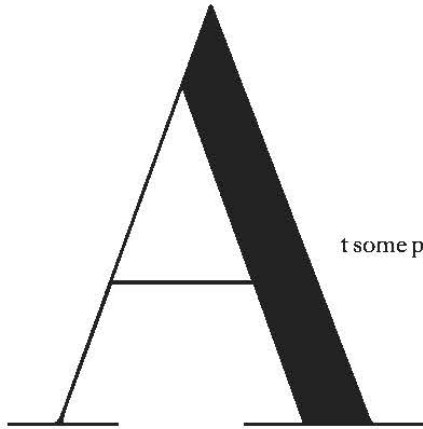


# BODY LANGUAGE



By EVIE LEATHAM Photographs by PAUL ZAK



At some point during lockdown, I had not gone outside for four days and I could feel my body's rebellion.

My partner pushed me out of the door and I walked and walked, and it felt euphoric: the cool breeze; my muscles moving, alive with purpose; my thoughts keeping pace with my steps. It was a

seized opportunity to nurture that primordial mind-body connection from which everyday life before lockdown often distracted me.

In the face of a global pandemic, we've been united by our fallible, fragile biology, and the idea of wellbeing has taken on deeper meaning. What has been put into sharp relief is not how we look, but how we feel within.

The tyranny of performative and elitist wellness trends has shifted to a gentler, more holistic sense of wellbeing. Exercise has become as much about emotional and spiritual health as physical. I find I'm kinder to myself and more forgiving, exercising when I intuitively need it, not simply because my phone guilted me with a reminder.

With fewer distractions, I have had the space to gain a deeper understanding of my body. I can discern biological rhythms that previously went unnoticed, from palpable hormonal changes to an acute awareness of whether I'm stressed or jittery, irritable or hungry, tired or wired. Without long commutes and office distractions dictating the day, the ticking of the body's internal clock can make itself heard.

During this past year of such quiet existence, social media has lost little of its influence. However, we are editing ourselves far less. #FilterDrop campaigns are challenging the pressure to appear 'perfect' online, and women are sharing openly about periods, body shape, scars and stretch marks, menopause, body hair and the realities of the changes associated with pregnancy and childbirth.

That's not to say there aren't elements of our physique that some of us might like to change. There has been the collective acknowledgement of lockdown weight fluctuations, but it seems, with less judgement of ourselves or others. And while bookings for injectables and tweakments have also increased this year, we're talking about having had them in a way we weren't before: a choice as empowering for some women as forgoing such treatments is to others. The truths about women's bodies are being shared with confidence, pushing these important discussions ever further on.

On my first commute to work in nearly 18 months, I still felt that thrill of walking with purpose, this time allied with the joy of having somewhere to go. But as life gets louder, I will keep listening to all that my body quietly has to say.

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## mindful training

With the return to gyms, trainers are increasingly tapping into the mind-body connection. Twenty Two Training's Lucinda Meade is a PT and physiotherapist, but also ends her sessions with an hour of hypnotherapy or acupuncture. 'It's a holistic process,' she says. 'We are addressing the physical progress a client might want to make, as well as what might be inhibiting them from achieving that, whether it's stress or anxiety, motivation or general mindset.'

'My clients view exercise as a way to future-proof their bodies through movements that support both their physical and nervous systems,' says Chiara Lewis, a functional trainer who recently launched TotalBody Studio with virtual exercise classes that can be filtered by mood and energy levels. 'Moving our body draws attention from our busy minds, but intuitive training is not only linked to low-intensity exercise, like yoga. A HIIT class can release tension and negative energy so you leave the mat feeling energised.'

Physical and mental wellbeing are uniquely combined for the psychotherapist William Pullen, who conducts therapy while jogging with his clients, a technique that he calls dynamic running therapy. Pullen thinks we could all benefit from an 'empathy walk', in which you stride side by side with a companion who talks for 10 minutes with no interruptions, before you switch and do the same. 'This creates an opportunity for people to ramble, unload and work through their thoughts,' says Pullen. 'It's critical that the person listening in no way tries to interrupt, encourage or advise, they are simply there as a witness and to provide a sense of community.'

## head-to-toe skincare

The ultimate goal for sunscreen is high protection with no compromise on finish or feel. Protect yourself with formulas that are all-but-invisible on every skin tone. Shiseido's Clear Stick UV Protector SPF50+ is great for active types, while Sarah Chapman's Skin Insurance SPF50 Invisible, Bliss' Block Star Invisible Daily Sunscreen and Supergoop Unseen Sunscreen SPF30 are specifically designed to avoid an ashy or dull cast on skin.

Then there are the 'skinscreens' – the formulas that actively boost your complexion. Ultra Violette's formula with Vitamin C and Kakadu plum, and Heliocare's new 360° Pigment Solution Fluid both tackle uneven tone, while Hello Sunday's the Essential One Body Lotion SPF50, with hyaluronic acid and a gel-cream texture, plumps and hydrates.



## smooth skin

It used to be that while the skin on our face got served all manner of scientific treats, our bodies were left to languish with little more than a moisturiser. That's all changed: exfoliation has sloughed off its salt-scrub-only reputation for the hi-tech wizardry of the acid-based body peel from Dr Dennis Gross. The Body Oil from Augustinus Bader uses the same TFC8 complex that Bader, a stem-cell scientist, devised to help skin repair; and Sisley's Black Rose Beautifying Emulsion is as luxurious as its cult face mask. U Beauty's targeted the Sculpt Arm Compound tightens and hydrates, reduces fluid and also tones by mimicking the same skin communication that is activated during endurance work-outs. Lyma's facial laser is also great for fading and smoothing small scars by helping to build new collagen. It is said to work brilliantly on caesarean scars and stretch marks, though the trick is to use it on new scar tissue.

