

LIFE info

**Take the
cash challenge**
Eight ways to
quit smoking
Stop worrying!
Common weight
loss myths
... **and more!**



'Worry a little every day and in a lifetime you will lose a couple of years. If something is wrong, fix it if you can. But train yourself not to worry. Worry never fixes anything.' – Mary Hemingway

A few years ago, I wrote an article for another publication about the problem of 'psychic distance' – or, to say it in English, the fact that in the modern world, we are always several steps removed from everything essential to sustaining our lives and do very little for ourselves.

This concept comes from the philosopher John Lachs – not to be confused with John Locke – who wrote a book called *Intermediate Man*. If you give it much thought, you'll quickly realise that without the whole infrastructure that surrounds you – the ATM, Mastercard, British Gas, Sainsbury's, and so on – you would probably be unable to survive for very long, and however long you did live, you'd almost certainly be cold, hungry and miserable. Our food comes in boxes and tins and plastic wrap. Clean water comes from the tap. Heat, hot water and gas for the cooker come from . . . somewhere. You see where I'm going with this.

At university, my first roommate was a girl who longed to live off the land – to 'kill my own food' as she put it. She worried a lot about everything, including the possibility that the world was in fact a giant insect and all the trees were its hairs. I often laughed at her – but as I've grown older, I've been forced to admit she had a point in her desire to be self-sufficient. If left to my own devices, alone in the forest, I would not only have no idea how to go about killing my food, but if, by some freak accident I did manage to kill, say, a squirrel, I'd have no idea how to proceed with the eating part, and would probably end up burying the poor thing under a makeshift memorial fashioned of pinecones and wild flowers. When I wrote the article I mentioned earlier, I'd been thinking about all this perhaps too much. I was freaking out. 'I *do not* know how to make fire!' I wrote, as a sort of repeating motif throughout the piece.

Not long after, it was either Christmas or my birthday, and, as one of my gifts, my father gave me a small box. Inside was a tiny red folding knife, a block of magnesium and a note which read, 'Dear Becky, Now you'll be able to make fire. Love, Dad.' What you do is use the knife to scrape a small pile of magnesium shavings. Then you strike the knife against an attached piece of metal to produce a spark, igniting the magnesium. It burns at much higher temperatures than other materials, and provided you have something with which to feed the flame (sticks, branches) you can get a strong fire going. I keep both the knife and the block of magnesium on my key chain, along with my bicycle lock combination and my miniature Borders reward card. In the event of catastrophe, I'll be able to build a fire, lock up my bicycle and pick up some good reading material, making certain not to lose out on those valuable reward points. . . .

But mostly I keep the knife and magnesium close because they are a visual reminder of an important truth: there are solutions. Rather than worrying, we'd be wise to seek answers to help us put our minds at ease and get busy living! ☺

Becky

- 04 LIFE snippets**
Just a few bits and bobs about this and that . . .
- 06 No ifs, ands or butts: Eight ways to take control and stop smoking**
Seventy percent of the 13 million UK smokers say they'd like to quit. If you're one of them, Victor Parachin offers a few hints to get you started.
- 11 Fitness tip: Interval training**
Use short bursts of intense effort to maximise your workouts and burn more fat.
- 12 Deep brain stimulation**
Alice discovered she had Parkinson's disease at the age of forty-nine. Eight years later, she underwent dramatic brain surgery. This is her story.
- 16 Don't worry, be happy!**
Worry eats away at us, robbing us of peace of mind and joy. Angela Gray offers some suggestions to help you deal with a mind that just won't quit.
- 18 Horton hears a who!**
It's a kids' film, right? Based on a kids' book. Well, sure. But that doesn't mean it can't pack a powerful message that can make anyone think about faith and the nature of existence.
- 20 Downshifting**
Following on from last year's article *Slow Life*, Andrew Anderson investigates downshifting – who's doing it, how and why. And what can it teach us?
- 24 A day in a life:spa**
Karen Holford offers suggestions for a spa day with a difference. Not only will you feel revived physically, but these spa days are good for the soul, too.
- 28 The other woman**
Katy's husband has another woman – and, worst of all, she's a bossy Sat Nav who can never admit when she's wrong!
- 36 Bouncing through midlife**
While men are famous for their midlife crises, women are not immune.
- 40 Keeping your child safe on Myspace**
The internet offers many opportunities for children. It can also be dangerous. Here are a few tips to help you ensure your children behave sensibly on social networking sites.
- 42 Is religion dangerous?**
Since 9/11 it certainly sometimes feels as if religion is the enemy of happiness and free thought – but is it really?
- 46 The clothes show live**
One teenage girl's report on last year's Clothes Show Live in Birmingham. Check it out – you may want to attend this year.
- 48 To have or to be?**
Erich Fromm's famous book asks us to look at our orientation in life – are we geared to having and accumulating or are we able simply to 'be'?
- 50 Common weight loss myths**
You'll be surprised at the truth!
- 56 The cash challenge**
One woman and her family go without credit cards (cash only!) for Lent.
- 58 Tarte de Santiago**
Delicious almond tarte.
- 62 Crossword puzzle**
This one will test your general knowledge.

contents



THE SHOPPING TROLLEY THAT TELLS YOU WHERE TO GO

A shopping trolley that knows what shelf your favourite goodies are on and can tell you if you are eating unhealthily has been unveiled.

The MediaCart looks like a normal shopping trolley except for a 12-inch computer screen and small keypad.

Using technology from Microsoft, it contains a number of features that not only include locating items and checking prices, but also the ability to suggest recipes, show your previous shopping

lists and tot up your bill as you shop.

The American-made MediaCart, which could be in British supermarkets within a year, is being promoted as 'the next generation digital grocery experience'. Using wi-fi radio signals, like a laptop computer, the trolley can plot the most efficient route for your shopping trip, based on the shopping list you download. It also has voice-recognition technology that allows it to take instruction from shoppers.

'They would simply press the button and say, "Where's the cereal?" The trolley then shows its current location, the product and the best route there,' said a spokesman for MediaCart. 'You just find the barcode on the bottom of the product, scan it and it pops up on your screen; as you go around it will subtotal all the items.'

The MediaCart will advise on special offers, and personalised features – including diet checks and remembered shopping lists – are activated when a shopper inserts a store loyalty card.

But in case any shifty shoppers take too much of a fancy to the MediaCart, they should be warned – if it feels it is roaming too far from its home store it will phone for security assistance.

(Dean Murray, Rex Features)



© Rex Features

PILOTS RUN OUT OF FUEL, PRAY, LAND NEAR JESUS SIGN

WELLINGTON, New Zealand. Grant Stubbs and Owen Wilson, both from the town of Blenheim on the South Island, were flying up the sloping valley of Pelorus Sound when the engine spluttered, coughed and died. 'My friend and I are both Christians, so our immediate reaction in a life-threatening situation was to ask for God's help,' Stubbs told The Associated Press on Wednesday. After Wilson glided the powerless craft to a landing on the grassy strip, the pair noticed they were beside a 20-foot-tall sign that read, 'Jesus is Lord – The Bible.' 'When we saw that, we started laughing,' Stubbs said. (Associated Press.)



© www.istockphoto.com/Andrey Chimelyov

KITCHEN SAFETY

In London, more than half of all accidental fires in the home start in the kitchen. Nearly all of these involve the cooker. Here are a few simple rules to help you stay safe:

- Never hang tea towels on the cooker.
- Never leave the cooker alone when it is switched on.
- Make sure the cooker is turned off when you have finished using it.
- Don't let leads from other appliances like kettles or toasters trail across the cooker.
- Don't let fat and grease build up on the cooker, especially in the grill pan where it can easily catch fire.
- Never allow children in the kitchen unsupervised.

Source: www.london-fire.gov.uk



© www.istockphoto.com/Steve Dibblee

DID YOU KNOW?

It takes glass one million years to decompose, which means it never wears out and can be recycled an infinite amount of times.

Most lipstick contains fish scales.

Forest fires move faster uphill than downhill.

Source: www.strangefacts.com



TRAVEL DEFINITIONS

TERM	TRANSLATION
Old-world charm	No bath
Tropical	Rainy
Majestic setting	A long way from town
Options galore	Nothing is included in the itinerary
Secluded hideaway	Impossible to find or get to
Pre-registered rooms	Already occupied
Explore on your own	Pay for it yourself
Knowledgeable trip hosts	They've flown in an aeroplane before
No extra fees	No extras
Nominal fee	Outrageous charge
Standard	Sub-standard
Deluxe	Standard
Superior	One free shower cap
All the amenities	Two free shower caps
Plush	Top and bottom sheets
Gentle breezes	Occasional gale-force winds
Light and airy	No air conditioning

Source: www.gcfll.com

NO IFS, ANDS OR BUTTS

EIGHT WAYS TO TAKE
CONTROL AND QUIT SMOKING

Victor Parachin

Puffing of the smoke of tobacco one to another, making filthy smoke and stink thereof, to exhale athwart the dishes and infect the air, when very often men that abhor it are at their repast? . . . Have you not reason then to be ashamed, and to forbear this filthy novelty . . . a custom loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs?

(King James I writing in a 1604 essay titled *A Counterblast to Tobacco*)

The above quotation from King James I clearly reveals that as far back as the seventeenth century smoking was considered to be an unhealthy and unwise activity.





SMOKING PARACHIN

With the passing of time and the advent of modern science, overwhelming scientific evidence verifies the viewpoint of King James I. Smoking is believed to cause 114,000 deaths a year in the UK. That is about 300 people a day – many of them relatively young smokers. Of these deaths, about 43,000 are from smoking-related cancers and 30,000 from cardiovascular disease. Nearly 30,000 people die slowly from emphysema and other chronic lung illnesses.

Although smoking has declined by more than a million people in the past decade, there are still about 13 million smokers in the UK. And seventy percent of these say they'd like to quit! Experts say that not smoking, or quitting if you smoke cigarettes now, is the number one thing people can do for their health. Here are **eight ways** to quit smoking. By doing so you will take control of your health and your life.

In spite of all the scientific evidence about the dangers of smoking, most people who quit do so for very personal reasons.

Begin by repeating this sentence: 'If I quit now, I will live longer.'

Here is a simple but important fact: the body has an amazing ability to heal itself. For example, after fifteen years off cigarettes, the risk of death for ex-smokers returns to almost the level of people who have never smoked. Male smokers who quit between the ages of 35 and 39 add an average of five years to their lives. Females who quit add an average of three years. These are averages, but many people extend their lives by several more years when they quit smoking.

Do some research. Knowledge is power, and information can lead you to liberation. There are many excellent books available dealing with the dangers of smoking and how to quit. Do your own research and find books which 'speak' to you and relate most to your circumstances and personality. Visit a library or bookstore to look over some books. Bring them home. Read them, reflect on them, and then put the information into action. Philosopher Thomas Fuller observed: 'Action is the proper fruit of knowledge.'

Develop your own personal motivations for quitting. In spite of all the scientific evidence about the dangers of smoking, most people who quit do so for very personal reasons. A man may quit because he witnessed a beloved relative die from a smoking-related disease. A woman may quit because she is pregnant and concerned about the health of her unborn child. A recently retired man quit because his energy level was getting lower and lower. 'Knowing your own reasons for quitting – and remembering them when times get tough – will be a big help to you in becoming a non-smoker,' says Edwin B. Fisher Jr, PhD, in the *American Lung Association 7 Steps To A Smoke-Free Life*. Dr Fisher advises going through a list similar to this one and checking the reasons which would be most important to you:

- I will have more control over my life.
- I will be healthier.
- My heart rate and blood pressure will be lower.
- I'll save lots of money.
- I'm tired of smoky-smelling breath and clothes.
- I'll set a better example to my children.

- I'll have more energy.
- The chances of fire in my home will decrease.
- I'll lessen my chances of death from heart disease, chronic bronchitis, emphysema and cancer.

Add more reasons you can think of.

'Once you have made your list, study it for two minutes a day, every day,' he says. 'Keep adding to it as new reasons occur to you. Make this an active process, not just a crumpled list lost in a drawer. . . . Continue to collect reasons to quit. When you have an urge to smoke, ask someone for a reason to quit. Every time you hear one, add it to your list.'



Consult your doctor and other medical authorities. Make an appointment to see your physician, letting him or her know your plan to quit smoking. Most physicians are eager to support you in quitting smoking and can help you develop a programme which meets your unique personal and medical needs. A doctor can guide you through the various 'nicotine replacement' products currently available, such as nicotine patches, nicotine gum, nicotine nasal spray and nicotine inhalers. Some are available over the counter, while others require a medical prescription. If you are uncomfortable with drug therapies, many smokers have experienced success by using alternative therapies such as acupuncture.

