the gym trying to undo what Pilates did to my body.' It went viral, racking up nearly 10 million views and a barrage of comments. 'People tagged influencers with stereotypical Pilates bodies saying they were proof that Pilates worked.

Some shared photos of their own Pilates transformations. Others told me I must be doing it wrong. I didn't intend for my video to be a Pilates versus strength-training war,' she says. 'But I think there is a misconception that there's one "Pilates body" everyone can achieve.'

The perfect rep

Christina's story makes a strong sell for the middle ground, and I'm with her. I've barbell squatted and C-curved through enough mornings to know that Pilates and strength training affect my body in complementary ways. Packaging them as rival strategies disregards the benefits of moving your body differently. 'There shouldn't be any lifting versus Pilates conversations because they can fulfil different purposes and, in the best case, be used alongside each other,' agrees McGowan. She's adamant that weights aren't responsible for the inflammation, tiredness and hormonal issues cited by many influencers – rather, they're a scapegoat for overtraining culture.

'Recent fitness narratives paint a picture of harder is better: more sessions, more volume, more load, more grind,' says McGowan. Aiming for maximum effort every session, plus under-fuelling, can cause hormonal and metabolic dysregulation, leading to changes in appetite regulation, menstrual cycles and stress responses. 'A lot of women aren't reacting to lifting,

they're reacting to poor programming, recovery and fuelling. Inflammation, stress and being constantly hungry are all signs of overtraining,' McGowan adds.

Meanwhile, Hoggins, as a competitive weightlifter, is eager to put the misconception of bulk to bed. 'It genuinely takes years of progressive overload to build large amounts of muscle. You don't accidentally bulk up,' she says.

Today, Christina, Hannah and Rebecca agree that the best results come from listening to your body (not the internet) and not obsessing about pitting one discipline ahead of another. They all now mix low-intensity movement with lifting weights – tailored around enjoyment, other stressors in their lives and pre-existing injuries. Looks, it turns out, are the least relevant part. 'On reflection, there are more important factors for training than the aesthetic side, like ongoing functional benefits for later life,' says Rebecca.

Gray recommends choosing trainers and instructors who focus on performance and body connection. 'Curate your social media feed so you're following fitness content creators who've also moved away from a heavy focus on appearance-related outcomes of exercise.' As for me, I suggest you shift your curiosity away from whether an activity will make you bulky, to why the idea of bulkiness is so terrifying at all.

5 Pilates moves to build muscle

It turns out there's a best of both worlds. These five moves are Pilates instructor Rachel Lopez's favourite strength-builders

1

The hundred

Lie on your back, legs in tabletop position (with a 90-degree angle at the hips and knees). Extend your arms forwards, then lift your head, neck and shoulders off the floor. Pulse your arms up and down an inch for 100 reps.

2

Glute bridge

Lie on your back with bent knees and your feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart. Press through your heels and lift your hips, creating a straight line from your shoulders to your knees. Squeeze your glutes at the top, then slowly lower back down.

3

Plank

Begin in press-up position. Put your forearms down on the mat, stacking your shoulders directly over your elbows. Hold your body in one long line from your head to your heels. Engage your core and glutes with hip level and hold.

4

Teaser

Lie flat on your back with your legs straight and arms overhead. Lift your head, neck and shoulders off the floor while bringing your arms to your side. At the same time, lift your legs to a 45-degree angle. Hold for a breath, then slowly lower.

5

Swan dive

Lie face down with your feet hip-width apart. Place your hands next to your shoulders, with elbows close to your ribs. Inhale to lift your chest. Exhale to extend your arms overhead. Rock forwards to lift your legs, then back, lifting your chest; repeat.



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Why Alpine is the new Med

If your holiday GPS navigates you to the Med on autopilot, we have important news: summering in the mountains is the latest wellness flex. From the Canadian Rockies to the Swiss Alps, three writers make the case for why 'rise and climb' is the new 'fly and flop'





Italy

What: High-altitude hiking with Alpine wellness

Where: Courmayeur and La Thuile in the Aosta Valley

How much: Rooms from £225pn; montanalodge.it/en, grandhotelcourmayeurmontblanc.it/en

Who: Hattie Parish, senior health and wellness ecommerce editor

High-altitude hiking sounds intense...

A stone's throw from Chamonix and nestled beside Switzerland, this is mountain wellness at its best. Hiking, cycling, rafting and horseback riding are all on the menu, the snow making way for wildflower-carpeted hillsides served with a generous dose of Alpine air. If you're a 'fly and flop' type, look away now. But if getting your blood pumping in nature is your idea of a reset, read on. The Aosta Valley makes up just 1% of Italy's territory, yet houses 40% of its biodiversity; take it in via the Rutor Waterfalls trail. A guided hike takes you along tree-lined paths and crystal-clear rivers, casting rainbows through their spray, to three thundering waterfalls fed by the Rutor Glacier. The word 'breathtaking' gets

thrown around a lot, but here it truly applies, especially as you cross the final bridge above the tallest cascade, the cool spray hitting your skin and delivering a nervous-system reset.

And when I'm not walking up a mountain?

