

# Your Health

● Real-life stories ● Latest health news ● Expert advice

## A TALE of two Christmases

One Xmas, Stacey was excited about the future. The next, everything was snatched away

**I**t was 4am on Christmas Day when my boyfriend Chris woke up me and our daughter Ronah, 12. 'Let's open presents,' he said.

After exchanging and opening our gifts, Chris was grinning.

'There's one more,' he said, pointing to a tiny parcel hidden in the Christmas tree branches.

He handed the present to me, and I opened it to find an engagement ring.

'Will you marry me?' he asked.

'Of course!' I whooped.

In time, we got hitched.

Then the festive period was approaching again.

'I'm looking forward to spending our first Christmas together as husband and wife,' Chris said.

We invited relatives to a party at our house, three days after Christmas Day.

On the morning of Ronah's last day at school, before she broke up for the holidays, I went downstairs to find Chris sleeping



**Stacey Macdonald, 44**  
Isle of Lewis

Us

on the sofa.

I made myself a coffee and then came back to the living room.

Looking at him closely, it was obvious now he wasn't breathing.

Going into autopilot, I gave him CPR.

I called 999 and a first responder paramedic arrived.

'I'll take over,' he said, putting his hand on my shoulder.

But it became clear that nothing more could be done.

Chris had died suddenly of a massive heart attack.

It was like a rug had been pulled from underneath me.

'Daddy's gone to heaven,' I said to Ronah.

I felt like I couldn't cancel Christmas for her sake, so we had a festive meal with my parents.

Then I sat at the undertakers saying



**Chris and Ronah**

everything I wanted to say to Chris in his open coffin.

On the day that should have been our Christmas party, I buried my husband. We'd only been married for 62 days.

Over the next year, I made a conscious effort to speak about Chris.

I wanted people who heard my story to think: *If you were brave enough to say that, I am brave enough too.*

The following Christmas, I drove eight hours to spend time with my parents.

During the journey, I made peace with myself.

*I'm done with living life on my own, I thought.*

I knew it's what Chris would have wanted.

I soon met a guy called Angus. A year later, he proposed.

I took control of my life in other ways too. I abseiled off the Forth Bridge, raising £5,000 in Chris's memory.

I also took up running for the first time, and lost 10 stone, going from more than 22 stone to a size 12.

Now I ensure Christmas is a happy time for my family — I celebrate Chris's life rather than mourning his death.



**Ronah and me**

## WHAT'S THE NEWS?

Your weekly update

### Donut miss it

It's official! The nation's favourite Christmas market treat is fried churros — topped with sugar and dipped in chocolate. Doughnuts came second, followed by mulled wine and mince pies. Pork-stuffing sandwiches came last.

### Big Zen

In need of some R&R? Devon has been named the best UK Zen escape thanks to its nature, spas and CBD shops. Wye Valley, on the Welsh border, also scored highly due to its large green spaces and river views.



### Cry for help

Thousands of pregnant Brits with Hyperemesis gravidarum (HG) have considered abortion or suicide. HG causes persistent vomiting. Five per cent of women admitted aborting wanted pregnancies due to the condition, while 25 per cent had suicidal thoughts.

**DID YOU KNOW?** A study has revealed what you should NEVER talk about on a first date. Unsurprisingly, your bowel movements came top, followed by your ex.



TURN OVER FOR MORE HEALTH



that's life! 15

# Why women don't leave

**W**hile the festive season is a time of joy for so many people, for others it can be fraught with anxiety and violence.

It's well known that domestic abuse spikes at Christmas, but with a further rise caused by the Covid pandemic, the situation looks bleak for many women this year.

When discussing domestic abuse victims, some say: 'Why doesn't she just leave?' But the right question to ask is: 'Why does she choose to stay?'

Here, family counsellor Darby Stickland explains why women stay put and what we can do to help...



Darby

It's the question many people wonder of domestic abuse victims, but they don't realise the half of it...

**1** Darby says that victims can struggle to see the severity of the abuse or the danger they are in. This is very common, since violent partners often use a cloud of confusion, blame-shifting and manipulative tactics to maintain control. The result is that victims either believe the abuse is their fault, isn't that bad, or doubt their own memories. Or sometimes, victims wrongly attribute their husband's behaviour to stress, alcohol, problems at work, unemployment or other factors.

