

Jason Momoa's Next Big Flex

P44

Men's Health

NEW TRAINING PLANS BUILT TO LAST

BODY FOR LIFE

FUTURE-PROOF YOUR PHYSIQUE
TRANSCEND YOUR AGE!

P81

MH REPORTS
HOW TO FIX THE NHS
A PRESCRIPTION FOR A HEALTH SERVICE IN CRISIS
P62

THE SCIENCE OF HAPPY

5 QUANTIFIABLE REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL IN 2023

POLITICAL FOOTBALL

GARY LINEKER SPEAKS HIS MIND TO ALASTAIR CAMPBELL

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FITNESS

P28 STRAIGHT SHOOTER

Hyrox champion Hunter 'The Sheriff' McIntyre shares his tips for strength, size and unstoppable stamina

P108 BUILT TO LAST

Future-proof your physique using this no-nonsense three-day strength plan

P114 AT FULL STRETCH

Limber up and boost your performance with this four-move mobility masterclass



WEIGHT-LOSS

P20 COME OUT SWINGING

Choose the right kettlebell for you and unlock its heavy fat-torching potential

P35 ON THE LEVEL

Can this tool help you bio-hack your bloody sugar levels to keep weight off?

P36 WORTH A SHOT?

We cut through the hype around appetite-suppressing injectables to find out if they are really a smart (or safe) solution



MIND

P12 BRIGHT AND EARLY

Getting your creative juices flowing could be as simple as switching up your breakfast

P55 GIVE UP THE GHOST

Being ignored sucks, but it's happening more often in the digital age. Here's how to exorcise lingering feelings of rejection

P58 IN POLE POSITION

Could transcranial magnetic stimulation help combat mental ill health?



HEALTH

P19 IN SMALL DOSES

Psychonauts speak highly of the mental-health benefits of psychedelics, but what really happens when you microdose?

P22 TOWN OR COUNTRY?

City life has its own health implications, but does rural living fare any better?

P62 A QUESTION OF NATIONAL HEALTH

With the NHS currently on its knees, eight leading voices proffer their cures



NUTRITION

P16 TOP SPEAR

Here's a tip: asparagus is in season, so get your fill with our fresh takes on today's crop

P107 WHAT'S THE SCOOP?

Powdered greens are causing a stir, but are you better off sticking with a juice?

P117 STACKED AND PACKED

This hot Thai tofu salad recipe provides enough protein-filled fitness fuel to keep you firing throughout the working week



MUSCLE

P15 ROLL UP, ROLL UP

Carve out a cast-iron core and freshen up your routine with the dynamic rolling squat

P42 THE TOTAL PACKAGE

Build all-round strength in a matter of minutes with this five-move body blitz

P94 NEED A TOP-UP?

We all know testosterone levels dip as you age, but should guys over 40 be thinking about topping up their T?

IN THIS ISSUE
CUTTING-EDGE RESEARCH, AGELESS ADVICE

The Science Of Happiness

Can contentment
really be taught?
p98

ON THE COVER

P44 THE NEXT BIG FLEX

Action superstar Jason Momoa is fighting for change

P72 MAN OF THE MATCH

Gary Lineker reflects on fame, imposter syndrome and posting *that* tweet

P81 ONE FOR THE AGES

Whatever decade you're in, make it your best yet

P118 WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

Eight rough and rugged UK destinations to explore now



ON THE COVER
JASON MOMOA
PHOTOGRAPHED
EXCLUSIVELY FOR
MEN'S HEALTH BY
JASON ROMAN

THE EXPERT PANEL

SIX OF THE BRIGHT MINDS WHO HELPED BUILD THIS ISSUE



KELLY STARRETT PHYSICAL THERAPIST

Mobility maven Dr Starrett knows moving better is the key to unlocking performance and longevity. Take his self-assessment. [p114](#)



ADAM WINSTOCK PSYCHIATRIST

Ever wondered what microdosing does to your brain? Addiction specialist Dr Winstock shares the science of psychedelics. [p19](#)



HUNTER McINTYRE ATHLETE AND COACH

The Hyrox champion, Murph record-breaker and online coach shares his unconventional tips for smashing your own personal best. [p28](#)



ANAND PATEL DOCTOR

GP and men's health specialist Dr Patel joins our roster of experts to offer simple tips for peak physical health in every decade of life. [p81](#)



ALAN MILBURN FORMER POLITICIAN

The NHS is ailing – but there are possible cures. Former Secretary of State for Health Alan Milburn offers his prescription. [p62](#)



JOHN SELLARS LECTURER

Can we teach ourselves happiness? Philosophy lecturer and author Dr Sellars shares his learnings on life satisfaction. [p98](#)

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EDITOR'S LETTER

WHAT'S MY AGE AGAIN?

During my fledgling years as a magazine journalist,

around the turn of the millennium, I was dispatched to Manchester's Granada studios to interview the cast of *Cold Feet*, a hit comedy drama that followed the social lives of a group of thirty-something friends.

The schedule was intense. I spoke to Robert Bathurst and John Thomson on set between scenes, then Hermione Norris over coffee; I made a pathetic attempt to flirt with Helen Baxendale and Fay Ripley in their trailers; afterwards, I set off to dinner at a swanky restaurant in the Northern Quarter where I would spend the evening with James Nesbitt. 'Tonight, Toby, we shall drink Sancerre,' he declared, glint in the eye, unmistakable Ulster brogue in full effect. 'And we shall drink bloody lots of it.'

Have I ever written a paragraph that reads quite so outmoded? With references to 1990s telly totty sounding almost as atavistic as boozy journalistic assignments, quite possibly not. But this is in part the point. Because it was on the evening in question that I first gave serious thought to the nature of age.

Jimmy – as James inevitably became known a short while into our second bottle – had a theory that he was keen to share, possibly because he felt it explained his compulsion to get leathered on a school night. 'All of us, I believe, exist as two ages throughout our lives,' he said. 'Now, my birth certificate says that I am 35. But in here,' he pointed to his head, 'I am 19. What's more, I always will be. How old are you?'

'I'm 23,' I said.

'And how old do you feel?'

'Not sure. About 18, I guess.'

'You see?' he cried. 'That's why we're getting along so well! Let's order another one...'

It's a conversation I've recounted many times, not just to brag about my close relationship with *démodé* players in regional comedies, but because it's one that continues to resonate. Despite being in my mid-late forties, I often feel decades younger – and not always or often in a good way, at least not any more. These days it's less a feeling of callow invincibility than one of temporal dissonance. It can lead to imposter syndrome: do I deserve responsibility? Am I taken seriously? When am I going to feel like a grown-up? It can also cause a jolt when you catch your reflection in the mirror and realise you're no longer the fresh-faced, indefatigable, lean machine you once were.

All this came to mind recently when I read an article in *The Atlantic* about something called 'subjective' age. It concerned a Danish study from 2006 that posited much the same as Jimmy had been claiming in a sauvignon-soaked dining room some years earlier. Having surveyed 1,470 participants, the study, led by David Rubin, a

professor of psychology and neuroscience at Duke University, concluded that adults over the age of 40 generally perceive themselves to be around 20% younger than they actually are. In most of us, it inferred, there is a gulf between objective age and subjective age.

The reasons for this are moot. It could simply be vanity. Or wishful thinking. But there are other more interesting psychological interpretations. Some people latch on to an age in their heads because it signals a momentous event in their lifetimes, such as losing a relative, or having a serious accident. Apparently, medieval theologians concluded that all people in heaven were 33, regardless of how old they were when they died, because that was the age of Jesus when he was crucified.

Many readers will be familiar with a tendency to cling on to formative adolescent years as they grow older, latching on to lived rites of passage, shared experiences, old films and playlists, first loves and so on. I'm the sort who follows Instagram accounts like @grew_up_in_the_70s_and_80s and forwards on pictures of *Now That's What I Call Music* cassette compilations and old polystyrene Big Mac cartons. I also have a 17-year-old son who I blatantly exploit as a sounding board for my own teenage exploits and on whom I foist my personal musical preferences at the time, no matter that 30 years have elapsed since. In these moments, I like to think he sees me as a like-minded mate,

if not a contemporary. My wife thinks I need to chill.

Of course, the age you feel in your head is not the same as the one you feel in your bones. In my mind, I may identify as a Radiohead fan at the 1994 Reading Festival in 30-inch jeans. But as recent attempts to revive my teenage skateboarding obsession cruelly demonstrated, the male ego likes to write cheques the body can't cash. This kind of realisation is hardly new – it's otherwise known as a midlife crisis. The difference is it's something that men are becoming less willing to accept.

That's why we made this issue a *Fit At Any Age* special. Your body is not a machine. How it works and looks changes as you grow older. But that doesn't mean it's something to be accepted without a fight. Of the readers who contact me directly with thoughts on our output, the majority are men of a certain age on a journey to reclaim their best lives. Approached sensibly, and with smarts, that's not egotistical – it's aspirational. Throughout this magazine, we present the tools you need to work with your physique rather than against it, plus strategies to keep you mentally and emotionally fit, too.

Act your age, they like to say. Sure, I say. But which one?

TOBY WISEMAN, EDITOR IN CHIEF



WE HAVE THE TOOLS YOU NEED TO HELP WORK WITH YOUR PHYSIQUE AS YOU AGE, NOT AGAINST IT



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AGENDA



19
THE SKINNY ON FAT-LOSS JABS
PAGE 36



24
YOUR ALL-IN-ONE ACTION PLAN
PAGE 42



23
THE CARDIAC SELF-CHECK
PAGE 40



18
THE SHARP END OF FOOD SCIENCE PAGE 35



12
TURF OUT DARK DAYS
PAGE 27

PATHS TO PEAK PERFORMANCE

JUNE 2023

07
BELLS WITH BALLS
PAGE 20



06
CAN LSD MAKE YOU HAPPIER?
PAGE 19



21
KICK YOUR BRAIN INTO HIGH GEAR
PAGE 39

LIFT THE LID ON THE
SECRET TO BETTER
BRAIN FUNCTION

SHARPEN UP WITH SARDINES AT BREAKFAST

Creative juices not flowing? Reeling in fresh ideas could be as simple as switching up your morning meal

Not long after kung-fu kicking an abusive spectator during a Manchester United match against Crystal Palace, the footballer Eric Cantona told a room full of journalists, 'When the seagulls follow the trawler, it's because they think sardines will be thrown into the sea.' His gnomic explanation of his actions – which resulted in a lengthy FA ban – has confounded fans and pundits for some 28 years. Whatever he meant, though, one thing is true: whether you're a seagull or not, any trawler hauling the delicious, omega-3-rich fish is well worth paying attention to.

According to a recent study of middle-aged adults conducted by scientists at the University of

Texas, a diet rich in long-chain omega-3s (known as EPA and DHA) can boost mental function. Researchers linked higher levels of these fatty acids with larger hippocampal volumes and, perhaps as a result, an improved ability to grasp complex ideas.

The link between omega-3 consumption and better thinking has long been established among elderly populations; significantly, the new paper suggests that its brain-sharpening effect could extend to younger men, too. So, park your morning oats and crack open a tin of sardines – among the most potent sources of omega-3s – to top your buttered toast. And who knows? Your elevated powers of mental reasoning could even help you decipher the free verse of football's philosopher king.

▶ YOUR ALPHA OMEGA SOURCES

Get your morning fix of the good stuff right here

i. FLAXSEED

A tablespoon in your cereal delivers 2g of fatty acid ALA, which aids the synthesis of DHA and EPA.



ii. SMOKED SALMON

Order the eggs royale: a 100g serving of smoked salmon packs roughly 500mg of EPA and DHA.



iii. EGGS

Two poached eggs can pack as much as 140mg of omega-3, plus brain-boosting choline.



iv. WALNUTS

Crunch through a 50g bag while you browse your emails and you'll earn a gram of helpful ALA.



v. KIPPERS

A serving of buttery kippers contains 940mg of EPA and 1,280mg of DHA, plus a dose of vit D.





TIME INSTRUMENTS
FROM THE COCKPIT TO THE WRIST

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ROLL UP FOR ABS OF IRON

When time is against you, give the **ROLLING SQUAT** a spin to add fresh momentum to your fitness routine. Hold tight now

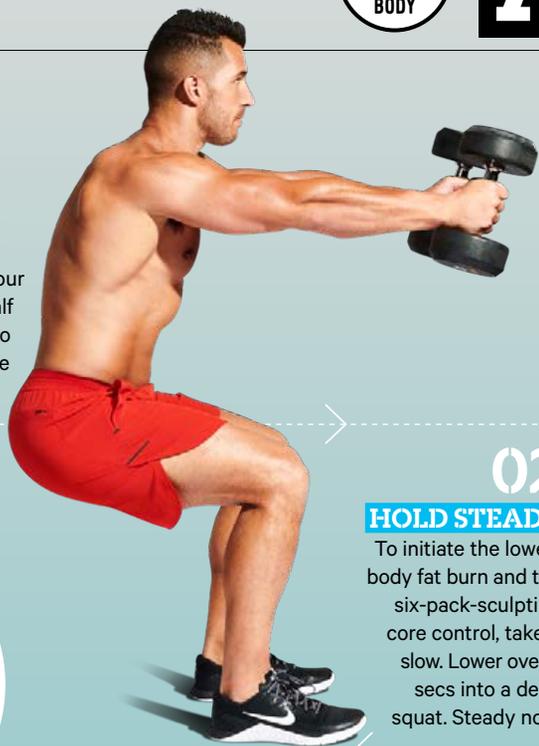
Don't be fooled – this is no roly-poly. It might look like child's play, but this (admittedly unusual) abs move combines a weighted crunch with a dumbbell squat to strengthen your core and get your heart pumping. It's also a lot more entertaining than another minute-long plank, both to attempt and watch.

As ever, maintaining form is the fast track to quicker results. 'Lower under control to activate your larger leg muscles, and ensure that your core is engaged as you roll back and forth,' advises strength trainer James Stirling, aka Instagram's London Fitness Guy. The stability required in your trunk to keep the roll straight will sculpt your abs more efficiently than a regular set of crunches, while the squat finish gives your quads a workout, too.

'This is best used as a HIIT finisher at the end of your workout because it's simple, requires minimal equipment and has an equally potent effect on your heart rate as on your core,' explains Stirling. Start with five rounds of 45 seconds' work and 15 seconds' rest, targeting as many reps as possible. Aim to complete an extra three reps in each round. Have you got it? Now stop, drop and roll.

THE BEST EXERCISE YOU'RE NOT DOING

01 SIT BACK
But don't relax. Start by lifting the dumbbells in front of you and draw your hips back into a half squat. Then hold, to activate every fibre for your first rep.



02 HOLD STEADY
To initiate the lower-body fat burn and the six-pack-sculpting core control, take it slow. Lower over 3 secs into a deep squat. Steady now.

03 ON A ROLL
Let gravity take over. As your glutes touch the mat, steadily roll back and brace your abs to keep the rep straight. Move the weights overhead to gain momentum.



04 LIFT OFF
Use the momentum to lift your legs above your head. Reverse the movement by crunching your abs and pressing up through the squat. Keep on rollin'.

WHAT YOU'LL GAIN



STRONGER CORE



BODY WEIGHT MASTERY



TORCHED CALORIES

THE NUTRITION SNOB'S GUIDE TO ASPARAGUS

Eating food in season can help you harvest a crop of health benefits. This month, that means asparagus. But there's a lot more to these green giants than just the tip

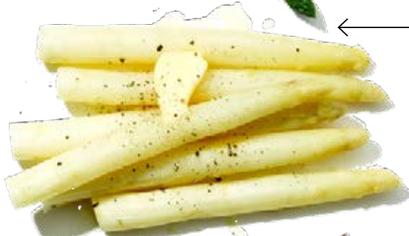
01 SPARE ROOM FOR A SPEAR

Like the British summer, asparagus season is short but sweet. The green zone lies between St George's Day (23 April) and midsummer (24 June) – but it's not just the smug taste of sustainability you'll savour. 'With fresh, local produce you get all the flavour that deteriorates when food is transported long distances,' says Gill Meller, author of British recipe book *Gather*. Add in the fact that you'll yield more nutrients at a lower cost and it's clear time is of the essence. Why wait?



A GREEN

The regular sort is packed full of folate, a B vitamin linked to neural health and fertility – or brains and balls, if you like. It's also depleted by excess alcohol intake. Top up if the after-work beers have been calling.



B WHITE

Grown underground away from sunlight, this vampire veg has little need for chlorophyll, accounting for its bleached-blonde looks. But it's still rich in glutathione, which helps to support cells damaged by stress and pollution.



C PURPLE

The anthocyanins that provide this variety with its pleasing purple hue are also powerful antioxidants, which curb inflammation and improve heart health. Oh, and they've been linked to a reduced cancer risk, too.



D JARRED

Okay, the salt used to preserve this kind is best rinsed away. But don't write off preserved veg just yet: whether jarred or tinned, they retain many of their useful micronutrients. Crunch straight from the jar.

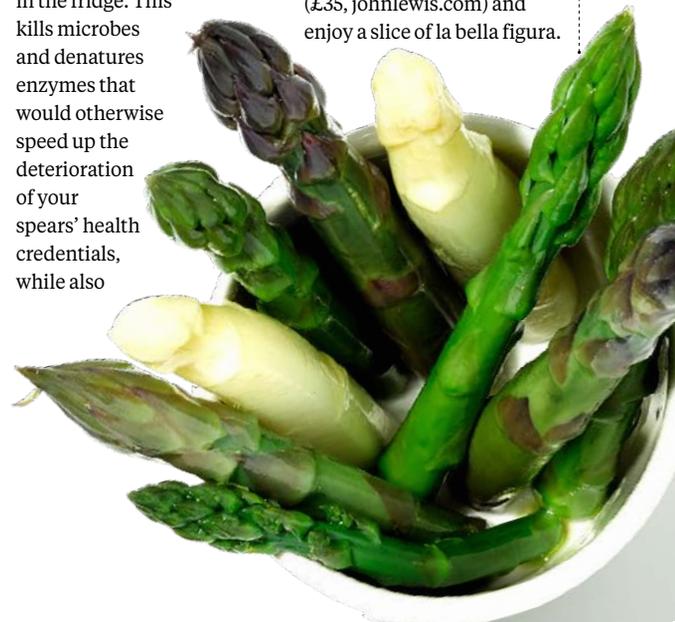


02 A FRESH TAKE

In the race to assimilate every nutrient, freshness is crucial. 'In an ideal world, you would collect your asparagus from the farm gate and eat them the very same day,' says Meller. But if you don't live next to Mr McGregor, the next best thing is to blanch them in boiling, salted water for a couple of minutes before storing them in a jug or beaker with a little water in the fridge. This kills microbes and denatures enzymes that would otherwise speed up the deterioration of your spears' health credentials, while also

offering protection from oxygen, which causes wilting.

To trim the stems, you'll need a good knife. Meller recommends a serrated tomato knife from Victorinox (£6.58, nibsets.co.uk), so you can slice, not crush, each spear, protecting the delicate fibre and structure. To score extra presentation points, cut them into long, thin ribbons using a peeler from Italian kitchen gizmo experts Alessi (£35, johnlewis.com) and enjoy a slice of la bella figura.



03

GREENS GOBLIN'

Getting fresh seasonal produce from farm to fork in as little time as possible is good for your wellbeing and taste buds. And as plant-based eating remains very much in vogue – both for health points and the planet – this is your chance to elevate asparagus from also-ran side order to the main event. So let's get to the point with recipes from chef, forager and seasonal eater Meller.



A

ASPARAGUS WITH POACHED EGGS

SERVES 2

- 12 asparagus spears, trimmed
- 2 eggs
- 100g butter, melted

METHOD

Simplicity is a virtue. Just don't stray into vice by using poor-quality eggs (go farm fresh for more omega-3). Bring one large and one small pan of water to the boil. Plunge the asparagus into the large pan and use the other to poach the eggs – they provide 6g of protein each. Let the pans simmer for about 4 mins, then plate up the asparagus and top with the eggs, melted butter, salt and pepper.



B

WHITE ASPARAGUS WITH MUSHROOMS

SERVES 2

- 1 small basket of St George's mushrooms
- Olive oil
- 12 white asparagus spears, trimmed
- 100g butter

METHOD

The St George's mushroom is in sync with asparagus season – and while this wild edible won't slay dragons, its selenium can cut your cancer risk. Clean, trim and halve them before sauteing for 5 mins in a little olive oil. Steam the spears for 4 mins, add them to the mushroom pan with the butter and season. Toss around once or twice and serve at once on pre-warmed plates.

FOOD DIARY

As one food falls out of favour, another hits its prime. Add these to your calendar for an in-season shopping list

COD

JANUARY-APRIL

Filled with more DHA and EPA fats at this time of year, your Friday-night supper can help lessen cognitive decline.



NEW POTATOES

APRIL-JULY

These spuds dish out vitamin B1, which your body uses to release energy from food, to better power your workouts.



DUCK

OCTOBER-DECEMBER

A forkful of duck meat provides all the amino acids your body needs to fuel your hungry muscles during the darker months.



C

PURPLE ASPARAGUS AND CRAB

SERVES 2

- 1 brown cock crab (about 1.2kg)
- 12 purple asparagus spears, trimmed
- Olive oil
- 1 lemon, juiced

METHOD

Wash the crab and boil in a large pan for 25 mins. Let it cool slightly before picking the meat from the claws and shell for a bumper serving of immune-supporting zinc. Toss the asparagus in oil and place it on a sizzling griddle pan. Cook for 4 mins, turning once. Spoon the meat on to a plate atop the spears. Season with lemon, salt and pepper.



D

JARRED ASPARAGUS WITH BURRATA

SERVES 4

- 4 buffalo burrata balls
- 1 jar of asparagus
- Large pinch of chilli flakes
- 1 lemon, zest only
- Small bunch of mint and parsley, chopped
- Extra virgin olive oil
- 1 baguette

METHOD

Tear the burrata – which, though creamy, is less calorific than cheddar and high in bone-building calcium. Divide it among the plates along with the spears then sprinkle with the chilli flakes, lemon zest and chopped herbs. Season with pepper, salt and lots of olive oil. Serve with warm crusty bread, then go about your day with a spring in your step.

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN...

06
TRIP OR TREAT?

A

... I MICRODOSE?

Psychonauts report better moods and brighter ideas, but what goes on in your body when you take a trip?

03

SAFE SPACE

While the dose is important, how you feel, where you are and who you're with are paramount. 'It's best not to take psychedelics when you're not feeling great, in a strange place or surrounded by strangers,' says Professor Winstock, and even small amounts shouldn't be given without consent (obviously). Evidence suggests that a placebo effect might also be at play when microdosing.

04

CHANGE MAKER

Most research into the effects of psychedelics links to mental health. 'Large doses disrupt connections between parts of the brain that have become embedded in people who are depressed,' Professor Winstock says. They boost the production of brain-derived neurotrophic factors (BDNF), a molecule linked to learning and memory. One study* found that a low dose of LSD caused a rise in BDNF.

05

NO QUICK FIXES

But the lab isn't real life. Psychedelics may be trendy, but they're also illegal. 'People need to understand that, in trials, participants are screened, prepped and working with experts,' says Professor Winstock. 'So, taking a psychedelic at home isn't a solution to complex psychological problems.' LSD can't cure depression like paracetamol can fix a headache. Think before you trip. Visit drugscience.org.uk.

01

UNDER THE LID

While much remains a mystery, we do have some insight into how hallucinogenic drugs act on the brain. 'Psychedelics stimulate the serotonin 2A receptor (5-HT2A),' says Tiago Reis Marques, a psychiatrist and CEO of biopharmaceutical company Pasithea. 'Brain imaging studies show that these drugs increase measures of connectivity between different parts of the brain and also increase entropy, a measure of "disorganised activity" in the brain.' This shake-up induces an altered state of consciousness.

02

PICK UP THE TAB

'For most drugs, the more you take, the bigger the effect. But the difference between a small or large dose of a psychedelic can be huge,' explains Adam Winstock, a consultant psychiatrist and addiction medicine specialist. There's no scientific definition of a 'microdose'. But, Professor Winstock notes that it's usually about a tenth of a recreational dose – that is, somewhere between 0.15g and 0.35g of dried magic mushrooms or 10mcg and 20mcg of LSD.



DO MUSHROOMS WORK LIKE MAGIC?

KING OF THE SWINGERS

Endlessly versatile and brutally efficient, the kettlebell deserves a spot in every man's fitness arsenal. We've found the best buys for any budget

Kettlebells first earned an underground following in the late 90s, among fitness coaches who'd heard they were the training weapons of choice for the Russian special forces. Today, you can find them in most gym chains. And yet, despite their ubiquity, they're still viewed by many as specialist tools. Not so: you can sub in a KB for pretty much all of your go-to dumbbell moves. Plus, they're even more effective in explosive training – think cleans, snatches, swings – teaching your muscles to work in harmony to control momentum. Oh, and they're king for fat loss, too.

You can reap these rewards pretty quickly: one US study found that kettlebell training improved participants' aerobic capacity, dynamic balance and core strength by as much as 70% in just eight weeks*.

But not all are created equal. Different weights suit different movements, which is why each of these bells is adjustable, allowing you to select from a range of options while keeping your lifting zone clutter-free. Our experts in the *MH* Lab put 10 models to the test to pick out our top five contenders, from budget buys to the fully specced-out. Let's get into the swing of things, shall we?



01 HEAVY WEIGHT 98/100

Bowflex SelectTech 840 Kettlebell, £179.99, onbuy.com

Performance	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Design	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Ease of use	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

SWING WHEN YOU'RE

WINNING: Our champ provides six weight options from 3.5kg to 18kg, catering to bodybuilding sets and full-body blasts alike. You can switch the resistance with a twist of the dial, making easy work of supersets and circuits that require a variety of weights. Unused plates remain in the dock, keeping your workout space tidy.

EXPERT VERDICT: Our testers rated the Bowflex for a broad mix of movements, including RDLs, loaded carries, windmills and the Turkish get-up. The ergonomic handle was comfy and the bell easy to manoeuvre, despite its bulky size.

02 TECH SUPPORT 87/100

JaxJox Adjustable KettlebellConnect 2.0, £170, decathlon.co.uk

Performance	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Design	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Ease of use	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

FUTURISTIC FITNESS: One for the data geeks. This clever model lets you select weights from 5.5kg to 19kg at the touch of a button. You can track reps and sets, and follow workouts (useful for newbies) via the JaxJox app. Just remember to charge it before each session.

EXPERT VERDICT: Despite its techy features, the JaxJox was a cinch to set up and changing the load couldn't have been simpler. However, some testers found it a tad cumbersome for moves such as snatches, shoulder presses and halos.



03
FUSS-FREE
81/100

Isogym Adjustable Kettlebell, £117.99, isogym.co.uk

Performance	
Design	
Ease of use	

IN SAFE HANDS: Simple but functional, this offers seven weight options in one, allowing you to go as light as 3.4kg for warm-ups or shift 18kg for a proper pump. Plates need to be changed manually, which rules out mid-WOD switch-ups. But it feels secure and, unlike other models, the weight of each plate is clearly displayed in kg and lb. **EXPERT VERDICT:** This product put in a solid performance. The pull mechanism was a little stiff to begin with, but felt smooth and straightforward with repeated use. There was some rattling during dynamic movements, but nothing too distracting.

04
SMALL BUT MIGHTY
80/100

HyGym Adjustable Kettlebell, £89.99, hygym.co.uk

Performance	
Design	
Ease of use	

STURDY AS YOU GO: You get a lot of bang for your buck here. Seven weight settings (3.6kg to 18kg, adjusted by sliding plates in and out of the shell – not super-speedy) make it suitable for most lifters. There's no holding dock for spare plates, however, so you may have to lug them around between sets. **EXPERT VERDICT:** The plates felt secure with little-to-no wobbling. Thanks to the bell's compact shape and broad, easy-grip handle, this one was a breeze to wield and helped training sessions feel smooth.

05
STRONG STARTER
77.5/100

Yanzhi Adjustable Kettlebell Weights, £33.99, amazon.co.uk

Performance	
Design	
Ease of use	

BEGINNER'S PICK: If you're new to strength training or want to focus on simple mobility drills, opt for this affordable bell. There are four weight choices, maxing out at 5.4kg, and it's easy to switch between them mid-flow. The flat, stable base also makes it handy for moves such as press-ups. **EXPERT VERDICT:** This baby bell is reliable and easy to use (just push the lock button, slide the plates on and twist to secure). Our testers had no issue with manoeuvring the weight and retained a good grip on the handle, even with sweaty palms.

WEIGH IT UP

Our MH Lab experts judged on these criteria:

01 EASE OF USE
Top marks were awarded to bells that allowed us to change the weight quickly and smoothly, without needing a mechanical engineering degree...

02 DESIGN
We looked for products that were easy to grip and manoeuvre and didn't take up a huge amount of space.

03 PERFORMANCE
Each bell was put through a few spicy sessions, so our testers could try a variety of isolated and dynamic moves to see how each performed.

TIME TO GET OUT OF TOWN?

Concrete research confirms that city life sends your biology off-kilter. But is a rural retreat really the panacea?

CITY	VS	COUNTRY
<h1>48,000</h1> <p>The number of new heart disease cases each year linked to harmful levels of environmental noise in European cities.</p> 		<h1>19%</h1> <p>The percentage of people in England's rural areas who live within a 20-minute walk of a GP surgery.</p> 
<p>Adding mileage to your time on earth is a walk in the park. Urbanites who live near greenery are less likely to die before their projected life expectancy*.</p> 	<p>LIVING IT UP</p> 	<p>Out-of-towners still have the edge. Those born in rural areas between 2018 and 2020 are expected to live two and a half years longer than their city-born counterparts*.</p> 
<p>Reroute your commute to safeguard your grey matter. Two hours' exposure to diesel exhaust fumes impairs brain areas linked with cognitive performance and mood*.</p> 	<p>BIG SMOKE</p> 	<p>Breathing in the country air is good in more ways than one. Trees emit compounds called phytoncides, which provoke a useful response in human immune systems*.</p> 
<p>Higher salaries</p> <p>Broader gym options</p> <p>Fast food on demand</p> <p>Expensive groceries</p>	<p>AT A GLANCE</p> 	<p>Lower house prices</p> <p>Improved wellbeing</p> <p>Long commutes</p> <p>Dodgy wifi</p>
<p>Despite what you might think, country isn't king for walkers. Urbanites walked further than rural dwellers in 2021, completing 253 trips compared with 152*.</p> <h1>253</h1>	<p>TAKE A HIKE</p> 	<p>They outpaced the country crowd on two wheels, too, with 18 cycling trips in the asphalt jungle versus 13 for those on the scenic route. Truly the path less travelled.</p> <h1>13</h1>
<p>Don't underestimate the power of office water-cooler chat. Suicide rates are consistently higher in rural regions, with social isolation cited as a driving force.</p> 	<p>GOOD NEIGHBOURS</p> 	<p>But the city can be a lonely place. Somewhat conflictingly, 8% of city dwellers report experiencing 'chronic loneliness' versus 6% of those in the sticks*.</p> 

MH VERDICT: IT'S A TIE!

Perhaps the countryside grass isn't greener after all. While scenery and serenity certainly have their benefits, it seems the city has perks, too. Though earplugs might be a wise investment.

WORDS: ANNIE HAYES; PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES; *SOURCES: THE LANCET PLANETARY HEALTH; DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD & RURAL AFFAIRS; UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA; NIPPON MEDICAL SCHOOL; NATIONAL TRAVEL SURVEY; OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS

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RAVE RUNS
ALLGÄU ALPS,
GERMANY

CHASE A NEW CARDIO HIGH

The Alps are not only good for snow sports. Strike while the weather's warm and hit the scenic trails for a fitness fix with unparalleled views

THE LOCATION

In Bavaria, near the Austrian border, the Allgäu Alps are characterised by steep grasberge (grass mountains). The region has a relatively high rainfall and, as a result, is home to some of the most varied flora in the Alps region. Book your trip now. During spring and summer, the snow recedes to reveal rolling alpine meadows, speckled with bursts of wild flowers.

THE RUN

The mountains are criss-crossed by an extensive and well-established network of trails (höhenwege). The good-quality paths feature a number of hard climbs and pass above crystal-clear alpine lakes and streams. Once the run's done, you can rest and refuel at one of the area's traditional dairies, known for their creamy Allgäu mountain cheese.

11
HIT YOUR
PEAK

A

LOCATION



47.6931° N,
10.3407° E



WORDS: FUNNER'S WORLD PHOTOGRAPH: JEFF HAINES

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Event: Maverick Race, Exmoor
Photo: Jake Baggaley

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HEALTH
NEWSFEED
06/23

WHY GRASS IS THE BEST DRUG

No, not *that* kind. Exposure to greenery has tangible benefits and can reduce reliance on medication. So here's your new prescription

As we become ever more urbanised and spend increasing amounts of our time indoors and online (22 hours and six hours a day, respectively), it's easy to neglect the natural world around us. Yet we remain inextricably a part of it – and whether it's a 'forest-bathing' expedition to the Japanese mountains or a lunchtime stroll in the local park, scientists have found that exposure to green spaces has measurable benefits to your body and mind.

In a recent study by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, researchers analysed the use of prescription drugs among 16,000 city dwellers who were asked to complete a survey about their interactions with nearby green spaces. These ranged from public gardens and parks to nature

reserves – easily accessible spots of nature even in a bustling city. Over the course of one summer, the scientists found that visiting such places three to four times per week correlated with significantly lower odds of requiring certain medicines. For example, habitués of neighbourhood parks had a 26% lower chance of using asthma drugs compared with those who had no exposure to greenery, were a third less likely to manage their mental health with the aid of medication and were a staggering 36% less likely to require blood pressure pills.

The precise reasons why have yet to be fully established, but swapping your gym floor for a run in the woods a few times a week is among the simplest ways of giving the

green light to better all-round health. What's more, separate studies have linked exposure to sunlight with lower systolic blood pressure readings (regardless, happily, of the temperature outdoors). Race you there?



ALL-ROUND BETTER HEALTH RESULTS COME WITH THE TURF

> COLOUR THEORY
Green isn't the only beneficial colour. Consult our chart of the healthiest hues



BLUE... spaces, where wide expanses of water are visible, are associated with increased happiness and lower levels of anxiety, obesity and stress.



PURPLE... plants such as aubergine and red cabbage are rich in anthocyanins, which are linked to better cardiovascular health and cancer prevention.



WHITE... training kit, along with other highly visible colours, was linked to enhanced performance in competitive sports games*.

HOW I
BUILT MY
BODY

RUN AND GUN LIKE THE SHERIFF

Biceps win races, as **Hunter McIntyre** is fond of hashtagging – but lungs are pretty important, too. Here's how the competitive fitness scene's biggest character built an elite set of both

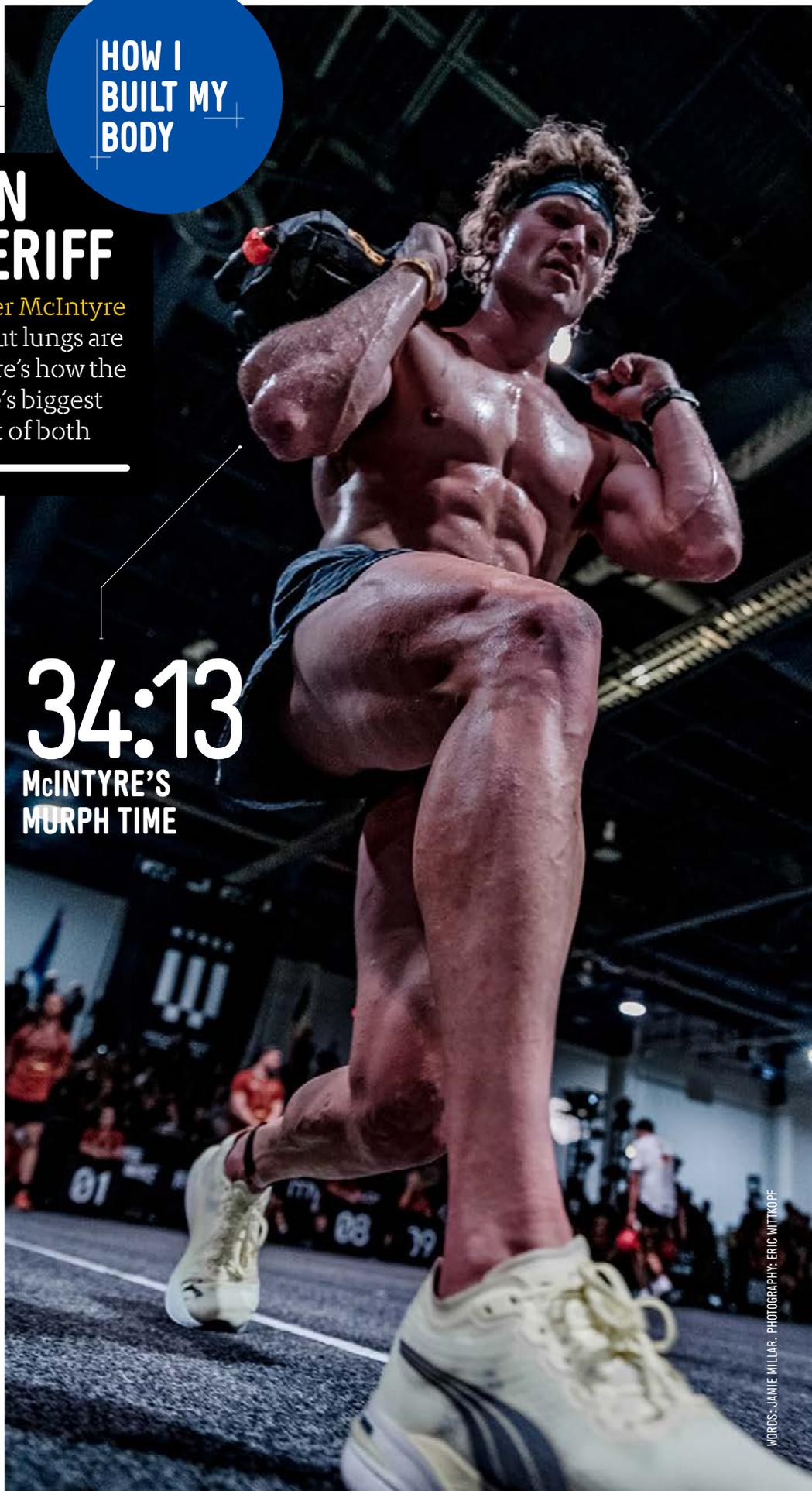
At his cabin in California, Hunter McIntyre sculpts his body with some unconventional tools. 'The Sheriff' – who set the men's record for functional fitness race Hyrox this March, after winning the World Championships in 2020 and 2022 – chops logs, lifts stones and flips tyres. Sometimes, he throws an axe into a tree stump... while balancing on a unicycle.

