

Introduction

Lockdown intensifies the positive and the negative emotions we feel. So, if you are generally a worrier then in the current climate it will seem like a magnifying glass has been placed over your feelings.

So it stands to reason that for many of us, feeling anxious is the most logical and understandable emotion at the moment, and although you can't always control the things that make you anxious, you can try and control the impact they have.

In these times we have to embrace uncertainty, and at the same time harness our strengths and skills to manage the anxiety we feel. This will help us to find a way through until we can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Otherwise our *feelings* of anxiety and our *thoughts* about the unknown will chase each other around in our head, exhausting our mind and body.

So I am hoping that in part 2 of my CareMail I can offer some proven ideas on how to increase your levels of happiness, whilst still embracing and respecting your lack of control over what is going on in the world.



Hints & Tips

Having a Meaningful Life/ Higher Purpose

A meaningful life is one where you belong to and serve something that is bigger than you.

Developing your skills, talents and strengths, and using these to contribute to the happiness of others brings about a better world. Furthermore, helping others leads to a life filled with meaning and purpose.

The beauty of this idea is that it brings together two views of human happiness:

- The individualistic approach, which emphasises that we should take care of ourselves and nurture our own strengths
- The altruistic approach, which tends to downplay individuality and emphasises giving to others for the greater purpose

Scientific Benefits of Helping Others:



- Helping others can help you live longer
 - Altruism is contagious
 - Helping others makes us happy
 - Helping others can help with chronic pain
 - Helping others lowers blood pressure
 - Helping others promotes positive behaviours in teens
 - Helping others gives us a sense of purpose and satisfaction
 - Helping others becomes part of who you are
- Mental Floss: www.mentalfloss.com

Recent research in Psychology Today suggests yet another way that our own well-being can benefit from us practicing pro-social behaviour – “helping others regulate their emotions helps us regulate our own emotions, decreases symptoms of depression and ultimately, improves our emotional well-being.”

How's that for a win- win situation!

“We are most joyful when we focus on others, not ourselves” – Dalai Lama

Forgiveness

Psychologists generally define forgiveness as “a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness” - greatergood.berkeley.edu

So let's look at what forgiveness is and what it's not.



Forgiveness does **not** mean:

- We forget what someone has done
- That we don't seek justice and an apology
- We don't respond to the wrong with clarity and firmness
- We accept or approve of the wrongdoing



Forgiveness **does** mean:

- We choose not to develop hatred and anger
- We allow ourselves to move beyond the past and appreciate the present
- We don't remain tethered to the person who harmed us
- We don't hold a grudge or keep reminding ourselves of what they did – otherwise we develop a stress response which means our blood pressure and heart rate increases

“Unforgiveness robs us of our ability to enjoy and appreciate our life because we are trapped in the past filled with anger and bitterness”

- The Book of Joy – Dalai Lama & Desmond Tutu

And to end with here's a wonderful quote from Mark Twain who I think sums up the concept of forgiveness and how holding onto difficult or negative feelings about others really just damages us in the end!

“Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured”

- Mark Twain

Compassion



We are social animals, hard wired to connect and to care.

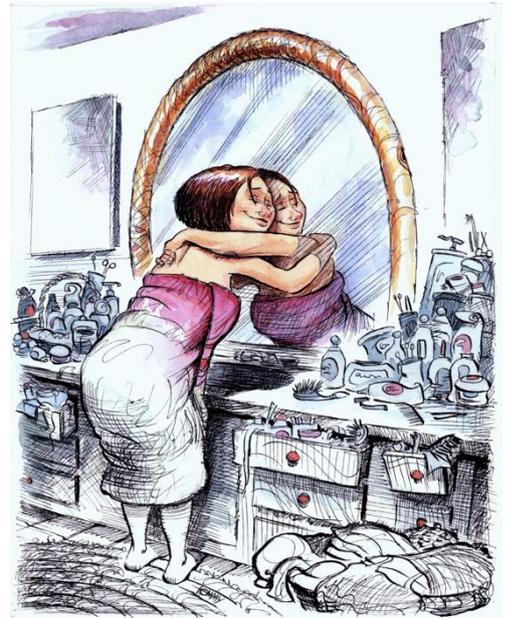
When we help others, endorphins called ‘the helper's high’ are released in the brain. These little helpers are actually the release of oxytocin, and one of the benefits is they reduce inflammation in the cardiovascular system – making our heart healthier and happier.

When we think of alleviating other people's suffering our own suffering is reduced.

But please remember the best way to develop compassion for others is to first develop it for yourself.

We spend so much of our life (especially in our childhood) being evaluated and judged by others, and what happens is we internalise these voices and often end up not being very kind and compassionate with ourselves. A lack of self-compassion manifests itself in a harsh and judgemental relationship with ourselves and others. So here are some ways you can learn to be nicer to you - and I'm betting you deserve a bit of niceness right now!

- Accept those parts of your personality that you may not like – don't beat yourself up about them but rather address them from a place of kindness and compassion.
- When you are feeling down, dissatisfied or inadequate in some way, be curious to understand your feelings and befriend them rather than rejecting them and being unnecessarily harsh on yourself.
- The time you spend beating yourself up distracts you from being 'curious' and noticing your thoughts so you can better understand them and find more acceptance and contentment. There is a wonderful poem from Rumi at the end of this CareMail about allowing your feelings in. See if it resonates for you!
- Give yourself permission to be nice to yourself – that's what self-care is about, and we all need and deserve lots of that right now.
- And remember westerners often mistake compassion for indulgence. And what about the whole British concept of a stiff upper lip, which can be traced back to Ancient Greece and the Spartans? The saying has traditionally been used to describe an attribute of the British people in remaining resolute and unemotional when faced with adversity, and then later became a source of inspiration in the English Public School system. It can of course work for some things some of the time, but a stiff lip can also give you a pinched face and a sore neck! As we now know being able to express our fears and vulnerabilities, allowing our emotions to be felt and expressed is also a sign of strength and resilience. Learning to let go of that attitude means we can be kinder to ourselves.