## How to help:

- Encourage a victim to track incidents of abuse in a notebook.
- Gently help her to see that the abuse always serves a purpose for her partner — like when he flashes anger, he gets his way.
- Be patient — it can take months, even years, for her to see what you see, so continue to find creative ways to guide her to

make an accurate assessment of her situation. Agree a safety plan with her for when she needs help. A domestic abuse charity, such as Women's Aid can support this.

**2** It's common for the victim to lack family, community and support. Darby says domestic violence victims have likely thought about the idea of leaving their partner, but don't feel they



Christmas can be bleak for some women



would be supported by those around them.

Many women fear that separating from their partner will cause them to be judged by friends and family. Some victims already find themselves alone since abusers work to isolate their victims, so they have no one to turn to even if they wanted to.

Being alone makes it harder to face future challenges like single motherhood, income loss, divorce and healing from trauma.

## How to help:

- Domestic abuse charities like Refuge.org.uk, your GP or local churches can be vital in giving support to those who feel alone or don't have any support.
- You can volunteer with these charities and help create ways to reach those at risk.

**3** Leaving is the most dangerous time for a woman. Victims know that if their abuser senses he is losing control, there is the potential for him to go to extremes — which could even mean killing her.

In one study, researchers interviewed men who murdered their wives. It found that threats of separation or the act of separation were the precipitating event.

Even worse, some women don't just have themselves to fear for. Many abusers threaten to kill themselves, the children or the family pet if a woman leaves.

## How to help:

- Find out what she's afraid of by asking her directly what she thinks will happen if she goes.
- Connect her with a domestic violence charity or shelter as they can help keep her safe — while she remains in the home or if she flees the abuse.
- Sometimes, leaving an abusive relationship can mean going into hiding and may take months to plan. This is why so many women choose to stay. If she does decide to stay, continue to care for her, keep

reviewing her safety plan and remind her you are willing to help if there is a day she wants to make the choice to go.

**4** Leaving abuse is extremely difficult and costly. Usually, victims agonise over what to do for weeks, if not months or years. Darby knows that fleeing abuse brings victims new challenges with their income, children, stability and other relationships.

Often an abuser might control the finances or have destroyed her credit, which could mean losing custody of children.

They also might believe that two-parent households are best for children, and that they must put their children first. Sadly, the effects of trauma on a victim (depression, anxiety, PTSD) might be overwhelming and make them behave differently to how they would prior to the relationship.

Tragically, many hope their man will change and that the good times outweigh the bad times.

## How to help:

- Try to understand why a victim is choosing to stay. It is easy to think: 'I'd never put up with that!' But until you live under the terror of abuse, you really don't know what you would do. Every choice comes at a cost.
- Practical help if she leaves can include helping her find a job or offering her a place to stay.
- Understand that any step a woman takes to address her abuse will, at least temporarily, make her and her children's lives more difficult. If she has told you about the abuse in the first place, it signals a step in the right direction.

If you or someone you know is affected by the issues raised in this health report, you can contact [REFUGE.ORG.UK](http://REFUGE.ORG.UK) or call them on 0808 2000 247. But in an emergency, always contact 999.

5 gift boxes to BOOST mental health

Show a loved one you care with one of these thoughtful gifts. They're guaranteed to make someone feel better...



1

Bloom and Wild delivers stunning fresh flowers and plants directly to the front door and, when on display, they can really give a boost to mental outlook by bringing a little colour into the home on gloomy winter days.

• From £20, at [bloomandwild.com](http://bloomandwild.com)

2

Reading is a brilliant way of keeping negative vibes at bay, offering an escape and something to look forward to each day. Willoughby Book Club delivers a book through your letterbox every month, chosen to specifically match your taste.

• From £39.99 for a three-month subscription, the-willoughbybookclub.co.uk

3

If chocolate is the only thing that will help, Hotel Chocolat is the answer.

With gorgeous chocolate delivered monthly and a huge range of flavours and styles to choose from, the mood-brightening qualities of chocolate can be the perfect remedy to any winter-period blues.

• [hotelchocolat.com](http://hotelchocolat.com)

4

Keep your brain happy with the freshest and healthiest ingredients from the food experts at Prep Kitchen. These healthy meals are prepared by chefs, delivered to your door, saving you the hassle of cooking and helping you pack in the nutrients that your mind and body will love.