Drop a bad habit but pick up a good one – exercise. Fortify your decision to quit smoking by taking up a regular exercise

programme. Many studies show there is a clear link between exercise and the cessation of smoking. In one study researchers tracked the progress of 281 women enrolled in a smoking cessation programme. All the women attended the same behavioural smoking cessation sessions. However, half who were chosen randomly also engaged in three vigorous exercise


workouts a week while the other women attended health lectures. The results were impressive. At the end of the twelfth week, twice as many exercisers were smoke free as non-exercisers. Additionally, the women in the exercise group had gained less weight. Researchers in smoking cessation believe exercise significantly aids efforts to stop smoking by:


- Building confidence and boosting motivation.
- Reducing nicotine cravings, especially in the early weeks.
- Cutting down stress while promoting relaxation.
- Improving moods which, in turn, reduces depressive feelings.
- Assisting in weight management, a concern for many who quit smoking.

Consider the experience of Judith Knauer, who wrote a letter to *Prevention* magazine in September 1978 saying: 'I am 45 years old, and I had been a smoker for 27 years. Since I began to jog in late November 1977, I haven't touched or wanted a cigarette. The mere thought of inhaling cigarette smoke, now, fills me with revulsion. I suspect that there is some biochemical or physiological connection between jogging (or running) and no desire to smoke.'




SMOKING PARACHIN

 **Focus on the positive.** Rather than thinking about how much you miss having a cigarette, remind yourself how great it is that you have made the commitment and have stopped smoking. Focus on how much better food tastes, how good it is not to wake up each morning coughing, how your breath no longer smells like smoke, how much healthier you are becoming day by day, how much better your complexion appears, that your teeth are whiter and your eyes brighter.

 **Don't hesitate to pay for help.** Counsellors and therapists offer ongoing classes specifically designed to help people stop smoking. These classes are usually highly effective but a fee is charged to attend. Don't be like some people who hesitate to pay for help to quit smoking. The modest fees charged will yield large and lifetime benefits. 'You may not want to pay for a stop smoking programme, but if you're a typical smoker, you're going to pay somebody,' Patricia Allison points out in her book *Hooked But Not Helpless*. 'Right now you're paying the cigarette companies. And what about the throat sweets, special toothpaste, sinus medication and nasal sprays? What about the extra cleaning bills and higher insurance rates? . . .

That's what smoking is costing you now. Doesn't it make sense to invest a modest sum now to save yourself thousands in the future? Money spent to stop smoking is an investment – one of the best you will ever make.'

 **Make plans to deal with the stress of non-smoking.** Beating an addiction is not an easy task. Be prepared to deal with the stresses connected to smoking cessation by making some advance preparation. The American Heart Association (AHA) offers these tips for handling the stress of non-smoking: 'Don't talk yourself into smoking again. When you find yourself coming up with a reason to have "just one", stop yourself. Think of what triggered you and come up with a different way to handle it. For example, if you feel nervous and think you need a cigarette, realise that you could take a walk to calm down instead. Be prepared for times when you'll get the urge. If you smoke when drinking, cut down on alcohol so you don't weaken your promise to yourself.' The AHA also suggest changing your habits. Instead of having a cigarette after dinner, go for a walk. Frequent places where there is no smoking allowed. Spend your time with people who don't smoke. Ask others to be supportive. ☺

The Skiing Accident



A husband and wife were skiing in Utah when the woman mentioned she needed the loo. Her husband, picking up on the urgency, suggested that since she was wearing an all white ski outfit, she should go off in the woods. No one would ever notice, he assured her. So she headed for the tree line, began disrobing and proceeded to do her thing – but she had the skis positioned the wrong way and soon the woman found herself skiing backwards, out of control and onto the ski slope. Her backside was bare, her trousers down around her knees, and she continued on backwards, totally out-of-control, creating an unusual sight for the other skiers. The woman finally collided violently with a pole and broke her arm.

In accident and emergency, a man with a broken leg took the bed next to hers.

'How d'you break your leg?' she asked, making small talk.

'Crazy thing,' the man said. 'I was riding up the ski lift and suddenly there was this crazy woman skiing backwards out of control down the mountain with her pants around her ankles, and her bare bottom hanging out. I leaned out to get a better look and I guess I didn't realise how far I'd moved. I fell out of the lift and broke my leg.'

The man paused and asked, 'So how d'you break your arm?'

 **fitness tip**

How interval training can burn **three times more fat in half the time**

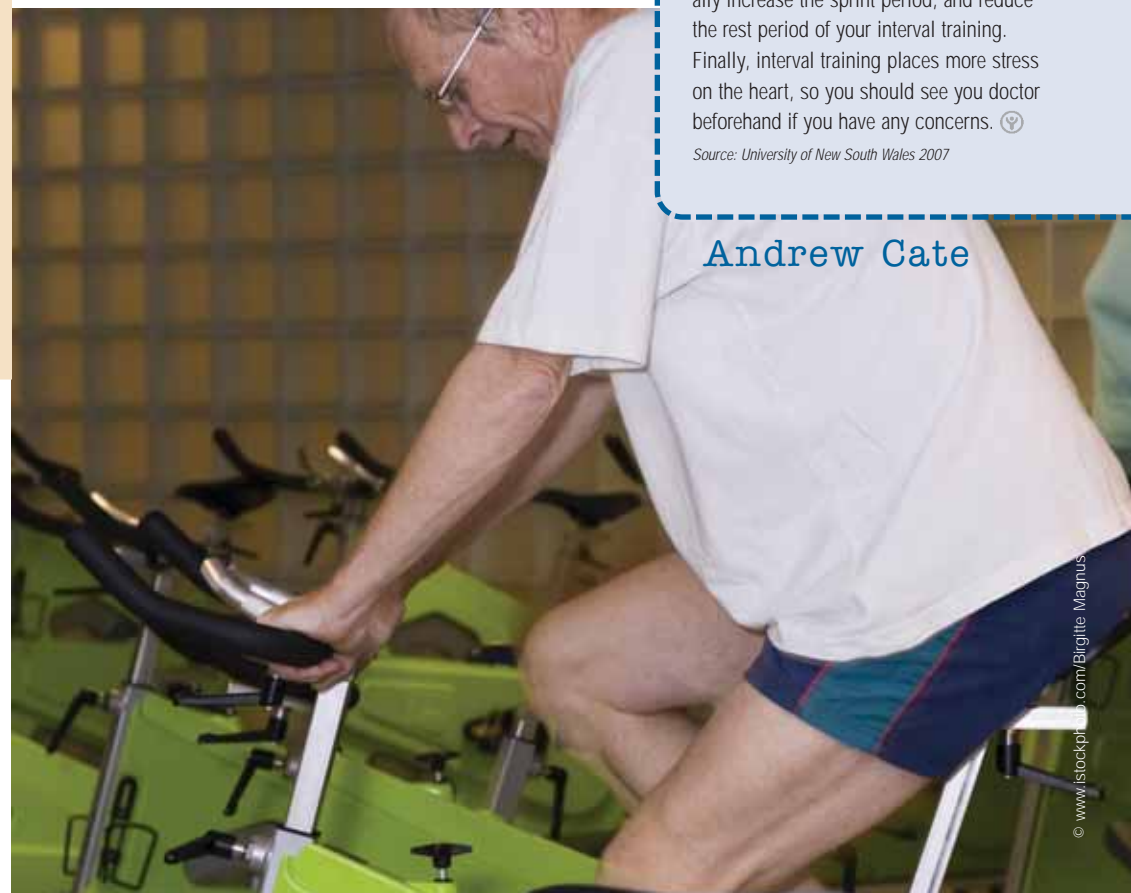
Interval training uses bursts of high intensity effort followed by recovery periods to boost dramatically the calorie-burning, fat-burning and fitness-increasing benefits of exercise. This was proven by a recent twelve-week study that compared overweight women who cycled at a steady, constant state for forty minutes with another group who cycled for twenty minutes. The twenty minute group performed interval training, using frequent, intense eight-second bursts followed by a twelve-second active rest. The interval group lost three times more weight. That's triple the weight loss in half the training time. Training at a much higher level of intensity (in small, tolerable doses) helps your body adapt to a higher level of fitness and stamina, especially if you have hit a plateau.

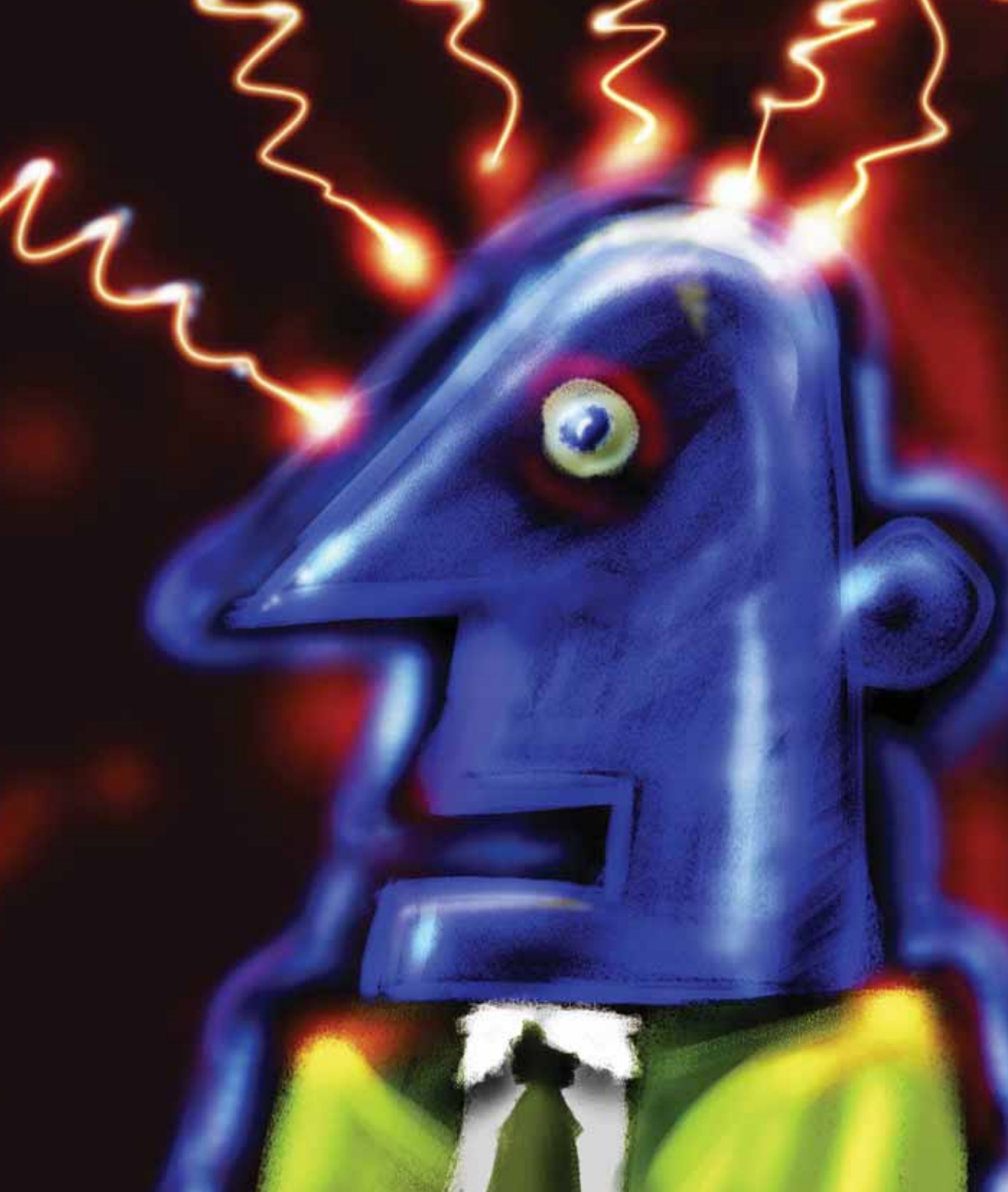
Implications

There are some important considerations to make when applying this information to your exercise programme. This study was conducted on unfit beginners on a stationary bike. These very short bursts of effort are better suited to exercise equipment, where you have a clock in front of you. It's not so practical to look at your watch every 8-12 seconds when you're walking or cycling outside. You will also need to adjust the ratio of work to rest depending on the activity. For example, walkers would need a shorter rest period than runners, because walking is a much lower intensity activity.

Swimmers might also find laps more practical than time. As you get fitter, gradually increase the sprint period, and reduce the rest period of your interval training. Finally, interval training places more stress on the heart, so you should see your doctor beforehand if you have any concerns. ☺

Source: University of New South Wales 2007

Andrew Cate



DEEP BRAIN STIMULATION

One woman's experience with a radical treatment for Parkinson's disease.

If the buzzing of a dentist's drill causes you stress, read this article at your peril. My adventure – having a neurosurgeon make holes in my skull using what appeared to be a £30 all-purpose household drill – may cause heart flutters.

