

Take a look at four practical ways we can interrupt this cycle of pressure.

	How are you going to make it happen?
<p>Taking exercise</p> <p>We all know that taking exercise is good for us, but few of us find the time to do much about it. The truth is that exercise helps us to feel better about ourselves – it helps to reduce anxiety and increases production of mood-enhancing hormones. Exercise also stimulates the production of dopamine, which is associated with pleasure, happiness, motivation and interest. When we do things we like, dopamine is released. However, from our teenage years onwards our brain's capacity</p>	

to produce dopamine decreases – it's a case of 'use it or lose it'. Research has shown that low dopamine levels can be associated with various diseases – for example, one of the characteristics of Parkinson's Disease is low dopamine production. Neuroscientific research shows that stress can impair the brain's ability to create new neurons, whereas exercise can promote the growth of neurons.⁹ We feel better about ourselves when we take control of our body and our health, instead of just fretting about it and wishing we were a few pounds lighter.

Making changes in your routine

We can be so busy just keeping up with all that we have to do that we may suddenly find our lives have settled into a predictable routine that has lost some its freshness and excitement. If we pay attention to this, and instead of feeling trapped by routine decide to make some changes, then we can reconnect with the moment-by-moment quality of life and feel refreshed. We can do this by looking at our routines and reviewing which of them are necessary and helpful, and which are simply habits that we can change or cut out altogether. It can start with very small things – do you put out your clothes for the next day the night before, or do you wait to see how you feel in the morning and what you would like to wear? Do you always eat the same things for breakfast? Then you could tackle bigger things such as what you usually do at the weekend and where you normally go on holiday. Trying something completely different introduces us to new impressions and experiences that can inspire us. Sometimes our routines are just ways of trying to over-organise our lives and are not really necessary. We can get much more satisfaction from responding to how life is in the present moment.

<p>Connecting with friends</p> <p>We discussed this already. Let's make a start by taking out our diaries and looking at the month ahead and seeing where we can fit in at least one social event each week with a friend.</p>	
<p>Making room for gratitude</p> <p>Appreciating what you have in your life and expressing gratitude for it helps us to move from being a glass-is-half-empty kind of person, to a glass-is-half-full kind of person – with all the accompanying benefits to our wellbeing.¹⁰ We can learn to do this by taking the time to notice the things in our lives that are working well and savouring them, rather than shrugging them off and focusing on the things that may not be going so well. Incidentally, research is showing that this helps to reduce our tendencies to adaptation and comparison, two of the ways in which we undermine our happiness that we looked at in Chapter 3. If we are grateful for what we have, it keeps it fresh and we are less likely to take it for granted (adaptation), and if we are happy and contented with what we have then we have no need to compare it to what others have (comparison).¹¹</p>	