



FIT FOR FARMING

Women's Health Made Easy





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MEN'S HEALTH FORUM

The Men's Health Forum's man manuals contain easy-to-read information on a wide range of men's health subjects. Founded in 1994, the MHF is the independent voice for the health and wellbeing of men and boys in England and Wales. Our goal is the best possible physical and mental health and wellbeing for all men and boys.

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A full list of references is available at:
menshealthforum.org.uk/MMreferences

The MHF encourages your feedback at:
menshealthforum.org.uk/MMfeedback



CONTENTS

FIT FOR FARMING: Edition for Women Farmers

Heads First	5	Sex Talk	38
Accidents	13	Should You See A GP?	40
Body Image & Self-Esteem	15	Women & Cancer	44
How To Eat Well	17	Sun Sense	48
Ditch The Diets	20	Occupational Health	50
Get off the Sofa	23	Ageing Well	56
Is It Wine O'Clock?	26	Using the NHS	58
Stub It Out	29	About This Booklet	62
Backs & Bones	32	Who Can Help?	63
Women's Health	35		

AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHING IS THE UK'S RISKIEST INDUSTRY.

The Farming Community Network

FCN is a voluntary organisation and charity that supports farmers and families within the farming community through difficult times. The charity runs a confidential national helpline and e-helpline which is open every day of the year from 7am-11pm.

FCN has over 400 volunteers throughout England and Wales. They provide free pastoral and practical support to anyone who seeks help, whether the issue is personal or business-related. Most volunteers are involved in farming, or have close links with agriculture so have a great understanding of the issues

farmers and farming families face. FCN works with a variety of stakeholders critical to the successful outcome of cases including government bodies, agricultural organisations and healthcare services. FCN volunteers can facilitate direct links to sympathetic professionals. FCN Volunteers provide support for as long as it is needed, 'walking with' people and helping them find a positive way through their problems.

Helpline: 03000 111999 (or e-Helpline: help@fcn.org.uk)

General enquiries:
01788 510866 or
help@fcn.org.uk





FOREWORD

My route into farming is probably best described as challenging. Like many farming families we struggled to talk about succession planning and my father was far from convinced that farming was suited to women. But in the end, my family came round to the idea and I managed to convince my landlords that I could take on the farm. Back then it still took people a while to get used to the idea of a woman farmer. Often people would deliver things to my farm and they would say: 'Can I speak to the farmer?'. I would then say, 'I'm the farmer.' They would then say, 'Well, can I speak to the boss?' and I would reply 'I'm the boss'.

When it comes to gender, the landscape of British farming is changing. Women make up the majority of students on many agricultural courses. More and more women are coming into the industry and making a success of it. They play a vital role in British agriculture. The NFU is working hard to ensure women have an equal opportunity to engage with the Union when they wish to. I am proud to be President of a Union that is overseeing such a long-overdue paradigm shift.

Women farmers, like their male counterparts, are not immune to the everyday challenges of farming: fluctuating market prices, animal disease, the weather, lack of fodder and rural crime to name but a few. Combine these stressors with the isolation and the pressure to make the business a success, it is not surprising that farmers, regardless of gender, are susceptible to poor mental and physical health. But women also have to deal with a variety of unique health issues and conditions, many of which can affect their duties on the farm.

It is vital that women farmers have access to information that will help them keep well and age healthily. This booklet does just that. Much like the original version of this booklet, specifically aimed at men, it is full of useful advice and guidance about how to look after your mental and physical wellbeing. This booklet also includes vital content about women's health including pregnancy, gynaecological health and cancer.

I am very grateful to the Farming Community Network and the Men's Health Forum for coming together to create this booklet. It has never been more important for members of the farming community to think about their own wellbeing, as well as the wellbeing of their farm business. We need a vibrant, strong and energetic farming community to meet the future challenges of the industry and to continue feeding a growing world population. It is essential that we are all "fit to farm".

Minette Batters - Beef, sheep and arable farmer in Wiltshire, Co-founder of Ladies In Beef and President of the National Farmers Union.





HEADS FIRST

Farming can be a 24 hour job. Sometimes it seems there aren't enough hours in the day to do important things in life that matter to you, and these often get put on the back burner.

Many things affect the way we think and feel – home life, relationships and work hassle are just a few of them. When we feel things are going well we're 'on top of the world' and tasks seem easy. Throw in a financial crisis, extreme weather and a bucket-load of red tape and the day-to-day grind can wear us down. All farmers deal with issues in their own way, but we can't ignore the fact that one in four will have a mental health problem.

HOW TO HELP

Do you know someone going through a crisis?

Here are a few ways you can help them to cope:

- Stay in their life – be there and keep in touch; Facebook and other social media is useful too



- > If they want to talk about a problem, just listen
- > Ask what you can do to support them
- > Remember, they're the same person you've known and cared about for years.

No one expects you to be an expert, but patience and time to listen can mean a lot to someone facing a crisis. Leaving them to speak freely and without judgement is a simple but effective way of getting the ball rolling.



Life without stress is impossible, and a small amount of stress can be good for you, but prolonged stress can damage your health and even affect the people around you.

Most of us have experienced feelings such as being worried, being tense or feeling unable to cope. The good news is that there are things you can do to manage stress, at home and at work, with support from those around you.

STRESS SIGNALS

We all have to deal with stress but people vary in how much it affects them. Get to know how it affects you. Watch out for common stress signals such as:

- > Eating more or less than normal
- > Mood swings
- > Not being able to concentrate
- > Feeling tense
- > Feeling useless
- > Feeling worried or nervous
- > Not sleeping well

Some agencies forget how many things we juggle on the farm and in the office.



- > Being tired or forgetful.

Part of the problem is not recognising our own stress signals. Another part is expecting too much of ourselves.

Stress can be particularly bad for farmers because they are often working alone and may not get much chance to socialise.

Stress can trigger anxiety, depression and physical symptoms such as:

- > Back pain
- > Indigestion
- > Irritable bowel syndrome
- > Psoriasis (scaly skin)
- > Migraine
- > Tension headaches.

It's hard
to get away.
We don't employ
anyone and there's
stock to tend
daily.

HELP YOURSELF

There are several things you can do to help yourself and improve how you feel physically and mentally:

Talk it out

Dealing with stress alone is never a good idea. Just talking about things that are making you stressed may help you see things differently.

Talk to your friends or family

Talking to even one other person can help.

Talk with a health professional. You can speak to a doctor or practice nurse for advice and support, or see the list of useful contacts on the inside back cover.

Time out

It can be tough on relationships when you are feeling very stressed which is why it is important to take time out.

Quick fix: Getting yourself out of a stressful situation, even for a few moments, can give you the space you need to feel ready to tackle the problem.

Long term: Taking time out from your normal routine may help. If you have young children, try to organise a babysitter for an evening. Or take it in turns with your partner to have time to yourselves. As for work:



- > Try to avoid doing excessively long hours (easier said than done at some times of year!)
- > Plan (and take!) a proper holiday in a quiet period of the year
- > Take breaks away from your work area each day.

Chill out

Getting enough sleep will relax your mind and help you cope with stress.

Quick fix: Simple relaxation techniques like breathing deeply can be an effective way of helping you deal with stress.

Long term: Plan relaxation time, even if it's just a long bath or listening to music.

Try to get a good night's sleep. Avoid sleeping tablets as they can be addictive and make things even worse.

Leave it out

Avoid smoking, junk food and alcohol! These won't help your stress levels. Go easy on drinks that contain a lot of caffeine or sugar, as caffeine may make you feel anxious and sugar can cause mood swings.

Quick fix: Drink plenty of water. This will help you concentrate and may stop you getting stress headaches.

Long term: Improving your diet will help your body to deal with stress. It's important to make time for proper meals. Talk during meals, as this is a time to relax as well as eat.

FIVE A DAY FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

The NHS suggests five steps we can all take to improve our mental wellbeing:

Socialise

Take time to develop family relationships. Close loving relationships with a spouse or life partner can go a long way to keeping us safe. Cultivate friendships off farm.

Be Active

Farmers are often on the move but also spend lot of time sitting in tractors, vehicles and at the computer. Exercise encourages the body to release endorphins which make us feel great and can relieve stress. Exercise also helps encourage sleep which is so important to helping us recover and feel well.



Keep Learning

Farmers are skilled people and, with constant changes to the way we farm and the demands of the bureaucrats, always learning. But make a little time to learn a different skill or get involved in a discussion group.

Give to others

Farmers produce food and commodities which enhance the lives of others. Farming itself can bring a feel-good factor. But sometimes farmers are separated from the end result of their work. Taking time to be involved in activities which help other people directly can redress that balance and can make us feel really good about ourselves as well as helping others. Some farming support organisations recruit farmers to give a little of their time to make a difference to other people's lives

Take Notice

Many farmers work in beautiful settings. Taking time to slow down and enjoy the beauty around us and appreciate the privilege of being in the country can improve our mindfulness.

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness involves taking charge of your own state of mind, being more aware of the present moment rather than thinking about the past or future, which is where we often give a lot of our attention.

It involves focussing for a few moments on one thing (usually your breathing). When the mind wanders you bring it gently back to the area of focus. A few minutes of each day promotes better quality sleep and reduces stress levels.

Find out more from focussedfarmers.com, a mindfulness resource for the farming community set up in 2016.





SUICIDE

Farming can be a wonderful profession. It's not just an occupation, it's a way of life. At times this makes it difficult for those farming to create a proper work-life balance. There is always one more job to do.