What, you may ask, would drive an otherwise sane person to have such an odd thing done to her head? In my case, it was Parkinson's disease.

Late in 1996, I was diagnosed with this dreaded condition. An optimistic doctor advised me to continue working. I would be all right for about ten years, he assured me. I was forty-nine at the time – much too young to be afflicted by this 'old person's' disease.

In fact, I was not all right. I was very tired. My husband, Dave, was concerned about the way I walked. He noticed that my left arm had stopped swinging. I increasingly had more difficulty doing things that had previously been easy for me.

Eight years passed. It became appar-

Alice M. Crooker

ent that I was losing the 'all rightness' battle. Nothing worked properly. I went through a plethora of doctors and medications and misdiagnoses. Finally, I met a physician with vision. At our first meeting, he broached the subject of Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS).

My husband and I were aware of this procedure and hoped the new doctor would suggest it. Nevertheless, I was





BRAIN CROOKER

afraid to mention surgery. The last time I brought it up, I was told to see a psychiatrist to help me deal with the emotional effects of the disease, and that I was not ready for such a procedure. We were overjoyed when he told me that I was, in his opinion, an excellent candidate for the surgery.

The cost was daunting – in excess of \$100,000 (£50,000). In my case, the procedure consisted of two penny-sized holes drilled into my skull. Wires were then inserted in the *subthalamic nucleus* – the electric stimulation would diminish the disease symptoms – and were strung down either side of my neck and attached to pacemakers located in the chest wall.

Pre-surgery testing was extensive. There were memory tests and tests for cognition. I was given a series of numbers to repeat and then asked to repeat them backwards. I was told detailed stories and asked to repeat them as well, after which I was given true or false tests. The tests were disconcerting, but I managed to pass them all.

In order to operate, doctors must be able to see clearly the subthalamic nucleus. I was in the surgeon's office when I quipped, 'I certainly hope I *have* a brain!'

The doctor said, 'We'll see right now.' He turned on his computer monitor. Up on the screen came my beautiful brain. Much to my relief, the subthalamic nucleus was clearly visible on both sides – which made me eligible for the surgery.

My relief was short-lived. Enthusiastic as I had been, I began to worry about this delicate, complicated procedure. Questions of all kinds flooded my mind, and death became an obsession. Certain that I would

die on the operating table, I picked out a new spouse for Dave. He was not appreciative. I didn't know this at the time, but he was experiencing a great deal of stress also, even having panic attacks at work. He feared that the operation would be a failure.

Two days before the surgery, Dave and I went to the hospital to sign consent forms. We were horrified when we overheard a nurse mention that my surgeon had undergone an emergency appendectomy the previous Friday.

The news put us in a quandary. We were afraid the operation would be cancelled, yet feared having it proceed with a doctor who

I was in the surgeon's office when I quipped, 'I certainly hope I *have* a brain!'

might be working at less than a hundred percent of his usual skill level.

Relief came when we saw my surgeon standing upright and looking remarkably fit. He assured us that all was well. He would be ready to perform surgery on me in just two days – less than a week after his appendectomy. We were weary of waiting and convinced ourselves that the doctor appeared perfectly fine.

Two days later, our son Dan and his wife Stephanie arrived early in the morning. They were there to help Dave get me out of the house and into the car for the trip to the hospital.

At that stage of the disease, mornings were extremely difficult for me. Dave's first duty each day was to pull me upright into a sitting position and give me a handful of pills – the drugs that had helped control my



The author, immediately following her surgery – note the shaved head!

symptoms for nearly a decade, but were failing to have as much of an effect as they had done previously. After taking my medicines, I'd wait for about half an hour. Then I would be able to move – for a short time anyway.

I was instructed to take no medicine at all the morning of the operation. However, because of the severity of my condition, the doctor said I could sneak one pill. I decided against it. I had a single crack at the surgery and wanted to do nothing that might put its success in jeopardy.

Just prior to leaving the house, we received an important phone call. Our daughter, who lived in Hertfordshire, rang to wish me well and to inform me that both her place of employment and her husband's had prayed for me that morning – that the operation would be a success and that I would come through it well.

All of a sudden I felt as though I had the entire world on my side. Even so, I was so miserable without my medication that all I could say was, 'Murder, murder, murder!'

That didn't sit well with Dave. 'Can't you say anything more positive?'

I replied, 'Sorry, but I can't.'

Since I had been on medication more or less continually since my diagnosis, I hadn't



Two years later, the author celebrates her 60th birthday.

experienced the full severity of my Parkinson's symptoms untreated. My muscles were extremely rigid and I had muscle cramps. My left hand curled so tightly it was impossible to loosen my grip.

It was a major relief when I arrived at the hospital and was placed on intravenous relaxants. In fact, I became so relaxed I wondered why I was bothering with the surgery.

My sense of humour returned. Doctors swarmed around me and I decided to distract myself by telling them a joke:

'A doctor was testing three little old ladies for dementia. He asked the first lady, "What is 3 x 3?"'

"297," she snapped back.

'The doctor looked disappointed and redirected his question to the next lady.

'Her answer was, "Friday."

'He relaxed visibly when the third little old lady answered, "Nine."

"How did you arrive at that?" he inquired.

"It was easy," she said. "I just subtracted Friday from 297."

The first step in the procedure was the screwing of a halo – a metal contraption with spokes designed to keep the head immobile during surgery – into my skull. It was no fun at all. To my consternation, the doctors



angela gray

DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY!

When my 20-year-old son visited me last week, he was full of angst. He's self-employed and, with his current contract about to end, he had a bad dose of the 'Am I ever going to work again?' blues! Knowing how this feels, I sympathised but pointed out that he'd been in continual employment for over a year and his chances of finding something else were high. I could also sympathise with his worries over the surprisingly high electricity bill and whether he should go out with his girlfriend or his mates on a Friday night, but when he said he'd started worrying about his old age, I realised he was locked into the vicious worry cycle. . . .

We've all been there and know how unpleasant it is to lie awake worrying in the middle of the night. The worry cycle can be very hard to break out of, but it can be done. The trick is learning how to use our worries to find positive solutions to our problems.

► **DEFINE THE PROBLEM.** Sara suffers from chronic back pain and was particularly anxious about a forthcoming family gathering. Her 'worry list' was enormous but, on closer examination, centred on how she was going to keep her pain levels under control. Sara has found that lying down at regular intervals and having an afternoon nap are the best ways to manage her condition. She says that 'no one seems to understand that I need to rest and so I always try to appear as normal as possible and then pay for it for days afterwards.' Asked to write down her problem in one short sentence, Sara came up with, 'Denying my needs.'

When you've clearly defined your problem, the next stage is to ask:

► **IS THERE A SOLUTION?** Sometimes there is nothing that you can do about a problem. If you are worried about a visit to the dentist, but know that you have to go, then the best solution is to push the problem to the back of your mind.

For other problems, you need to let your mind wander, to sit down and have a brainstorming session where you are looking for as many solutions to your problem as possible. It doesn't matter how crazy your ideas might be – keep focusing on possible solutions and write them all down. If you find this difficult, you'll be glad to hear that research has found that we come up with more creative solutions when we've just done something which cheers us up. Take some time out – do something you enjoy and then return to the question in hand; Is there anything I can do about this? Try it. You'll be amazed at how many extra solutions you add to your list.

► **DECISION TIME.** You are now ready to move on. Select the most promising solution from your list and decide to act on it. The fact that you have a possible solution should immediately make you feel much better.

Sara realised that she wasn't doing herself any favours by 'soldiering on'. She decided that she would ignore any detrimental comments and put herself first. Rather than apologising or asking if it was OK for her to disappear for her afternoon nap, she very calmly said that her back was troubling her and so she was going to rest for an hour. To her surprise, no one challenged her; they seemed to respond to her more positive approach and, naturally, she had a much better weekend away.

Finally, it's worth bearing in mind that, as Susan Jeffers points out in *Feel The Fear And Do It Anyway*, 'over 90% of what we worry about never happens. That means that our negative worries have about a 10% chance of being correct!' So, as the song says, 'Don't worry, be happy'; you know it makes sense! ☺



BRAIN CROOKER (continued from page 15)

discovered its placement was crooked. The only thing they could do was unscrew it and screw it back again. Dr Nora, my surgeon, had told me it was the worst part of the surgery – a fact I can verify.

Next, the drilling began. I was on edge and the sensation of liquid running across my brain did nothing to calm me down. I peppered poor Dr Nora with questions. 'It is only water from my drill,' he repeated at each query.

Finally, the first hole was complete. I was not enjoying the procedure, as evidenced by my blood pressure hovering at 185 over 110.

Dr Nora sighed deeply and said, 'I can't enter her brain with her blood pressure this high.'

I started praying as I had never prayed in my life. It seems God heard me, because my blood pressure went down. They poked some wires in my brain and all of a sudden I heard static. Dr Roberts said, 'I think we are in the subthalamic now.'

Remarkably, my left hand relaxed and stopped curling. Dr Roberts asked me to recite the days of the week and then asked how many clocks I saw on the wall. He liked my answers so well that Dr Nora began drilling another hole. 'My, you have a thick skull!' he said.

'Thank you for that observation,' I replied. 'Now I will be able to explain to my friends and family why I am so opinionated.'

Finally, the surgery was completed. I was glad to be alive and was amused when they pushed me into a public elevator. The startled passengers gaped at me in horror. I could sympathise with them. My head was, after all, shaved and bandaged. I broke the ice by saying, 'Hello folks! I have just had a brain operation!' They responded by wishing me well.

I spent a night in the hospital and returned a week later to have transmitters implanted.

Unlike the first procedure, I was put under general anaesthetic and remained blissfully unaware of the details of the surgery.

Deep Brain Stimulation was a miracle for me. It reduced dramatically the amount of medication I take. I can walk unaided and can even drive a car again.

One side effect I have noticed: I am wary of drills – all kinds of drills. ☹



Facts about Parkinson's disease

- Parkinson's is a progressive neurological condition affecting movements such as walking, talking, and writing. It is named after Dr James Parkinson (1755-1824), the London doctor who first identified Parkinson's as a specific condition.
- In Parkinson's there is a loss of nerve cells in the part of the brain known as the *substantia nigra*. These cells are responsible for producing a chemical known as *dopamine*, which allows messages to be sent to the parts of the brain that co-ordinate movement. With the depletion of dopamine-producing cells, these parts of the brain are unable to function normally.
- The reason why the loss of dopamine occurs in the brains of people with Parkinson's is currently unknown.
- The symptoms of Parkinson's include tremor, slowness of movement (*bradykinesia*) and stiffness or rigidity of muscles. Other non-motor symptoms include sleep disturbances, constipation, urinary urgency and depression.
- Parkinson's is found all over the world. It is estimated that four million people worldwide have the condition.
- In the UK, one in 500 people, around 120,000 individuals, have Parkinson's.
- Statistically, men are slightly more likely to develop Parkinson's than women.



HORTON HEARS A WHO!


© 20th Cent. Fox/Event/Rex Features

Recently, it has become a trend in Hollywood to produce films reflecting remarkably religious themes. Films such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Lord of the Rings* and *The Golden Compass* have given us some insight into concepts such as salvation, the battle between good and evil and the afterlife.

The influx of films with religious undertones can further be seen in the recent Dr Seuss remake, *Horton Hears a Who!* The film follows an elephant named Horton, who discovers a microscopic race of people living on a speck of dust, and his struggle to preserve their world. In the face of ridicule and contempt from the other jungle animals, Horton tries desperately to save the tiny world he can only hear but not see. Similarly, the Mayor of Whoville (the tiny town on the speck) struggles to convince his people that their world is in danger and there is an invisible being out there somewhere (in the sky) who can save them. They can't see Horton, and the Mayor is the only one who can hear him.

Faith is one of the key religious elements of the movie. To quote the kangaroo, one of Horton's biggest opponents: 'If you can't hear it, see it, or feel it, then it doesn't exist.' Prophets have claimed to hear the voice of God since the world began and yet people still doubt his existence.

The tiny world of Whoville has been in constant danger every day until Horton comes along and decides to try to save it by finding a safe place for it. Most of the citizens of this tiny world have no idea of the perils they face. They are content to live in a state of ignorant bliss. We as humans have no idea what a spiritual mess we're in. We don't mind living an ignorant existence as long as it doesn't interfere with our plans.

At the climax of the film, the other animals tie Horton down and prepare to destroy the tiny world. The kangaroo tells him that if he pretends the world doesn't exist, all will be as it was. Just as Christ was tempted in the wilderness, if you just bow down and worship me, you can have the world back and all will be as it was supposed to be. . . . 

We're interested in highlighting books, films and other aspects of media and culture that present positive and thought-provoking ideas. If you'd like to contribute a short piece, contact the editor: lifeinfomag@mac.com

© www.istockphoto.com/Marcela Barsse





Andrew Anderson

downshifting





DOWNSHIFTING ANDERSON

'The trouble with the rat race is, even if you win, you are still a rat.' (Lily Tomlin)

Do you sometimes feel that you're on a treadmill which is moving faster and faster, and you just want to step off?

