

# yourhealth

2008 Edition Issue 1 YW

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## Get fit for the New Year

Your essential guide to healthy eating, losing weight and avoiding the winter stresses and strains



The Somerfield Hospital



# love food

# love Slimming World



A world of smiles is waiting for you here:

## MONDAY

**Broadstairs**  
Portland Hall  
Hopeville Ave, St Peters, 8.00pm  
Tel: Patricia 01304 366986

**Canterbury**  
Canterbury High School  
Canterbury Campus, Knight Ave,  
6.30pm  
Tel: Suzy 01227 752758

**Hawkinge**  
Churchill School  
Haven Drive 6.00pm  
Tel: Claire 01303 893349

**Ashford - South Willesborough**  
East Stour School  
Earlsworth Road 6.00pm  
Tel: Louise 01233 662902

**Ashford - Charing**  
Charing Parish Hall  
Station Road 6.00pm  
Tel: Angela 01233 621497

## TUESDAY

**NEW GROUP** opens 8th Jan  
**Dymchurch**  
The Ship Inn, Function Building  
118 High Street 6.00pm  
Tel: Angela 01233 621497

**NEW VENUE** from 8th Jan  
**Ashford**  
The Wyvern School  
Great Chart Bypass 7.30pm  
Tel: Julia 01233 661978

**Ramsgate**  
St Benedicts Church Hall  
Whitehall Road 10.00am  
Tel: Sarah 01843 831682

**Cliftonville**  
Holy Trinity Church  
St Mary's Avenue  
6.00pm  
Tel: Tracy 01843 835220

**Deal**  
The Landmark Centre  
High Street 6.00pm  
Tel: Patricia 01304 366986

**Garlinge**  
Garlinge Methodist Church  
Canterbury Road  
6.00pm & 7.30pm  
Tel: Barbara 01843 835677

**Whitfield, Dover**  
Whitfield Village Hall  
Sandwich Road 6.00pm  
Tel: Claire 01303 893349

**Cheriton, Folkestone**  
St Josephs Church Hall  
Narrabeen Road  
6.00pm  
Tel: Theresa 01303 279317

**Ashford**  
The Elwick Club  
Church Road 10am  
Tel: Sue 01797 270452

**Chestfield**  
W.I. Hall  
Chestfield Road 6.00pm  
Tel: Jackie 01227 752704

**Faversham**  
Baptist Church Hall  
Institute Road  
6.30pm & 8.00pm  
Tel: Sally 01227 751640

## WEDNESDAY

**NEW CONSULTANT**  
**South Ashford**  
St Frances CofE Church Hall  
Cryol Road 5.30pm & 7.00pm  
Tel: Keli 01233 663703

**NEW VENUE**  
**Chartham, Canterbury**  
Chartham Village Hall  
Station Road 6.00pm  
Tel: Jackie 01227 752704

**NEW VENUE**  
**Whitstable**  
Our Lady Immaculate, Parish  
Social Centre, 15a Castle Road  
5.30pm & 7.00pm  
Tel: Sally 01227 751640

**Deal**  
St Leonards Hall  
London Road  
10.00am & 7.00pm  
Tel: Patricia 01304 366986

**Ramsgate**  
St Benedicts Church Hall  
Whitehall Road  
6.30pm  
Tel: Barbara 01843 835677

**Birchington**  
Kearns Hall  
Grenham Bay Ave  
6.00pm & 7.30pm  
Tel: Sarah 01843 831682

**Herne Bay**  
St Peters Church  
Herne Drive 9.30am  
Tel: Sally 01227 751640

Salvation Army Hall  
33 Richmond Street 6.30pm  
Tel: Suzy 01227 752758

**Faversham**  
Baptist Church Hall  
Institute Road 6.30pm  
Tel: Emma 01795 472747

**Aylesham**  
Stephen Bicker Hall  
Aylesham Baptist Free Church  
Dorman Avenue South  
6.00pm  
Tel: Claire 01303 893349

**Folkestone**  
Salvation Army Hall  
75-79 Canterbury Road 6.00pm  
Tel: Theresa 01303 279317

**Hythe**  
Light Railway Restaurant  
(Hall at Rear)  
Scanlons Bridge Road  
5.30pm & 7.00pm  
Tel: Alethea 01303 264685

**Ashford**  
The Julie Rose Stadium  
Wilkesborough Road  
5.30pm & 7.00pm  
Tel: Sue 01797 270452

**Tenterden**  
Tenterden Infant School  
Recreation Ground Road  
6.00pm  
Tel: Philippa 01797 270251

## THURSDAY

**NEW CONSULTANT**  
**Ashford, Willesborough**  
The Norton Knatchbull School  
Hythe Road 6.00pm & 7.30pm  
Tel: Louise 01233 662902

**Ramsgate**  
St Lukes Church Hall  
St Lukes Ave  
5.45pm & 7.15pm  
Tel: Linda 01843 589372

**Broadstairs**  
Portland Hall  
Hopeville Ave 7.15pm  
Tel: Patricia 01304 366986

**Canterbury**  
St Martins and St Pauls  
Parish Centre Hall, Church Street  
5.45pm  
Tel: Sally 01227 751640

**Dover**  
Curzon Hall  
Curzon Road 5.30pm  
Tel: Lesley 01304 206362

**New Romney**  
Assembly Rooms  
Church Approach  
5.30pm & 7.00pm  
Tel: Liz 01797 366202

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# Welcome to Your Health

Let us help you get the New Year off to a healthier and happier start



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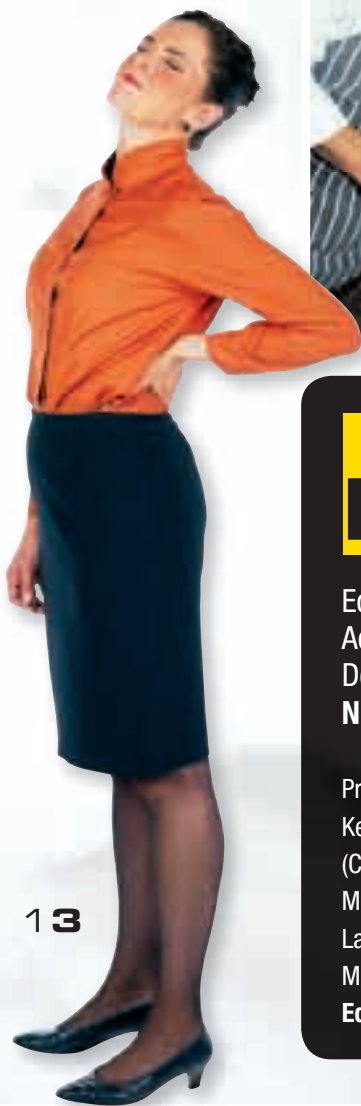
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Editor: **Andy Rayfield**  
Advertising: **Paul Farrelly**  
Design: **Colin Fielder,**  
**Nick Smith**

Printed and published by  
Kent Messenger Ltd  
(Chairman Geraldine Allinson),  
Messenger House, New Hythe Lane,  
Larkfield, Aylesford, Kent,  
ME20 6SG  
Editorial: 01622 794573

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one**life** one**club**

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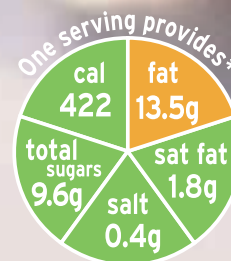
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Bannatyne's Health Club  
[www.bannatyne.co.uk](http://www.bannatyne.co.uk)

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*Jamie  
XX*

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# get fit

**Joining a health club – perhaps the most often broken resolution.**

**But you don't have to sign up to weeks of muscle wrenching in a weight room. Andy Rayfield discovers the acceptable way to get fit at Bannatyne's Health Club.**

Pictures: Paul Dennis

I confess at the outset, I'm a reformed health clubber. More years ago than I care to remember I joined a gym and lasted about, ooh, three weeks. The sweaty little room with some tatty weights tucked away in a dank corner of a council-run leisure centre really didn't appeal.

