

FIT FOR LIFE with Carol Westmorland

How can I beat the winter blues?

QUESTION: Dark evenings, bad weather, cosy clothing and comfort eating all add up to a perfect excuse to ignore my body, forget exercise and slump. What's your guide to surviving winter?

CAROL SAYS: It's a fact that the body needs light to stop producing the sleep hormone melatonin. So it is little wonder that you may feel tempted to put your usual healthy lifestyle on hold during the winter months. It is not an option you can take!

When nature doesn't put the lights on until gone 7am we need to take matters into our own hands.

Getting close to nature always works for me. We have a friendly farmer who has kindly filled one of our fields with sheep!

I love marching up the hill from our home and absorbing the country air to say hello.

Tommy Kitten, (Valentine Tommy Tippy Toes) the new addition to our family, has a voracious appetite so, after breakfast, always 7am, he needs no persuasion to charge up the hill with me. In a perfect world we would all have such energy. The reality is we don't.

Personally I always fall in love with the winter. There is nothing more romantic than a long winter walk when the air is scented by log fires. I am enchanted by the mystique of twinkly lights in cosy looking homes but then I need no excuse to be outside.

A lack of sunlight does mean our bodies are in short supply of vitamin D. Known as the sunshine vitamin it does do the job of lifting our spirits. If you find yourself sleeping



too much, your joie de vivre has gone and you definitely need to supercharge.

Try a power packed breakfast of sardines on toast or cereal with full fat milk to bring a sprinkling of happiness back to breakfast time. With a bit of planning your day needn't be a rollercoaster of highs and lows. I would never go without food for more than a couple of hours. I believe our bodies need stoked up to keep us firing on all cylinders. I think winter food is in itself comforting. All those beautiful vegetable stews and winter broths. I say tuck in! Just use that energy they supply.

You can't ignore your body when the party season approaches. Those sparkly and slinky dresses are designed to catch eyes.

I'm always asked how to define arms. I've been known to create 'coat hangers' for shoulders – not real ones. I use visualisations and it's amazing how quickly people draw their shoulders back when they think of coat hangers. Clothes and jewels then hang perfectly. Strong posture will simply not allow any slumping. Pilates reawakens those dormant offending muscles.

So, upon reflection, those dark evenings are actually rather inspiring. The weather is beautiful, your cosy clothes allow you to wrap up for an adventure and that comfort food is delicious. It's magical.



Carol Westmorland lives in the Eden Valley. She is a Cycling Time Trials national champion, clocking up 445 miles in 24 hours. She also teaches pilates. www.pilates-cumbria.co.uk

LIFE COACH with Marion Dunlop

You can learn to stop worrying

November 5 is National Stress Awareness Day and this year's theme is 'Don't Worry, Take Action.'

It's interesting how some people describe themselves as 'worriers' and as a life-coach I have to ask why? Will your worrying about something make it go away or stop it happening?

I can hear you say: "But I was born like this, our whole family is the same". OK, so you've learned the behaviour but, if you want, you can change it.

If you're up for trying then I'd like you to list all the things that seem to cause you worry on a regular basis. Then decide

which ones you can actually change in some way. These are the only ones that deserve your attention so delete the rest.

Consider how you talk about these things to yourself; that little internal chat that goes on for all of us. I can imagine the banter is along the lines of: "I can't possibly, what if, maybe it might go wrong" etc.

From now on begin to challenge the negative self talk. Is there any evidence that what you think might happen is likely to take place? When was the last time that it went wrong, if at all? Usually the answer to these challenges is that things actually went well.

Try replacing the negatives with positive

instructions. "I'm calm. I'm looking forward to it. I know I'll be fine. I can do it."

Research shows that giving your mind clear constructive commands helps you to achieve successful change. It takes practice so get your friends on board to remind you when you default.

Then allow good things to happen. If you believe in yourself you can do anything you want successfully. Maybe you just haven't learned how to yet!



Marion Dunlop is a Carlisle-based life coach and therapist www.cumbriatherapies.com