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FAMILY MATTERS

## PARENTING WITH LISA SALMON



# HELPING CHILDREN TO BREATHE

PARENTS instinctively want to protect their children - but how can you protect them from breathing dirty air?

Many UK cities repeatedly breach legal air pollution limits, and it's estimated that 29,000 premature deaths a year are caused by poor air quality in this country.

Because their lungs are still developing, children tend to breathe faster than adults and are among the most vulnerable to health damage associated with air pollution. A recent World Health Organisation (WHO) report said one in four deaths among children aged under five are due to environmental hazards, such as air pollution and contaminated water. The WHO points out that when infants and pre-schoolers are exposed to air pollution and second-hand smoke they have an increased risk of pneumonia in childhood, and a lifelong increased risk of chronic respiratory diseases, such as asthma. Prolonged exposure to air pollution in childhood is also linked with repeated infections, coughs and wheezing, and it may increase lifelong risk of heart disease, stroke and certain cancers.

Air pollution can even affect babies before birth - a 2013 European study found exposure to common air pollutants and traffic pollution during pregnancy significantly increases the risk of low birthweight in newborns. Buggies and prams can put children level with car exhaust emissions, and the Poisoned Playgrounds study released by ClientEarth found more than 950 UK schools are next to, or near, roads with harmful levels of air pollution.

Studies also suggest living near busy roads could be responsible for 15-30per cent of all new cases of asthma in children.

The Healthy Air Campaign (HAC) has launched the Help Britain Breathe initiative to raise awareness of air pollution. Andrea Lee of HAC says: "People living in UK towns and cities are unaware of how they and their families are affected by dirty air they breathe every day. Our children deserve better."

Pollution from road traffic, and particularly diesel fumes, is a major cause of poor air quality, and Help Britain Breathe says it can be responsible for up to 70per cent of air pollution. Other sources of pollution include industry and machinery, plus fumes from heating homes.

Help Britain Breathe aims to tackle air pollution through: A national network of Clean Air Zones to keep the dirtiest vehicles out of the most polluted parts of towns and cities and promote public transport, walking and cycling; Stopping incentives that encourage dirty vehicles and helping us move to cleaner forms of transport; and Championing a new Clean Air Act to ensure greater protection of health.

# IT'S TIME TO EMBRACE NEW YEAR CHANGE

## HEALTH

With Dr Zak Uddin



WITH the New Year upon us and thoughts of a fresh start in the minds of many, it can be easy to get carried away with the idea of a massive change, only to feel disheartened when you aren't able to realise your goals immediately.

However, by setting achievable and focussed aims, within a sensible time frame, I believe you may be able to avoid that sinking feeling a few months down the line when you discover you've set the bar too high.

Here, I share a few ideas that I hope will help you to embrace sustained change while not living a life of abstinence.

- A month without alcohol isn't a bad place to start, especially for those who have had a particularly hectic social schedule over the festive period. It has been demonstrated that many who took part in previous initiatives including "Sober for October" also had a much healthier relationship with alcohol after the end of the month.

- Exercise is often high on the list of New Year's resolutions. The British Heart Foundation recommend 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise five times a week, but remember that simple changes like walking short distances rather than taking the bus or car will soon have you hitting your target.

Eating in is the new going out, yet with a vast array of diet plans it can be confusing to know where to even start. However the standard advice is still a balanced diet, high in fruit and vegetables, with the avoidance of excessive amounts of processed foods. Treats and cheat days can and should be incorporated into this,



GET FIT: Exercise is often high on the list of New Year's resolutions

without a feeling of guilt.

- Good mental health can often be difficult to maintain. Try to surround yourself with positive people who share the same outlook as you, and spend less time with those who leave you feeling fed up or exhausted. If a relationship, job or indeed anything in your life is getting you down, it may be time to face up to this and ask yourself, "am I happy to continue like this, or is it time for a change?"

- Getting enough rest is vitally important, with the effects of sleep deprivation apparent even after one restless night. It is as important as a healthy diet and regular exercise, with the recommended daily amount being between 7.5 to 8 hours of good quality sleep per night.

\* No health article would be complete without advice on smoking, so if you are thinking of quitting, there is no better

time than the present. Both your body and your wallet will thank you for it.

- Finally, try something new. From travel to learning a new language or picking up a new hobby, the body and mind thrive on change and fresh stimulation. Broadening your horizons is linked with an improved outlook on life in general, and you may also get to meet different people and develop new friendships.

## So important to check on blood pressure

**Q.** My operation has been postponed after I went for assessment to the hospital. I was advised that my blood pressure was high, but when I went to see the nurse at my GP surgery she told me it was normal - Amar, 45

**A.** Blood pressure (BP) is not a fixed measure, and can often rise in times of stress. It is normally lower when asleep compared to when awake. It is important to confirm the diagnosis as untreated high blood pressure can be harmful in the long term. However, if you actually have normal blood pressure, starting

medication to lower it would be incorrect and possibly give you side effects.

Your GP may ask you to come back for a series of blood pressure checks, or offer you a 24-hour monitor which will give a more accurate reflection of your blood pressure.

**Q.** My 14-year-old daughter has been put on a three-month course antibiotics for her acne. I'm concerned as I keep hearing that excessive use of antibiotics means they may not work for you in future - Jasmin

**A.** While you are correct about being cautious with the use of antibiotics, it is thought that one of the causes of acne is overgrowth of a particular bacterium (P. acnes), normally present on the skin, which flourishes in puberty when the skin is oilier. Although mild acne can often be treated with gels and creams, if spots are extensive or affect the chest or back, a prolonged course of oral antibiotics may be required. This not only reduces the numbers of these bacteria but also lessens the redness and inflammation of acne, and

hopefully prevents scarring.

If you have a question for Dr Zak, email: askdoctorzak@gmail.com  
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Dr Uddin's advice is provided in good faith and in accordance with currently accepted evidence. However, this content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. You should always seek the advice of a GP, or other qualified health provider, regarding a medical condition.