

Spring into April by going green

I don't just spring into Spring, I quite literally dive in head first. April is my favourite month and historically the month I am driven to achieve the most. There is something about emerging from the winter months that can't help but invigorate and inspire. The cycle season is well under way so good nutrition is always high up on my agenda. This year I am going to gracefully tap into my creative side. I intend to live the good life and tinge my fingers green.

Having been vegan for over 15 years and vegetarian from childhood I know how eating a plant-based diet makes me feel. My energy is boundless. Growing our own vegetables means that we are not only eating them in season but we have the pleasure of watching them grow. Seasonally, April is the month for, among others, broccoli, cabbage, garlic and cauliflower, all of which are on a list of super foods. Experts now believe the greatest impact on our health will come from prevention, and eating these super foods will have unquestionable benefits to our long-term wellbeing. We intend to grow quite a crop which will include the best nutrient-boosting foods on offer.

We are all aware that eating our vegetables promotes health so becoming involved in their production as a family can't be anything other than fantastic. It encourages children to recognise seasonal foods.

My seedlings are being nurtured at the moment in their bio-degradable little pots with lots of encouraging words. As is usual in our household, I am in direct competition with my husband. Mine, all tucked up inside, are keeping toasty until they shoot up and can



enjoy the open skies. Husband has his under lock and key in his office listening to Radio 4 so his may take a little longer to emerge!

It may not be on our doorstep but the people of the Japanese island of Okinawa are the healthiest people in the world. They live to a ripe old age and understand the importance of a diet that is plant-based. They also understand how vital exercise is too.

It is a place where breast cancer is so rare that screening is not needed and where heart disease, stroke and cancer occur with the lowest frequency in the world. These people maintain a healthy weight throughout life and the average Body Mass Index of the senior citizens is a perfect 21!

Realising that Truly Scrumptious, our six-month-old puppy, loves green beans made me smile and feel just a little bit proud. She turns her button nose skyward if I serve a meal without her greens.

It is recommended that you steam your vegetables to retain important nutrients. We use a special steamer in our microwave – it's so quick and the vegetables stay crunchy!

While it is known that vegetarians have a more vigorous immune system with white cells that are twice as lethal to tumour cells, no-one is saying you have to become purely vegetarian – but don't be an April Fool: take a crunchy leaf out of the Okinawans' lifestyle book and start planting for a long and fruitful future.

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LIFE COACH with Jo Hampson

The secret of blue elephants with pink spots

Whatever you do, please don't even THINK about blue elephants with pink spots.

I want to continue to explain how we can use our minds to keep ourselves upbeat and positive. What came into your head when I asked you not to think about blue elephants with pink spots? Obvious, isn't it? What comes into your head when I say "maths exam"? Immediately, I am returned to school, wishing I was almost anywhere else. In fact I can feel my hands getting clammy at the thought of turning over the exam paper.

Thinking about the maths exam not only brings back the worry and fear, but also physical changes – sweaty palms and shallow breathing – and these

reinforce the sense of dread. Dwelling on bad thoughts, memories or fears about the future can become self-perpetuating. I don't think there are many people who haven't worked themselves into absolute panic over something that has turned out just fine. For people with depression it can be desperately hard to break out of a cycle of sad thoughts leading to sad feelings and the physical signs of sadness such as weeping. The weeping enforces the sadness and the cycle may continue whatever the reality of the situation.

The link between thoughts, feelings and physical responses can be very useful. If you realise a negative thought is leading to a bad feeling try and use it as a warning flag. You can then replace your

anxiety with a different thought: I'm now thinking about Catbells... I am remembering the last time I walked to the top it was the most glorious day – I can feel the sun on my back and the wind in my hair... I know it's not the hardest hill to climb but I am breathing deeply and feeling an energising sense of achievement!

If you can recognise your "physics exam" moments and find a "Catbells" moment to replace them you will be well on the way to understanding the secret: the secret of a blue elephant with pink spots and big smiley face!



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