McIntyre rarely pauses before charging head-on into the next challenge. When *Men's Health* first spoke to him, back in 2020, he had recently broken the record for CrossFit hero WOD Murph. Shortly after, he began training to run the fastest marathon for a man over 200lb (90kg). In the end, he got hurt and realised, 'I can't have one ass and ride two horses.'

So, how does McIntyre ride the twin horses of strength and endurance, but not half-arse either? 'Just periodisation, man.' He alternates endurance blocks with strength, fully focusing on each in turn. A great week for McIntyre, when he's not travelling, is six hours in the gym and 10 to 14 of cardio. Alongside training and competing, he also has a fitness platform, HAOS Training, and supplements brand BLDR.

When he speaks to *MH* from Boulder, Colorado, at the foot of the near-vertical Flat Iron mountains, McIntyre is gearing up for two hours on his single-

34:13
McINTYRE'S
MURPH TIME



WORDS: JAMIE MILLAR. PHOTOGRAPHY: ERIC WITTKOPF

54:07

McINTYRE'S
HYROX WORLD
RECORD



HOW TO WIN
AT HYROX

The record holder's
pro tips for newbies

1/ 'Just get used to running an hour straight. It's an endurance event. I hold the world record, and I'm fucking running my ass off the whole time.'

2/ 'It's almost all legs. You should be doing tons of squats, wall balls, box step-ups, lunges. You should be doing that about three days a week.'

3/ 'Test one of the workouts, such as 100 wall balls, for time: if it takes you five minutes, you should be doing something on your legs that's five minutes straight. It's not rocket science.'

speed bike, 'Magnus the Mountain Slayer', which builds 'almost unstoppable' physical and mental capacity – because if McIntyre doesn't pedal, he falls off. In the gym, he's working through a back squat cycle: pick a weight you think you'd be lucky to get 10 reps with, then don't stop

'Superheroes
are made
of calories'

until you've done 20. You need an alter ego, says The Sheriff – one that comes out when necessary. He self-talks by relentlessly bad-mouthing himself, repeating only two or three words so he doesn't get distracted. At school, teachers said his only life path was taking pills for his ADD; he ran, wrestled, drank, got arrested for stupid stuff. After rehab, he

realised that, to be worthy of people's time, he had to do something worthy with his.

McIntyre got into bodybuilding, then modelling, but he's not a still-picture guy – he's animated. Having never run further than three miles, he rocked up to a half-marathon and won.

Men's Health has a new alter ego: Hunter McIntyre.

HUNTER,
NOT A
GATHERER

McIntyre's
unconventional
meal plan (MH
doesn't endorse
avoiding veg)

FIRST THING



'I have Strong Coffee, my buddy's company: it's got collagen in it. I put BLDR aminos in a cup every day.' He typically adds about three tablespoons of honey for pre-training energy.

ALL DAY LONG



McIntyre eats a lot of food – and often: 'It's mostly sandwiches, steak and rice. I'll also have tons of Honey Nut Cheerios and milk, plus more sugar on top of that as well.'

AT NIGHT



'Lots of rice and meat, big steaks: sometimes I eat two or three a day. Last night, we had ramen noodles for dinner followed by sticky buns. And I'm still always under 10% body fat.'

ALMOST NEVER



'You can't pay me to eat vegetables... I've hung out with some super athletes and almost all of the best of them just rip calories. Superheroes aren't made of vegetables, they're made of calories.'



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MH GAME
CHANGERS
REAX RUNCARDIO'S
NEXT STEPS

This unpredictable 3D motion treadmill makes indoor runs feel like real-world miles. Lace up for the future of fitness

i_ **5%**

Studies show that running on uneven surfaces can increase energy burn by 5%*. It also activates more leg muscles than trotting on smooth terrain.



ii_ **3**

Imitating nature isn't easy. There's a trio of patents protecting Reax Run's unique treadmill tech.

iii_ **+/-14%**

The maximum side to side (or lateral) range of tilt. With a frontal tilt range of +/- 11% – pretty steep.

iv_ **21**

Reax's suite of training programmes include HIIT and fartlek, with targets for calorie burn, distance, heart rate and pace, along with outdoor run/walk simulations. You can also choose predictable and unpredictable modes to switch up the challenge.



v_

19in

The Reax packs a large integrated touchscreen, but it can also be controlled via partner iOS and Android apps.



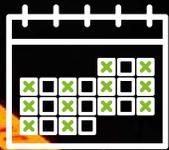
The problem with bashing out miles on a treadmill isn't just the tedium of staring at a gym wall. Hamstering away on the belt changes your running biomechanics. So, even though it works your cardio engine, when it comes to technique, form, muscle usage, brain activity and good old fatigue, tread miles just aren't the

same as running in the great outdoors.

The Reax Run is here to change that. The world's first and only 3D motion treadmill, it tilts, leans and shifts on its axis to create continuous and unpredictable changes in the angle of the belt. The result is a more challenging run experience that mimics the practice of tapping out miles over uneven roads and trails. The higher proprioceptive activation works your brain and body, unlocking a range of benefits including higher energy burn, improved balance and a tougher workout for your muscles. Oh, and the Reax is faster, too, with a top speed of 15.5mph, compared with most motorised gym mills' 10mph to 12mph. Is this the future of boot camp cardio? *MH* runs the numbers.

€34,000.
REAXING.COM

THE BEST GYMS IN THE WORLD



4-6

The number of days per week Marchon's members are advised to train. 'It's a big commitment,' he says. 'Otherwise, we just can't get the results that most people want.' Up to the challenge?

PROGRESS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Founded by one of the industry's best-respected trainers, **Marchon** offers tailored coaching in a group setting. Meet your support squad

Hybrid training might be ubiquitous now, but when Ollie Marchon founded his online coaching programme in 2014, it was a bit of a punt.

A rugby player turned PT, Marchon wanted to connect with clients remotely while out of the country. His experiment paid off: today, the Marchon Training app has more than 1,000 users.

Until recently, you'd need to swing by the Hertfordshire HQ to train with the team in person. But last year, Marchon opened the doors to its new home in east London – a functional training playground fitted with all the kit aspiring athletes could want.

His new gym runs larger classes with a personal touch. Too often with group fitness, staff struggle to deliver technical coaching, says Marchon. 'They don't have that eye for detail. But we pride ourselves on our ability to do that.'

Marchon Ldn follows a six-day programme with strength and conditioning classes, plus 'the fundamental movement patterns – squatting, hingeing, pushing, pulling, carrying', Marchon says.

The Marchon team can even help you get in competition shape. 'My passion for training grew from seeing the correlation between what I did in the gym and what I could do on the pitch,' explains Marchon. 'For me, it's more than a hobby – it's a daily competition with myself.' The only possible winner? You.



360°

Marchon takes a holistic view of fitness, employing two nutritionists, as well as ensuring coaches are clued up about recovery. 'We hold monthly check-ins with members,' Marchon says. Usually, it's the stuff they do *outside* of the gym that requires fine-tuning.



25

The impressive number of members who took part in the CrossFit Games quarter-final (Marchon recently became a CrossFit affiliate) this year. The gym and app also offer training plans for Hyrox.



GYM
MARCHON LDN

LOCATION
SUGAR HOUSE ISLAND,
STRATFORD, LONDON

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16

Within the Marchon business, there are 16 full-time members of staff, whom Ollie credits with forging the gym's strong community, on and offline. 'They're the centre. They're how you build connections and form genuine relationships with members,' he says.

WORDS: SCARLETT WRENCH. PHOTOGRAPHY: TON WATKINS. MODELS: ABBAS MWAMBAKALE; HARRISON VIDAMO; GABRIEL PASSELLE AT M MODEL. *TO ACCESS THE TRIAL, AT THE POINT, JUST EMAIL THE TEAM TO LET THEM KNOW YOU'RE A MEN'S HEALTH READER.

**STAYING IN
SHAPE
ISN'T JUST A
DAYTIME
THING**



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WHAT'S YOUR THING?

Delivery £20. Mattresses available separately. Event Price £449, After Event Price £599

TREND
ON TRIAL
LEVELSPINPOINT
NUTRITION

The Levels blood-sugar monitor is a bio-hacking tool that claims to boost wellbeing by taking the guesswork out of your diet. But does it deliver?

01

WHAT IS IT?

A small device called a continuous glucose monitor (CGM) is painlessly and unobtrusively implanted into your arm. By combining this info with other health and behavioural data, Levels provides real-time feedback on how your food choices and lifestyle habits impact your metabolic health. Insights are personalised: a 5K or bowl of pasta will affect your own stats differently from those of the person next to you.

02

SCIENCE SAYS

There's a strong case for bolstering your understanding of your inner workings: seven out of the 10 leading causes of death worldwide are in some way correlated with metabolic dysfunction. It can be tied to major chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke and dementia. There's limited data on the role CGMs play in behaviour change – but a 2020 study of patients with diabetes by George Washington University suggests they help.

03

HOW WE TESTED

MH's executive editor, David Morton, spent a month wearing a Levels CGM, logging all meals and using his Apple Watch and Whoop 4.0 to track activity and sync it up with the Levels app. Ideally, daily blood-glucose data would present like rolling hills rather than a San Franciscan seismograph.

GET YOUR BLOOD SUGAR ON TRACK WITH ADVICE TAILORED TO YOU

04

THE VERDICT

'I like pasta. I like bread even more. I'm partial to crisps. I know eating too much of these things isn't ideal for sustained physical and mental vigour, but I enjoy them anyway. Within a day, Levels' metrics helped me rethink my dietary crutches: one slice of toast, instead of two; lunchtime carbs scheduled purposefully around workouts. I found the personalised insights to be highly

effective. In a month, I lost 2kg – largely unintentionally – and felt better prepared for gym sessions. I found that beer didn't hit me as hard as I thought it would, and that the effects of fish and chips could be tempered by a serving of leafy greens on the side. I also learned that good hydration (shock!) is key.'

USER FEEDBACK



MASS EFFECT

Weight loss may not be Levels' MO, but it's clear that a steadier blood-sugar chart usually means smarter snacking, fewer processed foods and a more considered approach to eating. Sustainable weight management is a likely bonus.



UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

The app serves up recipes, education and tips based on your personal stats. This can help you become more aware of what causes spikes and, crucially, how to level off rather than crashing and burning.



STICKY STUFF

Monitors must be replaced every 14 days and you need to manually scan it with a smartphone every once in a while. The protective cover had a habit of peeling off, although you're supplied with plenty of back-ups.

Men'sHealth

SQUAD

Want to sign up to the UK launch waitlist? Use this link: levels.link/menshealthsquad



THE BIG QUESTION

MY WEIGHT HAS FLUCTUATED FOR DECADES. SHOULD I TRY THESE NEW INJECTIONS?

Matthew, Bristol

ASK MEN'S HEALTH
06/23

When Twitter quizzed Elon Musk about his recent weight loss, the billionaire was unusually forthright – at least compared with your average celeb. There was no fiddly food-elimination plan, nor strict exercise regimen to speak of. ‘Fasting’ and ‘Ozempic/Wegovy’ were his responses.

As you likely know, Ozempic and Wegovy are the brand names for once-weekly injectables that contain a medication called semaglutide. Essentially, they’re appetite suppressants – and effective, too. They also slow the rate at which food exits the stomach and improve sensitivity to insulin. ‘Ozempic is used to treat type 2 diabetes, whereas Wegovy has a licence to treat obesity,’ says Babak Ashrafi, an Asda Online doctor. At the time of writing, it’s expected to be available on prescription in the UK this year.

As for whether it’s the right drug for you, semaglutide is recommended only to those who have at least one weight-related health problem (prediabetes, hypertension, heart disease and so on) and a BMI of 35-plus, or

30-plus in special circumstances. If you’re generally healthy and don’t fall into the obesity bracket, it’s not for you – even if weight loss has proved tricky in the past.

And if you meet the criteria? It’s worth noting that there can be side effects. The most common include nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and fatigue. People who have had previous problems with their pancreas or kidneys are advised to avoid semaglutide, too. How the various risks weigh up against the health concerns associated with obesity – which can, of course, be serious, too – is something for you to discuss with your GP.

Crucially, semaglutide is not a short-term fix. Studies suggest that when you stop using the drug, your appetite returns to baseline, says Fatima Cody Stanford, an obesity medicine doctor and Harvard Medical School professor. If you struggled to keep the weight off before, there’s no reason you won’t gain it back.

Obesity is psychologically and physiologically complex; there’s more to it than just hunger signals and blood sugar. As Dr Stanford puts it, ‘We can hyper-focus in one area while neglecting the whole pie. And that’s where we fail!’



DO SOLUTIONS LIE AT THE SHARP END OF WEIGHT-LOSS SCIENCE?



TEXT A NUTRITIONIST

I'M TRYING TO CUT BACK ON CAFFEINE. ARE THERE ANY OTHER WAYS TO GET A DECENT BUZZ?

Richard, Leicester

Today 5:54am

I need a way to attack these early morning gym sessions without resorting to Red Bull.

Try training outdoors instead, or walking/cycling to the gym. Exposure to plenty of daylight in the mornings can help to reset your circadian rhythm ☀️

Already out – I'm texting as I walk. Still drowsy, though.

When you get to the gym, consider a 30-second cold shower. It can help improve alertness. Then kick off the session with five mins of cardio to get your heart pumping 🏃

Are there any supps I should be taking?

B vitamins and magnesium are involved in energy metabolism and are easily depleted by stress and anxiety 🍌 If work has been rough, start there.

All makes sense. Speaking of which, any good pick-me-ups for my morning meeting? I need to stay awake for that, too...

With espresso off the cards, try picking up a ginger shot on the way in to work. Or brew a spicy 'tea' with fresh ginger and lemon juice. Or, if you don't mind a little bit of a boost, try green tea: it has about a third of the caffeine in an americano.

Rob Hobson, sports nutritionist, robhobson.co.uk

RH

GROOM SERVICE

WHICH ANTI-AGEING SKINCARE INGREDIENTS ACTUALLY WORK... IF ANY?

Dom, London



Want to sort the marketing bump from the legitimate science? Here's what dermatologists scan for on the back of boxes

Retinol

It's the ultimate, says Salome Dharamshi, founder of Sky Clinic. It hikes collagen production and cell turnover. Start with a low concentration and build from there.

MH Likes Pharmacy 1% Vitamin A Retinol Serum, £55



Hyaluronic acid

'Dry, thinning skin is more susceptible to fine lines,' says Dr Dharamshi. Moisturisers, serums and oils with hyaluronic acid help skin stay supple.

MH Likes Boots Ingredients Hyaluronic Acid Serum, £5



SPF

Apply after other products daily to reduce damage from UVA/B, as well as the blue light from screens, says Dr Dharamshi. Look for one with zinc oxide.

MH Likes Murad City Skin Age Defense Broad Spectrum SPF50, £66



Niacinamide

'It protects skin from damage, helps regulate oil production and reduces inflammation,' says Dr Dharamshi. 'It can also reduce age spot visibility.'

MH Likes The Ordinary Niacinamide 10% + Zinc 1%, £5



THE FITNESS FIX

I'M ALWAYS GETTING BLISTERS, EVEN IN MY OLDER TRAINERS. WHAT GIVES?

Mark, Uttoxeter

The fault might not lie with your form, or even the design of your kicks. All too often, laces are the culprit. Secure pain-free feet with these quick fixes

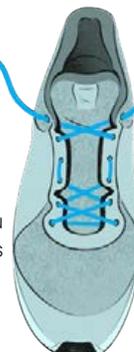
NARROW FEET

If your foot is sliding around inside your shoe, this can result in extra friction, especially on the heel, which can cause blisters. This lacing system tightens the shoe a bit more than usual, guaranteeing you a snug fit.



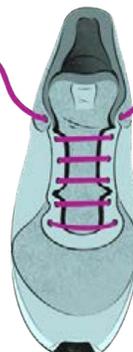
WIDE FEET

However, if the fit is too tight across the middle, you risk blisters on your arch. This lacing loosens the entire shoe, especially around the midfoot, and gives you more space. This can also be useful for runners with high arches.



TINGLY TOES

If you experience pins and needles as well as blisters on your toes, miss out the bottom eyelets to loosen that area without affecting the fit. This will increase blood circulation to your toes and relieve pressure at the same time.



Keep Your Skin Up

We've joined forces with grooming aficionados Bulldog to highlight the dos and don'ts of essential skincare

DO

Prep your skin

Have a pre-shave ritual before diving in with a razor. First, wash your face, then, two to three times a week, exfoliate with a face scrub to remove excess dirt, dead skin and oil. This will create a smoother surface to shave. Next, apply shaving gel, ideally including a hydrating ingredient, such as aloe vera, to help reduce redness and soothe inflammation. Finally, wash with cold water to calm the skin and reduce puffiness.



DON'T

Get in a lather

Avoid shower gels that use sodium laureth sulfate or sodium lauryl sulfate – common soap-like compounds that make toiletries produce lather and foam, as these may cause skin irritation and redness. Instead, opt for products that use milder, more complexion-friendly ingredients, which are kinder to skin. And keep your shower temperature below 41°C – any higher than that and you risk causing damage to the skin's delicate moisture barrier.



DO

Moisturise

We know it's a minefield out there when it comes to selecting a hydrating moisturiser but if you're looking for an affordable, everyday product for normal or dry skin, Bulldog's Original Moisturiser, developed specifically for male skin, is hard to beat. Not only does it provide 24-hour hydration, it features 96% natural origin ingredients including aloe vera, and is fast absorbing, meaning your face won't get that greasy shine.



DON'T

Neglect your fuzz

Just like the hair on your head, your beard (whether stubble, moustache or full-on Viking style) needs love, too. Bulldog's 2-in-1 Beard Shampoo & Conditioner will help soften hairs and eliminate the dreaded 'chin itch' that's usually followed by snowing dandruff. Top it all off with a beard oil to nourish the hair and skin beneath it, as well as add a subtle shine.

Find the perfect solution for your skin at uk.bulldogskincare.com

Your grooming arsenal

Here's a selection of our favourite Bulldog products

THE RAZOR

Sure, Bulldog's Original Bamboo Razor looks good but it also has substance to go with its style, as it features an aloe strip for a soothing shave, five tempered steel blades and an eco-friendly bamboo handle.

THE SPF MOISTURISER

UV rays can damage and prematurely age your skin. Bulldog's new Anytime Daily Moisturiser SPF30 is a light, non-greasy formula, containing vitamin C, along with UVA and UVB filters, to protect and hydrate cells.

THE SHAMPOO

Suffer with a dry or itchy head? Bulldog's Sensitive Hair & Scalp Shampoo contains Fuji apple extract to gently cleanse and soothe.

CARDIO
NEWSFEED
06/23

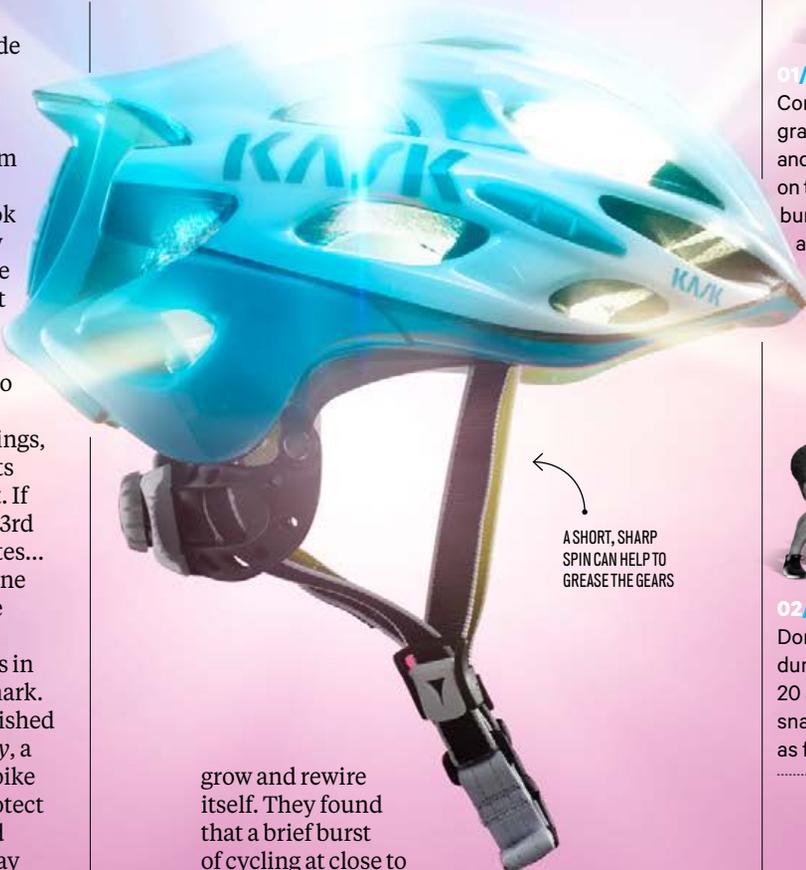
PUT THE BRAKES ON BRAIN AGEING

Good news for the time-pressed: just six minutes of cycling can slow the pace of mental decline – even more efficiently than longer cardio sessions

About a year after deciding to invade Iraq based on false intelligence claims, George W Bush injured his knee, forcing him to abandon his favourite pastime, running. So he took up cycling instead, security detail in tow. ‘When you ride a bike and you get your heart rate up,’ he told a reporter in 2004, ‘after 30 or 40 minutes, your mind tends to expand.’ Bush might have been wrong about many things, but on the cognitive benefits of cycling, he was prescient. If only he were a PT, not the 43rd president of the United States...

We will, however, make one key correction. Because the latest research shows that cycling’s mental boost kicks in long before the half-hour mark. According to research published in *The Journal Of Physiology*, a six-minute high-intensity bike workout each day could protect your brain from age-related decline and potentially delay the onset of neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer’s.

In the study, scientists at New Zealand’s University of Otago explored how non-pharmacological interventions, such as fasting and exercise, could influence the production of BDNF, a specialised protein linked to your brain’s ability to



A SHORT, SHARP SPIN CAN HELP TO GREASE THE GEARS

grow and rewire itself. They found that a brief burst of cycling at close to maximum effort can significantly raise levels of BDNF; moreover, a short, sharp session had far more impact than 20 hours of fasting, and up to five times the effect of slower, prolonged cardio workouts.

The lesson learned? A brief exertion’s capacity for holistic, long-term health benefits should never be *misunderestimated*. Go *nuclear* on cognitive decline.

> THE RIDE OF YOUR LIFE

Take things up a gear with this fast AirBike and dumbbell blast, from MH fitness editor Andrew Tracey



01/ Spin To Win

Commandeer an AirBike, grab a medium-weight bell and grit your teeth. First, hop on the bike and pedal hard to burn 20 calories as quickly as you can.



02/ Throw Your Weight

Done? Jump off, grab the dumbbell and throw up 20 alternating dumbbell snatches, again moving as fast as you can.



03/ Breathe And Repeat

And do it all again. Remove five calories and 5 reps per round, until you’ve done 4 rounds for a total of 50 calories and 50 snatches.

WORDS: YO ZUSHI, PHOTOGRAPHY: ROMAN FEE, ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: PHILIP HAYNES, MODEL: JAMIE FRANCE

THE
EVERYMAN
CHECK-UP



HOW HEALTHY IS YOUR HEART?

From BP to ECGs, many tests claim they can grade how your heart is performing. But which scores really matter? Use this guide to save time, stress – and maybe the muscle itself

01 THE BASICS

Even if you feel healthy, the following tests can tell you how proactive you need to be about maintaining good habits and keeping on top of your stats

CHOLESTEROL PANEL

This test measures total cholesterol, triglycerides, LDL ('bad' cholesterol) and HDL ('good' cholesterol) in your blood. Most doctors focus on LDL, which has been most closely tied to the risk of heart attack and stroke. Your specific LDL goal depends on how many risk factors you have for heart disease, but a level greater than 4 mmol/L is considered elevated. Get this done every three years.

BLOOD PRESSURE CHECK

High pressure in your arteries wears them down and increases the build-up of heart-attack-causing plaque. The NHS advises that healthy men aged over 40 get their BP assessed at least once

every five years, but annually is better. Consider buying an approved monitor through the British Heart Foundation website (bhf.org.uk). Aim for less than 120/80.

HBA1C TEST

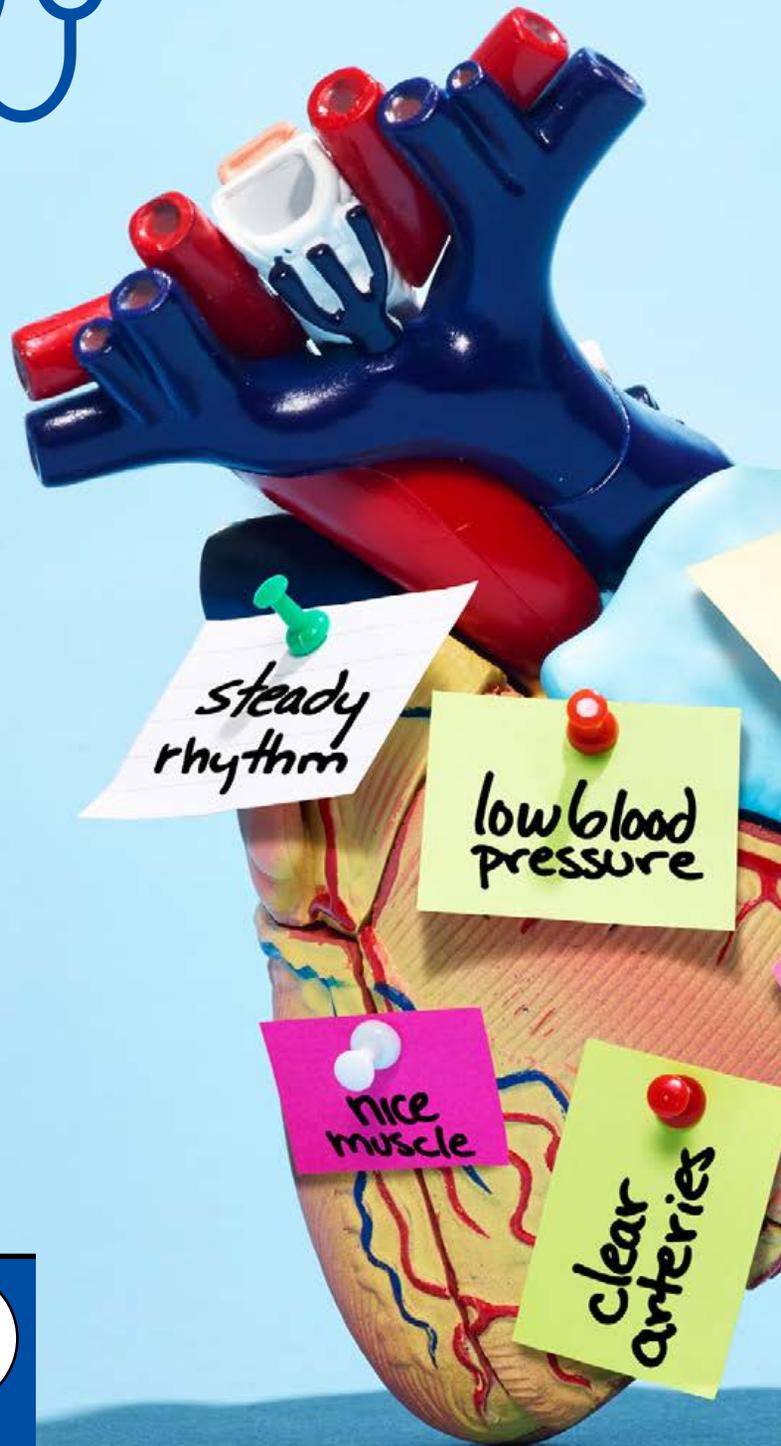
Diabetes increases the rate of plaque build-up in your arteries. The easiest way to screen for diabetes is the haemoglobin A1c test, which reflects your average blood sugar over several months. It can be done with a cholesterol panel. Normal is below 5.7; prediabetes is between 5.7 and 6.4. Above that indicates diabetes.

RISK ESTIMATOR

If you're over 30, know your blood pressure, cholesterol and weight, and haven't been diagnosed with cardiovascular disease, you can get a risk estimate by searching for the 'NHS heart age calculator'. This (loosely) estimates your chances of a heart attack or stroke in the next 10 years and determines how aggressive you need to be about getting your numbers down.



THE EXPERT
Dr Christopher Kelly is chairman of cardiology at UNC Rex Healthcare, North Carolina, US



02 

IF YOU WANT TO DIG DEEPER

If the numbers from your initial assessments aren't quite cause for alarm, but you're still keen to find out more, these tests will help inform your next steps

LIPOPROTEIN A

This type of cholesterol isn't measured in the classic panel; it's associated with an elevated risk of heart disease, but there's not enough data to support broad testing. However, this number can be helpful in recalibrating your risk assessment if you have a strong family history of heart attacks – meaning your father, mother or sibling had a heart attack before age 55. Lp(a) levels are stable over time, so you only ever have to get it checked once.

CALCIUM SCORE

This number strongly predicts your future risk of a heart attack and is calculated based on a CT scan of your chest. The radiologist measures the amount of calcium, a sign of plaque, in the arteries supplying your heart with blood. So instead of just estimating risk, you're measuring if disease is present. (A score of 0 means no plaque/very low risk; >100 means a higher risk.) Why doesn't everyone get it? There's a radiation dose, so we avoid it when the chances of it making a big difference are minimal – meaning your risk is already clearly low or high.

03 

IF YOU'RE ALREADY HAVING SYMPTOMS

Don't blow off brief spasms of chest pain, shortness of breath or occasional heart flutters. These tests, done at a GP surgery or hospital, can reveal what's going on

ELECTROCARDIOGRAM

This test is easy, harmless and inexpensive. The ECG's electrodes measure electrical signals from the heart. The image of your heart's rate and rhythm can reveal arrhythmias (such as atrial fibrillation), prior heart attacks and more. Unfortunately, it has a high rate of false positives – abnormal findings that turn out to be nothing. As a result, an ECG is not recommended as a routine test. Many smartwatches do ECGs as well; this function is most useful if you have palpitations. If the watch detects trouble, speak to your GP.

ECHOCARDIOGRAM

This just means an ultrasound of the heart and it offers a look at your heart valves along with the size, function and configuration of the four chambers. An echo is most helpful when you have symptoms of heart failure, such as shortness of breath or swelling, and it can clearly show problems such as a prior heart attack or cardiomyopathy. An echocardiogram isn't used as a general screening test, as it's time-consuming and rarely reveals anything useful when you feel fine.

CARDIAC STRESS TEST

If you love to exercise, this is your chance to show off. You get wired up to an ECG and walk or run on a treadmill that gets faster and steeper; when you're done, you may get an echocardiogram. As your heart pounds harder, it needs more oxygen-rich blood. When the arteries nourishing your heart are clogged with plaque, they can't meet that demand – resulting in chest discomfort, abnormal readings on the ECG and reduced muscle contraction in parts of the left ventricle, as seen on an ultrasound. Stress tests are most useful when you have symptoms of heart disease.

CARDIAC CATHETERISATION

This invasive test for plaque is generally performed in the throes of a heart attack or as the follow-up to an abnormal stress test. A doctor threads a tube to the heart through an artery in your arm or groin, then injects X-ray contrast into the arteries that supply the heart muscle with blood. This is usually carried out under local anaesthetic.

TESTS YOU (PROBABLY) DON'T NEED

 **Carotid artery ultrasound**
Although an ultrasound (sometimes called a carotid doppler) showing plaque in your carotid arteries can indicate a risk of heart disease, it's not as good as a calcium score.

 **Genetic heart-risk test**
Today, the most common heart diseases come from the intersection of many different genes and lifestyle habits, not from the single-gene mutations these panels typically report. Perhaps one for the future.

TAKING NOTE OF HOW YOUR HEART IS FARING MAY WELL SAVE YOUR LIFE



THE ALL-IN-1 BODY BUILDER

Pushed for time? Don't sweat it: this workout sculpts total-body muscle, and turns every move into a test of your core strength

**FITNESS FIX
SHORTCUT
TO STRENGTH**

DIRECTIONS: Aim to complete this workout four days a week, resting at least one day between sessions. (On rest days, go for a 20-min walk or run.) Perform the exercises in order. Rest 30 secs between sets and 60 secs between moves. Use medium-weight dumbbells.

WARM-UP

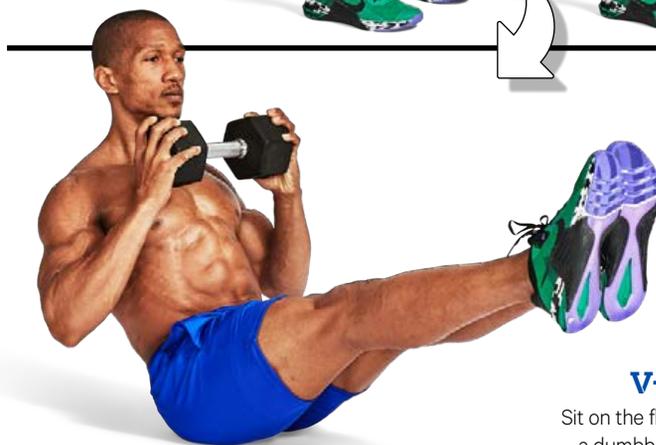
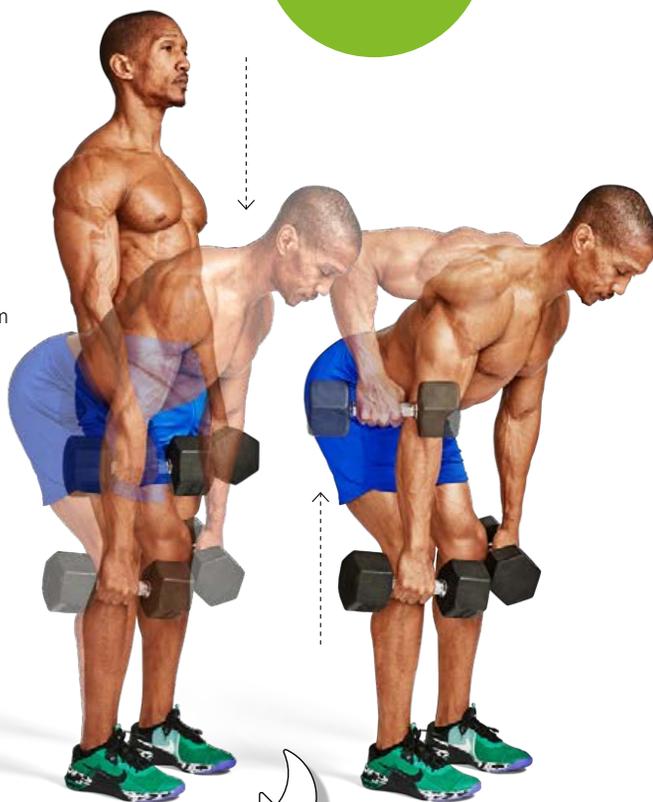


CHILD'S POSE WITH CROSS-BODY STRETCH

Start on all fours, hands directly below your shoulders. Push your bum back as far as possible, sitting on your calves. Then reach your hands forwards as far as possible, decompressing your spine. Squeeze your shoulder blades as you do this. Maintain this position as you lift your left hand and thread it under your right armpit, reaching as far to the side as possible. Repeat on the other side, then return to the start. Do reps for 40 secs, then rest 20 secs. Do 3 sets.

