

TUESDAY, MARCH 6, 2007

INSIDE

FAMILY, HEALTH & NUTRITION

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Adoption

Finding your natural parents

Reducing risk

Ian Grant on teens
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How to beat stress

Balancing act

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The New Zealand Herald



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edit...

James Russell – editor

The cover story in this edition of INSIDE Family, Health and Nutrition is sure to strike a chord with all of those who have been adopted and toyed with the idea of tracking down their parents by birth. We meet an amazing mother and daughter whose experiences of meeting their birth mothers have been cathartic for them both.

We have been lucky enough to have Ian Grant, founder of ParentsInc., contributing again, this time with an insightful piece on teenage drinking. His advice is important, concentrating on encouraging your child to build a caring group of friends around them and instilling them with the confidence to walk away from situations with which they are not comfortable.

Jackie Bedford chimes in with her advice for avoiding sibling rivalry, mainly through seeing each child as an individual and leaving squabbling children to their own devices (if the hair is not yet flying) once in a while.

Caryn Zinn contributes with her sound advice for the most important meal of the day, no matter your lifestyle, and Val Leveson looks at the options for getting your baby to sleep.

We hope you enjoy the issue.

INSIDE SERIES

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COMING UP

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Rock-a-bye baby

Val Leveson explores one of life's great mysteries – how to get your baby to sleep

All parents know that one of the most difficult things about having a small baby is getting enough sleep. The baby has her own interior clock and the parents' need for sleep has nothing to do with it.

However, as all parents know, their state of mind affects their infant – so getting the baby into good sleeping patterns is good for all.

Allison Jamieson, clinical adviser for Plunket, says a baby sleeps a lot, and as it gets older the baby has more time awake. On average a tiny baby will sleep 16 and a half hours a day, but this will be an amalgamation of shortish sleeps.

"Using the word 'training' in regards to getting a baby to sleep is a difficult term. We talk about managing issues. My advice is to talk to a Plunket nurse, or an authority about your circumstances. The danger of having hard and fast rules is that parents feel they're failing if the rules don't work for them."

Jamieson stresses that babies use crying as their only way to communicate. "If the baby cries, it could mean that she's in pain, has wind, is hot or cold or is hungry. Look at the

whole picture before deciding what to do about a sleeping problem.

"Some just cry because they want to be comforted. Picking the baby up and cuddling it may do the trick. Do what works and use what resources you have. Partners, grandparents or even good friends could be of help to allow you to get some rest."

Jamieson warns that some babies cry and grizzle and then fall asleep. "It's ok to leave the child for a few minutes if this is the case. But if there is prolonged crying, parents need to know that it's ok to go back and try again. The baby could be crying for good reason – she could be in pain."

Parents need to know the signs of tiredness in a baby – if they don't, the baby could become very grumpy without enough sleep. These signs may include grizzling, rubbing eyes, or drooping eyes.

One idea Jamieson has to help get a baby to sleep is to massage the baby before bedtime. "This is great for the recipient, but also gives some nice, quiet bonding time for the parents. It's lovely to see the baby relax."

Singing or talking to the baby could work, or having a bath together. If little else is working, try taking the baby for a ride in the car. Most important is creating a calm period before putting the baby into bed.

Jamieson's main advice is to tell parents to look at what resources they have access to. There's help and advice in the community and on the internet. Grandparents, aunts and uncles and friends can all be helpful.

She says that sometimes if you're with a child when it goes to sleep, or if the child is moved from one room to another – or from a car to its bed, the baby could wake up with its last memory of being with you.

This can be a problem as the baby may decide it doesn't want to be by itself after waking up and start to cry. If this happens it doesn't hurt to try and reassure the baby and settle it down.

It's extremely important to remember when putting your child to bed, to place the baby on its back. This reduces the chances of cot death.

In the contentedbaby.com website, authority Gina Ford mentions the Foundation for the Study of Infant Death is advising that for the first six months of a

baby's life, it should not be put in a separate room for daytime naps. Babies should be in a room where a parent is present.

Research in the International Journal of Epidemiology claims 75 per cent of the babies who died in the daytime were sleeping in a room where there was no adult present.



BED TIME

Some ideas from AskDrSears.com include:

- Develop a realistic attitude about nighttime parenting. Sleeping, like eating, is not a state you can force a baby into. Create a secure environment.
- Beware of sleep trainers as there are no magic formulas. Most of these techniques are variations of the cry-it-out method. There are also gadgets that can take some of the nighttime duties from you (such as baby monitors).

Be discerning about what you use and consider your circumstances.

- Stay flexible. No single approach will work all the time.
- Decide where the baby sleeps best.
- A peaceful daytime is likely to lead to a restful night. The more the baby is held and calmed during the day, the more likely she will be peaceful at night.
- Set predictable and consistent nap routines.
- Calm the baby down by giving the baby a warm bath followed by a soothing massage before sleep.
- Tank up your baby during the day. Babies need to learn that daytime is for eating and the night is for sleeping.
- Fathers can try nestling the baby's head against the front of the neck, with your chin against the top of the baby's head. As you sing or or talk, the vibration of the deeper male voice lulls the baby to sleep. Swaying with your baby also helps.
- Detect possible medical causes for nightwaking if nothing seems to work. ■

Actually, this is
a picture of a
mother sleeping.



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Breaking your fast

Caryn Zinn takes a look at the options for the most important meal of the day

Is breakfast really the most important meal of the day? The simple answer is 'yes, it is'. However, it is the quality of the meal that determines just how important this meal is. It is all very well fuelling the body first thing in the morning, but filling up on the wrong sort of fuel will do no good in the long-run. Sadly for some, neither a fatty, salty, cholesterol-coated fry-up nor a bowl of sugar-coated-cardboard-box-animal-shapes "posing" as cereal on the supermarket shelf is considered good quality. So where is the happy medium and what exactly is considered a

good quality breakfast?

Firstly, it is important to explain why breakfast is so beneficial. A good quality breakfast is fuel for your body and brain first thing in the morning, providing you with the sustained energy and nutrients you need for the early part of the day. The word breakfast in its literal sense means 'break' 'fast', and it does exactly that, it breaks the fast that you have been on since your last meal, which presumably was dinner on the previous night (8-10 hours prior). By morning, your near empty stores should be replenished, ready for the

day's work. You may have rested during your sleep, but your body's metabolism has not. It has kept on going throughout the night and if you do not replenish your stores, your energy levels will decline as the day progresses.

Research has revealed a lot about the importance of breakfast.

Outcomes of numerous studies show that breakfast eaters are associated with a more positive mood, have lower stress levels, are more alert and productive in their work or tasks. They are also less likely to have excess body fat, and may have

a lower risk of heart disease and diabetes later in life compared to breakfast skippers. Children who skip breakfast report more lethargy, have demonstrated trouble concentrating and struggling with complex mental tasks.

However it seems to be the wholegrain bread and cereal-based breakfast meals that impart the health and weight related benefits, rather than the fatty meaty fry-up.

Now onto finding a good quality breakfast meal.

The key for selection is a combination of foods that

provide high fibre (wholegrain) carbohydrate, low fat protein and minimal sugar. There are countless options to cater for everyone's needs. Choose from the lists below to find a breakfast that suits you and your lifestyle, making sure that you vary things from time to time, to prevent 'breakfast boredom'.

