

Suffering from the winter blues? Here's how to cure yourself

WORK

- 1 If you're not doing something you enjoy, it's time to leave. Use my "before you start" exercise (below) to work out what you DO want to be doing then make yourself a plan of action for how to get there.
- 2 If you can't leave, work out why you're not enjoying it. Is it the people or the workload? Is it too challenging or not challenging enough? Think about what you would do to change things and take action. If you need more responsibility, ask for it. If you want to move desks, tell your boss. If the workload is too heavy, suggest ways it could be better shared. If you approach people with solutions they're far more likely to say "yes".
- 3 Make a list of the things you DO like about your job and work out how to maximise those. If you really like interacting with customers try to work out how you can spend more of your time doing that.
- 4 Being promoted above your ability can also lead to stress. Don't go for a promotion unless you know exactly what the job will involve. If you get promoted and find you can't do it, admit it as soon as possible. Feeling pressured to do something you can't is a lot more stressful in the long run than owning up.
- 5 When you are going for a promotion write a business plan setting out why the promotion or new job should be yours. Write your strengths, weaknesses and any training needs you might have. Flagging these things up - if only to yourself - will help you to

MONEY

- 6 You HAVE to work out what you can and can't afford and stick to it. Factor in your salary, rent or mortgage payments, energy bills, council tax, TV and phone bills. Then work out what your monthly spend is on food and groceries and, if you can, include "extras" such as cosmetics, clothes and socialising. Be really honest with yourself - pretending you can afford things you can't will only lead to more stress long-term.
- 7 Find free things to do. Look in your local listings guide and online for free events and days out near you. And remember, a summer holiday is NOT compulsory. There are plenty of places to go for days out here in the UK.
- 8 Find ways to give yourself an incentive. Set yourself a deadline for completing a goal - whether it's arranging a meeting with your boss or sitting down for a talk with your partner - and reward yourself when you complete it.

FITNESS

- 9 First of all, take the pressure off. Everybody sets themselves crazy goals at New Year and by now they've given up. Have another look at the goals you made and see how you can amend them to make them more manageable. Go in small steps. When it comes to losing weight aim for "half a stone in six months" rather than "a stone in six weeks".
- 10 Drink at least two litres of water a day. Dehydration will make you feel tired, sluggish and physically unwell. If you want to combat stress you need to be alert and energised.
- 11 Don't push yourself to do something you hate. Find a sport you enjoy - perhaps running, football, dancing or swimming - and stick to that. Find easy ways to work exercise into your day. Walk or cycle to work or go for a walk around the block during your lunch break.
- 12 Lack of sleep will make even minor irritations feel 10 times worse. You need to get eight hours a night in order to be able to face the day with a clear head. Having a bedtime ritual will help you relax even if it's just a cup of tea and a chapter of your book before you go to sleep.

25 ways to put the spring back into your life

BY FRANCESCA COOKNEY

IT'S the time of year we all get a little down in the dumps.

Seasonal Affective Disorder - also known as winter depression - affects about 2million people in the UK, but it's not just the short, dark days that are making us miserable.

British workers are reporting more stress, anxiety, and depression than anywhere else in the world right now, according to an OECD study.

But don't worry, spring is just around the corner - and today we're sharing 25 great ways for you to shake off the winter blues.

They're from former high-flyer Mark Newey, 54, who was forced to re-evaluate his life after a breakdown in 1998 and is now a life coach.

To outsiders he was living the dream - his high-powered marketing job took him round the world. And he was earning a salary which provided him and his family with the kind of home and lifestyle he thought he wanted. But in reality he was on the brink of exhaustion, busting a gut in a job he didn't enjoy. He never saw his wife, Vicki, and their three daughters and never spoke to his friends.

He promised himself and his family, who live in Cambridge, to banish stress and unhappiness from his life for good. Here he shows you how you can do it too...



Before you start... try this quick exercise

Life coach and psychotherapist Mark (pictured) suggests you begin by writing down his top 10 life values in order of priority. They are: freedom, security, equality, compassion, humility, vitality, respect, tolerance, openness and passion. Give each area of your life a mark out of 10 for that value. So if freedom is on your list and you are self-employed, you should score a high mark for you. But if you value spontaneity and your partner is very routine-driven, you would score a low mark in the relationship category. Wherever there's an imbalance - when you're scoring low on something you value highly - this means something in your life has to change.

SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS

- 13 Communication is the key to a successful relationship. If yours feels like it's not working, the most important thing is to TALK about it. People change, their priorities and goals change. You can't expect to want the same things you wanted when you first got together. Try to have an update chat every six months or so to evaluate where you're at and where you want to go next.
- 14 Schedule "us time". Even if it just means cooking a meal at home together, going for a walk on a Sunday afternoon or having a quiet drink in the pub. Spending time together away from the distractions of your home, job and the demands of your kids is absolutely essential. If you have to pay a babysitter, so be it. Your relationship with your partner is worth the investment.
- 15 If you're in a relationship that's not right, get out. There are no two ways about it. Make the decision and take action. If "now isn't the right time" - you have a big project on at work, the kids are doing exams or you have to get through a family wedding - that's fine, but make sure you give yourself a deadline.
- 16 Same goes for friendships. Some friendships are really toxic, either because the friend is incredibly needy and doesn't give back or we're in competition with them all the time. Friendships should work both ways. If you're not getting anything from it or it's making you feel stressed and insecure, it's not being selfish to finish it.
- 17 If you're looking for love make sure you know what you're looking for before you throw yourself into something that's wrong for you. Make a list of what you really want in a relationship - good conversation, shared interests, security - and keep them in mind when you are dating new people.
- 18 Make time for sex. The hormones released during sex can help you relax. Plus it will benefit your relationship - and it's fun! So try to make it a priority. If you need to go to bed earlier to fit it in, do.



FAMILY

- 19 Get the children to help out around the house. Get them vacuuming, doing the washing up or sorting laundry. It will encourage them to feel part of the household and help with the setting of boundaries. Plus it will ease the burden on you.
- 20 Do things together as a family - and that doesn't include watching telly. Get out of the house. Go for a bike ride, wrap up warm and have a picnic or a treasure hunt in the park or drive to another town for a look around, just for a change of scene.
- 21 To foster better relationships, eat dinner as a family as often as possible. Ask each other about your different days and really listen to each other.
- 22 Set boundaries, for example on how much time is spent on homework and how much on the computer. Do it together. By sitting down with your children and working out sensible rules, not only will they feel more in control but you will be able to create a structure they can stick to. Once you've agreed, write them down where they can be seen, on a blackboard or in a frame on the wall. Then make sure you stick to them. You could even get everyone to sign them - a family contract if you like.



GENERAL HAPPINESS

- 23 Schedule some "screen-free" time into every day. Try to go for just an hour without looking at your phone, your TV or your computer. Move your social life offline - instead of tweeting or emailing someone, call them and arrange to meet.
- 24 Make time for your hobbies and interests. Think back to what you used to enjoy at school - drawing, singing in the choir, woodwork - and see if you can find a class or group to join.
- 25 Live for now, not for the future. Instead of focusing on what you think you need in your life, think about what makes you happy now. Focus on spending more time on that. Think about what's on your list of aspirations - do you really need those things to make you happy? Chances are you just need to spend more time on the things that already make you happy.



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