



# Cheer up...

## *here's the good news*

We're constantly bombarded with negative news stories and frightening statistics, but looking behind the headlines can turn up surprisingly positive results, says **Annie Makoff**

**T**his morning when I woke up, the sun was shining and I felt good – optimistic, energetic and eager to see what the day would bring. Over breakfast, I turned the radio on. Yet another ageing celebrity had been arrested for sexual offences. There was more bad news on the economy. I picked up a newspaper later. A 15-year-old boy had been stabbed to death. Homelessness is on the rise. Global warming; NHS cuts; another food scandal – by the time I started work, I felt defeated, exhausted and depressed.

I don't want to stick my head in the sand, but isn't it tempting to just turn off?

Absolutely, says clinical psychologist Dr Cecilia d'Felice. She believes that going on a 'bad news diet' – restricting the amount of news you expose yourself to – can protect your mood, and also enable you to look at the bigger picture in a clearer, more emotionally balanced way. 'We are so influenced by the media and its portrayal of global events that it influences how we take personal bad news,' she explains. 'Being saturated with bad news on an almost hourly basis can make our own world feel out of control. It can

make us reactive rather than reflective.'

The problem, says social psychologist Dr Sandra Wheatley, is that our brains are wired to zoom in on bad news, and to give it undue precedence. 'At an evolutionary level, bad news shows us what we need to react and attend to so we can protect ourselves. That's why people are more comfortable considering the negative rather than the positive. Even statistics, when they are reported, tend to focus on the negative.'

Economic research, for example, often focuses on an overall picture, which may be misleading on the reality of life for many of us, says Dr Marianna Koli, convenor and senior lecturer in economics at New College of the Humanities in London.

'Economists tend to talk about average figures and the macro picture, which is useful if you want to see if government policies are working, but on a micro level, things are very different,' she says. 'Life satisfaction indicators like good health and family have not changed since the recession. People are compensating for the general fall in incomes by spending more time with family and looking after their health.'

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PHOTOGRAPH: ERIC PRINE/GALLERYSTOCK

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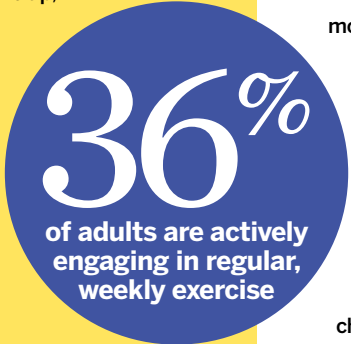
**‘HEALTHY LIFE EXPECTANCY IS SHORTER IN THE UK THAN ABROAD’**

The Guardian

The good news

We’re getting healthier

While it was reported that life expectancy in the UK is lagging behind the rest of the world, the study that sparked the reports, by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) actually showed that British life expectancy has increased by 4.2 years since the 1990s. Given that the general health trend in the UK is (cautiously) on the up, maybe that’s no surprise. In fact, cancer survival rates have doubled in the past 40 years, 36 per cent of adults are actively engaging in regular, weekly exercise, and general prognosis for conditions such as heart disease are going in the right direction. Recent figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) also showed that fewer people are smoking and drinking than they were 40 years ago. ‘We’ve seen a definite decline in the number of smokers over the last four decades,’ says Maureen Talbot, senior cardiac nurse at the British Heart Foundation. ‘But the drop in drinking is a welcome surprise, especially because drink is more accessible than ever.’ Although Talbot concedes that trends in binge-drinking are likely to fluctuate, she is optimistic that the number of smokers will continue to fall.



**‘CLONED BABIES FEAR AS STEM CELLS ARE CREATED FROM SKIN’**

The Daily Express

The good news

Potential for great change as technology advances

Sensationalist stories about the dangers of technological advancements are increasingly common – human cloning or Theresa May’s ‘snooper’s charter’ around the storage of personal data being prime examples. But many believe that in this age of rapid innovation, we’re a lucky generation. We live longer and modern devices make life easier. ‘It’s easy to say what the material benefits of technology are, but once you get used to something like a washing machine, you tend to discount it because it becomes part of your world and you expect it,’ says Andrew Nahum, curator of technology and engineering at London’s Science Museum. ‘Many of today’s inventions are about making things easier.’ The last two decades have seen technological changes that we’re still only beginning to understand, says Nahum. As with many advances, there can be positive opportunities. ‘Electronic connectivity through the use of smartphones is the single, greatest societal change in our lifetime. It’s so huge, we’ve hardly begun to absorb the implications. So, too, are advances in scientific medicine and research – the chances of being successfully treated for conditions which were previously fatal have improved to an astonishing degree.’