So make it a priority. Start your day every day with a good breakfast. Add variety to your choices. Add flavour. Try something you've never tasted before. Be creative and most of all, have fun and enjoy your breakfast. ■



BREAKFAST FOR THE CEREAL LOVER

Choose a cereal that is wholegrain or oat based, high in fibre, low in fat and refined sugar. For a hot meal, choose the super-food - porridge. Add the following to your cereal:

- Dried fruit such as diced apricot, mango, or dates.
- Fresh fruit such as diced pear, banana, kiwifruit, berries, pineapple or rockmelon.
- Poached or grilled fruit such as peaches, apricots or prunes.
- Diced roasted nuts, such as cashews, almonds, hazelnuts or pine nuts.
- Mix with low-fat milk, soy milk, rice milk or low-fat natural yoghurt.



BREAKFAST FOR THE 'CAFÉ JUNKIE'

Choose any of the following from the menu:

- Poached or scrambled eggs on wholegrain toast. For a larger meal, add grilled tomatoes and mushrooms or a side of low-fat bacon or salmon.
- Muesli with fruit and low-fat yoghurt. To curb the fat calories, choose untoasted muesli or Bircher muesli.
- Summer fruit salad (mix of strawberries, melon, kiwifruit) topped with natural yoghurt.
- For the rushed café individual, choose a trim milk latte and a bran and blueberry/raisin muffin to eat on the go.

LIQUID BREAKFAST



Alternatively, for the liquid breakfast lover, you can simply toss banana, berries, low-fat milk, yoghurt, Milo powder and wheatgerm into a blender and whip up a power fruit-grain blender-based smoothie to kick-start your day.

BREAKFAST IN A RUSH

The benefits of breakfast should ensure that you make time for breakfast. Should your intentions of sitting down to a plate of grainy cereal, fruit and milk just not eventuate, be rest assured that these quick easy options will suffice as a good quality breakfast.

- Liquid breakfast drinks (Up & Go, Fast Break, CalciTrim) and a banana.
- Yoghurt smoothie and a banana, plus a wholegrain breakfast bar.
- Carton of low-fat flavoured milk and a handful of Mini-Wheats (or Fruity-Bix Chucks) and some dried fruit all thrown into a plastic bag.



ALL PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

CARYN ZINN IS A SENIOR LECTURER AT AUT: DIVISION OF SPORT & RECREATION AND A NEW ZEALAND REGISTERED DIETITIAN / SPORTS NUTRITIONIST

BREAKFAST FOR THE TOAST LOVER

Try some new combo toppings to put on to wholegrain bread / toast.

- Fig or cherry jam and finely sliced gruyere cheese.
- Basil pesto and ricotta cheese.
- Lite cottage cheese and coriander pesto.
- Cottage cheese, cherry tomatoes, basil leaves and cracked pepper.
- Warm slice of ham, grilled tomato and a sprinkling of low fat cheese.
- Avocado, crumbled feta cheese and cracked pepper.
- Baked beans plus scrambled or poached eggs.
- Try different varieties of wholegrain bread: mixed grain, soy and linseed, sun-dried tomato, sunflower and barley.
- Add a low fat milk drink (trim milk coffee, hot chocolate, flavoured milk) to increase the calcium and protein content of the meal.

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INGREDIENTS

(Serves 4)

- 4 eggs
- 2 tablespoons cream
- 2 tablespoons chopped dill
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 cup sour cream
- 1 bunch rocket or salad greens
- 200g Regal Marlborough Cold Smoked Salmon
- Lemon wedges

METHOD

In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs, cream, dill and salt and pepper. Heat a small, lightly greased non-stick frying pan over medium heat. Pour 1/4 cup of the mixture into the pan and gently tip the pan to spread out the mixture. Cook for 1 to 2 minutes on each side or until golden. Repeat with the remaining mixture.

To serve, spread 1 tablespoon of sour cream over each omelette and top with the rocket and smoked salmon.

Garnish with lemon wedges.



In the wars

Sibling rivalry can turn your family home into a battlefield. Jackie Bedford finds out how to defuse the tension

At times my two sons are "best brothers". At other times they're like two little Genghis Khans bent on annihilating each other.

When things are sweet, they go off to a bedroom and play for hours, sharing ideas and constructing some massive project together.

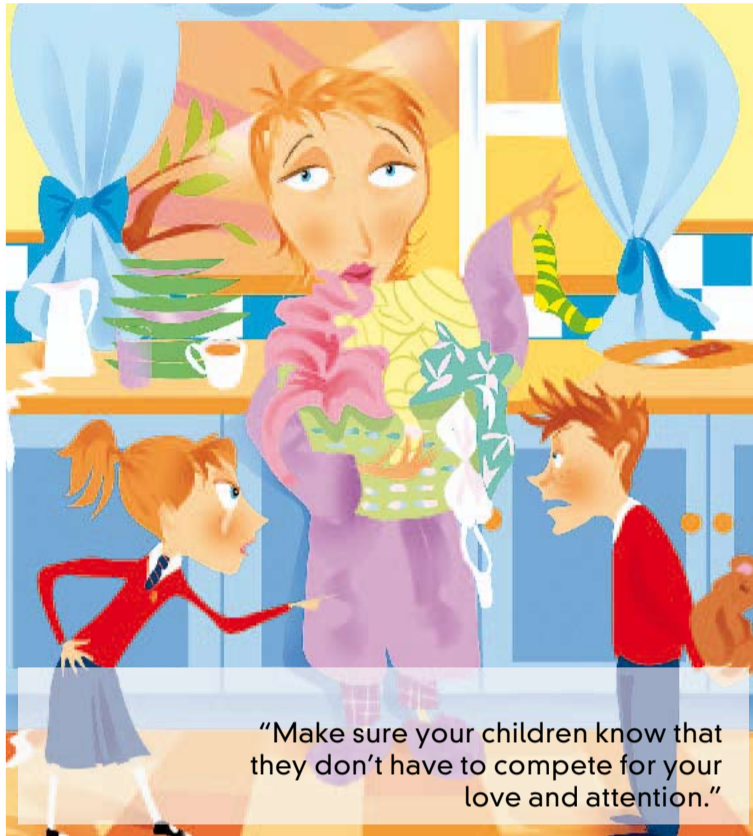
When they're in combative mode they needle, bash and whine, and seek to get a parent involved to act as referee.

Marie, a mother of three primary-aged girls, says the position in the family has an influence on sibling relations.

"The oldest can be challenged if the younger ones seem to be catching up or threatening her position. The middle child seems to fit in the easiest, despite not having the advantages that go with being the oldest or the youngest. The youngest one has her own place and protects it. She does have to get carted around a lot for the others' activities and she can object to that."

"They all dance and have come up through their own grades, but then the middle one took up jazz and contemporary dance, and entered at the same level as the oldest one. The older child's sense of being in the leadership position or being the first to do things was threatened.

"Girls tend to be more verbal in their attacks than physical. They can be subtle and cunning with it. For example, they will learn a



"Make sure your children know that they don't have to compete for your love and attention."

PICTURE/GETTY IMAGES

look that they know will annoy the other child."

"I got a lot from the book **Siblings Without Rivalry** (by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish), especially about finding the uniqueness of each child and not comparing them."

Marie works with new parents at Playcentre and says this concept of how to treat children is something many struggle with.

"You have to accept that life is different for each of your children. It is common, for example, for a mother to feel sorry that she won't

be able to spend as much one-on-one time with the second and subsequent children as she did with the first. But the younger one just has different experiences. And there are pros for the younger one as well. They have a more relaxed parent the second time round, for example, and they have an older child to entertain them."