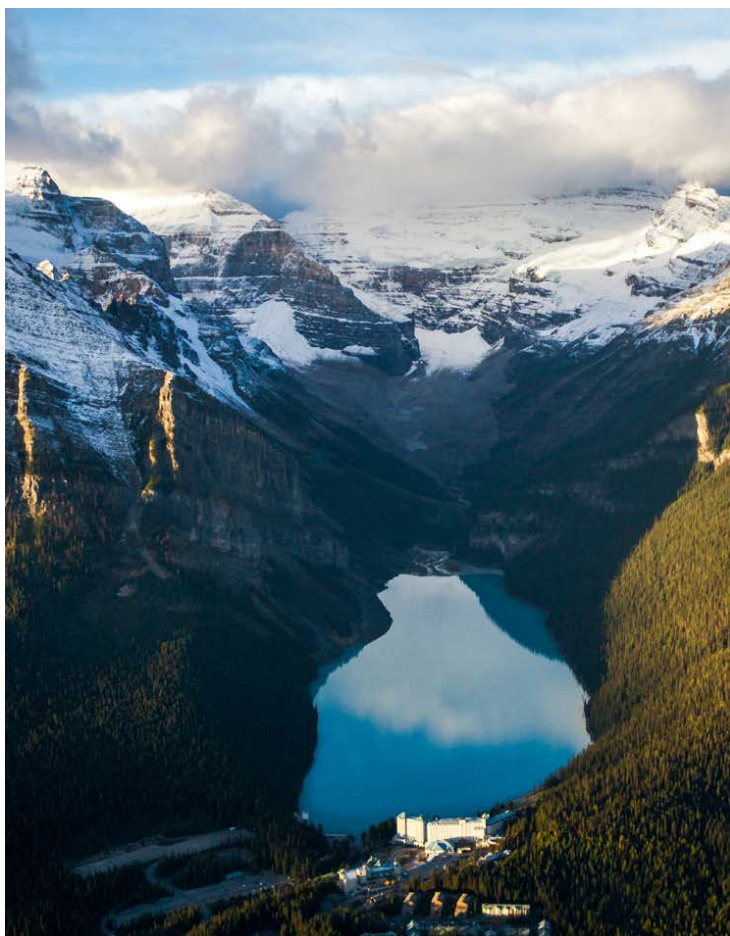
When your calves are begging for mercy, head to the Pré-Saint-Didier thermal baths. Naturally heated springs flow from the mountains at around 37°C, while an outdoor plunge pool sits at a bracing 15°C – both ideal for muscle recovery. For a taste of a typical Alpine winter, take the Mont Blanc Skyway cable car 3,466m above sea level. Up top, clouds swirl theatrically around the French and Italian Alps, sunshine dances off snow and the scale of it all is sincerely humbling. Refuel with fontina fondue and a glass of red, before heading back down. Oh, and if you're missing the pool, Piscina Alpina Plan Chécrouit, set 1,750m up in the Courmayeur Mont Blanc Funivie area, is a heated outdoor pool backed by sheer mountain rock. Loungers, umbrellas and that smug 'I'm swimming in the Alps' feeling included.



Clockwise from top left: Hattie hiking in the Aosta Valley; Piscina Alpina Plan Chécrouit; a Suite at Montana Lodge & Spa

Where am I staying?

Lean into Alpine charm at Montana Lodge & Spa in La Thuile, where cosy Nordic aesthetics meet Italian flair. Post-adventure, flop into the indoor-outdoor spa, hot tub or sauna, then refuel on trout ceviche or game pappardelle. Prefer something more polished? Grand Hotel Courmayeur Mont Blanc delivers mountain-chic interiors, a spa (sauna, Turkish bath, thermal tub, sensory showers) and Ayurvedic massages for post-hike dopamine.



Canada

What: Lake bathing in the Canadian Rockies

Where: Lake Louise

How much: From £276pn; chateau-lake-louise.com

Who: Emily Woodruff, sub editor

The Rockies? Aren't they a magnet for snowboarders?

Sure, the largest mountain range in North America is known for winter sports, but there's plenty to do when the mercury rises – and it does: highs in this region reach a balmy 22°C. I took the famous Rocky Mountaineer train from Vancouver to Lake Louise, passing tumbling waterfalls, cascading mountains and forest-laced ravines. On reaching Lake Louise, Fairmont Chateau's towers loomed large – it's the only hotel on the lake and there are eye-wateringly beautiful views from every window (the electric blue shrouded by mountains never lost its wow factor, no matter how many photos I took).

Sounds amazing, but what can I do there in summer?

Bathing in Lake Louise's mineral-rich waters is a highlight. I went on a sunrise meditative group walk, which ended with a dip. After a slow-paced stroll, listening to the crunch of each step, the guide from Fairmont Chateau encouraged us to slip off our robes and plunge into the icy water. The cold was so sharp it made me gasp, but focusing on my breath made the pain feel manageable – and the euphoria of running to the hotel's hot tub was like nothing I've experienced. Don't fancy taking the plunge? There's plenty to do, from guided hikes to e-bike tours and taking a canoe out to the water. But if it's restoration you're looking for, there's only one place for you.

So there's a spa?

Yes, but Basin is more than a spa. Extracted glacial-fed waters from the snow on the surrounding mountains go into steam rooms, hot tubs and

Clockwise from top left: Fairmont Chateau sits on the shores of Lake Louise; Emily after braving a cold plunge; rent a canoe from the Boathouse

plunge pools – supplying thermal mineral-rich waters directly to your body. Walking into Basin feels like stepping into another world; one softened with calming wave frequencies, inviting firepits and the cortisol-calming smell of essential oils, all framed by striking landscapes visible from almost every room. I was prescribed a cleansing trail: a sequence of hydrotherapy, sauna, waterfall shower, aromatic steam room, hydro pool and salt relaxation. That Basin is a tech-free zone means you'll be asked to leave your phone in your locker. If I was disappointed that I couldn't capture the mountain-view infinity pool, the feeling didn't linger for long. Some 15 minutes later – the view etched on to my retinas – I was ready to leave it there.