This can make for extreme tiredness and a build-up of damaging stress which can result in low mood and sometimes lead to depression.

Because the family and the job are inextricably linked, this can have a major effect on family as well as working life. Farmers and their families, used to hard work, are often resilient and stoical. But at times pressures can reach boiling point. Mental and emotional well-being suffers and this can lead to feelings of low self-esteem and thoughts can turn to suicide.

Like everyone else, farmers experience emotional issues such as bereavement, breakdown in relationships, anxieties and depression, but farmers are at particular risk because they:

- > often work alone and for long hours
- > can be marginalised from the wider community in which we live
- > have easy access to the means to take their own life
- > find it difficult to talk about feelings
- > are under pressure from changing commodity prices, animal diseases, bureaucracy and changing circumstances
- > deal with life and death all the time in daily life.

The first step towards recovery when feelings of suicide arise is to seek help from family, friend or support organisation. If you find it difficult to talk to someone you know, you could:

- > call your GP – ask for an emergency appointment
- > call 111 out of hours – they will help you find support
- > contact your mental health crisis team – if you have one.

If you have or are about to seriously harmed yourself – for example, by taking a drug overdose – call 999 for an ambulance or go straight to A&E.

If you're having suicidal thoughts, talk to someone.

An HSE awareness day helped me think about taking a moment to think first.



TIPS FOR COPING RIGHT NOW

- > try not to think about the future – just focus on getting through today
- > stay away from drugs and alcohol
- > get yourself to a safe place, like a friend's house
- > be around other people
- > do something you usually enjoy, such as spending time with a pet

LOOK OUT FOR OTHER FARMERS

Farming is a fairly close knit community and most of us meet from time to time with other farmers; we will have friends and family as well. Look out for symptoms of poor emotional and mental health in your friends:

- > Behaving out of character
- > Memory starts failing
- > Becoming increasingly negative or constantly anxious about something
- > Becoming irritable (or more irritable than normal!)
- > Complaining about not sleeping
- > Drinking to excess or developing nervous habits
- > Anything unusual that may suggest they're starting to feel stressed.

Don't be afraid to ask questions: Are you having thoughts about dying? Are you feeling suicidal? Do you feel that life is not worth living? Have you planned what you are going to do? Have you attempted to harm yourself in the past?

However awkward it may feel, be as encouraging as you can so that they talk





about their feelings. Talking with them about feelings is always a route to helping them move forward. Talking about their feelings never makes the situation worse.

Be prepared for the answer! Help your friend to seek help: perhaps from their GP (including the emergency doctor service if out of hours) or encourage them to phone a support organisation or with their permission, phone on their behalf. Go with them to an Accident and Emergency Department at a local hospital. Don't promise to keep it a secret and, if you can, please don't leave someone alone when there is significant risk of suicide.

SELF HARM

Self-harm is when somebody intentionally damages or injures their body. It can be a way of dealing with difficult feelings, a way to regain a sense of being in control by changing emotional pain into physical pain.

Self-harm can include cutting or burning skin, punching or hitting oneself or poisoning one. All ages and both genders self-harm though young women are likely to be most at risk. Depression and anxiety can accompany self-harm and people who self-harm are at high risk of suicide.

Often people keep their self-harming a secret but discussing the feelings that lead to self-harm can help to address the behaviour. Your GP can help.





ACCIDENTS

Around 430 000 people work in agriculture, which includes farming and use of the countryside. This is less than 1.5% of the working population, yet agriculture has one of the highest fatality rates of all industries and is responsible for between 15% and 20% of all deaths to workers in Great Britain each year.

The total annual cost of injuries (in farming, forestry and horticulture) to society is estimated at £190 million and nearly all of that is the result of what the HSE calls 'reportable injuries'. Of this sum, fatalities account for around a third at £55 million.

The most common causes of death are:

- > transport – being struck by moving vehicles
- > being struck by a moving or falling object (eg. bales, trees etc)
- > falls from a height
- > asphyxiation or drowning
- > contact with machinery
- > injury by an animal
- > being trapped by something collapsing or overturning
- > contact with electricity, nearly two-thirds of which involve overhead power lines.



There are many more injuries which do not result in death. The most common causes of non-fatal injuries are:

- > handling, lifting or carrying
- > slipping, tripping or falling on the same level
- > being struck by moving, including flying or falling, objects
- > falling from heights
- > contact with machinery
- > being injured by an animal.

People working in farming can be permanently disabled by ill health. Breathing in dusts, handling loads, exposure to noise or vibration, using chemicals and working with animals can all cause ill health with symptoms that can take years to develop. In some cases, this can result in premature death.

In most other industries, deaths and injuries are decreasing but in farming the numbers have remained steady over recent years. The reasons include farmers working alone, more powerful machinery and an ageing work force.

ACCIDENT PREVENTION

Avoiding accidents is not rocket science and most farmers are more aware than anyone else of just how dangerous the farm can be. Accidents are usually a combination of things such as tiredness, pressure from suppliers, old equipment and familiarity with machinery – but none of these are helped by working with alcohol on board.

Stress is a major cause of accidents on the farm. Dealing with modern day farm equipment, the pressure from deadlines, government and EU regulations makes it all the more important to take accident prevention seriously.

You know how to avoid farm accidents better than anyone. It is simply a matter of putting this knowledge first, every time, always. It's not just you who could be hurt – keep an eye out for other workers and children playing too.

The Farm Safety Foundation (Yellow Wellies) supports the physical and mental wellbeing of UK farmers. Its aim is zero avoidable deaths on our farms. Through its national campaigns, the Foundation is tackling the stigma around risk-taking, ensuring that the next generation of farmers is resilient and equipped with smart strategies and specific skills to live well and farm well.

Further information is available at www.yellowwellies.org



BODY IMAGE & SELF-ESTEEM

Eight out of 10 women agree that every woman has something about her that is beautiful – but do not see their own beauty.

When you look in the mirror do you like what you see? Or do you simply notice things you wish you could change? Having a positive body image will boost your self-esteem and help you to be healthier and happier. Here's how:

- > Focus on what you like about your body and pay yourself a compliment. Say: "My legs look great in these jeans." Or: "I have really glossy hair."
- > Instead of only thinking about the way your body looks, think about what it can do. Tell yourself: "These strong arms do front crawl." Or: "These legs can take me for long walks."
- > Find ways to silence your inner critic, the voice in your head that tells you you're flabby, or silly, or not good enough. Imagine the voice is a parrot in a

Be as nice
to yourself as you
are to those you
love.



cage. Every time you hear a squawk, imagine yourself throwing a cloth over the cage to send the parrot to sleep.

- Think positive thoughts and list some of your strengths – like making great lasagne or being a good listener. Keep the list where you can see it – on your fridge, at your desk – and add to it regularly.

WHEN HOME ISN'T A SAFE PLACE

More than 1 in 4 women have experienced some kind of domestic abuse.

It's not just about being punched or kicked: domestic abuse can be physical, psychological, sexual or financial.

It covers threats, shoves and pushes, hair-pulling, constant criticism, stopping you from seeing family or friends – it's any kind of controlling behaviour by a family member that frightens you or undermines your self-esteem.

If this is happening to you, remember you are not alone and it is not your fault.

Whether you would simply like someone to talk to, or specific information about how to stay safe, check the link on page 35 to find organisations that offer advice and support.

SEXUAL CONSENT

All those involved need to consent to sex every time it occurs. Consent cannot be assumed regardless of previous behaviour or previous consent. You always have the right to say no.





HOW TO EAT WELL

Do you think eating healthily means giving up chocolate forever? Think again.

We need to eat a range of foods to stay healthy – but that doesn't mean we can't have occasional treats. It's just a question of balance. Eating healthily doesn't have to be complicated. In fact, it's quite simple...

JUST EAT MORE...

- > fruit and veg
- > complex carbs – wholemeal/wholegrains
- > oily fish

AND EAT LESS...

- > salt
- > saturated fat
- > sugar

Did you know? Nearly one in 10 UK cancer cases could be prevented through a healthy diet.



GET SWAPPING

Some simple swaps can make a big difference.

You could:

- > have a spoonful of dried fruit instead of a spoonful of sugar on your breakfast cereal
- > swap the frying pan for the grill when cooking meat
- > switch from whole milk to skimmed or semi-skimmed.

DON'T BE FOOLED

Be careful about food claims. Do they really mean what you think they do? Learn to read labels and check the fat, salt and sugar content in food when you're shopping and cooking.

Traffic light colours indicate whether a product is high (red), medium (orange) or low (green) in fat, saturates, sugars and salt. Use these to make healthier choices – the more green, the healthier the food is likely to be.

You'll find hidden sugar in some surprising places such as ready meals, soups, ketchup and gluten-free products. Salt is also hidden in processed foods, such as bread and breakfast cereals.

'Low fat' doesn't always mean low in calories and foods claiming to be 80% fat-free still have a 20% fat content. Besides, whatever is taken out from food is usually replaced with something else. So low-fat foods may be high in sugar and low-sugar foods high in fat!

STILL NOT CONVINCED?

Here's why what you eat matters:

- > Eating healthily can help you feel better – you should have more energy and experience fewer mood swings.
- > It reduces the risk of developing diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol and helps to reduce the risk of some cancers and heart disease.
- > If you eat well now, you'll stay well longer.

I eat my eggs
poached instead
of fried.



HOW MUCH WATER?

Drink about 1.6 litres of fluid a day – that's about eight 200ml glasses – but you might need more depending on your size, how active you're being and how hot it is.