Then last year the realisation hit home that having given up sport and no longer having a dog to walk, the middle age spread was, well, spreading.

I was surprised and delighted to find that in the years that had passed since my previous abortive effort, gyms have become health clubs and are a whole lot more appealing.

So if you're reading this on the sofa at home and the Christmas excesses are sitting uncomfortably around your mid-rift, what can you expect if you decide to do something about it?

Understanding and a sensible regime for a start, as Gareth Carter, Health and Fitness Manager at Bannatyne's Health Club in Broadstairs explained.

"When a new member comes along to the gym for the first time we give them a full induction so they can see everything there is to do and we carry out a full fitness assessment so we can judge their exercise regime properly," said Gareth, 26, from Herne Bay.

And don't worry that that exercise regime will involve uncomfortable looking exercises with weights and dumbbells

"If someone is coming to us to help with weightloss we will be working on their heart rate," said Gareth.

So, you can expect to start your session with five minutes on the treadmill. The state-of-the-art equipment at Bannatyne's makes exercising easy. Each treadmill has an auto start function which means you just press a button and you are off.

Your instructor will have worked with you to judge the level you need to be running at so that your heart rate is at its optimum rate – too slow and it won't be helping you at all, too fast and you are getting into dangerous territory.

Every piece of fitness equipment at

Bannatyne's has a built-in TV set which you can plug a head set into. Or there are plenty of large screen TVs dotted from the ceiling. The result is that your mind is taken off the hard work your body is doing and, before you know it, it's time to move onto the next exercise. And that next exercise is the cross-trainer which works legs and arms together, before moving onto the rowing machine and finally the exercise bike.

That set of exercises three times a week would last a month.

"At the end of that time, you can talk with your instructor and decide what the next step is," said Gareth.

"You might want to move onto doing some weight work or you might want to step up the cardio-vascular side."

But what of the benefits? "You'll feel better at the end of your first visit," said Gareth. "As soon as you have finished your exercises the endorphins are rushing through your body giving you a real buzz."

"After a fortnight you will have lost about 3lbs so you will already be able to see real results."

## Find us at:

Ashford. Unit 2, Lower Terrace,  
Eureka Leisure Park. 01233  
653700, Fax: 01233 653711

Broadstairs. Westwood Farm,  
Westwood Road, Broadstairs.  
01843 600606, Fax: 01843 600608

Folkestone. Shearway Business  
Park, Folkestone. 01303  
270888, Fax: 01303  
275706







**B**annatyne Fitness is the UK's largest independent health club operator, with 62 clubs across England, Scotland and Wales.

The Bannatyne's Health Clubs chain began 11 years ago on Teesside. The idea was born following a skiing accident after which chairman Duncan Bannatyne, right, now well known to TV viewers as one of the fearsome entrepreneurs on BBC TV's Dragons Den, needed regular exercise to recover. He could not find facilities locally and decided to use some of the proceeds from the sale of a previous business to establish the chain. Bannatyne's provides its members with a wide range of exercise and wellbeing opportunities to support their healthy lifestyles. Fully equipped gymnasiums, featuring the latest in cardiovascular and resistance training equipment, are supplemented by multiple fitness studios offering, on average, more than 60 group exercise classes a week.

The clubs also feature relaxing and stylish wet areas, which include deck level swimming pools, large spa baths and sauna and steam rooms. The majority of the clubs provide free car parking for members and all of the health clubs are fully-air conditioned and incorporate high quality changing areas. Bannatyne's Health Clubs also combine health and fitness expertise to offer members increased support to their healthy lifestyles.

Devised to offer Bannatyne members with expert nutritional advice and support from the club's professionals, the programmes

guide rather than preach about the importance healthy eating tailored to the individual requirements of each member. To support Bannatyne's nutritional advice the company has designed the menu in its café/bars to fit in with the programme so members can not only enjoy a range of healthy dishes, but also see how they are broken down into the relevant food groups.







There are more to health clubs like Bannatyne's than just the gym area.

At Broadstairs, for example, there are three studios – one for relaxation classes such as yoga and pilates, one for more high impact classes such as aerobics and body balance, and a spinning studio. Not that you're likely to find Alastair Campbell in the spinning studio. This type of spin involves exercise bikes, an instructor, pumping music and disco lights. It's a modern and highly effective cardiovascular exercise which will help you shed weight and get fit fast.

The gym also has an area filled with Easyline machines. These resemble the equipment you'll find in the weights area but use air resistance so they are kinder to use for the elderly or for those rehabilitating after a sports injury or operation.

There are also two heated pools, indoor and outdoor plus a cafe area.

There's an active social side to health clubs too, with Bannatyne's hosting evenings featuring tribute acts and parties for occasions such as Halloween.





If you're still a little nervous about joining a health club and would like to raise your basic level of fitness before you do, there are every day ways of doing so. "Even getting in and out of chairs and walking upstairs are good, basic methods of aerobic exercise," said Gareth. "If you have a dog make sure you walk it every day. Even if you don't have a dog, go for a walk. Walk for the same amount of time every day but try and walk a little bit further within that time each day. "Leave the car at home and walk instead whenever you can. "And when you are unpacking the shopping from the car, just carry one bag in at a time so if you have to go backwards and forwards more often. "The most important thing is to just do something!"



## Get trouser fit for '08

at Ramada Hotel & Resort Maidstone

Christmas was all about getting in the spirit of things, with plenty of eating, drinking and being merry. Now it's time to get into the spirit of 2008. Join the Ramada Hotel & Resort Maidstone Sebastian Coe Health Club, follow a Personal Training Plan and we'll help get you back into your trousers and fit to face whatever the New Year may bring.

Sign up before 9th February 2008, and there's **no joining fee\*** For more information please call **0844 815 9045** or visit [www.sebcohealthclubs.co.uk](http://www.sebcohealthclubs.co.uk)



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\* New members need to enrol before 9th February 2008 to be eligible for this promotional offer. For more information visit [www.sebcohealthclubs.co.uk](http://www.sebcohealthclubs.co.uk)  
Facilities depicted by symbols are not all available at all clubs, ask for details.



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# Now is the time to quit

**T**he beginning of a new year normally prompts lots of us to consider changing our lifestyle. The best New Year present smokers can give themselves is to stop.

Since Smokefree England came into force on July 1, many people have taken the opportunity to quit smoking and change their lives for the better. Smokers, standing outside workplaces or pubs during balmy summer evenings is one thing, but cold, rainy nights with friends and family warm inside give all smokers food for thought.

Often, stopping smoking is a kick start to taking other healthy options to improve lifestyles.

Comments like: "It's the best thing I've ever done," and: "My life has changed for the better," are commonplace for the team of Stop Smoking Advisers who cover the whole of Kent and Medway and offer free advice and support to potential quitters.

But stopping smoking is not something to be taken on lightly.

Planning is the key. Offering Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT), which is often free after paying a one-off prescription charge, the advisers can customise a quit programme to suit the individual and offer one-to-one or group support.

You can call one of the three NHS Stop Smoking Services covering Kent and Medway and choose group sessions in the

community or one-to-one appointments at certain pharmacies and GP practices.

You will be invited to an appointment where the stop smoking programme will be explained and you will be helped to plan and prepare how to go smokefree and choose your quit date.