In a society filled with conflicting responsibilities and commitments, the work/life balance has become a predominant issue, with an increasing number of people looking to pursue a more balanced lifestyle.

The buzzword is 'downshifting'. This involves changing voluntarily to a less demanding work schedule in order to enjoy life more. Downshifter, also called 'sea changers', may want to spend more time with their families, or invest more time in their hobbies. They may simply be motivated by a desire to live a less materialistic lifestyle.

Other key drivers may be a clash of personal values in the workplace, or poor health as a result of excessive stress at work.

A way of life

Downshifter want to slow down at work in order to 'upshift' in other areas of their lives. Sometimes this is induced by a significant event in their lives, such as a bereavement, or a break-up of a relationship.

They seek a life filled with more passion and purpose, meaning, fulfilment and happiness.

The reason for downshifting will vary from person to person, but when taking the plunge, the primary driving force should not simply be seen as a way out of something, but as a positive move towards something else (such as setting up your own business, becoming a full-time writer and so on). For many people, depending on age, downshifting is difficult to reverse.

A survey in the UK in 2004 found that four out of ten people under the age of 35 were planning to leave their high-powered, high-

stress jobs and downshift at some point in their career.

Research has shown that in the Western world, we have approximately five hours more free time a week than 30 years ago. Modern appliances mean that we spend less time on housework than our parents did, we have fewer children, and are retiring earlier.

However, a large proportion of that free time is spent watching television, and the



© www.istockphoto.com/Rene Masi

remainder in 'leisure obligations'. Such obligations are for a purpose – fitness, socialising or fulfilling expectations.

Leisure has become a means to an end, rather than being undertaken for its own sake.

Downshifting probably conjures up an image of selling the house, moving to the country, buying a piece of land ('tree-changing'), and tending to your livestock, while spending your spare time knitting jumpers and making patchwork quilts. If this is your dream, then go for it.

For many, though, it's simply spending fewer hours a week in a stressful job, and spending more time on things which are spiritually rewarding.

Practicalities

We can downshift by working fewer hours each week in our present job, or by accepting less responsibility in the company, or we can quit our job and find another that we find more rewarding.

It follows that, practically, if your income is reduced, your expenses need to be reduced accordingly. It's important, therefore, that your family are with you from the outset.

The kids will have to get used to more inexpensive Christmas presents – although a jar of homemade strawberry jam may not be greeted with quite the same enthusiasm as the latest Playstation game!

The reaction from friends may vary between pity and sympathy. We live in an ever more materialistic society, where opting out of the daily rat race is still often perceived as a personal failure. At such times, you will discover who your true friends are. There will be others who gradually start to pass on to you items destined for the local recycling centre. 'I was on the point of throwing this out, and then I thought of you.'

Starting gradually

Downshifting doesn't have to mean giving up the full-time job and moving to the country. It may be best to 'dip your toes' first by making a few simple changes in your everyday life.

This could mean making a conscious effort to leave work early one day a week in order to spend time with the family. A more radical step may be to take a job closer to home, in order to shorten the working day.

It comes down to adjusting the work/life balance in favour of 'life'.

This may mean earning less money, which in turn makes you more thrifty, and subsequently more inventive and resourceful.

This greener approach to life will happen naturally, whether it be buying a jumper in a

charity shop instead of in a high street chain store, or cooking a meal from leftovers rather than buying a takeaway. You will become more resourceful, more inventive, and more aware of the 'throwaway' society we find ourselves in.

Remember, the more money you spend, the more time you have to be at work to earn it, and the less time you get to spend with the ones you love. ☺

The Downshifting Manifesto

Since 2005, National Downshifting Week has promoted ideas for individuals to 'slow down and green up.' Here are some of their tips:

- 1 Book a half-day off work to spend time with someone you love – no DIY allowed.
- 2 Cook a meal from scratch, using locally sourced ingredients.
- 3 Donate a bag of clothes, toys or useful items to a local charity shop, refuge or recycling centre.
- 4 Consider reputable work-at-home-parents and small local businesses for services you need.
- 5 Turn off the television, switch on the radio, and talk.
- 6 Cut up a credit card.
- 7 Eliminate three non-essential purchases this week.
- 8 Hand-make a simple birthday card (you'll be amazed if you work out what you spend on greetings cards each year).

I lay on the cushioned bench in the darkened room, surrounded by tiny ivory candles. A piece of minimalist piano music swirled among the vanilla breezes that drifted across my face. Delicious. A whole day relaxing in a luxury spa. What a gift! I sipped my glass of fresh mango and orange juice, flicked through an expensive magazine and watched the golden carp swimming in the pool next to my couch.

This was bliss. My soothed back was still

wondered if I could squeeze in an aquasize class before lunch. Maybe there would also be time for a free manicure, 20 lengths of the swimming pool, a facial, a sauna, a shower, another smoothie, and then just time to change and do my hair, fit in an hour's shopping, and catch the train home for my son's parent's evening.

My thoughts tumbled quickly, as they so often did, listing the things to be done, packing them together like the pieces of a closely-fitting jigsaw. The bliss soon dissolved back into the craziness of my everyday life, the same craziness I was trying to escape!

How often do you find yourself so crazily busy that even when you have a few moments doing something you want to do,

What I really need is a day off every week. A complete rest. A day where I could be totally refreshed.

you pause and realise that you are still rushing through the book, around the shops, swallowing the chocolate so fast you can barely taste it? How often do we take the time to walk slowly, to stop every now and then, and to smell the roses?

What I really need is a day off every week. A complete rest. A day when I don't have to cook or do the laundry or clean or shop or work. Then I'd feel so much better. A day that felt like a day in the spa, but without all the expense. A day where I could be totally refreshed. Mmmm. Could get used to that . . . perhaps I could call it my *life:spa* day?

Interestingly enough, the idea of a complete day free of any kind of work or stressful activity isn't a new one. Thousands of years ago, when life ran at a much slower pace, the Israelite people discovered the gift

A DAY IN A LIFE SPA

Karen Holford

oily damp from the massage; my feet felt fresh from the pedicure; and the steam room was the next item on my 'to do' list. I





of the life:spa day, and they called it Sabbath. It started just before sunset on Friday night, and ran till just after sunset on Saturday evening. Many Jews still keep the Sabbath as a very special celebration and rest day every week, and they continue to be refreshed by it, physically, relationally, emotionally and spiritually. They know a secret or two about coping with the crazy challenges of twenty-first-century life. Many Christians have also tried to set aside a day each week to take time out from the rat race and enjoy the life:spa benefits of a 'Sabbath'. Christians and Jews both spend time during their life:spa Sabbaths thinking about the place that God has in their lives, which is an important part of the gift of a refreshing day. However you understand God, or whoever you believe him to be, thinking about him as someone who loves you, and wants you to be happy, can be a vital part of your life:spa experience, soothing the spiritual aches and pains in your life.

How to get the best out of your life:spa day

Every person has his/her own different ideas of what is relaxing and restful in his/her life. Make a list of the things that specifically refresh you and leave you feeling soothed or energised. If you work indoors all week, it may be good to think of activities you could do outside. If you sit down all week at work, you may prefer to get up and do something active, and vice versa. Think about the things that inspire you, make you feel happy, and give you quality time with your friends and family. Take time to enjoy the beautiful places around you, and get out into a park or a forest. Or maybe you'd like to spend the day volunteering your skills to help other people.

© www.istockphoto.com/Victor Mafie



Creating the space for a life:spa day

- Plan ahead and make simple food that just needs to be heated or mixed together, so you don't have to cook a whole meal.
- Take a break from routine tasks like laundry, washing the car, shopping, homework, tidying up, and so on. If you can, tidy up the day before so that messy piles don't yell to be sorted, and disturb the peace!
- Have a media-holiday and turn off the TV, radio and your computers.
- Focus on your relationships with others, doing fun things together, making special memories and enjoying just hanging out with each other.

Here are some ideas for things to do on your life:spa day:

Life:spa @ home

- Read an inspiring book, alone or together with your family.
- Write a poem about the things that make you feel happy or loved.
- Create a watercolour painting or drawing of a flower or landscape.
- Play a game with your family, or invent a new game together.
- Invite friends over for a meal of freshly baked bread and butter. Ask them to bring their favourite toppings and have a simple indoor picnic.
- Find a Bible with contemporary language, such as *The Message*, and try reading from the New Testament or the Psalms. Try Psalms 23 and 104, or the books of Proverbs, John and Philipians.
- Make a 'thankful list' and write down 50 things that make you feel loved and happy.
- Watch a nature video.
- Make encouraging cards to send to other people, or send inspiring e-cards (try www.dayspring.com).

- Design a photo album or scrapbook that illustrates your own life or spiritual journey.
- Use whatever skills and materials you have around to make something beautiful for your home or garden, or to give away as a gift.

Life:spa @ away

- Find a new pathway to explore and see if you can find ten interesting natural things. Spend some time just looking at them and being filled with wonder for how they have been created by God. What can you learn from these things that can inspire your life?
- Hike along an ancient trail, walk around a small lake, or visit a park.
- Take a boat ride down a picturesque stretch of river.
- Explore old churches and collect unusual stories about them.
- Find a church to attend that suits the needs of your family. Check the websites of local churches before you go so that you have some idea of what to expect.
- Create your own unique traditions that let you have a weekly celebration! Buy a bunch of flowers, use a different tablecloth or crockery, light scented candles, play special music, eat different foods, plan surprises and treats.
- Take a digital camera and photograph things that illustrate a theme for you like love, peace, beauty or happiness.
- Make a picnic to share with friends and invite them to visit a forest or beach with you.
- Fly kites, cycle, or do something else that is environmentally friendly.
- Plant seeds or bulbs in decorated pots to give as cheerful gifts, and design bright gift labels for them.

Life:spa @ learning

- Go to a zoo or a farm with some children and spend time watching the animals

carefully. What can you learn by watching the animals, and the children?

- Visit the homes of a famous inspiring people and find out more about their lives.
- Spend time in an archaeological museum looking at artefacts from other centuries.
- Visit a museum of ethnic life, and taste what life is like in a different culture.



© www.istockphoto.com/Maurice van der Weeden

Life:spa @ sharing

- Offer to do some gardening or decorating for an elderly person.
- Babysit the children of a lone parent so that the mum or dad can have a break.
- Volunteer for a prison visitation service.
- Help clean up a littered beauty spot.
- Bake a tray of cookies or a cake for a new neighbour.
- Make friends with a lonely person in a care home.
- Make soup or sandwiches to feed homeless people.
- Service or mend the car of a person on a low income.
- Sew quilts or knit blankets to comfort children in need.

Whatever you find to do on your life:spa day, relax, and enjoy the day as a gift from God, to refresh you for the next week. A 'Sabbath' rest day was originally given to us as a reminder that God created us, loves us and cares for us. Keeping these thoughts in your mind can help you to find the tranquillity and strength of a life:spa 'Sabbath' in the hectic moments of the rest of your life. ☺

Katy Gardener

The other woman

© www.istockphoto.com/Sharon Dominick

I never thought I'd hear myself say this, but there's another woman in my husband's life.

Whenever he goes away from home on business trips, there she is, in the car, and she's taken over as navigator on some of his trickier journeys. That used to be my job. But even when we're all in the car together she still interferes with her advice. Sometimes, however, she gets it wrong, and I can't resist a self-satisfied smile. With the map on my knee, I can see her mistakes as clear as day.

Once she had us in a huge field. Not in reality, but . . .

OK, you've probably guessed. We were given a Sat Nav. My husband calls her Patricia. I call her Bossy-boots. Well, she does get a bit strident on occasions, and I'll tell you something for nothing, I'm never leaving him alone in the car with her. It's a recipe for a

heart attack.

'Reconfiguring! Reconfiguring!'

'Make a U-turn! Make a U-turn!' (On a motorway? Really?)

Occasionally, too, we do as she says and she still has a ducky-fit.

And then there was that time she went off into open space. The road was pretty new, but it was on my *printed* map. How come she didn't know it was there?

And there's that annoying 'Boinnng Boinnng' when we are in, or approaching speed control areas.

So far, Patricia has only been allowed to sit on my knee, because we heard that if you stick a Sat Nav to the windscreen the bad guys (or gals?) can see the mark it leaves and will break into your car for her. But mainly I keep her on my knee so that she's not a distraction while he's driving. If mobile phones are considered such a distraction that there's a law against using hand-held ones while driving, how come no one has seen the danger of the driver taking his attention off the road to look at that tiny screen?