And it doesn't have to be water. All drinks count, including tea and coffee.

That said, plain water is the healthiest choice.

The sugar in fizzy drinks, squashes, smoothies and fruit juice can lead to weight gain and damage your teeth, so save these for occasional treats. Flavoured waters often contain a lot of sugar, too.

And too much caffeine – found in tea, coffee and some fizzy drinks – can make you feel anxious and depressed and give you a bad night's sleep.

To cut down on caffeine, I drink herbal tea instead of coffee.

IT'S NOT HARD TO EAT FIVE A DAY

Lots of people still struggle with the advice to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day – but here are five quick tips:

- > slice a banana on your breakfast cereal
- > stir a handful of berries into a low-fat yogurt for a quick pudding
- > cook vegetable kebabs and corn cobs when you barbecue
- > cut up strips of peppers, cucumber and carrots to eat with a salsa dip
- > add chopped carrots and mushrooms to a spaghetti Bolognese.

FOOD ALLERGIES

Food allergies can be dangerous and appear to be on the increase. Risk is higher in those with a family history or with other allergic conditions such as eczema or asthma. Any food can cause a reaction but the most common are eggs, milk, soya, wheat, nuts, fish and shellfish.

I use herbs,
not salt,
for flavour.

Some people react to gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye.



How many times have you gone on a diet in order to lose weight before a wedding or to shift the pounds you piled on over Christmas?

And how many times did the weight you lost creep back on again?

The truth is that dieting doesn't work.

Researchers have found that within four or five years, at least one-third to two-thirds of dieters have regained more weight than they lost.

And it doesn't seem to matter what kind of diet you follow. One study compared people on a rapid weight loss diet with a group following a gradual weight loss diet. Three years later, seven out of 10 dieters from BOTH groups had regained most of their lost weight.

On top of this, many fad diets – such as the Dukan diet or the Paleo diet – are based on dubious scientific theories or unhealthy ways of eating that can be harmful to health. Instead of cutting out entire food groups, living on cabbage soup or egg-white omelettes, try small changes to the way you eat instead.



You could try:

> **Eating less.**

Cook smaller quantities, use smaller plates, take smaller portions, share a pudding. Think twice before having second helpings and don't feel you have to clear your plate.

> **Eating more slowly.**

Chew your food more. Savour it. Put down your knife and fork between mouthfuls. Your tummy takes time to realise it's full.

> **Eating mindfully.**

This means focusing on your food. So try not to eat on the go, at your desk, while watching TV or checking your email. Eat at a table if possible and learn to recognise when you're full.

I keep a bowl of fruit by the sofa - and the biscuits out of sight.

HEALTHY WEIGHT

Doctors use something called the BMI (body mass index) to decide whether someone is a healthy weight or not.

But there's an easier way: just take a tape measure and measure your waist. It should be less than half your height.

Even easier, if you want just one figure: **31.5 inches** (80cm).

As a woman, you have a higher risk of health problems if your waist size is more than 31.5 inches or 80cm (and this risk is even higher if it's more than 34.5 inches or 88cm).





EATING DISORDERS

An eating disorder such as anorexia or bulimia can affect women (and men) of any age and take over your life.

Symptoms include becoming obsessed with appearance, diet or exercise; strict rituals around eating such as avoiding eating with others; and making yourself sick or using laxatives. Untreated eating disorders can become very serious, so seek support if you're concerned about yourself or someone else.

DON'T DETOX

Detox diets usually involve drinking lots of water and cutting out foods such as wheat or dairy products, or fasting for short periods, in order to clear out 'toxins'.

Dieticians say the idea of detox is nonsense because your body filters out, breaks down and gets rid of waste products all the time. That's what your skin, your gut, your liver and your kidneys do.

Of course you need to drink enough water to stay hydrated – but drinking too much water can be dangerous. And eating a balanced diet is better for your health than following a fad.

FIVE TOP TIPS

- > Stick to a meal routine. Eat at roughly the same time each day (that includes your snacks). And don't skip meals – that can lead to overeating later.
- > Plan ahead. If you always have an apple or a small pack of dried fruit handy, you'll be less likely to buy a packet of crisps or a muffin as a snack.
- > Don't eat up leftovers – especially other people's! Put them in the fridge or use left-over vegetables to make a soup.
- > Recognise what triggers your snacking. Are you eating to cheer yourself up, or because you're bored?
- > Think about other ways you could meet your emotional needs but don't ban treats altogether – you'll just feel deprived and want them even more.



GET OFF THE SOFA

In the UK we spend 60 per cent of our waking hours sitting down.

Are you sitting comfortably? Then stand up and get moving! When it comes to staying healthy, being active is even more important than watching your weight.

You don't have to run marathons or spend hours in the gym. Even a modest amount of exercise – such as a brisk 20-minute walk every day will make a difference, whatever your age.

Being physically active can help you to be healthier – and happier.

As well as reducing the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, and some cancers, taking regular exercise can also:

- > boost your self-esteem
- > lift your mood
- > give you more energy
- > help you sleep better.



Exercise can be beneficial to everyone, but if you have an underlying health condition – such as heart disease or back problems – or if you’re pregnant or recovering from an illness, check with your GP before starting anything new.

HOW MUCH EXERCISE?

Try to take some exercise every day.

Aim for at least 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity that gets your heart and breathing going. Every little helps – you don’t have to do it all in one go.

Moderate-intensity activity – such as walking briskly or cycling on the flat – raises your heart rate and makes you breathe faster and feel warmer. (You’re working hard enough if you can still talk, but can’t sing the words to a song.)

Vigorous-intensity activity – such as playing singles tennis or running – is even better for your long-term health. (At this level, you won’t be able to say more than a few words without pausing for breath.)

You could do a mix of moderate and vigorous activity: 1 minute of vigorous-intensity activity is about the same as 2 minutes of moderate-intensity activity.

Also, aim to do some muscle-strengthening activities on at least two days a week. You could take up yoga, lift weights in the gym, do push-ups and sit-ups at home – or dig over the garden.

But anything is better than nothing.

WHAT’S STOPPING YOU?

‘I’m too tired’

It’s a nice paradox that if you get physical instead of flopping on the sofa after a busy day, you will boost your energy levels and feel less tired.

‘It’s boring’

You don’t have to go running or take gym classes. Find something you enjoy – you’ll be more likely to keep it up. What about salsa? Or bellydancing?

‘I haven’t got time’

Are you sure? How much time do you spend on social media or watching TV? Could you get up earlier? See our Five Ways to Get Moving opposite.



FIVE WAYS TO GET MOVING

1. Slot exercise into your daily routine

- > walk the children to school instead of taking the car
- > get off your bus/train/tram to work a stop or two early
- > use the stairs instead of the lift/escalator at the shopping centre or car park
- > mow the lawn or clean the windows.

2. Phone a friend

- > invite someone to take a class with you
- > sign up for a charity walk or run.

3. Have fun with your children

- > take a Frisbee or a football to the park
- > play skipping games
- > go on cycle rides.

4. Stand up more at home

- > cook, prep, iron, wash dishes (even do something while the kettle boils)
- > take out the rubbish in the TV ad breaks, or get up to tidy the kitchen.

5. Stand up more at work

- > talk to work colleagues face-to-face instead of emailing
- > stand when making or taking a phone call.



DID YOU KNOW? Being physically active can reduce the risk of developing breast, bowel or womb cancer.



IS IT WINE O'CLOCK?

Some of us like to wind down in the evening with a glass of wine. But before you take your first sip, pause.

Women are advised to drink no more than 14 units a week.

Do you know what one unit of alcohol looks like? Probably less than you think.

A glass of wine, for example, is least 2 units – possibly more than 3 depending on the strength of the wine and the size of the glass. Pubs and bars increasingly serve wine in larger glasses – some even contain as much as a third of a bottle!

A pint of beer, lager or cider is also 2-3 units depending on strength.

If you have two or three drinks, you could easily consume more than 6 units – almost three times the daily alcohol limit guidelines – without even realising it. And that's classed as binge drinking.

**I bought smaller
wine glasses to
use at home!**



There's also a danger in trying to match men drink for drink.

Women have a higher ratio of fat to water than men, so they are less able to dilute alcohol in the body. Women also tend to have lower levels than men of the chemical that metabolises alcohol in the liver.

And as women get older they become even more sensitive to alcohol's effects.

Alcohol can:

- > affect fertility
- > put you at greater risk of breast cancer
- > affect your appearance
- > contribute to weight gain
- > disrupt your sleep
- > increase some side-effects of the menopause.

I sleep
so much better
now I've stopped
drinking during
the week.

And although it may not be apparent for years, drinking over the lower limit guidelines most days or every day can cause a whole range of health problems including liver disease and several types of cancer.

Sounds scary, doesn't it? But there are plenty of ways you can cut down on your alcohol intake, safeguard your health and still enjoy yourself.

EIGHT WAYS TO CUT BACK

1. Find alternative stress busters

Instead of having a drink to wind down at the end of the day, have a cup of herbal tea or go and soak in the bath.

2. Take a break

Have alcohol-free days. Build up to having an alcohol-free week or month. Note the benefits – are you sleeping better, do you have more energy?

3. Switch to lower alcohol drinks

Check the label for the ABV (alcoholic strength by volume) or ask the bar staff. The lower the better. A lower alcohol wine, for example, might have an ABV of 5.5%, instead of the usual 12-14%.