Switzerland

What: Cycling and sailing in the Alps

Where: Saint Moritz

How much: From £550pn; Grace La Margna (gracehotels.com)

Who: Georgea Evans, WH contributor

Saint Moritz? Isn't that where billionaires ski?

Granted, it's giving glamazons in salopettes, but it hasn't always been that way. Saint Moritz was originally a summer hotspot, but in 1864, hotelier Johannes Badrutt made a bet with English tourists that if they returned in winter and didn't like it, they could stay in the hotel for free. He won the bet – and Saint Moritz lost its summer holiday clout. Now, they want it back. And with its Alpine air, awe-inducing vistas and effervescent energy, you can understand why the locals breathe a sigh of relief when the snow melts and they get the place to themselves.

Okay, so I'm not skiing. What else am I doing?

You'll start by getting on your bike. We hired e-bikes (£45 for half a day and £65 to £95 for a full day) to explore Alpine trails – the key detail being 'e'. It means you can power up slopes with enough left in the tank to take in the views while you're at it. Cycling not for you? Take a guided sailing tour on Lake Saint Moritz (from £130 per hour; maximum of five people per boat). The lake freezes over every winter, when ice skating is the main attraction, so the ability to explore it by boat feels like Saint Moritz's best kept secret.

And where am I staying back on dry land?

The Grace La Margna hotel is one of only a few luxury hotels that stay open year-round – and with eye-watering views over the lake from the rooms, it isn't hard to see why. That it's a stone's throw from



Clockwise from top left: Georgea explored Alpine trails by e-bike; Stüvetta serves everything from Swiss classics to salads; the Junior Suites come with a lake view

the station also makes it a breath of Alpine air to weary travellers arriving from the airport. And if you're floored and awed by the Wes Anderson-esque exterior, the wonder continues inside. Walking into the granite spa is like being transported into another world, an afternoon nap in the sprawling bed will be some of the best sleep of your life and the wood-panelled Stüvetta Moritz is featured in round-ups of the best restaurants in the world. If it's good enough for the 1%...

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Can you find 'wellness' on a family holiday?

Travel goals once fell into parallel universes – an off-grid restorative wellness retreat *or* a family holiday with a soundtrack of pool squeals. As one resort claims to have nailed both, *WH* editor-in-chief Claire Sanderson reports from the sunlounger

It's not your typical school run when the transportation stops to pick up more passengers in the Bahamas. Yet my children – Zak, 13, and Nell, 10 – are the reason we're waiting for the day's second flight, having already clocked up nine hours

from the UK. Yes, while the Caribbean might be a world away from the kinds of places I visited in my youth, a resort in Turks and Caicos claims to have found the elusive solution to keeping wellness-seeking adults and action-minded kids in holiday heaven.

In-flight (again) towards Turks and Caicos – the British territory of 40 coral islands clustered in the Atlantic – the ocean shifts to a shade of cerulean so vivid that, to view my Instagram Story, you'd assume I'd used a filter. I'm here to visit Beaches Turks and Caicos – specifically, to sample its hybrid hospitality model of entertainment and activities delivered alongside the kind of disconnection that this corner of the Caribbean specialises in. A waterpark spanning 45,000sq ft has the kids covered, but can I really hope to find solitude in a resort with 900 rooms?

I get my answer the following morning when, en route to the gym, I get lost in the landscaped gardens. It's easily done. For those like me who pack their trainers before their toothbrush, the fitness offering is impressive. There are two gyms (you can see where I went wrong) and alongside a rotating schedule of classes you'll find volleyball, tennis



Far left: Beaches' stunning coastline. Left: Claire soaking up the sun. Above: the waterpark is what kids' dreams are made of. Right: Claire and Nell enjoy some time together

There's movement without pressure, indulgence without excess

and pickleball. A family lesson in the latter becomes a holiday highlight and by the end of the week, my husband, Dan, and Zak, are playing matches daily.

If the scale of the place makes navigation a challenge, it's also the reason it never feels crowded. The 12-mile beach is expansive enough for solo swims, while the pools combine lively energy with cortisol-calming corners. We travelled in low season, which made it even quieter (although the tropical storm made for a lively 24 hours).

They say it takes a village, and Beaches is divided into six of them.

The newest is Treasure Beach – a fresh £113m expansion, accommodating families of up to 10, that opened in March this year. We stayed in a two-storey suite with sea views and butler service in the Key West Village. Having our own butler took adjusting to as a family used to doing everything ourselves. At first, it felt indulgent, but by booking restaurants and activities, the butler service removes all the low-level admin that's a hallmark of the family holiday, making it a genuinely useful way to switch off.

Speaking of, there's plenty more where that came from over in the

spa, where the pace feels decidedly slower. My massage was head-and-shoulders above most, but the peace lingered longer than the essential oil – a peace enabled by the fact that Zak and Nell were otherwise engaged; joining football matches, pool games and spending time with new friends.

