

Reader's digest

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A TOWN UNDER ATTACK

FITNESS FADS
FROM AB MACHINES TO ZUMBA

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CONFESSIONS OF A COP

DESMOND TUTU
ON THE POWER OF FORGIVING

A THINNER TOMORROW



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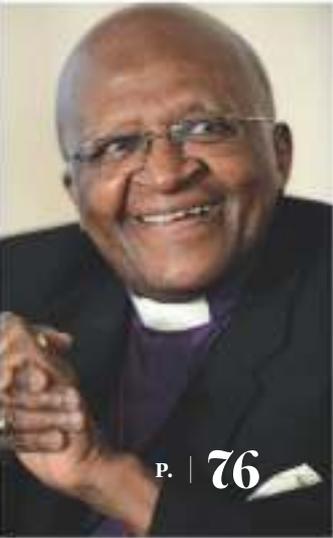


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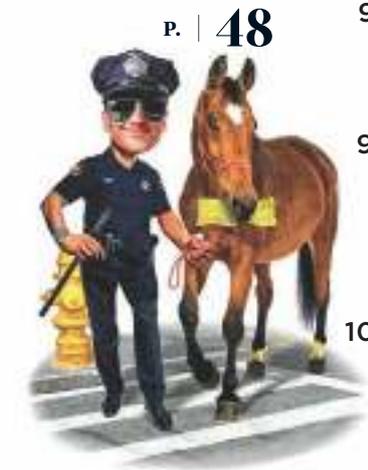
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Letters

READERS' COMMENTS AND OPINIONS

The Magic of Childhood

Thank you for the article, "There is a Santa Claus" (December). Francis P. Church must be saluted for answering an eight-year-old's earnest question with grace and wisdom. He handled the little girl's innocence like a piece of delicate china. He strove to preserve all that is good – faith, love, beauty and kindness – for as long as he could. He was careful not to break this beautiful realm of childlike wonder, for doing so would snuff out the purity and curiosity which is the essence of childhood.

MARY EU



Going Shopping

As an avid online shopper, I found "The Bargain Games" (November) really useful. I thought your advice to procrastinate by putting the items in my online shopping bag particularly helpful. It gives the same satisfaction as window-shopping and allows you to come back and decide if you really need the item!

MEG DUFF

I really believe that I have "shopping-phobia". As soon I hit the shops, I start sweating and stressing out! The only solution I now have is to browse the ads and if I do see something I need, go to that store, walk directly to the object, take it and pay!

PETRA DU PLESSIS

Grammar Class

I found the piece on the correct and appropriate use of hyphens ("Hooray for Hyphens", November) to be both important and interesting. As a primary school teacher, it worries me that this information often falls by the wayside in a modern curriculum, leaving students deficient when they leave school. Additionally, I believe I

WRITE TO US

If you are moved – or provoked – by any item in the magazine, write to us. Refer to page 6 for the editorial contact details in your region.

can speak for the masses when I say that reading another person's repeated errors in punctuation and grammar can be infuriating. Thanks for the great article!
CHRIS SUTER

A Win-Win Situation

"How to Win Almost Anything" (September) by Sally McMullen was very informative. It helped me to improve my strategies for job interviews and competitions.

RAYMUND FERRER

Waiting for the Gift of Life

While my dad was being treated for acute kidney injury I noticed that most patients in the nephrology ward had a gruelling day - packed with tests and dialysis ("One Kidney, Three Lives," October). Young and old, these people were waiting in the hope of a kidney for a transplant.

A.A.



CAPTION CONTEST

Come up with the funniest caption for the above photo and you could win cash. To enter, see details on page 6.



Monkeying Around

WE ASKED YOU TO THINK UP A FUNNY CAPTION FOR THIS PHOTO.

Acting on the advice from my dietitian, I have decided to replace the chip on my shoulder with a healthier option.
CINDY BRENNAN

I asked the genie for a six-figure bonanza and got a six-finger of bananas.
LANCE ROSS

That's the problem with cultivating a Carmen Miranda hairstyle - you moulst tropical fruit. The pineapples are a killer.
LEIGH OWEN

While the new Banana Republic knitwear logo is certainly distinctive, it is proving to be somewhat impractical when worn under a jacket.
MIKE BOYD

If monkeys work for peanuts, the big apes in management must get all the bananas.
ANITA DE LANGE

Fruity Krueger is coming to get you!
SEUGA FROST

Congratulations to Cindy Brennan.