Yvonne Philbrick, NHS Stop Smoking Lead for Dover and Thanet said: "For many people it's often the thought of stopping which is scarier than actually going smokefree. But once they compare the carbon monoxide levels in their body before and after stopping smoking they are definitely more convinced, and the support of fellow group members is also a great motivator."

**Who to call:**

**Eastern and Coastal Kent (including Swale)**  
- 0800 849 4444

**West Kent – 01622 723836**

**Medway – 0800 234 6805**

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# Slim chance



If you want to lose weight, the support of a group can make it a lot easier.

**Emma Martin, 30,** of Walderslade surpassed her own expectations when she joined Slimming World. This is her story

Imagine losing a pound a week. It doesn't sound much does it, but over one year it is nearly four stones!

I never imagined I would lose four stones having been larger all my life and after being bullied as a child I just believed that my size was me.

When my dad took up a bet to lose weight and joined his local Slimming World group I was interested listening to him talking about all the foods that he could eat and still lose weight. I never wanted to be hungry or go without and this sounded incredible.

Out of curiosity I went along with him the next week and was so impressed at how warm and welcoming the whole group was that I joined.

I thought I'd go for a half stone weight loss, which felt achievable. You get awards for every half stone and I wanted to get that award. I knew after the first one that I could do a half stone and I did it again and again.

When I had a difficult week, as we all do from time to time, the encouragement of the group and my Consultant spurred me on.

My eating is now really varied. Essentially it is healthy eating without any fuss and just becomes a way of life. The plan you follow allows for treats, so I can eat, drink and party!

When I was bigger I suffered all sorts of aches and pains, they have all gone.

The humiliation of having a bridesmaid dress specially made for me (in a size 22; did you know you have to get an outside dress pattern rather than use a regular one?) was dreadful. When I saw the photo I was devastated. I never thought I would proudly show it as one of my "before" photos.

I'm now a size 10/12, so I really am half the person I used to be while my confidence and self-esteem have rocketed.

I love fancy dress and instead of the frumpy ones I used to have to put up with I can now be my favourite Bat Girl in a size 10.

It was quite a shock when I was voted the Group Woman of the Year, suddenly I was inspiring other members.

I was tickled recently when my sister-in-law from America looked me up on Facebook and sent me an amazing e-mail about how proud she was of me, and how she wished she could do it too. Well, if I can do it you can too. It is the best feeling in the world.

If you have a wish in your heart to lose weight and feel the benefits that can bring I can only recommend getting along to Slimming World. It is a fun night out, you don't have to count calories or fat grams so it is really easy to follow and the results, well, they speak for themselves!

By the way, in case you were wondering, my dad lost two and a half stone.

- Slimming World is the largest and most advanced slimming organisation in the UK.
- In 36 years, more than five million slimmers have attended and lost a total of 60 million pounds.
- There are now over 5,500 groups nationwide.
- Slimming World Magazine was launched to group members in 1998.
- In 2001, Slimming World pioneered Slimming on Referral in the UK and actively supports the building of partnerships with the NHS to develop effective strategies to manage obesity in the community.
- Slimming World believes that the burden carried by overweight people is two-fold. There is excess

weight, but there is a far heavier burden to be lifted – that of guilt, self-criticism and poor self-esteem.

- Slimming World strives to ensure members have the motivation, confidence and support they need in order to make healthy and highly effective lifestyle changes for life.

#### FOOD OPTIMISING

Food Optimising gives members four healthy choices to help them eat well and lose weight. It allows members the freedom to choose what they eat, when they eat and how often they eat to suit every individual's taste and lifestyle. There is little or no weighing and no calorie counting.

1. The Green choice - unlimited pasta, rice, potatoes, baked beans, pulses and grains, plus vegetables, fresh fruit, very low fat natural yogurt and fromage frais.
2. The Original choice – unlimited lean beef, lamb, pork (including bacon), chicken, turkey, fish and seafood, plus fresh fruit and most vegetables, very low fat natural yogurt and fromage frais.
3. Mix2Max – for days when a member wants to spend more time deciding where to go in the morning than planning what to eat.
4. Success Express – enjoy Green and Original Free Foods at the same meal.

To find out where your nearest Slimming World group is visit [www.slimming-world.com](http://www.slimming-world.com) or call 0870 7546 669. This line is open Monday to Thursday from 8am to 8pm and Friday 8am to 6.30pm.



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# Back answers



We lose 36 million working days a year to work-related illness and injury. **Julie Michalski**, founding partner of Maitland Medical, the Chislehurst-based occupational health specialist, says there are simple steps we can all take to minimise risks

**T**he most common cause of absence among manual workers is back pain, while for those in non-manual occupations it is stress-related ill health. In both cases these are associated with long periods of absence from work and in both prevention is better than cure.

Former nurse Julie says: "Our spines weren't designed for sitting at a desk but that is where many of us spend our working day. To lower your risk of back pain it is important to take regular short breaks and do some gentle stretching exercises.

"Proper posture is vital as your discs are under more pressure when sitting than when standing. To ensure your lower back is properly supported, sit up straight and adjust your chair so that it reclines slightly allowing the backrest to take some of the pressure off the discs.

"When using a keyboard your forearms should be horizontal to the desk and keyboard with your elbows at right angles. Your feet should also be supported so if the seat is too high for them to reach the floor, use a footrest to rest your feet on. The knees should be level with or slightly higher than the hips."

Neck pain is another symptom of poor posture so make sure the computer monitor is not too high or too low –ideally the top of

the computer screen should be just below eye level. When reading, place the material at an angle rather than flat on a desk or your lap. And always ensure you are facing your computer head on and not at an angle.

Posture is also important if your job involves driving, or you drive to work, because your feet are tied up with operating the foot controls and therefore cannot offer support.

Most important is that the knees should be level with the hips. A cushion or back support placed between the lower back and the seat may give support at the point where the spine naturally curves.

Drivers should sit at a comfortable distance from the steering wheel. Reaching increases the pressure on the lumbar region.

In manual jobs, repetitive actions can lead to back pain. Try and mimic the opposite action to the one which caused the pain.

"If you've twisted and reached to the right too many times and got a sudden pain then do the opposite action and stretch to the left. This can also be used as a preventative measure so don't forget to give your back some respite by stretching in the opposite way," says Julie.

Stress has a number of effects on the body, some more predictable than others. It causes blood pressure to rise and the heart rate to increase but it can also cause the body to produce more stomach acid which shuts down the intestines and stops them digesting food properly. It can lead to tension in the shoulders, causing headaches, and chronic stress can also affect the immune system.

Avoiding office politics and interpersonal conflicts, accepting that some things cannot be changed, managing your time better and learning to delegate will all help lower stress levels.

Julie says: "Exercise is one of the best ways of working off stress and it will also help you to get to sleep, which is something else that suffers when a person is under stress. When feeling really tense it can be tempting to reach for the cigarettes or a stiff drink but alcohol only exacerbates stress as do nicotine, caffeine, and tranquillisers."

It makes business sense for companies to look after their employees and Julie says they should consider having processes and procedures in place to deal with all health-related issues, including stress.

**Maitland Medical helps design, plan and implement occupational health programmes to fit each client's budget. These can encompass health promotion, on-site visits, health screening along with comprehensive health and welfare strategies with the option of confidential advice and counselling for individual employees.**

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# Medway Maritime Hospital

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The Medway NHS Trust is one of four hospital trusts in Kent. Employing more than 3,550 staff, its main focus is to run the hospital in Gillingham. Medway Maritime Hospital is the largest and busiest hospital in Kent. This reflects the size of the population it serves, mainly in Medway and Swale, but increasingly other parts of north and west Kent.

The Medway  
NHS Trust



## Infection control is everyone's business

Healthcare associated infections continue to have a very high profile both locally and nationally and Medway NHS Trust is committed to reducing these.