The fun continues in the evenings. From stage shows to silent discos, there's always something going on, but you never feel pressured into joining in if what you're craving is some quiet time. That the resort boasts 20 restaurants also means you can spend a week here and never eat the same thing twice; we fell hard for the French fine dining at Le Petit Château, while my kids' review of Arizona's featured the phrase 'the best burgers ever'.

In the end, the scale that at first felt daunting quickly became part of the experience, and after a full week there were still corners we left unexplored. In fact, the word that best sums up how it feels to holiday here as a family is that clichéd wellness byword: balance. There's movement without pressure, indulgence without excess, time together alongside individual space. Every generation left feeling so restored that we're already planning our return.

A seven-night stay for two adults and children (aged 2-11) at Beaches Turks & Caicos, in a Key West Oceanview Two Story, Two Bedroom Butler Suite from £21,449. Price is valid for arrivals between 22 August to 14 November 2026 (subject to change and availability)

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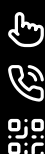
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WH PROMOTION

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WH PROMOTION

REST AND RESTORE YOUR GUT, AND GET YOUR ENERGY BACK; A LOOK INSIDE MY NEW PROGRAM.

For many women, gut problems take away more than comfort; they drain energy and confidence. Issues like perimenopause, menopause, IBS bloating, SIBO flare-ups, unpredictable bowel movements, food intolerances, brain fog, tiredness after meals, and side effects from weight loss drugs such as ongoing nausea and sudden trips to the bathroom can be linked to gut dysbiosis. Imbalances in gut bacteria can quietly affect mood, hormones, and well-being.

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After 12 weeks, you can expect more regular bowel movements, less bloating, steady energy, better nutrient absorption, stronger immunity, and long-term resilience. Many clients also notice clearer skin, better focus, and easier digestion as their bodies adjust.

Jayne is a Registered Clinical Nutritional Therapist who combines insights from functional testing with practical self-care advice. She is also a Nourish Awards Judge, which keeps her informed about which supplements work. If you're a Women's Health reader, you can book a free 15-minute Gut Restore Assessment to discuss your symptoms and claim 10% off her Gut Rest & Restore programme. Call Jayne if you're ready to start; she can discuss your issues, explain more about the process, and share her availability.

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REIKI LOVE AND SHINE

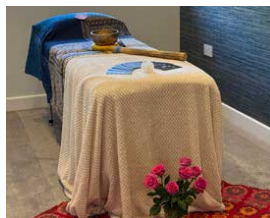
In today's busy world, peace can feel out of reach, but for many, it begins with Reiki. As a Reiki Master Practitioner and holistic therapist, Varsh Mistry is devoted to guiding others on their healing journey. As the founder of Reiki Love and Shine in Hall Green, Birmingham, she creates a peaceful, heart-led environment where true transformation can begin. Her personalised Reiki sessions, offered both in person and online, reach clients across the world. Varsh guides individuals toward emotional release, inner healing, and spiritual awakening, helping them reconnect with their authentic selves.

Through intuitive insight and gentle energy work, she encourages clients to let go of what no longer serves them, embrace balance, and step into a life of light, purpose, and inner radiance. Ready to reconnect with your true self? Begin your healing journey today and enjoy **15% off** your first session.



@VARSH REIKILOVEANDSHINE

reikiloveandshine@gmail.com



ESSEX'S BIGGEST WELLBEING SHOW RETURNS TO CHELMSFORD CITY RACECOURSE

The **Chelmsford Mind Body Spirit & Wellbeing Festival** returns on 6-7 June 2026, marking its inspiring 10th year at the **Chelmsford City Racecourse**.

Curated for women seeking balance, nourishment and meaningful escape, the weekend offers 115 beautifully selected stalls, serene meditation spaces, empowering workshops, soulful music and delicious, feel-good food. New creative zones and expert practitioners invite moments of calm, clarity and personal renewal. Festival organiser Chris Cozens describes the event as a warm, heart-centred space filled with uplifting energy and genuine community spirit, all supporting the Helen Rollason Cancer Charity. A restorative, soul-soothing weekend awaits.



For full details visit www.lifearts.co.uk
Scan the QR code to claim 15% off early-bird Gold Pass

WH PROMOTION

WHY WOMEN EXPERIENCE MORE INCONTINENCE, AND HOW TO HELP

More than 423 million adults worldwide live with urinary incontinence (UI), and women are disproportionately affected: over 25% of women experience UI compared with 5% of men. Several biological and lifestyle factors contribute to this difference, and understanding them is key to supporting women with UI.

Pregnancy and Childbirth

For over a third of mothers, UI is a natural consequence of pregnancy and birth. A growing foetus places pressure on the bladder, and vaginal delivery can weaken pelvic floor muscles. More than half of pregnant women report stress UI in the third trimester, and over 20% experience postpartum UI. The stigma surrounding leaks can make early motherhood more stressful, but research shows that regular pelvic floor muscle training during and after pregnancy can reduce symptoms.

Menopause

UI affects around 30.8% of older women, compared with 15-20% of older men. Hormonal changes during menopause, particularly declining oestrogen; can thin the urethral lining and weaken pelvic floor muscles, increasing the likelihood of leaks. Between 8% and 27% of menopausal women report UI. While oestrogen therapy can help, its limited, strategies such as pelvic floor exercises and avoiding tight clothing can help.



THE HEALTH &



Higher Risk of UTIs

Women are 30 times more likely than men to develop urinary tract infections due to anatomical differences. UTIs often cause urge UI, but symptoms typically resolve once the infection is treated. Preventive measures include staying hydrated, avoiding constipation and urinating frequently.

