

'My hair is falling out and my libido is non-existent'



Natasha Billing, 30, is an Internet producer from London. Constant travelling and long work hours mean she's exhausted and lashes out at her partner.

THE STORY 'I'm away so much for work that I hardly ever see friends, so I end up playing catch-up, staying out late and drinking more than I should. My typical day is 11 hours long. As a result, I get so tired that I'll pick rows with my boyfriend, Mark. He's always

saying, 'Work is everything to you.' I don't blame him – I can still be sending e-mails at 11pm. My libido is non-existent and we can go for three weeks without making love. The biggest wake-up call was seeing clumps of hair in the bath recently.'

STRESS PRESCRIPTION: HYPNOTHERAPY

'Relaxation was a low priority for Natasha and that was affecting her health – hair loss and lack of libido are classic symptoms of stress overload,' says hypnotherapist Ursula James.

'Using voice prompts, I led Natasha into a deeply relaxed state, then made positive suggestions to her.

'We identified her current coping strategies – drink, partying, being a workaholic. Then my "positive suggestions" came in: yoga, swimming, warm baths, before it all gets too much. After that, I made "bigger picture" suggestions: how did Natasha want her life to look in 10 years? If her picture was far from today's, the need for change would become more urgent in Natasha's mind. I finished with some practical suggestions: appointments in her diary for relaxation time; drinking more water, taking deep breaths before she responds emotionally, and making a short list at the end of the day on which to "download" worries she might otherwise take to bed.'

TWO WEEKS LATER

'Seeing Ursula was like having an MOT for the mind. I concentrated on "going under" and felt quite dizzy at first, but after some deep, even breathing I let myself switch off.

'While I was under, Ursula explained how my stress gains momentum, and how it will eventually spiral out of control. After the session, I felt really refreshed, and now it's as if I'm coming at life in a more effective way. I haven't had an argument with Mark all week, and I'm starting to crave intimacy. I'm dreaming again for the first time in years and learning to say no to extra work. I even took a day off recently to spend with Mark, which was once unthinkable. I'll definitely be booking another session.' ■

Ursula James has a practice in London, (020) 7262 1659; ursulajames.com. To find a local hypnotherapist, visit thehypnotherapyassociation.co.uk

SECRET STRESS REMEDY

The amino acid L-carnitine can help normalise brain function and encourage feel-good endorphins. Research shows it can even alleviate the symptoms of stress-related insomnia and help burn fat, too. From health food stores.