The chief executive is ensuring that infection prevention and control is everyone's business and not just the responsibility of the infection control team. The Trust does however have a dedicated infection control team, including a Director of Infection Prevention and Control to support the Trust's strategies on infection control.

### Reducing cases of MRSA and C Diff

Every NHS trust in England has a target to meet for MRSA reduction. The target is to reduce MRSA bacteraemias (blood stream infections). Medway NHS Trust's target from 2007 to 08 is no more than 19 bacteraemias. This target is across the health economy and includes patients admitted with the infection from the community.

The Trust has worked extremely hard to reduce its rates and has the best ever rates this year. However, there is still work to be done. Actions to improve the rates have focused on several areas including:

- Ensuring all Trust staff have received up to date infection control training.
- Improving the management of devices regularly used in patients who are unwell such as drips and urinary catheters. This has included the purchasing of specialist packs to use when inserting the drips.
- Significantly increasing the amount of MRSA screening undertaken.
- Opening an MRSA cohort ward for surgical patients.
- Ensuring very good hand washing or hand rubbing between every patient contact and on entry and exit to every ward.

At the beginning of 2007, a sum of £300,000 was received by the Trust from the Department of Health as part of a national initiative to reduce the rates of Clostridium difficile infections. This money was used within the medical directorate for the

purchase of equipment in order to help reduce the spread of Clostridium difficile infections. The rates of Clostridium difficile infection fell significantly within this directorate between January and April. A new Clostridium difficile target was set by the primary care trust in April this year. The Trust is reducing rates to meet this target. The Trust has also received a further £321k in October to assist in the fight against both MRSA and Clostridium difficile.

### Recent initiatives

Our latest initiative involved the opening of a designated ward solely for patients who are found to have MRSA and require admission for surgery at hospital. This means we can provide specialist infection control management for the affected patients and assure patients that the risks of acquiring MRSA on any of our other surgical wards are significantly reduced.

The new ward opened on September 24 and we involved patients by asking them to choose a new name for the ward which they decided to call Victory Ward. The ward team have received extra training in the management of patients with MRSA carriage and also in a few cases, infections.

### You can help to reduce hospital infections

The Trust encourages patients and visitors to work with us to achieve reductions in infections. All visitors are requested to use the alcohol hand rub when entering a ward and again when leaving. It is also important that staff or visitors always wash their hands very thoroughly using soap and water as alcohol hand rub does not work against the C.Diff toxin.

Equally important is that visitors do not come to the hospital if they are unwell with a cold, fever or diarrhoea and vomiting. We have developed several patient information leaflets to assist in the explanation of infections and the actions that can be taken to reduce them.

These are available on our website at [www.medway.nhs.uk](http://www.medway.nhs.uk) or can be picked up at the hospital.





LEFT TO RIGHT: Stephen Griffiths, Head of Imaging, Claire Cockell, Project Manager and Elizabeth Connell, Clerical Operations Manager.

## Two week imaging waits at the hospital by January 2008

Medway NHS Trust has reduced its waiting times for all medical imaging (X-rays, CT scans, MRI scans and ultrasound examinations) to four weeks and it is expecting to reduce this by a further 50 per cent to two weeks by January 2008.

This is already above and beyond the Department of Health's target of reducing imaging waiting times to a maximum of six weeks by March 2008.

The imaging department has managed to make these reductions

by introducing increased service hours from 8am to 8pm over a full seven day week. Usage of the MRI and CT scanners has also been increased, making them available for 84 hours a week instead of the previous 35 hours.

The increase in capacity has led to a reduction in waiting times which has in turn led to a more efficient department, reducing long term costs and improving patient care.

Stephen Griffiths, Head of Imaging said: "The reduction

in waiting times is due to the hard work and dedication of all staff within the imaging department. Patients are now seeing first hand the benefit of being diagnosed more quickly and we hope to continue giving first class patient care to the local community.

"Once we reach our target of two weeks the department has already put in place initiatives to ensure these waiting times are maintained and hopefully, reduced even further."

### Facts about us

1. Patients no longer need to travel to London for cardiac angiograms. These procedures are now undertaken routinely in our purpose built catheter laboratory, for which the waiting list is less than three weeks.

2. Ninety eight per cent of patients are seen in our genitourinary department within 48 hours.

3. Our surgeons routinely undertake advanced key-hole surgical procedures which are not readily available in many

hospitals in the country. This enhanced surgical treatment greatly reduces pain and overall length of stay.

4. We have three specialist surgeons who specialise in caring for children and young people who receive care in a child friendly environment.

5. We offer state of the art surgical treatment for cancer, including reconstruction after breast cancer surgery and new bladder reconstruction after removal of bladder for cancer.

6. We offer free nuchal scans at 12 weeks pregnancy in our new foetal medicine unit.

7. We are the regional vascular centre for the whole of West Kent.

8. We have the busiest A&E centre in Kent

9. We have been nationally recognised as one of the best employers in the NHS

10. We see more than 200,000 people in our outpatient departments each year

## Help us plan the future of maternity services at Medway

Medway NHS Trust participated in a review of maternity services conducted by the Healthcare Commission this year. It was an ideal opportunity to get feedback from our patients, whilst identifying areas where we are performing well and areas for improvement.

The review included a Trust questionnaire, a staff questionnaire, views of women who gave birth in February 2007, and a collection of data relevant to delivery of care at Medway.

Our areas of good practice centred on, safe clinical care, efficiency and capability. Action plans have already been drawn

up to address areas where improvement is required and this is seen as a priority for maternity services in the forthcoming year.

One particular area that we would like to improve is involving mothers who have recently used our service to join a forum where they can provide regular comments on our service and participate in planning the future of maternity services at Medway.

We would welcome any interest and ask that you contact

Karen McIntyre, Acting Head of Midwifery, on **01634 825157** or email: [karen.mcintyre@medway.nhs.uk](mailto:karen.mcintyre@medway.nhs.uk)





# food

**When you get home after a busy day at work, fast food or microwave meals might seem tempting. But it's just as easy to eat healthily**

**Dave Flynn, owner of The Allotment, Dover, shares quick, simple to make supper menus for the week, and something special for the weekend.**

## **Find us at:**

The Allotment, 9 High Street,  
Dover. Call 01304 214467, or go to  
[www.theallotmentdover.co.uk](http://www.theallotmentdover.co.uk)



**F**or a chef, Dave Flynn starts from a somewhat contrary position when it comes to eating well. “Of course, raw is the healthiest option, whether its’s vegetable, fish or meat. There are some questions about raw meat, and sourcing and freshness are very important, so growing your own, or buying from a reliable source, is important.

“Here at the Allotment we try to have a vegetable or salad course separate from the main course, which I think is good for the metabolism. It breaks up the meal, and was the way meals used to be served in France.”

As a general rule he suggests: “Eat more courses, but smaller amounts.

“Seasonal food has to be good for you because it is fresh.

“Things to avoid include excessive amounts of animal fats, which is a great shame because they are what give great flavour.

“There are lots of different types of oil. Use olive oil to give flavour, but not for cooking as all the goodness is burnt out in the process.

“Super foods such as avocados and quinoa are a good idea. So is eating fruit and nuts, especially if you do a lot of travelling when there is the temptation to binge on chocolate. I could buy a Cadbury’s Fruit and Nut, a family bar, and demolish it in minutes. Fruit, fresh or dry, is better.”

“Drink juices and smoothies.

“A really good diet would include Japanese food, salads and a bit of grilled meat.

“Good cuisines to try include Lebanese, which uses lots of vegetables, not a lot of meat, lots of herbs and has vibrant flavours.