Supporting Women with UI

UI can lead to social withdrawal and mental health challenges, but compassionate support and the right products make a meaningful difference. iD offers discreet, highly absorbent solutions such as iD Discreet pads and pants, designed to help women manage UI comfortably and confidently.

For more information visit
[id-direct.com](https://www.id-direct.com)

SUPPORTING CALM, CONFIDENT EARLY PARENTHOOD

The early weeks of parenthood can be wonderful, but they can also feel lonely, exhausting, and overwhelming. Between broken sleep and the pressure to "do it all right," many parents simply want to feel calm, confident, and connected to their baby.

That's why **Juniper Wellbeing** was founded in 2017. Based in Cumbria, we offer baby massage and baby yoga sessions designed to nurture both baby and parent. Through gentle touch, guided movement, and practical techniques, babies are supported with digestion, sleep, and early development.



Having experienced the emotional challenges of early motherhood herself, founder **Giselle Nejady** understands how vital safe, supportive spaces are. Every session is small, welcoming, and relaxed, a place where parents can ask questions, share experiences, and realise they're not alone. Alongside baby classes, Juniper Wellbeing offers holistic therapies for women, providing restorative treatments that support relaxation and wellbeing for all ages. With in-person classes across Cumbria and online resources launching soon, more families will be able to access calm, professional guidance from home.

Take the first step in supporting your family's wellbeing.

Book a session or learn more at www.juniperwellbeing.co.uk

Follow on Instagram: [@juniperwellbeingandbabymassage](https://www.instagram.com/juniperwellbeingandbabymassage)

Follow on Facebook: JuniperWellbeingCumbria



FITNESS EDIT



PEACE+RIOT

Peace+Riot is childcare, reimagined.

Flexible, reliable, and playfully unique.

Supporting hundreds of modern families as well as London's most premium creches and members clubs. We're a perfect fit for modern families, keeping the chaos in check and making parenting feel a little lighter.

Not all families need traditional nannies. We get that. Ad-hoc, flexible and trusted childcare should come standard.



Whether you need a last-minute save or a long-term solution, we tick every box possible for parents.

Our team of Peacekeepers come from the world of theatre. As performers, storytellers and creatives, we have a natural gift to engage and inspire children. These combined traits are the magic that make outstanding, creatively led childcare.

We're aiming to solve the childcare gap with unparalleled creativity and laughter, one playful moment at a time.

Discover our world: www.peaceandriot.co.uk

Contact: hello@peaceandriot.co.uk



THE ONE SUPPLEMENT FOR FERTILITY & PREGNANCY

Packed with 16 ingredients, The One all-in-one daily supplement is expertly formulated by BBC Women's Health Doctor, Dr Ravina, for your journey to motherhood.

For just £1.52 a day you can get all your nutrients to help with trying to conceive, pregnancy and postpartum.

Science-backed ingredients including methylfolate, active CoQ10 and myo-inositol helps to support egg quality and reproductive health, particularly for women over 30 or those navigating PCOS, endometriosis, miscarriage or fertility treatment.

Vegan, gluten-free and carefully formulated for the female body. Join hundreds of happy couples.

Save 20% at theonelabs.co with code: WH20.

Limited time only.

WH PROMOTION

RETREAT YOUR WAY

A luxury retreat designed for driven midlife women who need a break. Menopause claims one in ten careers, don't become a statistic. Struggling with symptoms but still trying to do it all? Take a menopause break at my rural home retreat on the Ards Peninsula. Yoga, breathwork, massage, sauna, sea and CBT you choose the date, itinerary and food preferences. Come alone or with a friend navigating perimenopause too. Leave feeling refreshed and confident that you are in control.



Get in touch to plan your stay
<https://www.louisepitmanyoga.com/mindbodymenopause> or scan the QR code and follow me on Instagram



REPOSE PILATES RETREATS

Reformer and Pilates retreat in Spain, July 2026. Reset your body. Refocus your mind. Reignite your drive. A 4-night luxury retreat in a private Spanish villa. Daily mat Pilates & reformer sessions. Floating sound baths & spiritual healing. Slow, sun-soaked days, coastal walks & private chefs. Join us this July. Last few spaces remaining. **Scan to explore & book reposepilatesretreats.com**



THE HEALTH &

FIND YOUR WAY HOME TO YOURSELF WITH PSYCHOTHERAPY & YOGA

Life can feel overwhelming, and sometimes the support of loved ones simply isn't enough.

Kate Winter is an experienced psychodynamic psychotherapist and senior yoga teacher offering online sessions and in-person appointments in Lewes, East Sussex.

She works with women and gender-diverse people navigating anxiety, eating disorders, trauma

and major life transitions, combining compassionate talk therapy with supportive embodiment practices.

Kate's inclusive, non-judgmental approach helps you build a healthier relationship with yourself and others, creating space for meaningful, lasting change at your own pace.

Take the first step today and email kate@katewinter.co.uk to arrange your introductory session.