From the book, Marie also got an idea of how to diffuse the classic rivalry scenario - arguments about allocation of food and drink. "If a child complains, you get them to focus on their own need, not

what the other has. You say 'If you want some more, you can have more'. The same principle works for clothing and other items. You need to convince the children that you will meet their needs rather than attempting to treat them exactly the same."

Another aspect of the rivalry is to see that they can learn from it, says Marie. "Small fights often don't matter. If no-one is getting hurt, it can be a good idea to let them resolve it. Learning to negotiate is a necessary skill in life. You don't want to be in the middle all the time."

Australian parenting guru Christopher Green, in his book **Toddler Taming** (published by Doubleday in 1990), defines sibling rivalry as "that competitive streak which makes children squabble, fight and accuse their parents of impartial treatment". And he reassures parents that it's not "a pathological condition but just... a very normal human trait... Fighting between our young is one of those universal but irritating parts of family life."

He observes that parents' biggest mistake is to get involved and try to intervene in their children's fighting. He advocates moving physically away from less serious battles so that they don't have an audience and know that you're not even going to try to negotiate the truce for them. This enables them to "find their own equilibrium", he says.

If a parent does intervene, he says, it should not be to conduct a major investigation to identify a culprit - which is doomed to failure. Rather, the parent should aim to re-establish peace, for example, by providing a distraction or organising some time out.

The arrival of a new sibling is often a challenge for existing children in the family. Her first child's response to her second pregnancy inspired Rochelle Neale's latest book **I Know About Babies**.

Her "shy and imaginative" son announced that he was pregnant too. It was his way of being part of things and ensuring some of the attention was directed towards himself, she observes. Rochelle and her partner went along with it and his "pregnancy" continued right through to giving birth himself, as described in the book.

"Sometimes it was a bit of a nuisance," says Rochelle. "He wanted to put his baby in the special basinette I had. We came to a compromise and got him his own basinette."

She says he was looking forward to the new baby and has proved a loving brother. Rochelle and her partner ensured he had special time with them and indulging his fantasy about being pregnant helped too. "It is a loss. They were the special one and now something has usurped them. It's a shock, but it can be exciting too." ■

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Little miss sunshine

A UK study highlights the need for adolescent girls to show their skin to the sun now and again, finds Megan Rauscher

In a study of healthy adolescent girls, researchers found that insufficient vitamin D levels were a relatively common finding, with non-white girls more severely affected.

According to the UK-based study team, "reduced sunshine exposure rather than diet explained the difference in vitamin D status of white and non-white girls" in the study, reported in the **Archives of Disease in Childhood**.

"Vitamin D deficiency during childhood and adolescence," warns Dr. M. Zulf Mughal and colleagues, "might impair the acquisition of peak bone mass at the end of skeletal growth and maturation, thereby increasing the risk of osteoporotic fracture later in life."

Mughal, from Saint Mary's Hospital for Women and Children in Manchester, and colleagues

measured vitamin D levels in 14 white and 37 non-white 14-16-year-old girls attending a multi-ethnic girls' school in the UK.

Thirty-seven girls (73 per cent) were vitamin D deficient, and nine (17 per cent) were severely deficient.

Average vitamin D levels were higher in white girls than in non-white girls.

For the group as a whole, the vitamin D concentration correlated with the estimated duration of daily sunlight exposure and percentage of body surface area exposed, but not with estimated intake of vitamin D.

"This is in keeping with the fact that the main source of vitamin D is that produced by the action of solar ultraviolet B radiation acting on seven-dehydrocholesterol in skin," the team explains. "Only small



PICTURE/GETTY IMAGES

amounts are obtained from dietary sources."

As they note, "Avoidance of exposure to sunshine for religious and cultural beliefs that encourage wearing of concealing clothing and

restriction of outdoor activities has previously been reported as a risk factor for vitamin D deficiency in Saudi Arabian adolescents."

In an editorial, Dr N. J. Bishop, from the University of Sheffield,

expresses concern that "failure to supply an essential nutrient during a period of rapid growth and development is likely to result in problems across the population as a whole."

He writes, "We need to take simple, practical measures to reduce the burden of early bone disease and other later problems." These include reminding women that breast milk lacks vitamin D and that totally breastfed infants should be supplemented until receiving a full mixed diet.

It remains to be determined, Bishop adds, how to meet the needs of older children and adolescents from cultures that avoid sunlight. "Perhaps more exercise outdoors would help deal with this problem." ■

SOURCE: Archives of Disease in Childhood, July 2006.

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Young lives out of control



Problems such as excessive teenage drinking can be lessened by helping to shape their lives, writes Ian Grant



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One of the greatest tragedies in our nation is teenagers who have been left to their own resources to work out what is right or wrong in life. Our papers carry stories of drunken teenage drivers who kill themselves and their friends. Is there a way of preventing this carnage? I believe there is, and one of the major factors is how those teenagers were parented.

Life is full of risks, and human beings have to work out how to assess risk in their lives. Because the frontal lobe of the brain doesn't develop until over 20 years of age, teenagers haphazardly assess risk – that's why they need parenting. Too many parents in a modern world struggle with what their role is. Often they back away from confrontation because they desperately want to be their teenager's friend. A good coach never backs away from confronting what is best for the player, and parents need to learn that rule.

I am not saying it is easy. John

Cowan and I wrote the book, "The White Water Rafting Years" on parenting teenagers. In it we make the point the crucial time is the quiet part of the river before the rapids. If you've been on one of those adventures, the guides will teach you, in that quiet part of the river, all about safety. Everything from how to paddle to what to do if you fall out. Simply, it is so much easier to do it then than trying to have a meaningful conversation on a twisty, rubber platform, covered in spray, and having to shout at the top of your voice.

So in the "tweenage" years (9-12), parents need to make sure their child has the right attitude of life. Viktor Frankl, survivor of four concentration camps said, "Everything can be taken from a man except one thing; the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."

We need to teach our teenagers attitude.

-A self to live with: Encourage them to dig into the wealth of who they are and to discover

just how much they have got to offer as a human being. Boys need to hear often, "You've got what it takes mate" and girls need to hear, "Yes you are lovely and capable". They need to know they can never come to the limit of their potential.

-A work to live for: They need to know work creates things – and they are creative. Our sense of feeling really comes alive as we create. Talk often to them about what careers they would like in life.

-A belief to live by: Your tweenager needs to ask the questions, Who am I? Where did I come from? What am I here for? Where am I going? What happens when I die? As a personal observation, a lot of teenagers have lost respect for death. Parents need to know these answers so they can guide their young people.

-A cause worth your life: Martin Luther King said if a man hasn't discovered something he is prepared to die for, he isn't fit to live. Too many teenagers are under-challenged and are

suffering from the dreaded "affluenza" disease. Too often they are rescued by their parents in situations where they could learn the consequences of their actions. Young people won't waste their weekends blotted out on alcohol if they have a cause that commands their best – and their life.

Apart from these four, the other protection for teenagers, is to have good mates. With small families, often teenagers don't have bigger brothers or sisters to look out for them.

So in the tweenage years it is good if families create a "family-friendly Friday night", where with other families they do fun things together. This builds up friendships with other young people who will become a "family" through those years.

I've seen the success of this so many times, where tweenagers from small families have "cousins" who look out for them. It is easier for a teenager to leave a party when it turns to custard if their group decides to, rather than if they have to

decide alone. It seems to be a rule with teenagers that if their parents have a weakness such as over-drinking, their teenagers will do it ten times worse.

