

Rebuild your... **psyche**

By the time you read this England are likely to have again failed to live up to the hype and suffered another premature World Cup exit. Don't get us wrong: we hope as much as you that 44 – count 'em – years of hurt will come to a glorious end in South Africa. But they probably won't – and it's going to hurt. So we're here to help.

More than a game

The World Cup is so much more than just a few games of football, says Dr Abigail San, a chartered clinical psychologist. 'It gives us a clear, collective national identity and a sense of togetherness and belonging that is missing from society today. It makes us feel part of something important!'

This hype causes feelgood endorphins to be released, resulting in feelings of elation and excitement. An England victory causes a surge of testosterone and you feel incredible. It's addictive – but anything less than outright victory leads to an inevitable low.

'Disappointment at not achieving what we really want is always crushing,' says San. 'But failing at the World Cup is harder to swallow because our emotions are so entwined with the team's performance – we can even feel as though we failed as individuals, we have invested so much in the team – and because the opportunity only comes once every four

years.' As levels of the stress hormone cortisol soar, serotonin production grinds to a halt and we feel jaded, sluggish and depressed.

Anti-climax

Even if the miracle happens and England lift the famous trophy, you still may feel a bit down once the final's over. After a month of non-stop football, where the rules of your daily routine have gone out of the window, you are bound to experience an anti-climax as normal life resumes,' says psychologist

Dr Victoria Galbraith (counsellingpsychologist.org). To prevent this, have something to look forward to. 'Plan a day out with mates doing something that gets the adrenaline pumping, such as paintballing or climbing. Replicate the drama, thrill and excitement that the World Cup has been providing,' Galbraith says.

Remember the best bits

Still down in the dumps about another four empty years before the next

tournament? 'Try to take as many positives from the tournament as possible,' adds Galbraith. 'Which English players excited? Of the younger guys, who did enough to show that the future will be bright? And remember that while it hurts now, time is a great healer.'

'Failing at the World Cup is hard to swallow because our emotions are so entwined with the team's performance'

She's right. Take three tournaments from the 1980s. Elimination was agony at the time, but watch the highlights now and they're electrifying. Think David Platt's pirouette and volley against Belgium at Italia 90, Gazza's scoop and finish (and subsequent celebration) against Scotland in Euro 96, or a teenage Michael Owen skinning the entire Argentine defence to score the goal of France 98. It's enough to make a grown man cry tears of happiness.