MEET YOUR NEW WELLNESS HOME

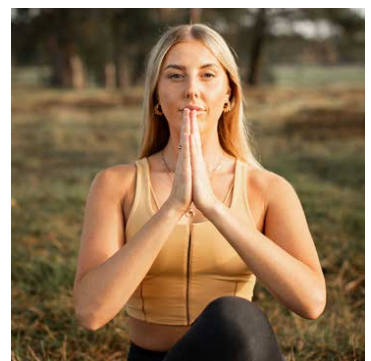
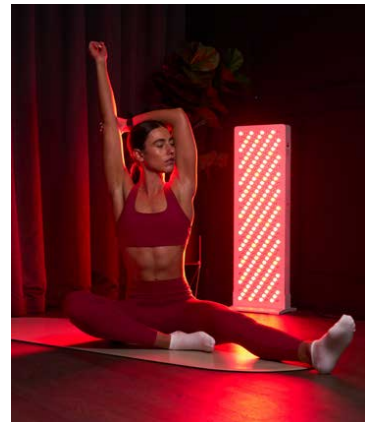
This May, Salt Studios opens its doors in Richmond and we'd love to welcome you in.

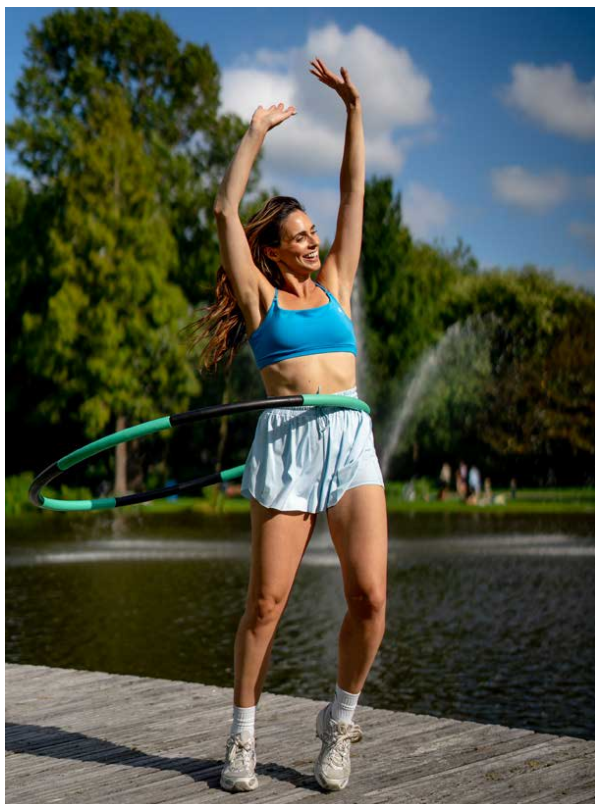
Alongside our main yoga & sound space, we're introducing a clinical-grade LED studio, where therapeutic light works alongside restorative movement to support recovery, relaxation and cellular health.

Blending ancient practices with modern science for next-level wellbeing.

To celebrate, we're offering Women's Health readers an exclusive £10 off their first LED yoga class* with code WOMENSHEALTH10.

Book at saltstudioslondon.co.uk
*Valid until 1st August.





GET YOUR HOOP ON

Hula Dancercise blends hula hooping with the energy of dance and the benefits of fitness to create a full-body workout that's fun, engaging, and accessible for all ages. Built on the core principles of coordination, rhythm, and community, it transforms movement into an uplifting experience that strengthens both body and mind. Whether you're a beginner discovering the hoop or an experienced mover looking for a fresh challenge, Hula Dancercise offers programs designed for personal growth and community engagement. Their instructor training programs empower passionate individuals to create their own entrepreneurial ventures with the support of the Hula Dancercise community. Alongside their programs, Hula Dancercise offers a premium range of weighted hula hoops designed for performance, comfort, and results. Each hoop is fully customisable to suit individual needs,



making it easy for anyone, anywhere in the world, to get started and keep moving. Ready to begin? Hula Dancercise offers a **FREE Hula Hoop Guide** on their website - your first step into a vibrant global community built around movement, wellbeing, and fun. **Save 30% on your first order at huladancercise.com with code: WH30**

FITNESS EDIT



THE PILATES SECRET TO AGELESS STRENGTH: HOW TO MOVE BETTER AT ANY AGE

Meet the Pilates expert who's helping women over 40 reclaim their strength, mobility, and confidence without the gym. Join Rachel Lawrence, Master Pilates instructor, on her popular YouTube channel, The Girl with the Pilates Mat where women in their 40s, 50s and beyond are rediscovering movement with confidence. Her online Pilates classes are designed for real bodies, adaptable for aches, stiffness, or post-injury recovery, and perfect for those who want to build strength, improve balance, and move with ease, all from home. With clear cues, gentle progressions, and no pressure, it's fitness that works with you, not against you. Ageless strength isn't a myth. It's just a click away. Scan the QR code to try one of her recommended classes. rachellawrencepilates.com



TRANSFORM YOUR HEALTH AND CONFIDENCE WITH LISA WARD

After a successful 32-year career in banking, Lisa Ward made a bold decision at 50 to follow her passion for health and wellbeing. Qualifying in nutrition and weight management six years ago, she now works one-to-one with women across the UK, delivering bespoke online nutrition coaching that truly transforms lives. Lisa's approach is simple and sustainable: no calorie counting, no macro tracking, no fads. Instead, she teaches women how to make healthier choices without giving up the foods they love. For Lisa, true success isn't just weight loss, it's confidence regained, energy restored, and women becoming happier, healthier versions of themselves.