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PUBLISHED BY READER'S DIGEST (AUSTRALIA) PTY LTD

Managing Director/Publisher
Walter Beyleveldt
Director Lance Christie

READER'S DIGEST ASSOCIATION, INC (USA)

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Vice President, Chief Operating Officer,
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Editor-in-Chief, International Magazines
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Send in your real-life laugh for
Life's Like That or All in a Day's
Work. Got a joke? Send it in for
Laughter is the Best Medicine!

Smart Animals

Share antics of unique pets or
wildlife in up to 300 words.

Kindness of Strangers

Share your moments of
generosity in 100-500 words.

My Story

Do you have an inspiring or
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Submissions must be true,
unpublished, original and
800-1000 words - see website
for more information.

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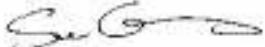
Editor's Note

Filling the Blank Page

AS EVERY WRITER KNOWS, whether you're setting out on a novel, a poem, an application for a job, a letter to a friend, or even this editor's note, there's nothing so intimidating – or rich with possibility – as a blank sheet of paper or an empty laptop screen with an impatiently flashing cursor. You just have to begin...

As I write this, the editors here are in the midst of sorting and reading entries in our latest 100-Word Story contest. The first year we ran this short, short fiction competition, we held off until the closing date to begin reading entries; now we eagerly dip into the tales as they arrive each week. Gems go into our shortlist for the final rounds of judging this month. It's shaping up to be another fabulous collection, thanks to our extraordinarily talented and creative community of readers. You are amazing!

Words and writing have the power to amuse, provoke and entice, and we clearly see that in readers' impassioned responses to our Living Language feature series. (This issue, RD's chief subeditor Donyale Harrison takes on the tricky topic of troublesome spelling.) We settled on this title for a regular section on grammar, punctuation and spelling to flag that communication must change with the times, and to welcome a hearty debate. Write in with your views. You just have to begin.



PS E-readers will notice this month's Digest has gone ad-free in response to your requests for faster downloads. Let us know what you think!



My Spelling Sins

We took the honesty test round the RD office to see who could and couldn't spell (see "How to Spell", page 52). It seems we've all had at least one word we struggled with ...

When I was 16, I started exploring new words. I was particularly smitten with the word erudite and made a big effort to use it 23 times in an essay on A Tale of Two Cities. I remember this point very clearly, as it seems I'd spelled it wrong 23 times. I'd spelled it "erodite". I've never used it since.

Louise Waterson

Not so much a spelling problem as a typing problem but whenever I type freedom I always type freedome, Heathrow instead of Heathrow and prob is often porb.

Hannah Hempenstall

Can anyone tell me why "vast" is such a teeny-tiny word? It ought to be longer. At least that is my explanation for putting a rogue e at the end of it for much of my life, until a spellcheck program put me right.

And a plea to anyone - usually a job applicant - who ever dares to claim they can "liaise". It's scary how few people get this word right.

My fail-safe method for spelling: not sure? Use another word instead. It makes you more creative and often there's a better word anyway.

Sue Carney

For some reason words like license and coincidence always trick me. I almost always jumble the S's and C's up or try to add extra ones in!

Sally McMullen

Various combinations of double letters often have me lurching for the dictionary: misspelled, millennium, Philippines, and colosseum.

Melanie Egan

When I was about nine, I remember walking into the classroom and staring at the spelling words on the blackboard, completely perplexed by “headache”. Couldn’t for the life of me understand what a hedaitch was! To this day, I can’t spell parsley. I always type parsely, which is a problem when you have worked on as many recipes as I have during my time as a subeditor!

Artemis Gouros

For me, it’s “restaurant”. I always end up putting the u after the second a, as that’s how the word sounds to me – “res-star-raunt”. Even typing this out I had to use a spellchecker to make sure I’d done it properly!

Tom Goodwin

Austria: I can spell it perfectly well, but after typing Australia a million or so times, I can’t type Austria without enormous concentration!

I was going to say necessarily, because I had a horrible time with it growing up, but apparently if you spend 40 years looking up a word, you do eventually learn how to spell it...