It is role modeling at its worst, and it may be that we need to look at our own lives before working on our teenagers' attitudes. Parents need to know it is a natural and healthy thing for teenagers to challenge their thinking.

Sometimes parents need to be a faithful and strong kicking post that teenagers can bump up against. Your teenager is individuating, and the tragedy is so many of them are trying to be adults by bumping up against their own peers, when they need to come up against mature adults.

Finally, as a parent, never just shrug your shoulders and say, "Oh they are teenagers and that's what they do." Rather, without crushing their individuality, help shape their lives so they become responsible adults. That's what parents do. ■

INSIDE



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The New Zealand Herald

Like mother, like daughter

Ashley Campbell meets a mother and daughter who both made the decision to track down their birth parents

Kathy Inns and Leigh-Anne Nisbett have an unusual mother-daughter relationship.

Kathy, 56, and Leigh-Anne, 32, both grew up knowing they were adopted. And both have had contact with their birth mothers.

In the more secretive 1950s and 1960s, the openness of Kathy's adoptive parents was unusual. "I just grew up knowing I had been chosen," she says.

Her experience meant that when, in the mid 1970s, she and husband Mike adopted Leigh-Anne, they decided to be open with her from the word go. "Otherwise, how do you broach it?" asks Kathy.

Kathy and Leigh-Anne both recall being curious about their birth parents, especially their birth mothers.

"I always wanted to know," says Kathy. "I had little bits of information, and so I created fantasies about who my family might have been and always imagined it was better than the family I was in."

When she started work at 16, she decided to find out more, but in the days before the Adult Adoption Information Act she had no right to information and was on her own.

Well, not quite. "I had a school friend working for the Registrar of Births Deaths and Marriages." With her friend's help, she found her mother's name, but took it no further.

"In a way, it was enough to know I had a name," she says. "It wasn't until I was in my early 30s that I decided I really needed to know. It was always in the back of my mind."

Kathy went to Catholic Social Services' adoption support service for help, and a social worker told her how to trace her birth mother.

She applied for her birth mother's marriage certificate. "That was a real shock for me," she says. "I applied and two weeks later, I got it. I thought, I'm not allowed to know who my parents are, but I can apply for someone's marriage certificate and get a copy of it."

Searching electoral rolls and the phone book, Kathy found her birth mother's address. She returned to the social worker, who helped her write a letter. Her birth mother replied and asked to meet Kathy.

"It was very nerve-racking," Kathy says. "I think the first thing I said to her was something silly like, 'Now I know where I get my nose from'. We talked. She told me her story. We kept in touch."

Kathy learned that her birth grandmother had been furious when told her daughter was pregnant, and punched her in the face. Her birth mother later married, but had no other children, and her husband had since died.

Finding her birth mother didn't alter her relationship with her parents. "It just really reinforced that they were my parents," she says.

Kathy was open with her children about what was going on. "I think it was quite hard for Leigh-Anne, because, before, she could always identify with me as being the same as her. I can always remember her saying 'Can we find my birth mother now?'"

Leigh-Anne confirms she was curious about

"It was nerve-racking. I think the first thing I said to her was something silly like, 'Now I know where I got my nose from'."

KATHY INNS ON MEETING HER BIRTH MOTHER FOR THE FIRST TIME

her birth mother, but mainly because she wondered if they looked alike. "I never really wanted to meet her."

Once she was 20, with the Adult Adoption Information Act in force, she applied for her original birth certificate and registered that she was willing to be contacted by her birth mother.

Some years later, Leigh-Anne developed an irregular heartbeat and was asked if there was any family history of heart trouble. She half-heartedly began searching for her birth mother, but at the first obstacle, she stopped.

Three years ago Leigh-Anne was asked by Social Welfare to attend a meeting. When she got there, the bombshell was dropped. "They said my birth mother had sent a letter and wanted to contact me. It was a bit of a shock."

At first, Leigh-Anne couldn't read the letter. When she did, she read the explanation of why her birth mother felt it was now the right time to make contact, and her home address and phone number.

"I didn't know how to feel," says Leigh-Anne.

Eventually she wrote to her birth mother - not the least because she still wanted to know if there were any heart problems in her family (there weren't). They wrote regularly, and each time Leigh-Anne's birth mother included her phone number. But Leigh-Anne never phoned. About five months ago, knowing her birth mother was ill with cancer, Leigh-Anne decided to meet. Her birth mother



PICTURE / SIMON BAKER

Daughter Leigh-Anne and her mum Kathy were both adopted, and both met their biological mothers.

immediately set a date.

"I was fine up until the day before, and then I was a bit nervous," Leigh-Anne says. "I was most nervous about opening the door. Do you hug her or shake her hand?"

As it was, Leigh-Anne gave her birth mother a hug, and introduced her twin baby daughters.

"She's very kind. There was never any awkwardness or any uncomfortableness – the conversation flowed." When Leigh-Anne asked her birth mother if she'd like to meet Kathy, the answer was "I'd love to meet her".

When Kathy arrived, she instantly saw where her daughter got her looks from. "When Mum walked in, she said 'Oh my god, oh my god'," says Leigh-Anne.

Both Kathy and Leigh-Anne are glad they found their birth mothers. Kathy has minimal information about her birth father and needs no more.

Leigh-Anne has two half-siblings through her birth mother and knows her birth father married and has two children. She's curious to see a photo. Kathy's birth mother has since died and she attended the funeral.

Both say it was a relief to make contact. "It's kind of like closure in a way," says Leigh-Anne. And both say people who are not adopted can't understand how it feels to not know basic information about your biological family.

Kathy, in particular, now believes that closed adoption is unhealthy. "It leaves you with a lot of unanswered questions that could be answered so simply." ■

FINDING YOUR BIRTH PARENTS

Once you turn 20, write to the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths and Marriage (PO BOX 10 526, Wellington) for a copy of your original birth certificate.

- Include your name, place and date of birth, name(s) of your adoptive parents, your address, phone, signature, and the \$15 fee.
- If details of your birth parent (s) appear on the certificate, you will be sent a list of counsellors and agencies. You must choose one.
- The Registrar-General will send the certificate to that counsellor or agency, who will arrange for you to receive the certificate.
- You can discuss with your counsellor how to search for your parents and how to make a sensitive approach.
- If there are no details of your birth parent(s) on the certificate, they may have placed a veto.
- The certificate will show your place and date of birth and possibly your original first names. It will be sent to you directly, with a list of counsellors. You may want to discuss the situation with one of them.
- Ask if the person placing the veto has left a letter of explanation and if non-identifying information is available. A veto is in place for 10 years, but can be lifted at any time. It expires if the person who places it dies.
- You can ask the Registrar-General to verify if either or both of your birth parents' deaths are recorded.

From <http://www.cyf.govt.nz/adoptions.htm>

ADOPTING A CHILD

The agency responsible for overseeing adoptions is the Adoption Information and Services Unit (AISU) of Child, Youth and Family. You can contact your local unit through your local CYFS office. The AISU is involved in adoptions within New Zealand and of children from overseas.

If you are considering adoption, you can attend a meeting or an interview with an adoption social worker. To make an application for an adoption within New Zealand you will need to:

- Fill out an application form, giving details about yourself.
- Supply the names of two people who know you well and will provide references.
- Give permission for the AISU to get medical information from your family doctor.