The truth is, however, that although most of the time Bossy-boots really is a great help, when she gets upset because we've ignored her directions and her tone becomes somewhat strident, it can only raise the driver's blood pressure, surely? And what if he got so used to doing as he was told (which he never did with calm old me) and made an inappropriate U-turn and ended up under a lorry?

No, no. He still needs me. I tell her straight, when she gets insistent, to 'Calm down, woman!'

Mostly, though, her directions are very clear, repeated at (usually) the exact moment for a right or left turn, and if we do ignore her, or go the wrong way through over-anticipating a turn, she has almost always been able to say, truthfully, 'Arriving at

Continued on page 35



WHO ARE YOU?

We'd like to hear your stories, find out who you are, where you've been, what's happened to you along the way.

We're particularly interested in personal stories of people living positive lives and making a difference to their communities.

Contact the editor at lfeinfomag@mac.com.



feedback

Vol. 7, Issue No.4

Please let us know what you think. Your suggestions are a crucial part of enabling us to provide a magazine that is relevant, interesting and useful.

Your overall opinion: (Please tick as appropriate)

Loved it liked it disliked it hated it

Best bit: _____ Worst bit: _____

Comments/suggestions/article ideas: _____

Do you belong to any type of faith group/church? Yes No

LIFE.info needs more writers

LIFE.info is sponsored by a Christian organisation but you don't have to be a Christian to contribute. If you've enjoyed the content of **LIFE.info** and would like to write something for the magazine, we want to hear from you. For more information about writing for **LIFE.info**, tick the box below and don't forget to give us your contact details.

Yes, I am interested in writing for **LIFE.info**. Please send me more details.

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Email _____ Telephone _____

Occupation _____ Age _____

How did you get hold of your copy of **LIFE.info** magazine? (Please tick as appropriate)

Came through letterbox given by a friend found it other*

*If other, please elaborate:

To send us your feedback and/or subscription form, simply pull this middle section out of the magazine, fold it and stick down the three open sides, then pop it in the post. **Postage is FREE.**

LIFE.info Subscription form

Yes I would like to subscribe to **LIFE.info** magazine

For me For a friend

If the subscription is for yourself, just fill in your contact details below. If you are subscribing on behalf of someone else, please fill in your contact details as well as their address details. Thank you.

My contact details:

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

My friend's name and address:

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

For office use only

Vol. 7, Issue No. 4

Annual UK subscription still only **£5** including p+p
European subscribers pay **€10**

All cheques should be made payable to: LIFE.info.

LIFE.info is published five times a year (on a ten-week cycle).

For all enquiries contact Gloria on: 01476 591700 Email: lifeinfomag@mac.com

BUSINESS REPLY SERVICE
Licence No. GM26

2

LIFE.info Magazine

Alma Park
Grantham
Lincolnshire
NG31 9SL

To return the feedback form and/or the subscription form, simply pull out this middle section of the magazine, fold it in half and stick down the three open sides. Then pop it in the post. Postage is FREE.



OTHER WOMAN GARDENER (continued from page 29)

destination' when we finally arrived.

Having said that, once, when we were going to a village somewhere in deepest Somerset, we knew we'd be arriving after dark, so we stopped in a lay-by while I held her out of the car window (for about ten minutes, possibly because of the trees) to 'acquire satellites', and when we arrived, instead of finding our guest house, she led us up someone else's garden path with the smug instruction 'Destination on left.'

It was a totally unlit village, and pitch dark as I made my way to the front door, but the kind couple who answered soon directed us a little further along the village street – on the right! I'd switched Bossy-boots off, by then, having believed that we had, indeed, reached our destination, so I walked those last few yards in front of the car to the guest house, rather in the manner that undertakers lead the hearse for a few yards. When we reached the gate of the guest house, the owner greeted us with 'Well done!', which goes to prove that it was a bit tricky, even for humans.

As Sat Navs have become more commonplace, they have generated some horror stories, though why anyone would actually follow instructions so slavishly that they ended up in a field (as some have claimed), I just can't imagine. But in our local newspaper recently they have definitely been blamed for many of the hits on low bridges with which our market town seems to abound. Something in the region of 30 hits on four bridges in the past couple of years! Apparently some people get so reliant on Sat Nav that they stop reading road signs! We did once see an official sign that said, in large letters: IGNORE SAT NAV – Narrow streets ahead.

For myself, I have to admit that they can take a lot of the stress out of finding places where we've never been before, and several people have told me that their Sat Nav got

them 'all the way across France [or wherever], without any bother at all', so they do work, though not so well in the town centre situation, as we have found.

I think the thing is to build up your confidence in that dismembered voice, learn where she is most likely to get it wrong, not to mention her occasional blind spots, and do what the manufacturers advise – always study the map before you set off, *and take it with you.*

Postscript

With those last words echoing in your brain, I have to tell you that the love affair is over! Yesterday, he wouldn't leave home without Patricia. Then we had to find a carpet warehouse in Chesterfield.

Chesterfield proved one too many for ol' Bossy-boots! She had us round that town centre three times before I could get orientated enough to find us on the map on my knee. Twice she urged us, urgently, to turn right into the wrong end of one way streets. Once she took us into a cul-de-sac. OK, even to the naked eye it didn't look like one, but she was most insistent, so we turned. There were no instructions as to how we should get the car over the bollards that littered the other end.

But the worst was when we got very close to our final turning. She was most insistent that we 'keep right, keep right!', but as we approached for the third time, I just knew we had to take the left fork (it was, after all, the only way we hadn't gone!), but the last time, Bossy-boots had made it impossible to make the turn with her very insistent 'keep right!' We took an unauthorised right turn, circumnavigated a car park, 'kept left', and made the turn perfectly.

There was no apology from Patricia.

We fired her, and went home a different way! ☹️

bouncing through midlife



© www.stockphoto.com/Diana Muller

Ren Powell

I remember exactly when it happened. I was sitting on the bus and trying to wiggle my toes in my boots, thinking I should really buy a pair of comfortable shoes. Nothing geriatric, mind

you – just sensible.

Then I looked down at my watch, at my surprisingly wrinkled wrist and at my mother's hand. Since my mother lives clear across the country, this startled

me. I held up both my hands just to make sure they were mine.

Then I got off at the next stop and headed right back downtown. I had to find some red stilettos. Every





shop screamed: Midlife Crisis!

Let me set this day (yesterday) in context: I have never been the sophisticated woman in heels, absent-mindedly twisting a strand of pearls, thinking up fabulous ideas so absorbing she doesn't look the least bit fidgety in a room full of strangers. But I wanted to be.

I've read that one of the main causes of midlife crisis is the recognition that one has not accomplished all that one expected – and one realises now it's too late. If so, then I have been going through midlife crises since I was seven and I expected to be the perfect Mary in the school nativity play. I bounced back then: setting my sights on being the perfect Angel Number 2. And I bounced again when I tripped on my robe (at that point I just expected cookies and milk).

There was cheerleading, piano playing, tap-dancing and, not least, perfect parenting. Bounce. Bounce. Bounce. And BOUNCE.

The fortunate thing for me is that there are books and courses to help me 'cope' with the bouncing I will presumably need to do now. According to the books and course descriptions, all the bouncing I've done in the past won't have prepared me for what comes next.

Midlife crisis as a sociological/psychological phenomenon has only been around since 1965, when Canadian psychologist Elliott Jaques coined the term. And it was in the late 70s that it became a household term thanks to Gail Sheehy's *Passages:*

Predictable Crises of Adult Life, which could be found on millions of bedside tables across the country. In his book, Sheehy describes the 'Forlorn 40s: The dangerous years.'

Apparently, like the flu, this 'condition' can be diagnosed, and prognoses abound: It can last 2 to 12 years. 'The initial stages can be difficult.'

According to *Psychology Today*, male

midlife crisis is brought about when his mate reaches menopause, is no longer fertile (that is, sexually desirable) and he is biologically driven to seek out younger women. In other words: male midlife crisis is caused by female menopause.

The female midlife crisis has now been acknowledged and is accepted as a response to, among other things, deaths in the family, 'empty nest syndrome', menopause, or the fact that her husband has packed a bag, donned a toupee and sped off in a convertible, leaving signed divorce papers on the kitchen table. Because of her menopause.

I am not sure why grief over losing a loved one to death would be experienced differently in your 40s than your 60s or 30s, but it does seem to me that, given the above information, the vast majority of women experiencing midlife crisis must be married and yearning to have children. If this is true, I am going to file for divorce now and preempt this 2 to 12 year flu. (Thank goodness my nappy and bottle appetite has been met).

In reality, women initiate two thirds of midlife divorces. And, according to the US Census Bureau, the median age for a divorcing woman is actually 29 years. So, if there is a female midlife crisis, it must have other significant causes and/or symptoms than the loss of a spouse through divorce.

In a 1994 study, 98% of young adults said they believed in midlife crisis, while only 50% of older adults did.

I remember being vaccinated when I was twelve. The thirteen-year-olds gave us sly smiles and told us how much it was going to hurt. We were going to wish we were dead, it would hurt so much. . . . I can't help but picture half of that 50% of older adults wearing sly smiles on their faces when they ticked the box stating their belief in midlife crises.

Dr Ross Goldstein, PhD, a San Francisco

psychologist and author of *Fortysomething: Claiming the Power and Passion of Your Midlife Years*, developed a self-help test to help women identify midlife crisis. Statement number 12 is: 'I have a hard time accepting that I am as old as I am.'

My grandmother is 89. Every time I talk to her she tells me what a shock it is to see her own face in the mirror. 'Who is that old woman?' she asks herself. My grandmother is not dotty. She simply doesn't feel the way she thinks 89-year-old women should feel; she doesn't look the way she feels. She tells me she has a hard time accepting that she is as old as she is. But it is not a midlife crisis. It's not a crisis of any sort. As a matter of fact, it makes her smile.

One interesting fact is that, while midlife crisis is 'present' in more than 80 countries, there are no signs of it in developing or under-developed countries. According to Arnold Kruger of the University of British Columbia this is because individuals need a society that focuses on self-fulfilment as a goal. This is only possible in affluent societies.

It is also likely the non-existence of midlife crisis is due to the lack of access they have to magazines, self-help books and to television shows featuring anorexic thirty-somethings whose make-up and hair is retouched every four minutes between takes, whose tummies are tucked every four years between babies, and who live in three-bedroom apartments in Manhattan on a waitress's salary.

I am convinced that if I just packed up my bags, my dog and my husband and moved to a secluded island – no television, no Internet – I would be happy with who I really am well through my midlife years. I could escape the stereotypical stuff: judgemental reassessments, life-affirming risk-taking, rediscovering myself at weekend courses. Don't let me forget denial.

As it is, two of my friends have lost their fathers this past year. They sometimes get teary for a moment. Then smile. One of them is pretty sure she's had her last hot flush, the other has made peace with the fact she never had children. They are both taking an

People who express gratitude are happier – even in midlife.

aromatherapy course. They meet on Saturdays for cappuccinos, and on Sundays they go rock climbing. Last I heard, they were planning to skydive. Last I heard, they were laughing louder than ever.

One study suggested that one treatment for midlife crisis is gratitude. People who express gratitude are happier – even in midlife. I don't live on an island, and I do still look around for clues to who I really am. But at my age, I'm not looking back at who I never was to learn that. I'm looking forward towards being 89 and feeling un wrinkled. I want to be like my grandmother and remain grateful.

My safeguard through midlife will be gratitude, even through the hard days I'm certain are ahead. My back up will be my friends, and since I am grateful for them, I've got myself a vicious little circle against raiding my daughter's closet for short skirts.

This morning I put on the red shoes and a sophisticated black dress. I posed for the mirror. I squinted, took one graceful step and a mental snapshot of what I could have been had it really been important to me. Had I ever really thought it worth an hour of stiletto practice every day?

Today I am going to return the shoes and get a massage.

So you see, I am not having a midlife crisis. I am just having a little aromatherapy. ☺



Keeping your child safe on Myspace

Sarah Kipling

As a teenager and Myspace member, I am no stranger to the controversies and potential dangers of social networking sites (Bebo, Facebook and Habbo are a few others on an inexhaustible list).

With many being open to children as young as thirteen and old dears with a penchant for basket weaving and Viking re-enactments, these sites are notorious for their dumbing down of normal codes of social conduct. (Lately, Myspace was in the news for advertising young people downing alcopops. As the vast majority of Myspace users are teenagers, this was perhaps an

unwise decision in the light of current soaring teenage binge-drinking statistics.)

Myspace has, therefore, become something of a dirty word. Until recently, there were no age restrictions on socialising – now, however, in the wake of statistics showing 50,000 sexual predators to be online at any one time, Myspace has prohibited interaction between anyone above 18 and anyone below. Additionally, 14 and 15-year-olds' profiles are automatically made private.