01 HINGE TO ALTERNATING PAUSED ROW

Stand holding dumbbells at your hips while keeping your abs and glutes tight. With the dumbbells close to your legs, push your bum back and lower your torso until it's nearly parallel to the floor or until you feel your hamstrings tighten, whichever comes first. Pause. Row the right dumbbell to the right side of your ribcage, then lower. Repeat on the other side, then stand and squeeze your glutes. That's 1 rep; do 3 sets of 8.



02

V-SIT HALO

Sit on the floor, legs straight, a dumbbell held in front of your chest with both hands. Tighten your abs and raise your legs a few inches from the floor. This is the start. Maintain this position as you rotate the dumbbell around your head in a tight circle. Do 6 reps clockwise and 6 reps in the other direction. Do 3 sets.



03 HALF-BENCH SINGLE-ARM PRESS

Lie with your back on a bench, a dumbbell held in your left hand over your shoulder, feet flat on the floor. Now shimmy to the left side of the bench so that your left shoulder blade, your left glute, half your head and your spine are off the bench. Tighten your abs and glutes. This is the start. Bend at the elbow and shoulder, lowering the dumbbell to your left shoulder. Press it back up. That's 1 rep; do 3 sets of 10 per side. Don't rest between sets.



YOUR TRAINER
Ebenezer Samuel is *MH* US's fitness director and a long-time trainer who has worked with several professional athletes.

05 GOBLET SQUAT WITH HEELS ELEVATED

Place a 20kg plate on the floor and stand with your feet close together, heels on the plate. Hold the end of a dumbbell at your chest, abs and glutes tight. Bend at the knees and hips and lower your torso until your thighs are parallel to the floor. Pause here for 1 sec. Stand. Lower again, this time pausing for 2 secs. Stand. Repeat this pattern, adding 1 sec to the pause with each rep, for 8 reps. Do 3 sets.



04 PLANK TO BEAR HOLD ROW

Get in press-up position, hands on dumbbells. Keeping your hips and shoulders square to the floor, row the right dumbbell to your ribcage. Pause, then lower. Repeat on the left side. Jump your feet forwards so your knees are below your hips, shins off the floor. Keeping your hips and shoulders square to the floor, row the right dumbbell to your ribcage. Repeat on the other side. Jump back to plank position. That's 1 rep. Do reps for 40 secs, then rest 20 seconds. Do 4 sets.



HOLD TIGHT FOR
FULL-BODY GAINS

Jason

MOMOA'S STARDOM MEANS
LESS TO HIM THAN WHAT IT
ENABLES: HIS ACTIVISM



Momoa's Next Big Flex

Cover Model Muscle

The newly single *Aquaman* lead and *Fast X* villain gets real about his greatest challenge yet: fighting for change and finding a new path

Words by Ben Court – Photography by Jason Roman

Jason Momoa is a hard man to pin down.

He's currently a little more than halfway through an eight-month shoot in New Zealand for an Apple TV+ show called *Chief Of War*. As co-writer, co-director and star of the nine-episode series, Momoa tells the quasi-historical story, from an indigenous perspective, of a Hawaiian chief in the late 1700s, who tries to unite the warring islands in order to save them from the threat of colonisation. When we finally connect by Zoom after some serious wrangling, it's midnight in New York and 5pm Kiwi time; his assistant hands him an iPad as he walks off the set after wrapping an epic scene, which explains why he's wearing only a malo (a traditional Hawaiian loincloth) and a self-satisfied grin with a swollen top lip. He uses a wipe to clean his sweaty face; dabs different members of the crew; and, after lots of 'Love you, bros' and 'Love you, dudes', is ushered into a car that will whizz him back to his base camp in Auckland while we talk.

Even from 9,000 miles away, his energy slams like a chest bump. He leans forwards and starts talking about the day's shoot, his green eyes blazing and his new head tattoo giving texture to his dome. He's both a fast talker and a serial mumblor, and his words and sentences sputter, then gush out, forming fast-moving stories. 'I'm trying to figure out what I can and can't say, but my character, a chief called Ka'iana, travelled to a foreign land to rescue a friend. It's like a prison riot: people hanging, people falling from the ceiling. There's musket shots and fires everywhere, just burning chaos.' He sounds a little like an excited kid, improvising the plot of the world's hottest action movie. 'It's a beautiful wonder we pulled it off and no one got hurt. I'm pretty high off that. All I got was a bruised lip. Ka'iana is helping free people who have been enslaved, and he's witnessing for the first time poverty, drugs;

and it's the first time he's seen a dog, a rabbit, a peacock. He's experiencing with new eyes the whole world.'

Momoa, too, is experiencing the whole world with new eyes. Now 43, he's in a different place – professionally, emotionally and literally – than he was when *MH* last caught up with him, in 2020. Careerwise, he's conquered the blockbuster with the billion-dollar-grossing *Aquaman*, the brightest star in the DC Extended Universe; held his own among an A-list ensemble in *Dune*; and carried three successful seasons of *See* on Apple TV+. This month, he plays the villain in *Fast X*, the much-hyped final ride for the Vin Diesel-powered franchise, and the sequel *Aquaman And The Lost Kingdom* drops on 29 December.

He's also dealt with some major events in his emotional life. Last January, he separated from Lisa Bonet, his partner of 16 years (and wife of nearly five years), as well as the mother of their two children, Lola, 15, and Nakoia-Wolf, 14. (Before the interview, he made it clear he doesn't want to get into the nitty-gritty of his personal life, and we don't really blame him.) Two months later, he underwent surgery to fix a hernia injury sustained during the shoot for the *Aquaman* sequel and joked that he couldn't do sit-ups any more, describing himself as an 'ageing superhero'. (But in our Zoom, there's no sign of the dad bod that set off Twitter trolls last year.) That June, he was named the UN Environment Programme's Advocate for Life Below Water for his activism with Sustainable Coastlines Hawaii

and rePurpose Global, and for his fight to ban single-use plastics. And that September, he spent two hours getting a traditional Hawaiian tattoo on the left side of his head. He tells me it's his favourite ink, symbolising protection for his family and his aumakua, which in Hawaiian means 'guardian spirit'; the triangle pattern represents a shark.

The Power Of Stardom

Now he's living in Auckland, pouring his heart into his work for the next year or so. (After *Chief Of War*, he's shooting an undisclosed blockbuster-to-be there.) At the moment, he's nesting in a warehouse, surrounded by the things and people helping him be creative: his own kettlebells and boxing gear, his vinyl, his guitars, his mountain bikes, his vintage Land Rover, a fridgeful of poi (a Polynesian snack made from mashed taro root and fruit, either bananas or pineapple, mixed with coconut cream) and cans of Guinness, plus a chef, a trainer, a Hawaiian language teacher and a squad of artistic collaborators he's worked with for years at his production company, Pride of Gypsies.

Momoa is aware that his career orbit is in that high stratosphere where his name is the green light for a project. 'Now it's wonderful because it wasn't handed to me. It was a very, very, very hard road,' he says. 'For a good 20 years, no one knew who I was. I worked on TV





FLIP MODE: MOMOA (SHOT IN THE MIRROR) BLASTS HIS CORE AT THE GYM AT HIS BASE CAMP IN AUCKLAND

Cover Model Muscle Jason Momoa



shows and wanted to be on something better.' Now he has the power and the platform to make a real difference through his storytelling and activism. He doesn't want to waste it. 'I gotta help the world. This shit weighs on me.'

The Last Big Dream

While filming *Dune* in Budapest four years ago, Momoa pitched *ChiefOfWar* to Apple with his producing partners, Brian Mendoza and Thomas Pa'a Sibbett. He says he wanted to tell this story for a long time, but he had to wait until his career was at a peak because of the costs and because he wanted the control to direct, produce and act in it. During our interview, he calls it his 'holy grail', 'my baby' and 'my dream'. He's prone to hyperbole and is known for being super enthusiastic, but this really means a lot to him. 'It's like my *Braveheart* or *Dances With Wolves*,' he says. 'I never thought it would be this big. It's the hardest, most challenging, most demanding thing I've ever done. It's the last big dream I have left. Everything else is just kind of "actor for hire", but this is my homage to my people. We have so many beautiful stories in Hawaii that no one knows about. All I care about is just doing right by my people.'

The series is also 'for indigenous kids growing up, understanding that we were warriors and what we come from and understanding there was a language that was stripped from us. Like most indigenous tribes, everything's taken from us. It's like rebuilding and building these bridges back,' Momoa adds. The first two episodes are entirely in Hawaiian, Mendoza tells me, and he believes it's the largest indigenous series ever made. The show is written by Hawaiians, and the majority of the cast members are Hawaiian and Polynesian. Three episodes were shot in Hawaii and the rest in New Zealand, which has bigger studios and better 360-degree vistas with visibly fewer tourists. 'There's a massive responsibility to Hawaii and the

Speed Round

Favourite cardio?

'Every human's favourite cardio! [Laughs] We all have the same – no one should ever be saying anything different.'

Workout tunes?

'I travel with a record player, vinyl and a Marshall speaker. Everything from Missy Elliott to Funkadelic to ODB to Pantera.'

Favourite movie?

'*Basquiat*.'

Heroes?

'My mom is my light. And my uncles and friends. You don't really think that your friends are your heroes, but they are. At any given moment, I have friends who are being heroes, and that feels good.'

Last time you cried?

'Today. I cried quite a bit. I'm not afraid to cry. If you feel a lot, you cry a lot.'

Motto?

'I don't really have one. But my mom always said to me, "Never settle."'

culture,' says Mendoza. 'Even though we're not making a documentary, we've gone to great lengths to ensure what people see is historically and culturally appropriate.'

Mendoza, who calls Momoa his best friend, first met the actor in 2008. They

bonded over a shared love for Julian Schnabel's *The Diving Bell And The Butterfly*, a devastating movie about an editor's heroic struggle to communicate after he suffers a stroke. They started working together in 2010, when the two co-produced Momoa's directorial debut, the 2014 Native American drama *Road To Paloma*. He says Momoa has long had an inner fire and wanted to be a director. 'Jason's always been a non-stop workhorse who sleeps a few hours a night and whose mind is always racing,' Mendoza says. 'I think Jason knows this is a rare opportunity, and he's grabbing it by the horns because this moment may not last forever. We hope that with this show it opens doors for other film-makers to tell stories of under-represented cultures.'

When asked what he thinks the most surprising thing about Momoa is, Mendoza says it's his talent as a director. 'He has a creative eye and he's so visually focused, but also so story-driven. He has the ability to spot performances and work with actors. And he's never, never had an ego. Sure, he knows what he wants, but he's very collaborative.'

Momoa directed the last episode of *ChiefOfWar*, which he shot in Hawaii. Again, he doesn't want to spoil anything, but he says it's historically based and



ACTING GIVES MOMOA
A PLATFORM TO SHARE
INDIGENOUS STORIES



involves two forces battling it out on a black lava bed, with two volcanoes actually erupting. Upon the crew's arrival to shoot the season finale, Mauna Loa and Kilauea were erupting together for the first time in about 40 years. 'We paid our respects and we did it right,' he says. 'There are so many spirits and things we're stirring up – and I believe in that. We shot it all at dusk and at night with four units. It's crazy to think two volcanoes went off while we shot a story about two volcanoes going off. Wow! It's probably the highlight of my career.'

For many actors, playing the titular superhero in a billion-dollar-grossing movie would be the highlight of their career. And in some ways, *Aquaman* – and its sequel (and a rumoured sequel to the sequel) – is for Momoa. But not for the reasons you might think. 'Well, to be perfectly honest, I was absolutely baffled that *Aquaman* was received so well,' he says. (The film was appreciated more by audiences than by critics.) 'I've done things that are amazing that no

one sees and no one gives a shit about. You just don't know in this business.' He's quick to add, 'I don't go do things and think, "Oh, I'm gonna get \$1bn on this one." I go in and do my best job.'

Momoa's feelings about *Aquaman* – frustration, bitterness, apathy – are less about the character and more about how the character has been treated. 'It's not that I don't care about Aquaman; it's a wonderful character,' he says. 'Aquaman is probably the hardest character in comic-book history. He's made fun of and ridiculed, but I tried to give it heart and soul, and I'm proud of it in certain ways. Do I feel pressure for [the sequel] to do well? No. All I can do is give it my all. But it's in a lot of other people's hands.'

He's referring to the turbulence of 'different directors having different ideas of who Aquaman is' (Momoa has played Aquaman, aka Arthur Curry, in three other movies in the DC Extended Universe) and, more specifically, to the 50-page treatment he and Mendoza

wrote for the sequel that he says Warner Bros bought but did not follow completely. That bugs him and spins him into an impassioned, salty riff. 'That's the reason why I love directing and creating. At the end of *Chief Of War*, I'm like, "Yeah, feel free to knock, ridicule it. If it isn't good, then we suck. It's our fault." Yeah. I don't wanna just go like, "I'm acting. I'll be in my trailer." I love being able to burn for what I believe in. I've seen some of the most shocking acting performances first-hand and watched them edited, and they were amazing. I wish I could tell you who it was. I'm like, "What the fuck?" I watched this guy who had to be fucking propped up. They read the lines to him. But this motherfucker killed it when the edit came in and was applauded for it. At that point, I was like, "Wow, this shit is made in the edit."'

There's new leadership at DC Studios, too: co-CEOs Peter Safran and James Gunn. Safran, who produced *Aquaman* and the sequel, is a big Momoa fan. 'What you see is what you get with Jason,' he says. 'I've been working with him for six or seven years, and I keep waiting for the proverbial other shoe to drop. If there's an inner asshole in him, it has never come out. That, to me, is a surprise... albeit a very pleasant one.' Momoa says that he's 'extremely, extremely excited' about his DCEU

'I love directing, creating, and being able to burn for what I believe in'



**'I practise what I preach.
Get up there, say what's
important and fight'**



HITTING THE BAG
HELPED SCULPT
MOMOA'S RIPPED
AQUAMAN PHYSIQUE

Cover Model Muscle **Jason Momoa**

future but won't divulge any secrets other than 'there's a lot of badass shit coming up'. Safran, who probably wrote the secrecy memo, adds, 'I look forward to working with Jason for many years to come. I would be happy for it to be in Arthur Curry's world, but if/when another opportunity came up, I'd find another great character for him to create.'

The bar is set high, because, as Safran tells me, 'There are few superhero castings that are more perfect than Momoa as Aquaman.' He explains how Arthur Curry is the ultimate outsider: he doesn't believe he's part of the surface world or the underwater kingdom of Atlantis – and has never felt a true sense of belonging in either. Momoa was born in Hawaii but moved to Iowa after his parents divorced when he was six months old, and he grew up with that sense of 'otherness' that led him to discover, like Arthur does in the films, that not belonging anywhere makes him belong everywhere. And, of course, Momoa is deeply connected to the natural world – and passionate about protecting it.

He's a fierce advocate for banning single-use plastic bottles. 'We're just killing our planet. We're choking our planet out. Why the fuck are you drinking out of a plastic bottle of water? It's crazy 'cause it's easy to change. Like drink a can of Coke, beer or sparkling water.' Momoa is quick to add that you should get a purifier or Brita water filter in your home and carry a reusable bottle. But he was so infuriated by seeing plastic bottles of water sold at airports that he started his own company, Mananalu, selling purified water in recyclable aluminum bottles.

His status as eco-warrior, elevated by his role as Aquaman, enables Momoa to make a difference. He says it's a calling from deep, deep in his soul, his mana. 'It's my kids' generation, and they're looking up to me, going like, "You're Aquaman, you're Aquaman." I'm not fucking Batman or Superman. That's really cool to me – it really is.' It's not all easy. Momoa recalls how fearful he was when he first spoke at the United Nations about banning single-use plastics in 2019. It was terrifying for him to stand up in front of the whole world – and have his own kids watch him trying to make that difference. 'I couldn't chicken out of it and try to do some fake stuff. I practise what I preach. Get up there, say what's important and fight,' he says.

Momoa believes in the ripple effect, and he's giddy when he tells me that Harrison Ford, a fellow eco-activist, recently sent him a letter to applaud his conservation work. ('Han Solo! Indiana Jones! Bro!') What Ford wrote about – gulp, the meaning of life – really resonated with him. 'He said he's been doing conservation work for 30 years, and he says

'Momoa is a fantastic action actor. He'll perform all his stunts... He's just a force'

it's the most positive work he's been doing.' It's an outlook Momoa also shares. 'It's really cool to be up here as an actor, but this is not what I wanna do for a living. It's just a moment in time,' he says. 'I wanna go back to making art, to painting, to writing, you know, raising a family, and then making significant environmental change. I'll do movies just to entertain.'

Playing The Bad Guy

That brings us screechingly to *Fast X*, and a reminder of why so many people care about Momoa: he's the stallion who mounts the world, a larger-than-life kicker of ass. In the movie, he plays Dante, a villain out for revenge following the death of his father at the hands of Dom and Co. in *Fast Five*, the 2011 instalment of the series. Momoa – a 'huge, huge car and motorcycle fan' – came into the movie with his own ideas on how to be the best villain ever, but he felt privileged to join the franchise and wanted to collaborate with Vin Diesel and director Louis Letterier.

'I saw the first *Fast* and the one that was in Brazil [*Fast Five*], and they're amazing – they always are,' he says. 'I talked to Vin and said, "Yo, Daddy-o, I'm here to support you, but I'm going to do it my way. I'm going to be a bad man, and you're going to want to take me out!" It felt really good to go there without some ego competition, like, "Who's this?" and "Who's that?" I'm like, "No, dude, you got 10 movies under your belt. It's an honour to be here. I'm down to go down."'

Momoa says Letterier and Diesel respected and supported his 'weird and bold' choices, pushing him to bring more out of the character and giving him a safety net. 'If I did something quirky that Louis really liked, he would be like, "Oh, can you do that again?" No director has ever really asked me to do that.' And the love goes both ways. 'Jason brings the humour, the panache, so much pink, purple and fuchsia, beautiful silk, and he's not afraid to improvise and take risks,' Letterier says. 'He's also a fantastic action actor – he'll perform all his stunts, he'll ride his bikes, he'll drive his cars, he'll sing his own songs. He's just a force.'

Of course, Momoa being Momoa, he love, love, loved the motorcycle scenes. 'I'm riding in Rome on a Harley ripping through centuries-old cobbled streets,' he says. 'I had an amazing

stunt double, Joe [Bucaro], and he did some cool stuff that would kill me. But the other half of the time, I'm riding at top speed through Rome – that's me. I couldn't believe Louis let me do it. He was like, "Wow, that guy really looks like Jason?" They're like, "That was Jason." And he's like, "Are we insured to let him do that?" And they're like, "He just does this in his normal life – that's what he does." It was surreal, dude. C'mon, bro.'

We're nearing the end of our call, closer to his destination, when Momoa will get out of the car and return to his warehouse/artist commune. Maybe he'll hit the heavy bag, pound some poi, throw back a Guinness, spin some vinyl and watch climbing videos sent by his kids. 'I make them send me clips all the time,' he says. 'I'm watching my heart climb up the wall. They're children, but they're so strong and confident and express themselves through movement. Sometimes you have to be dynamic, sometimes static and smooth, and you just get to explore. When they succeed, you feel the moment. I absolutely love climbing and encourage any parent to go experience it with their kids. That's what my mom did with me.'

Momoa's origin story involves a lot of climbing. His mum introduced him to it as a teen and it became his passion. He lived the dirtbag life, climbing in remote spots around the world, living off sardines and crackers; those experiences still inform his outlook. 'Climbing is what keeps me grounded in a chaotic world that just wants more of me. It keeps me centred, keeps me in the dirt, keeps me humble and keeps me stoked.'

He shares that passion with his kids, who he communicates with twice a day. 'That's the thing I try to teach my children right now,' he says. 'There's nothing worth doing if it's not gonna be hard and it's not gonna be a struggle. It's okay to fall. You fall, you get back up and do it again. They wanna be perfect and they're afraid; they think if you fall, it's bad. But I'm like, "No, falling is great, man. Falling is great 'cause you're gonna succeed if you keep doing it.'" I would never teach acting, but the one



MOMOA ROLLING ON THE COAST NEAR THE AWHITU PENINSULA IN HIS 1948 LAND ROVER

thing I could teach is climbing. It gives us this massive bond, and we go outside and do it. It's the ultimate thing for me.'

No doubt Momoa misses his family, but he also recognises this is the life he's chosen. 'I don't get to see my kids right now for a very long time. I gotta share things with them,' he says, his rapid-fire speech pattern slowing way down. 'I'm doing everything that I want to do, everything that I'm designed to do. And you've got to do that. I want my children to know that and do that. I worked for a very long time when they were young doing shit I didn't want to do to put food on the table. And now? You should only work with the people you wanna work with. You should create with the people you wanna create with. And if you're not, then [you've] got one shot in this life – you gotta get the fuck out. Whatever situation you're in, you gotta find your path, you know?' **MB**



Muscle Up Like Momoa

Forget bench presses and deadlifts. When the *Aquaman* star works out, he rarely relies on muscle-building staples. Over the years, he's crafted a routine that lets him stay fit and have fun. Spice up your own workouts with his training tactics



01 SWING BIG BELLS

► Momoa does kettlebell swings to build explosive hip power, and they blast your abs and forearms, too. Start with three sets of 6 to 8 reps, three times a week.



02 PUNCH WITH MORE POWER

► To ratchet up the cardio intensity and power demands on classic heavy-bag work, Momoa wraps a resistance band around the bag and his waist. Do 30 secs on, 30 off, for five rounds.



03 CRAWL LIKE A BEAR

► For a sculpted core, Momoa does the bear crawl, which has you going forwards and backwards on all fours, with your knees off the floor and your back flat. Do 40 secs on, 20 off, for four rounds.



04 CLIMB WITH HEART

► Climbing is Momoa's passion. A good climb jacks up your heart rate while torching your forearms, abs and back muscles. Do dead hangs and pull-ups three times a week to strengthen your game.

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Hey! What's up?!!

Miss you!

Hope you're doing well!

Dinner next week?

Haven't heard from you so just want to follow up!

Are you alive?

Read 09:40



iMessage



FEELING IGNORED?
WE HAVE THE
ANSWERS

With greater demands on our collective mental bandwidth than ever before, it can feel like our friends and colleagues are perpetually unreachable. Here's how to regain control when everyone's too damn busy for you

WORDS BY AUSTIN WILLIAMS



If you communicate with people throughout the day – basically, if you’re human – then you, like me, sometimes find yourself ‘following up’, ‘circling back’ and generally coming to terms with being ignored, especially considering all the other instances in your life in which you might go unheard. (No response to a ‘let’s catch up’ DM to an old friend; crickets when you ask your landlord to renew your lease; no answer from the doctor’s office, even three days later; hello, barista?) At a certain point, feeling invisible can begin to take a toll on your mental health.

In fact, Kipling D Williams, professor of psychological sciences at Purdue University, found that being ignored literally hurts – it triggers the same part of the brain that registers physical pain. Technically, you’re experiencing ostracism. You may think of ostracism as the stuff of black sheep and outcasts, but it basically means you’re being excluded from group dynamics or otherwise feeling ignored. The person or people ignoring you might not even know they’re doing it. They may not have received your message, might’ve been on holiday, or just haven’t had time to respond. ‘It’s hard to know what they were thinking. But it doesn’t really matter. From your perspective, you are perceiving that you’re ignored and excluded, and it has its effects on you, whether or not it was intended to be that way,’ Professor Williams says.

That sensation of being invisible feels so bad because it threatens some basic human psychological needs. And it works quickly. In experiments, Professor Williams and his team watched what happened when some people were left

out of a virtual ball-tossing game with strangers – just about as low-stakes an ostracism scenario as you can imagine. The people who were being ignored in the game reported elevated feelings of sadness and anger after just a few minutes.

Research has found that most people experience these feelings at least once a day. As a journalist who cold-emails contacts, a college professor who lectures aloof adolescents, and a morning person who texts his friends way too early, I have a rate higher than that. Which helps explain why I started this morning the way I’d begin any other: I set yesterday’s hurt feelings aside and reached out, followed up and circled back with the people I needed to speak to today. Then, around lunchtime, a sensation washed over me that felt like a bitter blend of sadness, exhaustion and complete helplessness. I convinced myself that I’d just wasted time sending even more messages that wouldn’t get responses and almost went back to bed. Instead, I’ve discovered that one key to managing ostracism and moving on from it is understanding the nuances of the feeling itself.

Why Silence Gets Under Our Skin

■ Being ignored shakes us because it threatens our basic needs for belonging, control, self-esteem and meaningful existence. No matter the circumstances or severity of the situation, ‘it’s a very primitive response in us’, Professor Williams says – even if the person we’re getting the silence from had no real obligation to respond to us in the first place. Our sensitivity to silent rejection is likely more a product of evolution than entitlement. ‘Evolutionarily speaking,



IF RESPONSES AREN'T FORTHCOMING, MOVE ON TO THE NEXT THING

being ostracised led to death, Professor Williams says, ‘so there’s probably some kind of hardwired mechanism in us to detect it quickly... maybe even over-detect it.’ Usually, the first thing you do when you perceive you’re being left out is ‘try to regain the needs that have been threatened’, as Professor Williams puts it. ‘You might reach out and say, “Hey, can you text me? I want to be sure my phone is working,”’ or do something else to get attention, be included or be acknowledged. If you keep trying and you still get nada, and if you don’t have good strategies for coping, you can end up where I did – resignation – which doesn’t feel any better. You might become especially sensitive and go on high alert for anything, anywhere, that makes you feel like you’re being rejected. But there are ways you can cope.

Did you get my message from the other day?

Are you free to touch base on that project?

Checking in...

Mixed Emoji

■ Why aren't you hearing back? It could be your shorthand. A review in *Frontiers In Psychology* found these emojis to be among the most likely to be misinterpreted

	YOU MEANT	THEY THOUGHT
	Funny or pleasing	Crying
	Thank you	High five
	Nervous or embarrassed	Mischievous grimace

In Your Personal Life Distract Yourself

■ When you're looking for a response from a family member, a loved one or anyone else who claims to care about you, you can't really get away with low expectations for responsiveness. That's when being ignored hurts most and can send you into a tailspin of rumination, wondering if you said or did the wrong thing. 'If you think of all the reasons why the ostracism [may be] occurring, you're relieving it; you're keeping it fresh in your mind,' Professor Williams says. And you're not offering yourself the chance to recover. To stop the rumination, find a distraction. In one of the ball-toss experiments, Professor Williams had some of the excluded people think about their experiences in the study, then fill in a survey to reveal how ostracised they felt. Others were distracted before taking that survey. Some were asked to select an area of life that they felt was important to them (finances, friends, etc) and write why it meant so much. Others, who were religious, prayed. Then they took the mood survey. Those who responded immediately after the game reported feeling more rejected and disconnected. 'If we offer people opportunities to do anything... think of things they're good at or think of people they belong to, then they get over it more quickly,' Professor Williams says. The best distractions are ones that fortify the needs that are threatened. So you might think of groups you fit into (which restores belonging) or the skills that you have (which helps to bolster self-esteem).

In Your Social Life Take Control

■ You have more control than you think when you're being ignored. Urgiles, for instance, uses deadlines to change up the dynamic. 'We all have group chats where plans never happen,' she says. 'It always starts with "Let's hang out," and no one ever ends up making plans. I've started saying, "Let me know by this time if I should make reservations at this restaurant."' Deadlines inspire urgency and allow you to get past it mentally if you still don't get a response. You're free to assume either they're just not interested in doing something or what you're offering doesn't fit with their schedules. You divorce yourself from the pain and the hope of a response and you get to move on.

At Work Change Your Expectations

■ First, have compassion. Think about what might be going on with someone that could explain why you're not getting a response. Maybe they have urgent deadlines in addition to answering you. Or maybe they have an illness in the family. Or their computer fatally crashed. Or all of these. Give them a little slack and consider that the lack of an answer might have nothing to do with you. If, for instance, someone ignores the question you just asked, it's possible that they didn't hear you because they had earbuds in. Understanding that is going to help you get over the feeling faster than if you think they're annoyed

with you or that you're not worth looking up for. And when you're not in person, normalise not receiving an answer at all, especially if you have a job with a high rate of unresponsiveness (salesperson, journalist, canvasser, publicist, etc).

'Use silence as a launch pad for new experiments in reaching out'

Recognise that answers are a numbers game and the rate of responses is going to be low. In other words, shift your goal from nailing every shot to simply aiming for a decent average. If you think you can nail more shots, look at the

non-responses as opportunities to learn, says Erika Urgiles, a communications executive who basically tries to get people's attention for a living. Don't use the silence as evidence of your failure; use it as a launch pad for new experiments in reaching out.

Can Magnets Build A Better Brain?

New tech aims to tweak what's in your head to help with depression, PTSD and even everyday issues such as sleep and focus. **Should you plug in?**

WORDS BY ALLA KATSNELSON

Picture your brain as an intricate road map, networks of well-worn streets and dual carriageways laid out in all directions for wherever you want to go. Every time you book an Airbnb, figure out the tip on a bill or laugh at a meme, nerve cells in your brain pass electrical messages along these networks of roads. When the signals move smoothly, they help you to respond appropriately – get you excited about the trip, remind you to sign the receipt, prevent you from laughing too loudly in the coffee shop and much more.

But if you have a mental health condition such as depression or PTSD, the networks of neurons that keep your brain running get weaker and less functional, as if part of the roadway has been washed out. To help people with depression realign their brain's firing

patterns and get traffic moving again, scientists are looking at new forms of a type of brain stimulation called transcranial magnetic stimulation. Also known as TMS, the procedure can be administered in an outpatient clinic by trained healthcare pros. TMS relies on a key concept in physics, which is

**Optimising
your brain to
do one thing
might make it
worse at doing
something else**

that magnets can crank up electrical signals from a distance – in the case of TMS, the centimetres between a magnet positioned outside a skull and the lobes and folds encased inside it. TMS sends magnetic pulses to specific areas of your brain to fire up neurons in the vicinity. This in turn helps those neurons connect and sync with others in the network, restoring the pathway and improving symptoms, says Joshua Berman, an assistant professor of psychiatry at Columbia University who works with various forms of brain stimulation. In other words, magnets

help to get the signals travelling properly along the network again.

In 2015, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence approved TMS for depression that hadn't responded to other therapies, and it was life-changing for the people it helped. Research in 2021 from Stanford University has jolted the field with news that higher-intensity, more-targeted doses could take the success rate of TMS as high as 79%. TMS is now available off-label to those experiencing a variety of mental health conditions, including anxiety, OCD, insomnia and multiple addictions. Ongoing research is testing its efficacy for chronic pain, epilepsy, migraines, traumatic brain injuries and more. Scientists are just starting to match up particular patterns of brain activity with symptoms of different disorders. So, for example, to treat depression, a clinician directs the magnet – which is often housed in a space-helmet-sized headpiece – to a spot in the front of the brain that is affected in depression. 'When we do TMS, it's almost like we're forcing cortical neurons to exercise,' says Dr Berman. Future advances in the field of brain science and the devices around it will one day enable clinicians to precisely tweak brain circuits to very specific ends, says Alvaro Pascual-Leone, a professor of neurology at Harvard Medical School.

Now, a US company called Wave Neuroscience says that some of life's more commonplace woes, such as trouble sleeping or focusing, may also be helped by magnetic therapy. This year, Wave is launching Sonal, a helmet-like at-home device that uses magnets to help sync errant electrical activity in your brain. By wearing it for about 30 minutes, five days a week for a month, the company's researchers say, you can generally get your brain to work better. The idea is that the networks responsible for controlling everyday performance might, in some people, have become a little disrupted. 'We're helping people to restore function,' says Erik Won,

An Attractive Prospect

Wave Neuroscience's president and chief medical officer.

Wave wants to give everyone the power to reap the benefits of TMS at home. It takes an EEG of your brain at rest to figure out where its waves might be out of whack. The company's device then delivers magnetic pulses to realign your waves – a move that has been shown to reduce symptoms, says Dr Won. 'People tend to feel better, really, in a matter of days to weeks.'

So far, a small 2019 study in the journal *Brain Stimulation* reported that Wave's approach and device reduced PTSD symptoms in a group of military veterans. The company is working with Texas A&M University and the US military to carry out more studies and explore the technology's use in addiction, Covid-related brain fog and traumatic brain injury. And Wave is hoping it will be beneficial for people who just feel their brain could work better. 'There's a demographic that we call "the silent sufferer";' Dr Won says – those who are struggling but don't feel unwell enough to seek medical care, or who fear the stigma of doing so. Wave's Sonal magnetic therapy offers stimulation that's about one-100th the strength of in-office TMS devices; in lieu of power, the aim is to be more precise and personalised.

While brain stimulation has been used in clinics for a while, Dr Pascual-Leone points out that no one fully understands what it means to reshape or optimise brain activity, especially on your own at home. It's possible that optimising your brain to do one thing might make it worse at doing something else. The risk may be worth it when addressing some forms of depression or PTSD that don't respond to other treatments, but your calculation may differ if you simply want to sleep better or sharpen your focus at work. All of these question marks should give you pause, seeing as this is your brain we're talking about. Until we know more, you might want to stick with the arsenal of well-known ways to help your mind, such as stress reduction, exercise and sleep. They might not be a quick fix – but they won't cost you, either.



THE USE OF MAGNETS FOR MENTAL HEALTH IS POLARISING FOR SOME

56%

In one study of 196 people with serious depressive symptoms, more than half experienced remission with at least 10 sessions of combined psychotherapy and TMS*

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A Prescription To Save The NHS

Our health service is unwell.

You've read the news stories – staff at breaking point, pitiless waiting times, patients languishing in corridors. The problems it faces are deep and knotty, though hope is not lost. Whether the solutions lie in smarter funding, technological innovation, or even our own actions, there are bright minds at work to find them.

MH assembled a team of field-leading thinkers to share their strategies. This is our recovery plan

Illustrations by Ryan Todd



PRIORITIES MUST BE PUT
IN ORDER BEFORE THE
ISSUES FACED BY THE
NHS CAN BE TREATED



Rt Hon Alan Milburn

Secretary Of State For Health 1999-2003

What condition is the NHS in at present?

I've been around health policy for over 30 years and the situation we're in is the worst I've ever seen. It's inarguably a crisis, yet there hasn't been proper recognition of the fact from this government. What we're seeing now is of a different order completely. Years of austerity have destroyed the system. The problems are deep and structural.

So what needs to be done?

The first thing to do is acknowledge the scale of the problem. The second is to have a proper plan to deal with it. Right now, that's sorely lacking. This situation requires long-term thinking that addresses the fundamentals, but it's perfectly obvious that the current administration's strategic focus is on the short term. They want to patch things up just enough to have a chance of getting voted back in at the next general election.

Ultimately, we have a volume issue. There's a mismatch of supply and demand. We don't have enough doctors and nurses, we arguably

don't have enough beds and we certainly don't have enough primary, community and mental health services. There just isn't the required capacity. But more than that, the system is not aligned with the problems we're facing.

Can you explain what you mean by that?

The biggest problem for healthcare is the rising tide of chronic disease: arthritis, diabetes, dementia, all of these sorts of issues. The present NHS isn't built to deal with any of that. It's set up to deal with episodic care in hospitals. That's where the majority of the budget goes. The kind of things that could be used to keep patients healthy and out of hospital have suffered hugely from a lack of funding and investment. We've seen falling GP numbers since 2015.

Is it about money?

Some of this is about money, but it's largely about where we get the system focused. Healthcare is undergoing a wholesale revolution where the alignment of data analytics and



genomic science is beginning to allow us to concentrate on predicting and inhibiting ill health, rather than purely diagnosing and caring for patients. This

is what we should be focusing on. But to do that, we need to change how staff are trained, how the workforce is configured, how resources are provided, what the infrastructure is and so on. We need a new 10-year plan, and that requires real leadership. I know shadow health minister Wes Streeting is thinking along these lines.

Doesn't the harnessing of new technology inevitably mean more private sector involvement?

There's nothing wrong with private sector involvement if it's for the public good. As long as the outcome benefits people with the greatest clinical need rather than the fattest wallets, it makes sense to employ companies with the greater knowledge, expertise, capability and efficiencies. It just has to be

on the right terms. The likes of Apple and Google are currently making a big bet on health and that's a good thing. But only if we have a long-term plan to utilise these advancements to address the problems we're facing and help deliver on the service's founding principles.