Ready to start your journey? Contact Lisa today to arrange your personalised coaching: hello@lisawardcoach.com | <https://lisawardcoach.com> | Instagram: [lisa_ward_coach](https://www.instagram.com/lisa_ward_coach) | Facebook: [Lisa Ward Nutrition & Fitness Coach](https://www.facebook.com/LisaWardNutritionFitnessCoach)

WH PROMOTION

ELEGANCE WELLNESS STUDIOS

Offering you the foundations of wellness as you explore and nourish every part of you. Located in the heart of Ramsbottom, a town in the North West of England, EWS is a place to relinquish responsibility and develop soulful connections. Owner and founder, Leah Hauserman, has created an experience like no other where movement and wellness are used to celebrate our bodies as our greatest gift! 'Our classes encourage movement, based on respect, awareness and admiration for women's bodies to create our most powerful and authentic selves'.

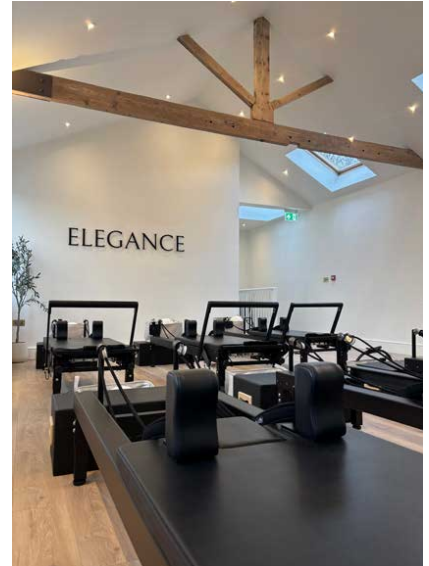
Studio offerings:

- Reformer Pilates
- Mat Pilates/Barre
- Hot Pilates & Yoga
- Red light therapy pilates
- Yoga
- Dance
- Wellness (including sound, reiki, meditation and breathwork).
- Skin therapies

EWS is more than a space for movement. It is a sanctuary designed for connection, growth and meaningful gatherings. We are a safe space where conversations flow, ideas spark and every event feels intentional, empowering and beautifully aligned with well-being.

You are warmly invited to EWS, where women from every walk of life can relax, reconnect and nurture their minds and bodies in a supportive and uplifting community.

Website: <https://www.elegancewellnessstudios.co.uk/> Instagram: [elegancewellnessx](https://www.instagram.com/elegancewellnessx)



THE HEALTH &



HIGH-ACHIEVING. HIGH-RESPONSIBILITY. COMPLETELY EXHAUSTED?

Burnout and menopause often collide at the peak of a woman's life and career. I offer personalised 8–16 week online coaching for burnout, menopause, and their intersection. Certified burnout coach. Menopause practitioner. Former headteacher of seven years. Lived experience of burnout and menopause. I promise you a confidential, safe space where we can work together so you can feel vibrant, confident and in control again. Book your free discovery call. 'Women's Health'



readers receive 10% off. Natalie Frost - Revive & Rise. Independent Researcher & Burnout and Menopause Specialist. Supporting women nationally through private coaching. **07518062447**
reviveandriseburnoutcoaching@gmail.com

WHY YOUR SKIN THRIVES ON DOING LESS?



Skincare has become overwhelming, but your skin doesn't need more — it needs what works. At SkinDose, we champion a minimal, evidence-led approach that supports barrier health and reduces unnecessary irritation. When you simplify your routine and focus on clinically backed ingredients, your skin has the space to repair, rebalance and thrive. Healthy skin isn't created by constant experimentation; it's created by consistency, clarity and understanding what your skin truly needs. Less noise, more results.

SkinDose Reader Reward — July 2026

Enjoy **20% off** a SkinDose Facial this July. Show your June issue of Women's Health and share it on social media to redeem. No additional vouchers apply.



Explore SkinDose's website and follow us on Instagram to discover more. www.skindose.co.uk @skindose_

EASE EVERYDAY ACHES NATURALLY WITH NURTURE MOBILITY LOTION



From Penny Price Aromatherapy Ltd, Nuture Mobility Lotion is a soothing blend of Rosemary, Sweet Marjoram, Juniper, and Lavender essential oils, carefully selected for their natural pain-relieving and anti-inflammatory properties. Designed to support easier movement, this fast-absorbing, non-greasy lotion helps ease stiffness, tension, and everyday aches. Ideal for morning discomfort or after activity, it works to promote comfort and mobility

throughout the day. Apply a small amount to the affected area whenever needed, though twice daily is recommended for best results. Originally blended for arthritis support, Nuture Mobility Lotion is suitable for all ages and perfect for soothing general aches and pains.

www.penny-price.com | 01455 251020 | Info@penny-price.com



RECLAIM | THE ALL-IN-ONE RECOVERY DRINK

Reclaim delivers the highest functional mushroom doses in any drink on the market with 1,500mg Lion's Mane and 1,500mg Cordyceps, plus 18 additional active ingredients in each can.

From post-training fatigue, 3pm office slump, busy working weeks or complicated morning routines, Reclaim simplifies recovery into one convenient and powerful can.

Built for recovery, it combines electrolytes, adaptogens, vitamins, nootropics and minerals targeted to support 4 main functions detoxify, energise, hydration, and replenish when your body feels depleted and run down.