It is inevitable that because of the lack of spontaneity and reality that chatting over the Internet provides, conversation can become less natural and inhibited. The fact that Myspace is driven by a 'friend counter' impetus, whereby people are encouraged to add

as many 'friends' as possible (below 80 and you're a social leper; over and you're a social butterfly) is apt in highlighting the artificiality of social networking sites. And all this without that annoying niggles we usually have to tend to in real life – talking.

Which brings me to the crux of the matter; so long as people talk and act as they would in real-life situations, the dangers of Myspace are no more exaggerated than in everyday life. However, because there will always be people who bypass this behavioural particular, ensure that your child stays safe online by remembering the following:

- 1 Ensure your child keeps his/her profile private and does not distribute any personal details to strangers.** All the Net Nannies in the world won't keep your child safe if he or she doesn't employ a little common sense first. Encourage your child always to question, 'Why is it that a person should want to use the Internet as a primary means of meeting people? Why not go to a club or bar? Are they divorced forty-somethings with no self-esteem?' Remind your child that he/she is not a divorced forty-something with low self-esteem.
- 2 Ensure they don't put anything on their profile that isn't true to life.** While many children have been aware of the 'Don't talk to strangers' mandate since they were in their nappies, a desire to appear cool and street-wise has led to innumerable children shedding the under-16 'ball and chain' and lying about their ages. This also extends to countless doe-eyed pre-pubescents taking provocative pictures of themselves. While the desire to metamorphose into whatever they want to be may be tempting, it is because of this that laws protecting children become ineffective – and online predators become a problem. In one case, a 13-year-old girl's parents attempted to sue Myspace when

their daughter was sexually assaulted by a man she met online. The judge threw out the case. Why? Because she had lied on Myspace that her age was 18. The judge was quoted as saying, 'If anyone had a duty to protect Julie Doe, it was her parents, not MySpace.'

- 3 Make sure kids know the difference between online friends and real ones.** If your child is spending more time chatting to online friends than real ones, talk to them and remind them that the best relationships are formed through natural conversation. Using networking sites as an accessory to real relationships is perfectly healthy, but substituting such sites for real relationships is not.
- 4 Make sure your child is not spending so long on social networking sites that it interferes with his/her day-to-day life.** Ever heard of the song 'Myspace Ruined My Life'? You have been warned. While the majority of youngsters are quite capable of balancing a normal, healthy lifestyle with the Internet, some are spending all their time on it. If you feel your child does, talk to them; there may be an underlying reason that they choose to 'escape' into such an environment, such as stress, loneliness or feelings of inadequacy. (The format of social networking sites is such that they are used primarily for seeking praise and approval from others; a flattering photo comment, a particularly large friend count, regular comments and so on.) If you are really worried, invest in a filter so as not to deprive your child of the beneficial study aid the Internet is.

Ultimately, if your child takes advantage of the possibilities of social networking sites, they offer a facility through which friends can connect, much in the same way that pen-pals do. As with most activities, it's simply important to be sensible! ☺

Before 11 September 2001, social commentators were predicting that religion would move away from the public arena, transforming from an all-encompassing

worldview to the level of a leisure activity or lifestyle choice. Now, however, the UK government is pouring funding into research on religious phenomena, in the name of public safety. The title 'fundamentalist' has suddenly grown horns, so to speak, and even the Anglican Church, known and loved for its rather British 'tolerance', has been the focus of controversy due to various comments made by its bishops. After a call to disestablish the Church of England from the state, someone apparently thought it was diabolically funny to allocate the motion to order paper number '666'. With the publicity surrounding changes to the Blasphemy Act, which some have said prioritise the protection of Islamic sensibilities, it seems as if religion is remaining very much in the public eye, but is all this hype justified? Is religion actually dangerous?

In ancient times, the Egyptians and the Romans solidified their political power by sustaining a religion that placed the leaders as demi-gods. Whatever the Pharaohs and Emperors said was both religious and political, so there was never any conflict between the two types of power, because

they were one and the same. Later, Christian Europe adopted a similar policy with the concept of the Divine Right of Kings. This proclaimed that God had chosen the reigning monarch to be his earthly representative, and, therefore, the sovereign was irrefragable. This often led to wars between countries with different religious allegiances, for example Protestant England's ongoing conflicts with Catholic Spain. Both states firmly believed that God was on their own side, and each was deeply suspicious of the other. At its peak, history tells us of hideous torture during the Spanish Inquisition, and the thousands of martyrdoms of English dissenters. This was considered politically necessary, because disagreement with the state's religion meant disagreement with the state – treason.

John Locke, a political philosopher writing in Britain in the seventeenth century (during the time in which the first common law Blasphemy Act was introduced), declared that he found this approach 'strange', because the state was killing people who refused to attest to what the state called 'truth'. In the state's terms, those who didn't pledge allegiance to the national religion were 'heretics', and heretics were destined for eternal damnation. For Locke, this meant that the state, out of 'concern' for souls, was sending them to hell. Still, even Locke, speaking very liberally for his time, had some limits. He differentiated between denominations, saying that Catholics were a set of believers that could not be tolerated, because they recognised a higher earthly power than the monarch. This meant that when push came to shove, they'd follow the Pope instead of the King, which meant that they were potentially traitors. Quakers were another people who were persecuted at this time, because they firmly believed in equality. To them, St Paul's Cathedral was just 'Paul's church', and the King was just 'James', but because there was no authority but their

IS RELIGION DANGEROUS?

Beth Holford





RELIGION DANGEROUS HOLFORD

own consciences, and they firmly believed in peaceful living, they were less dangerous, although some of the leaders were still executed.

So, perhaps religion is dangerous to those people who have beliefs that contradict or threaten the state. During the conscription for the First World War, the UK's 16,000 conscientious objectors were imprisoned and thirty-five death sentences were given, though none of these was actually carried out. It seems that even though particular religious groups are no longer targeted, people can still be punished if they hold certain moral beliefs that do not serve the government's objectives.

Not all conscientious objectors were religious, though, which begs the question of whether religion is any more dangerous to a person than living by other beliefs that are currently illegal. Until 1967, homosexuality

In Europe, the two most serious attempts at an alternative worldview – Communism and Nazism – have also been the most lethal projects of the twentieth century.

was illegal in the UK, and two centuries ago such acts could warrant execution. Some people firmly believe that they have a right to choose how to live, and when to die, advocating the legalisation of euthanasia, and people who have put this belief into practice have been charged with assisting murder.

However, this could be put down to the fact that most British laws have been around, in some form, for centuries, and have been hugely influenced by a Christian moral code. For a long time, acts that were 'unchristian'

were also illegal, so, for example, you could be punished for using religious profanities. This is, arguably, also the thinking behind the recent 'gay marriage' legislations; the Church of England, especially, protested that marriage was an inappropriate term for male-male relationships, so 'civil partnership' was agreed upon instead. As humanist pressure groups gained momentum, Britain has been forced to modernise and liberalise its legislations, shaking off the traditional religious connections in favour of free choice. They argue that maintaining a Christian influence on laws is dangerous and has in the past been seriously harmful. For example, the law forbidding abortion had created a market for filthy and ill-equipped back-street clinics in which countless women died. Perhaps the world would be a safer place without these sorts of restrictions.

But, to look at it a different way, the last century has shown that, at least in Europe, the two most serious attempts at an alternative worldview – Communism and Nazism – have also been the most lethal projects of the twentieth century. Political theorist Walter Benjamin argued that the reason that these were so dangerous is that they were aiming for a political Utopia here on Earth: a 'perfect' society. When your idea of 'heaven' is something that you can achieve on Earth, any actions can be justified as serving a higher cause. Killing a few people seems a worthwhile price for bringing about a superior world, and each body is hoped to be the last martyrdom for the cause. Religion in this sense is less dangerous than Communism or Nazism, because it not only puts the promise of Utopia into the afterlife, but also places inherent value on human life here and now.

Obviously, religions differ in their form and content. Some more extreme and politicised forms of religion have led to a

devaluing of the lives of some humans, but these tend to have more to do with the political and social culture in which that religion is being practised than teachings inherent in the religion itself. Eastern religions, such as Sikhism and Buddhism, tend to place emphasis on the importance of tolerance and peace, although even Buddhists have formed extremist groups at times. Similarly, Christianity is often read as emphasising the importance of being a good citizen, as far as conscience allows, and in the past rulers have exploited this, and have sent their subjects on 'holy' crusades, in which both sides suffered terrible massacres.

Perhaps, then, religion isn't the problem, but those who exploit it for other purposes. For example, many people have come to associate 'fundamentalist Islam' with suicide bombers and military groups, when, actually, that's political Islam. There are, in fact, forms of fundamentalist Islam that have far more supporters than any militant group, but rarely make the news in Britain because they are not posing any threat to Western society. Political Islam, however, is a set of several schools of thought that have only really come into play in the last hundred years, so it is not something inherent to Islamic theology, and it is only this branch of belief that has grown into something that we now see as dangerous.

Still, the same incentive is on offer to all religious believers, whether their actions seem to be destructive or constructive. Throughout history there have been religious people who have willingly paid a price for trying to make a difference. Christians have the ultimate example in their God, who, made man, died a peaceful martyrdom for the love of his friends, and for those who were killing him, even healing some of his enemies. With this sort of sacrifice as their model, those who truly follow Christianity would be aiming to do only good, and would be willing to go



to any extreme to do so.

Further, religious groups are often the most vocal in support of life-promoting laws. Whether they're speaking out against cloning, euthanasia or stem-cell research, they are pointing out that science can overreach itself. Whether you agree or disagree with the actual principles, it is tremendously important that science continue to question itself, its practices and its values, and for it to be unlimited could be the more dangerous option.

Tony Blair came under fire for expressing his religious beliefs, and stating that he prayed about going to war with Iraq. As *Times* journalist Michael Gove points out: 'The real nuttiness in our society is that an open commitment from a public figure to organised Christian religion is now seen as shameful, while every sort of faulty moral reasoning from other sources is accorded grave respect.' Religion, misused and exploited, can be the most dangerous and the most persuasive force on Earth, but at its best, can be the reason behind the most loving and noble actions. In 2001, New York saw religion at its most powerful; at one extreme, a sacrifice of life felled the Twin Towers, and at the other, people of many faiths laid down their lives in the rescue efforts. Maybe all religion is dangerous, but that doesn't mean that all religion is bad. ☺



THE CLOTHES SHOW LIVE

Anna Surridge

www.clotheshowlive.com
5-10 December 2008

For me to wake up at 6am on a cold winter morning, I need an *unbelievably* good reason. Last December (2007) I did. The Clothes Show Live!

The Clothes Show is an annual event held in the National Exhibition Centre (NEC) in Birmingham. It is like an enormous market with really cool stuff. There is really something for everyone; quirky, fashionable, gothic – you name it. In addition to the expensive designer gear, there are also plenty of perfectly affordable things too.

The Clothes Show isn't just about shopping. For example, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) had a huge inflatable furry – yes *furry* – tent promoting the awareness of fur being used in fashion and the cruelty involved.

At one end of the building, there was a stage with a rock band playing live. This was next to the entrance to the main catwalk. I met up with my best friend by the stage, as it was a pretty obvious meeting point. Around the hall, there were about three mini catwalks, with showing times every couple of hours. I saw the end of one show, and wished I had seen more of it as it had been really good. I did watch one full show and it was amazing! They modelled wedding dresses, among other things, which were utterly stunning. I was nearly deafened at one point by the screams of all the women in the crowd when the male models came out wearing some rather-too-tight Speedos. . . .

For the main catwalk, everyone has a certain time slot when you can go and see the show. Our time slot was quite late in the day, so we were all quite tired by the time we went in. We took our seats in a massive stadium with three huge TV screens at one end with a catwalk jutting out into the middle of the stadium with the seats positioned around it. The lights went down and the presenters came out. Before I knew it, the models were parading around in clothes considered to be the



© Anna Surridge

height of fashion. The thing I most enjoyed was the dancers. They were so energetic and made the show exciting to watch. Then, all too soon, the flashing lights stopped, as did the pounding music, and the show was over.

The day, although it was absolutely shattering, was an unforgettable experience and I would definitely recommend it. ♡



Becky De Oliveira

to have or to be?

GOOD BOOK



Every once in a while you come across a book that causes you to look at yourself in a whole new way. Before I read *To Have or To Be?* by Erich Fromm, I would not have classed myself as an individual who lives in the 'having' mode of materialism and greed. But I am. And I do.

While I'm not the type who has to have the latest handbag or a shiny new car every two years – and therefore the kind who can easily feel smug and 'above it all' – I'm a 'haver' all the same. I define myself almost entirely in terms of things I imagine I possess. I *have* degrees and books. I *have* a subscription to *The New Yorker*. I *have* a job, a wicked (in my opinion) sense of humour, a husband, children, a cat. I *have* friends and acquaintances, an extended family. Fromm points out that this way of existing seems natural to us. How, after all, can we enjoy things without having them, he asks? 'It would seem that the very essence of being is having; that if one *has* nothing, one *is* nothing' (p. 25).

