

## The Northern Echo

The North's campaigning newspaper

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## COMMENT

### Honours... and favours

WE see the honours system as a welcome tradition in this country – an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of people from a rich variety of backgrounds and occupations.

But it never fails to throw up controversies and the latest New Year list is no exception.

Let's start with those whose honours are justified beyond question: Barbara Windsor has stood the test of time and is a national treasure who deserves to become a Dame. Tony McCoy jumps out from the list as one of the greatest sportsmen of his generation and a knighthood is a fitting reward for the sacrifices he has had to make to be the best. Falklands veteran Simon Weston emerged from a devastating personal ordeal to dedicate the rest of his life to helping disfigured people face the world and his CBE has been truly earned.

Here in the North-East, we are particularly pleased about the MBE for Steph Houghton, our own recent Local Hero, who went from County Durham schoolgirl to England football captain and is an inspirational pioneer of women's football.

Great-grandfather Kenneth Hayes, 83, who receives the British Empire Medal for his dedication to helping elderly and disabled people on Teesside, is a heartwarming inclusion in a list which must always dig deep into the grass roots of community life.

In stark contrast, there is a knighthood for Lynton Crosby, whose claim to fame was masterminding the election victory for David Cameron.

It is not a party political point we make because it matters not a jot which colours the Australian strategist Mr Crosby was wearing when he set about his task of opening the door to 10 Downing Street.

But isn't it the kind of gong which smacks of cronyism and not only undermines the honours system but contributes to the erosion of trust in politics?

 **What do you think?**  
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#### QUALITY

If you have any comments or suggestions about the print quality of today's copy of **The Northern Echo**, please contact our customer care department on 01325-505151.

# Up happiness



Many of us will feel the dreaded 'January Blues' once Christmas celebrations are out of the way and the

return to work beckons. But it needn't be like that, says **Susanna Halonen**

HOW many of us feel depressed at this time of the year?

We're deep into winter and the weather is cold, dark and wet. We've just wrapped up all the Christmas fun and we're back to our usual work routine. It's very common to have low energy and moods in January of all months, but that doesn't mean you can't do anything to combat it.

For a long time I used to fight all kinds of blues. I was a naturally pessimistic person and when things went wrong I used to go to really miserable places. Eventually I felt so desperate for change I did a Masters of Science in Applied Positive Psychology, also known as the science of happiness and human performance. As I studied what makes us happy and successful, I tested every theory and practice on myself. And it worked. Now I can happily call myself a trained optimist.

Going through this journey myself made me realise how I wanted to help others to become happier too. I put my positive psychology learnings and my previously achieved life coaching accreditation to use by becoming a happiness coach. Today, I'm known as the 'Happyologist'.

Through my work I help people to embrace a positive mindset, build fulfilling lives and choose happiness rather than chase it. I help them get from good to great. This can be hard to achieve in January when the mood is low. But it doesn't mean you can't try. Here are five things you can start doing right away to turn your mood into a more positive one.

- Remember what you have to be grateful for. It's such a simple concept but also a very powerful one.

