

NEWSLETTER

This quarter, our focus is on the British Value 'Individual Liberty' as we explore self-expression in a digital age. We delve into Menopause, its signs and symptoms and the impact this can have on a woman's life. And finally, as the days become shorter, we will be mentioning the 'C' word. Love it or hate it, Christmas is just around the corner and we examine some ways to manage what can be a stressful time of the year.

Individual liberty versus AI and Self image



The Fundamental British Values underpin what it is to be a citizen in a modern and diverse Great Britain. Individual Liberty, is the right to believe,

act and express oneself freely outside of Government control. Our rights, and the rights of others, are protected.

Individual Liberty means we can decide how we wish to live our lives and affords us the freedom to express our individuality and uniqueness within the rule of law. However, our choices are increasingly influenced by social media.

If we take our appearance as an example, we have the choice to express ourselves through the clothes we wear, the hairstyle we choose. We are free to decide to get a tattoo or a piercing. However, research has shown that 61% of adults and 66% of children feel negatively or very negatively about their body image most of the time.

Beauty in the AI age.



Two decades ago, the personal care brand, Dove, made a stand in challenging false beauty standards and introduced the Dove Self-Esteem Project. Their

message is clear: **KEEP BEAUTY REAL!**

By 2025, it is predicted that 90% of online content will be AI-generated. 1 in 3 women feel pressured to alter their appearance because of what they see online, even when they know the images are fake or AI-generated. The rise of AI has presented one of the greatest threats to real beauty in the past 20 years as it doesn't imagine beauty in a human sense, it simply reflects the way we talk about it.

AI reduces the world to stereotypes, instead of representing diverse cultures and visual identities. If left unchecked, the worry is that it will have a negative impact on social media and other online spaces by perpetuating the stereotypes of appearance and narrowing the standards of beauty.

Artificial intelligence has produced its idea of what the "ideal" man and woman look like, based on social media data and results on the World Wide Web.

Dove became the first beauty brand to ban AI-Generated Women in its ads and continues to work towards avoiding appearance-based stereotypes and toxic beauty standards.

Poor body image is not just a female issue - many men are also dissatisfied with their body image and has been linked to dieting, excessive exercising, eating disorders and steroid misuse.

Research consistently reports that girls and women experience body dissatisfaction more frequently than boys and men, but poor body image is not just a female issue. Recent research shows that males, and those who identify as male, are also vulnerable to body dissatisfaction at similar rates to females, and those who identify as female. Many men are dissatisfied with their

body image and this has been linked to dieting, excessive exercising, eating disorders and steroid misuse.

The AI images of men and women were created through engagement analytics on social media, using tools to look at billions of images of people.



The Bulimia Project, an eating disorder awareness group, monitored the findings and warned the results from the AI's

collection of social media-inspired images are "largely unrealistic" and "far more sexually charged" than those based on everything else it found on the World Wide Web. It said the images of men and women tended to be biased toward specific physical attributes. A separate study found that self-objectification and low self-esteem were directly related to selfie editing through photo editor apps and filter usage.

So, how do we embrace our own identity, enjoy our individual liberty and appreciate the way we are? How can we minimise social media influence?

Body image is your view of your own appearance – your ideas and feelings about your body – and how you feel about that view.

It is about your relationship with your body. If you feel unhappy or dissatisfied with your body from time to time, don't panic, this is very normal and something we all experience.

Poor body image is a problem if it starts to make you very unhappy or interferes with your life. If this is the case, then it's time to take action. The NHS have a [Self-Esteem Self Help Guide](#) that uses Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to support and improve self-esteem.

Supporting young people to develop a positive self-image is crucial and The Children's Society has further information on [Artificial Intelligence, Body Image and Toxic Expectations](#). Dove offers resources for parents and carers to support [conversations around body confidence with young people](#).

Menopause



In recent years, awareness around menopause and its effects has increased significantly and, in 2023, the UK government appointed Helen Tomlinson as their very first Menopause Employment Champion. With Menopause Awareness Day taking place in October, it feels appropriate to examine some of the challenges women face and the support available to them during perimenopause and menopause.

In 2023, Helen Tomlinson released a report, [No Time to Step Back](#), which found "With close to four million women aged 45-55 employed in the UK and women over 50 representing the fastest growing segment of the workforce, there are few workplaces where menopause is not being experienced by staff. A lack of awareness and treatment are negatively affecting UK workforce productivity". Evidence in the report also suggested that a lack of support from employers, managers and colleagues negatively affected 84% of individuals.