The truth of this statement really hit me, and made me realise why I cling so much to having. Most of us can think of individuals who have pretty much nothing. No family, no home of their own, no status. About the worst thing that can happen to us is to 'lose everything'. We talk about such people in hushed terms. 'He had it all,' we say, 'and then he lost everything.'

The whole goal of our existence is to have – to have it all and then some. Fromm writes, 'In the having mode of existence my relationship to the world is one of possessing and owning, one in which I want to make everybody and everything, including myself, my property' (p. 33).

One particularly poignant example of the difference between 'having' and 'being' is dating and marriage. During the courtship phase

of a relationship, when neither individual yet 'has' the other, each is focused on being. When the marriage is final, love and the relationship become things the couple 'has'. Typically, they also begin amassing possessions as a couple also: a house, a car, children, investments.

The concept of 'being' and what it means is hard to define. According to Fromm, this is partly because having is the defining mode within our culture (Western) and partly because being refers to experience which is 'not describable' (p. 91). He gives, as an example of being, a symbol suggested by Max Hunziger: a blue glass. The blue glass appears to be blue because it absorbs all the other colours from the light that passes through it and will not let them pass. 'We call a glass "blue" precisely because it does not retain the blue waves. It is named not for what it possesses but for what it gives out' (p. 92).

To Have or To Be? is not an easy-reading book and it cannot be devoured effortlessly in an afternoon in the back garden. Each idea presented feels like something you could turn around in your mind for the rest of your life, trying to figure out what it means in practice. This image of the blue glass being called 'blue' because of what it gives out is one of these concepts – but as hard as it is to get a concrete grasp on what it really means (to *have* the truth of it perhaps?) it does give a hint of what a person who lives in the 'being' mode might become. Not a magnet, drawing piles of junk to itself and keeping them close, but something like a light – giving more than it takes. ☺

Erich Fromm. (1976). *To Have or To Be?* Abacus: London.

Other titles by Erich Fromm include *The Art of Being* and *The Art of Loving*.

While there has never been more information and research into diet and weight loss, it has resulted in a great deal of conflicting information. Online weight loss coach Andrew Cate dispels some of the most common and popular myths about weight control, and sets the record straight.

MYTH▼

Low-fat foods help you lose weight

FACT▶ Many low-fat processed foods are very high in sugar, such as yoghurts, ice cream, cakes and biscuits, so using these alternatives may not significantly reduce your calorie intake. What's more, because these foods are perceived as healthy, they can often be eaten in larger portions, resulting in an even greater consumption of calories than if the higher fat item was consumed.

MYTH▼

Food combining accelerates weight loss

FACT▶ The theory that eating the wrong combinations of foods can result in health problems and weight gain has no scientific foundation. Rest assured that it is safe to eat carbohydrates at the same time as protein, drink water with your meals, and eat fruit after midday. Most foods contain a combination of carbohydrates, protein and fat, and these nutrients are not designed to be separated. If you consider that breast milk is designed for developing babies (the one food nobody could deny is designed for

Andrew Cate

COMMON WEIGHT LOSS MYTHS





WEIGHT LOSS MYTHS CATE

human consumption), and that it contains a combination of all nutrients, then this myth should be laid to rest.

MYTH▼

I have a sweet tooth

FACT▶ A sweet tooth is often used to describe cravings for foods such as chocolates, cakes, biscuits, pastries, ice cream and desserts. But these foods are not only sweet; they are all extremely high in fat. In other words, the sweet tooth is just a fat tooth with a nicer name. To see if your sweet tooth is genuine, try some sweet-only foods (sorbet, jelly, boiled sweets) next time you have a craving.

MYTH▼

Lifting weights makes you bigger

FACT▶ Lifting weights can actually help you lose weight, not gain it. Weight training helps to strengthen and tone your muscles, and increase your metabolic rate. Lifting moderately heavy weights will not add muscle bulk. Even if you lift heavy weights (a weight you can only lift 6-8 times is considered heavy), very few men and even fewer women have the genetic potential to build bulky muscles.

MYTH▼

Sit-ups trim your waist

FACT▶ While there is a wide array of tummy-toning devices that claim to help you remove fat directly from your tummy, reality takes an alternative view. Abdominal

exercises such as sit-ups will strengthen the muscles in your stomach, but they do virtually nothing to remove the fat sitting on top of your stomach muscles. Just as chewing gum won't rid you of a double chin, you can't 'spot reduce', or train one area of the body to lose fat in that area.

MYTH▼

Fruit juice is a good substitute for fruit

FACT▶ Fruit juice is promoted as a healthy drink, and is even mentioned as a replacement for whole fruit. But this is not necessarily the case. Fruit juice actually has a similar calorie content to a glass of regular soft drink, without the fibre. If you ate three oranges instead of drinking them, you'd get a whole lot more nutrients, fibre and fullness from the same amount of calories. Eat whole fruit, as nature intended, and drink water instead.

MYTH▼

Bread, pasta, rice and potatoes are fattening

FACT▶ High carbohydrate foods like bread, pasta, rice and potatoes may or may not be fattening, depending on their quality, their portion size, and the company that they keep. Highly processed varieties of these foods, such as white pasta, white bread and white rice, are easy to over-consume because they are so low in fibre. The common accompaniments that people have with these carbohydrate foods (butter, creamy sauces, sour cream) also have a lot to do with their fattening reputation.

© www.istockphoto.com

**MYTH**▼

Salads are healthy

FACT▶ Many a fatty item has been bundled up under the guise of a 'salad'. For example, a chicken Caesar salad has more fat than a hamburger. Salads with creamy dressings or mayonnaise, cheese, sour cream, fatty meats or large quantities of oil can convert an otherwise healthy plate of salad vegetables into a high-calorie, fat-storing junk food.

Five warning signs of a weight loss myth

- Programmes or products that promise fast, miraculous results.
- Diets that suggest the elimination of whole food groups.
- Programmes or products that are disputed by qualified experts or respected organisations.
- Disclaimers that the programme must be combined with exercise and a calorie controlled diet for best results.
- Diets that claim that you can eat as much as you want, or that you don't have to exercise.

MYTH▼

I'm too old to exercise

FACT▶ This myth is actually the complete opposite of the truth, because the older you get, the more you benefit from it. Every older person would benefit from stronger bones, more energy, better balance, improved sleep, reduced blood pressure and weight management. Some of the effects of ageing, such as the loss of muscle tissue and bone density, can actually be reversed to some extent through regular physical activity.



© www.istockphoto.com

MYTH▼

It takes twenty minutes of exercise before I burn fat

FACT▶ Many people mistakenly believe that you need to exercise for at least 20 minutes to get any benefit from exercise. It all depends on your goal. If you were training to play competitive sport, then a 10-minute walk probably wouldn't do much for your fitness. But if your goal is fat loss, any extra calories you burn will help. You can also accumulate small amounts of exercise over the day. There is no magical duration, and every bit of extra movement will have benefits for removing stored body fat.

MYTH▼

Margarine is healthier than butter

FACT▶ Margarine can actually be more damaging for your health than butter. Margarine is made from vegetable oils chemically altered to be solid at room temperature, resulting in a type of fat called trans fatty acids. If you can find a margarine low in saturated fat and trans fats, then that would be a better choice. But for weight and fat loss, it's best to minimise or eliminate butter and margarine.





WEIGHT LOSS MYTHS CATE

MYTH▼

Becoming a vegetarian will help me lose weight

because fat is energy dense, and contains twice the amount of calories per gram than carbohydrates and protein. The weight also includes water, which makes up a large proportion of the weight of the food like milk.

FACT▶

There is a general perception that being a vegetarian means being healthy. But this is not always the case. It depends on what type of vegetarian you are. Vegetarians can still get a lot of fat from milk, butter, cream, cheese, eggs, vegetable oil and yoghurt. Research has shown that vegetarians who still eat dairy products and eggs store just as much unhealthy saturated fat as meat eaters. Only vegans, who avoid all animal products, have the better health status.

MYTH▼

It's only the occasional treat

FACT▶

What does the word 'occasional' really mean? With such a wide variety of junk food out there, people might have pizza once a week, but they also have fried chicken once a week, and hamburgers once a week, and then a takeaway another night. But when you advise them to go without junk food for a few days, they feel as if they are on a diet. If you are serious about fat loss, try to aim for 5-6 days a week where you stick to a healthy eating plan. Don't have treats every day.

MYTH▼

Full cream milk is 4% fat

FACT▶

Full cream milk contains 4% fat (by weight), but its actual fat content by calories is over 50%. The fat percentage of a food can be determined by weight or by calories. Using weight is misleading,

MYTH▼

Electrical muscle stimulators help you lose weight while watching TV

FACT▶

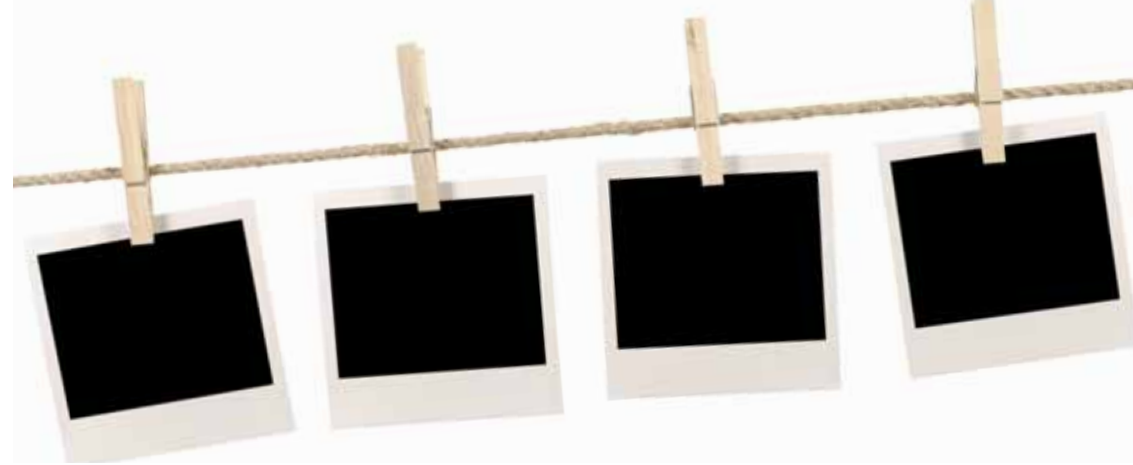
These gadgets claim to help you lose weight and tighten your abs, thighs and buttocks without actually exercising. They trigger tiny muscle contractions, and claim you can get fit while sitting in front of the television. You might want to believe it, but you probably know deep down inside that it's useless. If you don't work, it doesn't work. There's no evidence to support strength gains or weight loss. Save your money, but have a good laugh at the ads.

MYTH▼

It's my genes

FACT▶

People often like to blame their excess body fat on bad genetics. While there are some rare exceptions, an unhealthy lifestyle is more often the cause. Overweight and obesity have only become significant health problems in the last 30-40 years. That time period happens to coincide with the biggest changes in food manufacturing and technological development in human history. It seems unlikely for genetics and human evolution to change so much in such a short period of time. Maybe it's because we eat more and move less. You be the judge. ☺



LIFE.info

magazine

Vol. 7, Issue No. 4

Editor: B. A. De Oliveira

Design: little bear creative

LIFE.info magazine
Alma Park, Grantham
Lincolnshire, NG31 9SL

Telephone: 01476 591 700

Email: lifemag@mac.com

Published by The Stanborough Press Ltd,
Alma Park, Grantham, Lincolnshire, NG31 9SL.

Printed in Thailand.

Sponsored by the British Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. If you would like to find out more about the Seventh-day Adventist Church, see www.adventist.org.uk.

LIFEResources

Stop smoking (p. 6)
www.quit.org.uk

Parkinson's disease (p. 12)
www.parkinsons.co.uk

Worry (p. 16)
www.anxietyculture.com
How to Stop Worrying and Start Living,
by Dale Carnegie.

Downshifting (p. 20)
www.thedownshifter.co.uk
Life Swap: The essential guide to downshifting,
by Jo Hampson and Georgina Perkins.

Cash Challenge (p. 56)
www.themoneysecret.com
www.cfam.co.uk
www.creditaction.org.uk

aims



- To provide relevant material to help you with day-to-day living.
- To encourage you to stop and think about your life and its purpose.
- To make you smile.



THE CASH CHALLENGE

Sue Greenleaf

I sat in my kitchen, half-heartedly sifting through the day's letters. I used to open the bills first, and get them out of the way, so I could enjoy the rest of the mail. But now I always opened the bills last, sometimes even leaving them a day or two if I couldn't face them, especially credit card statements. We always tried to have enough money in the bank to pay off our cards at the end of the month, so we never paid very much interest on them, or carried huge debts. But there was the ever-nagging thought that we were always living off next month's pay cheque, and living ahead of our means.