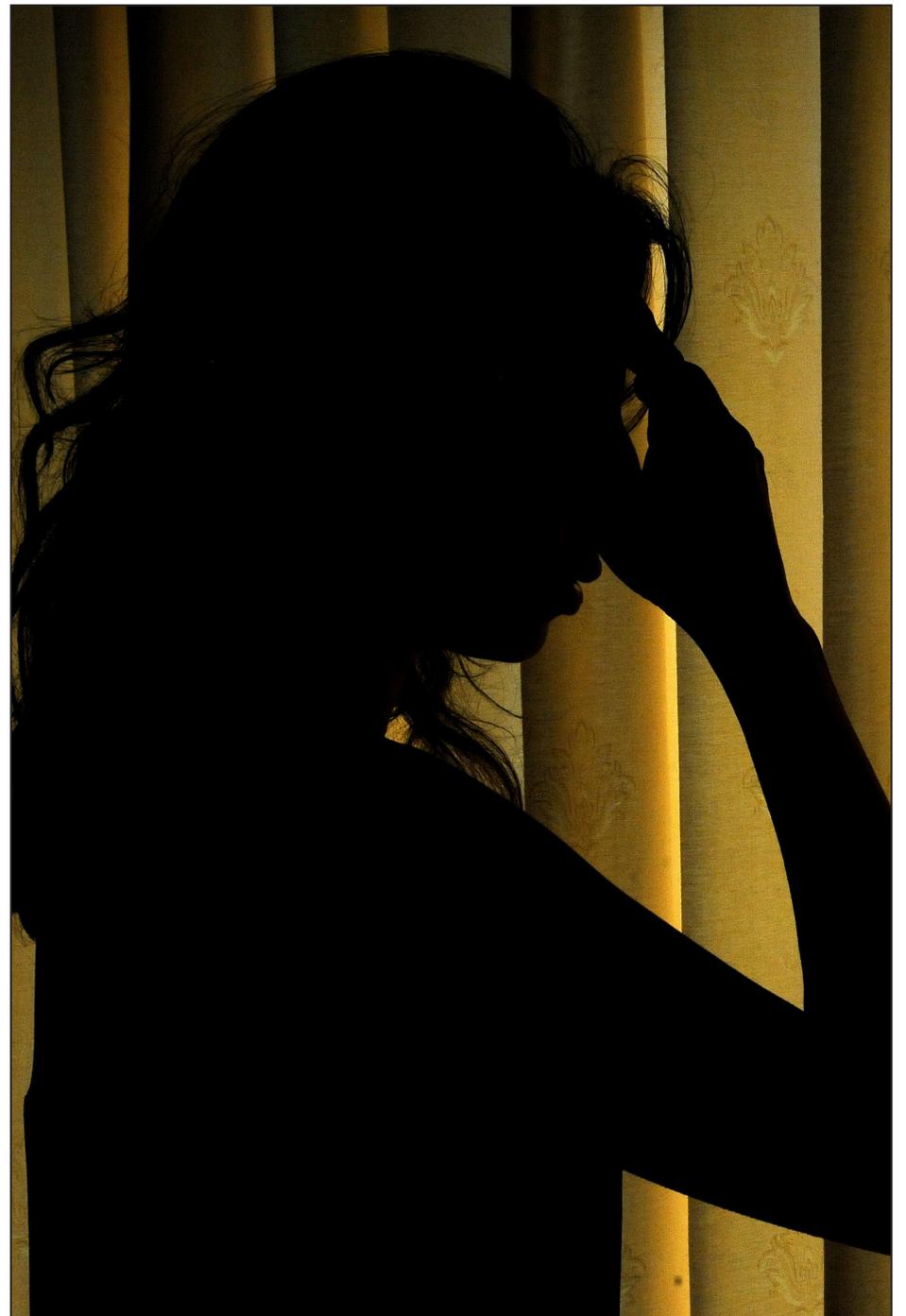
When you feel low it's natural for you to struggle with appreciation. That means you have to work extra hard at it. Try finishing every day by writing three specific things you were grateful for in that day. This will remind you of all the amazing things you have to be grateful for and it will also start turning your mind into an optimistic one. Instead of looking for what's wrong with life, you start to look at what's right with life. Do this for 21 days in a row and you'll start turning it into a happiness habit.

- Be kind to yourself. Harsher, colder weather conditions take a toll on your mind and body.

Don't beat yourself up for feeling more tired or being less productive. It's okay for you to not be in top form 24/7 and it's even more okay this time of the year. Cut yourself some slack and show kindness towards your body by giving it enough sleep, moving it in a rehabilitating way and giving it all the nutrients you can.

- Keep moving. When you're feeling lethargic, it's easy to think you're too tired to exercise.

You have to fight this lethargy with action. The more you move, the better you'll feel. You don't need go to a spinning class or an



It's not uncommon to feel lethargic and of low mood in January in particular

hour's jog if you're feeling rough. Things like swimming and taking brisk walks in fresh air are ideal. The key is to get any type of movement in so your body starts producing more endorphins, or happy hormones.

- Get outside as much as you can. Okay so it's raining cats and dogs, but you can still put a good raincoat and wellies on to brave the weather.

Fresh winter air is beautifully crisp and it will help fill your lungs with oxygen, as well as help regulate your body's natural energy and mood levels. It will also help you sleep better at night, which also helps balance your happiness levels out. So put on your favourite fleece or coat and get outside.

- Smile. Even a fake smile triggers your

brain's reward mechanism and induces your positive emotions.

It produces endorphins like exercise does and it will lower your anxiety and blood pressure. The more you smile the better you feel and the better you feel the more you want to smile. A smile really does start a reinforcing happiness spiral in your brain. Best of all, happiness is contagious. The happier you are, the happier you will make the people around you too. Beat your January blues and you'll be beating the blues of all your friends and family too.

- Susanna Halonen is a happiness coach and author of *Screw Finding Your Passion*. For more information about her work visit the website [www.happyologist.co.uk](http://www.happyologist.co.uk).

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