4. Become a mixologist

Have a mocktail instead of a cocktail. You'll find plenty of recipes online. Try a Virgin Mojito. In a tall glass, crush a handful of fresh mint leaves with a teaspoon of brown sugar. Add crushed ice and top up with low-calorie lemonade. Garnish with a sprig of mint and a slice of lime.

5. Dilute your drinks

Have a white wine spritzer or a shandy made with low-calorie lemonade.

6. Sit at a table in the pub or wine bar

People drink more quickly when they are standing.

7. Don't finish the bottle

If you're sharing a bottle with a partner or friend, don't feel you have to drink it all. Screw the top back on or push the cork back in and it should keep for a couple of days. Or try a wine box – they last for weeks.

8. Keep tabs on those units

There are various apps including from the NHS that can help you track how much you're drinking. Check out the iTunes App Store or Google Play.

WHAT'S IN YOUR GLASS?

The calories in alcohol have no nutritional value – they're empty calories. Alcoholic drinks are also full of sugar. So spending an evening drinking is like spending an evening eating cakes!

- > Pint of cider (4.5% ABV) = 1 doughnut (210 calories)
- > Large glass of wine (250ml, 13% ABV) = 1 Cornetto (228 cals)
- > Standard glass wine (175ml, 13% ABV) = 1 slice angel layer cake (160 cals)
- > Glass of champagne (125ml, 12% ABV) = 2 Jaffa cakes (89 cals)
- > Single gin (25ml, 40% ABV) and slimline tonic = 1 Cadbury Mini roll (115 cals)

A pint of cider contains as many as five teaspoons of sugar – almost as much as the recommended upper daily limit. While two glasses of white wine provide 360 calories – nearly one fifth of a woman's daily calorie allowance.

A photograph showing the lower half of a woman in a black dress and tights, holding a lit cigarette in her right hand. She is standing next to a red fire truck. The legs of other people are visible around her. The text 'STUB IT OUT' is overlaid in large white letters on the left side of the image.

STUB IT OUT

If you smoke, quitting is likely to be the most important step you can take to improve your health. As well as increasing the risk of a heart attack or stroke, smoking can cause at least 14 types of cancer – including ovarian and cervical cancer.

After quitting, you will start to see some benefits very quickly – and you'll be adding years to your life and greatly improving your prospects of enjoying a healthy, mobile, happier old age. But long before that...

- > You'll feel less stressed. Nicotine addiction makes smokers experience a 'withdrawal' between cigarettes. The pleasant feeling when you satisfy that craving is only temporary and is not a real cure for stress.
- > Your skin will look less sallow and your face will age less slowly, with fewer lines and wrinkles.
- > Your teeth won't become stained and your breath won't smell stale.
- > Your sex life could improve. You may become aroused more easily and have stronger orgasms.



- > Your sense of taste and smell will improve.
- > You'll have more puff and energy so you'll be able to run for a bus or keep up with the kids in the park.
- > Your fertility levels will improve. Quitting also makes it less likely that you will miscarry and increases your chance of having a healthy baby.
- > You'll be less likely to get gum disease.
- > Your immune system will work better, making it easier for you to fight off colds and flu.

Stopping smoking at the age of 30 increases life expectancy by 10 years. But it's never too late to benefit.

For information and referral to free NHS services, call the Smokefree National Helpline (0300 123044 England; 0800 848484 Scotland; 0800 0852219 Wales).

WHAT ARE YOU WEIGHT-ING FOR?

Some smokers gain weight when they quit because nicotine affects appetite and metabolism. But weight gain isn't inevitable if you eat healthily and take some exercise.

Giving up cigarettes means you'll be able to breathe better and you'll probably have more energy, so exercising will be easier and more enjoyable. In any case, putting on weight is less of a health risk than continuing to smoke.



Nicotine is highly addictive but you can double your chance of quitting successfully if you use products such as patches, lozenges, inhalers, and/or gum that contain nicotine. The idea is to wean yourself off nicotine by gradually reducing your intake until you don't need it any more.



WHAT ABOUT E-CIGARETTES?

Electronic cigarettes contain nicotine but because they don't contain tobacco, they are seen as less harmful than smoking. Using e-cigarettes – or vaping – can help smokers quit.

However, e-cigarettes are not just hot air. They are a regulated product containing all sorts of chemicals and flavourings. Evidence is only just emerging on their long-term effects. Moreover, since the step between smoking and not smoking is smaller when you vape, it may be easier to slip back into the habit.



DRUGS

There are many different types of drugs, each with their own facts, issues and risks – too many to cover in this guide.

For frank, confidential information from friendly people who are professionally trained to give straight-up, unbiased information about drugs, ring Frank on 0300 123 6600, or check out www.talktofrank.com. The lines are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and offer translation services. Both the helpline and website also give confidential information and support for those worried about a friend or family member.



If you've ever suffered from a bad back you'll know just how painful and restrictive it can be – and because other people cannot 'see' the pain it tends to get little sympathy. But bad backs are also one the greatest causes of sickness-related absence from work.

The good news though is that back pain is rarely serious and the best advice is to keep moving and stay active. If your job involves lifting heavy objects or sitting at a desk (and farming today usually involves both), checking your back makes good sense. Chronic back pain can result from bad posture, poor lifting technique or accidental injury.

Being overweight is also a major cause of back problems, not least because it can reduce activity and flexibility, but also because it also puts added strain on the muscles, ligaments and bones of the spine. Smoking can also significantly reduce bone strength – which is another good reason for quitting.

Adult bone is constantly being altered and renewed. This needs plenty of calcium. The body can only store this vital mineral in the bone itself, so fresh calcium is needed on a daily basis. The best sources are dairy products such as milk, cheese and yoghurt, but bread is also good as are fish (such as sardines) with edible bones and green leafy vegetables. You should include some of these foods in your meals as a matter of routine.



It's not enough just to eat calcium. The body needs vitamin D to help take calcium in from the stomach. Sunlight converts an inactive form of vitamin D into the type which does this. You need a healthy balance between too much sun (which can cause skin cancer) and too little (which can cause bones to thin).

Bones are not the only cause of pain. The back is supported by hundreds of different muscles including those that also support the arms, legs and head. All of them can be strained or overworked leaving the spine vulnerable to damage. Most back pain comes from injured muscle or tendons rather than the spine.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR BACK

When standing for long periods

- > Head – keep it up and in line with your spine
- > Shoulders – relax and pull in your shoulder blades
- > Pelvis – keep your hips level while tucking-in your tailbone to line up with your spine
- > Knees – keep slightly bent (not locked)
- > Feet – share the weight evenly.

When driving

- > Head – use a head restraint at all times
- > Lower back – adjust the seat (or use a small cushion) to give maximum support, and sit well back without slouching
- > Arms – slightly bent
- > Legs – adjust the seat for ease of reaching the pedals (while allowing maximum visibility)
- > Take a break – when stopped at the lights, relax by taking your hands off the wheel and bending your legs.
- > The HSE publish guidelines on driving a tractor safely.

When lifting heavy objects

- > Keep your back straight and use your legs to take the strain
- > Know your limits. If it's a two-man job then don't be a one man bad back. It's not always just weight but also the awkward shape or location of a load that can cause problems



- > Make sure you can deal with the shape, clear the area and warn people before you attempt a lift. If equipment is being used by someone else, wait until it is free – machines are easier to repair than people.

OSTEOARTHRITIS

Osteoarthritis occurs because joints have been continually stressed over the years. It can affect your knees, hips, fingers, and lower spine region. Farming for 10 or more years increases the risk of having osteoarthritis by nine times. If necessary knees and hips can be replaced with artificial ones. See your GP.

OSTEOPOROSIS

Osteoporosis weakens bones over time. They become less dense and more likely to break. As it is not usually painful, osteoporosis is often only diagnosed when a bone breaks. It can cause long-term spine pain and stooping.

Women are more at risk than men because of hormonal changes at the menopause when levels of oestrogen, essential for healthy bones, fall.

You can help prevent osteoporosis by:

- > taking regular exercise to keep your bones as strong as possible
- > healthy eating – including foods rich in calcium and vitamin D
- > taking a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D
- > making lifestyle changes – such as giving up smoking and reducing your alcohol consumption

If you are concerned about osteoporosis, visit your GP. You may be referred for a short, painless bone density scan.

FIBROMYALGIA

Fibromyalgia is a long-term condition causing pain all over the body. It affects seven times as many women as men and usually develops between the ages of 30 and 50.

Symptoms include increased sensitivity to pain, extreme tiredness, muscle stiffness, difficulty sleeping, problems with mental processes, headaches and irritable bowel syndrome. Although there is no cure, there are treatments available so see your GP if concerned.



Women experience unique health issues and conditions, from pregnancy and menopause to gynaecological conditions, such as urinary tract infections and endometriosis.

Reproductive health affects both men and women but women bear the brunt of reproductive ill health. Good sexual and reproductive health is important for women's general health and wellbeing. It is key to their ability to make choices about their lives, including when or whether, to consider having children.

PREGNANCY AND LAMBING

Some infections can be passed from sheep and other animals to humans. In a pregnant woman, it could harm her and her unborn baby's health.

If you're pregnant or think you might be pregnant, avoid close contact with sheep during the lambing season (usually January to April). Ewes can pass chlamydiosis, toxoplasmosis, listeriosis and Q fever to pregnant women. These infections are uncommon in sheep and rarer in humans so the number of pregnancies affected is small but it's best to be on the safe side. There is a small risk even out of lambing season.