You will then be invited to attend an education programme to provide information and support. A social worker will assess you during and after the programme.

You will then be placed in the waiting pool and asked to prepare a profile. This profile will be given to birth parents to help them decide who to place their child with.

Social workers can help to draw up a "contact agreement" for an open adoption when the birth and adoptive parents want this. However, these arrangements are not legally enforceable.

Overseas adoption

You can make an application at your local AISU, which will have a list of countries that allow adoptions to New Zealand.

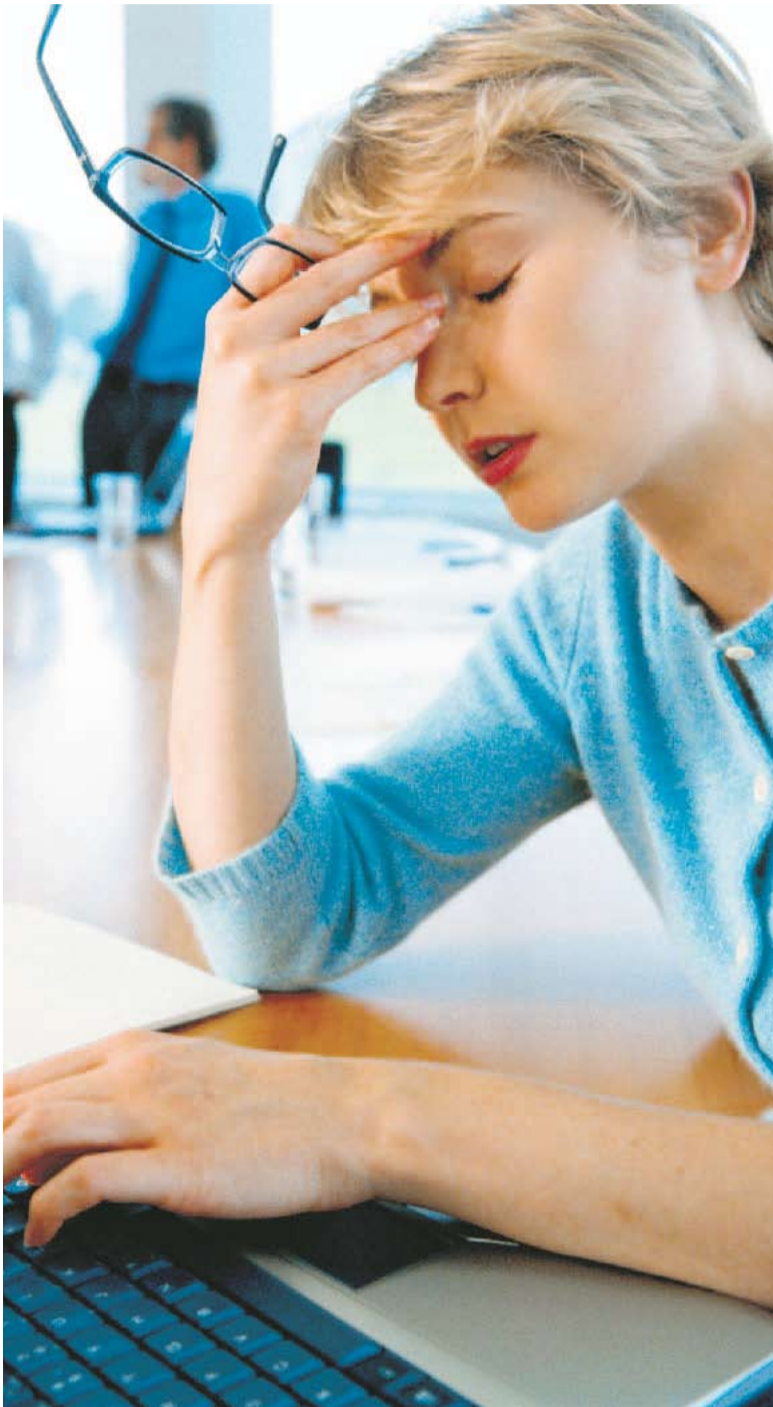
You will have to fill out an application form, giving details about yourself, as well as permission for medical and police checks. You will also have to give references and some countries will require additional information, such as a psychological report. The AISU will tell you what you need for the country you want to adopt from.

You will be invited to attend an education and preparation programme. You will be assessed during and after this programme.

The social worker will complete an assessment report and send it to the authority in the country you want to adopt from. That authority will then decide if a suitable child is available for adoption. ■

Dealing with stress

Stress is a survival trait that kept us alive in the past, but now causes many problems, writes Ashley Campbell



PICTURE/GETTY IMAGES

Thousands of years ago, when humans shared the savannah with large beasts that regarded us as lunch, we sometimes needed a boost to run fast. Our stress response gave us that boost.

When confronted with a sabre-tooth tiger or similarly malevolent beast, stress would cause reactions in our body that we now know as the fight or flight response. It would pump glucose into our muscles so they could work fast, make our heart beat and our breathing quicken so those muscles got the oxygen they needed, and turn off any functions that weren't immediately important, such as digestion and our sex drive.

Stress would also dull our sense of pain and increase our blood's ability to clot so we could run (or stand and fight) until we were safe.

While we no longer face many large beasts threatening to eat us, we do face continual pressures that our bodies react to as if they were mortal threats.

We fight traffic on the way to work, face constant deadlines, and argue with our partners, children, bosses and neighbours. In fact, our fight or flight reaction seems seldom to be able to switch off.

The Neurological Foundation suggests we may be stressing ourselves into an early grave.

"All those changes that provide protection in a moment of crisis suddenly start to cause problems," it says on its website. "Now you're just a person with unregulated blood sugar, high blood pressure, blood clots, a depressed sex drive and an immune system buckling under all the strain. It sounds a lot like getting old."

As the foundation points out, scientists now realise that how well we age has a lot to do with how we handle stress.

Not only that, but the American Psychology Association has reported that depression is strongly linked to constant exposure to stress hormones.

But not all stress is bad. Yvette Britten, who takes stress management workshops for Zealmark Group, says planning for a wedding or a job promotion are examples of good stress - stress that leads to improved performance. When it gets too much and performance starts to decline, we know it's tipped over into bad stress.

"That stress threshold will be different in different people at different stages of their lives," says Britten.

There are, however, sure signs that you have crossed that threshold, such as:

- Constant headaches
- Changed sleeping patterns (sleeping too much or too little - see "A

good night's sleep")

- Stomach upsets
- Diarrhoea
- Withdrawing from your social circle
- Not coping with situations that normally don't faze you
- Changed emotional reactions - reacting more or less strongly than usual
- Feeling out of control

The last one is particularly important. The first Whitehall study, carried out on 10,000 British civil servants during the Thatcher years, showed those who felt least in control were the ones who had the worst physical effects of stress.

If you're feeling stressed, Britten's advice is to start with the basics, which are often the first casualties: food, exercise and relaxation. "That takes a person 80 per cent through the day," Britten says.

The Neurological Foundation also emphasises the importance of keeping family and friends close - their care will help you cope.

Once this is in place, you can start analysing what's causing your stress.

"We are actually able to choose our response (to stress)," says Britten. "We are not slaves to our emotions."

She's not talking about "positive thinking" - some things simply aren't positive and pretending they are won't

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QV NAKED

help – but rather, rational thinking.

“It may be a very negative event,” says Britten, “but there’s an element where you can always have control about how you respond.”