“Use yoghurt instead of cream, good oil not butter, and change your liking for certain flavours. We can change from the traditional fish and chips to, say, roast sea bass and new potatoes.

“Eat regularly rather than binge, and follow the rule: Breakfast like a king, lunch like a lord, dine like a pauper.



# for thought

## easy meals for two

### Roasted bass fillet and mango salsa

Bass (Wild) – get your fishmonger to scale and fillet the fish and remove the pinbones. Really fresh fish should be firm to touch, shine, and smell wonderful.

*½ of a ripe sweet mango – diced ½ cm cubes*  
*juice of half a lime*  
*10 capers, roughly chopped*  
*½ onion diced finely*  
*½ teaspoon of fresh ginger juice (grate fresh ginger and squeeze out the pulp)*  
*teaspoon of fresh chopped parsley*  
*salt and pepper to taste*  
*half a medium hot pepper finely diced*

half an hour before you are due to eat combine the salsa ingredients and leave in a non-metallic bowl at room temperature to sleep. Stir to incorporate ingredients, once during half hour and just before serving.

Pre-heat oven to 220 degrees C Place a baking sheet in oven to pre-heat for two minutes

Once baking sheet is hot pour a little vegetable oil over surface and place bass fillets on this skin side down ; sprinkle a little water over the fish flesh and place in oven for six minutes.

After six minutes remove from oven and allow to rest for one minute. The fish should be just cooked.

On a large plate, mound just off centre a good tablespoon of salsa. Take a fish slice and place between the flesh and skin of the bass which will have stuck to the baking sheet. Gently manoeuvre the fish slice along the skin in one movement, removing the fish from its skin. Place the fish on the side of the salsa, cooked side up.

Garnish a wedge of fresh lemon and serve – new potatoes and seasoned green vegetables or leaf salad as an accompaniment.

### Fresh pasta with walnut and parsley

Fresh pasta, or dried if you prefer, of your choice – tagliatelle, spaghetti, linguini or papardelle work well with this dish.

*For the pesto. Make 250 ml*  
*125g of good walnuts, lightly toasted*  
*2 x garlic cloves chopped roughly*  
*2 good tablespoons chopped fresh parsley*  
*60g grated parmesan cheese*  
*olive oil*  
*salt and pepper to taste*

Blend the walnuts, garlic, parsley and cheese in a food processor until well mixed. With the motor running, gently pour in the oil until the pesto has a smooth consistency. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Spoon the finished pesto into a jar and flatten the top with the back of a spoon. Float a little extra olive oil onto the top of the pesto, to stop oxygen getting to the sauce. Keep refrigerated and bring back to room temperature before use. When putting back in the fridge, re-seal the top of the sauce as before.

Fill a large saucepan with plenty of water and bring to the boil. Add salt and plunge in sufficient pasta for two portions. Gently boil, stirring occasionally to prevent any pasta sticking. Taste when the pasta should be ready and pour out contents into a colander. Toss the pasta to remove the water, but leave it slightly wet as this helps to coat the pasta with the sauce.

Place enough pesto and the pasta back in the pan and put a lid on. Holding the lid on, gently toss the pan to distribute the sauce evenly. You want to achieve a light coating to each piece of pasta.

Place the finished pasta into heated bowls and garnish with more freshly grated parmesan and extra virgin olive oil and black pepper to taste – a lovely fresh

green or tomato salad are an excellent accompaniment.

### Goats cheese salad

Sufficient goats cheese (I use the log type with a rind, as this holds well and has different textures in the finished dish). Slice into six slices (wheels).

*some fresh salad leaves*  
*some caramelised onion*  
*some delicate tasting fresh herbs*  
*some cooked crispy lardons of bacon (optional)*  
*one ripe avocado – peeled and cut into slices*  
*sufficient amount of good vinaigrette*  
*good French bread cut into six slices*

Toast the slices under a grill, lighter on one side, put to one side.

In a large mixing bowl assemble all the other ingredients except the cheese and toss with your hands or a spoon to mix well and put to one side.

Place a wheel of cheese on the lightly toasted side of each slice and place these under a hot grill until the cheese is hot and a golden colour.

Place the salad mix nicely on to two cold plates and top with three goats cheese slices on each plate.

### Grilled marinated prawns

*20 good sized fresh prawns in their shells with the heads on*

*four cloves of garlic minced / chopped*  
*2cm piece of ginger – grated on a parmesan grater and the juice squeezed out of the pulp and retained. Throw away the pulp. What you now have is fresh ginger juice.*

*1 red chilli medium heat – finely chopped and seeds discarded*



*1½ tablespoons of chopped fresh parsley*  
*the juice of one lemon*  
*1 dessert spoon of olive oil*  
*salt and pepper to taste*

An hour or so before you want to eat, place all the ingredients into a container, mix well and leave to marinate, covered in a fridge. Stir the mix once or twice, to ensure a good marination during this period.

When you are ready to eat, warm two plates and heat a grill or griddle to very hot.

Take the prawns out of the marinade and place on a griddle or under the grill. They will change colour quickly. When cooked on the first side, turn them over to cook the other side. It is essential to have a very high heat as quickly cooked prawns are delicious.

You want them just cooked. When cooked, mound them onto the heated plate and garnish with a wedge of lemon and more chopped parsley. Any residual juices from the grill pan can be poured over the prawns. Eat with a good mayonnaise and sweet chilli dipping sauce accompanied by hot bread and a green salad.

### Chicken breast wrapped in pancetta

*2 skinless and boneless chicken breasts*  
*4 fresh sage leaves*



# easy meals for two

2 sundried tomatoes sliced finely  
1 flat mushroom finely sliced and sautéed in a little oil  
4 thinly pancetta  
olive oil  
salt and pepper to taste

Pre-heat the oven to 200C  
Take the chicken breasts and pierce each one with a thin very sharp knife from the thick end along the centre of the fillet, making sure you don't pierce any other part of the flesh.  
You should end up with a small tunnel / cavity along the centre of each piece of chicken.



Place your finger in the hole to gently enlarge it to take the filling.

Divide the tomato, mushroom and sage leaves in two and stuff these into the breast cavities. Lay two slices of pancetta slightly overlapping on a board and place the stuffed breast onto this, across the length of the pancetta. Wrap the pancetta tightly around the chicken breasts.

Heat a little olive oil in a very hot frying pan and seal off the wrapped breasts using tongs to turn and hold them as you do.

Transfer the sealed and browned breasts to a roasting dish and drizzle them with more olive oil and the frying pan juices. Roast in the oven for 25-30 minutes. To test whether cooked, insert a skewer in the thickest part of the breast – the juices should run clear. Remove the pan from the oven and pour out any fat from the pan, retaining any residual cooking juices. Cover lightly with foil and allow to rest for five minutes.

I like to serve this dish on a bed of puy lentils that have been braised with onions and the addition of finely sliced cabbage at the last moment.

Heat two plates and mound the lentils in the centre of each plate. Take the chicken breasts and carve, on the slant, thick slices and arrange these layered on the top of the lentils. Pour over the cooking juices from the pan.

## Fillet steak au poivre

two trimmed fillet steaks (cut from the middle of the fillet) – ask your butcher to remove all sinew. You should be left with a perfect disc of marbled beef.

30 green peppercorns in brine. Rinse off the brine by running the pepper corns under a cold tap in a sieve. Chop coarsely.  
peppermill and sea salt  
brandy  
double cream  
clarified butter

Pre-heat oven to 150C.

Heat a frying pan to hot and add a film of clarified butter. When the butter is hot place the steaks cut side down in the pan. Leave for two minutes and then turn over to seal the

other side and leave for a further two minutes. If you wish them to be cooked further, turn the heat down slightly and cook further on both sides. When cooked to just before your liking, pour a good measure of brandy into the pan and stand back and flame the steaks in the alcohol.