> Do not help deliver lambs (or calves or kids)



- > do not milk ewes
- > avoid contact with aborted (miscarried) or newborn lambs and with the afterbirth, birthing fluids or contaminated materials, such as bedding
- > ensure your partner washes thoroughly after contact with lambing ewes
- > wash clothing worn during lambing separately from other washing.

See a doctor if you have a temperature/flu-like symptoms and think you might have an infection from the farm.

Remember, farmers are responsible for minimising the risk to pregnant women and members of their family, the public and professionals who visit their farms.

Cows and goats that have recently given birth can also carry similar infections.

The NHS website has plenty of useful information about your rights at work while pregnant and how to cope with pregnancy symptoms.

POST-NATAL DEPRESSION

Many parents experience postnatal depression after having a baby. It affects at least one mother in ten and sometimes fathers and partners. It usually starts in the first year after giving birth

Seeking help as soon as possible is important as symptoms could worsen having a significant impact on you, your baby and your family. Regular ‘baby blues’ shouldn’t last more than a couple of weeks. Look out for longer-lasting symptoms and talk to your GP or health visitor:

- > lack of enjoyment and loss of interest in the wider world
- > lack of energy and feeling tired all the time
- > trouble sleeping at night and feeling sleepy during the day
- > difficulty bonding with your baby and no enjoyment in their company
- > withdrawing from contact with other people
- > problems concentrating and making decisions
- > frightening thoughts – for example, about hurting your baby
- > feeling that you’re unable to look after your baby
- > loss of appetite or an increased appetite (comfort eating)
- > feeling agitated, irritable or very apathetic (you “can’t be bothered”)



- > feelings of guilt, hopelessness and self-blame
- > thinking about suicide and self-harm

Many women don't realise they have postnatal depression, because it can develop gradually. But depression is an illness like any other. It's not your fault and doesn't mean you're a 'bad' parent. There is treatment and support available and many national and local support organisations.

Things you can try yourself include: talking to your family and friends about your feelings and what they can do to help, making time for yourself to do things you enjoy, resting whenever you get the chance and getting as much sleep as you can at night, exercising regularly and eating a healthy diet.

ENDOMETRIOSIS

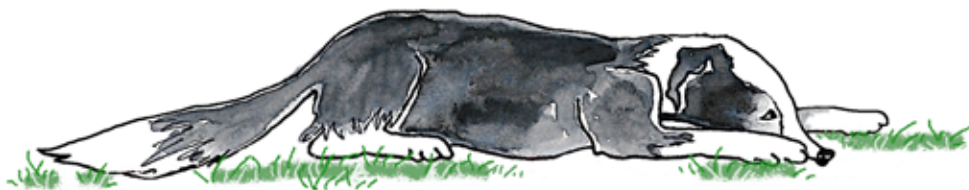
Endometriosis is the name given to the condition where cells like the ones in the lining of the womb (uterus) are found elsewhere in the body. It affects 1 in 10 women in the UK

Each month these cells react in the same way to those in the womb, building up and then breaking down and bleeding. Unlike the cells in the womb that leave the body as a period, this blood has no way to escape. This can cause inflammation, pain and the formation of scar tissue.

Around 1.5 million women in the UK live with the endometriosis. It is a debilitating long-term condition that can cause painful or heavy periods, affect fertility and cause fatigue and bowel and bladder problems.

However, with the right treatment, many of these issues can be addressed. It's important to remember that endometriosis is not an infection, is not contagious and is not cancer

If you think you may have endometriosis, see your GP.





SEX TALK

Whatever your age, the importance of keeping yourself and your partner safe and protected remains the same. It's not just the youngsters who are at risk of sexually transmitted infections (STI's) and diseases, such as AIDS and HIV: the rate of STI's has doubled in the over 45 age group in recent years.

Researchers now know that some types of oral cancer are linked to Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), the virus that cause cervical cancer in women. Oral HPV is twice as common in men as women, and is most common in men in their 40s and 50s. The under 25s are at higher risk of contracting chlamydia and the NHS recommends that everyone in this age group has an annual check with their GP.

Whatever your age, be safe and use a male condom or another barrier method. If you want advice or think you may have contracted something, don't hesitate to see your GP.

SEXUALITY

We're all different and free to express our sexuality – it's an important part of who we are. A helpline has been set up specifically for gay farmers wanting support (www.gayfarmer.co.uk).

SEXUAL HEALTH

Sexually transmitted infections can be passed from one person to another through sexual contact.

Condoms (male and female) are the only contraceptives that protect against sexually-transmitted infections (STIs) as well as pregnancy.

Some infections such as chlamydia may not show any symptoms but if you think you may have an infection, the earlier you are tested the sooner treatment such as antibiotics can start. Some infections, if left untreated, can cause infertility. Symptoms to be aware of are pain on passing urine; itching or burning; blisters, sores or lumps in the genital area; black or white dots in your underwear; yellow or green offensive discharge; bleeding between periods or after sex; pain during sex and lower abdominal pain. These symptoms can be caused by several types of infection, the most common being chlamydia,



gonorrhoea, trichomoniasis, genital warts, genital herpes, pubic lice, scabies and syphilis.

For testing and advice, you can visit your sexual health clinic, some contraceptive clinics, some GP surgeries and, for chlamydia testing, some pharmacies. Your visit and any treatment will be private and confidential and you can ask to see a female doctor or nurse.

CONTRACEPTION

Using condoms can help to prevent against sexually transmitted infections as well as being a method of contraception.

Deciding which method of contraception is best for you will depend on a number of factors including age, whether you smoke, your medical and family history and any medication you are taking. Hormonal methods of contraception include the combined and progesterone only pill; the contraceptive implant, injection or patch and the intrauterine system. Non-hormonal contraception includes caps, diaphragms, female condoms, intrauterine coil or natural family planning. Female sterilisation is a permanent method of contraception.

Check the NHS website to find out where you can get contraception locally. It is free on the NHS so it makes sense to get some advice. Emergency contraception (the ‘morning-after’ pill or the IUD coil) is also free.

Common STI symptoms in women include: vaginal itching, rashes, unusual discharge and pain. But not all STIs have symptoms. If you’re concerned, see a health professional and don’t have sex in the meantime.

If you have unprotected intercourse you may require emergency contraception. It is important to seek advice as soon as possible as Levonelle must be taken within 72 hours (3 days) and ellaOne and the coil within 120 hours (5 days).

For more info, visit www.nhs/conditions/contraception or www.fpa.org.uk

HOPING TO GET PREGNANT?

If you’re hoping to get pregnant, all the good advice about not smoking, eating healthily and going easy with alcohol applies to the would-be father too. You might want to take folic acid. There are many sources of information on pregnancy; it is beyond the scope of this short booklet.



SHOULD YOU SEE A GP?

URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS

One in two women will have a urinary tract infection such as cystitis at least once during their life.

Lessen the risk of getting a UTI by:

- > emptying your bladder after sex
- > wiping from front to back after going to the toilet
- > avoiding constipation.

Urinary tract infections usually get better on their own within four or five days. But you should see your GP the first time you have these symptoms or if you have a UTI more than three times in one year.

You should also see a GP if you develop a high temperature, your symptoms suddenly get worse, you are pregnant or have diabetes.

Don't be
afraid to ask silly
questions - it's
only silly not
to ask.



STRESS INCONTINENCE

One in three women in the UK leak a little when they laugh or sneeze. Lessen the risk of stress incontinence by:

- > doing pelvic floor exercises regularly, especially during pregnancy
- > staying a healthy weight
- > not smoking.

If you are a lady who leaks, don't suffer in embarrassed silence. Talk to your GP who will discuss treatment options with you.

HOW TO DO PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES

Make yourself comfortable, either standing or sitting tall. Now squeeze and lift the muscles you would use if you were trying to stop yourself weeing and passing wind at the same time.

You should feel your vagina and back passage drawing up inside and your lower abdominal muscles should also be working.

Try not to hold your breath or tighten your stomach, buttock or thigh muscles.

When you get used to doing this, hold each squeeze for a few seconds, then release and rest.

Every week, you can add more squeezes and hold each for as long as you can (up to 10 seconds), then release and rest for a few seconds.

Don't give up – it may take a few months before you notice the results.

THRUSH

Most women experience occasional bouts of thrush – itching, soreness and swelling of the vagina caused by a yeast infection – particularly during pregnancy or after a course of antibiotics.

To lessen the risk of getting thrush:

- > wash your vaginal area with water and avoid perfumed soaps, shower gels, vaginal deodorants, or douches
- > avoid latex condoms, spermicidal creams or lubricants if they irritate your genital area



- > wear cotton underwear, not synthetics
- > avoid tights, leggings and skinny jeans.

See a GP the first time you get thrush for a swab to confirm the diagnosis. After that, if you recognize the symptoms, you can just go to a pharmacy and buy anti-thrush medication over the counter.

If the thrush doesn't clear up, or if you have frequent bouts (at least one every few months), see your GP again.

Vaginal thrush isn't an STI, but it can sometimes be passed on to men during sex. Men can have thrush without noticing it, so if you are in a relationship and keep getting attacks, you could be treating your thrush and then your partner could be giving it straight back to you.

Thrush can also be triggered by sex, especially if your vagina is too dry.

PERIOD PROBLEMS

If your periods change, it doesn't necessarily mean there's a serious problem but it should be investigated. Period pain can be caused by conditions like endometriosis or fibroids. If you notice that you're bleeding between periods or after sex, or if your periods become heavier or longer or more painful, see your GP.

If your periods have stopped (and you're not pregnant) or become irregular, it could be the menopause (see page 30). Again, talk to your GP.

