

# TRENDS



STYLE // WELLBEING // CELEBRITY



## OH, SHOP IT!

Kendall's bumbags, Flack's mini-dresses and more

The Hot List: **Page 42** »



Nature doesn't judge

MAKE LIKE KATE AND LET THE OUTDOORS DO THE SOOTHING WHEN IT COMES TO YOUR MENTAL HEALTH SAYS **SUSAN GRIFFIN**

IT'S a beautiful spring afternoon as I amble through Regent's Park in London. The pathways are lined by trees bursting with blossom, the formal gardens are fringed by a kaleidoscope of buds and there's a whisper of a breeze beneath a cloudless sky. You can't help but take a deep breath and feel at ease with the world which is the premise of psychotherapist Jonathan Hoban's new book, *Walk With Your Wolf*. Within its pages, Hoban implores us to take a little time out for ourselves

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# TRENDS

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Eden  
project:  
Kate, left,  
with son  
Louis in  
the garden  
she created



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NOW  
PAY  
LATER

**very**

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## 'It's a stroll to

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each day, look up from the phone, step away from the computer, and simply enjoy being outside.

Merging nature and therapy might not be a new concept but in a world that feels ever more harried and disconnected, it's a timely reminder of nature's calming effect.

The message has been shared by Kate, Duchess of Cambridge, who delighted in watching her children play barefoot in a back-to-nature garden she created for the Chelsea Flower Show. Her creation was designed to boost mental and physical wellbeing, which means Hoban's timing couldn't have been better.

'People feel so held by nature - there's something so soothing and comforting about being out in the elements,' he says as we walk together. 'I mean, this,' he adds, gesturing to the tranquil view, 'is an amazing space, it's free and you can have it as much as you want.'

Hoban, who moved from London to the Isle of Wight five years ago, uses 'walking therapy' to ease the stress, anxiety and depression of his clients.

'You have that freedom of thought, you relax in your body, you're not sedentary. It also creates a neutrality,' he explains.

'Sometimes therapists can overcomplicate things and when you're stressed and burnt out you need someone to make it simple. The book breaks it down as to what causes anxiety and depression, and the exercises you can do during your own walks. It's about creating a boundary, a window, when you're committed to you.'

Hoban's approach stems from first-hand experience.

'I was being bullied at school, my mother was dying from cancer at home and I had nowhere emotionally to escape, so the stress got more and more,' he says.

'I was a very shy and sensitive child, and in my teenage years I started drinking to numb my pain.'

'When my mother finally died I was 17, my father wasn't in a great place and, five years later, my brother died from an overdose. I partied more, I drank more, took more drugs and pushed the pain down.'

'But emotion is such a powerful thing that however much you cram it down, it comes back up, like emotional backlog.'

When I finally decided to stop drinking and doing drugs, I remember thinking, 'What do I do with all of this?'

He tried cognitive behavioural therapy and counselling but 'they weren't hitting the mark' - and then he remembered the long walks he enjoyed while growing up. 'I started to walk an hour every day.'



Turned a corner:  
Hoban once had drink  
and drug problems



## repel anxiety'

Over time, I developed this amazing connection with nature, my anxiety lessened and it brought my mind into a greater perspective,' says Hoban, who later trained as a counsellor. Nature doesn't judge – it provides

a space for you to be yourself. When I didn't know who I was, it gave me the time to ask, 'What am I thinking? What am I feeling?' and to get a sense of what it was like to be with me without the noise.'

Very few of us give ourselves the time or space 'to just be', notes Hoban, and the result is an epidemic of stress and mental health problems. According to the Mental Health Foundation, three-quarters of adults have felt unable to cope because of stress.

'Our bodies are machines and require primal living requirements but people want to essentially just put those aside,' says Hoban. 'If you put the body under undue distress, it's going to have a reaction – and that reaction is anxiety and depression.'

'When we walk, oxytocin is released, along with endorphins, which acts as a de-stresser. If you're feeling stressed, walk at a swift pace to channel that energy out, otherwise just amble. Don't fight your thoughts – let them come. When we walk, we can think a lot more freely.'

Hoban advises getting up earlier and

kicking off with a walk. 'If people start the day with stress, they'll end the day with stress, so think about more soothing behaviours on the way to work,' he says. 'It's about being strategic and taking

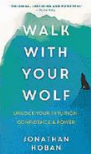
**Our bodies need primal living requirements but people want to just put those aside**

responsibility. That half-hour could change your mindset and your day.' Walking in the Underground doesn't count, however. There's noise, people bumping into you, everything's rushed, so you get to work stressed out,' says Hoban.

And don't be shamed into feeling guilty for taking time out. 'All clients start by saying they can't take these breaks but it's about setting our own boundaries because we make our lives as hard and difficult as we want them to be,' he insists. 'It's amazing how reluctant people are to change. It comes down to being seen to be working.'

The idea that 'I have responsibilities and can't just go for a walk' – I get it, you create excuses, but when we do make the time, we feel so much better, so why don't we do it more often? 'You need to make yourself the priority.'

Walk With Your Wolf is out now, [jonathanhoban.com](http://jonathanhoban.com)



## HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY STRESS?

There are clear signs that you're reaching burnout. 'Feeling that sense of dread is classic,' says Jonathan Hoban. 'Feeling overwhelmed, being reactionary, pushing people away and thinking you can always manage – and you have this overriding sense of responsibility to absolutely everyone. It's that tunnel vision.'

'It's why, after a two-week break, people [get perspective] and say, "What was I thinking?" But you don't need a two-week holiday – you need to take more breaks. It'll give you time to process each part of the day so you won't get an emotional backlog and you'll have something in reserve for when a work or life event happens.'



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