

Thrive

Not Strive

A Practical Guide to Feeling
Happy, Confident &
Healthy Again

Get curious about yourself & your
health, & design your own personal
blueprint for Living & Thriving, not just
Existing & Surviving!

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Self & Health

**Where are you now? Where do you want to be?
The hardest part is to know where we are, the
second hardest part is to admit it"**

"I am fat." It was early evening and I was stood looking at myself in the mirror for the umpteenth time that day. As I inspected my body, those three words played in my head on repeat. I asked myself: would I ever feel comfortable and happy with what I saw reflected back to me? At the time it seemed unlikely. After all, I'd spent nearly 30 years thinking it!

If you've ever found yourself thinking and saying negative things like that, you're not alone. The problem is that the way that we view ourselves and the language that we use to talk to ourselves is hugely important when it comes to taking control of our health - and many of us just aren't getting it right.

You might think that the language that you use inside your own head isn't important. On the surface, it doesn't seem to have any bearing on what size you are, how healthy you are, how much energy you have or how you feel on a day-to-day basis. But in actuality, it's a key factor in determining whether you have a good day or a bad day.

Whatever negative feelings that you have about yourself - whether they're to do with how you feel, how you look, or how you perceive how you look - start with a thought inside your own head. Think "I am fat" enough times and you'll not only start to feel fat, your body will do everything it can to keep you fat. This might sound too simplistic, but the brain and body relationship is genuinely that simple.

Here is a very important message for you to take on board. (That's why it's in bold!)

What you believe determines your thoughts, your thoughts determine how you feel, how you feel determines how you behave and how you behave determines the actions you do or do not take.

The problem is that we tend to over-complicate things by believing that there always has to be a "right" way of looking and a "right" way of behaving.

We're fed messages by society and the people around us that give us a prescriptive idea of what a happy, healthy and successful person is like.

This ignores the fact that every single one of us has unique DNA: we all look different, we all sound different, we all move differently and we all think differently.

It's impossible for each of us to happily fit into the same cookie cutter mould that society determines as "right" - yet many of us put pressure on ourselves to do just that. This is especially true for women, but for men too.

Throughout the course of each of our lives we're encouraged to force ourselves to become the "perfect woman". We try and meet expectations of how a woman should behave, how a woman should look, how she should feel and how she should interact with her family... In doing so, we lose our connection with the signals that our body and brain use to indicate what they need in order to function well.

Instead, we're chasing ideals. Some are physical: just look at how the "perfect" body has been dictated by society through the decades; from the hourglass shape of the '50s to the tall, muscular '80s look to the Kardashian body of today.

Other ideals impact every part of our lives. You probably remember how in the '90s and '00s magazines were full of articles about how you could "have it all" as a woman: the hot body but also a career, a family, a buzzing social life and happiness. The message was that you could be a "superwoman" - and many of us have spent our lives buying into it.

Thing is, that's somebody else's definition of "having it all" and not necessarily yours.

The fantastic thing about the human body and mind is that they clearly communicate to us what they want us to do, and what they don't want us to do in order to stay happy and healthy.



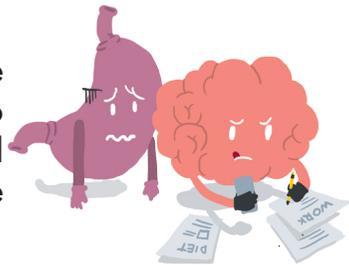
But, in attempting to fit what society tells us is the “right” way to live we are overriding what our bodies and brains are saying they need.

This is why I say there is an A R T to health and wellness.

The A stands for AWARENESS. You have to start being really aware of what you are thinking and therefore what you are doing, right now, that is keeping you in struggle and strive mode.

For example, do you deny yourself food when you’re feeling hungry because you’re following a certain diet? Do you say “yes” to going out with friends when really you just want an early night with a good book. Do you stay up late doing work despite your body crying out for sleep?

We need to allow our bodies to decide what feels good rather than trying to follow messages about how we should look, how we should behave, how we should feel and how to get there.



Can you remember the last time you actually stopped to listen to what your body was telling you? And honoured it? I bet you can't.

If you want to feel happy, healthy, confident and in love with life, it's time to change that.

Now is the time to look at the **3 Rs** that are keeping you where you are:

ROLES

RULES

ROUTINE

I invite you to do a little written exercise at this point to help you gain awareness of where you are in your day-to-day life. Simply jot down on a piece of paper all of the roles you play at this moment in time: parent, wife, homemaker, daughter, employee, businesswoman, etc.

Next, think about the RULES around these roles, the “must haves”, “shoulds” and “ought too’s”. What do these roles mean you have to do? Then look at the C U E’s around these roles:

Conditional Unwritten Expectations.