Donyale Harrison

Mine is accomo... accomo... accommodation! I never know how many c’s and m’s belong in there so I depend on a spellchecker to let me know. And for someone who likes to make precise lists of travel plans which require that

word, it can be quite frustrating. So

I shorten it to

“accom” so

I don’t get driven crazy. Also,

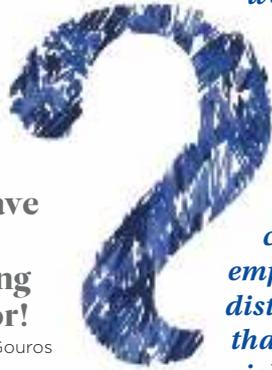
calendar vs

calender. I need to

empty my mind of any distractions before

that one comes out right.

Siti Rohani



As families left their homes in India, friendships were torn apart, but some had help to carry things through

Postcard from Pakistan

BY PARVEZ ANDREWS

Colonel (Retired) PARVEZ ANDREWS, 76, worked in the corporate world after he left the Indian Army in 1987. He now lives in Kolkata.

IT WAS THE SUMMER of July 1947. As the excitement of Independence drew near, countless Indians were also facing the dreadful consequences of Partition. In what was to become one of history's greatest human migrations, innumerable Muslims started moving to the newly carved-out Pakistan, just as Hindus were doing – in the opposite direction. En route, innocent men, women and children were ruthlessly attacked and killed by frenzied fanatics from both sides. Communal violence had reached unfathomable levels.

A nine-year-old boy then, I lived with my mother, three sisters and younger brother in Jalandhar, not far from the border. My dad, who was with the Provincial Civil Service, had recently been posted to Lahore, near his hometown. When he was with us in Jalandhar, there was a tall, well-built, moustached employee in his office called Mohammed Ali. This is my memory of Ali and how I learnt about unfailing bonds, regardless of the faiths people may profess. It made me realise that, even if politicians create wars and divisions, ordinary citizens want peace, trust and goodwill.

Our home in Jalandhar, a bungalow with a boundary wall, was on the historic Grand Trunk Road that runs across



ILLUSTRATION: KUNAL BELLE

northern India into Pakistan and beyond. Seated on the wall, I watched as bullock carts filled with migrating Muslims moved westwards. They took along whatever worldly possessions they could manage, including livestock. Plucked ruthlessly from their roots, they were leaving with no hope of ever returning. The carts moved closely in line, providing some brittle security in their togetherness. Although ours was a Christian family and moving to either side wasn't on our agenda, we could understand the heart-wrenching reality of parting, of

friend turning foe. We wondered if these travellers would ever reach Pakistan safely. Indeed, mere survival in those times had become a privilege.

ONE MORNING

Mohammed Ali, dressed in a white *Pathani salwar-kameez* (traditional tunic and pants), came rushing to our house. He looked worried. In his hand was an Ovaltine tin. I'd always known Ali, who had two little

daughters, and we all liked him very much. "I've come to say goodbye to all of you," Ali said. "I too am going across the border with my family to seek our destiny." His eyes grew moist as he reflected on whether we would ever meet again. He put the Ovaltine can down and hugged all five of us children.

What attracted my attention was the tin's lid. It was roughly, yet firmly, sealed with a brownish paste that looked like *atta* (dough). After tearfully bidding my mother farewell with his salaams, he hurriedly thrust

the tin into her hands. "Keep this! I have to join my family waiting in the cart." Saying so, he rushed out.

We stood there waving our goodbyes. After a while, we all stared at the Ovaltine tin. Wondering what it contained, Mummy carefully opened its sealed lid. My guess was that it would be filled with homemade sweets, a parting gift from Daddy's loyal staff member. But our expectation soon turned to amazement and disbelief. The tin was stuffed with gold jewellery, some of it inlaid with precious stones!

The truth soon dawned on our mother. It was Ali's family jewellery – the collection of a lifetime, heirlooms perhaps. Mother sat down, emptied the contents on to a bed and inspected it. After that, still puzzled, she returned every piece to the tin and re-sealed it with dough from her kitchen. Then, after hiding it in her cupboard, she told each one of us not to mention a word about it to anybody. We obeyed – it was such a solemn secret, we never spoke of it even among ourselves. As the years went by, I almost forgot about it.

MEANWHILE, we moved to Ambala Cantonment. It was a summer evening in 1953 when the entire

family was relaxing in cane chairs on our lawn. Just then our bungalow's iron gate swung open and a *tonga* (carriage) drove in. The horse stopped and as the dust settled, a neatly dressed gentleman alighted.

He wore a *kulledar pagri*, a colourful fan-turban, which signified prosperity. We looked at each other. It took a few seconds for us to recognise our cheerful unexpected guest. It was Mohammed Ali!