Stress can come in several forms – a catastrophic event, such as a death in the family, a reaction to something important in our lives, such as exams, or the cumulative effect of lots of seemingly small things. So a response that helps you deal with a death in the family would be “This happens to everybody, and I’ve still got to get up in the morning”.

You may identify the cause of your stress as a

looming event, such as an exam. A rational response to this would be “If I always get stressed because of exams, then I need to address my planning”, says Britten. Or if it is simply the accumulation of small, constant stressors, that build and build until a spilled coffee sets you yelling at a colleague, a rational response would be “I need to have an analytical look at my life and see what I can cut”.

“If you understand the stress and what it is that’s stressing you, then you feel you have a handle on it, a sense of control,” says Britten. ■

ON THE WEB

WWW.NEUROLOGICAL.ORG.NZ

WWW.ZEALMARKGROUP.CO.NZ



PICTURE/GETTY IMAGES

Hidden hazard

There has been a lot of talk about trans fats lately. But just what are they?

On the hierarchy of dietary fats, trans fats have, for a long time, been rock bottom. Now, the bottom just got rockier. A new study has found that trans fats redistribute body fat to the abdomen, creating the deadly “apple” body shape. And this happens on a calorie-controlled diet too.

The find was made by researchers at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Centre, who were examining the role of trans fats in atherosclerosis (clogged arteries). They took two groups of 25 monkeys and, over six years, fed them on a diet containing the same number of calories. The only difference was that one group received 8 per cent of their dietary fat in the form of mono-unsaturated fats, while the other received 8 per cent of their fat in the form of trans fats (trans fatty acids). “We believed they couldn’t get obese because we didn’t give them enough calories,” says Professor Lawrence Rudel, head of the Lipid Sciences Research Program at Wake Forest University.

But Rudel and his colleagues were surprised by the outcome. The monkeys fed trans fats had a 7.2 per cent weight gain (compared to 1.8 per cent in the group given mono-unsaturates), and computed tomography images showed that the trans fat-eating monkeys deposited 30 per cent more fat in their abdomens. Of course, animal models aren’t perfect when predicting outcomes in humans but the vervet monkeys used in the experiment share more than 95 per cent of our DNA. The researchers are confident that the same weight changes and fat redistribution would occur in humans fed on a high trans fat diet.

“It is an interesting finding,” said Dr Frankie Phillips registered dietician with the British Dietetic Association. “Trans fats up cholesterol levels, but also, increased abdominal fat leads to insulin resistance and that combined with poor blood cholesterol levels can increase the risk of heart disease even further.”

Dr Phillips does, however, stress that the monkeys were fed more trans fats than the average Brit consumes. “In the UK, we only have about one or two

per cent of our calorie intake from trans fats,” says Dr Phillips. “So going from one or two per cent to eight per cent is a big change.”

But a study in *The New England Journal of Medicine* in April 2006, showed that just a two per cent increase in energy intake from trans fats is linked to a 23 per cent increase in cases of coronary heart disease.

Trans fats are created when vegetable oil is heated to super-high temperatures and hydrogen is bubbled through, creating new chemical bonds with a similar structure to plastic. A hard fat is produced that has a high melting point and a long shelf life. In other words, trans fats are used because they save money. In 2004, Denmark made it law for manufacturers to label trans fats on all food labels and decreed that no item can contain more than two per cent of them. In January this year, the Americans followed suit. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) made it law for manufacturers to list trans fats on nutrition labels.

To be safe, avoid fried foods, popcorn, pastries, pies, margarine, biscuits, or any products containing hydrogenated oil. There is also a way to find out the trans fat content of a product if the amount is not listed on the label. In David Zinczenko’s book, *The Abs Diet*, he gives this useful tip for working out a food’s trans fat content: “Add the fat grams together that are listed on the label, and subtract that number from the total fat content. The number left is the estimate for the amount of trans fat in the food.”

For example, if the total fat content listed on a jar of peanut butter is 49.4g per hundred grams, with saturates at 9.9g and mono-unsaturates at 24.0g, if Zinczenko’s formulation is correct, then 15.5 per cent of the peanut butter is made with trans fats.

“I’m not convinced that adding trans fats to a label will help the situation which is already quite confusing to some people,” says Dr Phillips. But until it is possible to read the trans fat content on all product labels yourself, this method remains a good way to select the products with the lowest trans fat content. ■

(c) THE INDEPENDENT

A GOOD NIGHT’S SLEEP

There’s nothing worse than dealing with stress when you’re tired, but stress and insomnia often go together. Scientists aren’t sure precisely what happens when we sleep, but some things are certain. For a start, there are two types of sleep that, together, form a sleep cycle. One cycle lasts 90-100 minutes, and we go through several cycles a night. The first type of sleep is non-rapid-eye-movement, or non-REM sleep, which has four stages ranging from light to deep sleep. Your body slows down and your temperature drops. It’s thought that non-REM sleep is important for physical health. The next type of sleep is rapid-eye-movement, or REM, sleep. You dream, your brain becomes very active and you twitch a lot. It’s thought REM sleep is important for psychological health.

According to the Neurological Foundation, recent evidence suggests that during sleep our memories are moved to “more efficient storage areas” in the brain. This could be why children and teenagers, who are constantly learning and memorising information, need more sleep than adults. It could also explain why when we’re stressed, having to deal with complex issues and make difficult decisions, sleep becomes crucial. How to achieve a good night’s sleep? The Ministry of Health has several pointers:

- Establish a regular routine – go to bed and get up at about the same time every day
- Exercise every day to relieve the physical tension
- If you can, have your main meal in the middle of the day so your digestive system doesn’t have to work hard in the evening
- Avoid tea, coffee, alcohol, cigarettes and any stimulants in the evening
- Unwind at the end of the day with a quiet activity, such as listening to music
- Try to set aside any unresolved worries. Deal with them in the morning
- Try slow, deep breathing when you get into bed, and then slowly tighten and relax all your muscles
- Don’t focus on the fact that you’re not sleeping – think of pleasant things.
- If you’re still not sleeping, see your doctor. It could be a sign of anxiety or depression, both of which can be treated.

Creating a fine blend

Family therapist Shelly Anderson takes a look at how to deal with the increasingly common phenomenon of parenting as a repartnered couple

There's no doubt that families exist in a changing world – and are changing themselves. Last year, just over one-third of all marriages in New Zealand were remarriages of one or both partners and 45 per cent of divorces involved couples with children. The number of children who experience their parents' divorce and remarriage, and then have to live in repartnered and extended families, is high – even higher when you include children whose parents haven't married. However, while the definition of what constitutes a family is changing, what doesn't change is our need for love, safety and belonging – and basic physical needs such as food, shelter and clothing. But with families changing all around us, how do we provide these for our children?

The first step, says family therapist Shelley Anderson, is that the adults in repartnered families need to be aware of the difficulties they're facing.

"The complexity of parenting increases for repartnered families," says Anderson. "Being aware of the challenges involved and getting support when necessary is useful."

So what are the challenges? The first, she says, is dealing with what she calls "the prevailing myth" of repartnered families: that they're just like nuclear families. They're not. For a start, at least one of the adults is not the parent of at least some of

the children. And children have a whole lot of new issues to deal with, such as:

- More people they now have to relate to as family members
- Possible change in their position in the family, such as from eldest to middle child
- Deciding whether to love the parent's new partner or not
- Torn loyalties
- Changed daily routines and new traditions
- Sharing their mum or dad with a new partner and other children
- Moving between houses when seeing the other parent.