PREMENSTRUAL SYNDROME (PMS)

Nearly all women have some premenstrual symptoms before periods, from bloating to mood swings. But 5-10% get PMS which is severe enough to prevent them from getting on with their daily lives. Improve your symptoms by:

- > taking more exercise
- > eating a healthy balanced diet
- > avoiding caffeine and alcohol
- > drinking plenty of water
- > finding ways to reduce stress.

If PMS disrupts your life, discuss lifestyle changes and treatments with your GP.



THE MENOPAUSE

The menopause occurs when a woman's ovaries stop releasing an egg each month. Periods stop and she is no longer able to get pregnant naturally. But as levels of the hormone oestrogen decline, menopausal symptoms can begin many years before the actual menopause (and continue for around four years afterwards). The average age for a woman in the UK to reach menopause is 51 but about 1% of woman will have it before the age of 40.

Common symptoms include: hot flushes, night sweats, vaginal dryness and discomfort during sex, trouble sleeping, lower mood, anxiety, lower sex drive and poorer memory and concentration.

A GP can confirm the menopause with a blood test and advise you on treatments such as hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and lifestyle changes around diet and exercise. Don't underestimate the impact of the menopause on yourself and your relationships. Find out about it, the pros and cons of HRT and get the support you need.





WOMEN AND CANCER

No one likes to think about cancer, but there's no getting away from it – half of us in the UK will develop cancer at some point in our lives.

It's not all bad news. Cancer may be more common – but more people are surviving cancer than ever before. Take breast cancer for example: survival rates have doubled in the UK in the last 40 years.

Cancer Research UK says that more than four out of 10 cases of cancer can be prevented by making the kind of lifestyle changes this booklet suggests. But women also need to be vigilant – and not only for signs of the cancers that we associate with being female.

Lung cancer is still the biggest ladykiller, followed by breast cancer. Third comes bowel cancer, responsible for one in 10 of all female cancer deaths.

That sounds scary. But the sooner cancer is diagnosed, the easier it is to treat – and the more likely treatment will be successful.

So accept invitations for 'smear' tests and mammograms to screen for



cervical and breast cancer, even if you think everything is fine (and don't panic if you are recalled – in many cases, there will be nothing to worry about).

But also get to know your body and what's normal for you. Keep an eye out for any unusual, persistent changes and if you notice a change, talk it over with your practice nurse or doctor.

THE PILL AND CANCER

Taking the pill increases the risk of breast and cervical cancer – but the combined contraceptive pill lowers the risk of ovarian and womb cancer, and may also lower the risk of bowel cancer.

Experts agree that any increase in risk is likely to be small and starts to drop as soon as you come off the pill. After 10 years, the risk is the same as if you had never taken it.

BREAST CANCER: SEVEN SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

Breast cancer is easily the most common cancer in women – but the good news is that more women are surviving breast cancer than ever before.

The key is to catch it early. Be breast aware. Watch out for:

1. A lump or thickening in an area of the breast
2. A change in the size or shape of your breast
3. Dimpling of the skin like orange peel
4. A change in the shape of a nipple
5. Discharge from one or both nipples
6. Redness or a rash on the skin and/or around the nipple
7. A swelling or lump in your armpit

These signs don't necessarily mean cancer – most lumps are harmless. But if you notice any change from what is normal for you, see your GP as soon as possible. Women on HRT may be at increased risk.

DID YOU KNOW? Having 1 drink a day could increase the risk of breast cancer by 5%. And the risk increases the more a woman drinks.



ANTIPERSPIRANTS AND BREAST CANCER

Parabens are chemicals used in deodorants and antiperspirants, as well as many other cosmetic products.

Parabens have been found in breast tissue removed following breast cancer but researchers haven't found any convincing evidence that parabens cause breast cancer.

Sometimes women are advised not to use deodorants containing aluminium salts before going for breast screening.

This isn't because the salts are dangerous, but because they can affect the results of screening tests and make breast cancers harder to detect.

CERVICAL CANCER

Women of all ages can develop cancer in the cervix – the neck of the womb – but it's the most common cancer in women under 35. Most cases are linked to the human papillomavirus (HPV) which can be spread during sexual activity, so using a condom can reduce your risk of infection.

There are now vaccines to prevent HPV infection but they don't protect against all types of the virus and it will be some time before the vaccination programme will reduce the number of cervical cancer cases.

That's why it is important to go for cervical screening – commonly known as having a 'smear' test. (You need to be registered with a GP to be invited for screening.)

If you are too young – or too old – to be called for screening, watch out for:

- > any unusual bleeding from the vagina, particularly after sex or after the menopause
- > persistent vaginal discharge that is blood-stained or smells unpleasant.

These can be early signs of cervical cancer.

Even if you've had a normal screening result or been vaccinated against HPV, it's important to let your doctor know if you develop any of these signs so they can be checked out straight away.

DID YOU KNOW? The best time to have a 'smear' test is in the middle of your menstrual cycle because the health professional is likely to get the best possible sample of cells at this time.



WOMB CANCER

Womb cancer is almost always curable if caught at an early stage.

The early symptoms are:

- > vaginal bleeding after the menopause
- > bleeding that is unusually heavy or happens between periods
- > vaginal discharge, from pink and watery to dark and foul-smelling.

These can also be symptoms of much more common conditions than womb cancer but if you have any of them, it's important to see your doctor to find out.

Don't die of embarrassment.
Doctors have seen it all before.

OVARIAN CANCER

When ovarian cancer is diagnosed at an early stage, the outcome is usually good. If you know the key signs to look out for, you can seek advice as soon as possible.

These are:

- > persistent pelvic and abdominal pain
- > increased abdominal size/persistent bloating
- > difficulty eating and feeling full quickly.

If you regularly have any of these symptoms – and they are not normal for you – see your GP, particularly if you are over 50 or have a strong family history of breast or ovarian cancer.



Is the sun good or bad for us? It can be both.

Sunlight is our main source of Vitamin D, which is essential for strong bones. Low levels are linked to conditions like osteoporosis (brittle bones) and there's evidence that Vitamin D may also help to protect us from getting cancer, heart disease, diabetes, multiple sclerosis and other chronic diseases.

BUT exposure to sunlight is also the main cause of skin cancer. It can age skin prematurely and is a major cause of wrinkles. Farming is particularly risky because of the long hours spent working outside and exposed to sunlight.

So how can you enjoy the sun safely? The two key things to remember are:

- > Little and often is best
- > Never burn

This is even more important if you have fair skin that burns easily, light-coloured eyes or lots of moles or freckles.

A lot of sun exposure occurs in childhood, so parents need to think about their children's exposure too.

Keep sunscreen handy so you're never caught out by the sun.



When the sun is strong or you're at risk of burning:

- > Spend time in the shade
- > Cover up with clothing and wear sunglasses and a hat with a peak or brim
- > Use a sunscreen.

When your shadow is shorter than you are, the sun is more likely to burn you.

YES TO SUNSCREEN

Go for a sunscreen with a protection level of at least SPF 15 and 4 stars. Use it generously and reapply regularly.

Make sure it's not past its expiry date – most have a shelf life of 2-3 years.

Remember that sweating, going in water and drying off with a towel can remove sunscreen – even the ones that claim to last for eight hours or more.

Don't rely on your facial moisturiser even if it has an SPF of 15. You won't be applying it thickly enough – and won't be reapplying regularly through the day.

YES TO SHADES

Too much exposure to sunlight – especially reflected from water or snow – can damage your eyes. Play it safe in the sun by wearing a hat that shades your face and sunglasses.

Not all sunglasses are up to the job. Don't just focus on style or price – make sure you choose a pair that has wide or wraparound arms to protect the sides of your eyes and one or more of the following: the CE Mark and British Standard (BS EN 1836:2005); a UV 400 label; or, a statement that the sunglasses offer 100% UV protection.

NO TO SUNBEDS

When you use a sunbed, your skin is exposed to harmful UV rays that increase your risk of skin cancer and other problems such as cataracts.

If you want to look tanned, the safest way is to use a fake tan. But this won't protect your skin from sunburn, so you will still need to use sunscreen when you are in the sun.



ORGANOPHOSPHATES (OPS)

Between 1988 and 1991 it was compulsory for sheep farmers to dip their sheep using pesticides containing OPs, and they are still widely available in agriculture. Recently scientists have concluded that low-level exposure to OP's can result in lasting brain damage. If you suffer flu like symptoms after handling OPs it could be a sign of exposure.

FARMER'S LUNG

Farmer's Lung is caused by inhaling mould spores. These spores are so tiny that they are easily absorbed and work their way into the smallest lung cells as you breathe.

Symptoms include a dry cough, flu-like aches and pains and eventually shortness of breath. These symptoms are not unusual in winter but if they persist you should visit your doctor. Make sure you tell your GP if you have been exposed to dusty forage.

If you ignore the problem then you run the risk of further contamination which can lead to chronic chest trouble and the development of scar tissue. This causes irreversible damage and permanent shortness of breath.



Prevention is the key:

- > Avoid using mouldy hay, straw or grain. If you have to, then disturb it as little as possible
- > Always wear a mask – this can make all the difference
- > Keep dust exposure to a minimum by keeping barn doors open when working with hay and straw
- > Keep your back to the draught to lessen chances of inhalation.

ASBESTOS

Asbestosis is a serious, long-term lung disease caused by inhaling asbestos dust and can take 20 years or more to develop – so ill-effects are not instantly traceable to asbestos.