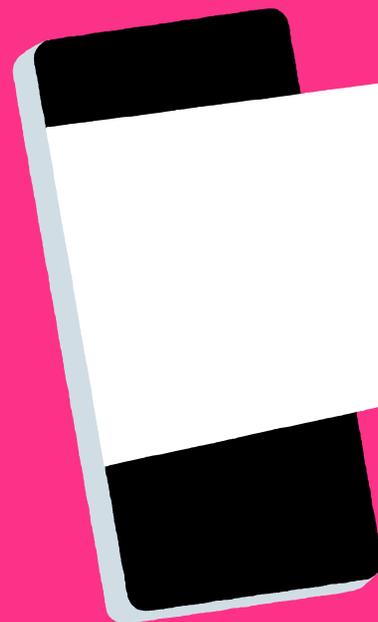
It's difficult to get visibility

on this because everyone is drowning in pessimism. 'The NHS is broken, it's finished, we need to tear it up, we need to introduce social insurance...' All of which is nonsense, frankly. Social insurance would not add one jot of difference. It would just cause turmoil for 10 years. We already have turmoil – what we want is order and sustainability. So my message is one of possibility and optimism. Above all else, hope is what's missing from the debate about the NHS. And hope lies in technological change.

How do the challenges and solutions of today differ from when you were in charge?

The big difference now from when I was Secretary of State for Health is that technology is capable of doing the things we always wanted to but never could because we didn't have the tools in the box. The hope has always been that tech would help facilitate an approach to healthcare that the founders of the NHS envisaged, which is to focus on prevention more than treatment. This is now within our capability. The question is: who's thinking about it and what's the plan to harness it? The answer is no one and there is none. That's the opportunity.

'Tech is capable of doing things we always wanted but never could'



Dr Max Pemberton

NHS Psychiatrist, Journalist And Author

The original idea of the NHS – in Aneurin Bevan's innocent view – was that once it was up and going, demand would decline: you'd treat someone and they'd no longer need help. Of course, he hadn't allowed for advancements in medicine and surgery, so, actually, we've seen the opposite happen. As time has gone on, demand has increased.

It's difficult for politicians to have an honest discussion about that. People have increasing expectations of the



DATA AND APPS COULD PLAY AN ESSENTIAL ROLE IN IMPROVING THE UK'S HEALTH OUTCOMES

years. If they wanted to leave, they could resign, but they would have to pay back a certain amount of the cost of their training. At the moment, people feel no debt to the NHS. The same thing is happening in medicine. You have this conversation with junior doctors and they're of the attitude that, 'I bought this degree, I'm £80,000 in debt, I've got absolutely no loyalty to the NHS.'

There are other, smaller, things that have shifted. Training budgets have been cut for doctors and are barely existent for nurses. When I was a junior doctor, most hospitals offered accommodation on site. It created a sense of camaraderie, which is lost now. We should reintroduce free accommodation for junior nurses and junior doctors.

Finally, there's the issue of resources. There's been a real problem with the bureaucratisation of the NHS in the past 10 to 15 years. There's been this enormous swelling of middle management – thousands of people sitting in offices, drinking lattes and looking at pie charts.

This started when hospitals became financially independent institutions and were able to compete for contracts. To build an argument for why your trust should take over a particular service, you need data. I can't tell you how many hours of my life I spend filling out forms that have little, if any, benefit for the actual patient. Yet it takes up a large proportion of my and my colleagues' time.

It feels very modern, but when you look at it, you think – so what? If you're having eye surgery, the only key performance indicator that matters is 'can I see?' That's all that matters to the patient and that's all that needs to be measured. What's more, lots of areas of medicine don't even have such clearly defined end points. So the data that's collected has little meaningful impact on patient welfare.

There will be an extraordinary level of resistance to change, because there's this whole stratum, this whole ecosystem, which you'd have to take a scalpel to and deftly remove. Interestingly, we saw this in Covid: all those middle managers went home and it didn't affect care whatsoever. In fact, it became more efficient. We cut all the bureaucracy and

everything became much leaner, much quicker.

My personal way of approaching it would be to say, 'We're going to continue paying you the same, but we'll put you back on the wards as a clinician.' I think you'd find that a lot of managers didn't really like being clinicians.

That's not to say that managers are never important. There are ones involved in care, in managing a service where they have a demonstrable purpose. And to those, I would say, 'You can spend 80% of your time managing, but you still have to do 20% clinical.' It would be interesting to see who we retain.



NHS, but they're understandably reluctant to pour more and more money into it through taxation.



working conditions for better pay? At what point would the stress be worth it for the remuneration?

There's a feeling now that our taxes are sprayed everywhere. I'm quite keen on an 'NHS tax'. It might make these conversations easier. Politicians could say, 'This is how much we need to meet the common demands.' Then, if you vote for a party that doesn't want to do that, you'd have to accept a shift in the kind of things the NHS can cover.

Then there's the issue of staff. We're seeing billions of pounds haemorrhaged on agency staff. It's creating a downward spiral: there are gaps in provision, so the staff already there are placed under more pressure and more of them leave.

I think the strikes pose an interesting question. At what point would you, as a doctor or nurse, accept unbearable

I'd suggest that first we need to increase

morale. We have to improve staffing and that means encouraging more people into the profession. Until recently, all nursing students got a bursary from the government. Reintroducing that in the form of a grant would be an inexpensive solution. The same with the introduction of fees for nursing degrees – it has been a disaster and the numbers applying to study nursing have fallen. We should scrap tuition fees for all people studying nursing degrees and introduce a grant, like students used to receive. Not only would it mean that nurses graduated without debt, it would communicate that this country values their chosen profession.

Part of the pay-off would be that you tie nurses into working in the NHS for an agreed number of

'To get more people into healthcare, we first need to increase staff morale'

Dr Jennifer Dixon Chief Executive Of The Health Foundation

Are Britons right to be more concerned by the state of the NHS than by the state of the economy?

Yes, but they're related. Right now, the picture is bleaker than I've known it for 40 years. More people are waiting: 7.2 million are in line for routine hospital treatment, the average waiting time for an ambulance is 32 minutes, and 25% of patients wait over four hours in A&E. Behind these figures, people are suffering and a lot of it is avoidable. While NHS staff are working hard under intense pressure to provide the best care they can, longer waiting risks the safety and quality of care.

The NHS lacks investment, in part because since the financial crash in 2008, economic growth has not been strong enough to support it. Then there was austerity across the public sector. Governments have been unwilling to take on more debt (even at a time of historically low interest rates) or raise taxes to invest in public services such as the NHS.

We've got waiting down before – in the early 2000s, for example. The recipe was investment, targets and intense political focus on just a few priorities. We need these now, but the huge added issue today is that of workforce shortages due to chronic underinvestment. If the government is



committed to addressing the crisis in the NHS, it needs to act on these now.

So workforce shortages are as significant a problem as the lack of money?

Yes. Full-time vacancies in NHS trusts in England were around 133,400 in the quarter to September 2022 – that's a five-year high. Vacancies in social care stand at around 165,000. This is just short of 10% of the workforce in the NHS and social care.

The effects across the system are devastating. People are struggling to get GP appointments. Some hospital delays come from delays in discharging patients due to a lack of social care. All this leads to a pressurised workforce that's demoralised

because it can't deliver the quality care it's been trained to give. This in turn leads to burnout, sickness and early retirement, which makes the shortages worse.

It's all the result of short-term political priorities that don't allow for medium-term planning. If the government hopes to tackle the current crisis, it must act differently and produce a fully funded workforce strategy.

Are the current problems intensified versions of perennial issues or are they exceptional?

The former. Covid was atypical, causing huge disruption to health systems across the globe, many of which face the same long tail of problems today. But the pressures we're seeing now are because of a fundamental lack of resilience, due to a decade of underinvestment, a failure to address chronic staff shortages, and the neglect of adult social care. This is a political failure.

In 2019, per capita public spending on health in the UK was £2,646.95 – well below France (£3,307.54) and Germany (£4,131.21). Spending on health capital – buildings, equipment and IT – was also materially lower than other advanced health systems. If the UK had matched

other EU countries' average investment in this area, it would have invested £33bn more a year than it did between 2010 and 2019. Compared with Germany, it would be £70bn a year. These are huge sums. Even before the effects of the pandemic were felt, NHS performance against a range of important indicators – including waiting times – was the worst on record.

The Health Foundation exists to identify and support promising ideas to improve healthcare. Where do you see the green shoots of recovery?

Part of the answer lies in technology, to improve the quality of care at the same time as reducing the level of growth needed in the workforce. Tech will help more people manage their health conditions at home, reducing reliance on formal care and the need to physically travel to healthcare facilities.

An example of a remote monitoring project that the Health Foundation has funded was the Hampton project, led by a team at St George's University Hospitals NHS Trust, who supported women with high blood pressure during pregnancy to monitor their health using an app that alerted them if they needed to go to hospital. It's a model that's now been spread widely.

Also, improved data collection, greater digitisation of health information and the increased use of AI all spell potential. We can improve the quality of care, empower patients to manage their health with apps, and improve efficiencies around paperwork.

But this won't happen with NHS technology budgets due to be cut.

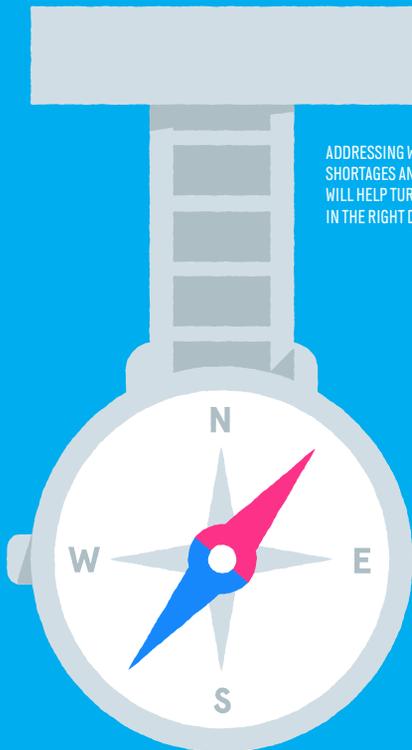
What does the future hold for the NHS?

It's clear a new approach is needed. We're moving too slowly to cope with the demands made on the service. Any alternatives to the NHS, even if they were feasible, will be far more expensive. The answer is to improve the current system and make use of its huge assets – the cradle-to-grave data it has on us all, for instance – to improve care. That simply means investment and reform.

Capital investment needs to increase to support the labour-saving digital care that will help sustain the NHS in the long run. We need long-term planning. And we need an intelligent vision of where the service needs to go to provide new forms of high-quality care that are consistent with the founding principles of the NHS. This is what the public cares about. Polls show that people don't want the NHS funding model to change – they want the current system to work better.

'Today's pressures stem from a decade-long lack of funding'

ADDRESSING WORKFORCE SHORTAGES AND FUNDING WILL HELP TURN THINGS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION



WITH PRESSURES HIGH
BUT RESOURCES LOW,
MANY NHS STAFF
FEEL DEPLETED



Tim Knox

Author Of **The International Health Care Outcomes Index 2022**

A little over three years ago, on 26 March 2020, we stood outside our front doors for the first time and started to bang our pots and pans and ‘clap for our carers’. For weeks, this continued every Thursday evening as we made a public display of affection for what is, in Nigel Lawson’s famous words, ‘the closest thing

the English have to a religion’: the NHS. That all seems distant today. Yes, there rightly remains much recognition of the extraordinary efforts and sacrifices of NHS staff throughout the pandemic. But undiluted respect for the institution of the NHS itself? That seems to have vanished.

Consider the findings of the most recent British Social Attitudes Survey, the gold-standard measure of public opinion: satisfaction with the NHS has fallen to its lowest level since 1997, with just 36% of the population satisfied with how the service runs, an unprecedented



drop of 17 percentage points from 2020. Record falls in satisfaction were seen across all individual NHS services, across all ages, income groups, sexes and political allegiances.

This is the background against which Keir Starmer and his shadow health minister feel comfortable openly criticising the NHS. ‘If we don’t get real about reform, the NHS will die,’ Starmer has written. He’s called for an ‘unsentimental’ shake-up of a service that’s ‘undeniably failing. The idea that the service is still “the envy of the world” is plainly wrong’.

So what can be done, politically? The first and most important thing is to rule out any suggestion

Keeping The NHS Alive

that we should have anything resembling a US style of healthcare. By nearly every measure, the American system fails: worse outcomes, extremely high costs, appalling inequity. We don't want to go anywhere near there. But what we can do is to learn from the countries that do have better health outcomes than us, those that preserve the principle that everyone has access to first-class healthcare, irrespective of their ability to pay; where public, patient and staff satisfaction is high; and where the financial costs of healthcare are supportable.

Many other countries meet these criteria: France, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy all do better than the UK with a mix of state-funded care and social insurance. And so does Australia. There, the state funds healthcare through the Medicare system, with access to treatment being totally free for the less well off. But unlike the UK, where the NHS tries to both fund and run almost all healthcare, Medicare only funds healthcare. It doesn't deliver any of it. Instead, patients choose their providers, with Medicare picking up the bill for those on a low income.

So there's a huge range of healthcare providers, ranging from hospitals run by regional governments to charities and for-profit companies, all competing and innovating to attract patients with better services and outcomes. And if you are well-off, you're expected to get private health

'We can learn from countries with better outcomes than ours'

insurance – if you don't pay for private medical insurance, your tax rate goes up. The result: patient outcomes are better than ours on nearly every level, while staff are happy and less pressurised, working fewer hours for higher wages. All this while

spending less on healthcare than we do: just 10.6% of GDP in Australia compared with 12.0% here, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The question then is how can we move from where we are now to where we'd like to be. This is a far bigger task than any of the dozen or so attempts at NHS reform since 1990. To have any chance of success, the ground rules of reform must be established. We must get broad acceptance of the need for deep-seated reform while recognising that doing nothing has a substantial cost (nearly 50,000 people a year die in the UK from medical shortcomings, the highest per capita rate of all advanced economies other than the USA). Any significant reform would be expensive in money, time and energy, and would therefore need cross-party support in Parliament, as well as wide support from the public, patients and every level of the NHS.

Which is where a Royal Commission might come in. Its authority and expertise could detoxify the best reform proposals, while its explicitly bipartisan nature could be preceded by concessions from all parties to accept its conclusions. Its huge investigatory powers – summoning witnesses under oath, offering indemnities, seizing evidence – might help it find the kind of solutions that will endure well beyond the first change in Downing Street. And with a tight remit and timetable, it could just find a way to reform a healthcare system in which so many of us have – sadly but rightly – lost faith.



Dr Raghiv Ali

Chief Medical Officer At Our Future Health And NHS Consultant

You're leading the UK's biggest health research programme. How will the insights you gather reduce the burden on the NHS?

Something I realised quite early on in my career is that we tend to treat people far too late. Diseases such as heart disease, stroke and cancer develop over years, if not decades,



and are preventable through early intervention. The idea behind Our Future Health's research programme is to move the NHS from being a late-stage disease-treatment service to an early-stage detection and prevention service. It's much more expensive to treat the complications of a disease or a cancer once it's spread than it is at an earlier stage.

IT'S TIME THAT WE
SUBJECT THE NHS'S
INNER WORKINGS TO
CLOSER SCRUTINY

This is how it works: you fill out a questionnaire about your health and lifestyle, then book an appointment to have various physical measurements taken – blood pressure, weight, waist circumference, a cholesterol test. Then we'll be in contact to ask if you'd like to receive information about your risk of certain diseases, based on an analysis of your DNA and other information we collect. Anyone in the UK can sign up.

Ultimately, we want to recruit five million people. There aren't many countries where you'd be able to get this many people into a study within a single healthcare system. The UK is really the

only place where you can look at every common chronic disease across every demographic. We can link the data we collect with NHS data and census data, and that will make these predictions much more powerful. Eventually, this will be done through the NHS app.

Do individualised insights like this offer a better way to incentivise behaviour change?

That's what we're trying to test. Nearly all prevention efforts to date have relied on broad categorisation: 'You're over 40 now, come and have your diabetes and cardiovascular disease screenings.' But if I can say to you, 'This is your risk of this disease and this is what you should do, based on what we already know about you.'

That's what's called personalised prevention, which is relatively new.

We think about 80% of your health outcomes are based on social determinants of health – where you live, your economic situation, your job, etc. People in the most deprived areas live up to 20 years less than those in the least deprived areas. Fixing that inequality is important. But it's also about giving people the ability to make informed choices. If you don't know you're at high risk of a disease then you can't do anything about it.

What would a well-functioning NHS look like in 20 years' time?

I expect this information will be available from birth. Newborns will have their whole genome sequenced, then parents will be informed, if they have consented to that, about what their child is at higher risk of. All adults will have this as well. The screening of diseases wouldn't take place in hospitals, it would be mainly online. A lot of this can be done alone, and where samples need to be collected or measurements taken, that could be done in pharmacies.

Primary care will deal with more complex treatment requirements. And secondary care would deal with emergencies, operations and the complicated cases. We're never going to stop people getting sick. But it will reduce the proportion of people who develop diseases and move most preventative healthcare into the community.

'I realised early on that we tend to treat people far too late'

Will Self Journalist And Author

Is it a case of whether the NHS, or wither the NHS? The crisis in the post-pandemic world is evident.



A combination of underinvestment and heightened demand has led to massive waiting lists, derogated care and even crumbling infrastructure – witness the grotesque news in recent months that there have been almost 500 leakages of raw sewage into hospital wards. As the ambulances queue up in A&E, with trolleys in the corridors resembling some real-life game of Candy Crush, wannabe patients sequestered in their homes waiting, despairingly, for long-postponed elective surgeries. The conclusion is surely inescapable: what's needed here is a massive injection of adrenalising cash into our sclerotic health system, so that it can remain a beacon in a darkening world. 'Our NHS': the national service that didn't just protect the abstraction of nationhood, but the very concrete, bodily reality of man-and-womanhood.

Okay, fine, but pandemic or not, here's the problem: the demand for the sort of healthcare offered by the evolving western model – which remains fundamentally instrumental: *we cure you* by doing/giving things to your body – continues to grow exponentially. Meanwhile, the capacity to pay for this is necessarily incremental. And the ever-widening gap between the perceived capacity of the NHS to cure people of pretty much whatever ails them (even unto death itself) and the reality of the care on offer, is experienced by Britons as terrible privation.

Yes, the pandemic put great pressure on the NHS. Yet it's the associated social care crisis that really gives the lie to the idea that there's any fundamental solution to the problems of an ageing, obese population that doesn't exercise, and drinks, smokes and takes too many drugs, in simply investing more in medicalised approaches. Yes, yes, dear reader, I know this isn't *you*. But then it's the first rule of good empathetic medical practice that no patient ever considers himself to be a statistic.

Unfortunately, the disconnect between this attitude and a public debate about healthcare founded entirely on the quantification of resources is only too

clear. Successive governments impress upon voters that they'll protect 'our' NHS. Really, the health service stands proxy for whatever notion we have left of a mutually supportive civil society – so for 'commonwealth', read 'common health'.

The solution doesn't lie in this paradigm at all, but in a taking back of responsibility for health on the part of the individual. Yes, it's easy to be bedazzled by what medical science can do – it does, indeed, approximate to magic when compared with the healthcare practices of the very recent past. But if we want to revert to a statistical view rather than indulging in individual credulousness, the fact is that if we, as a society, halved our drinking, quadrupled our exercise and cut out refined sugar altogether, both the crises in social care and the NHS would belong to the past quite as much as excruciatingly painful dentistry and septic obstetrics.

I write this not as a statistic myself, but as an individual whose very life currently depends on pharmaco-wizardry. If I didn't take drugs that specifically target the stem cells in my bone marrow that go on to overproduce white and red blood cells and platelets, I would die from the underlying cancerous condition in pretty short order. Of course, basing any opinion on an empirical sample of one is a big mistake – and besides, while my own treatment has been exemplary despite the pandemic, I know this is due to such specifics as where I live (within a mile of one of the foremost teaching hospitals in the world) and, frankly, how

I speak. Educated, middle-class doctors still have an unconscious bias to look out better for their own.

So, I speak not for myself, but in the spirit of 'our National Health'. And I say this: if you really believe in universal healthcare, free and on demand, then you're a communist by definition. And as such, you should look to nations such as Cuba for a radical reconfiguration of health services towards prevention, community care and education in self-reliance. Good luck with that one!

'We have a population that drinks, smokes and takes too many drugs'

Dr Nick Thayer

Head Of Policy At The Company Chemists' Association

What role could – and should – local pharmacies play within our healthcare system?

Generally, people are surprised by the breadth of things community pharmacies do. We play a huge role in vaccinations and offer a variety of services in sexual health and treating minor conditions. And, of course, around the safe use of medicine.

Right now, there's a drive to broaden that. We've seen some recently commissioned services such as hypertension screening. There's a lot of discussion about a 'Pharmacy First' service.

We're talking about England, here. In both Wales and Scotland, they already have a version of Pharmacy First. It recognises that there's a large proportion of people who have a minor ailment that needs a healthcare practitioner to look at it, but doesn't necessarily require a doctor. It's not complicated stuff, but if it's not treated, it might get worse.

The NHS estimates that, in England, there are 20 million GP appointments a year that could be treated in a community pharmacy. That's a big number! Twenty million appointments could be moved over right now, without the need for any additional training.

What are the obstacles to this happening?

Many GP surgeries can already refer you to a pharmacy. The problem is, that doesn't help – because you've got to go to the GP in the first place to get referred. It's a bureaucratic nightmare. If patients know when they can be seen by a pharmacy and when they need to see a doctor, you can let them go directly.

The other problem we've got is that community pharmacies need to be paid for the work that they're doing. That's true of the whole healthcare system, but at the moment, there's not enough funding for us. We actually want to be more ambitious than 20 million



appointments; we think there are 30 million people every year who could go to their community pharmacy and have a private consultation with a pharmacist.

There are certain mechanisms, called Patient Group Directions (PGDs), which allow pharmacists to supply and administer select medicines without a prescription. That's an immediate solution. About 5% of community pharmacies are already prescribers.

'The NHS is swamped. Pharmacies are saying, "We'd like more work"'

And from 2026, every pharmacist who graduates will be an independent prescriber. So, this extra 10 million becomes easily achievable. The problem is, if the NHS

want us to provide these appointments, it must fund them. And that's what we need Pharmacy First to do.

Most of the NHS is struggling, it's swamped. The pharmacies are saying, 'We'd like more work. Send more patients to us. All you need to do is give us the money to do that.' But because of this dearth of funding over all these years, we're seeing the active deterioration of the pharmacy network. Just accounting for inflation, each individual pharmacy in England is underfunded by £67,000 a year – that's more than £750m in total. Since 2015, there have been 720 closures and 41% of them were in the 20% most deprived communities. And the trend is accelerating.

Do community pharmacies offer any intrinsic benefits compared with a GP's office?

A lot of patients are more willing to come to community pharmacies, because it's not this very clinical environment. It can be part of your shopping. That ties into a larger point about accessibility. Nearly 90% of the population are within a 20-minute walk of a pharmacy. And they're open longer. So, if you do shift work or work long hours, you can access the pharmacy at a time that works for you. You don't need to register with a pharmacy, either. That flexibility is really important.



Sebastian Rees

Senior Researcher At Public Services Think Tank Reform

The NHS crisis is, yet again, in full swing. Ambulances queued outside hospitals, year-long waits for treatment and endless hold tones on GP phone lines.

But the usual toolkit to solve these problems isn't working. More money into the system? We've tried that – more than 40% of day-to-day government spending goes on the NHS. More doctors for our overcrowded hospitals? The number of hospital doctors is up by 33% since 2010.

Add yet care gets worse and health declines – 64% of us are overweight or obese, one in six young people live with a mental health condition and our likelihood of surviving bowel cancer is lower than most comparable countries.

Seventy-five years after the founding of the NHS, our sickness service is no longer up to the job. It's time to radically rethink the system itself.

Doing things differently starts with acknowledging a simple fact: prevention



is better than cure. Success shouldn't be measured by how many patients we treat, but how many we stop from

needing healthcare in the first place.

Many of our modern health 'giants' are avoidable. From type 2 diabetes to heart disease, addressing the circumstances that lead to unhealthy choices can help shift the dial. For our system, that means a massive movement of resources away from treatment and towards prevention. It means dismantling our hospital-centric model.

In Singapore, the government uses data from wearable devices to drive healthier choices. Citizens log their exercise patterns and diet, and if they meet their health goals, are rewarded

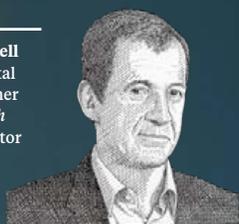
with vouchers. Those who don't meet their targets are nudged by their device to do better. A real-time, prevention revolution, driven by people power.

In Brazil, the frontline of the health system is not the GP surgery, but patients' homes. Local residents are recruited to become community health workers, trained to deal with a range of common health issues, and spend their working days visiting local households to carry out health checks and dispense medical advice. This proactive, community-driven care has delivered extraordinary results, including big reductions in deaths from stroke and heart disease. It costs no more than £40 a year per citizen and the model is currently being trialled in London.

Obsessing about healthcare is not the same thing as obsessing about health. Failing to recognise that feeds our seemingly insatiable – and ultimately unaffordable – demand for more clinical care. If best estimates suggest healthcare accounts for just 20% of health outcomes, then we need to get serious about what drives the other 80%. That means ensuring that our lifestyle choices, and the places we live, work and socialise, are health boosting. That, in fact, is the only way to save our NHS. 🇬🇧

‘The NHS isn't up to the job. It's time to rethink the system’

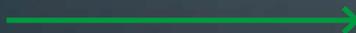
Alastair Campbell
Journalist, mental
health campaigner
and *Men's Health*
contributing editor



Talking Heads Alastair Campbell meets **Gary Lineker**

Political Football

For a man renowned for his equanimity, and a playing career untarnished by so much as a yellow card, Gary Lineker has been attracting some censure of late. Over a frenzied week in March, during which a single tweet managed to throw petrol on searing tensions within the government and the BBC, the model professional was recast as a political firebrand. **Here, talking to Alastair Campbell, he reflects on his employer's own goal**





Despite his relaxed appearance, Lineker has a steely resolve and won't back down under pressure

Talking Heads

Alastair Campbell meets Gary Lineker

First, I should declare a few interests. I went to the same school as Gary Lineker, though he was a few years below me, and while I remember him because he was already making local headlines as a footballer and cricketer, he has no memory of me. Our next tie-up was via the Blood Cancer UK charity, for which I was once chairman of fundraising and he was a prominent supporter, his son George having survived leukaemia. In the political arena, we worked together on the People's Vote campaign for a second Brexit referendum. When Burnley were in the Premier League, I regularly offered him my views of the *Match Of The Day* running order, a habit I shall resume now we're back in the big league. And finally, as the BBC and others felt compelled to point out when I went out to bat for Lineker in support of his battle with the BBC and the Tories that followed him airing his views on Suella Braverman's 'stop the boats' propaganda, his Goalhanger company produces my podcast.

Defensive throat clearing over. The truth is Lineker, now 62, needs no introduction. One of the country's most famous footballers, who went on to become one of the country's most famous broadcasters, he's been presenting *MOTD* since 1999 and has for some time been the BBC's highest-paid presenter. There are few people with profiles such that a single exchange on Twitter could become a front-page, bulletin-leading controversy. But Lineker has been making news all his life – and staying calm about it. For *Talking Heads*, meeting at his home in Barnes, which just a few weeks earlier had been besieged by media chronicling his every move, we start with that calm, which has served him so well in both of his careers.

AC: In this series, I tend to ask sportspeople the same first question: how much of your success is down to physical attributes and how much of it is mental?

GL: Well, you can't be a top athlete without the right physical attributes, but your mentality will always be a big factor, too. I've been lucky on that front. I have ups and downs like anyone, but I'm generally very calm, don't have much of a temper and I'm pretty good at dealing with setbacks.

AC: You've never had what I would define as mental ill health, such as depression or chronic anxiety?

GL: No. Ups and downs, sure. Serious mental health problems, no.

AC: Where do you think your calm comes from?

GL: If we're talking genes, then I'd say it comes from my mother. She was amazingly even-tempered. My dad had a bit of a temper, but

I was always more like my mum.

There wasn't much that would get her down and I'm a bit like that.

AC: You've had some pretty hard stuff to deal with, though. Not just defeats in big matches, but your son George being very ill as a child; your parents' divorce, which I know hit you hard; your own divorce; the death of both your parents in recent years; the occasional scandal and controversy to deal with...

GL: Sure, but everyone has tough stuff to deal with, and [for] a lot of people [it's] way worse than anything I've had. It's why after the recent hoo-ha about refugees and what I said on Twitter...

AC: We'll come to that.

GL: ...I said that whatever problems I'd faced as a result, it was nothing

compared with desperate people fleeing war or persecution, or famine or climate change. So whatever life throws at me, I know I've been very lucky in so many ways. I've

had two great careers, both times doing something I love, fabulous kids, financial security, good friends. So, I guess I have this ability to look on the bright side, whatever goes on around me.

AC: Is there not a disconnect, though, between a massive will to win, which top sportsmen have to have, and such a calm mindset?

GL: Well, for some people, yes. You see players who have to be pumped up, totally psyched. To perform to their best, they have to live on the edge. But I'm not like that. I perform best when I'm calm. Goalscorers have to be cool and calm. I see players getting fouled and they retaliate, but who are they helping? If I was fouled, I'd say to myself, 'Good job, we've got a free kick, we've got a chance from this.' I'd moan to the refs sometimes, but I'd never swear at them, never abuse them.

AC: Still, not a single red or yellow card in your entire football career – that's pretty amazing. Is that where it comes from, your calm – an ability to not overreact?

GL: I played in an era when defenders could kick lumps out of you without the ref being too bothered. I don't know if I'd be able to avoid the occasional yellow in the modern game. I'd probably get one for having big ears. The closest I ever came to getting one was when I was playing for Barcelona. The ref gave a decision against me, I laughed, and I could see him reach for his pocket. I said, 'Oh, come on, you can't book me for laughing!' And he stopped himself. I'm quite proud of my record on that front.

AC: Did you always know you would make it as a footballer?

GL: Not at all. In fact, as a kid I would've said cricket was my best sport. I was tiny growing up, a really late developer. I didn't reach puberty till I was about 17, which was really embarrassing in the

showers, I must say – and then from 17 to 18 I had a growth spurt and suddenly people thought I might have it in me to be a footballer.

AC: And did you think that?

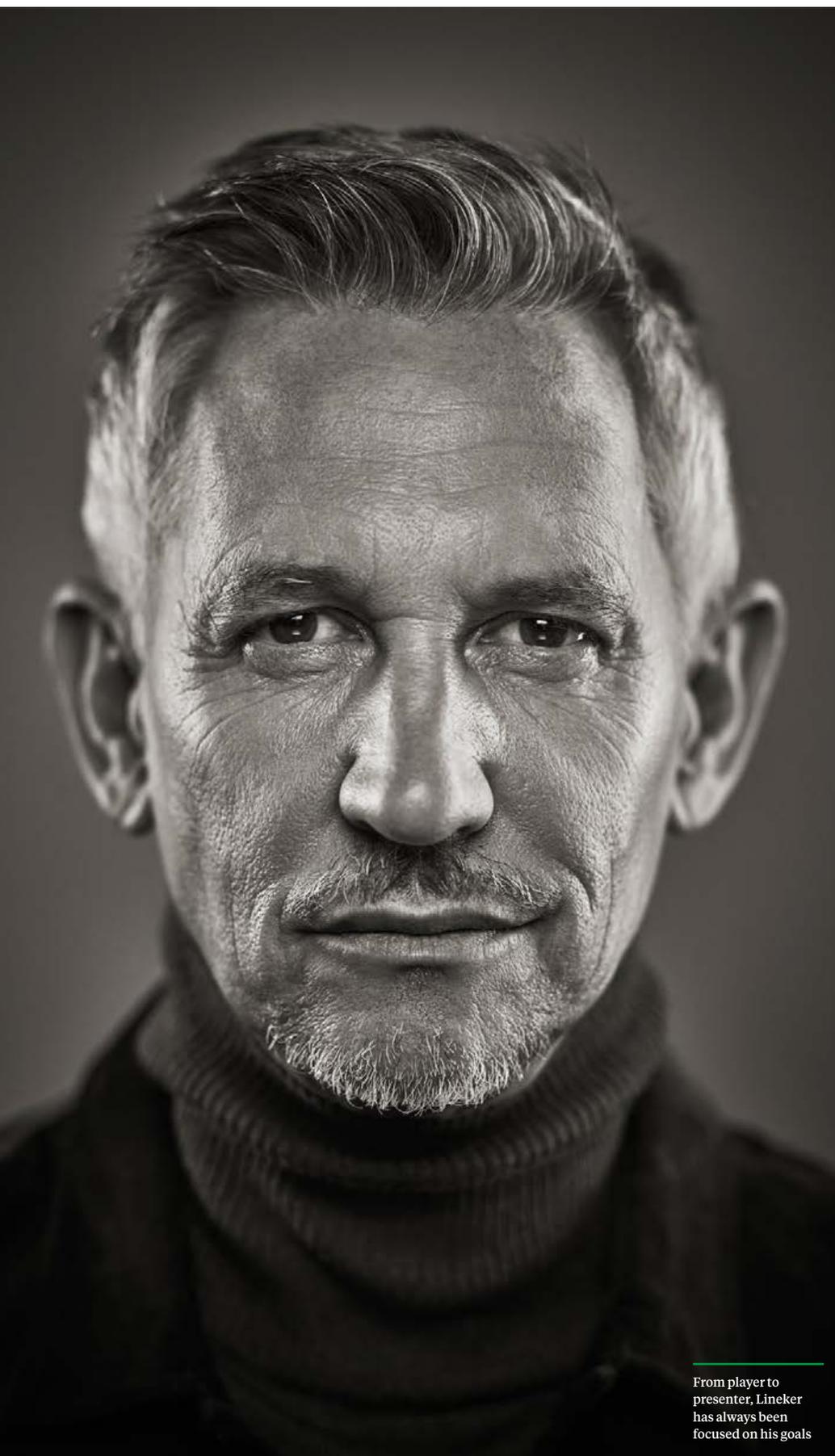
GL: Not really, no. I was honestly a bit

surprised when Leicester took me on as an apprentice. I never felt I was at that level. And I was probably into my mid-twenties before I felt comfortable with the idea that I was a professional footballer. Right up to the time I became an established international, at every level I played I thought, 'I'm going to get found out here.'

AC: So you had a bit of impostor syndrome?

GL: I did. I'd look at other players in training or in matches and think they were so much better than me. There was a time when Jock Wallace had just been made Leicester manager and he was watching a reserves game I was playing in. He came into the dressing room at half time and absolutely bawled me out – 'You lazy little shite, what are you playing at?' Which was weird, because we were two up and I'd scored both goals. Then at the end of the match, he was in and at me again, said he wanted to see me in his office first thing. I hardly slept. I'm thinking,

I guess I have this ability to look on the bright side, whatever is going on around me



From player to presenter, Lineker has always been focused on his goals

'I'm finished; the new manager thinks I'm useless,' and maybe because I never saw myself as top level I thought he had a point. I go in to see him and he sits me down, looks me in the eye and says, 'Son, you were absolutely magnificent last night.' So, I said, 'What was all that about, the "lazy little shite" stuff?' And he says, 'I just wanted to make sure you keep your feet on the ground.'

AC: I'm not sure managers could get away with that kind of approach these days.

GL: Probably not. But it didn't harm me. It made me realise I had to work hard, not go out, not mess about, understand what it meant to be a professional footballer. It's so easy to go off the rails as a young player, especially now with the money, the fame and the media all over you.

AC: Do you resent the money today's players get compared with your generation?

GL: Not at all. Good luck to them.

AC: You were one of the first English players to go abroad when you played for Barcelona. Did the impostor syndrome not kick in then, at one of the biggest clubs in the world?

GL: I was at Everton and I was really happy there. I was sure we were going to win stuff. Then they call me in and tell me Barcelona have made a bid and that they've agreed a price. I honestly didn't know what to do. I didn't have to go. Michelle [then wife] and I talked about it for ages and eventually we got four pieces of paper. I wrote 'Yes' on one, 'No' on the other, and she did the same. We put them in a pot and we pulled out one each – they both said 'Yes'.

AC: What if it had been one each?

GL: Happily, we didn't have to deal with that!

AC: You learned the language, which English players don't always do.

GL: I looked at the ones who'd gone abroad before and done well – players such as Ray Wilkins, Kevin Keegan, Trevor Francis, Tony Woodcock. They immersed themselves, so Michelle and I had three hours of Spanish tuition every week and I really enjoyed it. I love being able to speak Spanish.

AC: How much did you know about

the politics of Spanish football?