Using organic coconut water as a base ingredient and Peruvian ginger for flavour, it's clean, low in sugar, and packs a punch!
From burnout to back on it

FITNESS EDIT



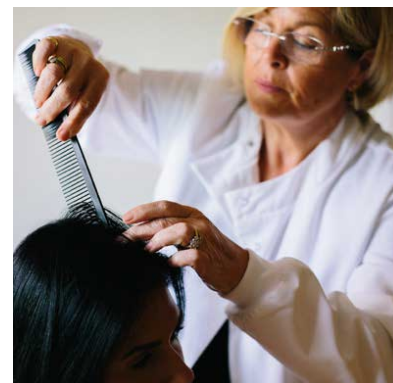
HEAD OFF PERIMENOPAUSE – NATURALLY

Noticing disrupted sleep, lost mojo, aching joints, anxiety or brain fog? Perimenopause can hit earlier than you think. At Cotswold Menopause, we specialise in helping women take back control with natural solutions tailored to busy lives. Through targeted nutrition, lifestyle strategy and expert guidance, we help relieve — often resolve — symptoms before they escalate. This is your opportunity to act early, feel informed and stay in charge of your health. Don't wait until you feel overwhelmed. *Perimenopause is more about your health than your hormones!* Visit cotswoldmenopause.co.uk today for trusted advice and practical solutions to help you feel like yourself again.



HAIR LOSS OR 'SHEDDING'? IT'S TIME TO SEEK SUPPORT FROM A TRICHOLOGIST

Eva Proudman FIT IAT (TV's "The Hair Loss Clinic") has been working for over 25 years as a leading expert in hair and scalp health. Eva is one of the UK's top trichologists, diagnosing and treating clients across her nationwide network of clinics for all types of conditions, including issues affecting women such as, "female pattern hair loss" and both post-partum & menopause-related hair loss



Eva has also developed a portfolio of award-winning hair retaining, restoring and treatment products (shampoos, conditioners, scalp creams and dietary supplements), including hero brand, Tricoextra and the new 'game changing' topical treatment for hair loss, TricoActiv+ For more information about Eva's range of products or to book an appointment, **scan here**





Age: 80 (on 1 May)
Job: Actor
Fitness MO: Cricket

Dame Joanna Lumley

As the national treasure reaches her ninth decade, she credits her growth mindset and playing the most British of sports: cricket

Value

I was a model when I was young, so appearance was important. Now, endlessly looking at yourself or at people who have used filters means you judge yourself against a false kind of beauty. My advice is to be sensible about it. Wash your face, clean your teeth and if, like me, you love dyeing your hair, dye it. But then forget it. I've met the most beautiful people in the world, and the ones who are truly beautiful are because it comes from the inside. A darlingness comes out of them.

Master

Every part I've played has challenged me in some way, and [even after acting for 50 years] I never think I can just cruise through it. I always start as though it's the toughest job in the world and investigate every part of the character. You must be a servant to the script and bring all you can to it. It's a lovely discipline and runs through everything in life, even humble things, such as sweeping a room or washing up. Do things properly, do things *brilliantly* – and life becomes pretty nice.

Move

From the age of eight, I've played cricket. It gets you moving. So, I'm thrilled to be Toyota's chief cricket officer; they're sponsoring clubs nationally to open to those who may have never tried it. Women's football and rugby are storming ahead – cricket is due its moment.

Explore

I was born in a suitcase, as it were, in Kashmir; then began travelling with my father's regiment, the Gurkhas. We went to Malaysia and Hong Kong, so I got a taste for travel being how you meet people and appreciate their cultures. Once you realise how similar we all are, it's heartening.

Nourish

I've been vegetarian for so long and I'm still firing on all cylinders. It used to be frowned upon in Europe, but I've been lucky to travel to countries where millions of people are vegetarian. That's when you discover the joy of spices and respect for the food you're eating.

Befriend

My rule in life is to think of who you'd like as a best friend. Someone who is always good-natured, trustworthy, wouldn't lie to you; is kind, helpful, supportive, generous and fun to be with. Then become that person. Be your own best friend.

Act

You learn a lot more about yourself by looking out instead of looking in. Volunteer, help people, learn new things and be grateful. Doing is better than sitting and brooding. Once you're happy, it spills out into others and often comes from giving.

Appreciate

I don't feel like my time is running out, but we've all got a lifespan, so I'm not going to waste a second of it. I want to learn more, read more, meet more people and have time for just being. Life is fabulous; the world is full of thrilling and good stuff. We've got to focus on that and not get dragged into the darkness.

Joanna has been appointed by Toyota as chief cricket officer to support Toyota's role as principal partner of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB)

Pregnacare®

FROM BIG PLANS TO TINY HANDS



Most trusted by mums, most recommended by midwives.†

Expertly formulated and trusted by generations of women, with essential folic acid, vitamin D and more.

Pregnacare - for every stage of your pregnancy journey.

From Boots, Superdrug, Holland & Barrett, supermarkets, chemists, health stores and [pregnacare.com](https://www.pregnacare.com)

*UK's No1 pregnancy supplement brand. Nielsen GB ScanTrack Total Coverage Value and Unit Retail Sales 52 w/e 04/10/25. To verify contact Vitabiotics Ltd, 1 Apsley Way, London NW2 7HF. †For more detail, please visit www.pregnacare.com/mostrecommended. Pregnacare contains 400µg folic acid and 10µg vitamin D, as advised by the UK Department of Health during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Folic acid contributes to normal maternal tissue growth during pregnancy.


VITABIOTICS



Never just a hike.

