

Carol's countdown: the 28 facts of February

QUESTION Why is health advice often so downright depressing? Can you tell me facts and figures that will actually motivate me?

CAROL SAYS It could be said that February feels like one of the longest months, but with spring round the corner and 28 days to get there, let's count them down with some thought-provoking facts.

Did you know that to walk for **1** hour a day you can more than half your risk of breast cancer, and up that to **2** hours non-stop at a pace of **3**mph and you will burn off 160 calories – which is a cupful of vegetable chilli that, after eating, increases your metabolic rate for up to **4** hours, which is how long an 'average' couple spend talking per week.

Feeling inspired? Then **5** hours of running a week will lower your oestrogen levels, with each foot striking the ground between **6** – 800 times for every mile you run. When we exercise, we improve our chance of getting the ideal **7** good quality hours of sleep a night. **8** weeks of strength training is all it takes to boost metabolism, which burns your energy quicker.

If you fall into the 'average' category then as a couple you will spend **9** hours watching TV per week together. Instead, spend **10** minutes running up and down your stairs and burn 100 calories. Having an **11**am snack of iron-packed apricots will improve concentration levels and if you add some yoghurt you will include magical Vitamin **B12**, a natural mood enhancer. Remember



to share some love and catch that Valentine post on the **13**th, then spoil loved ones on the **14**th. Don't avoid lifting heavy objects – it can increase your metabolism by up to **15%** because muscles are metabolically active. Origins No Puffery Cooling Mask for puffy eyes is **£16**, well spent for me after cycling in cold weather.

I can then smile using the **17** muscles required. Feeling lazy? For **£18** you can boost your circulation the easy way with cranberry-scented socks that you heat up and wear (from The Bodyshop). And **19** calories are in 50 grams of my favourite vegetable – the Brussels sprout.

Reach for that lipstick! It is worth looking good and when playing sport it improves your performance by **20%** across all disciplines. Honest!

Chewing gum for **21** minutes or after a meal helps prevent tooth decay. There are **22** calories in a Rolo. Each parent contributes **23** chromosomes to start a human life. In **24** hours I cycled 445.41 miles. Unless you exercise after the age of **25** you will lose around 1/2lb of lean muscle tissue every year. We are **26** years old before the sacrum, a triangular bone located just below the small of your back fuses into a single bone. We have **27** bones in our hand and finally, look on the bright side – with **28** days in February, this year spring has just got even closer.

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Putting things off only makes you more stressed

Finding anything to do other than what you should be doing is easy, isn't it? Coming up with a good excuse to put off that difficult job can be such a relief. But whether it's a displacement activity or a delaying tactic, all you are doing is adding 'procrastination stress' to the postponed ordeal.

The hardest thing about doing something you don't really want to do is getting started – after that it becomes easier. It may be very important or it may not be, but whether it is cleaning out the garage, having a difficult conversation, writing a report or going to the dentist; all

the time it is waiting to be done you are building your stress levels.

So why do we do it? It must be some sort of madness because what a great feeling you get when you can tick the box that says 'job done'. The world can feel like a better place, there is a real sense of achievement and even liberation.

I don't think my house had ever been tidier than when I was studying for my exams. I would do anything rather than get down to studying – I even ironed my socks! And all the time I was washing the windows and cleaning the oven I was feeling bad about the revision that wasn't

getting done and worrying about the exams. When I eventually did get down to studying I felt so much better – why had I put it off? It wasn't nearly as bad as I thought it would be.

Maybe that's the key. When you find yourself fretting about something you are putting off, remember: it's unlikely to be as bad as you've imagined and you can't put it off forever, so get on with it, get it done and start feeling great!



Jo Hampson and Georgina Perkins run life-change company Stepping Off, based in Shap