Remove the steaks from the pan onto a heated plate in the oven to rest and hold. Put the chopped green peppercorns into the pan with the juices from the meat and brandy and cook out for one to two minutes. Now pour in some of the double cream, a little more than you want the finished volume of sauce to be. Increase the heat and using a spoon scrape the bits off the pan into the cream. Now reduce the cream to the consistency so that it covers the back of the spoon. Check for seasoning and adjust.

Take two heated plates and place a steak in the middle of each plate. Pour the juices that have gathered in the plate the steaks were resting on into the sauce and reduce.

Pour the sauce over the steak and serve accompanied by your favourite potatoes and a seasonal green vegetable or salad.

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Spire has also been offering a wide range of cosmetic surgery treatments under the BUPA name for more than 25 years.

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In short, Spire Healthcare is dedicated to looking after you.



#### RULES

This competition is not open to employees (and immediate families) of the Kent Messenger Group, Spire Healthcare, or any other company associated with them. Entries which are altered, illegible or not in accordance with the rules will be disqualified.

Responsibility cannot be accepted for

Spire hospitals give more time for you and to celebrate the launch of Spire Healthcare in Kent, we are giving five lucky readers the chance to take some time out with a relaxing spa day at the Utopia Spa at Rowhill Grange, Dartford.

Winners will receive gift vouchers entitling them to a Tailor Made Day, allowing them to tailor make their own day with full use of the sauna, steam and jacuzzi to soothe and relax, a choice of treatments to the value of £140 and a two course lunch.

To be in with a chance of winning a relaxing spa day at the Elite Spa of the Year 2007, answer this question:

**What are the names of the two Spire Healthcare hospitals in Kent?**

Send your entries to Spire Healthcare Competition, Messenger House, New Hythe Lane, Larkfield, Aylesford, Kent, ME20 6SG to arrive no later than noon on Friday, January 18.

entries lost or damaged. Proof of posting cannot be accepted as proof of delivery. The decision of the judges, as appointed by Kent Messenger Group, is final. Entries must be original and no photocopies will be accepted. Entries must be received by noon on January 18. There is no cash alternative to the prize.

Winners will be notified in writing by Spire Healthcare. Prizes will be supplied as gift vouchers. Winners should contact Utopia Spa at Rowhill Grange to organise spa day (subject to availability). Winners to pay and organise transport to and from Rowhill Grange. Additional treatments charged at an extra cost.

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# Beat the blues this winter

It's the time of year when we can all easily feel under the weather. Lack of sunlight, miserable weather, coughs and colds can easily combine to leaving you feeling down and miserable.

But do you just have the winter blues or is it something more serious?

And what can you do to avoid falling foul of illnesses such as stress or anxiety during the dark days of winter. The Your Health Files are here to help you identify what is a potential problem and what isn't.

Over the following pages we look at some common conditions, identify the symptoms and have advice on how to combat them.

For more information on these and many other conditions, visit [www.bupa.co.uk/health\\_information/asp/your\\_health/factsheets](http://www.bupa.co.uk/health_information/asp/your_health/factsheets)

The Your Health Files are intended only as a guide and you should always seek health advice from your GP or NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or by visiting [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)



**anxiety** 22



**insomnia** 24



**SAD** 25



**stress** 26



# What is anxiety?

**Anxiety is a feeling of unease. Everybody experiences it when faced with a stressful situation, for example before an exam or an interview, or during a worrying time such as illness.**

It's normal to feel anxious when facing something difficult or dangerous and mild anxiety can be a positive and useful experience. However, for one in 10 people in the UK, anxiety interferes with normal life. Excessive anxiety is often associated with other mental health problems, such as depression. Anxiety is only considered to be

a mental health problem when it is prolonged, severe and is interfering with everyday activities.

## Do I suffer from anxiety?

When you're anxious, you may also experience a range of physical symptoms including:

- abdominal discomfort

- diarrhoea
- dry mouth
- rapid heartbeat or palpitations
- tightness or pain in chest
- shortness of breath
- frequent urination
- difficulty swallowing
- shaking

Psychological symptoms can include:

- insomnia
- feeling worried or uneasy all the time
- feeling tired
- being irritable or quick to anger
- an inability to concentrate
- a fear that you are going "mad"
- feeling unreal and not in control of your actions

## Causes of anxiety disorders

Anxiety may be a symptom of other mental health problems, such as depression or alcohol dependence.

It can also be caused by substances such as ecstasy or caffeine, or by withdrawal from long-term drugs.

Sometimes anxiety can be associated with a physical illness, such as thyroid disorder. It's advisable to see your GP in order to rule out a physical cause.

## Reaction disorders

Reaction disorders are caused by some sort of stressful life event. Some examples are:

- Acute stress reaction. Acute means that the symptoms develop quickly, minutes or hours after the stressful event. This typically happens after an unexpected life crisis such as bereavement. Sometimes symptoms occur before an event, such as an important exam. This is called situational anxiety. Symptoms usually settle fairly quickly and treatment may not be needed.

- Adjustment reaction. This is similar to acute stress reaction, but the symptoms develop over days or weeks after a stressful situation, for example as a reaction to a divorce. Symptoms tend to improve over a few weeks or so.

- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This can happen after you experience or witness a traumatic event, such as a major accident or military combat. Anxiety, which may come and go, is only one of the symptoms. Others include recurring thoughts, memories, images, dreams, or distressing "flashbacks" of the trauma.



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**Types of anxiety disorders:**

**Phobias**

A phobia is a fear that is out of proportion to the real danger posed by the thing that triggers it. They interfere with your ability to lead a normal life.

Social phobia is also one of the more common, but complex, phobias. If you are affected by this, meeting people causes anxiety, and you're overly worried about what others think of you.

**Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)**

This anxiety disorder consists of recurring obsessions and/or compulsions. Obsessions are recurring thoughts or images about specific things that trigger feelings of disgust.

Compulsions are thoughts or actions that people feel they must do or repeat. A compulsion is usually a response to ease the anxiety of an obsession. For example, repeatedly washing your hands to deal with an obsession about dirt.

**Panic disorder**

Panic disorder is an anxiety disorder whereby

sufferers live in fear of fear. This causes panic attacks - a sudden sense of anxiety that occurs without warning and with no apparent trigger. Panic attacks usually last five to 10 minutes.

**Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)**

Anxiety can be a long-term disorder where you feel worried most of the time about things that might go wrong. This is called GAD.

**How do doctors recognise anxiety?**

If you think your life is being affected by anxiety, visit your GP. He or she will want to identify any physical or psychiatric illness that may be causing the anxiety. Your GP will listen to a description of your symptoms and may carry out a physical examination. Some people are referred to a psychiatrist.

**Treating anxiety disorders:**

**Self-help**

You may be able to improve your symptoms by using relaxation techniques, exercise or by talking to other people in support groups. Your GP can advise you about groups in your area.

**Counselling**

This involves talking through your problem with a counsellor, who can help you focus on what it is you want to do and how you can achieve your goal.

**Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)**

This is a form of psychotherapy carried out by a specially trained therapist. Cognitive therapy involves assessing the reasoning behind your thinking - it is based on the idea that abnormal thinking results in abnormal reactions. Behavioural therapy aims to change behaviour - usually you are gradually exposed to the situation that causes anxiety. CBT combines these two types of therapies.