He hugged each of us and sat down to chat. Ali recalled his safe trip to Pakistan in 1947, the

good old days, even the bad old days, and caught up with the past six years. Ali and our parents even discussed the prospect of India and Pakistan joining back once again. Anyway, Ali had settled down well to a new life. He was now an upper division clerk in a Pakistani government office.

Soon it was time for Ali to leave and he was once again saying goodbye to each of us. Strangely, there was no mention of the Ovaltine tin he'd left behind, or of its contents. He'd returned to the tonga when Mummy stepped forward. "Mohammed Ali!" she cried, "haven't you forgotten something?"

"No, Memsahib, I have not left anything behind."

"Wait," said Mummy as she went

“***It was such a solemn secret, we never spoke of it even among ourselves ... In time, I almost forgot about it***”

into our house and returned with the old Ovaltine tin, its atta seal still intact. She smiled and went up to Ali saying, "Take this. You had left it with me when you were leaving for Pakistan. I have kept it safely all these years for you."

Just then, most unexpectedly, Ali broke down and started crying. "I didn't come for this," he said, regaining his composure. "I was in Jalandhar and came to know that Sahib and his family were here in Ambala. I just wanted to see you all. I cannot take back something I had gifted you. Had we taken it with us, we might have been looted and harmed on the way. We would have lost it - along with our lives, who knows! This was for your three daughters who are like my own girls. Don't misunderstand me, I have come this evening to meet you all and not for any ornaments, which are yours now."

It was a most sentimental scene. It required a lot of forcing and cajoling on the part of my father and mother before Mohammed Ali reluctantly took the tin back.

"I only hope that the customs officials at the border do not confiscate your tin," said Daddy. "Be careful."

"Insha-allah, God willing, it will reach my wife," said Ali. "You have kept it safely all these years, and now no-one can take it away."

"Please write us a letter when you reach home," said Mummy. Ali agreed and left with tears in his eyes.

Two weeks later, a postcard arrived with a Pakistani stamp. Its cryptic message read: "The sweets you gave have reached my wife and daughters. God bless!"

**Do you have a tale to tell?
We'll pay cash for any original
and unpublished story we print.
See page 6 for details on how
to contribute.**

STARTING A NEW JOB IS NEVER EASY

I accidentally pressed the panic button and summoned an armed response police team in my first week of training in a new job.

First day of working as a cashier, I put the wrong code in for a voucher, giving the customer £3,000,000,000 credit.

First job, first week, I refused to let a "strange man" into the shop before opening time. He was the regional manager.

@RHODRI

I can tell you this: you can change someone's life just by lifting her suitcase

Sharing the Burden

BY HILARY PARKINSON FROM QUEST FOR KINDNESS

I WAS ONLY THREE DAYS into a graduate year in England, and I was dragging a heavy backpack and suitcase through the London Underground. I was also crying uncontrollably. As I struggled to get the suitcase up another flight of steps, I was struggling to understand how my life had fallen apart.

The day before, my uncle had informed me that I was never to speak to him, his wife, or my two cousins again. Earlier, I had made a silly, joking remark. It was never meant to hurt my aunt's feelings, but it did. I spent the evening in a telephone booth, weeping as I spoke to a family friend who lived in England.

The most foolish part was that I did not immediately call my parents. As a 22-year-old who had been raised to respect and trust adults, I believed my aunt and

uncle when they said I'd ruined the relationship between themselves and my family. Today, as a 38-year-old, I know this was ridiculous. Their reaction was all out of proportion. But at the time, it was as if I had razed everything my family had built.

When I left the phone booth, I went back to a silent house with three closed bedroom doors. I did not sleep. In the morning, I heard everyone get up and leave; no-one knocked on my door. When it was quiet, I wrote a note of apology and left it in my uncle's bedroom. I dragged my bags the kilometre to the train station. When I got into London, I had to take the Tube to the Angel underground station to get to my family friend's house.

I was familiar with the Tube, but at the time, it was a tube of endless white tiles. I was exhausted. Coming to England seemed like a bad

ILLUSTRATION: GREGOIRE MAHLER/FIGAROPHOTO/CONTOUR STYLE
PHOTO: (WOMAN) GETTY IMAGES



decision. Worst of all, no lifts were working. Crying yet again, I tried to lift my suitcase up the stairs.

Suddenly in my slog there were hands. No-one said anything, but each time I faced another set of steps, a hand would grip the suitcase handle and lift it. At the top of the steps, the hand would let go, and I'd pull the suitcase to the next set. And just as I was about to struggle again, another hand would materialise.