There are three main types – often called white, brown and blue asbestos. The use of blue and brown asbestos (the two most dangerous forms) is totally banned by law. Rural buildings still have large amounts of this natural mineral, which was once so attractive because of its fire-retardant properties and easy working.

Around 4,000 people in Great Britain die each year from mesothelioma and asbestos-related lung cancer as a result of past exposure to asbestos.

The main symptoms of asbestosis are:

- > Increasing breathlessness
- > Coughing
- > Chest pain
- > A feeling of tightness in the chest.

To help prevent problems:

- > Wear the correct protective gear and don't take contaminant home
- > Use a shower after working.

If you think you've got occupational lung disease (through asbestosis or farmer's lung) you must talk to your GP. Give details of your symptoms, your job and the materials that you work with. You will almost always need to see a lung specialist at a hospital for a full diagnosis. They will do some tests. These may include a chest X-ray, blood tests and detailed lung function tests.



INFECTIONS FROM ANIMALS & INSECTS (ZONOSSES)

Zoonoses are diseases that are passed from animals to humans. Micro-organisms such as bacteria, fungi, parasites and viruses can cause illness by infecting the body when they are breathed in, swallowed, or when they penetrate the skin through small cuts or grazes.

WEIL'S DISEASE (LEPTOSPIROSIS)

Leptospirosis is a serious disease which affects rats, pigs, cattle, dogs and humans. We can become infected through contact with infected urine, water or milk. The disease organisms penetrate broken skin or mucous membranes (eg. the mouth). Often there are no visible symptoms in infected animals. The most serious form of the disease is spread by rats.

In humans, flu-like symptoms may occur, but in most cases symptoms are more severe and can include jaundice (yellow skin and eyes, brown urine), kidney disease, meningitis, skin rashes and changes to other internal organs.

If there are rats around, set traps or put down poison.

Cover up cuts and abrasions and always wash well before eating or handling food.

If you visit the GP with flu symptoms, ask about leptospirosis. Blood tests are available and leptospirosis can be treated using antibiotics. It is better to seek advice early rather than wait until irreversible harm has taken place.

TICKS

Ticks feed by perching in low vegetation and waiting (questing) for a susceptible host on which they can attach and feed. Ticks can carry Lyme disease. Early symptoms may include fever, headache, fatigue, depression, and a circular skin rash. Personal strategies include:

- > avoiding grassy areas with shrubs that attract ticks,
- > wearing white or light-coloured clothing so that attached ticks can be seen easily and removed,
- > tucking trouser legs into socks and
- > walking in the centre of paths to avoid vegetation on which ticks lie in wait of a host.

If a tick is found on the skin, it should be removed by gently gripping it as close to the skin as possible, preferably using fine-toothed tweezers, and



pulling steadily away from the skin. Do not use a lighted cigarette end, a match head or volatile oils to force the tick out. Some veterinary surgeries and pet supply shops sell inexpensive tick removal devices, which may be useful for people who are frequently exposed to ticks.

INSECT STINGS

You cannot always avoid getting stung, but in rare cases there can be a serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. Any difficulty with breathing after a sting needs urgent medical attention.

TOXOPLASMOSIS

A pregnant woman should avoid lambing ewes because of the risk of infection to both herself and her baby.

Animals that have aborted and the aborted products are especially dangerous to pregnant women. During the first three months of pregnancy the foetus is less susceptible to the disease, but if infection does occur, abortion or stillbirth may result. If the infection occurs later in the pregnancy the baby may be born with serious health problems. Milder forms of damage may only become apparent in later life.

LISTERIOSIS

Listeria bacteria are present in the dung of infected sheep. They survive in the soil and can grow at low temperatures.

The source of human infection is unclear but is probably contaminated food and milk. The bacteria can continue to grow in partially refrigerated food. Silage may also be contaminated.

Listeriosis is generally only a danger to pregnant women, who should avoid sheep, especially at lambing time.

ORF

This is a viral condition usually caught from sheep or goats. It may occasionally be acquired from cattle or even from dogs that have been fed unskinned carcasses.

The animals have painful blisters and scabs around the mouth, nostrils and ears. It is usually transmitted to the farmer when working with the animal. After a period of three to six days, a single red painful lump appears on the hand or



forearm. This goes on to form a blister and may become infected with other common bacteria and develops an abscess or a spreading red painful area.

Orf itself is a virus and therefore will eventually disappear of its own accord. The doctor will treat any secondary infections. Once infected, lifelong immunity will follow.

- > Wear gloves when handling infected animals
- > Do not scrape off the scabs
- > Do not use veterinary foot spray on human wounds and blisters. This can cause a severe reaction
- > Keep blisters clean and covered to avoid cross-infection.

CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS

Cryptosporidiosis is transmitted from a parasite picked up by touching livestock, animal housing, or feed. It can cause diarrhoea in humans, and be particularly severe in young children.

Q FEVER

This is caught mainly from cattle and sheep, but it can also be carried by other mammals, including deer. It leads to acute illness with feverish symptoms and occasionally pneumonia and other complications.

E. COLI

An organism that may be present in animals and can also affect visitors to farms is the verocytotoxin-producing bacterium *E. coli* O157 or O26. This can cause serious illness, especially in young children and the elderly in whom symptoms may include bloody diarrhoea and kidney failure.

TETANUS

The bacteria enter the body through cuts in the skin. You are more at risk of developing tetanus if the wound is deep or if it gets dirty with soil or manure, but even small wounds, such as a prick from a thorn, can allow enough bacteria to get in.

The bacteria release a toxin which then causes tetanus. The illness can take 21 days to develop. Tetanus affects your nerves and can be fatal.



Tetanus is quite rare because many people are vaccinated against it. This vaccine enables your body to create antibodies which protect you from the illness if you were to become infected with the bacteria.

The only way to prevent tetanus is to be immunised. A full course of tetanus immunisation consists of five doses of vaccine.

All children are routinely offered immunisation. As an adult, if you are not sure whether or not you have been fully immunised, see your GP or practice nurse. They will be able to advise you about having a 'catch up' injection.

GET SOME FIRST AID TRAINING

Undertaking some basic first aid training can make all the difference in an emergency situation, particularly if circumstances mean you're not able to seek help because you're away from the farmhouse or not able to get someone to help immediately.

Organisations such as The British Red Cross, St John's Ambulance, British Heart Foundation and Community First Responder Groups offer training. They may offer short workshops locally covering basic lifesaving skills. Often they take place in community locations such as village halls and pubs.





AGEING WELL

According to a report published by the Prince's Countryside Fund in 2017, the average age of a UK farmer is 59. Many continue to farm into their 70s and beyond, so it's important to age well.

Despite our youthful approach to life, we can't hold back time. The ageing process is likely to affect your body, but it is possible to maintain and improve health and mobility with the right approach to healthy living.

Over time, ageing increases your likelihood of:

- > Increase in weight
- > Diabetes
- > Sight deterioration
- > Arthritis
- > Reduced mobility.

On the bright side, think of your personal achievements and how much knowledge and experience you've gained over the years – this is the benefit of age

NEURODEGENERATION AND DEMENTIA

Neurodegeneration describes the loss of nerve cells in the brain which cause a number of diseases and dementia.

The term Dementia is used to describe a set of symptoms including memory loss, confusion and mood changes. Symptoms between the different forms of dementia vary a great deal.

People living with dementia need to be treated with respect and dignity.

Dementia is caused by a number of different diseases. Alzheimer's disease is the best-known and the most common, causing about two thirds of cases. Other diseases that cause dementia include vascular dementia, dementia with Lewy bodies and frontotemporal dementia. .



Most people with dementia are over the age of 65 but younger people can be affected. It's estimated that 25% of people with dementia are under 65.

In the UK 61% of people with dementia are female. This is mainly because women tend to live longer than men and as dementia becomes more common with age. More and more people are living with dementia. The figure is expected to reach one million by the 2020s.

The main risk factors are:

- > age;
- > lifestyle - the risk factors for heart disease and stroke are also thought to be risk factors for some causes of dementia. So maintain a healthy lifestyle with lots of exercise and a balanced diet;
- > genes - some rare forms of dementia (such as some forms of early onset Alzheimer's and frontotemporal dementia) can be caused by faulty genes but in most cases, the genes we inherit from our parents only have a small effect on our risk of dementia.

Dementia often develops slowly and the early signs are not always obvious. Similar symptoms are seen in other illnesses and some mild forgetfulness is not unusual in normal ageing. However, Alzheimer's, dementia with Lewy bodies and frontotemporal dementia are all neurodegenerative diseases, meaning that the symptoms get worse over time. This is usually the case with vascular dementia too.

None of these disease which cause dementia can currently be cured but there are some treatments are available that can help some people with some symptoms for a temporary period.

ARE YOU A CARER?

Caring becomes more common as we age but it can include anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member with an illness, disability, mental health problem or an addiction.

Women are more likely to take on caring roles than men. Of the 6.5 million unpaid carers in the UK, about 58% - 3.34 million - are women. It can be very draining and sometimes mean effectively putting your own life on hold. Help is available if you register. Carers UK can advise (contact details on page 63).



Almost all health problems can be more easily and successfully treated the earlier they are caught. The NHS has a range of services that offer convenient options that allow you to get the right treatment at the right time, and at the right place. Consult your GP as soon as symptoms develop and take advantages of any check-ups offered.

DON'T GET CAUGHT IN THE WEB

If you're looking for health information online, the NHS website (www.nhs.uk), the country's biggest health website, is the online 'front door' to the NHS.