Then there's the pressure on the adults to "get it right". It helps when they're aware of this, says Anderson.

"Couples need to decide together what kind of family life they want to create," she says. And the best way to decide this is to talk about how they might achieve it and what effect their decisions will have.

"Often what can become exposed to the couple are their differences in parenting styles. The dynamic becomes about who is right and so making the other person wrong. This is not constructive."

Some of the things they can look at when making their decision are:



PICTURE/GETTY IMAGES

- What behaviour do they want to encourage in the children?
- How will they do this?
- What is unacceptable behaviour and how will they address it?
- What behaviour is annoying but can be ignored?

It is crucial the couple remain "child-focused" during this process, says Anderson, as this will minimise any negative effects on the children. "Their sense of being loved, belonging and being able to manage the changes will be affected greatly by how the adults manage this."

It also helps to have co-parenting agreements with the ex-partners, as that acknowledges the loving connections with all parents and their extended families. There are also many books available through libraries and

bookstores, with Anderson recommending **Repartnered Families** by Jan Rodwell. Of course, when it all gets a bit stressful, communication can become difficult. If this happens – or even if couples are just struggling with some issues – Anderson recommends seeking professional counselling, saying more families seek counselling and support while trying to navigate the new complexities of family life.

"Counselling can support all members to find ways to create the relationships they want."

There are many parenting groups and programmes in the community, and your local Citizens Advice Bureau will be able to tell you what's available. Cost need not be an issue.

Not many are aware that six sessions of funded counselling are available through the Family Court. ■

PARENT POINTERS

- Set rules together about what is expected of children and teens.
- Decide together on what happens when rules are broken.
- Where possible have each parent take the lead in disciplining their own children
- Be aware of gender expectations, such as women taking up the nurturing role and men the disciplinarian role.
- Support children in staying connected with their own parents and having time with them.
- Take things slowly and give time for trust and connections to develop between the children and the new partner.
- Involve all the children in creating new family traditions where appropriate.
- Don't put the other biological parent down.

SHELLEY ANDERSON IS A FAMILY THERAPIST AND MANAGER OF THE NORTH SHORE COUNSELLING CENTRE OF HOME AND FAMILY.

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PICTURE/ANIKA VUKSICH

Quality time

Ashley Campbell talks to Karen Daniel about her philosophy for a successful and happy life

Eight years ago Karen Daniel was 30, with two daughters – Olivia (then four) and Zoe (then five).

She hadn't worked for five years and had separated from her husband. She was also starting to plan how she was going to give her girls the life she wanted for them.

At first she took a job cooking in a rest home. The hours, 9am to 1pm, were great for someone who wanted to be home for her children after school, but the money, \$12 an hour, wasn't and Karen knew she was going to have to gain some new skills.

After a year she quit work and started a six-month certificate in business computing. Again, the hours suited. Courses ran from 9am to 3pm and the following year she tackled some diploma papers while continuing to do a Sunday shift at the rest home. She also did some commercial bookkeeping from home to keep money coming in.

After six months, Karen got a 9am-5pm job with ACNeilson. It paid well, used

her new-found skills and she loved the challenges it threw up. But there was a problem.

"At the end of a year, I felt it was just too hard," she says.

Karen was paying \$110 a week for after-school care for her girls, and they weren't getting home until 6pm. Then it was dinner, homework, and bed for the girls at 8pm. She felt as if she was only getting two hours a day with her children. "I just felt it was unfair to them to do that."

Luckily she got a job cooking in a Devonport café. The hourly rate was the same, but she could work straight through from 8.30am-3pm and be there when the girls got home from school.

"It was the same money and I had no after-school care to pay for. And cooking was always something I had been passionate about."

After 18 months she left work again and did a small business course, during which she completed a business plan, got an enterprise allowance to start her business, and began making cakes and slices to sell to cafes.

The business grew and she found her niche – gluten-free cakes and slices. Healthy Indulgence was born.

The business continued to grow and expanded to supply into Crave Deli in Takapuna. Karen also now runs the Devonport Farmers Market with a partner.

Through all the growing pains, she has maintained one golden rule – be home for the girls after school.

"All the way through, my priority has been to be home at 3.30. They want to come home from school and talk about their day or bring friends over. For me, I just enjoy having them in my life."

There is a cost to a business-owner making that decision, but it's not a cost Karen really thinks about.

"I don't really think about how much I could make if I stayed open until 5pm. I just think of it as just the way it is. I'm not that hungry for money – I like it, obviously, but not at the expense of my children."

Changing her life so she could make the time for her children has been a series of

conscious decisions for Karen and she's employed several strategies to get there.

The first has been to explain to her girls why things were happening. When she was studying, money was tight, but the girls knew that it wouldn't always be that way.

Secondly, she's drawn on the support of her mother and stepfather, who live nearby. When she was really busy with assignments and work, the girls might spend a night with their grandparents to give her time to do what was needed.

And since she's been able to afford it, she's employed a cleaner at home.

This means there are no arguments about cleaning up and she and the girls can spend their time together doing fun things, like sport and shopping.

Her advice for people struggling to find a balance in their life is to consider whether they need to work all the hours they do, or whether they could survive on less but with more family time.

"My whole outlook is that life is about choices." ■

MAKING IT WORK

As a business owner, Karen Daniel can make the decision to work fewer hours, or work hours that suit. But New Zealand offers little legal support to employees wanting flexibility at work.

Employers can't discriminate on the basis of family status, and employees are legally entitled to use their sick leave to care for a dependent person, but for many, that's just five days a year.

Philippa Reed, chief executive of the Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, says reaching an agreement involves negotiation between employer and employee.

The most common issues are flexible hours and being able to work from home.

It's important to be well prepared and go in with a ready-made solution, says Reed. "Don't just go in and say 'I've got this problem,' and expect your employer to come up with an answer."

The good news, says Reed, is that "many employers will play ball" because they want to keep staff.

And if your employer won't? There's a skills shortage out there, says Reed. "If all else fails, find one who will."

Light reading

Ashley Campbell takes a look at the latest books that could help to improve your family life

ALCOHOL, YOUR KIDS, AND YOU: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

BOOKLET

AUTHOR/PUBLISHER: ALAC

AVAILABLE: ALAC, PH 0800-787-797, WWW.ALAC.ORG.NZ, FREE

"Is your teenager drinking?" is the first question this booklet asks, and gives an answer you might not want to hear: "Most likely." Then it gives some uncomfortable truths about what kids do when they're drinking. "Whatever the reason, chances are high that your teenager will be involved with alcohol," it says. The book is divided into five sections; setting alcohol ground rules, party at your place, teenagers and the liquor laws, handling things that go wrong, and where to go for help. It features down-to-earth advice throughout and you can download the PDF from ALAC's website.



BEWILDERED: ALCOHOL, DRUGS AND YOUR CHILDREN

WORKBOOK AND DVD

AUTHOR/PUBLISHER: ALAC

AVAILABLE: ALAC, PH 0800-787-797, WWW.ALAC.ORG.NZ, FREE

This resource was put together for parents who are already dealing with their children's drug and alcohol problems. The DVD has stories of parents and two Kiwi youngsters who talk about their experiences and how they set about changing.

The workbook is designed to help you think about how you can apply the lessons and strategies to your own situation. It also includes addresses and phone numbers for organisations that can help.