Have you put these rules in place or did you pick them up from your mum or grandma? Are you assuming your partner expects certain things from you? Are there things you do because you believe there are unwritten rules in this area?

Finally, take a look at the routines you have instigated into your day and week to ensure you stick to the roles and their rules...

CASE STUDY:

Maria's Story

Maria did the 3 Rs exercise with me. Her roles were: wife, mother, daughter, cook, entertainer, manager, friend, taxi driver.

She knew she had picked up the rules from her mum and believed as a wife she had to put her husband's wants before hers, that included when they had sex, where and when they went on holiday, out for dinner, to the cinema or theatre.

She also believed her husband expected a freshly ironed white shirt every day and dinner on the table when he came home, even though she had never actually asked him if these were his expectations. She put those rules on herself.

She also believed she had to monitor the children's activities and keep them busy and learning, so she made sure they belonged to various groups and had hobbies.

There was an unwritten rule that she look after her mother by having her over for lunch at weekends and taking her to appointments or shopping.

Plus she had a job as an office manager.

Maria's day began with getting up before everyone else to sort out the washing and put a load on, iron a shirt for her husband, make the children's lunches and her own, drop off the kids to school breakfast club and be in work by 8.00am.

She would rush out during her lunch break to grab some food to cook for dinner and a coffee and a muffin on her way back to the office.

She left work at 4pm and went straight to pick up the kids from an after-school club, then started preparing dinner, often with her mum on the phone on handsfree so she could talk, listen and cook at the same time. She fed the kids before taking them to Guides or another evening club and then rushed back to have dinner on the table for her husband.

She would eat quickly with her husband, and would watch the clock during the meal so she wouldn't be late to pick up her girls. Then it would be bath, story, bed.

More often than not, the phone would ring with a friend or her mother asking a favour, to which she would say “yes” even if it put her out totally.

Maria would try to relax with a large glass of wine, because she “deserved” it. That would lead to another. Hopefully she would make it to bed rather than crash on the sofa, before doing it all again the next day.

At the weekends she’d have dinner parties or a business or charity event that she “had” to attend, she’d look after the kids all day Sunday. Then on Monday it would all begin again.

Maria felt fat, fed up, unattractive and had a ton of symptoms that made her feel rotten and worn out most of the time, yet she just carried on.

She didn’t see a way out and felt totally stuck. She wanted things to change but didn’t know where to start.

By doing the Rs exercise she could clearly see that she could make some changes. She didn’t have to follow the rules she had put in place. She could set her own rules and ask for help. In the space of just two months, she taught the girls to make their lunches the night before and to help with preparing and cooking meals.

She set up a rota with another two other mums for picking up and dropping off the kids at breakfast club, after-school club and evening activities.

She put in a “no calls after 8.00pm” rule for friends, family and work to give herself some evening time to herself.

Instead of collapsing on the sofa with a glass of wine every night she went to a yoga class one night a week and instigated a bedtime routine for herself.

Her husband's shirts were sent out each week and came back ironed. It turns out he didn't expect her to cook every night. He liked to dabble in the kitchen!

It was only when she was aware of the "rut" she had gotten herself into that Maria saw what and where things could be different.

Do you see how you might have been keeping yourself stuck in a rut without really knowing how or why?

As women, we often put ourselves last on the list of who we take care of because we believe that our children's well-being, or our partners, or our parents, or our job, or having a nice house is more important than how we feel about ourselves.

Thing is, if we are stretching ourselves to meet the perceived demands of our roles as parent, daughter, worker and homemaker, what happens to our own personal self-worth? We tend to be at the bottom of the pile. And, the more we continue to not pay attention to our wants and our needs, the less inclined we are to look after ourselves.

The knock-on effect of this is that our health deteriorates, and our confidence drops.

Confidence and health go hand in hand. If your health declines, you're not going to want to go out and socialise with people.

If you're shattered or have problems with your hormones or energy levels, you're not going to be the life and soul of the party. You need to value yourself. You are just as important as everybody else. Your wants and your needs are not worse, less than or nearly equal to others. You are a human being just like they are, no better or worse.

The philosopher Will Durant said: "You are what you repeatedly do".

If you look back at old-fashioned game shows you'll notice that when they used to ask contestants, "What's your occupation?", lots of women would answer, "housewife". Now, it's changed, people tend to say, "homemaker" or "stay at home mum", which are a little bit better. But all those titles are still expressing that you are what you do and in my book that's wrong, sorry Durant! You are you, an independent being with your own specific wants and needs and you are not defined by your job or your roles in life.

The final part of the 3 Rs exercise is to rewrite your own rules and routines; ones that are based on what you want them to be NOT the conditional, unwritten expectations you have followed. Do it with a view to ditching some of them completely if you can. Just like Maria ditched ironing a shirt and cooking every day.