GL: Not much, but you learn fast. The rivalry with Real Madrid is about much more than football. They were seen as representing Franco's Spain, and Barca's identity is interwoven with the struggle for independence for Catalonia. When you walk into the empty stadium, you see the words 'mes que un club' in giant letters on the seats. It's Catalan for 'more than a club', which speaks to a political identity and a philosophy that you feel very strongly when you're there. There was a period when the Catalan language and the Catalan flag were banned, and people felt the club kept that identity. They would go to matches and no one was going to stop them speaking Catalan. In the 1930s, one of the club's presidents, Josep Sunyol, was killed by Franco's troops without a trial. So when you see someone like Pep Guardiola campaigning as he does, you see why. It runs deep for the people there.

AC: Did it politicise you at all?

GL: I certainly found it interesting and it gave me a sense of why sport provokes the kind of passion that sometimes goes beyond what some people might view as normal.

AC: How political are you?

GL: I've always been interested in politics. I know how much it matters. But I'm not politically tribal in the way someone like you would be. My dad was a big fan of Thatcher. I've voted for different parties at different times. The right-wing papers like to call me a leftie, but I wouldn't say I am. I'm somewhere in the centre, probably more centre-left at the moment, certainly not right wing. I think I'm your classic floating voter.

AC: When I've spoken to you about this before, you've said, 'I will never voice my opinions because there's no point. You just end up with 60% of people hating you.'

GL: (Laughs) Not wrong.

AC: So, do you wish you hadn't voiced your opinions on the government's policy around refugees and asylum, given the fuss it caused?

GL: When I sent that tweet, it honestly never even crossed my mind that it would lead where it went. I've worked with refugees' charities for years. So



A divisive tweet about the UK's stance on refugees led to a media storm in March

when I saw the Suella Braverman film, I said I thought it was pretty awful. Then the 'stick to football' people weighed in and I replied to one of them, just saying there was no massive influx, the UK takes far fewer refugees than other European countries, this is a cruel policy and the language used in the debate reminds us of Germany in the 1930s. I think that is factually accurate.

AC: So, when did you realise it had kicked off?

GL: The next day. I always turn my phone off when I go to bed. I don't turn it on again until I've had a coffee in the morning. The next day, I woke up to more than 200 WhatsApp messages. I thought something must've happened to one of the kids. I opened the first message and it was a picture of the *Mail's* front page, saying I was comparing the government to the Nazis. So my first reaction was relief that nothing bad had happened.

AC: But then it ran out of control?

GL: That's what papers like the *Mail* do. They turn something you've said into something you haven't said and whip it up into a huge row. It was totally out of proportion, but that's what happens. Then the politicians pile in and the BBC felt it had to do something. The thing is, when the new social media guidelines were brought in, I said fine, but we agreed I wouldn't stop occasionally tweeting about two issues in particular: climate change and refugees. I wasn't prepared to back down on that, especially as I felt and still feel that what I tweeted



The *Daily Mail's* dramatic front-page headline, which Lineker believes contributed to the disproportionate controversy around his tweet

was fair and true. I wasn't abusive, I wasn't saying she was a Nazi. I talked about using words such as 'invasion', 'swarms', 'criminals' and 'rapists', which I think we should be very careful about, as they have real-life consequences.

AC: Was there a moment you thought you'd presented your last MOTD?

GL: I guess I must have, because when they said I had 'stepped back' and the row was raging, it was hard to see how

Talking Heads

Alastair Campbell meets Gary Lineker



Hill did it a bit, Bob Wilson did it, but they were exceptions. I looked at people like Sue Barker and David Gower and I felt that their knowledge of their sports added to their presentation of tennis and cricket. I wanted to do that for football.

AC: Did it come naturally?

GL: Not at all. I found punditry easy enough, but presenting is totally different. You've got so many moving parts and you're trying to hold it all together. I did *Football Focus* for two years and I'd go home thinking I was never going to master it. I guess I was never quite bad enough to be dropped, though, and with time I got much more confident. It was a bit like my football. It took a while for me to accept that I was up to performing at the top level.

AC: But presumably it's very much second best to playing?

GL: Absolutely. But you can't play forever. I remember talking to Michael Owen about this. He trains racehorses and I said to him, 'When one of your horses wins, is it the same feeling as scoring a goal in a big game?' And he said, 'Nothing is the same as scoring a goal in a big game!' He's right. You will never replace the sense of excitement before a massive game, or the sense of

elation if you win.

So yes, it's second best, but what are you going to do? You can't do nothing just because you have to stop playing...

AC: So how hard is it to give that up?

GL: For a lot of players, it's unbelievably hard. The stats for divorce, addiction and other issues like that are off the scale for people post-playing career. But I always felt I had something to look forward to and I'm not someone who looks back too much. It's why I don't play in charity matches. I haven't actually played in a proper game since the day I retired. I couldn't do it. I loved playing big matches, but I can't say I enjoyed training and I hated friendlies. So the thought of being in a dressing room with a load of geriatrics and celebs for

way the Premier League captains got together during the pandemic and raised money for the NHS. Brilliant. Or Raheem Sterling and the way he has campaigned on racism. If footballers choose to use their profile to try to make change like that, we should celebrate it, not look to bring them down.

AC: Do you think the sport treats young players well?

GL: Well, it's a fact that most won't make it. For every Marcus Rashford or Raheem Sterling, there are thousands who maybe get as far as a trial or one of the academies, and that's as far as it goes. My son was at the academy at Chelsea for a while and I would go and watch. There were hundreds of kids there, all able to say they were with the academy, and their parents are thinking their kid could be set for the big time. But I know that one, two, maybe three will get to play at the top level. That's a lot of disappointment in the making.

AC: How did you and your son deal with that?

GL: In one way it's harder for a kid who has a dad who has been an England international. But in another it's easier, because he knows that he's financially secure. My message was always just play to enjoy it and you will find your level. But for a lot of those kids and their parents, they are maybe looking at it as a way of escaping poverty or building a new kind of life – and for most, they

won't make it. The ones who do have got something special. So many want to be a pro. When I hear people lambast players on radio phone-ins, they have no idea how good you need to be to make it as a pro with any club.

AC: Did you find it hard to stop being a player?

GL: No. I knew when my time had come and I'd already decided to try to make a go of a media career. I was always fascinated by the media coverage; I used to write match reports when I was a kid. I often wondered why they didn't have people who'd actually been footballers doing the big presenting jobs. Jimmy

'There's always a political element to sport. It's naive to think you can separate them'

players, it's unbelievably hard. The stats for divorce, addiction and other issues like that are off the scale for people post-playing career. But I always felt I had something to look forward to and I'm not someone who looks back too much. It's why I don't play in charity matches. I haven't actually played in a proper game since the day I retired. I couldn't do it. I loved playing big matches, but I can't say I enjoyed training and I hated friendlies. So the thought of being in a dressing room with a load of geriatrics and celebs for

it got resolved unless they backed down. I think the key moment was when the other presenters and commentators made it clear they wouldn't go on if I was taken off air. I found that incredibly moving. I had a tear in my eye when I heard Wrighty and Alan Shearer had pulled out. Ian had told me he would do it, but it's one thing to say it and another to do it. Then the others pulled out one by one, and even some of the players and managers said they wouldn't do interviews. To be fair to Tim Davie, he admitted they'd got it wrong and sorted it out. I love the BBC and I was very glad to be back on air and talking about football again.

AC: Will it make you think twice about tweeting about politics again?

GL: I always think twice. I have three rules: I never tweet if I've been drinking, I never tweet if I'm angry and I always read the tweet back before hitting send. If I have 1% of doubt, I don't post it.

AC: So, what do you think of people telling you to 'stick to football'?

GL: There is always a political element to sport. It's naive to think you can separate them entirely. And I'm incredibly proud of the way some of today's players have used their profile to make change. Marcus Rashford shouldn't have had to run the campaign he runs on food in schools, but he did it because he believes it so strongly, and he got the government to change policy. Good on him. Or the

Talking Heads

Alastair Campbell meets Gary Lineker

a charity match... it's not for me.

AC: You never thought of being a coach or a manager?

GL: No. I don't think I would've made a good manager. I'd seen too much of the pressures they were under. The best ones never ever switch off.

AC: How do you assess the health of the sport?

GL: The quality at the top level is out of this world. We saw that at the World Cup. The Premier League really is the best, because the best players want to be here. I don't think that 10 or 20 years ago someone like Erling Haaland would've wanted to be in England. Spain or Italy were the countries attracting the best players. Now we do.

AC: What about the big clubs being part of geopolitics?

GL: That worries me. I don't like the idea of state-owned clubs. But I fear that train has left the station.

AC: And is there not a risk that with so many foreign players, the national side can never develop to the very top level?

GL: I think we're getting better at developing young footballers. We're getting used to seeing smaller pitches, smaller goals. For too long you've put 22 little kids on a massive pitch and the only way to get the ball from one end to the other is to boot it as hard as you can. That's no way to learn the skills you need for football: good passing, dribbling, technique. Also, we need to push back on the culture of fear that's created by the obsession with winning; parents ranting and raving on the sidelines, 'Boot it! Get stuck in!' It makes the kids treat the ball like it's a bomb – just get rid of it before it blows up.

AC: Sport at the top level is obviously in amazing shape, if measured on money and the quality of players, the teams and the competition.

But do you think we value sport as a country in the way we should?

GL: I'm not sure we do. I know we're in an era when money is tight, but I've never understood why we don't fund grassroots sport better. It would save fortunes in health, crime, communities. You learn so much about life through sport. I know why science and maths are important, but I would put sport

Lineker lifts the FA Cup for Tottenham Hotspur after beating Nottingham Forest 2-1 in the 1991 final



up there with them in terms of what it can offer to young people.

AC: You're a BBC man, but would you say Sky has been good for football?

GL: Absolutely. The way they present the football has made it even more popular. Sky is very important, but so is MOTD. It still gets great numbers, still sets trends.

AC: Do you think MOTD will last forever?

GL: It's operating in a very competitive environment, but I think one of the reasons the row about my tweets got so big was that people value the show – not just as a tradition, but because we provide something relevant and important in the coverage of the football.

AC: Around the same time, the BBC was under pressure for axing the BBC Singers, something else it reversed. But your salary was bigger than the entire cost of the Singers. So, do you understand the criticism of your salaries as presenters and pundits?

GL: I get why people criticise us for earning good

money doing something we love. The truth is you can never really justify wages in the entertainment business, but that is what it is. I did take a pay cut last time around and I understand why people felt that was appropriate.

AC: Do you enjoy being famous?

GL: I've always enjoyed fame. There are downsides, but I think when you reach a certain level, you have to accept them. The truth is most people are lovely. Even with Twitter and all the abuse on there, there's still an awful lot of niceness. And sure, sometimes the press can be nasty, but there are also lots of good people just doing their job.

AC: You've been doing MOTD for almost a quarter of a century now. Will you keep going forever?

GL: I honestly don't know. I guess a lot will depend on what happens with the rights. It's unbelievably competitive.

AC: Just before the BBC News At Ten, when you do the trailer, do you ever feel like saying, 'No point staying up for this, it was all rubbish today'?

GL: Tricky. I did it once and got hauled in for a bollocking by the BBC One controller. I said, 'If there's one to miss, it might be this one.' But I think I have to be honest or else why should people believe me when I say it's going to be amazing, only for them to tune in for a load of nil-nilts? So, if you hear me say, 'It's going to be interesting,' I reckon you should think about going to bed. To be fair, most weeks there are amazing matches, goals and talking points.

AC: Did it ever bother you that you were known as a poacher?

GL: No. Why do you think I called the company that makes your podcast Goalhanger? My great skill was being in the right place. So, it'd irritate me

when people said, 'He did nothing, just managed to be in the right place to tap it in.' What football people understand is the work you're doing off the ball, the running, losing defenders, gambling on where the ball is going to be, knowing that nine times out of 10 it won't land

'Better funding for grassroots sport would save fortunes in health and crime'



The former footballer won't hide his views on the issues that matter most to him

there, but when it does, being able to convert the chance. That was my great strength: converting chances. When we do packages on Messi, you see screamer after screamer, incredible goals from distance. I only ever scored one screamer in my whole career, a 25-yard curler for Spurs at Old Trafford.

AC: You sometimes seem a bit obsessed with Messi.

GL: Justifiably. I think he and Maradona are the two greatest footballers of all time. I think there's a case to make that Messi is the greatest sportsman of all time. Only Muhammad Ali gets close, and there are a lot more footballers than heavyweight boxers. I was a good footballer, but then there was always someone like Gazza, who was better than me, much better. And then you could say there were players like Zidane or Platini who were better than Gazza. And then there's Messi and Maradona, doing things that other people just cannot do. It's like they're watching themselves from above, seeing every dimension around them. It's a different game to the one mere mortals play.

AC: Did you resent the Hand of God goal?

GL: No. He tried something and got away with it. And when he scored the second one, I was at the other end of the pitch and I almost felt like applauding. It was the greatest individual goal of all time. I once did a documentary with him, spent three days in Buenos Aires with him and got to see just how crazy his life was. Everywhere he went, people literally bowing down, mobbing him, it was nuts. It was no wonder he was a bit crazy with it. But he was a lovely human being: warm, loved people, had this impossible fame to deal with, yet was always giving back.

AC: Is there a moment in your time as a footballer that you look back on as the best?

GL: The truth is I didn't win much by way of medals and trophies. Didn't win anything with England. There was the Second Division title with Leicester, and at Everton we were on for the double but just missed both. At Barcelona, I won a Spanish Cup medal and the Cup Winners' Cup, but winning the FA Cup with Spurs was a real highlight. I had a good career. 

Esquire

THE UNDENIABLE ELVIS COSTELLO: AN EPIC ENCOUNTER WITH A POP LEGEND / THE 2023 WATCH REPORT / GARETH SOUTHGATE ON STAGE / BESPOKE JEANS / THE MEANING OF KEN / JOHN BANVILLE ON THE ROAD / RUTH WILSON'S SLEEPLESS NIGHT / INSIDE DRAKE'S / TEO VAN DEN BROEKE'S LIFE IN STYLE / WEMBLEY AT 100 / FERRARI'S SUV / GREG WILLIAMS' HOLLYWOOD / ANDREW O'HAGAN ON MADONNA / FICTION BY CALEB AZUMAH NELSON



THE SUMMER ISSUE, ON SALE NOW



Fit *At* Any Age

Your body is not a machine. How it works, feels and looks will change as you grow older. Over the next 16 pages, we present every tool you'll need to work *with* your physique rather than against it, as well as strategies to keep you mentally and emotionally fit, too. The rest of your life starts here



Your Twenties

20s
YOUR
DECADE TO
SMASH IT

You've got it good. Right now, your metabolism, energy levels and ability to bounce back from hangovers are at their peak. With extra help, you can keep the good times rolling without racking up a debt your body can't repay later



THE NUMBERS

How do your metrics stack up against the average man in his twenties?

BMI
25.7

RESTING HEART RATE
62^{BPM}

DAILY STEPS
9,903

DAILY ACTIVE MINUTES
60

HOURS OF SLEEP
6^{HR} 35^{MIN}

What You Can (And Can't) Get Away With

You're not invulnerable. But during this decade, you may be more resilient than you think

<p>Routinely Drinking To Oblivion</p> 	<p>A Chronic Weed Habit</p> 	<p>Out-Training A Bad Diet</p> 	<p>Avoiding The Dentist</p> 	<p>Those Two (Three?) Times You Did Ecstasy</p> 	<p>'Borrowing' The Odd Cigarette</p> 	<p>An Erratic Sleep Schedule</p> 
<p>Your brain isn't fully developed until your mid- to late twenties, so the potential for harm is significant, says neurologist Frances E Jensen. As vast numbers of connections form between your neurons, habits form easily, and drinking to excess can affect your memory and attention. You might cheat the hangovers, but you can't cheat time.</p> 	<p>CBD oil may be everywhere, but don't mistake that for a green light to get stoned. In your first decades, the connections in your brain are gradually being wrapped in a form of insulation called myelin, with the frontal lobe (linked to decision making) the last area to complete this process. Daily cannabis use can disrupt this, which affects your cognition. Make smart choices now so your future self can do the same.</p> 	<p>Living off the saver menu isn't a routine you want to get into, no matter your BMI. A poor lifestyle can lead to invisible yet enormously harmful fat storage around your major organs. However, the high muscle mass and metabolic flexibility (the ability to adapt to different diets) of men in their twenties make a weekly burger and chips a permissible indulgence.</p> 	<p>'The twenties are the worst decade for oral health in males,' says Mark Wolff, a restorative dentist at Penn Dental Medicine. Failing to book in dental appointments now (coupled with frequent nights of crashing before brushing) can prove a painful mistake. Decay can be permanent, but it's preventable. Book in now and you should be okay, limiting future check-ups to once every two years, says Dr Wolff.</p>	<p>'We don't have evidence of long-term brain damage from intermittent use,' says Wilson Compton of the National Institute on Drug Abuse. 'I wouldn't expect someone who had no complications at the time to have problems 10 years later.' Long-term use, however, carries bigger risks. Drop it regularly and ecstasy can harm the brain regions involved in memory. Not something to dance about.</p> 	<p>While we aren't offering you carte blanche, a study of former smokers in the <i>New England Journal Of Medicine</i> found that those who quit between the ages of 25 and 34 had a life expectancy equal to that of non-smokers. But you're gambling with your health: after all, cigarettes are moreish. If you carry that 'only on weekends' habit into later life, your risk of heart complications won't be too different to that of a daily smoker.</p>	<p>'We tend to get more deep sleep when we're younger,' says MH sleep adviser W Christopher Winter. In other words, the sleep you get will likely counterbalance any midweek Netflix binges, as long as you aim for seven hours per night. This ability diminishes as you age, when consistency is key. You can't bank sleep for your thirties, so enjoy yourself now.</p> 

PREVIOUS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPHY: RAMONA ROSALES; GROOMING: ELOISE CHEUNG; FASHION STYLING: RYAN YOUNG; CASTING: IMPOSSIBLE CASTING; ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID VENNI; MODEL: ANTON ILLSSON AT SELECT MODEL.

FINANCIALLY FIT AT 20

So you're trying to get a foothold on the bottom rung of the ladder, while revelling in your freedom when you're able to: good for you. But a little financial forethought will serve you well, says Laura Whateley, author of *Money: A User's Guide*.



CHECK YOUR CREDIT

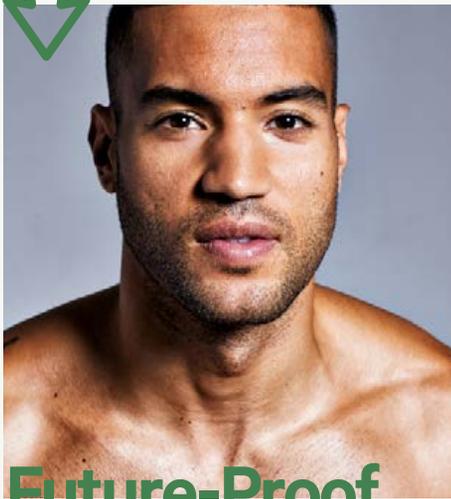
There is a common myth that you have one credit score. In reality, every financial company that you might want to borrow from has its own mysterious, bespoke way of assessing whether or not you are reliable enough to lend to. You do have a credit *history*, though, and lenders will look at that, so you should check what shape it's in and correct any mistakes early, via experian.co.uk or creditkarma.co.uk.

SAVE SMARTER

You should have at least three months' worth of essential outgoings – for example, rent, food and bills – in an easy-access savings account, in case you're made redundant or fall ill. (Debt charities advise aiming for at least £1,000.) This may seem a tough ask, but start saving small and download an app such as Cleo or Plum, and the magic of compounding will slowly build you a reliable rainy-day fund. Learn to save now, and it may just save you in future.

GET OUT OF DEBT

There's little point in saving, however, if you're barely chipping away at debts that charge interest rates 20 times higher than savings accounts. This applies to credit cards, payday loans and bank loans, though not student loans. Never just clear the minimum payment on a credit card – research by TotallyMoney shows that if you were to do so on a £2,000 debt, you would typically repay a total of £5,983.



Future-Proof Your Face

Make the effort now to ensure your skin can go the distance

Even if you're still getting ID-ed at the Dog and Duck, this isn't the time to abandon all caution. 'The most important thing you should be doing during your twenties is protecting yourself from the sun,' says dermatologist Joshua Zeichner. Any sun damage that occurs now risks weakening the foundations of your skin. Fortunately, many of the new daily-use sunscreens (such as Kiehl's Ultra Light Daily UV Defence SPF50) are lightweight and invisible, so you won't feel like you're hitting the beach on the way to work. Wash your face twice a day, too. Use a cleanser that contains salicylic acid, such as Clean & Clear Advantage Quick Clear Daily Treatment Wash, which will minimise your chances of breakouts.

THE NUTRIENT YOU NEED NOW VITAMIN D

'When you're in your twenties, your body can still lay down the foundations for strong bones that will sustain you through life,' says nutrition consultant Mike Roussell. Vitamin D plays a key role in this, as well as in muscle function, so now is the time to prioritise your intake. Aim for 600IU per day, either from food (100g of cooked wild salmon will meet your target) or by taking a supplement. A trip to Ibiza is also effective.

Eat more:

Salmon, mackerel, sardines, egg yolks, lamb's liver and fortified plant milks



YOUR TRANSFORMATION PLAN

How To Build Muscle At 20

THE CHALLENGE A youthful metabolism may well have its merits, but it can make maintaining muscle mass tough – particularly when you're tied to a desk all day

THE GOAL Pack on 5kg of muscle

THE TIME FRAME 12 weeks

In terms of biology, you'll never find it easier to pack on muscle mass than you do right now. Your levels of the muscle-building hormone testosterone and growth hormone are at their peak between the ages of 19 and 30, while your ability to recover is quicker and DOMS is far less debilitating. But whether these facts fire you up or fill you with despondency likely depends on how successful your training plan is proving. Fortunately, if you're struggling to put on lean mass, that doesn't mean you're destined for scrawny arms and a soft middle. There's a simple solution: all you need to do is re-evaluate your approach to nutrition and exercise. Happily for you, with your body and brain at their most malleable, this is the ideal stage in your life to knuckle down. Get ready to hit the big time with these new training rules.



YOUR NEW FITNESS RULES

By Jaxon Knighton, personal training director

Don't Work In Isolation

Targeting the muscles you want to develop with exercises such as biceps curls may seem a shortcut to growth, but you'll miss out on the hormonal hit only full-body workouts deliver. Compound moves such as bench presses and rows also 'build a foundation for strength', Knighton says.

Drop The Weights (Sometimes)

While barbell workouts will spike your testosterone, Knighton advises one body-weight session per week, starting with press-ups and pull-ups. Not only do these decrease the risk of injury, but you'll also improve your mind/muscle connection, helping you form good habits for heavier lifts.

Every Day Is Core Day

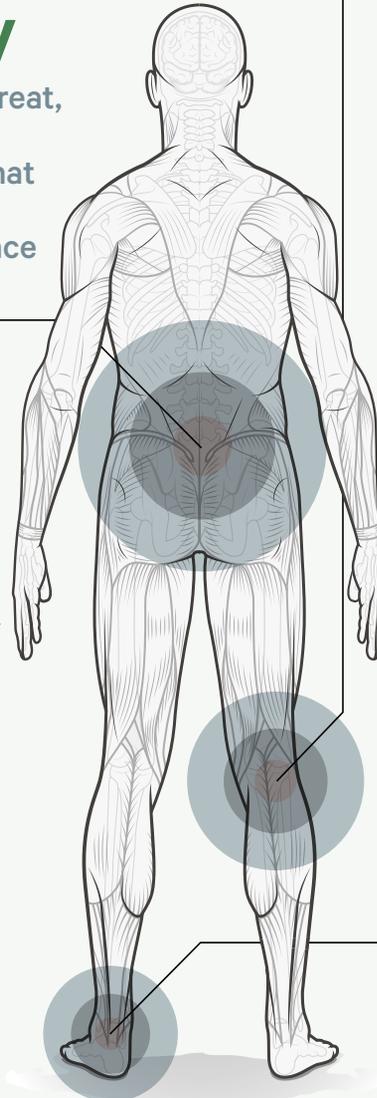
Incorporate core work into all your sessions with moves that challenge your balance and recruit your abs, lower back and glutes for stability. Sit-ups are out. Ab wheel roll-outs, Pallof presses and TRX pikes deliver more burn for your buck, so tag these on to lifting sessions.

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CONSULT THE SCIENCE
TO LIFT YOURSELF TO
PEAK PERFORMANCE

Bounce Back From Your First Big Injury

Use our guide to treat, beat and manage any problem, so that it doesn't become a lifelong annoyance



THE DANGER ZONE

Lower Back

THE INJURY Muscle Spasm

'Lifting weights with poor form can trigger spasms in the muscles that extend up and down your back,' says sports physician Ryan J Lingor.

Treat It: Both heat and ice can help. 'Go with whichever feels better to you,' Dr Lingor advises. Ibuprofen can also offer temporary pain relief. Resist the (pretty understandable) temptation to stay put – light stretching or even taking a short walk can help to stop the affected muscles from continuing to spasm. Get yourself moving.

The Long-Term Fix:

Sort out your form. Build core strength with rotational movements – chops, say – and do a deep abs-strengthener, such as front and side planks.

THE DANGER ZONE Knees

THE INJURY ACL Tear

This most frequently occurs when there's an uneven strength relationship between your quads and hamstrings, says John Gallucci Jr of Jag-One Physical Therapy.

Treat It: Ice it, rest and stretch your quads (heel to your glutes). Partial tears can heal with physical therapy, but some require surgery.

The Long-Term Fix:

Strengthen your quads and hamstrings with walking lunges and step-ups. Keep your knee tracking between the second and third toes.

THE DANGER ZONE Ankle

THE INJURY Sprain

The ligaments supporting your ankle can overstretch and tear, resulting in bruising and swelling. The more it happens, the more susceptible you'll be.

Treat It: A sprain may seem like no big deal, but it can limit you for life if you push it. In the first 48 hours, use RICE: rest, ice, compression, elevation. Then perform ankle circles to help your range of motion.

The Long-Term Fix: Try balancing moves (single-leg squats, say) and agility exercises such as running in progressively smaller figure of eights.



YOUR NEW FOOD RULES

By Matt Carlin,
nutrition consultant

Double Down On Calories

Training regularly but not getting the results you want? You're probably not eating enough. To pack on weight, you need to be in a calorie excess. This could mean consuming closer to 3,500 calories per day – 1,000 more than the recommended intake. And hunger isn't always a good guide. Even if you normally have no appetite in the mornings, get used to eating breakfast if you want to build and maintain muscle.

Portion Out Your Protein

Bulking up requires a whole lot of chewing. Carlin advises eating six meals per day, each containing 30g of protein, which will do a lot more for your developing muscles than scoring your RDA from one supersize, protein-stuffed dinner. If you struggle to eat so regularly, shakes can help.

Make Meal Prep A Habit

For weight-gain diets to thrive, you need structure in your life. Try this schedule that Carlin developed for busy younger men: shop on Tuesday, then prep four meals that evening for the week's lunches and dinners. Shop again on Saturday and prep three more lunches and dinners that night to take you back to Tuesday. Stock your desk drawers with protein- and calorie-rich snacks such as jerky, almonds and low-sugar bars. You'll never be caught short again.

THE CHECK-UP

Bite the bullet and book an STI screening for chlamydia, gonorrhoea, HIV and syphilis, regardless of how cautious you've been. Men can access free testing on the NHS at their local sexual health clinic, but many areas offer home testing, too. 'Men who have sex with men, or those who have sex with partners from high-prevalence countries, should also consider being checked for hepatitis B and C,' according to Sexual Health London. Get retested with every new partner or once every three months for peace of mind.

MEN KILLING IT IN THEIR TWENTIES



Your Thirties

30s
OPTIMISE
YOUR
PRIME

So, your hair is a bit thinner and you're getting a little less sleep. But arm yourself with some essential skills as you begin life as an adult proper, and the stage will be set for your best decade yet



THE NUMBERS

How do your metrics stack up against the average man in his thirties?

BMI
27

RESTING HEART RATE
63^{BPM}

DAILY STEPS
10,006

DAILY ACTIVE MINUTES
60

HOURS OF SLEEP
6^{HR} 26^{MIN}

FINANCIALLY FIT

AT 30

You're on your way (hopefully) to paying off those loans and (maybe) buying property and having kids. Invest wisely and you won't feel the hit quite so hard, says financial journalist **Wateley**.



SAVE FOR A DEPOSIT

If you want to escape tenant life and become a homeowner, put your savings in a Lifetime ISA, available to anyone under the age of 40. It offers a valuable 25% top-up of your savings from the government, as much as £1,000 a year. Keep in mind that you'll get a much better mortgage rate with a 10% deposit than a 5% one. It's worth rustling up the extra now.

START INVESTING

If you've already built up a rainy-day fund in a cash account, start putting a bit extra into stocks and shares. Cash savings are diminished by inflation and most experts agree you're more likely to beat inflation by putting your money in the markets. As a rule, invest for as long as possible – be prepared to lock your money away for at least five years – ideally 10 or more. This is about the long haul.

GET HELP WITH THE KIDS

If you plan to start a family at some point in your thirties, be sure to take advantage of the free cash schemes offered by the government that can be put towards childcare. Far too few parents know about them. Find out more at childcarechoices.gov.uk. You'll receive £2 for every £8 you pay in, up to the value of £2,000 per child each year.

I used to take pride in how well I slept. I'd scoff at the 36% of men who clock less than seven hours of sleep a night. Who are these people? I know now they're mums and dads – like my wife Meghan and me, who spent months after the birth of our child waking up every two hours to his wails.

During this time warp, I called up *Men's Health* sleep adviser Chris Winter, the author of *The Sleep Solution* and a father himself. 'Most new parents don't expect how much sleep they lose, not only when trying to get the baby back to sleep,



How To Sleep Like Your Baby

People tell you that time goes by so fast with newborns. Not at 2am on a Tuesday, it doesn't

but also when trying to get *themselves* back to sleep,' Dr Winter says. 'It's usually because there's no plan. I call this "guerrilla sleep".'

Dr Winter suggests dividing and conquering. 'Agree "on" and "off" shifts, ideally of about seven hours every other night,' he says. The "on" shifter stays in a spare room, apart from the "off" shifter, who's only to be woken in case of emergency.

My son sleeps better now, though there are still nights of terror. But something in me has shifted. I no longer take

as much pride in my own sleep as I do in my child's. Don't tell Meghan, but most nights I don't mind a teething-induced caterwaul at 2am. I can swoop in, scoop him up and soothe him until he rests his cheek against my chest.

As I try to return to sleep, I implement one of Dr Winter's strategies: meditating on something calming. He suggests mentally mapping out some relaxing weekend activities, but I often think of my son, dreaming his dreams, and hope that I'm a part of them.

By Paul Kita

Whatever You Do, Don't Panic

Up to a third of men will suffer from an anxiety disorder or panic attacks in their lifetime. But as real-life responsibilities truly start to bite in your thirties, you're more vulnerable than ever. Use our timeline to survive any breakdown

0-3 MINS

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE You're short of breath and your heart rate spikes. You're trembling and, in an evolutionary response, your body redirects blood to muscles and organs that can help you overcome a threat. It's designed to maximise your odds of survival, but it can lead you to misinterpret a minor office crisis as a matter of life and death.

WHAT'S HAPPENING A panic attack occurs when the mind makes a powerfully negative interpretation of normal events. When your boss sets you an impossible deadline, for example, your hypothalamus activates your pituitary and adrenal glands,

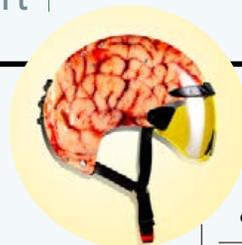
which causes stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol to flood your system: the 'fight or flight' response.

YOUR DEFENCE

A US study found that refocusing the mind on simple tasks can calm you. The solution can be as mundane as counting the number of tiles on your office ceiling until the panic passes.

3 MINS – 2 HRS

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE Your breathing normalises and your heart rate falls. 'What was that? Am I dying?' you wonder. You're not. **WHAT'S HAPPENING** Adrenaline has a half-life of three minutes, so the initial panic soon passes.



Cortisol, however, sticks around for longer. It can take two hours for your more chronic feelings of stress to subside.

YOUR DEFENCE

Your brain is associating the current situation with a sense of panic. Staring at your inbox will do nothing to rest your overactive endocrine system. Take yourself away from the situation: leave your desk for a 10-minute break and divert your attention to what's around you, even if it's just what's being served in the office canteen. Eventually,

your cortisol levels will even out and you can return to your desk on a more even keel.

1 WEEK

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Anxiety can easily extend beyond a specific stimulus and hang over you once the stressful situation has passed. Unexplained chest pains and a sense of fear are symptoms that your anxiety is a chronic problem.

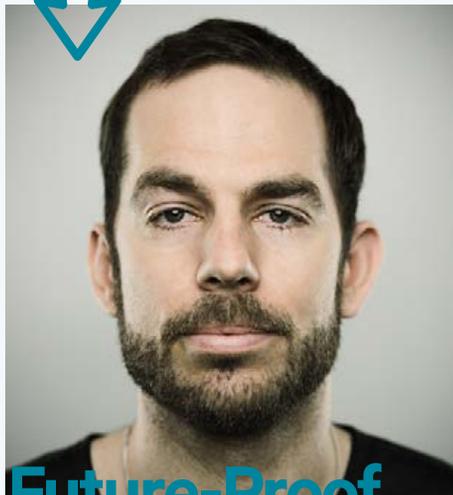
WHAT'S HAPPENING

These heightened anxieties mean that your hypothalamus is unable to switch off. In its state of constant agitation, it'll keep ordering the release of adrenaline and cortisol;

with levels set to surge at any point, the simplest upset can burst the dam.

YOUR DEFENCE

In severe cases, your GP may prescribe anti-anxiety drugs along with beta blockers to steady your heart rate. Aside from that, here are a few effective lifestyle prescriptions: omega-3 fatty acids in oily fish, which curb adrenal activation caused by stress; the cortisol-slashing B vitamins in steak; and a lunchtime run, which produces mood-boosting endorphins while making use of the extra adrenaline. Outrun your panic: flight, in this case, might be the best way to fight back.



Future-Proof Your Face

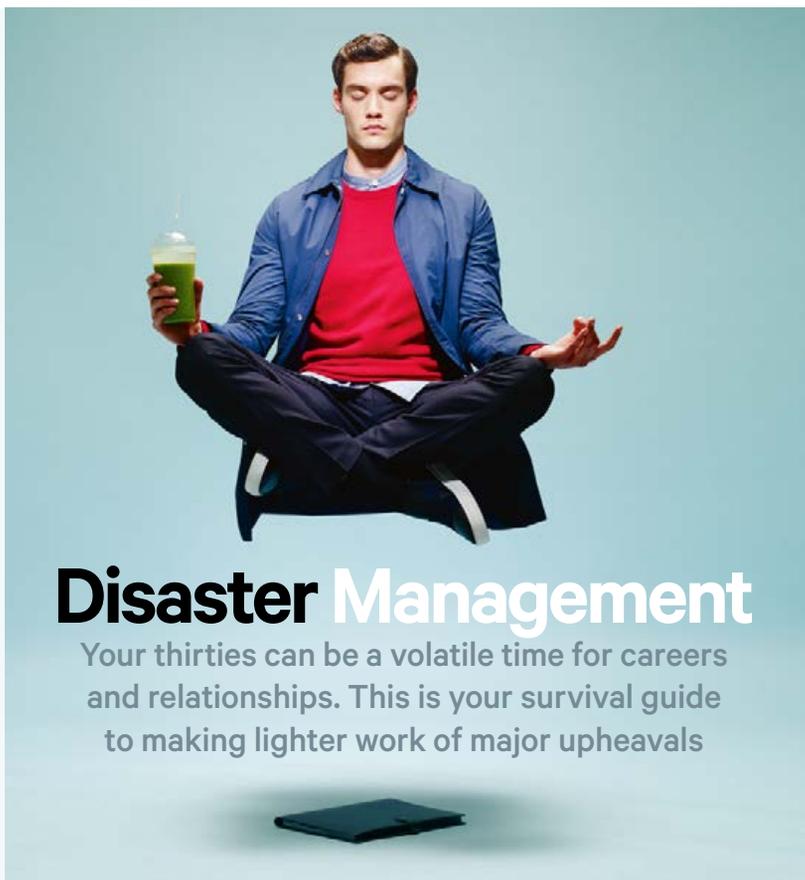
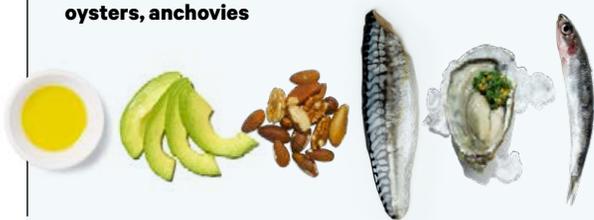
As your skin's defences weaken, protect it from the inside out

The turnover of your skin cells starts to slow down in your thirties. 'The skin can't defend itself as well as it used to from the environment,' says Dr Zeichner. 'Collagen and elastin weaken and fine lines start to appear.' Products that contain retinol (such as Neutrogena Rapid Wrinkle Repair Serum) can stimulate collagen production, which strengthens skin from the inside out and increases cell turnover to keep it fresh and diminish signs of ageing. Retinol can irritate your skin at first, so add a pea-sized amount to your moisturiser every other night, working your way up to larger amounts. Then, help your skin cells retain moisture on a daily basis with a hyaluronic acid serum, such as Vichy Minéral 89 Fortifying and Plumping Daily Booster.