Buying drugs from illegal internet sites is potentially very dangerous. They are at best fake and useless, at worst harmful. You may also have your credit card details stolen as well. More important is the danger of not getting a medical diagnosis. Always speak to your doctor or chemist first.

PHARMACISTS: OVER THE COUNTER ADVICE

Pharmacists are highly-qualified professionals providing advice on the use and selection of prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines. They can give advice on how to manage small problems and common conditions. This



includes lifestyle advice about eating habits, exercise and stopping smoking, but they will also tell you where you can get further advice.

NHS WALK-IN CENTRES

At NHS walk-in centres, highly qualified NHS staff offer a range of convenient and free services with no need to make an appointment: advice, minor illnesses and injuries, prescriptions and even emergency contraception. Look out for centres in railway stations, shopping centres or on the high street.

NHS 111

Call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. The NHS say 111 is 'a fast and easy way to get the right help, whatever the time'.

ACCIDENT AND EMERGENCY (A&E)

A&E treat serious accidents or life-threatening illnesses such as heart attacks or medical conditions which suddenly become worse. Only use A&E in a genuine emergency. And be prepared to wait if there are people more seriously ill than you.

A&E is usually open 24 hours a day all year round – although in some rural areas this may not be the case so check before you set out.

GP SURGERIES

Doctors are generally available from around 8.30am to 6pm (or later). Make sure you know your GP's opening hours.

Calling at other times will put you in touch with an out-of-hours system. It's always best to see your own doctor if possible, so unless your problem is urgent and cannot wait, you should make an appointment to be seen by your normal doctor. Practices now often offer a huge range of services such as minor surgery, skincare, chiropody and even diabetic clinics.

To get the best from your doctor:

- Turn up. If you don't turn up for an appointment you can cause huge frustration.



- > Write down your symptoms before you see your doctor. It's extremely easy to forget the most important things during the examination
- > Doctors will ask questions such as: When did the problem start and how did it feel? Did anyone else suffer as well? Has this ever happened before? What have you done about it so far? Are you taking any medicine for it?
- > You can ask questions too and don't be afraid to ask your doctor to give more information or make something clear that you don't understand
- > Get to the point – if you have a lump or bump say so. Time is limited so there is a real danger of you coming out with a prescription for a sore nose when you might need a serious problem sorted
- > Have your prescription explained, and ask whether you can buy any medicines from your chemist. Make sure you know what each medicine is for. Some medicines clash badly with alcohol.

NHS HEALTH CHECK

You make sure your car and farm vehicles are in good working order – do the same for yourself with an MOT!

If you're aged between 40 and 74 and live in England, your GP will write to you every five years and offer you a Health Check. This check involves some routine tests that will help identify your risk of developing heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and type 2 diabetes.

DENTISTS

It can be difficult to find time to get to a dentist and it's not exactly the first thing you want to do. However, most things that go wrong in your mouth can be prevented. Getting a check-up can avoid a lot of pain and even unnecessary extraction. And it's not just your mouth that will benefit – dental decay may increase your risk of heart disease.

Sugary foods or drinks feed the plaque bacteria that live naturally in the mouth. The bacteria then make acid which attacks the tooth enamel causing tooth decay. The bacteria also irritate the gums which can cause gum disease. When older people lose their teeth, most do so because of gum disease. Smoking also causes gum disease. Preventing all this is quite simple:

Brush your teeth and gums every night and morning with a fluoride toothpaste. Spit but don't rinse to keep the fluoride working after brushing.



Try to keep sugary foods and drinks to mealtimes only. Choose healthier snacks between meals such as fruit and vegetables.

Visit a dentist at least once a year. You will have to pay for dental check-ups and treatment unless you are at school, are pregnant or receive certain benefits. To find an NHS dentist in your area, check the NHS website.

EYE CARE

It is easy to neglect our eyes because they rarely hurt when there is a problem.

An eye test is about much more than getting glasses or contact lenses. It can also help to detect a range of conditions including diabetes and glaucoma.

In your 40s eyesight starts to change. Blurred near vision (presbyopia) affects everyone sooner or later. Don't panic – get an eye test so you can get the right eyewear for you. In your 60s, regular eye checks are even more important.

Look out for free eye test vouchers in your local press.

Wear the right protective gear (glasses, goggles or face shield) for the tools you're using and work you are doing.



EAR CARE

Hearing deteriorates with age: around 42% of over 50 year-olds in the UK have some kind of hearing loss.

Wear ear protectors when appropriate and let your ears rest after being exposed to unavoidable noise. See your doctor if your hearing is getting worse.

Wax is a common cause of reduced hearing especially when water gets trapped behind it. See your practice nurse. Do not stick anything in your ear!



ABOUT THIS BOOK

The Men's Health Forum have been producing health information for the farming community for many years. Fit For Farming has appeared in many versions including a Welsh language one. It is designed to support those working on farms to keep well and age healthily.

This particular version of Fit Farming probably began in 2012. Building on the original Fit For Farming written by Dr Ian Banks, it was developed with the Yorkshire Rural Support Network, supported by the Yorkshire Agricultural Society and the Farming Life Centre (Blackwell, Derbyshire). It was revised again in 2015 by various organisations led by the Farming Community Network, who had used the original booklet extensively to help promote good mental and physical health in farming.

Fit For Farming was ostensibly aimed at men but recognising the supreme contribution made by women to farming, in 2019, the Farming Community Network decided to produce a manual specifically aimed at women farmers.

This new edition of Fit For Farming combines existing content with sections from the Men's Health Forum's popular Woman manual and new material. Thanks to all the farmers who helped produce it.

Text by Ian Banks, Lee Rodwell and Jim Pollard with additional material from the Derbyshire Rural Life Centre, Yorkshire Rural Support Network and the Farming Community Network.

Edited by Jim Pollard.
Cartoons by Audrey Quinton.

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menshealthforum.org.uk/MMreferences

The authors and the publisher have taken care to make sure that the advice given in this edition is correct at the time of publication. We advise you to read and understand the instructions and information included with all medicines and to carefully consider whether a treatment is worth taking. The authors and the publisher have no legal responsibility for the results of treatments, misuse or overuse of the remedies in this book or their level of success in individual cases.

The author and the publisher do not intend this book to be used instead of advice from a medical practitioner, which you should always get for any symptom or illness.

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WHO CAN HELP?

Call 111 (24 hour) for non-emergency medical advice or visit the NHS website: www.nhs.uk

Links to useful organisations for men and women are also on our website: www.menshealthforum.org.uk/links

SAMARITANS offer emotional support 24/7 on 116 123 or samaritans.org

Health and Safety Executive
www.hse.gov.uk

Farming Help
Farming charities' umbrella organisation: 03000 111 999
www.farminghelp.co.uk

The Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI)
Grant-making charity offering confidential, financial support to farming people of all ages: 0808 281 9490

The Addington Fund
Help for families in England and Wales leaving farming and so losing home: 01926 620135

Yorkshire Agricultural Society
www.yas.co.uk

Farming Community Network
Confidential, national helpline 03000 111 999 (7am-11pm; every day of the year).
e-Helpline: chris@fcn.org.uk
www.fcn.org.uk

RSABI – Support in Scotland
0300 111 4166

Beds & Cambs Rural Support
0300 323 1244
Gloucestershire Farming Friends
0845 300 6886

Lincolnshire Rural Support Network
0800 138 1710
Nottinghamshire Rural Support
0800 138 1710

Northern Ireland Rural Support
0800 138 1678
Shropshire Rural Support
0300 123 2825

Alcohol
www.drinkaware.co.uk
Drinkline 0300 123 1110

Alcoholics Anonymous
0800 9177 650
www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Dementia UK Helpline:
0800 8886678
www.dementiauk.org

Back Care
www.backcare.org.uk

Oral Health Foundation
www.dentalhealth.org

British Heart Foundation
Heart helpline: 0300 330 3311
www.bhf.org.uk

Macmillan Cancer
Free helpline 0808 808 00 00
www.macmillan.org.uk

Bowel Cancer UK
www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk

Eve Appeal
(Gynaecological Cancers)
0808 802 0019
eveappeal.org.uk

Breast Cancer Now
0808 800 6000
breastcancernow.org

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust
0800 802 8000
jostrust.org.uk

Carers UK
0808 808 7777
www.carersuk.org

Diabetes UK
0345 123 2399
www.diabetes.org.uk

Stroke Association
0303 3033 100
www.stroke.org.uk

Smokefree
0300 123 1044
www.smokefree.nhs.uk

Mental Health Foundation
www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Mind
0300 123 3393
www.mind.org.uk

Frank (confidential drugs advice)
0300 123 6600
www.talktofrank.com

Domestic Violence: Refuge
0808 2000 247
Refuge.org.uk

For a fuller list of rural support organisations, visit YANA (You Are Not Alone): www.yanahelp.org

FIT FOR FARMING

Special Edition for Women Farmers

One careful owner? The mind and body of the farmer is the best bit of kit on any farm. With a little care, this high-performance machine will run smoothly for a lifetime with just basic maintenance and minimal need for spare parts. This easy-to-read handbook is a basic introduction to female health written with women farmers in mind. We'll explain the little changes that can make a big difference:

- > how to be good to your body
- > how to be good to your brain
- > how to handle the ups and downs

FIT FOR FARMING also includes details on all the common occupational health concerns for UK farmers from ticks and insect stings to asbestos and tetanus.

Full of
useful advice
and guidance with
vital content
on women's
health

WARNING: Reading this booklet could seriously improve your health.

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