WORRY BOX

Worrying about worrying is a dangerous spiral to fall into!

A 2005 study in the journal Behaviour Research and Therapy showed that people who naturally try to suppress their unwanted thoughts end up being more distressed by the thoughts. Meanwhile, researchers from the University of Wisconsin write that "those who are naturally more accepting of their intrusive thoughts are less obsessional, have lower levels of depression, and are less anxious. Therefore, people who get caught up in worry when they try to force themselves to stop worrying may want to try a different strategy -- acceptance.

- Article by Amanda L. Chan - The Huffington Post

Silver Lining

Think about all those books you have been wanting to read for ages – well now's the time to indulge in doing nothing but relaxing with no guilt attached (read the words again slowly, **no guilt attached**) because if not now when!

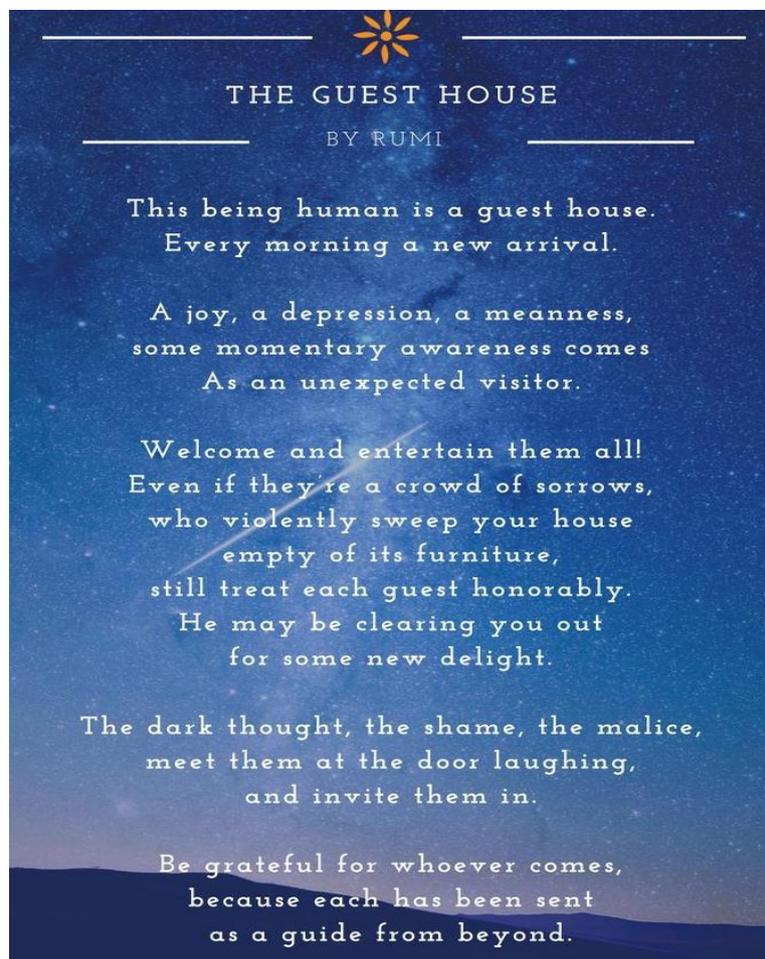
And I do practice what I preach most of the time! I have just stated reading Heartburn by Nora Ephron and I find myself laughing out loud!

Questions of the week

1. What's the best advice you were ever given? Please share it with me so we can start a new column!
2. What could you have told your younger self that would have made a positive difference to your future well-being? (delicate hint – it has to be something that meant you would have been less critical, judgemental and demanding of yourself!)



Poem of the week



Share Space

My thanks to Bart Van Olphen for his recipe (in last week's Sunday Times) for these delicious Tuna fritters with tzatziki. It's canned tuna you need, and they are easy peasy to make and great for lunch or dinner.

(Serves 2 people as a starter)

Ingredients:

For the Fritters:

- 1 medium potato, peeled
- ½ courgette
- 160g tin of tuna in water, drained
- 150g canned sweetcorn, drained
- ½ bunch of parsley, leaves only, finely chopped
- 50g plain flour
- 1 egg
- 2 tsp crushed chilli flakes
- Tabasco sauce
- 1 lemon, cut into wedges
- Sunflower oil

For the Tzatziki:

- ½ cucumber, peeled
- 125g full-fat Greek yoghurt
- Zest and juice of 1 lemon
- 1 small clove of garlic, minced

Method:

1. To make the fritters, coarsely grate the potato and courgette and combine in a bowl. Add the tuna, corn and parsley, then mix thoroughly before adding the flour and the egg. Season with the chilli flakes, tabasco and salt and pepper. Set aside.
2. To make the tzatziki, cut the cucumber in half lengthways and deseed. Coarsely grate the flesh and put in a sieve. Using the rounded side of a spoon, press out as much liquid as possible and then combine the flesh in a bowl with the yoghurt, lemon zest and juice and garlic. Season with salt and pepper. Set aside.
3. Heat a generous splash of sunflower oil in a thick-bottomed frying pan over medium-high heat. Once the oil is hot enough, spoon two portions of the fritter mixture into the pan. Cook for 3-4 minutes until golden brown. Flip the fritters and cook for another 3-4 minutes until crispy and done. Lift them out and drain on kitchen paper. Repeat until the mixture has been used up.
4. Serve the fritters alongside the lemon wedges, with the tzatziki in a separate bowl.