• From £5.75, [prepkitchen.co.uk](http://prepkitchen.co.uk)

5



Finally, candles can be a really calming presence around the home, not least during a hot bath or lazy evening with wine and a box set. Iggy Box delivers artisanal, all-natural candles every month to ensure the home is in a constant state of relaxation.

• from £14.99, [iggybox.co.uk](http://iggybox.co.uk)

# DOC IN THE HOUSE

Nutritional therapist **Olga Preston** is on call...

## Festive frazzle

**Q** How can I improve my family's nutrition to ward off infections during winter?

Karen, 36

**A** Poor nutrition has been found to increase the risk of infections, so limit sugary, processed snacks and highly-processed ready meals if you can — think about what sweets you give children as presents!

Eating a 'rainbow diet' — vegetables and fruits with a variety of natural colours — over the course of the week is a good way to ensure you are obtaining a range of nutrients.

This also feeds helpful bacteria in the gut, which play a fundamental part in regulating a healthy immune response and ensuring the body can recognise invaders.

Try to get your children eating herbs and spices in their daily diet. Garlic contains compounds that help support immune function, while curcumin found in turmeric is brilliant for fighting infections. You can use it in soups, stews and stir-fries. Add a sprinkle of black pepper as this will aid absorption of the curcumin.

**HELP!** Got a health worry? Email your problem to [doctors@thatslife.co.uk](mailto:doctors@thatslife.co.uk) or see page 3 for other contact details.



## Brazil magic

**Q** I seem to constantly have a cold during winter. Are there any key vitamins that are particularly good for supporting my immune health?

Penny, 29

**A** Infections deplete the body's vitamin C stores, so start there. Vitamin C-rich foods include citrus fruits, berries, kiwi or sweet peppers. Sugar also competes with vitamin C, so avoid sugary snacks if you can.

A lesser-known hero nutrient for a well-functioning immune system is selenium. This is a mineral found in Brazil nuts, seafood, fish, organ meats, meat, poultry and grains. Brazil nuts are high in selenium and just two can contain more than the daily recommended intake — 60 micrograms for women and 75 micrograms for men.

The NHS recommends everyone should supplement with 10 micrograms of vitamin D every day throughout winter.

Lastly, the mineral zinc helps to prevent colds and can be found in lentils, beans, chickpeas, hemp, pumpkin, squash, sesame seeds, cashews, almonds, pine nuts, oats and grass-fed red meat — British beef is mostly grass-fed.



# CURE me CORNER

## HANGOVERS

**BUY IT** The new **Inside Out** drinks are the ultimate solution for hangovers.

These berry-flavoured pre-tox drinks are full of antioxidants to protect your liver before you booze and reduce the negative effects of alcohol. £3.99, [insideoutdrinks.co.uk](http://insideoutdrinks.co.uk)



## TRY IT

**Milk thistle** With its large purple flower heads, milk thistle (*silybum marianum*) has powerful liver-cleansing effects. Find it in sunny, sheltered spots in the UK. Grind the seeds to a powder and add to hot water to make a hangover-busting tea.



Olga Preston's advice is for guidance only, and is not a substitute for seeing your GP

# 5 fun ways to burn Xmas calories



Dance those calories away!

**1** **Rock around the Christmas tree!** All those parties mean you're a calorie-burning machine! You can shift 195 calories spending half an hour on the dance floor. Keep going all night and you'll burn the equivalent to a helping of cheese, crackers and wine!

**2** **Kissing under the mistletoe** Half an hour of kissing could help you burn in excess of 30 calories. That's one chocolate coin — so pucker up!

**3** **Shop 'til you drop!** The average person burns 165-220 calories per hour while shopping — that's the same as a whole mince pie.



**4** **Cooking up a treat** You'll be thrilled to hear half an hour spent on your feet food-prepping will burn roughly 70 calories. Even the act of eating your meal burns around 50 calories. Winner, winner, Christmas dinner!

**5** **Go on a festive walk** Take in twinkling lights at one of Sony's trails around the country and burn 280 calories per hour walking — that's 100g Camembert cheese! Locations include stunning Blenheim Palace in Oxford, Hillsborough Castle in Belfast and Delamere Forest in Cheshire — all featuring magical illuminations. Visit [mychristmastrails.co.uk](http://mychristmastrails.co.uk)