Since the publication of her initial report, Helen has gone on to release a 12-month Progress Report, [Shattering the Silence about Menopause](#), which celebrated the activity and momentum that has built as "conversations about

health and wellbeing are becoming normalised in the workplace".

It is important to note that symptoms are not limited to women in the 45-55 age bracket. Early menopause can happen when periods stop before the age of 45. This can happen naturally or be caused by treatment for other conditions. Forced menopause, also known as surgical menopause, occurs when the ovaries are removed or damaged before a woman naturally goes through menopause.

Many of us will be aware of some of the symptoms of menopause, including hot flashes and night sweats. However, there are a multitude of physical and emotional changes for women, making it a challenging and complicated time. Symptoms can include:

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- **Sleep issues** – insomnia and difficulties can lead to daytime fatigue and irritability
- **Mood changes** – including depression, anxiety and low mood
- **Skin changes** – dry or itchy skin, or acne
- **Bone loss** – decreased bone density which can lead to osteoporosis and fractures
- **Cognitive changes** – brain fog, memory loss
- **Other symptoms** – headaches, migraines, muscular aches, joint pain

Evidence suggests that, too often, women feel forced to suffer in silence, reduce their working hours, pass up promotions or even resign from their jobs, due to a lack of support.

At Buttercups, we want to recognise this and do what we can to offer support. It is crucial to develop our understanding of menopause, as well as educate ourselves about menopause to “become invaluable allies

to [our] partners and colleagues, offering empathy, patience, and practical support both at work and at home during this significant life transition”.

For further information, support and resources, visit the gov.uk website, [Menopause in The Workplace Resources Hub](#). This hub is for employers and workers alike and has been created by a group of employers who are already effectively supporting menopause in their workplace.

[The Menopause Charity](#) provides a wealth of information to women experiencing perimenopause or menopause, including advice on [how to talk to your employer](#) about your symptoms and how they are impacting you and affecting your work.

The NHS website also provides [Help and Support](#) in navigating menopause.



Expectations at Christmas

While many children and adults look forward to celebrating Christmas; decorating the tree, receiving and giving presents and spending time with family, there are many that it fills with a sense of dread.

To provide the wanted gift, to mix socially, to cook wonderful food, to spend the money you perhaps don't have or the pressure to create a new activity for that naughty Elf every day! All these expectations, the hype and the fact the shops now start filling with decorations and gifts in August, all add to the pressure, emotionally and financially.

By recognising this, whether we celebrate Christmas or not, we can enjoy the time of year in our own way and, by accepting the day does not have to be 'perfect', we can go some way to alleviating some of the pressure.

After looking for ideas, here are some tips for helping to reduce the stress and lessen expectations:

1. Set a budget – This is easier said than done when the food, gifts and decorations are in the shops so early, but decide what is important to you and your household. Do you need to have six courses for Christmas dinner? Is a room full of presents, or decorations in every nook and cranny, appreciated?

- Create a list of who you want to buy for and how much you want to spend
- Agree a spending limit for friends and family

- Consider a Secret Santa between friends; set a spend limit and only buy one present!
- Put money aside throughout the year to help pay for the extras you want

2. Plan – Routines tend to change in the run up to and throughout the Christmas period causing anxiety for some. Try and stick to certain routines to lessen the changes, and plan activities ahead. However, don't feel you have to yes to everything!

- Enjoy things in moderation – as with planning, don't feel you have to buy everything and do everything.

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Try an [activity advent calendar](#) with younger children (or adults) picking from an activity from a stocking or a '[fill your own](#)' [advent calendar](#). These provide the excitement, but allows you to control the nature and cost of the activities.

3. Support others – whether that is helping someone in your own family, or [volunteering](#) to help others. Giving your time and attention to others who need your support can boost your mood and make a huge difference to them.

4. Look after yourself – between the demands of the festive period and your normal day-to-day life, there isn't always time to look after yourself. Plan some down-time such as catching up on your favourite TV programme, going for a walk with the dog or listening to your favourite music. These can all boost your mood and relieve stress.

Resources and Support

-  [Mental Health Foundation](#) offers tips to support your mental health this Christmas
-  [Mind](#) offers lots of information for people who find Christmas hard and how to cope
-  [Action for Children](#) has advice on how to cope with anxiety and stress at Christmas

Whatever your feelings about Christmas, whether you celebrate it or not, Buttercups wishes you good health, peace and happiness.