THE NUTRIENT YOU NEED NOW HEALTHY FATS

These are a hallmark of the Mediterranean diet, which studies suggest can reduce your risk of heart disease, the leading killer of men. Your risk shoots up in your forties, so taking measures now will improve your powers of prevention in the next decade. Doubts remain about the effectiveness of supps, so stick to natural sources and seek out foods rich in monounsaturated fats. Eat to your heart's content, in other words.

Eat more: Olive oil, avocado, nuts, mackerel, oysters, anchovies



Disaster Management

Your thirties can be a volatile time for careers and relationships. This is your survival guide to making lighter work of major upheavals

01/ YOU GOT SACKED

Out of a job? So was Steve Jobs at one point in his thirties. 'You're not the first person this has happened to. Realising that can normalise your experience,' says Geoff Greif, a professor at the University of Maryland School of Social Work.

OWN YOUR ROLE: Blaming others will only work for so long, says clinical psychologist Stephan Poulter. Recognise your part and you might figure out what you want (a more engaging gig, say), what you were disappointed with (the lack of responsibility) or what your unspoken expectations were (more flexible hours). 'Self-reflection becomes a compass, helping you move forwards,' Dr Poulter says.

PLAN YOUR NEXT MOVE: It's easier to find a new job when you're employed. So, network strategically once you're working again. Seek out interviews, meet with mentors and know how your field is evolving – and if your skills are, too.

02/ YOU GOT DIVORCED

First marriages that don't work out often end in the thirties. The changes can take from six to 12 months to process, says Dr Poulter. So, let the dust settle, then use these strategies to saddle up again.

WRITE A NEW STORY: 'People going through separation often struggle to manage their stress,' says psychology

professor David Sbarra. It's fine to analyse the causes ('Is there a pattern in my relationships?'), but move away from the narrative that 'everything is terrible'. Reach out to friends in similar situations, as well as those who are happily married, suggests Professor Greif. Talk to people, listen and create a new road map.

EMBRACE YOUR CORE VALUES:

Doing enjoyable activities with people you genuinely like reaffirms who you are and what makes you happy. It's a chance to do all the stuff you wanted to but couldn't in your former situation.

03/ YOU MESSED UP

Whether you crossed the line with a co-worker or made a tone-deaf joke in a meeting, you need to address the issue.

APOLOGISE PROPERLY: So, you feel humiliated... but this isn't about you. Acknowledge the impact of your actions. Psychotherapist Avi Klein advises letting the other person decide how they will or won't interact with you in future. It's respectful and it gives them the agency you denied them – important for levelling out any power imbalances.

DECIDE HOW TO MAKE AMENDS:

Take the problem seriously. Tell people you'll answer any questions. It's up to you to start difficult conversations and make those around you feel comfortable enough to share their concerns.



IT'S A MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT: START THINKING ABOUT YOUR LONG GAME

YOUR TRANSFORMATION PLAN

How To Get Fitter At 30

THE CHALLENGE Around this age, the number of nerve receptors in your heart declines and your maximum heart rate drops – which is why you're breathing a little harder on your weekend jog

THE GOAL Run your first half marathon

THE TIME FRAME 12 weeks

Your thirties undeniably represent a physiological turning point.

But rest assured, this is no hairpin bend towards decline – merely a gentle lifting-off-the-throttle from your testosterone-fuelled twenties. The key, therefore, is to act now and shift your focus towards building lifelong fitness, as opposed to summer-long abs. You need to work on your engine.



YOUR NEW FITNESS RULES

By Rory Knight, co-founder of running collective Track Life LDN

Consistency Over Intensity

Gone are the days when you could push through your limits day in, day out. Be realistic in how you plan to tackle this half marathon, but remember that slow and steady wins the race. You're far better off operating at 80% for 100% of the time, as opposed to vice-versa. Hit your weekly mile goal, even if you have to walk parts.

Prevention Beats Cure

Prioritise adequate recovery. On rest days, you're not only recuperating from the session you've just done, but preparing for what you plan to do later in the week. The day after a long run or intense speed session should be followed by a gentle jog at most, along with one or more of the following: a massage, foam rolling, cryotherapy, compression wear, a mobility session or your feet up in front of Netflix.

Work On Your Tekkers

Almost everyone can run. But how many people can run *properly*? A good coach at a local club such as Track Life LDN will be able to offer pointers and feedback on technique – arm or knee drive, for example – which will minimise the impact on your body and ensure you can continue for years to come. After all, running is all about efficiency. Better technique requires less effort, which allows you to run further, more easily.



YOUR NEW FOOD RULES

By Rick Miller, London-based clinical and sports dietitian

Timing Is Of The Essence

If you've always thought more about what you eat than when, it's time to change that. Adopt a 'train low, compete high' carbohydrate protocol: eat less when training and more on race day. Training in low-carb conditions boosts the number of mitochondria, your body's energy producers. Then, by loading up on race day, you'll make even better use of those macronutrients.

Go Slow And Low

It's a good general rule for most people to go for moderate- to low-glycaemic carbs to improve their blood glucose balance: sweet potatoes, legumes, wholegrain pasta, oats and so on. But this becomes even more vital post-30. At this point, mitochondrial density starts to fall in skeletal muscle, which may affect your ability to manage blood glucose levels, causing dips in energy that can nullify your resolve to train.

Dose Up On Beet Juice

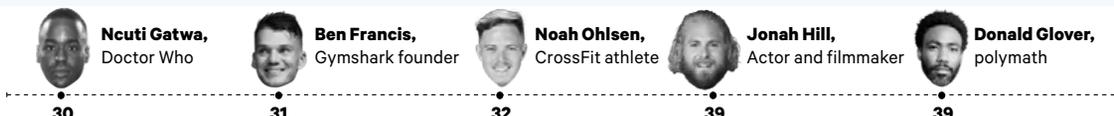
If you've maxed out on dietary changes, consider this instant endurance hack. Beetroot juice, which is rich in nitrates, has been shown to boost power output during cardio by increasing the production of nitric oxide, a potent vasodilator. This allows more oxygen to saturate muscle tissues. Have a shot of beetroot juice two hours before your race and you may find yourself speeding ahead when your rivals start to struggle.

THE CHECK-UP

'Due to stress, lack of sleep, sedentary behaviour and even a preference of weightlifting over aerobic exercise, many younger men have high blood pressure,' says Martin M Miner, male health expert at Miriam Hospital in the US. Get yours tested, as premature heart attacks can hit by the age of 45. Keep tabs on your waist size, says Anand Patel, a doctor at London's Centre for Men's Health. 'Too much visceral fat affects testosterone and increases your risk of diabetes and heart issues,' he says. Waist over 102cm? Act now before it becomes a problem.

GROOMING: ELOISE CHEUNG. STYLING: RYAN YOUNG. CASTING: IMPOSSIBLE. CASTING: ILLUSTRATION: TRAVIS COBURN. MODEL: GEORGE LLOYD AT W MODELS

MEN KILLING IT IN THEIR THIRTIES



Your Forties

40s
SECURE
YOUR
FUTURE

You're busier at work and at home, and your body, both inside and out, seems to be conspiring against you. But get your life right in your fifth decade and you could find you still have half of it ahead of you



THE NUMBERS

How do your metrics stack up against the average man in his forties?

BMI
27.8

RESTING HEART RATE
64^{BPM}

DAILY STEPS
10,026

DAILY ACTIVE MINUTES
61

HOURS OF SLEEP
6^{HR} 20^{MIN}

FINANCIALLY FIT

AT 40

Sure, it's all about the children and your wider responsibilities.

But being on the money in your forties means looking after number one, so you can look after everyone else, says Whtaley.



FIX YOUR PENSION

Ideally you should have started saving into a pension in your twenties, but now is the time to make it a priority. If you want the lifestyle you have today in retirement, your pension pot needs to be twice your annual income in your forties, rising to seven times by 68, according to investment company Fidelity. One way to boost yours is to move out of your company's fund if it's overly cautious.

WRITE A WILL

If you have dependants, and especially if you're cohabiting, make sure you have a will. If you and your partner don't own a property 50:50 and you're not married, your next of kin will inherit your home, regardless of whether your partner lives in it. Also consider life insurance and own-occupation income protection if you're unsure how your family would meet costs if you fell ill or died. It sounds bleak, but it's smart.

SORT YOUR MORTGAGE

If you're on a bad deal, you could be wasting thousands of pounds, especially if you went on the standard variable rate (SVR) after your original offer came to an end. Mortgage broker Coreco found the average person could save £11,000 in a single year by moving from an SVR to a best-buy tracker rate, based on a borrower with 40% equity in a £500,000 home.

WTF Is Hair Doing Growing There?

You couldn't muster much more than patchy chin fluff in your early manhood. But now, all of a sudden, you look like Teen Wolf's dad at full moon...

It's one of the great ironies of manhood

that when the hair on your head begins to thin, the hair on other parts of your body goes wild – your ears, your shoulders, your left eyebrow (which now proudly sports a single strand three times as long as the rest). And these twin struggles, it turns out, are very much related. Both occur because of a genetic switch that typically happens in your forties, explains cosmetic dermatologist Paul Jarrod Frank.

'Hair follicles appear to change their reactivity to androgen hormones, particularly dihydrotestosterone (DHT),' he says. While follicles on the head react to DHT by shedding the hair, follicles on the body can react in the opposite way, turbocharging growth. 'It's one of nature's mysteries,' he says.



Most men see their chest hair thickening and experience new growth on their ears, nose, shoulders and back. When this happens, Dr Frank says, there are three options: 'Own it, groom it, or destroy it.' Your first strike could be taking a finasteride-based product, a common hair-loss treatment that also

works to regulate excess body hair.

But to permanently rid yourself of unwanted fuzz, the best way is to zap it to death with lasers. 'Laser hair-removal technology has come a long way,' says Dr Frank. 'Newer instruments can remove hair painlessly and in half the number of treatments as standard machines.' Costs vary, but you're looking at about £200 a session, on average, and you'll need between four and six sessions for a full scorched-earth policy that will last for life.

Drink Like A Grown-Up

Workday hangovers used to be standard, but now it's time for a more considered approach

I used to be 'a drinker'.

It was part of my identity. I was, and still am, very good at drinking. I have a well-grooved order depending on the place, and I know most places. I know how to mix cocktails from memory. I enjoy drinking and, between the ages of 25 and 42, I frequently drank.

'Frequently' means basically every night. Sometimes, those nights were fun, but so many weren't. They were a way to pass the time. And they were not worth the hangovers, which only got worse as I grew older. So, I stopped being 'a drinker' and started to become someone who drinks occasionally, and with purpose. That purpose was to socialise with other people who were drinking: at a



once-a-month pub meet-up with old friends, say, or if someone was proposing

a toast, or if it would mean a lot to a colleague if I went for a beer after work. Once a week, at the most. I'm now an intentional drinker. If you want to be one, too, here are your back-of-a-beer-mat rules: **01/ Never drink alone.** This is pretty much sacrosanct.

02/ Never drink anything that is bad: £4 bottles of wine, or anything you don't like the taste of.

03/ Always enjoy the company of the people you're drinking with. If you don't, just leave.

04/ Drink water. Lots and lots and lots of water. Then drink more water.

By Ross McCammon



Future-Proof Your Face

Get tough on the causes of skin damage, not just the symptoms

In this decade, most of us develop sunspots and an uneven skintone, largely caused by damage from our earlier years. 'Vitamin C is your go-to ingredient,' says Dr Zeichner. 'Think of this potent antioxidant as an insurance policy on your sunscreen. Put it on every morning under your SPF.' Try Aesop Perfect Facial Hydrating Cream (£87): a daily dose of vitamin C helps to combat new UV damage, as well as repair existing pigmentation issues. Meanwhile, schedule a yearly full-body check-up with a dermatologist to monitor sunspots and moles. You're probably fine, but being vigilant is the best way to save your own skin.

THE NUTRIENT YOU NEED NOW

FIBRE

Weight management is of paramount importance in your fifth decade, and increasing your fibre intake is the easiest way to fill yourself up without filling out your waistline. Plus, research shows that it can significantly reduce your risk of colon cancer, which can start forming in your forties. There are plenty of delicious food sources, but for an easy win, psyllium husk supplements are a good option.

Eat more:

Berries, mangoes, pears, kale, butternut squash, asparagus



Pain And Gain

From the occasional creaky knee to the more serious slipped disc or blown ligament, the wear and tear of more than four decades can turn into chronic pain. Your best tactic to overcome it is to treat it like a team sport



01/ THE MANAGER

'The strain in pain lies mostly in the brain,' says Sean Mackey – not a poet but the chief of pain medicine at Stanford University. So, consider speaking to a therapist. 'Your beliefs and emotions about your pain play a huge role in your experience of it,' he says, and he has the brain scans to prove it. Chronic pain rewires your brain, and therapy can help to undo this. It may not eliminate pain, he says, but it can 'give you back control'.

02/ THE PHYSIO

When a Premier League player injures his knee and needs surgery, the first thing the doctors do is send him into physical rehab. The same could work for you. 'Although it may hurt at first, you need to strengthen those muscles and support the area that's painful,' says Dr Mackey. Studies show that physiotherapy reduces pain in the long run – so act now for lasting relief.

03/ THE FAMILY

Reducing stress reduces your pain, Dr Mackey says. Thankfully, there are now more options than ever when it comes to tackling it. Apps such as Headspace can guide you through mindfulness lessons, while many gyms offer meditation classes. Involve your family and friends, too – stress is something we all experience, and sharing the load is more effective than trying to bear it alone.

04/ THE SUPPORTERS

Chronic pain isn't something you want to deal with in stoic silence. Managing it is a long-term effort, and support groups exist to make this easier and less lonely. So, seek out meet-ups where you can compare notes with others. The idea of sharing your experiences of pain with strangers might sound horrendous, but so is enduring a screwed-up back with no one to talk to who actually understands what it's like.



YES, IT'S HARDER. BUT STAY COMMITTED AND YOU'LL CRUSH WEIGHT

YOUR TRANSFORMATION PLAN

How To Lose Weight At 40

THE CHALLENGE The proven cliff-diving of your metabolism is only being made worse by a lifestyle that leaves little spare time for the gym, so middle-aged spread is proving tricky to outflank

THE GOAL Lose 5kg

THE TIME FRAME 10 weeks

While it's true that long-time, ardent gym-goers can continue to get stronger and fitter in their forties and beyond, the physiological realities of this phase of your life stack the cheesy chips in favour of weight gain. A drop-off in testosterone makes it harder to maintain muscle mass, which, combined with the

gradual slowing of your metabolic rate, causes you to burn far fewer calories than you did in your prime.

This is also the age when work, family and niggles have likely conspired to put the brakes on your training. Possibly even the handbrake. To reinvigorate your fat-burning potential – as well as your excitement about training – you need to start slow and stay consistent, whether you're in the gym or the kitchen.



YOUR NEW FITNESS RULES

By Jack Sorrels of Life Time North Meridian

Develop A Baseline

To stave off sarcopenia, the age-related loss of muscle that hits many men in their forties, you need to build it up. But first, become consistent with low-volume work. Too much intensity after a long lay-off will leave you out of action with soreness. Aim for light or body-weight exercises with higher rep ranges – 12 to 15 reps for just two or three sets.

Engage Before Exercise

Among the key differences between 20-year-olds and the 40-plus is that your body has had far more time to develop the bad habits that can lead to injury. Always spend 10 to 15 minutes warming up, stretching tight tissues (hip flexors and pecs if you sit often) and awakening dormant muscles (the rhomboid muscles in your back) with resistance band drills.

Ramp Up To Muscle Growth

After four weeks of low-volume work, you'll be ready to accelerate your strength building, performing 8 to 12 reps per set – a range that will help you build muscle. Supersets and circuits can unlock fresh fitness: pairing, say, bench presses with 30 seconds of rowing to raise your heart rate.



YOUR NEW FOOD RULES

By Kristen Cohen, trainer and nutrition coach, Life Time North Meridian

Choose A Goal A Week

Tackle everything all at once and you'll easily start to feel overwhelmed. One week, focus on drinking three litres of water each day; another week, try to cut back on added sugars. As the weeks go by, you'll accumulate beneficial behaviours with far less stress than if you took on multiple goals simultaneously. And you won't beat yourself up as much. Which is nice.

Visualise Your Meals

This might sound like hokum, but trust in the process. Envision yourself making more nutritious options early in the workday and you're more likely to stick to your eating plan later. The same goes for family gatherings and nights out at the weekend. It's the simplest willpower workaround going.

Check In With Yourself

The number on the scale isn't your only marker of progress. Even if the needle hasn't shifted as much as you expected it to, consider all the other aspects of life that have progressed. Are you sleeping better? Feeling more confident? More energised? More motivated? That stuff counts. Food for thought, and holistically nutritious, too.

THE CHECK-UP

Get a blood glucose test, regardless of your BMI. A third of people over 45 are prediabetic, and that includes those of a healthy weight. The NHS offers a set of check-ups after you reach 40, including blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol, so book an appointment. Prediabetes can be reversed through lifestyle changes, but it's tougher if left to develop. And mind your testosterone levels. 'Some studies suggest a third of diabetics will develop low testosterone,' Dr Patel says. Seek help if you notice signs such as lethargy, low moods and erectile dysfunction.

MEN KILLING IT IN THEIR FORTIES



Mikel Arteta, Arsenal manager

41



Kumail Nanjiani, Actor & comedian

45



Tom Brady, NFL legend

45



Ryan Reynolds, Wrexham co-owner

46



Pedro Pascal, Actor

48

The Truth About Testosterone

40s
YOUR
HORMONE
DIGEST

The hormone has been peddled as a way to pump up everything from strength and energy to longevity. But just how much of a difference does it really make?

For a long time, we accepted certain changes as the price (and privilege) of getting older. Your hair turns grey. Your hearing starts to... wait, what was that you said? And, of course, your testosterone level drops. But with the boom in testosterone-replacement clinics – by now, who hasn't been targeted by an ad offering to test your T for under £100? – and both podcasts and influencers preaching the powers of hormone optimisation, should guys over 40 think about winding back their T clocks? And by how much? Here's what you should know.

T CAN HELP YOU LIVE LONGER



A shortage of testosterone is associated with a shorter life.

'We now have decades of research showing remarkable longevity and health benefits in men with normal testosterone levels compared with men who have low levels,' says Abraham Morgentaler, urologist and author of *Testosterone For Life*. That's true for guys with healthy levels naturally or those who use testosterone-replacement therapy to help bring their levels up.

T CAN MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER, TOO



Feeling young often boils down to a few things,

says Dr Morgentaler: being strong, staying active and having energy for things you enjoy. 'Men with low T often lose those things,' he adds. 'Not only do men feel better with normal T levels, but for a variety of health issues, they are better.' That means better sexual function, physical function and mood, according to a study in *The New England Journal Of Medicine*.

BUT TESTOSTERONE LEVELS DECLINE WITH AGE



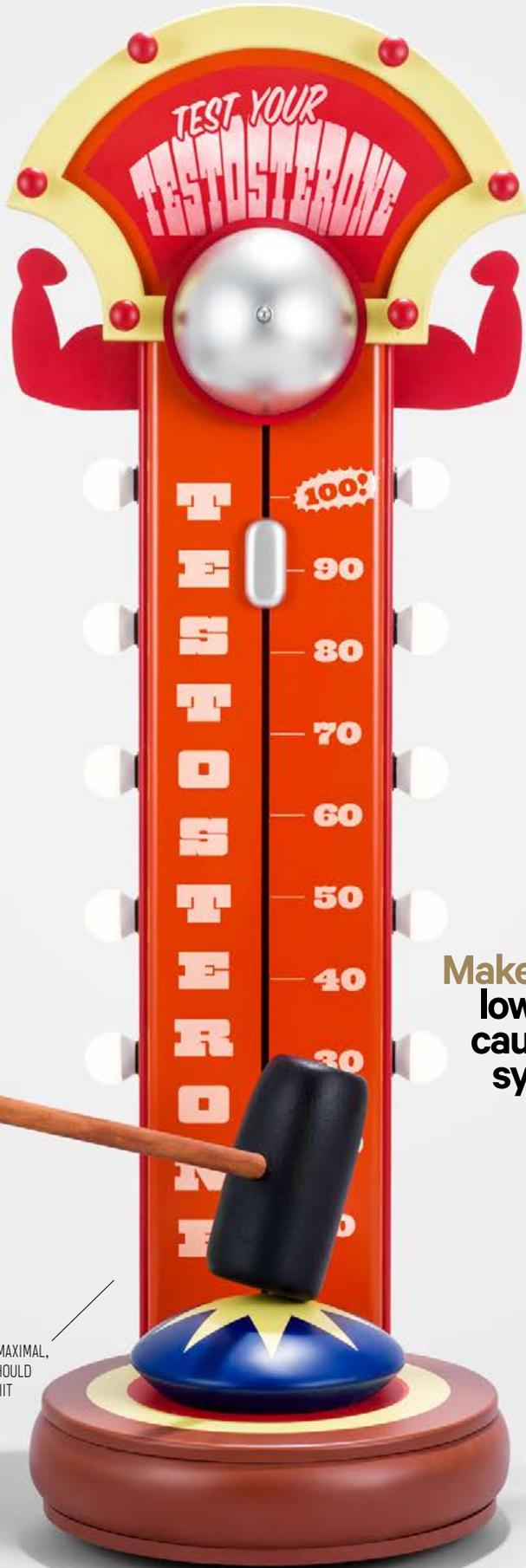
A man's testosterone level drops about 1% to

2% a year, starting around the age of 40. Doctors generally don't prescribe T replacement unless a man's level is low (less than 300ng/dL) and he has symptoms of testosterone deficiency: reduced libido, erectile dysfunction, fatigue, lack of motivation, insomnia, depression, reduced muscle mass and weight gain.

Yet even without these symptoms, a lot of men are clamouring to replace that age-related loss, because why wouldn't you want your level to be the same at 60 as it was at 30? Bradley Anawalt, a professor of medicine at the University of Washington's Medical Center, echoes the reasoning of other top testosterone researchers when he says, 'The simple answer is that we don't know if it's beneficial or harmful to give testosterone to a man whose concentration drops with ageing.' If your T level is in

the gigantic normal range (264 to 916ng/dL) and you're not experiencing any low-T symptoms, it's hard to argue that you need more of it.

'There's what I call a "threshold effect". Once you're above it, you're just normal; it's hard to be more normal than normal,' says Dr Morgentaler. 'For the most part, someone who has normal testosterone levels will not notice anything if he takes some testosterone and goes into the upper range.' Or, as Dr Anawalt puts it, 'The difference between a level of 450 or 445 is clinically nonsense. From day to day, you can have a variation of about 10% to 20%, and within the day, you can have a variation of about 5% to 35%.' So, wanting to correct for that 1% to 2% drop each year is understandable, but top researchers in the field aren't willing to encourage you to go for it quite yet.



NORMAL, NOT MAXIMAL, IS WHAT YOU SHOULD BE AIMING TO HIT

THERE ARE OTHER WAYS TO FIX AGE-RELATED MUSCLE WASTAGE



It's true that you lose muscle fibres as you get older.

While testosterone increases muscle strength and mass, hormone replacement might not be able to prevent muscle-fibre loss. 'It just makes the muscle fibres that remain bigger,' says Dr Anawalt, and it's not certain that this has age-reversing benefits. But if you have a deficiency, T therapy can restore vitality and may help motivate you to do the workouts that will build muscle strength and mass.

HOW TO KNOW IF YOU'RE NORMAL FOR YOUR AGE



Beware of anyone who says that you, at 30, 40,

50 or even 60, have the testosterone level of a 70-year-old. There's a giant reference range regardless of age, so at 70, 'normal' is within a 650-point span. 'If you take 10,000 20-year-olds, average testosterone might be 550

or 500,' says Dr Anawalt.

'The average testosterone in 10,000 70-year-olds might be 380 or 400. But they're

both in the normal range. It doesn't mean you have the testosterone of a 70-year-old when you have a testosterone of 400 at age 20.' You have a normal level for both ages.

There's a movement by influencers and early adopters to stack up your level against yourself, not other people your age. They advocate a baseline testosterone test early in life (or now, if you didn't do it in your twenties or thirties), so you can see how your levels compare later on. This may or may not prove to be a good investment.

WHEN NOT TO TAKE T



Testosterone therapy isn't recommended if

you hope to start a family.

When you're on it, your body produces less T and, in turn, fewer or no sperm. Most of the time, production returns when you stop T therapy – but not always like before. Later this year, the results of a blockbuster testosterone trial should answer the lingering questions about T's cardiovascular safety and benefits.

But doctors make it clear that if your level is low and you're suffering, you can benefit from increasing it. In other words, the benefit-to-risk ratio is favourable when you treat the right people (those with testosterone deficiency). 'Testosterone gets a bad rap,' says Dr Morgentaler, as it's been associated with bodybuilders and cheating athletes. Yet there are years of data on it; it's been on the market since the 1930s.

Just make sure that low T is what's causing your symptoms. Weight gain, fatigue, erectile dysfunction and lack of motivation or concentration can all have other causes. And obesity, smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and a lack of sleep may also be responsible for low testosterone. Manage those and you might be able to naturally raise your testosterone level and improve the number and quality of years you have ahead. After all, 'if you have a garden with a bunch of overgrown weeds, planting more flowers isn't necessarily going to make for a more beautiful garden,' Dr Anawalt says. 'You need to actually get rid of the problem.'

Make sure it's low T that's causing any symptoms

Your Fifties

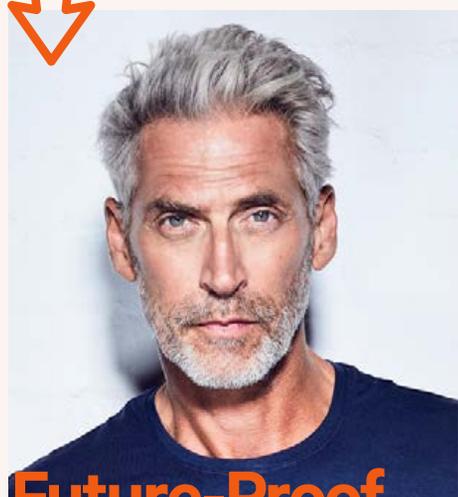
50s+
OWN YOUR
NEW SILVER
AGE

...And beyond. Yes, you can still stay fit. In fact, you *should* stay fit. Make these simple lifestyle changes to run further, lift heavier and think faster than people half your age. Keep yourself ahead of the pack

THE NUMBERS

How do you stack up against the average man in his fifties?

BMI	RESTING HEART RATE	DAILY STEPS	DAILY ACTIVE MINUTES	HOURS OF SLEEP
28.1	64 ^{BPM}	9,993	65	6.3



Future-Proof Your Face

Smart grooming will overcome the ravages of Father Time

Don't take this personally, but your skin can grow 'dry and dull', says Dr Zeichner. It loses hydration and takes longer to purge dead cells, but using hydrating creams or exfoliators will help, such as Dr Dennis Gross Skincare Alpha Beta Extra Strength Daily Peel. 'Hydroxy acid dissolves the connections between your skin cells, so they can be shed more easily,' he says.

THE NUTRIENT YOU NEED NOW

POTASSIUM

'Your risk of hypertension [high blood pressure] increases every year,' says Dr Roussel. But cutting back on snack bars isn't the only way to offset your risk. 'Potassium balances the sodium in your diet and supports healthy blood pressure,' he explains. As a bonus, greens that contain potassium also tend to be rich in fibre, which will help with blood-sugar control. A word of caution: potassium supplements can put you at risk of overdosing, leading to heart issues.

Eat more: Apricots, artichokes, beetroot, sprouts and potatoes



YOUR TRANSFORMATION PLAN

How To Hit Reset At 50

THE CHALLENGE At this age, all those heart disease and diabetes statistics can start to feel a little too real. It's time to work towards longevity

THE GOAL Rebalance blood sugar and lose fat

THE TIME FRAME 10 weeks

It's not easy to maintain a superhuman six-pack in middle age – Hollywood's veteran action heroes are the exception, not the rule. Are you striving for high energy levels, solid cardio fitness and impeccable health metrics? These are wholly achievable goals. And worthy ones, too: after the age of 45, men's risk of heart attack increases steadily, with your mid-sixties being prime time for a cardiovascular event. The same goes for type 2 diabetes. So taking control of your health and striving for new goals now could save your life in the decades to come. Muscle mass may be harder to maintain now (again, we invoke the Hollywood clause), but stamina is one of the last things to wane, so there's no reason why you shouldn't be able to keep up with your young grandchildren/nephew/dog. Focus on what you can do, not what you can't, and you'll be surprised by just how far you can push yourself.

FINANCIALLY FIT AT 50

The finish line is almost in sight. Maximise your savings and plan for a smoother retirement with these tips from Whateley. You've bloody well earned it.



SCRUTINISE YOUR PENSION

Get serious about when and how you're going to retire, plus how much you'll retire on. You might want to consolidate your pensions from previous employers. If so, PensionBee has a handy app to track them all down. Make sure you know what state pension you could be entitled to. Request a statement from gov.uk/check-state-pension.

DE-RISK YOUR SAVINGS

As your pensions and investments grow, you should focus on capital protection as well as capital growth, recommends Patrick Connolly of financial advisers Chase de Vere. You should still invest in shares for their growth potential – but you should also hold money in other assets such as property and fixed-interest, to provide diversification and reduce your overall investment risk.

USE YOUR TAX-FREE ALLOWANCES

Maximise your pension allowance. Anyone under the age of 75 can contribute up to £60,000 tax-free into their pension each year. Don't forget your ISA allowance, too, which is now £20,000 with tax-free interest. It's worth seeking help from a financial adviser to weigh up your options and make the smartest financial decision for your future.



YOUR NEW FITNESS RULES

By Kirk McFarland, PT and nutrition coach at Life Time Fitness

Play It Safe To Start

If you're fairly new to the game – or you've taken an extended gym hiatus – the last thing you should be doing is leaping into a hardcore programme. McFarland recommends basic moves that are unlikely to lead to injuries, such as the plank, bird dog and rotator cuff exercises to strengthen your spine and shoulder joints. For metabolic conditioning, McFarland favours rowing. These moves will help to build strength without overloading your muscles.

Switch Things Up

Taking it easy isn't imperative. You can work out six days a week if you're smart. Alternate between days of fast-paced strength training – using light weights and body-weight moves – and interval-style cardio on a treadmill, stationary bike, elliptical trainer or rower. This stimulates muscle growth one day and ramps up your heart rate the next.

Listen To Your Body

There will be days when you feel burned out or sore. Ignore this feedback at your peril: training through the pain puts you at greater risk of injury. If you don't feel up to a full session, go for a brisk walk outside or on the gym treadmill. This will increase your overall calorie expenditure and improve blood flow to your muscles, without wearing you out ahead of tomorrow's session.



YOUR NEW FOOD RULES

McFarland's advice for intelligent eating

Get Tested For Diabetes

It's more common than you think: more than five million Britons are expected to have diabetes by 2025. It's worth noting that diabetes will affect your weight-loss efforts: you'll have to exercise caution with carbs, making popular carb-heavy, low-fat plans unsuitable. Speak to your GP before making any major changes to your diet.

Eat Your Greens

The warning your mum gave you when you were a boy is worth heeding now, too. Cruciferous vegetables – cabbage, broccoli, kale and cauliflower – provide crucial fibre and disease-fighting antioxidants for a minimal calorie count. For a simple coleslaw, thinly slice and combine with a splash of red wine vinegar and salt and pepper. Alternatively, chop and toss into a stir-fry.

Don't Blacklist Red Meat

Many default to lean chicken and white fish when on a diet, particularly if they're mindful of their metabolic health. But, combined with a low carb intake, this approach risks excessively dropping your calorie intake, which will inhibit recovery after your gym sessions. Don't just survive your fifties – enjoy them.

THE CHECK-UP

Prostate cancer is now the most common form of cancer in UK men, but the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test is controversial. 'A raised PSA doesn't necessarily equate to cancer, and you can have a normal PSA and still have cancer,' says Dr Patel. 'Talk it through with your doctor,' he says. If you're concerned about your risk, don't shy away from a fingertip examination. Finally, schedule an inspection of your, erm, stool. Remember: dealing with these problems now is a lot more comfortable...

MEN KILLING IT IN THEIR FIFTIES & BEYOND



Ke Huy Quan, Oscar-winner

51



Laird Hamilton, Big-wave surfer

59



Samuel L Jackson, Badass

74



Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor

75



David Attenborough, Environmentalist

97

The Science Of Happiness

The question of what makes a person happy is no longer a philosophical conundrum. Many now see 'life satisfaction' as a metric, and there are countless books, apps and pods pledging to up your score. But with more resources than ever, **why are we still so confused,** asks *Stuart Heritage*? Can happiness really be taught?

Artwork by Peter Crowther 



CAN STUDY-BACKED
HACKS MAKE YOUR LIFE
MORE EFFERVESCENT?

If

you've ever seen something called the happiness U-curve, you'll have every right to feel a bit despondent. This chart, which tracks human satisfaction by age, does not make for especially cheerful reading. From the mid-teens to the late forties or early fifties, the chart plots a steady descent. True, it does then begin to tick back upwards. But until then, on average, every year of your life will be a little less happy than the one before it.

It isn't hard to see why. Everything is a struggle. Maybe you're battling with the pressures of work, or money, or kids, or health, or your elderly parents, or all of these at the same time. We might all *want* to be happier, but knowing how is the hard bit.

Some happiness hacks are pretty much agreed upon, if not always easy. (More time outdoors; fewer hours zombified in front of a laptop.) Others are questionable. (Should you get up at 5am to meditate? Start a gratitude journal? Wouldn't an extra hour in bed make you more grateful?) What you really need is someone to test them all, and report back.

Well, good news! As a father of two currently riding the downwards slope of the U-curve while working in a dying industry during a gruelling cost of living crisis, I'm ideally placed to be your guinea pig. What's more, I really wanted to find a way to make my day-to-day a bit nicer. So, over the course of a month, I practised as many of these scientifically backed strategies as I could to see what would stick. Here's my crash course in contentment.

Experiment 01 Satisfaction, Gamified

■ The overwhelming advice when it comes to feeling happier is to strengthen your interpersonal

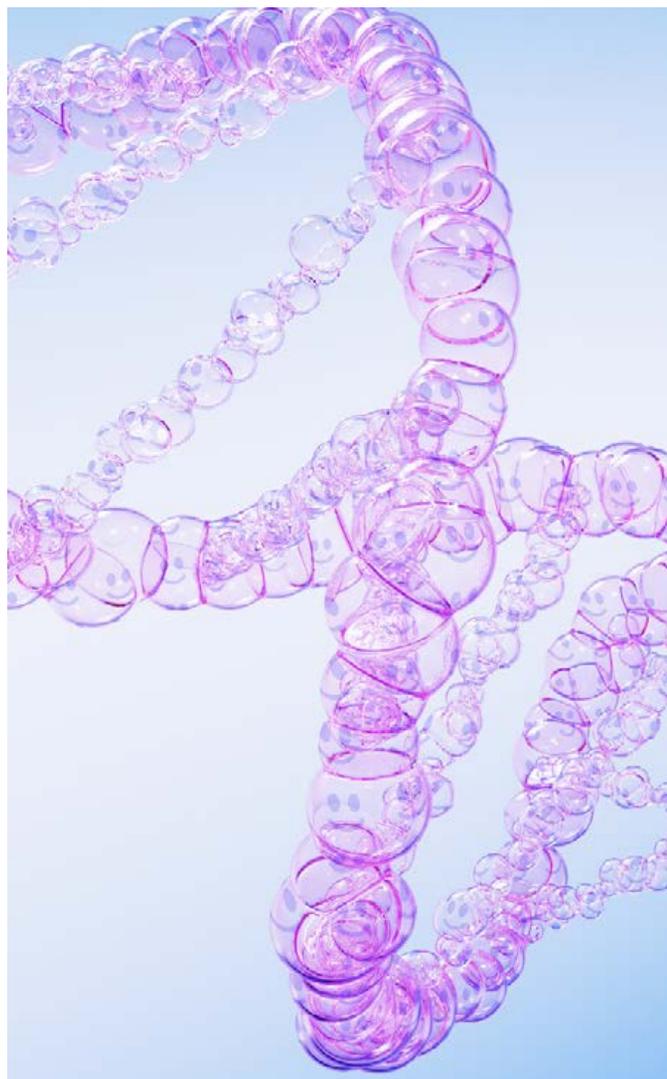
relationships. Both Yale's Laurie Santos (who leads the university's Science of Well-Being course and hosts *The Happiness Lab* podcast) and Harvard's Robert Waldinger (who recently published a book on happiness, *The Good Life*) hammer home the importance of seeking out and maintaining a healthy social network.

