

Meet the team

OUR EXPERTS



Dr Carol Cooper is a GP and health writer who also broadcasts on TV and radio.



Ian Marber runs The Food Doctor nutrition clinic and is a best-selling author.



Nicki Waterman is one of the UK's leading fitness experts and personal trainers.



Jane Alexander is an expert in natural health, with a special interest in living holistically.



Dr Kate Saffin is a GP with a particular interest in healthy diet and lifestyle issues.



Susan Quilliam is a psychologist and renowned agony aunt, specialising in relationships.



Dr Kate Cavanagh is a clinical psychologist and a member of the British Psychological Society.



Peter Bowen-Simpkins is a gynaecologist and medical director of the London Women's Clinic.



Dr Christian Jessen is a GP and presenter of the Channel 4 show, *Embarrassing Bodies*.



Juliette Kellow is a dietician with a wealth of experience in food and nutrition.



Sophie Michell is an award-winning chef, TV presenter and author of several books.



Mark Hix is a celebrated chef, restaurateur and author of numerous cookbooks.

Behind THE SCENES

Here are some of the people who helped make this issue so special...

CONTRIBUTING THIS MONTH

LAURA MERCIER is a world-renowned make-up artist and creator of Laura Mercier Cosmetics. Discover her step-by-step secrets for flawless foundation on page 86.

What's your best beauty secret?

'Use concealer to camouflage dark circles and minor imperfections, followed by translucent powder.'

How do you get a glow for a night out?

'I dust my complexion with a little bronzer.'

What's your favourite beauty treat?

'I always feel a million dollars after a bath. I love the scent bath oils leave on my skin, particularly rose.'



MATTHEW BARBOUR

is a leading health journalist who writes for *Men's Health*, *Red* and *The Times*, among others. This month, on page 26 he reports on whether sexism is preventing women getting the best health treatment.

What's your top health tip? 'Cycle or walk as much as you can, and drink plenty of water.'

How do you relax? 'With exercise or by playing with my children, who have no concept of stress!'

What's your healthy-living motto? 'You never regret going to the gym, but you almost always regret not going.'

DR VICTORIA GALBRAITH

is a counselling psychologist and senior lecturer at the University of Worcester. Turn to page 32, where she offers advice on how to beat the Disease To Please.

What keeps you content? 'A work-life balance is vital. I try to find time for my friends, family and me.'

How do you manage your time? 'I write a list, then prioritise certain items on it – there's nothing more therapeutic than crossing things off that to-do list!'

What's the key to a happy relationship?

'I follow the "three Cs": communication, compliments and compromise. And I try to avoid another "C" – criticism.' □



'HELP, I'VE GOT THE DISEASE TO PLEASE!'



Tired of prioritising the needs of others over her own, Beth Gibbons looks at why more women than ever are risking their health to keep other people happy

When my friend Jo came over yesterday for pre-Christmas drinks, she remarked how immaculate the house looked and politely marvelled at the Nigella-worthy mince pies I served up. What Jo didn't know was that I'd been up since 5am screaming at my two children to get ready, while I hung holly around the house, wrapped elaborate ribbons around endless presents and wrestled with home-made pastry. Jo only stayed an hour, but it's hardly surprising that I can't shake the cough I've had for weeks when I go to such exhausting lengths to gain other people's approval.

A quick look at my closest friends suggests I'm not alone – and that their health is suffering, too. Michelle, 39, has just invited her entire (not to mention huge) family to stay for a week over Christmas, despite already being so stressed that she has high blood pressure. Our mutual friend Louise, 42, is no better. Head of marketing

for a cosmetics company, she's agreed to work over the entire Christmas period, even though she desperately needs a break – and has the stress migraines to prove it.

It's the new epidemic

But the Disease To Please doesn't just raise its head at Christmas. It's a problem that's reaching epidemic proportions. One in four women now suffers from depression or anxiety in middle age, according to a survey by the NHS Information Centre, and it's believed the pressure we put on ourselves is partly to blame for this figure being so high. 'Keeping everybody happy means spreading yourself extremely thin,' warns counselling psychologist Dr Victoria Galbraith (www.galbraithconsultancy.com). 'You begin to neglect your physical health, while suppressing stress and resentment can lead to depression and anxiety.'

Tellingly, both of these conditions are now twice as common in women as in men.

'It's really no coincidence,' says psychologist Donna Dawson (www.donnadawson.co.uk).

'These days, women are far more likely to pursue a career at the same time as having babies, arranging childcare, keeping on top of things at home, looking after ailing parents... you name it. Frankly, "having it all" is a con. It simply means we *do* it all.'

So, in that case, why do we continue to put ourselves through it? 'To a certain extent, I think we're hardwired to please,' continues Dr Galbraith. 'Humans are social animals, after all. Problems occur, however, when that desire to meet other people's approval comes at the expense of our own health and happiness.'

Something it seems that women, in particular, are especially prone to. 'Little girls are now being raised to be people pleasers,' says Dr Cecilia D'Felice, clinical psychologist and author of *21 Days To A New You* (£7.99, Orion). 'From the start, we're taught to be sweet, kind and >



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nurturing – all valuable skills for a woman's traditional role of raising a family.'