**Medicines**

Tranquilisers, such as benzodiazepine tablets, may help to relieve some short-term stress-related anxieties. However, they shouldn't be taken for long periods because of the risk of addiction. Buspirone is another type of medicine that can help relieve anxiety. It has different side-effects to benzodiazepines and it isn't thought to be addictive. Antidepressants can treat certain anxiety disorders such as generalised anxiety

disorder, social phobia, OCD, and anxiety associated with depression. Some doctors may prescribe you a type of drug known as a beta-blocker. These relieve many of the physical symptoms of anxiety such as palpitations and tremors and may be helpful for some people.

**Relaxation**

Various types of relaxation therapy are available - you might want to discuss this with your doctor. Some people may find yoga, Thai Chi or other exercises helpful.

**find out more**

- National Phobics Society  
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[www.phobics-society.org.uk](http://www.phobics-society.org.uk)
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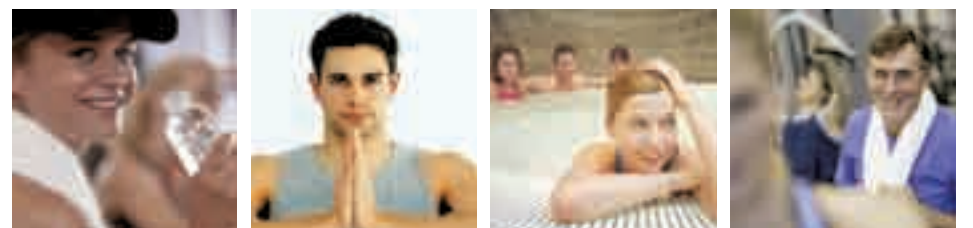
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# Insomnia

**Insomnia is a feeling of not being able to get enough sleep. It is usually related to finding it hard to get to sleep, waking up without having had enough sleep, or having unrefreshing sleep.**

## Who is affected?

People differ in their need for sleep, and everyone has the occasional night of disturbed sleep. Almost a quarter of the population frequently experience sleeping difficulties, and it becomes more common with increasing age. Over the age of 65, 29 per cent of men and 37 per cent of women are affected.

## Sleep

The exact function of sleep is not fully understood, but the effects of lack of sleep suggest that its main function is to rest and repair the body.

There are also psychological benefits. One phase of sleep is called rapid eye movement (REM) because the sleeper's eyes can be seen to move rapidly behind the lids. This is thought to be the time when dreams occur.

People who don't sleep for long enough or who sleep very lightly, become deprived of REM sleep. They can become irritable and anxious and, in extreme sleep deprivation may even have hallucinations.

## Symptoms

**The symptoms of insomnia typically include:**

- difficulty getting to sleep (taking more than 45 minutes to get to sleep),
- Difficulty staying asleep (frequent awakenings and difficulty getting back to sleep),
- early morning waking,
- feeling tired and unrefreshed in the morning.

Some people notice that the irritability that results from their insomnia has an effect on partners, families and work colleagues. Accident statistics have shown that daytime sleepiness can double the chance of having an accident while operating machinery or driving a car.

There's also a link with physical illness. People with insomnia have an increased risk of dying from cancer, heart disease or stroke. Insomnia can be described as either transient, intermittent or chronic. Transient lasts only a few nights to a few weeks. Intermittent insomnia occurs occasionally but not every night. Chronic insomnia occurs most nights and lasts three or more weeks.

## What causes it?

Typically, there is no single cause for insomnia but a number of factors are known to contribute.

- Lifestyle - eating late at night, jet lag, hunger, alcohol, caffeine, stimulant drugs, including nicotine.
- Environment – noise (eg partner snoring), uncomfortable bed or bedroom.
- Physical health problems – sleep apnoea (abnormal breathing while asleep), asthma, tinnitus, pain, prostate problems that mean frequent trips to the toilet at night, and indigestion.
- Psychological – including stress or grief.
- Mental health problem such as depression or anxiety.
- Medication – eg certain tablets for asthma and treatments for nasal congestion, vertigo and depression.

Rarely, insomnia occurs even when none of the above are present. This is known as primary insomnia.

## Treatment

There are a number of things that people affected by insomnia can do to help themselves. These are known as sleep hygiene measures.

- Avoid taking cat-naps during the day.
- Reduce the number of cups of coffee, tea or cola drinks you drink, especially later on in the day.
- Only drink alcohol in moderation. It may bring on sleepiness, but will tend cause early waking.
- Stop smoking – nighttime breathing problems are more likely in smokers.
- Take regular exercise, but avoid strenuous activity immediately before going to bed.
- Try to get into a daily routine. Go to bed the same time each night and get up the same time each morning.
- Avoid heavy or rich meals, especially in the few hours before bedtime.
- Work out how many hours sleep you can manage with before daytime sleepiness becomes a problem. Becoming unnecessarily stressed over insomnia can lead to a vicious cycle.
- If you can't sleep, get up and read in a dim light until you feel sleepy. Don't watch television



or lie in bed thinking about how much sleep you are missing.

- Other activities that can create a relaxed mood include taking a warm bath, having a milky drink, or listening to soothing music.
- Mentally dealing with the day's unfinished business is also helpful. Writing down any worries to deal with the next day may help to clear them from the mind and prevent them re-surfacing in the early hours.

## Psychological therapies

Psychologists can teach simple relaxation techniques. They can also provide "talking therapy" (psychotherapy) which can help people come to terms with various life events - eg bereavement, marital problems etc. that may be triggers of insomnia. Psychological "tricks" can also be taught. These include telling yourself you must keep awake, which often has the opposite effect.

Specific sleep therapy includes cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), which deals with misconceptions about sleep such as believing that frequent short naps during the day are good for you.

## Medication

There are a number of over-the-counter treatments that might help for occasional insomnia in conjunction with the sleep hygiene tips mentioned above.

Sedative antihistamines – eg diphenhydramine (Nytol) and promethazine (Phenergan). These are effective but stay in the body for a long time and can cause a hangover effect in the morning.

Herbal – there is some scientific evidence that valerian is effective. Passiflora and wild lettuce extract are also traditionally used, but their benefits have not been proven in medical trials. If you are taking any other medication, check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any herbal remedy.

## Getting help

If work or leisure activities are disturbed by daytime sleepiness, or if you wake up feeling unrefreshed and irritable, consider consulting your GP. Some doctors feel that prescription-only medicines that cause sleep, known as hypnotics, should be started as soon as these problems start, while others believe that sleep hygiene methods should be tried first. In all cases, drugs should be used for as short a period as possible, and certainly no longer than two weeks. Beyond this, there's a danger that dependency (addiction) to sleeping tablets, will develop.

A GP will also look out for any underlying cause of insomnia that also needs treatment. Depression, for example, may need treatment with antidepressants. People who have primary insomnia (see above) – may need to see a hospital specialist.



# What is SAD?

**Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that occurs at particular times, commonly in the winter months.**

**M**ild forms of SAD are commonly referred to as winter blues but some people have a more severe form and cannot function in winter without treatment.

For most sufferers of SAD, symptoms get worse in the autumn and winter when the days are shorter, and clear up in spring and summer. People are more vulnerable to SAD the further away they live from the equator as daylight hours become fewer.

## Symptoms of SAD

The symptoms of SAD can vary from person to person.

### The most common symptoms include:

- a low mood for most of the day
- lethargy
- a greater need for sleep and sleeping more than usual
- eating more than usual, especially craving carbohydrates
- weight gain
- irritability
- mood swings and excessive energy in spring/summer - but this is less common

## Causes

The exact cause of SAD isn't fully understood, although there are theories.

## Amount of sunlight

SAD may be related to changes in the amount of daylight during the autumn and winter. The amount of sunlight affects the levels of certain chemicals and hormones in the brain.