## inner strength

A growing area of female-focused training, the pelvic floor is key to core stability working in co-ordination with the abdominal and back muscles as well as the diaphragm. A weak pelvic floor is often associated with pregnancy and childbirth, but is also impacted by the ageing process. 'As oestrogen reduces, the pelvic floor becomes weaker,' says Baz Moffat, co-founder of the Well. Less talked about

is a too tight pelvic floor. 'Women hold a huge amount of stress and tension in the pelvic floor: literally tensing the muscle,' says Alexia Acebo, a trainer at Pvolve, a US-based studio with dedicated pelvic-floor classes also available digitally. 'This leads to hyper tenacity, where you might experience pelvic or back pain, an overactive bladder or painful sex due to constriction.'

A women's-health physio can identify a problem at either end of the spectrum by assessing the pelvic floor internally. However, we should all be working on a full scope of function as part of our overall fitness. 'The biggest misconception is that you should be training your pelvic floor all the time: the ability to release and relax is as important as engaging the muscle,' explains Acebo.



We should be working on a full scope of function for fitness

*Dumbbells, £170  
each, Tom Dixon  
at Selfridges*



*Hourglass, £55, Pols  
Potten at Selfridges*



## glow-enhancing tans

The latest body tanners are like soft-focus filters: hydrating, plumping, smoothing and helping to conceal blemishes on the arms or legs while soothing irritation, for example after shaving. Key ingredients include hydrating hyaluronic acid, as found in the Dior Bronze Tanning Water; the tone-evening vitamin C within Natura Bissé's C+C Vitamin Self-Tan Drops as well as calming aloe vera, found in Clarins' Radiance-Plus Golden Glow Booster for Body.

The secret to a flattering faux glow is to also focus on improving tone rather than just deepening colour. For light skin tones, new formulas have less of a tangerine hue, such as Vita Liberata Heavenly Elixir, which utilises technology that creates a more natural finish slowly over 72 hours. Black skin, once overlooked by the tanning industry, can also benefit from tanners that provide a lit-from-within radiance. Tan-Luxe's Super Glow Elixir, with its skin-smoothing tetrapeptides, comes highly recommended.

## the de-stress stretch

Stretching is gaining focus beyond the cursory five minutes you might spend at the end of an exercise class with studios such as StretchLab, which is solely dedicated to extending both muscles and limbs with one-to-one sessions and small group classes. There are well-known benefits to stretching, including injury prevention, flexibility and faster recovery post-exercise, which is more important now that we are generally moving less. 'Stretching loosens tight muscles, relaxing them and increasing blood flow,' says the sports chiropractor Brett Gibbens. 'But it also encourages the release of endorphins as well as stimulating receptors in the nervous system that slow the production of stress hormones.' Which is why stretching before bed – or even an important meeting – will calm you.

## boost your work-out

If you were a Nineties gym bunny, chances are you used an ab-sculpting belt, which stimulates muscles to cheat your way to more definition. This technology, known as Electro Muscle Stimulation (or EMS), has become increasingly sophisticated and offers impressive results. The London-based E-Pulsive now kits out clients with an EMS suit that delivers electrical impulses with diodes that increase muscle contractions during 20-minute strength-training sessions, significantly reducing the time it takes to see results. Yet however hard you work out, the Theragun works harder to help your muscles recover. The vibrating tool deeply massages away knots and heaviness, so you can worry less about aches and pains post-work-out. While the thrumming motion is slightly painful on tight spots, tension release is the reward.

## track and tweak

Tech is demystifying the impact that our menstrual cycles have on our physiology. The Lumen is a portable device that links to an app to assess whether you're burning carbs or fat via the carbon dioxide in your breath, allowing you to better fuel your work-out and make adjustments according to fitness and recovery goals or the course of your cycle. The new venture from Jessica Ennis-Hill, the Jennis Fitness Cycle Mapping app, has guided work-outs led by the former Olympian, which are devised in harmony with the hormonal changes you experience over the course of your cycle. For example, strategic strength training during your follicular phase (days one to 14) produces 15 per cent more strength gains.

## targeted treatments

Exercise doesn't always impact specific areas as much as we'd like, which is where these in-clinic body treatments come in.

**FAT REDUCTION** *Dr Selena Langdon, CoolSculpting Elite*  
CoolSculpting is a non-invasive treatment that permanently destroys fat cells by treating areas of the body to extreme cold temperatures. The next-generation CoolSculpting Elite has innovative new heads to better fit tricky-to-reach spots while also treating 18 per cent more surface area than the original.

**STRETCH MARKS** *Dr Sophie Shotter, Illuminate Viva Stretchmarks + VR*

A cocktail of hyaluronic acid, fatty acids, antioxidants and vitamin C physically plumps uneven texture associated with stretch marks and stimulates new collagen. This is followed by nano-fractional radiofrequency to smooth. A course of four 45-minute treatments is required.

**SKIN-FIRMING** *Natali Kelly, NuEra Tight*

If you need to tone and tighten, the NuEra treatment uses radiofrequency to stimulate collagen, firming skin and plumping fine lines and wrinkles over a course of four to six sessions with treatments personalised for any area of the body.