Fuelled by low-self esteem

While being a people pleaser might not sound like such a terrible thing at face value (on a good day I like to think of myself as generous, giving and kind), constantly putting others first at the risk of neglecting our own wellbeing is actually a symptom of low self-esteem. Indeed, the very nurturing skills that helped women succeed in the past may be working against us these days, particularly in the workplace where it usually pays to be assertive. 'There's also the fact that taking on more means we're opening ourselves up to the increased likelihood of failure,' says Dr D'Felice. 'Which is why so many of us live with a constant feeling of inadequacy.'

As the late Dr Harriet Braiker pointed out in her bestselling book, *The Disease To Please* (£12, McGraw-Hill), a people pleaser's self-worth is so tied up with gaining the approval of others, they'll do anything to please – at any cost to themselves. And the cost, shown in the number of us who say we don't have the time to eat well or exercise regularly, or who suffer from stress-related health problems, is high.

My mother is always despairing at the amount I take on, telling me how much easier things were when she was my age – and this is a woman who raised five children. The difference is there were fewer expectations in her day. Back then, being a mum – and all the cooking, washing and cleaning that went with it – was considered a full-time job in itself. Fast forward 36 years and I juggle a career as a freelance writer with running around after two small children and a constant feeling of inadequacy (thanks to the likes of Gina Ford and Annabel Karmel). So rather than patting myself on the back for keeping all the plates spinning, I find myself focusing on all the things I should have done, or could have done better, and feel like a failure.

Modern-day triggers

I suppose it's not just our friends and family we strive to please, but society in general. And the goalposts keep moving. Having a successful career and a well-used Aga is no longer enough: we have to look polished at all times, too. Hardly surprising, then, that a recent YouGov poll found 85% of

us are unhappy with our bodies. It has been 17 months since I had my second child and I still can't squeeze into my size 12 jeans. Meanwhile, every new celebrity mother seems to be ping-pong back into her sexy, silhouette-hugging dresses before she even leaves the maternity ward.

'You have to realise that this is not reality,' says Dr D'Felice. 'Celebrities have huge teams of staff dedicated to perfecting their image. How can you possibly compete? Plus, the irony is that these are women who are starving themselves when they should be taking time out to enjoy their new baby. They're seeking approval on a global scale to make up for their own self-worth issues.'

Treating the Disease To Please

The problem with comparing yourself to others is that you'll always fall short, adds Dr Galbraith. 'There'll always be someone with a tidier house or a glossier wardrobe. Rather than aspire to these things, you need to question why you want them in the first place. Will any of it make you happier?'

Dawson doubts it. 'Status symbols are merely a way of making us feel more worthy in the eyes of society,' she says. 'Unfortunately, the Range Rover has to be paid for, the immaculate home has to be tidied, the size 8 jeans have to

be starved into... all of which erodes our happiness and health, in the long term.'

So how do we go about making *ourselves* happy, rather than everyone else? Awareness of your behaviour is key, says Dr Galbraith. 'If you find yourself feeling strung out, resentful or dwelling on what other people think, then alarm bells should be ringing,' she says. 'Be honest. Are you doing this for yourself or for others? If the answer is the latter, it's time to start exercising your right to say "no".'

For those who struggle with the word, Dr Galbraith has this tip: 'Practise by saying it in response to something little. For example: "I'd love to do coffee, but why don't we meet up at a café rather than at mine?" When you see that the world hasn't stopped turning, you can be a little bolder,' she says. 'Try moving onto things like: "I'm afraid I can't do coffee this week, I'm a little busy right now," or "You know what, I've got so much on at the moment, it would be really helpful if you could make dinner tonight."'

The next step is to prioritise. 'Think about what makes you feel happy and healthy, then free up more time to do that by letting other things slide,' says Dawson. 'Apart from anything, it's better

to do a couple of things well than a whole load of things badly. The sense of achievement you gain will do more to boost your self-esteem than pleasing others ever could.'

Personally, my priority now has to be to do things that make *me* feel good. So I've vowed to cure my Disease To Please by putting myself first a bit more. If that means I don't have time to keep the house completely spotless or deck the halls with boughs of holly, so be it. And I'll be buying the mince pies from M&S from now on... □



7 signs you've caught it!

The following are all classic symptoms of the Disease To Please. Tick just a couple and your health and wellbeing could be at risk, so you need to rethink your choices.

- 1 Friends always say what a great listener you are – right before they burden you with their latest problem.
- 2 You often find yourself saying 'yes' when your heart is shouting 'no'.
- 3 You constantly feel guilty for letting others down.
- 4 You'd rather feel miserable than risk upsetting others.
- 5 There are times you have so much on that you feel like crying.
- 6 You use the words 'I must' and 'I really should' on a regular basis.
- 7 You rarely open up to people about what you're genuinely thinking and sometimes feel isolated.

'Putting others before ourselves is a symptom of low self-esteem'