The average amount of debt carried by each British family is currently estimated to be more than £8,000. With the credit crunch well and truly on top of us, it's time for drastic action. The British charity, 'Care for the Family', is suggesting that we try spending only the cash in our pockets for a whole month. It's part of their experiment to help families become debt-free, and more aware of their financial expenditure, because they've seen how many families have been torn apart

Paying with cash was going to be a new experience for us, as we used our cards to pay for practically everything and were notorious for barely having enough change for car parks or the toilets.

over money issues.

Although we could choose to be cardless during any month of the year, the email came in February, just before Lent. So we decided to give up using our credit cards, instead of the usual chocolate or cakes.

We clicked on the website (www.cfam.co.uk) to sign up for 'Cash for a Month'. The process was very quick and simple, and we were sent an email giving us some tips about how to get going, with the promise of more suggestions and ideas each week throughout the month. Paying with cash was going to be a new experience for us, as we used our cards to pay for practically everything, and were notorious for barely having enough coins between us to pay for things like car parks, or the 20p needed for the toilets at Euston Station.

According to our first email, one of the main benefits of resorting to hard cash for a month is that you have a clearer idea of how you're spending your money. This can help





© Food Features

RECIPE

TARTE DE SANTIAGO (St James' Almond Tart)

This is a very rich and delicious traditional Galician almond tart, often served with quince and thick cream.

Serves: 6-8

Prep time: 20 mins Cook time: 40 mins

For the pastry:

1 egg
150g butter or margarine
225g plain flour
2tbsp icing sugar, sieved

For the filling:

4 eggs
225g castor sugar
1 small lemon
225g ground almonds
Pinch ground cinnamon
Flour for rolling out
Butter for greasing
Icing sugar for sprinkling

Method:

1. Beat together the egg, butter, sugar and 1-2 tablespoons of warm water until light and creamy. Gradually work in the flour until the mixture leaves the sides of the bowl clean. Knead lightly until smooth and then chill until required.
2. Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/gas Mark 4. For the filling, beat together the eggs and sugar until creamy. Fold in the finely grated lemon rind, and juice, the ground almonds and cinnamon.
3. Roll out the pastry to 1/8-inch thick on a floured work surface. Line a greased, loose-bottomed 10-inch flan tin with the pastry. Prick it all over with a fork and spoon the filling on top.
4. Bake in the preheated oven for about 40 minutes, until golden brown and just firm. Leave the tart to cool in the tin.
5. Transfer carefully to a serving plate and sprinkle with icing sugar. Serve with thick cream and poached pears or quince if you wish.

Tip: You can spread the base of the pastry with your favourite fruit jam before adding the almond topping if you wish – though it can become quite sweet for some tastes. 🍯

Historians generally agree that almonds and dates, both mentioned in the Old Testament of the Bible, were among the earliest cultivated foods.

In classical times, the Romans distributed sugared almonds as gifts to great men at public and private events.

Distributing sugared almonds wrapped in tulle as a wedding favour is a tradition that dates back to early European history. These almond 'bonbonnières' symbolise children, happiness, romance, good health and fortune.

The earliest varieties of almonds were found in China, carried by traders down the ancient Silk Road to Greece, Turkey and the Middle East.

Cinnamon-glazed almonds were President Clinton's snack of choice at both the 1993 and the 1997 inaugurations.

According to superstition: If you eat almonds before taking a drink, you will reduce your chances of getting drunk and avoid having a hangover. Source: www.waterfordnut.com



© www.istockphoto.com/Norman Chan



you evaluate your expenditure and identify the areas where you need to cut back. It suggested that we could start by cutting back on buying coffee and sandwiches by making our own packed lunches. But we already did that.

To be honest, my first challenge was hunting down the local cash machines. I usually managed my money online and only went into my bank to deposit the occasional cheque. I took out £50 for my first card-less week. But I forgot that it was my husband's fiftieth birthday in a few days, and that we'd planned a party for about fifty people. So I went back to the cash machine and took out another £80 and went to the supermarket to buy drinks and nibbles.

Within the first couple of weeks I found myself buying things I hadn't anticipated, and it was useful to see what these were – often gifts for other people, or little treats for myself after a hard day.

As I wandered around with my trolley I remembered all the other things we needed at home. Eggs, bread, tomatoes, cereals, marmalade, frozen peas. . . . Half an hour later I pushed my over-full trolley towards the checkout. And then I remembered the 'cash for a month' promise. I realised that my fortnightly shopping trips had been comfortably cushioned by my credit card. Hesitantly, I unloaded my groceries onto the conveyor belt, trying to estimate how much everything was going to cost. I was relieved to notice that the checkout display indicated a running total as well as the price of each item being scanned. I watched the total rise along with my stress level, told the teenager

at the checkout that I'd changed my mind about a few of the last items, and she watched, slightly bemused, as I counted out the cash. After all, this was a slightly up-market grocery store, one that I hardly ever went to, in a town where apparently everyone, who was anyone, used a credit card. I felt strangely embarrassed as I paid her with real bank notes, almost as if I had gained the money by some slightly illegal means. But this strange self-consciousness disappeared after a few days and I became rather blasé about flashing my cash!

Within the first couple of weeks I found myself buying things I hadn't anticipated, and it was useful to see what these were – often gifts for other people, or little treats for myself after a hard day. Consequently, I ran out of cash very quickly. Once I had to cancel the sale and go outside to find the nearest cash point, which, fortunately, was just across the road, and the lady behind the counter was very sweet about it. I soon learned to plan better, to take out the maximum amount of money that I was allowed to withdraw each time, and to leave extra cash at home if I was sure I wouldn't need it. Then I would be less likely to impulse shop, and more likely to stick to my shopping list.

One of the downsides of not using credit cards for a few weeks was that we missed out on their loyalty points. It seemed kind of petty of us to be concerned about lost loyalty points when we were experimenting with trying to manage our finances. But this heightened our awareness of how credit companies seduce us into spending more than we can really afford, for the sake of a few airmiles, or theme park tickets. Sometimes I felt that having the cash in my wallet made it easier to spend money. After all, I could buy that luscious top for the summer and there would be no record of my purchase on the monthly statement. . . .

And did we break our credit card fast?



© www.istockphoto.com/Achim Prill

Well, yes. It was all my fault. I was grocery shopping again. On my own. I had lots of cash, all ready for the experience. But half way around the store my mobile rang and some friends invited themselves for the weekend. I panic-shopped. Silly really, as they don't eat that much. Three-quarters of the way through the checkout I realised I was miserably short of money. The queues were long and I didn't have the nerve to leave my trolley, go outside to the cash point, and hold up the queue of already-frustrated customers. I meekly handed over the credit card and felt like a failure.

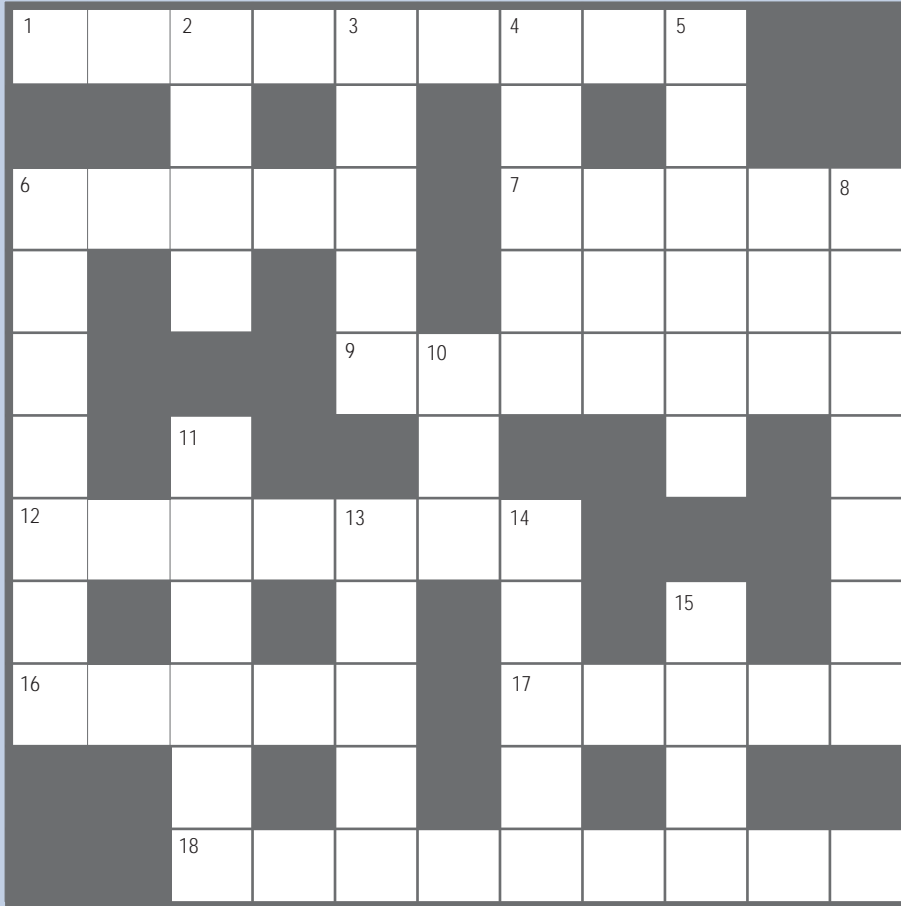
But when the credit card bill arrived at the end of the month, it was worth all the inconvenience, the minor embarrassments and the hassle. We had managed to fast (mostly) from using our credit cards. And we felt lighter, not because we'd given up meat or chocolate or calories, but because we no longer felt so dependent on the plastic cards. We had spent several hundred pounds less than we usually did in a month. It was a good feeling and we hadn't really failed. We celebrated by tucking into an organic, fairly-traded Easter egg, bought with real pound coins, and wondered whether we had the courage to cut the card into tiny pieces and never use it again. We had some friends who decided to do just that, and it saved them from bankruptcy. But, for now, we'd proved that we could be in control of the card when we needed to be, and that was enough. ☺



useful hints for limiting spending

- Allow yourself a fixed amount of pocket money each week. If you need to buy something more expensive, wait until you have enough money for it – don't borrow from a future week.
- Take a hard look at your credit card statement and add up how much you are spending on food, petrol, home, clothes, entertainment, and so on. Does anything look out of balance? How can you spend less in each of these areas?
- If you have debts on your credit cards, aim to spend at least £100 less on your cards each month.
- Watch the instant-gratification syndrome. If you find something you would like to buy, wait for a month, see if you still want it as passionately, and then decide whether you really need to buy it.
- Try going for month without spending any money on clothes or entertainment. Wear the clothes you have already, and find free ways to have fun. You could even try to reduce your expenses for a month by eating up the food you already have in your cupboards.
- If you feel your debt is out of control, find a trustworthy independent charity that can advise and support you. See the websites on page 55.
- Read *The Money Secret* by Rob Parsons. It's not expensive, you can read it in an hour or two, and it could transform your finances.
- If you are paying lots of interest on your credit balance, transfer the debt to a new card that has 0% interest for the first year. Stop using your credit cards, divide your debt into ten, and save that amount of money each month in a high interest account. Within a year you will be able to pay off your debt without incurring expensive interest payments. It's hard work, but it's worth it.

Crossword Puzzle



Across

- Country whose capital is Canberra (9)
- Black _____ : deadly spider (5)
- Bronze medal winning position (5)
- A type of dark cell (7)
- Weekday derived from the Nordic god Tyr (7)
- The opposite of zenith (5)
- Smart _____ : a wise guy (5)
- English county and birthplace of Jane Austen (9)

Down

- The froth produced by soap (4)
- What Steve Redgrave did to win Olympic gold (5)
- Language of the Roman Empire (5)
- Stage whispers (6)
- Churchill: former Prime Minister (7)
- The country where Hans Christian Andersen was born (7)
- _____ Thurman: *Kill Bill* actress (3)
- Port city in western Saudi Arabia (6)
- Type of wheat (5)
- William Butler _____ : famous poet (5)
- E.g. Luke Skywalker and Yoda (4)

Answers: Across: 1. Australia; 6. Widow; 7. Third; 9. Dungeon; 12. Tuesday; 16. Nador; 17. Aleck; 18. Hampshire.
Down: 2. Spide; 3. Rowed; 4. Lather; 5. Asides; 6. Winston; 8. Denmark; 10. Lima; 11. Jeddah; 13. Durum; 14. Yeals; 15. Jedi.

I'd like to get connected to God through regular prayer and Bible study. Please send the first lesson of my FREE correspondence course.

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode: _____

Post this coupon to:


Correspondence Courses, Discover Bible School,
Stanborough Park, Watford, WD25 9JU.





Get in touch with a higher power that can make your life so much more meaningful.

www.bibleschools.com



Local distributor details