Which is great... but it's also a lot of effort. So, I thought I'd start with the apps, instead. After all, an app helped me lose weight last year, so maybe one could cheer me up a bit, too? More importantly, it sounded a lot more time-efficient to twat about on my phone for a few minutes a day than to actually go out and talk to people. And this brought me to Happify.

Launched seven years ago in New York, Happify claims to have helped millions of people by boiling down the tenets of cognitive behavioural therapy and gamifying it for on-the-go users. Its science is backed by 28 experts, who range from the professor of psychology at the University of California to yoga instructors and 'compassion teachers'. The app asks you to choose a 'track' – a pathway to happiness based on your own experiences – and every day it parcels out a few minutes of homework.

There is a catch, of course. You can only experience the full version of Happify with a premium subscription, which costs £125 a year: that's a lot to ask of someone whose financial situation might be contributing to their unhappiness. Alternatively, as I did, you could opt for the pared-down free version.

I chose a track designed to help with the stress of caregiving, since that is currently my biggest obstacle to mental wellbeing. Some of the tasks involve listening to guided meditation (more on that later) or writing little gratitude lists (which some people might find helpful), but the Happify app also includes various games. And, god, these games are awful. One of them is essentially a shameless imitation of *Angry Birds*, except instead of killing pigs, you kill words with negative connotations. And, while I'm no doctor, I don't think this is the fast track to a happier life.



'An app helped me lose weight last year, so maybe one could cheer me up a bit, too?'

While apps can help with things such as weight loss or nutrition – where progress can be measured in cold, hard numbers – something as subjective as happiness is harder to compute. Happify offers fortnightly check-in quizzes, where you answer questions about yourself along a spectrum that ranges from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The median score for users is 45.8 out of 100, and when I first took the quiz I scored a respectable 46. But by the end of the month, I had grown so disenchanted by all the pointless hoops that Happify made me jump through that my score had plummeted to 40. When it told me, 'You need a happiness boost,' I took it as a sign to delete the app and get on with my life.

3/10

What you'll save in time you'll lose in the will to live.



Happiness By Numbers

Looking for more ways to scale up your wellbeing? Here are a few of your life-satisfaction RDAs

IS A POSITIVE MENTAL ATTITUDE WRITTEN INTO YOUR GENES?

-1hr

A US study of 840,000 people found that when night owls shifted their sleep time one hour earlier, it decreased their risk of depression by 23%. Separate research* concluded that morning people tend to be happier with their relationships.

15 mins

'Twenty years into teaching happiness, I have an answer: find awe,' wrote Dacher Keltner, who created UC Berkeley's happiness-science syllabus. Whether you find it in art, music or nature, studies suggest a 15-minute fix has measurable benefits.

Experiment 02 Food For Thought

■ There exists a branch of science called nutritional psychiatry, which researches how food affects your mood. This goes beyond feeling regretful or lethargic after a three-day snack binge. In truth, the science is complicated. There are microbes in your gut, and these microbes produce neurotransmitters that send messages to your brain. The theory goes that, by eating certain foods, you can alter the message that your brain receives.

The study that interested me the most came out of Deakin University in Australia. Researchers took a group of people with major depression who perpetually grazed on low-nutrient processed snacks and, over the course of 12 weeks, swapped these foods for fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and legumes. Porridge was eaten in place of sugary cereals. Processed meats were replaced with seafood and small amounts of lean red meat. And at the end of the trial, most people noted a significant improvement in mood.

This is something backed up by Gordon McCrorie, a Glasgow-based life coach who operates as The Happiness Guy. When we spoke,

I asked him what set him on his path to seeking happiness. 'Flippantly, I would say misery,' he told me. 'It was being overweight. It was not coping well with stressors in life.' This manifested in compulsive overeating, and the thing that most helped him pull it together was a change in diet.

'When people clean up their diet, their body invariably functions more smoothly – they'll feel better, their head will be clearer,' he says. 'I'd encourage people to think of how they eat as a way of taking care of themselves. If you take care of yourself, then it means you matter. It's an act of love.'

At the start of my month, I'd fallen into a bit of a dietary hole. I was snacking more than I'd like, often on whatever happened to be in the supermarket bakery aisle, and had slipped into cooking whatever meals made my kids complain the least. On day one, when I traded in macaroni cheese for a vegetable stir-fry, I was convinced that this particular experiment would prove a bad idea. My children reacted to the sight of vegetables like it was a violent personal insult. And, since my body had grown used to the quick carby hit of pasta, I didn't have enough energy to cope.

But I persevered. One of the biggest proponents of this approach is Felice Jacka, founder of the International Society for Nutritional Psychiatry Research. Her book, *Brain Changer*, makes a strong argument for the connection between diet and mood. According to her, one diet has been shown to have far more empirical benefits than others. 'The Mediterranean diet is certainly the most studied, and the dietary pattern that has by far the largest and strongest evidence base for health benefits,' she has written. Psychologist Kimberley Wilson, author of *Unprocessed*, concurs, describing it as 'the gold standard diet for promoting heart – and by extension brain – health'.

I tried sticking to this – lots of omelettes, tuna salads and grilled chicken – while experimenting to see what would go down best with my family. For the most part, I managed to keep it up all month, except for a couple of days when I was strong-armed into ordering burgers. The results were encouraging. The problem is, I don't know why.

I ended the month feeling better about myself. But was this because I'd successfully hacked the microbial neurotransmitters in my gut, or was it – as I suspect – because I lost a bit of weight and felt happier because I looked better? Outside of a stringent scientific study, I can't say for sure.

6/10

I might have eaten my way to happiness. Then again, I might just be colossally vain.

Experiment 03 Who's In Control?

■ I had plans to study stoicism – an ancient Greek philosophy pegged as one of the foundational texts of virtue ethics – for years. So, in 2020, when lockdown hit, I decided to insulate myself from the swirling uncertainty by buying John Sellars' book *Lessons In Stoicism*. But guess what? As the drudgery of lockdown continued, and I was left holding down a full-time job while raising two children and tending to an unwell wife, I didn't have much free time to brush up on 2,000-year-old thought experiments. Who could have known?

I wasn't the only one to get the idea, though: books on stoicism experienced a noticeable sales boost during the pandemic and (versions of) its ideas are increasingly popping up in podcasts and on Instagram. This article gave me the perfect opportunity to dive in, but that immediately raised a question. Stoicism involves self-control and self-awareness. Is that what happiness is?

'When the stoics are talking about happiness, they're not talking about a subjective, fluffy, warm feeling inside, they're talking about something more substantial,' says Sellars over Zoom. 'It'll reduce the amount of frustration that you feel, it'll reduce the amount of disruptive negative emotions that you'll feel. In that sense, it'll lead to a happier life. When people think about happiness, they're often confusing it with pleasure. This isn't that.'

Sellars helps to run Stoicon, an annual event where attendees spend seven days following stoic teachings. They're asked to fill in questionnaires at the start and end of the week, and overwhelmingly report an improvement in their life satisfaction after participating. 'We did a follow-up survey six months later,' Sellars says. 'Some people hadn't kept strictly following stoicism, but the benefits were still there. It really stuck with them.'

Luckily, it really worked for me, too. A central part of stoicism involves learning to relinquish control of matters that are out of your hands, which is incredibly useful. During my month-long experiment, I was asked to go abroad on a work trip, but my visa got snarled up in processing. Before I started practising stoicism, the likelihood is that I would have exhausted myself railing against the embassy. But thanks to Sellars' book, I quickly realised that being angry at an impossible wall of bureaucracy wouldn't speed my passport along. It would have been a waste of energy. Instead, I let go. The trip wasn't meant to happen. Oh, well.

Learning to think rationally, minimising overreaction and relinquishing the things I can't control took a stiff brush to my mental fog. It allowed me to think clearly, to see my place in the world without any complications. Maybe 'happy' isn't the right word for how it made me feel, but



DON'T GRIN AND
BEAR IT - SEEK OUT
SMART SOLUTIONS

there was certainly a lightening of my mood. I became calmer, resilient, more relaxed. I'm still not a perfect stoic by any means, but this is one habit I'm definitely keeping up.

8/10

Worth exploring. And if it doesn't help you, at least you can stoically surrender your disappointment.

Experiment 04 Breathe Easy(ish)

■ While investigating practices for this article, I came across an astounding study. Published in 2020, it saw researchers from Yale submit students to randomised wellness techniques to see which worked. One of them, by a considerable distance, was found to offer the greatest benefits – not just

to stress levels, but to mood, positivity and possibly even happiness. Better still, it was relatively simple: Sky breathing meditation.

I had long assumed that focused breathing was a shortcut to feeling better. There are countless mindfulness apps with little animations to help you focus on inhalation and exhalation, as well as books and classes to teach you how to do it properly, from Dan Harris's *Ten Percent Happier* to Wim Hof's tutorials. I actually tried transcendental meditation a few years ago, and the main appeal of that seemed to be getting 20 minutes to yourself. But something with empirical proof? Count me in.

Now, technically, Sky breathing meditation should be taught to you

£80k

Can money buy happiness? A famous 2010 study by psychologist Daniel Kahneman and economist Angus Deaton suggests that it can, but that the effects level out at an annual salary of \$75k, equivalent to roughly £80k today. Best not think about it, eh?

50-40-10

Many scientists subscribe to 'set point' theory: the idea that our baseline happiness is informed by genetics. Sonja Lyubomirsky, a researcher and tutor at the University of California, estimates that happiness is 50% genetic, 40% mindset/choices and 10% life circumstances.

12 weeks

A recent review looking at 1,039 trials concluded that exercise is 1.5 times more effective than counselling or medication for improving the symptoms of depression and anxiety. Better still, effects kick in within 12 weeks of starting a new routine. Don't quit now.

'I became calmer, resilient, more relaxed. But I'm still not a perfect stoic'

over a number of days by a qualified instructor. But on YouTube, you can find a lot of free Sky exercises. Cheapskate that I am, this is the solution I opted for.

Sky isn't just one exercise repeated over and over. There are several, and they range in intensity and length. One exercise asks you to try to only breathe two or three times a minute, another asks you to breathe in and out

rapidly. It involves sitting through a lot of explanations – which is inconvenient when you're already busy – but in my experience it pays off.

The science behind Sky is that changing the rhythm of your breathing helps to signal relaxation, slow your heart rate and stimulate the vagus nerve, which is integral to the parasympathetic nervous system. And in practice, I felt a profound sense of relaxation wash over me whenever I tried the exercises, especially the ones that required slower breaths. My thoughts became clearer, and I felt like I was more capable of taking on whatever the world threw at me.

This one lasted the whole month – although, in truth, there were a couple of days when I forgot about it and had to catch up on the toilet, which probably wasn't the intended environment – and I'm going to try to keep it up, too.

7/10

**Surprisingly effective.
It's not just a lot of hot air.**

Experiment 05 Lost Connections

■ And finally, the big one. Even though it sounded like the most work – and went against the most fundamental aspects of my core personality – I decided I should probably bite the bullet and become a more integrated member of society.

The evidence for this speaks for itself. Dr Waldinger is the current head of a long-term Harvard study into happiness that for 85 years has tracked a number of people and their offspring to see what contributes to their levels of life satisfaction. And far and away the biggest factor is a person's relationships – more so than social class or genetics.

In his book, *The Good Life*, Dr Waldinger suggests a range of ways to improve your relationships. But for my personal experiment, I wanted to concentrate on two: giving people your undivided attention and making small connections throughout the day. 'Chatting to a stranger' also happens to be one of the practical tasks recommended on Bristol University's Science of Happiness course, so that

seemed like a good place to start – not least because I have plenty of opportunities to make daily connections, and I always ignore them.

When I'm picking my kids up from school, I have a habit of standing grumpily in the playground, staring at my phone. But I spent the last couple of weeks of term leaving my phone in my pocket and talking to the other parents. Which was *excruciating* to begin with, obviously. But luckily, I was on nodding terms with a handful of other dads so, after taking a deep, meditative breath, I took the plunge: say hello, ask questions, see what happens. And you know what? I'm glad I did. All of them were interesting. One's starting to get a new business off the ground. One of them, amazingly, runs a pub. One just really likes walking everywhere really fast, and we're starting to bond over that. It sounds so nothingy, but making new friends as an adult is extremely difficult. Perhaps these are the seeds that need to be sown to make that happen.

For the other approach, I chose to focus on my dad. This is largely because I think he needed this just as much as I did. Since my mum died six years ago, Dad has lived alone, and I worry about him getting lonely. But life is busy, things get in the way and I only really see him for an hour or so with the kids once every couple of weeks, and we spend quite a lot of that time checking our phones.

My approach was two-pronged. First, I just upped the number of times I visited him, popping over every few days rather than once a fortnight. This alone worked wonders. Mum was always the chatty parent growing up and when she was gone, I struggled to find things to talk to Dad about. But simply by being in his presence more often, I found that things fell into place more easily. True, some of our discussions are profoundly superficial – the number of conversations we've had about air fryers would stagger you – but we're gradually starting to open up. And this has created a genuinely tangible happiness within me. There's an honest to goodness warmth in my chest when I go to visit my dad now.

10/10

A winner. Even – or especially? – for grumpy, unsocial types.

With the exception of the app, all of these techniques provided some form of positive result. Did my happiness experiment transform my life? Well, no. The pressures I mentioned before are all still there. But if this experiment has taught me anything, it's that seeking happiness isn't really about making your life better. It's about realising it was never that bad in the first place. At any rate – it's all uphill after 50, right? 🍷



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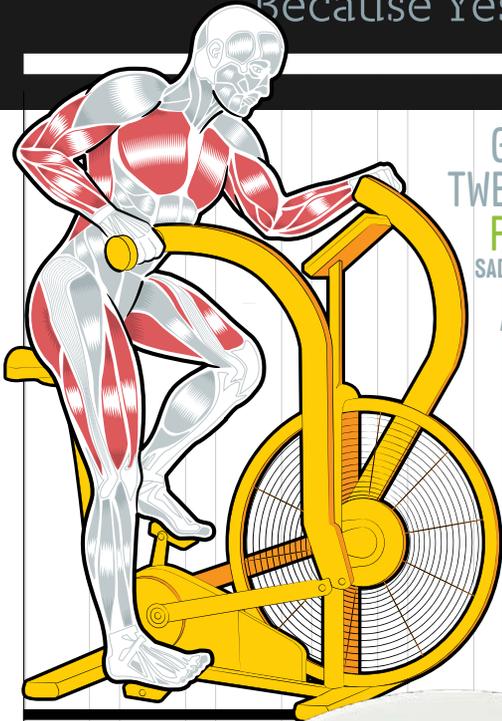
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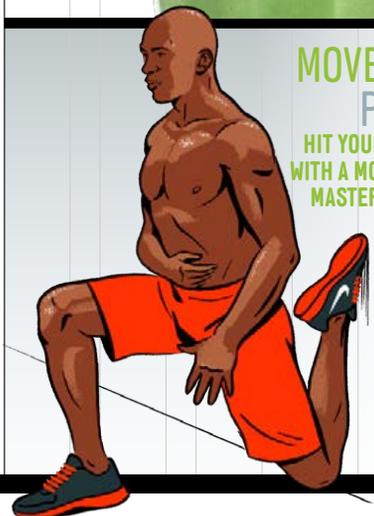
THE BIG
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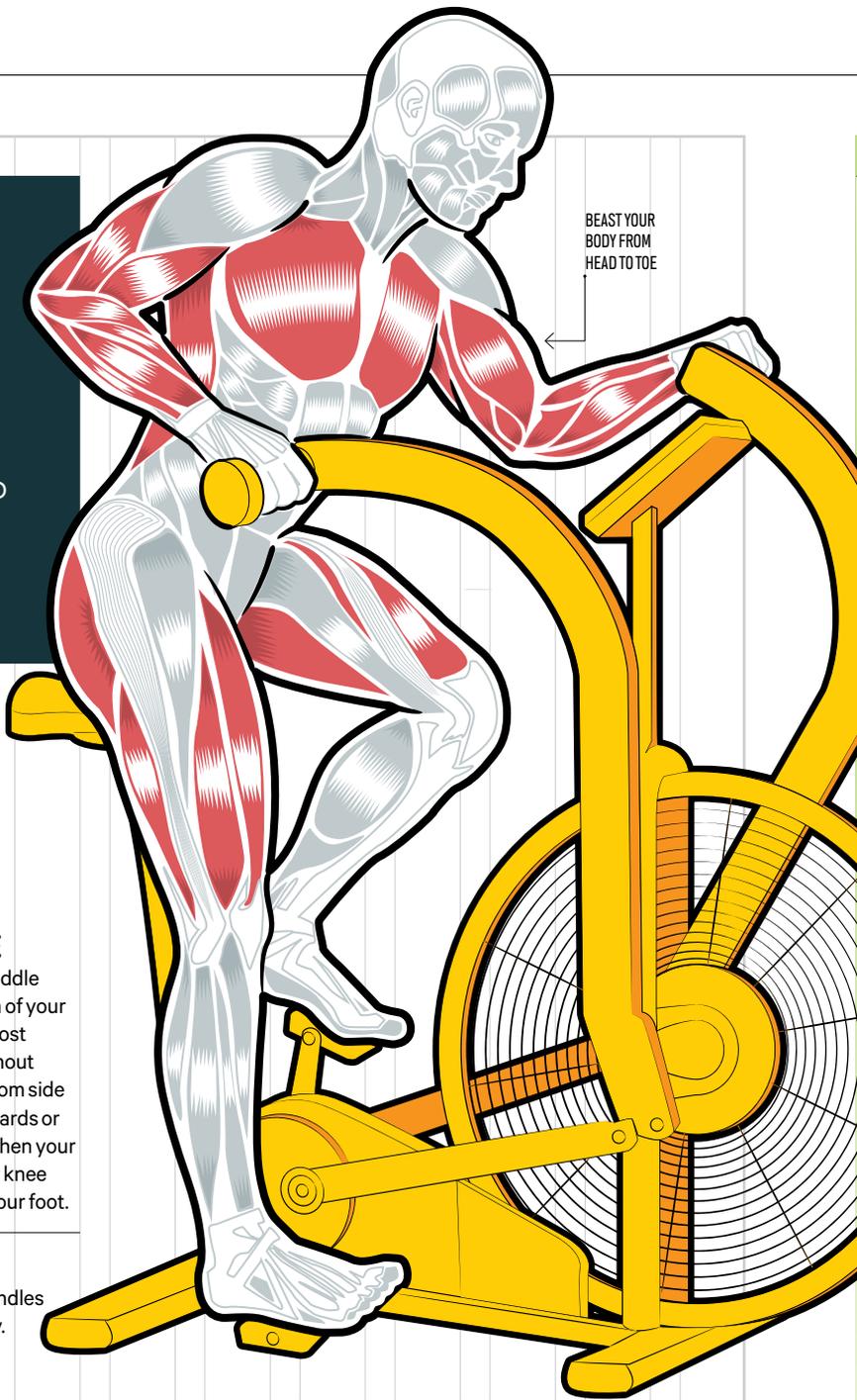


MOVE ON
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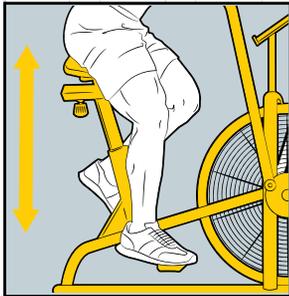
OUTRIDE THE DEVIL HIMSELF

The static bike might be a popular rehab tool, but its sibling, the AirBike, is best known for its hellish cardio assaults. Here's how to saddle up and survive



BEAST MODE

While there's nothing too complicated about an AirBike workout, there's a lot you can do to make getting *this* uncomfortable more productive. Master the devil's tricycle using the following four techniques and tweaks



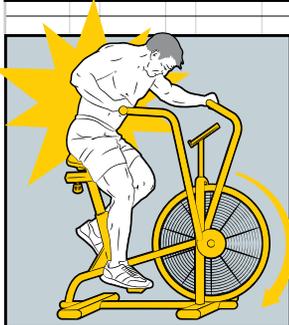
01 / GET IN THE SADDLE

■ Start by adjusting your saddle height so that at the bottom of your pedal stroke, your leg is almost straight (but not quite), without your hips needing to shift from side to side. Adjust the seat forwards or backwards to ensure that when your pedal is at nine o'clock, your knee lines up with the centre of your foot.



02 / REACHING OUT

■ Unlike the saddle, the handles don't offer any adjustability. The perfect torso angle for your height will enable you to keep a relatively upright posture that won't constrict your breathing and allows you to bring the handles to just below your chest and push them out to full extension.



03 / START FAST, FINISH FIRST

■ In an AirBike sprint, you need to get up to speed quickly. Start as powerfully as possible to blast the wattage up, then settle into your rhythm. This will get the flywheel moving freely and you'll earn more distance (or calories) 'for free' as the wattage momentarily remains high, even as you reduce your effort.

THE SINS OF THE DAMNED

We've shown you the good – what about the bad and the ugly? Watch for these technique faux pas to avoid AirBike hell

MR HIGH KNEES



Sets his seat too low, meaning

his legs never get enough stretch and his quads blow up like balloons in the first 20 seconds. Unable to put out any more power, he limps off like John Wayne with rubber legs. Crank up his seat for him between sets.

MR MOSH PIT



Closes his eyes and frantically

shakes his head from side to side like a man possessed. Wastes lots of energy, loses vital breathing efficiency and makes a lot of noise. Tell him to focus on one spot on the monitor or wall, keep his head up and stay calm. Smooth is fast. And fast is good.

MR PRAYER-GIVER



Puts his head way down

between the handles. His arms flare wide and he's unable to use a full range of motion. Hunching over is restricting his breathing, grinding him to a panicked stop. Tell him to sit up proud and open his chest, re-engaging his upper body.

05

FINISH

WORTH A TRY?

'I like a greens product as a supp for those who can't consume enough veg, or during travel,' says Abbie Smith-Ryan, a professor of exercise physiology at UNC Chapel Hill. But they're not a neat workaround for a sub-par diet. You still need to eat real veg. So, if you're already getting your five a day, it might be smarter to save your cash.

04

WHAT'S BOGUS

Greens supplements are a processed food, and in that processing, fibre is lost. Greens powders provide roughly 2g to 3g per serving. Real green veg, such as chard or kale, have 3g to 4g of the stuff per 70g. Plus, nothing except your digestive tract, kidneys or liver can 'detoxify' your body.

03

WHAT'S IFFY

The 'research-backed ingredients' sell is a tricky one, says registered dietitian Abby Langer. For example, a greens powder can say it contains the antioxidant alpha-lipoic acid, which research has linked to better blood sugar balance. But those studies look at alpha-lipoic acid in isolation within a test group. There's little research into the effectiveness of powdered greens as a whole.

SUPPLEMENT CHECK

ARE GREENS WORTH A GO?

These forest-coloured powders advertise mountains of nutrients per scoop. But are they any better than your average green juice?

START

01

THE CLAIMS

These powdered-superfood shakes (made from plants) proffer benefits such as a boosted immune system, better gut health, alleviated inflammation, balanced blood sugar, 'detoxification', clearer skin and enhanced athletic performance.

02

WHAT'S TRUE

Greens powders are made from nutrient-dense foods such as kelp, barley grass and dandelion leaf (yum!). Athletic Greens, one of the best-known brands, lists hipster algae spirulina as its main ingredient. As you'd expect, greens supps can be good sources of vits and minerals, which will juice up your overall health.

ELIXIR OF LIFE OR JUST SNAKE OIL?



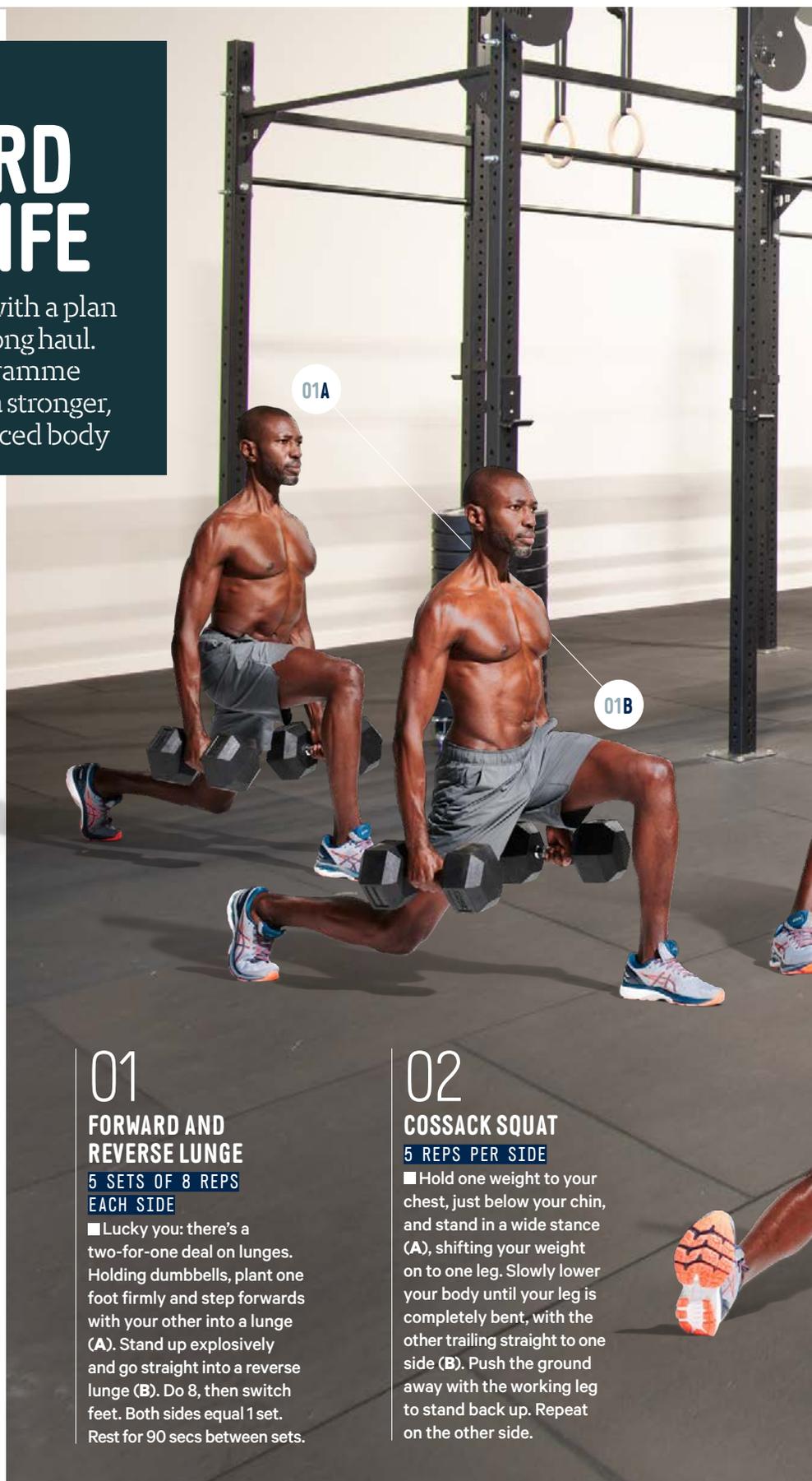
THE BIG WORKOUT

BUILD A HARD BODY FOR LIFE

Future-proof your physique with a plan that's designed to last for the long haul. This fuss-free three-day programme ticks all the training boxes for a stronger, more resilient and truly balanced body

■ The phrase 'you only get one body' might be a platitude, but it's nonetheless true. The fact that you've heard it many times before only means it's worth repeating. Now – with this issue being our Fit At Any Age special – you might expect this to be a workout programme aimed at the ailing silver fox: a weathered old gunslinger refusing to go gently into the night, despite a litany of niggles, tweaks and injuries. But the truth is, whether you're in your early thirties, forties, fifties or beyond, it's *always* the right time to be thinking about training for longevity. The shapes you cut in the gym today will directly affect your future self, for better or worse.

It might help to think of your body as a savings plan: each workout is either a deposit to or a withdrawal from the physical funds you'll have available in years to come. Our advice? Pick a training plan now you can see yourself coming back to in 10 or even 20 years' time – like this one. This three-day-a-week strength and fitness plan, designed to be followed in four- to six-week stints, will deliver for the rest of your life. A low-fuss combination of joint-friendly, mobility-boosting and muscle-building exercises, it's designed to keep you moving better – and for longer. A good investment, if we do say so.



01

FORWARD AND REVERSE LUNGE

5 SETS OF 8 REPS
EACH SIDE

■ **Lucky you:** there's a two-for-one deal on lunges. Holding dumbbells, plant one foot firmly and step forwards with your other into a lunge (A). Stand up explosively and go straight into a reverse lunge (B). Do 8, then switch feet. Both sides equal 1 set. Rest for 90 secs between sets.

02

COSSACK SQUAT

5 REPS PER SIDE

■ Hold one weight to your chest, just below your chin, and stand in a wide stance (A), shifting your weight on to one leg. Slowly lower your body until your leg is completely bent, with the other trailing straight to one side (B). Push the ground away with the working leg to stand back up. Repeat on the other side.

WORKOUT #01 THE GROUND WORK

■ Leave the legs day skipping to the bros. Stronger foundations last longer, so we're building from the ground up with

a lower-body workout that's all killer, no filler. Push your legs in all directions and challenge your core by performing 5 sets of

exercise 1 before moving into as many rounds as possible of 2 to 4, with a 20-min time cap.



03 FRONT RACK SQUAT

10 REPS

■ Now bring both legs into play to keep the party moving. Clean two dumbbells on to your shoulders explosively and take a deep breath (A). Drive your hips back and sink into a squat. Once the crease of your hips passes below your knee, pause (B). Drive upwards explosively and repeat.

04 ROMANIAN DEADLIFT

15 REPS

■ To finish strong, drop your dumbbells to your sides (A). With a slight bend in your knees, push your hips back. Lower the bells towards the floor, pinch your shoulders back and keep a neutral spine. When you feel a stretch in your hamstrings, pause (B), then return. Finish your reps, then go back to 02 for the next round.



01

TOWEL GRIP PULL-UP**5 REPS**

■ Much kinder on your shoulder joints and with more grip strength-boosting bang for your buck. Hang a towel over a pull-up bar, grip it in both hands and hang with straight arms (A). Pull yourself up by flexing your elbows while pinching your shoulder blades together. When your chin passes your fists, pause (B). Lower back to the start and repeat.

02

PRESS-UP OVER DUMBBELL**20 REPS**

■ Time to get those pecs popping. Assume a strong, straight-armed plank with one hand on a dumbbell (A). Lower your chest to the floor, then explosively press up, shifting your weight over the bell and changing hands as you do (B). Alternate sides for 20 reps, then go back for another 5 reps of the pull-ups.

WORKOUT #02 PRESS AHEAD

■ An upper-body pump that'll leave you feeling as good as you'll look, this workout includes joint-friendly twists on classic moves, which are followed by some actual twisting to keep your core functional for longer. Warm up and do as many reps as possible of O1 and O2 in 15 mins; rest only as needed. Then do 15 mins of O3 and O4. Track your reps and beat that score before adding weight.



O3A

O3B

O4B

O4A

03 SINGLE-ARM DUMBBELL PUSH PRESS

10 REPS PER SIDE

■ Ready to build some circus strength? Clean your weight up to your shoulder, squeeze your opposite fist to create tension and dip at the knees slightly (A). Stand back up explosively and press the dumbbell overhead (B). Return the dumbbell to your shoulder with control and repeat.

04 ROTATIONAL DUMBBELL CLEAN

10 REPS PER SIDE

■ A core-rocking classic with a twist – literally. Place a weight down to the outside of your foot, squat down, pivoting on the opposite foot and grasp the bell (A). Explosively rotate upwards, pulling the dumbbell up on to the opposite shoulder (B). Reverse the move back to the ground and repeat. Switch sides after 10 reps.

PHOTOGRAPHY: PHILIP HAYNES. MODEL: RODNEY CHARLES AT MODELST. STYLING: ABENA OFELI. GROOMING: NAT SCHMITT USING CLARINS FOR MEN. BACKGROUND IMAGE: CALLUM TRACEY. LOCATION: CROSSFIT HUNTSMAN NORTH HERTS, CROSSFITHUNTSMAN.COM

WORKOUT #03 CARRY IT WELL

■ This workout combines muscle-building with functional strength. A mash-up of loaded carries, uneven lifts and hybrid

movements, this will build an unshakeable trunk, real-world muscle and a durable body fit for the long run. Warm up, then

do 5 sets of move 1 before doing 5 rounds of 2 to 4 as a circuit. If you nail your form and hit your reps, add more weight next week.



01

DUMBBELL BEAST ROW

5 SETS OF 20 REPS

■ Switch on beast mode. Drop to all fours with your hands on your dumbbells, put your weight into your toes and lift your knees from the ground (A). With your hips as still as possible, row one dumbbell up to your hip and pause (B). Lower to the ground and alternate sides for 20 reps. Rest 90 secs between sets.

02

PRESS TO SINGLE-ARM OVERHEAD CARRY

5 SETS OF 5 PER SIDE

■ Clean your dumbbells on to your shoulders. Press one bell overhead 5 times in a row (A). After the fifth rep, keep the bell locked out overhead and walk 15m forwards (B). Lower it to your shoulder and turn. Repeat with your other arm. Finish your reps, then move on to exercise 3.



MODEL: ADE YUSUFF AT W MODEL. GROOMING: LUCY RIDLEY

03 WALKING LUNGE

5 SETS OF 30M

■ Now to test your legs, core and grip. Clean the bells up on to your shoulders and stand tall (A). Keeping your chest up at all times, step forwards with one leg and bend your front knee until the back knee touches the floor (B). Stand up, pause and repeat with the other leg. At the 15m mark, turn around and head back.

04 SUITCASE CARRY

5 SETS OF 30M

■ Drop one of your weights, or if you can, grab a heavier bell. Hold it at your side, squeeze the opposite fist and create tension through your entire body (A). Take a deep breath into your belly and begin a fast, deliberate march, keeping your torso upright (B). Switch arms at the 15m mark and repeat. Rest for 60 secs before beginning the circuit again.

THE SELF-TEST

YOUR MOBILITY MASTERCLASS

Brute strength and cardio fitness aren't the only signs that you're in shape. This four-part test will get the measure of your mobility, to unlock peak performance

Working with pro athletes, the military and civilian gym-goers in the early 00s, physical therapist Kelly Starrett noticed a recurring problem. Many people were in pain and lacked a complete range of motion for basic moves such as squats and lunges. That inspired Starrett to create what he called 'mobilisations', which take your joints to different places, unstick compressed soft tissue and ingrain new patterns of movement. That helped birth mobility training. Starrett's website, MobilityWOD – renamed The Ready State in 2019 – popularised mobility work, such as squat challenges and foam rolling, and his books (*Becoming A Supple Leopard* and *Deskbound*) espoused more and better movement. Starrett, now 49, has been warning of the dangers of a sedentary lifestyle for a while. During a Zoom interview with *MH*, he's on the floor with his feet down and his knees raised, sitting on a lacrosse ball to dig into his right glute.

'Almost every metric – obesity, back pain, ACL-injury rates, depression, even life expectancy – is trending in a worse direction,' Starrett says. He and his wife, Juliet, provide solutions in their new book, *Built To Move*. With tactics to hit your sleep, step and protein goals, it details several tests for



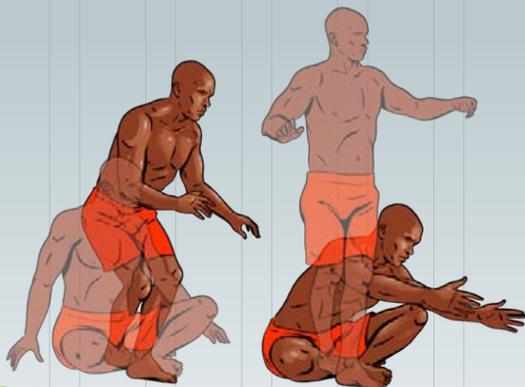
TACKLE STARRETT'S MOVES TO STRETCH YOUR POTENTIAL – IN THE GYM AND LIFE

basic moves that you should be able to do. 'Just as you have vital signs for other aspects of your health, so these are vital movement signs,' he explains.

The good news, he says, is that your body is extraordinarily robust, meaning that with regular practice it will start to adapt. Consistency counts for a lot. Your approach should be to pepper in mobility 'snacks' – two- to five-minute sessions – every 30 to 60 minutes

throughout the day, especially if you spend a lot of time sitting. Research shows that this can significantly lower blood sugar and blood pressure.