- A chemical called serotonin plays a role in 'lifting' the mood. It is thought that people with SAD may have abnormally low levels in winter.
- A hormone called melatonin slows down the body clock and affects sleeping and mood patterns.
- People with SAD may respond to a decrease in light by secreting more melatonin. However, drug treatments designed to suppress the secretion of melatonin do not stop the symptoms of SAD so this is not the only factor.

## Genetics

Research has shown that if you have a close relative with SAD, you are more likely to develop it.

## Diagnosis

A GP is a good first point of contact. He or she will ask about your day-to-day life and symptoms. One bout of the winter blues doesn't automatically mean you have SAD. But, if you have regular symptoms over at least two consecutive years in autumn/winter which clear in the spring, the diagnosis may be SAD.

## Treatment Self help

There are a number of steps you can take to lessen the effects of SAD. Wherever possible, you should:

- live and work in light, bright environments
- try to find time each day to walk, run or take a bike ride outside, especially if it's sunny
- sit near windows when inside
- take regular, moderate exercise
- eat a well-balanced diet
- Light therapy (also called phototherapy)

Research has shown that exposure to bright, artificial light can improve symptoms in about two out of three cases of SAD. The aim is to replace bright summer light to stimulate a change in the levels of chemicals and hormones which affect your mood. Bright and broad-spectrum light is delivered by devices including:

- a specially-made light box
  - light caps or visors that are worn on the head like a baseball hat
  - dawn stimulators - these are in the form of a bedside light, connected to an alarm clock that mimics a sunrise and wakes you gradually
- The light is at least 10 times stronger than that



from normal light bulbs. It is very similar to natural daylight and it won't harm your eyes, unlike strong ultraviolet (UV) light. Homemade light units, such as tanning lights or beds, should never be used for light therapy.

Light box treatment can be done by people in their own home. Light boxes are not available on the NHS but you can buy or hire one. This also gives office-based workers an option to work with a light box in their work place.

### Light therapy has few side-effects but they can include:

- a headache
- irritability
- fatigue
- difficulty sleeping

You should get advice from your doctor before starting light therapy.

Most people notice an improvement in symptoms within three weeks, although you may start to feel better within a matter of days. You should continue to have light therapy every day until spring.

## How can family and friends help?

People with SAD may withdraw from friends and relatives around them, rather than asking for help or support. It can be upsetting to witness loved ones in this condition and it is natural to want to help. But unwanted pressure or criticism from others usually makes matters worse.

Try to let the person make his or her own choices and let the person know that love and support are consistently there. Once the person has recognised the problem, offer to help with practical matters such as finding appropriate treatment and other resources that may be needed to help them get over SAD.

### Further information

- The Seasonal Affective Disorders Association [www.sada.org.uk](http://www.sada.org.uk)

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# Stress

**Stress affects virtually everyone at some time in their life. As well as the emotional and psychological disruption it causes, stress-related medical problems are becoming increasingly common.**

## What is stress?

The body has an inbuilt physical response to stressful situations. Faced with pressure, challenge or danger, we need to react quickly, and our bodies release hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline to help us do this.

These hormones are part of the “fight or flight” response and affect the metabolic rate, heart rate and blood pressure, resulting in a heightened - or stressed - state that prepares the body for optimum performance in dealing with a stressful situation.

Very often, modern stresses do not call for either fight or flight. Nevertheless, the same stressing hormones are released as part of the reaction and this natural reaction to challenge or danger, instead of helping, can damage health and reduce the ability to cope.

## What causes stress?

Many things can lead to stress:

- pressure to perform at work, at school or in sports
- threats of physical violence
- money worries
- arguments
- family conflicts
- divorce
- bereavement
- unemployment
- moving house
- alcohol or drug abuse.

Sometimes, there is no particular reason for developing stress.

## Who gets stressed?

The list above shows that everyone is at risk of being stressed, since it can be caused by a range of commonplace situations. However, people have very different mental responses to the body’s natural reaction to a stressful situation. For some it can be an essential stimulus, helping motivate them to achieve more. In others it causes an adverse reaction, causing a sense of not being able to cope. It is important to differentiate between temporary stress that you know will go away when a situation is resolved, and long-term or chronic stress. Most people can cope with short

periods of stress, and it can often be relieved by relaxing, taking a walk, chatting through issues with friends, or having a good night’s sleep. Chronic stress is much harder to deal with, and can be psychologically and emotionally damaging.

## The symptoms

Everyone reacts to stress differently, but there are some common effects that help us recognise it. In times of extreme stress, people may shake uncontrollably, hyperventilate (breathe faster and deeper than normal) or even vomit. For people with asthma, stress can trigger an attack.

**People who are chronically stressed are also susceptible to any of the following:**

- periods of irritability or anger
- apathy or depression
- constant anxiety
- irrational behaviour
- loss of appetite
- comfort eating
- lack of concentration
- loss of sex-drive
- increased smoking, drinking or recreational drug-taking.

**There can also be physical effects, which may include the following:**

- excessive tiredness
- skin problems
- aches and pains resulting from tense muscles
- increased pain from arthritis and other conditions
- heart palpitations
- for women, missed periods.

## Post-traumatic stress

Post-traumatic stress can affect anyone who has been through an extremely difficult or violent experience, such as witnessing a violent death or disaster, being involved in a serious car crash or surviving a fire.

People suffering from post-traumatic stress may experience any of the symptoms above. They may also feel a mixture of emotions such as fear, shame, depression, guilt or anger, and recurrent memories or images that may be



haunting or lead to nightmares. These feelings can last for weeks, months or even years after the traumatic event that triggered them. Specialist treatment is available.

## When to see a doctor

If stress is causing physical symptoms, severe distress or making it difficult for you to function as normal, it is worth seeing the doctor.

It is important to remember that although stress is a usual part of life, extreme or prolonged stress can lead to other illnesses that will need treatment, so it is better to visit a doctor sooner rather than later. Stress has been linked to the development of high blood pressure and heart disease, as well as insomnia and depression, for example.

There is no diagnostic test for stress since everyone reacts to it differently, but a doctor will be able to spot the physical symptoms, and should ask pertinent questions to identify any underlying problems that might be the cause.

## Tackling stress

If you feel that you are suffering from stress, try to identify the aspects of your life that are causing it. Sometimes you may not be able to change or avoid them, but at other times simple lifestyle changes can make all the difference.

**There are several strategies that can help you deal with stress:**

- delegating or sharing your responsibilities at work

- avoiding confrontation with difficult colleagues
- learning to be more assertive
- taking regular exercise
- not using drink or drugs to cope
- eating a healthy, balanced diet, rich in fruit and vegetables
- finding humour or absurdity in stressful situations
- never taking on more than you know you can cope with
- organising your time better
- talking to friends or family, and sharing your thoughts and fears
- listening to music or relaxation tapes
- tensing and then relaxing your muscles, starting at the toes and working up to the head and neck.

## Medicines

Only in exceptional circumstances is your doctor likely to prescribe medication to help you cope with stress, although some types of anxiety can be treated with antidepressants.

Tranquilising drugs such as diazepam (Valium) or temazepam are not suitable for treating stress because they can cause addiction. It is usually far better to try and identify the things in your life that are causing stress and try to deal with them.

## Other treatments

There are many stress management techniques in the form of counselling, psychotherapy and hypnotherapy. Complementary approaches include aromatherapy and reflexology and these may, if nothing else, provide a quiet, relaxed environment in which to wind down.

## How will stress management help?

The aim of stress management is to help you balance the various aspects of your life and to balance the physical, intellectual and emotional aspects of life. People who effectively manage stress consider life a challenge rather than a series of irritations and feel they have control over their lives, even in the face of setbacks.

**find out more**

**International Stress Management Association**

**www.isma.org.uk**

**07000 780430**

**Mental Health Foundation**

**www.mhf.org.uk**

**020 7802 0300**



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