There's a tendency for women to get a bit lost in all of the masks they wear or the roles they play. Your task, by the end of this book, should you accept it, is to have re-found or reinvented your new, better self.

Think that sounds impossible? I'm proof that it's not - and everything I'm going to explain to you in this book is based on my experience and on the experience of my clients.

For more years than I can believe, I stood in front of the mirror and thought the words "I am fat". When I hit my early forties, I thought I'd let all of those body hang-ups go. But when, all of a sudden, my health started to deteriorate too, I realised I hadn't.

I'm a health, fitness, nutrition and fat loss expert. I thought I was supposed to fulfil those roles by looking a certain way and presenting a picture of amazing health, so it came as a huge stumbling block to find that I couldn't control what was going on with my own body.

Gaining awareness that trying to force myself to be a certain way had contributed massively to the state of my health was vitally important in my journey to being able to change my life.

Had I been taking care of myself as well as I should have? No.

Was my self-worth as high as it could have been? No.

Was my health suffering as a result? Absolutely.

Was I embarrassed and ashamed? You bet - to the extent that I kept my symptoms secret from everybody around me and also from myself!

How could I admit to myself, and anybody else, that sometimes before a class I was in tears because I felt so wretched and that I often had to talk myself into just getting through the next hour?

I just wanted to stay in bed and pull the duvet over my head - and that's not really an option for somebody who's 44, running her own business and trying to tell everybody how incredible exercise and eating the right foods is for them.

I was convinced I was depressed but was terrified to admit it. My father had committed suicide and mental health problems ran in my family. I just didn't want to accept that it might be what was wrong with me. So I was in denial, big time.

Journal

How can I pretend that I'm something that I'm not?
Everything I'm doing is just a lie I can't even get my own
body to function properly. Is my whole life just a total lie?
Am I kidding myself? Am I kidding everybody else?

That was the state of mind I was in at that time. How did I turn things around? Well, I did what I've always done. I decided to investigate a little bit deeper into what was actually going on for me. Information and education have been key all the way through this process for me, as well as good old trial and error.

It turns out it wasn't depression, but boy did it feel like it. It was problems with my gut, my thyroid glands, my adrenals and my absolutely terrible diet. I wasn't taking care of **me**! I could pretend in my head that I was, but my body was telling me the real truth!

Once I began to make the changes that I'm going to talk to you about in this book, I started to feel better - although, I'm not going to pretend the journey was easy.

Over the years I tried all the fad diets. I told myself it was "research" when I was actually dieting to try and get my weight sorted out. (Although in the end, it did help me to find out what *doesn't* work.) I'd say I was "too busy to eat" but it was actually

because I was subconsciously reverting to the bulimic habits of my twenties when I'd starve myself for three days and then binge on carbs.

It was realising that I'd ended up back on that path again that woke me up to the craziness of what I was doing.

I thought to myself: "Hang on, I thought I'd left that behind when I turned 30,

now it's 10 years later and I'm *still* doing it?" That's because the old stories I'd told myself, the patterns I had set up because of the way that I'd talked to myself for years were waiting to bite me in the bum, and I was vulnerable.



I will talk about stories in more detail in the next chapter. Let's get back to you.

You have looked at where you are and where you want to be within yourself and your roles in your life.

So now let's look at where you are and want to be in your HEALTH. Again AWARENESS has to come first.

See how many of the following statements you agree with:

- You do get enough sleep but you never wake up re-energized.
- You can't sleep because your mind is too active.

- You alternate between being too hot or too cold.
- You find that your skin is feeling really dry.
- You are suddenly getting breakouts.
- You're experiencing more hair loss than usual.
- You've got an upset tummy (cramps, wind, diarrhea).
- You are constipated.
- You're bloated.
- You have arthritis or inflamed joints.
- You're craving sweet or salty foods or drinks.
- You're consistently coming down with colds.
- You get pins and needles in fingers and toes.
- You struggle to get excited or enthusiastic about anything these days.

All of these are indicators that your health is not where it could be and your quality of life is being affected.

Now you have read through the list above, I invite you to get your pen and paper and write down how you want your health to be. It doesn't have to look a certain way - it could be a series of short sentences, a bullet list or a whole paragraph - that's up to you.

For example, my client Jane wrote:

“I want my energy back, my eyes to sparkle, my shoulders, head and neck to stop aching all the time. I want to feel like I can cope instead of being overwhelmed and I want to be able to go out shopping or to the theatre without having to know where all the loos are first. I want to get up and look forward to the day instead of wanting to hit snooze twice. I just want to feel healthy and happy again!”

By writing down what you DO want, you are more likely to start taking care of yourself as you will see when I talk about the four Ss in the next chapter.