**‘WARNING OVER UK CHILD WELLBEING’** The Daily Express

The good news

Our children’s wellbeing is generally improving

Are our kids part of a deprived generation missing out on ‘better times’ or have they never had it so good? Certainly, headlines circulating around the recent UNICEF child wellbeing report were not positive. But while it’s true there have been concerns raised by children’s experts about poverty and families struggling to make ends meet in recent years, the report found that general wellbeing in British children was actually

improving. In fact, according to Anita Tiessen, deputy executive director of UNICEF, the UK is one of only four developed countries to see a decline in the percentage of overweight children and currently has the lowest child deprivation rate. Although Tiessen worries that cuts in children’s services could undermine that improvement, for the moment, the statistics are positive. ‘The story for

the first 10 years of the new century is one of improvement in most indicators of child wellbeing,’ she says. ‘Previous government policies that invested in child support service during that time have paved the way for more children to have improved lives. As a result, 95 per cent of youngsters were enrolled at pre-school, which has had a significant impact on the individual child, their future and therefore society.’

**‘MAJORITY OF BRITISH WOMEN WOULD PICK BEING A HOUSEWIFE OVER HAVING A CAREER’** Daily Mail

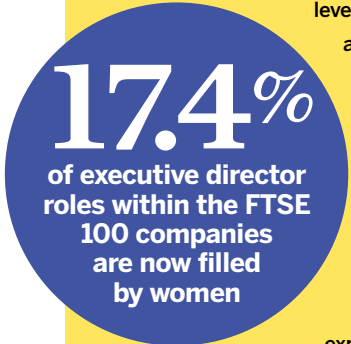
The good news

Women have more options open to them than ever before

If recent tabloid headlines are anything to go by, British women prefer being housewives than having careers, they’re severely under-represented at board level and they have fewer career opportunities than men. But how much of this is true?

Servane Mouazan, director of Ogunte, an organisation that works with female social entrepreneurs on ‘building a better world, powered by women’, is all too aware of the gender inequalities that still persist in some aspects of the workplace, but has nevertheless seen massive improvements in recent years. ‘There is a lot more noise about women being involved at board level these days – we’re starting to break the glass ceiling,’ says Mouazan. ‘Women have no issues with being business professionals, although a minority of men may think they do. More and more women are becoming the sole breadwinners and some are earning more than men. They are starting to hold the fort.’

In fact, according to the Professional Boards Forum, which works to increase female representation at board level, 44 per cent of non-executive director roles and 17.4 per cent of executive director roles within the FTSE 100 companies are now filled by women, a significant rise since 2010 where figures stood at around 12 per cent. Considering the government target



of having female representation at director level at 25 per cent by 2015, things are definitely moving in the right direction. ‘More women are taking on leadership roles than their predecessors. Women have always been leaders, they just didn’t know it before,’ Mouazan adds. ‘With social media and the growing collective movements supporting gender equality, we are exposed to more stories to learn from, so women have more opportunities to pick and choose role models and promote themselves and their skills – that’s a great boost to confidence. Leadership can take many forms; we’re showing that it’s not just for the big boys.’

**‘FIRST-TIME BUYERS WILL BE AGE 40 BEFORE THEY CAN AFFORD TO BUY THEIR OWN HOMES’** The Sun

The good news

Most homeowners are better off

If you live in London or the south east, rocketing rents and catapulting house prices are probably having a detrimental effect on your household budget. Certainly, getting on the property ladder in London is quite a feat, especially as house prices in the capital are currently averaging around the £500,000 mark. But, according to Kate Faulkner, property market analyst and commentator, the bigger picture isn’t quite so eye-watering. Rents are averaging 2.5 per cent lower than in 2008, and declining house prices outside of London is good news for first-time buyers.



‘Everyone gets obsessed with price falls, but it’s great news for first-time buyers and those wanting to trade up,’ says Faulkner. ‘A percentage of people who bought their home in 2006 or 2007 have gone into negative equity but the majority of buyers have benefited. Yes, you sell for less, but you save money on the property ladder.’

What’s more, the government’s latest Help To Buy scheme announced in this year’s budget, which provides an interest-free loan of up to 20 per cent if buyers can raise five per cent, will see a rise in the number of people being able to afford their own house – and well before they’re 40.

And, as Faulkner points out, the scheme will ultimately encourage developers to build more properties, creating a ‘virtuous circle’.

‘It’s not a total panacea,’ she concedes. ‘The scheme also helps lenders, too, and some may say they have enough protection already, but for the average buyer, it enables them to access better mortgage rates and to buy a bigger house for an expanding family.’ ■