UNDERSTANDING SIBLING RIVALRY: THE BRAZELTON WAY

PAPERBACK

AUTHOR: T. BERRY BRAZELTON, JOSHUA D SPARROW. PUBLISHER: DA CAPO PRESS

AVAILABLE: FISHPOND, WWW.FISHPOND.CO.NZ, \$24.99

It probably started sometime soon after the second child came home ("I don't like babies", one toddler was heard to announce), and hasn't got better since. So how do you deal with sibling rivalry? Professor of paediatrics T. Berry Brazelton and child psychologist Joshua D. Sparrow point out that, as well as driving their parents crazy, siblings are also learning from each other and developing relationships. To help parents cope, the authors explore the way rivalry manifests itself at different ages, and give advice on issues such as birth order and blended families, scapegoats and competition in school.



A PARENT'S GUIDE TO EATING DISORDERS AND OBESITY

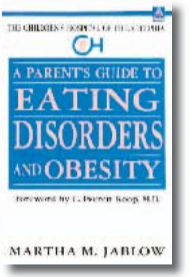
PAPERBACK

AUTHOR: MARTHA M. JABLOW, BILL BRYSON, C. EVERETT KOOP

PUBLISHER: DELTA TRADE PAPERBACKS

AVAILABLE: FISHPOND, WWW.FISHPOND.CO.NZ, \$32.76

"It is not a matter of food or hunger, rather, her eating disorder is tied up with her feelings about herself and her family." Sound familiar? These words come after three brief profiles of young women in an eating disorders therapy group. Specifically written for parents, this book has separate chapters of anorexia, bulimia, compulsive eating and obesity. It looks at recognising the warning signs of obesity and eating disorders, the medical complications and effects, as well as the physical and psychological implications.



REDESIGN YOUR LIFE: 12 EASY STEPS TO A NEW YOU

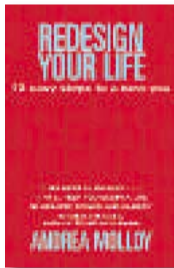
PAPERBACK

AUTHOR: ANDREA MOLLOY. PUBLISHER: RANDOM HOUSE

AVAILABLE: WHITCOULLS, WWW.WHITCOULLS.CO.NZ, \$27.99

Tired? Listless? Lacking energy? Here's a 12-week challenge for you. Life coach Andrea Molloy reckons that by following her programme, you can design the life you want - rather than trying to manage the life you've ended up with. In week one you'll be taking stock, week two, three and four you'll be learning how to live healthy, eat better and get fit. Before long you'll be learning how to enjoy work, manage your finances, get rid of your self-sabotaging beliefs and have more fun in your life.

Now there's a challenge worth accepting.



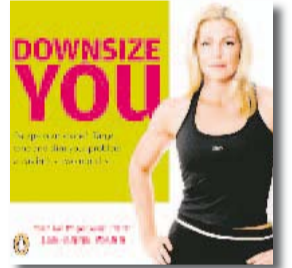
DOWNSIZE YOU

PAPERBACK

AUTHOR: LEE-ANNE WANN. PUBLISHER: PENGUIN NZ

AVAILABLE: WHITCOULLS, WWW.WHITCOULLS.CO.NZ, \$19.95

If your belly is spilling out over your jeans and every time you hear about the obesity epidemic you get a sinking feeling in the pit of your ever-expanding stomach, it's time to do something about it. Wann, who co-presents *Downsize Me* on TV3 (on which this book is based) and owns The Body Place, takes no prisoners and accepts no excuses. You'll get explanations (and photographs) of exercises to firm and shape your chest, back, shoulders, arms, legs and stomach, as well as a personal nutrition guide you can adjust for your body shape.



KIWI KIDS' PARTY BOOK: A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR PARENTS

PAPERBACK

AUTHOR/PUBLISHER: PENGUIN NZ

AVAILABLE: WHITCOULLS, WWW.WHITCOULLS.CO.NZ, \$19.95

In these hi-tech, instant gratification days, pass the parcel and pin the tail on the donkey don't cut it anymore, so what's a parent to do? The nice folk at Penguin have put their collective heads together to find the easy answers. They promise this is a sanity-saving book for parents of kids aged 3-12 and includes everything from invitations, party themes, games, food and a planning checklist to make sure you don't forget anything.



THE MAGICIAN'S SON: A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

PAPERBACK

AUTHOR: SANDY MCCUTCHEON. PUBLISHER: PENGUIN NZ

AVAILABLE: WHITCOULLS, WWW.WHITCOULLS.CO.NZ, \$35

When Sandy McCutcheon was two-years-old, he was adopted into a respectable Christchurch family, who for 40 years maintained the lie that he was their natural son. He grew up thinking his memories of his natural parents were just figments of his over-active imagination. But on her death bed, when McCutcheon was in his 40s, his mother admitted the truth. His search for his identity took him to an acting career in Britain, a Buddhist retreat in Tasmania, and eventually led him into the radio career he loves.



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Avoiding a load of old rubbish

From milk cartons to ink cartridges, we are in thrall to the single-use container. But everything deserves a second chance, says Lucy Siegle

HAVE milk bottles become extinct? It's a long time since I've seen one.

Small children probably wouldn't even know that these bottles, shunted out of everyday life by the Tetrapak, were once conduits for cow juice, never mind that they were routinely collected and refilled.

We have become 'fast' consumers, enthralled by the single-use container. Not only does this create huge amounts of waste - 560kg of solid waste are produced per capita each year in industrialised countries, three times more than in 1984 - but it also distances us from the products we buy. The average food item now travels more than 1,500 miles from field to table. It's one-night-stand consumerism, according to US environmentalist Wendell Berry, and one in which "the histories of all products will be lost. The degradation of products and places, produces and consumers is inevitable."

Against this backdrop, refilling any kind of container seems a very 'slow' concept. Perhaps this is at the root of our apathetic attitude towards refills?

In 2003, the Body Shop retired its famous in-store refill programme due to lack of interest. In 2002 only 1 per cent of the Body Shop's customers used the service. Instead the company channelled its efforts into introducing 30 per cent recycled plastic into its PET plastic bottles - a non-PVC plastic which is more easily recyclable.

Refilling will always have the upper hand on recycling, which typically downcycles as materials are rehashed into inferior products. Janet Shipton, from Sheffield Hallam University in the city of Sheffield, England, is a proponent of refillable and reusable packaging and has some insight into our thought processes.

Her research leads her into our homes, and the dark regions of rarely used drinks cabinets and shoe-cleaning kits. In these 'twilight zones', we hoard bottles, bags and containers.

They are all 'resting' while we figure out how the hell we can reuse them. We householders mean well. Shipton quotes ethical-design expert Sylvia Katz:

"If the consumers can't think of a second use for it, then it is the designer's or

manufacturer's responsibility to tell them.'

Some companies do address this twilight zone. Ecover (www.ecover.com), manufacturers of eco-friendly cleaning products and detergents, provide retailers all over the United Kingdom with vats of detergent. People just take along their bottles and fill up.

Then there's the Green Stationery Company (www.greenstat.co.uk), where you can buy not only refilled printer cartridges but also inserts for your highlighter pen. MAC, the Canadian cosmetic company, offers a free lipstick when you return containers.

But we need more. Meanwhile, the global packaging industry works on developing containers that feature ID microchips, regulate oxygen, self-heat, self-chill, give off light, emit sounds or contain vitamin supplements. These are ideas apparently inspired by the quest to provide food for a three-year trip to Mars. They are also known as 'smart' packaging, but sadly without the basic common sense to be refillable and therefore sustainable. ■

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