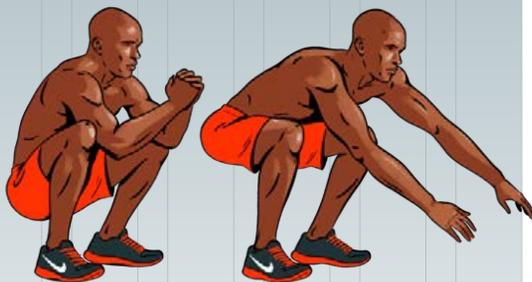
The idea behind the book may seem basic, but mobility work can transform both your workouts and your life. If you can do a lunge or squat with a full range of motion, you're going to see greater strength and performance results. Get ready to liberate your body.



01 SIT AND RISE

■ This test determines whether you have a good range of motion in your hips and gauges leg and core strength. Stand next to a wall for support if needed. Cross one foot in front of the other and sit cross-legged without holding anything (unless you feel unsteady). Then, rise up without touching the floor. Your goal is to sit and stand without using any points of contact besides your feet.

MOBILISE Sitting in a chair affects hip mobility, so Starrett recommends taking breaks every 30 to 60 mins, as well as sitting on the floor for at least 30 cumulative mins a day. **Kneel, sit cross-legged, scissor your legs with one at a 90 degree angle in front and one behind, or sit with your legs out in front of you.**



03 UPGRADE YOUR SQUAT

■ A low squat assesses the range of motion in your ankles, knees and hips. Stand with your feet at hip width, then bend your knees and squat. The ideal position is: glutes a few inches above the floor, hip crease below the knees, toes pointed forwards, heels flat. Hold for 5 breaths. If you can't do it, angle your toes outwards and separate your legs a little more or allow your heels to rise slightly. Still too hard?

Lower your hips to the height of a chair seat so your knees are bent 90 degrees. **MOBILISE** If your squat is weak, stand with a chair behind you and squat down until your bum hits the chair, then stand up. Do 20 reps daily. Also, practise sitting in a deep squat for 3 to 10 mins daily and do Tabata squats (as many squats as you can in 20 secs; rest for 10 secs; repeat 8 times).



YOUR NEW ARSENAL

■ Unleash these tools to target your body's key problem spots



i. LACROSSE BALL

Use to 'unglue' tissue knots and self-massage tight spots.



ii. FOAM ROLLER

Best for rolling out tightness in your spine, quads, glutes and calves.



iii. EXERCISE BAND

A great aid for stretches such as hamstring lockouts.



iv. PVC PIPE OR BROOM

Good for analysing form when squatting and planking.



02 UNLOCK YOUR HIPS

■ Hip extension enables you to walk and run with ease, stand up from a squat and rotate with power. Place your left knee by a wall, then rest your shin against it. Hold yourself up with your arms straight. Activate your glutes and inhale to a slow count of 5, then relax as you exhale to 5. Repeat 5 times. Switch sides. Easy enough? Repeat, but this time raise your right knee at a 90 degree angle. Place



your foot down and lean over your thigh, hands still on the floor. Clench your glutes and inhale to a count of 5, then exhale to 5. Want to make it harder yet? Raise your torso upright so that it's as close to parallel to the wall as possible. **MOBILISE** To improve, do the easier positions but on a sofa, and hold for 1 to 3 mins per side. Foam-rolling your hamstrings, quads and glutes will also help.

HOLD THIS POSE AND KEEP YOUR SHOULDERS SUPPLE



04 STABILISE YOUR SHOULDERS

■ This test assesses shoulder mobility – critical if you need to lift anything over your head or reach something high on a shelf. Lie down and, while keeping your forehead and belly in contact with the floor, arms straight and thumbs up, lift up your arms as high as they'll go. The goal is 2 or more inches off the floor. Hold for 5 inhales and exhales. Avoid holding your breath or bending your elbows.

MOBILISE If you struggle, do the test daily, but repeat 5 times and try these moves. **Wall hangs:** stand a few feet away from a wall. Bend at the waist and place your palms flat on the wall. Look down, roll your shoulders out and 'hang' on the wall for 10 breaths. **Press-ups:** to improve shoulder rotation, imagine screwing each hand towards its pinkie finger. Do 3 sets of 5 to 10.

Ben, RW Podcast co-host



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Rick, RW Podcast co-host

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Stephen Mangan



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MEAL PREP HERO #2

ADD SOME FUEL TO YOUR FIRE

Muscle doesn't have to mean meat. Prep five days' worth of fitness fuel with our hot Thai tofu salad recipe

SPICY TOFU AND BLACK RICE SALAD

Split this high-protein recipe into five batches to power your training

INGREDIENTS

- 250g Thai black rice
- 1kg tofu
- 250g feta
- 500g beetroot
- 65g peanuts
- 125g chia seeds
- 65g raisins
- For the marinade**
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp turmeric
- 1 tbsp soya sauce
- 1 tbsp red wine vinegar
- ½ red chilli, chopped

490
cals

27g
fat

32g
carbs

32g
protein

METHOD

- Step 1** To shorten cooking time, rinse and soak the rice first. Two cups of water for one cup of rice will serve you well. Cook for 20 mins in a saucepan until it has a fluffy texture.
- Step 2** Don't wait while the rice cooks: soak the tofu (a complete protein source) in the marinade, then grill in a pan for 3 to 4 mins until each side is golden brown.
- Step 3** Chop the feta and beetroot, mix the rice with the marinade, then top with the tofu, peanuts, chia seeds and raisins. Separate the salads into five containers. A job well done.



FRUIT AND NUT MUSCLE MIX

Per container: 25g
Pre-workout peanuts and raisins dish up useful electrolytes for hydration and sugars for easy energy.



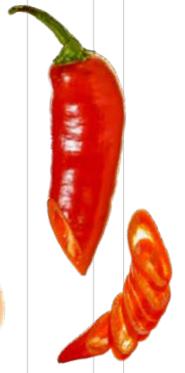
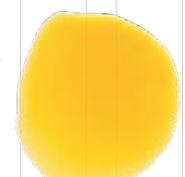
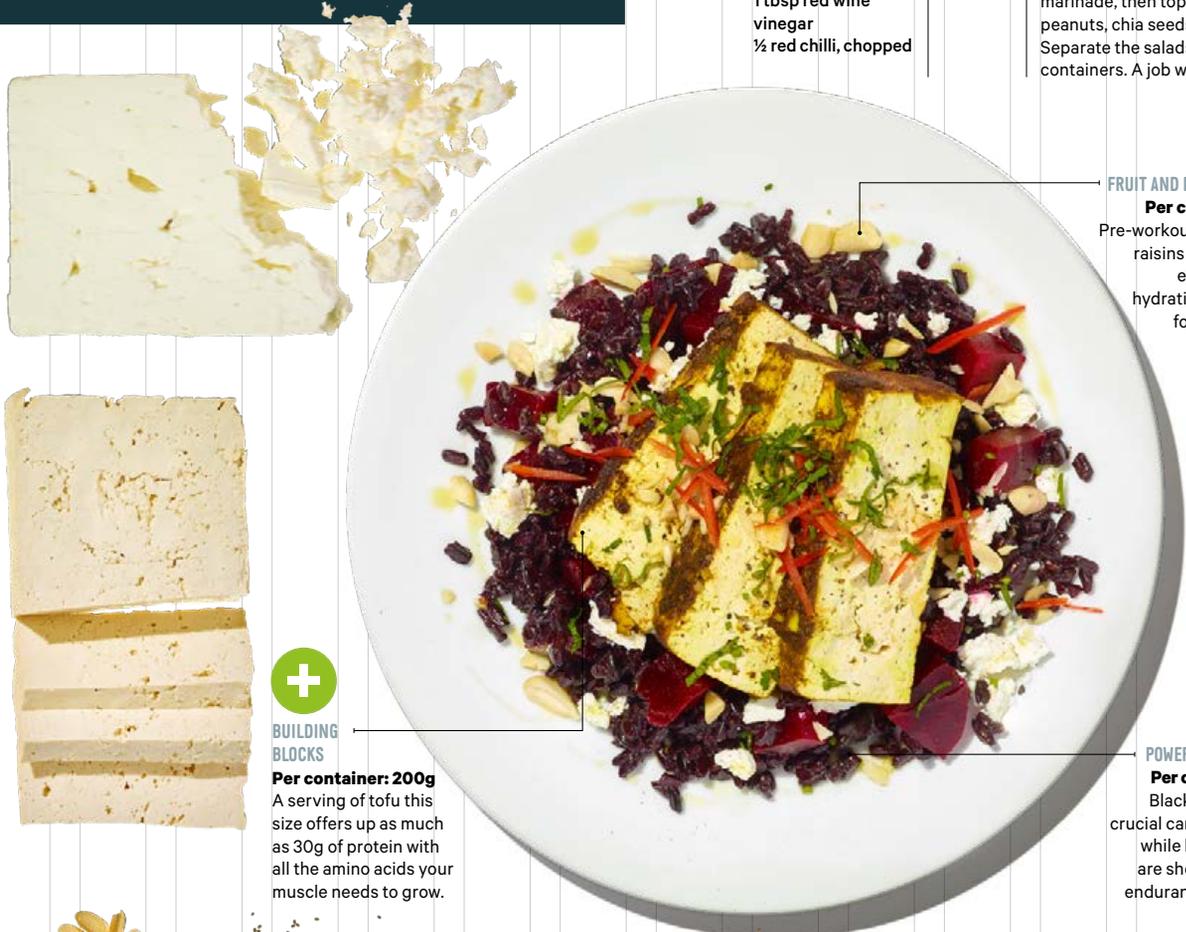
POWER-PUSHING RICE

Per container: 50g
Black rice provides crucial carbs for energy, while beets' nitrates are shown to elevate endurance in the gym.



BUILDING BLOCKS

Per container: 200g
A serving of tofu this size offers up as much as 30g of protein with all the amino acids your muscle needs to grow.



DEPARTUR

YOUR PASSPORT TO WELLNESS /

06 / 23



POWER TRIPS

Call Of The Wild

You know nature's good for you – it can assuage anxiety, curb blood pressure and bolster mental health. But sometimes a stroll around the park won't cut it. From eco treehouses to off-grid cabins, these Great British retreats deliver home comforts in a wild environment. Because green is good

WORDS BY AMANDA STATHAM, SCARLETT WRENCH,
TOBY WISEMAN, DAVID MORTON



ES



EASE INTO A REFRESHING
AND RUGGED BREAK



EVERYTHING TASTES BETTER
COOKED IN A FIREPIT



01 Roseland Peninsula, Cornwall

The scenery: Even the train to Truro has tracks so close to the coast you seem to be chugging through to the sea. This is Cornwall at its most refreshingly rugged. From there, a short taxi and the King Harry chain ferry will take you across the River Fal on to the Roseland Peninsula – one of the lesser travelled reaches of the county and all the more unspoiled for it.

The remedy: When the cobwebs of the nine-to-five have been duly banished by the breeze of a clifftop walk, there's more than enough on the peninsula to keep you uniquely entertained. The Lost Gardens of Heligan is Europe's largest garden restoration project, with its 200 acres mislaid in a jungle of brambles from 1914 until 1990 and unlike any visit to a generic bit of nature.

After a sharpener or two at one of the unrepentantly traditional pubs in St Mawes, bag yourself a ticket to one of The Hidden Hut's feast nights, where you and fellow diners will sit around

a ginormous table on Portscatho Beach, while the team of chefs cook log-fire local produce. Their season runs from May until September, so tuck in.

Where to stay: Embrace the rewild at 7th Rise, a pocket of off-grid luxury in a secluded woodland valley with the River Fal at the bottom. The refurbished cottage comfortably sleeps groups and families, while couples will find the smaller lodges and gypsy caravan perfectly cosy. Owner Thom Hunt and his team of local experts can offer everything from canoeing and paddleboarding to foraging and meals around the evening fire. Going home with grubby fingernails and smelling of smoke is guaranteed.

From £150 for a two-night adventure; 7thrise.co.uk





LOSE YOURSELF IN THE HILLS
OF THE CLADDACH VALLAY



02

North Uist, Outer Hebrides, Scotland

The scenery: Some rural retreats sell themselves on their proximity to cities such as London or Manchester. But if you truly want to get away from it all, you can't go much further than Claddach Vallay on the Scottish island of North Uist. Come for its forests and white-sand beaches, as well as eagles, red deer, seals and the occasionally spotted otter.

The remedy: Book in for a cruise aboard the Lady Anne, which offers wildlife-spotting trips that take in dolphins, nesting sea eagles and other sea birds. Then iron out any remaining desk aches with a class at Yoga For Life Hebrides in a glass-fronted hut overlooking the beach. For an extra dopamine fix, sign up for a horse-riding lesson with Uist Community Riding School, including a wade through the ocean shallows. Once you've built up an appetite (and you will), replenish your protein and load up on omega-3 with a plate of freshly caught lobster and chips at the seafood cafe on the pier at Kallin.



REFUEL WITH A PLATE OF
FRESHLY CAUGHT LOBSTER

Where to stay: The treehouses at Uist Forest Retreat offer elevated views of the nearby beaches, uninhabited Vallay and the Isle of Harris, so you'll feel fully immersed in your surroundings. Their circular design might be based on Iron Age wheelhouses, but these secluded self-catering cabins are almost luxurious inside, with wood-burning stoves, free-standing bathtubs with a view – and fast wifi. The best bit? Your payment contributes to a reforestation initiative, so you'll be doing a good deed even while you sleep.

From £130 per night (minimum stay seven nights); uistforestretreat.co.uk



03

Cardigan, Wales

The scenery: Often cruelly overlooked by Wales holidaymakers – even the Welsh themselves – the mid-western coastal town of Cardigan offers the perfect combination of natural history, cultural heritage, beautiful landscape, arty sensibility and foodie appetite. It's a place to get away from it all, but nonetheless one that has it all – just with its own pace and cadence.

The remedy: Cardigan is an elixir for multiple complaints. A cultural hub sat on the estuary of the River Teifi, it's a place to accommodate both artistic types in recess and intrepid souls. In the town centre, Stiwdio 3 is a studio-cum-gallery with an adjoining shop and cafe that runs workshops in various artisan disciplines, from printmaking to bookbinding to creative writing.

Overlooking the Teifi in a riverside courtyard is Pizza Tipi, home to excellent wood-fired pizzas and local craft beers, while a stone's throw away is Cardigan Castle, a Norman fortress recently subject to a £12m restoration. But if adrenaline is more your thing, the bay and river play host to coasteering, white-water rafting, rock climbing and kayaking.

Where to stay: Fforest Farm is a place like no other – occupying 200 acres of countryside on the edge of the Teifi gorge. The setting is home to many forms of neo-rustic accommodation, ranging from crog lofts to geodesic domes to modern organic shacks. Wood, stone and canvas are the pre-eminent materials here, with a cedar barrel sauna in the woods, interspersed firepits, and wood-burning stoves providing light, warmth and energy, plus Y Bwthyn, the



best – and smallest – pub you've ever visited, converted from an old crofter's cottage. Fforest's owners James and Sian have been steadily expanding their Cardigan footprint since 2005 – it now extends to numerous sites and their boys run Pizza Tipi in the town – but the authentic, elemental, almost spiritual ethos of the place remains intact. Just don't call it glamping. *Prices vary according to time of year and type of accommodation; coldatnight.co.uk*



BOOK YOURSELF IN FOR
DINNER WITH A VIEW

04

Tintagel, Cornwall

The scenery: Kudhva, meaning 'hideout' in Cornish, is a 45-acre disused quarry in north Cornwall. That might not sound much like a rural paradise, but – well, the photos speak for themselves. Nature's been allowed to do its thing unhindered, transforming the area into a wild hideaway with rugged forests and waterfalls. Popular surfing beaches are found less than a mile away.

The remedy: For benefits such as improved circulation, immune support and bolstered mental health, opt for a guided wild swim in the lake. (No, it's not heated.) Then, if the water's not too cold for you, sign up for a surfing lesson; the Mud Van, Kudhva's 1978 Ford pick-up, will drop you at the beach. There are a few different spots for equipment hire along the coast.

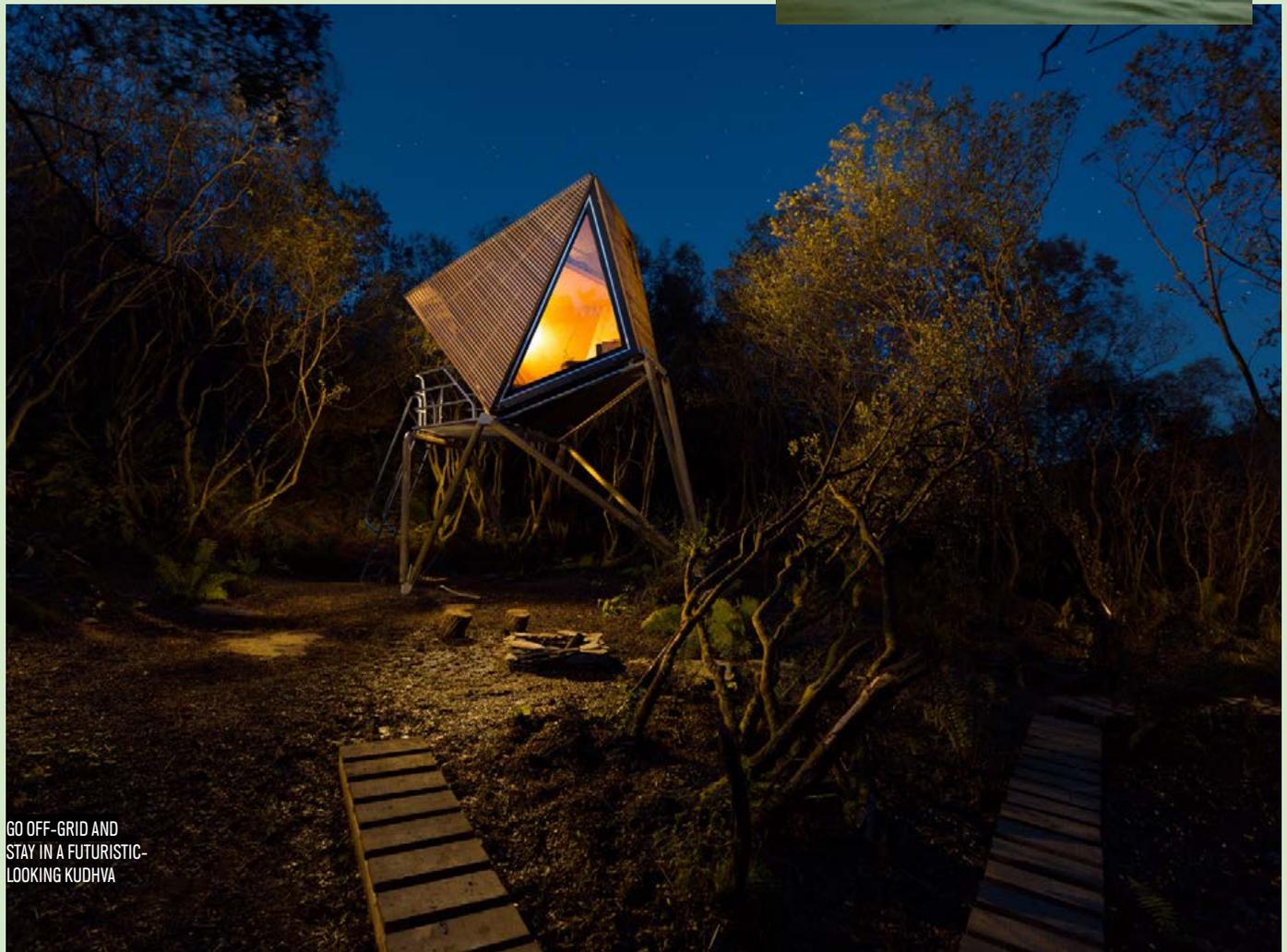
Or if dry land's more your thing, there are plenty of spots for foraging, as well as beachfront hikes. In the evening, melt away any muscle soreness in a wood-fired hot tub.

Where to stay: Choose from one of four futuristic-looking off-grid cabins (kudhvas) raised above the ground. Each is completely private and basic-yet-comfortable, with a campfire for cooking and the aforementioned hot tub. If you need a few more creature comforts, there are communal showers, toilets and a kitchen in the reception area, where you can also charge your phone – though coverage is sketchy, and do you really need to respond to those WhatsApps? An organic breakfast hamper is a must-order and there are great restaurants nearby if cooking on a campfire gets tiring,



including the St Moritz Hotel's sea-view restaurant, a 15-minute drive away. If you're travelling with a group, there's a Danish cabin for six to hire, or – if you're up for a little soul-searching – Kudhva also hosts men's retreats, led by former rugby pro Anthony Mullally. *Two-night minimum stay in a kudhva from £244; kudhva.com*

FACE THE ELEMENTS
OUT ON THE LAKE



GO OFF-GRID AND
STAY IN A FUTURISTIC-
LOOKING KUDHVA



LIVE OUT YOUR WILDEST
CHILDHOOD FANTASIES

05 Cemmaes, Wales

The scenery: Hidden in a secluded valley in the heart of the Welsh mountains, this is probably the closest you'll get to living out your best hobbit life. By all accounts, it was the small village of Sarehole near Birmingham that inspired the home Tolkien created for his diminutive characters, but just 70 miles further west in rural Powys, this charming woodland retreat is a veritable modern-day Shire.

The remedy: Powys is the largest county in Wales and an outdoors-lover's paradise, renowned for its castles, lakes, rugged landscape and deep natural beauty. But in this quiet spot, just south of Snowdonia, the vibe is one of isolation and tranquillity, rather than high stakes and adrenaline. Long walks or bike rides are the order of the day, as are peace and contemplation as and when the conditions suit. You really



are in complete synchronicity with the natural elements here, so best to go with the flow. But when in need of some social contact, the nearby town of Machynlleth has a quirky, eco-friendly vibe, while Aberystwyth is one of the most attractive seaside towns and has a stunning western coastline.

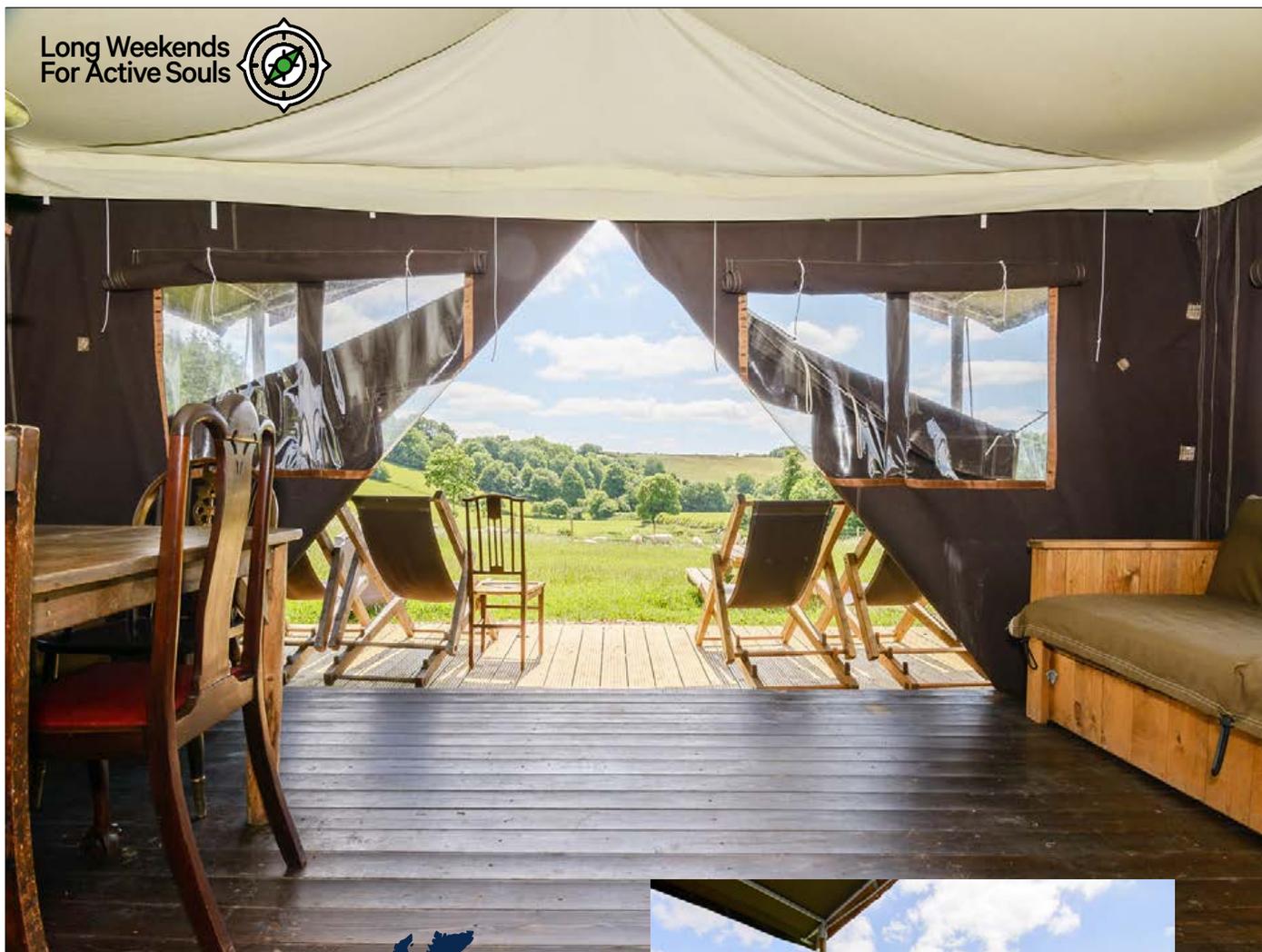
Where to stay: The Living Room has to be seen to be believed. Six treehouses, each with its own identity and layout according to the characteristics of the trunks and branches that support them, form this unique arboreal hamlet. Fusing highly technical design and architecture with organic materials and



sympathetic techniques, they scream future fantasy while simultaneously blending seamlessly into the ancient landscape. *The Sunday Times* described it as a 'Tarzan meets Richard Rogers' pad' and the references are apt: despite being high up in the tree canopies, each house features luxurious double beds, artfully curated fabrics, wood-burning stoves, spring-water showers and en suite composting toilets, all held together by state-of-the-art supporting structures. While there might not be any electricity, the experience of going off-grid is rarely so refined.

Prices vary according to time of year and type of accommodation;

living-room.co, canopyandstars.co.uk



06

Blackdown Hills, Somerset

The scenery: This pocket of tranquillity on the border between Somerset and Devon is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). So the views are, as you'd expect, pretty spectacular. With steep ridges, rivers, woodlands and fields, it's a great hiking spot, just 30 minutes from the coast. The hills are also home to rare birds and free-roaming deer.

The remedy: We prescribe heading to Thuribear Wood, an ancient woodland with paths that are lined with flowers in spring and summer, including rare orchids, primroses and bluebells. You might want to bring – or hire – a bike: there are plenty of scenic routes to test your fitness levels. One of the more challenging is a 17-mile track with some quad-burning hills and exhilarating downhills, from Stockland via



Yarcombe, Whitestaunton and Membury. Afterwards, call in at The Kings Arms in Stockland and refuel with a locally sourced dinner, such as Dartmoor beef burgers, wild mushroom ragu or a West Country cheese board. Bringing the kids? Go hunting for fossils at Lyme Regis beach on the Jurassic Coast, less than half an hour's drive away – also a perfectly suitable pastime for curious adults.

Where to stay: Go glamping at Feather Down Wambrook Farm. It's within the AONB, so opening the canvas doors each day reveals a view of the woodlands, hedgerows and rolling hillsides that will clear any residual thoughts about your



office inbox. The tents don't have electricity, so be prepared to spend the first half of your morning getting a fire going in the stove so you can boil a kettle and fry up some farm eggs. You can stroll across fields to the nearby village pub for dinner, enjoy a late-night local beer from the honesty shop and even have a crack at making a margherita in the communal pizza oven. There's an option to book all six tents, meaning up to 25 of your family and friends can get their fix of nature together. *From £60pp for two nights based on a group stay, one tent from £470 for two nights; featherdown.co.uk*



ENJOY HOME COMFORTS AT SHEPHERD'S COTTAGE

07 Yorkshire Dales National Park

The scenery: We doubt we'll need to sell this one too hard. The Yorkshire Dales are known for their stunning features, from rolling hills to the hidden world of underground caves. Low levels of light pollution mean you can enjoy the vast, star-studded night skies, too.

The remedy: Disconnect from everyday life and get back to nature on a hike up one of the Three Peaks. Pen-y-ghent's the smallest; it takes three to four hours to summit from Horton-in-Ribblesdale, and you'll be rewarded with panoramic views of the Dales. Want to take things up a gear, cardiovascular-wise? This is a great location for fell running, or bring a bike and tackle some of the peaks and troughs of the cycle routes made famous by the Tour de France. For adventure at a slower pace, visit White Scar Cave, just outside Ingleton, where you can travel a mile underground along walkways passing stalagmites and giant caverns.

Where to stay: If campsites aren't your thing, book into Shepherd's Cottage at A Corner Of Eden in the north of the Dales. It offers all the home comforts you need after a day exploring, biking or caving. It's self-catering with a fully equipped kitchen, but if you don't want to cook, The Fat Lamb pub is just a stroll away. But it's best to plan ahead: this spot's so popular it gets booked up well in advance, so get in there early.

From £775 for three nights; acornerofeden.co.uk



08 North Norfolk

The scenery: An hour's drive from Norwich and roughly 30 minutes from the historic port town of King's Lynn, you'll find the grounds of Houghton Hall. Its 1,000 acres of parkland and woodland are home to rare white fallow deer, with twisting wilderness paths dating back to the 18th century and Bronze Age burial mounds or 'barrows'.

The remedy: There's plenty to explore on the estate itself. Culture fans can start by wandering down to Houghton's Sculpture Park, which showcases work from world-renowned artists across the gardens and grounds. Because who wants to be stuck indoors at this time of year? Or book a guided tour of nearby Wild Ken Hill, a 'rewilding reserve' and sustainable farm with woodlands, marshes and free-roaming ponies, cattle, pigs and beavers. Cyclists can hire a bike from Holkham Hall, close to the coast, which has a mix of woodland and lakeside routes where you can spot waterfowl, butterflies and dragonflies. Craving sea air? Head down to Holkham beach – or anywhere along the 80-mile-plus Norfolk Coast Path – for seafood, boat trips and other coastal activities.

Where to stay: Go off-grid: Unyoked operates a series of cabins in remote locations. Its dog-friendly, lakeside cabin Rex is hidden away in the



woodland on Houghton Hall estate, where the only sounds likely to disturb your peace are the hoots of its resident barn owl. The cabin is solar powered and eco-friendly with a hot shower, gas stove, mini fridge and composting toilet. (Well, you're not an animal.) Enjoy a simple home-cooked meal and cold beer by the outdoor firepit at sunset, or head to one of the area's many excellent pubs, including The Dabbling Duck in Massingham and The Rose and Crown in Harpley – a former Camra winner with a range of real ale and small-batch craft lager.

From £154 per night, two-night minimum stay; unyoked.co



HOLE UP QUIETLY IN THIS HIDDEN LAKESIDE CABIN

THE MH DIRECTORY

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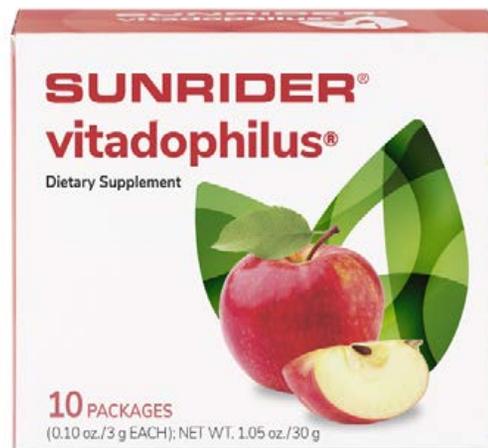
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Our dedication to quality is evident in every product we offer. We use only the best materials to ensure that our products are durable, comfortable, and stylish. Whether you're looking for knee sleeves, weightlifting belts, or hand grips for protection, Reyllen has got you covered.

We also understand that every athlete has different needs, which is why we offer a range of products that cater to different workout styles. Whether you're into weightlifting, cardio, or bodyweight exercises, Reyllen has the gear you need to take your workouts to the next level.

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THE MH DIRECTORY

Look good and feel great with this selection of life-enhancing products



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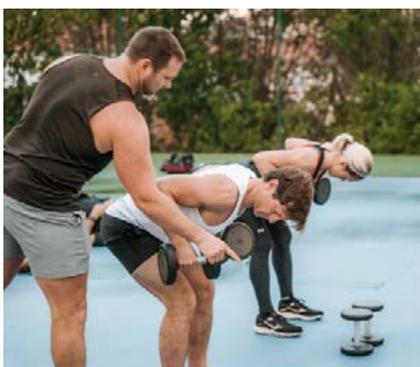
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Did you know that wellness travel experiences are one of the hottest trends of 2023? If you're pushing to get fit or fitter this summer, head straight to Workout Away for five-star-rated fitness retreats in paradise!

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Workout Away retreats are open to all levels, and you'll spend your time with their highly regarded UK trainer team as they guide you through your wellness escape. Join a Workout Away retreat as a solo traveller, or bring along a friend or partner.



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MONDAINE PRESENTS ITS NEW ULTRA-CONTEMPORARY CUSHION COLLECTION

The new Cushion Collection features a selection of watches in two different sizes (31mm and 41mm watch cases) made with the brand's iconic Swiss railway style featuring the historic red second hand. The collection is inspired by vintage design that pays tribute to the brand's history and heritage. This is a collection outside of the circular norm that surely will make you stand out. The watches feature a square case with rounded corners as well as perfectly integrated double-domed sapphire crystal, which is extremely strong and scratch resistant. Perfect to transition from business to leisure, the watch's ergonomic and ultra-elegant, curved shape allows clothes to glide over it, making it not only easy on the eyes but easy to wear too.



If sustainability is important to you this brand is perfect for you. MONDAINE is committed to protecting and preserving the planet for generations to come. It is one of the world's first comprehensively CO2-neutral brands (scopes 1, 2, and 3 of the Greenhouse Gas Protocol) thanks to its efforts over the past decades implementing the 3 Rs: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.

On top, it has moved to using only vegan straps while it produces with green energy with up to 80% coming from its own photovoltaic solar power system. Get your new MONDAINE watch, an eternally adaptable design that doesn't get stuck in any one era.

Available in selected specialist retailers and at mondaine.com

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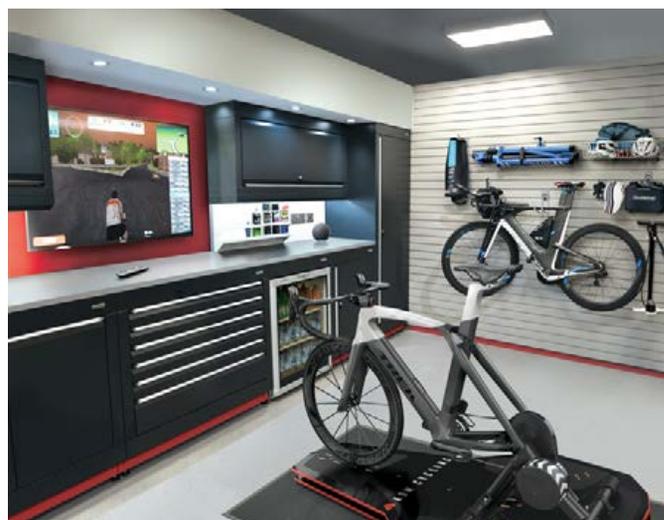
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ONE WORD ANSWER #77

QUESTION

What bittersweet tonic can help you win office battles?



A BURST OF CITRUS
COULD AVERT
AN OFFICE CLASH

ANSWER

Lemonade

As a somewhat health-conscious nation, we've grown used to the trope that we are what we eat. Anyone who works in an office, however, knows that one of these words is wrong: you are what you drink.

You have the builder's tea drinker: solid, dependable. Then there's the guy with the cafetière: bit precious but worth keeping on side in case you need some jump leads. As for the camomile crew, the less said the better. The point is, we Brits are creatures of habit. However, new research

suggests that the next time work tensions are running near boiling point, you'd do well to think outside the set menu.

A study in the *Journal Of Consumer Research* showed that the temperature of the drink we're holding has emotional power. Participants experiencing 'heated' emotions – frustration, guilt, anger – felt notably calmer after grasping a chilled glass. Scientists posit this could help put the brakes on rash decisions by cooling the hot-headed.

For once, avoiding sugar might not be the smartest strategy

either. Ohio State University found that people who drank a glass of chilled lemonade showed greater empathy towards others than those who simply took sweeteners. Patience requires mental energy; glucose could well provide that vim.

So if you suspect your next work meeting might rouse a few tempers, make sure the office fridge is well stocked. But perhaps pop the kettle on, too. You know – in case things really kick off.

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