It happened several times. I never looked up, because I could not stop crying. I do remember thinking through the haze of grief that each

hand looked different, that many different people helped me, without asking or saying anything. They just helped, right up to the top of the last flight of stairs. I couldn't look up. I wasn't able to say thank you.

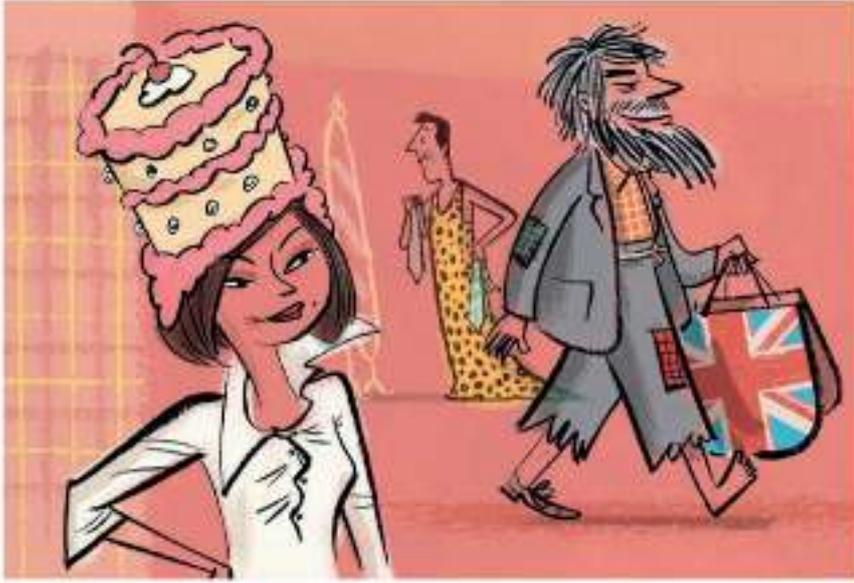
I went on to have an amazing year studying in England, and I made some friendships that continue to sustain me. But that was the last time I saw or spoke to any of those four family members. Yet when I think about that terrible loss in 1998, I remember those strangers' hands. They were there when I needed them, and even now, they pull me through the sadness of that memory. I think of them as I ride the Metro in Washington today, and I watch the commuters and tourists surge by, just in case someone needs a hand.

Share your story about the kindness of strangers and win cash. Turn to page 6 for details on how to contribute to the magazine.

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Unbelievable

TRUE TALES TOLD TALL



Clothes-minded

Don't be a fashion victim, advises a sartorial Nury Vittachi

MANKIND IS SLEEPWALKING towards a global catastrophe, unwilling to take action to avert impending doom. I am talking, of course, about the worldwide epidemic of poor clothing choices.

On the morning of writing this story, I saw a number of people (two)

wearing orange-and-brown tartan golf trousers in public, in full view of frail, impressionistic minds such as those belonging to small children and politicians.

When I expressed shock about this at work, a colleague showed me a news report illustrating the incredible

ILLUSTRATION: ANDREW JOYNER

power of bad clothing. A grown man wearing an ankle-length leopard-print dress walked into a bank in the US state of New Hampshire and handed the teller a note demanding money. The man did not brandish a weapon, nor claim to have one. But the terrified teller handed over the money, which the robber grabbed before escaping.

The teller did the right thing. Anyone with a dress sense that bad can be extremely dangerous.

I used to work with a punk rock fashion victim who once turned up with her buttons fastened out of alignment. When I pointed this out, she snarled: "It's fashion, look it up." I did look it up. It wasn't fashion. But I soon realised that this

line is useful for covering all acts of sartorial stupidity. ME: "I think you sat on a 2kg lemon cheesecake and most of it is still attached to your nether region." HER: "It's fashion, look it up."

In London, the current fashion (and when I say current, I mean for the past 40 years) is to dress like a homeless person. This makes things tough for people like me, visiting from conservative Asia. You meet someone and you never know whether to give him your business card or drop small change into his coffee mug.

Over-dressing can be problematic too. I once turned up at a fancy hotel

function wearing a mandarin-collar shirt and a Nehru suit. As I walked through the hotel restaurant, everyone kept trying to press money and credit cards into my hand, thinking I was the waiter. I seriously considered standing in the restroom for half an hour to collect tips.

It's also come to my attention that bulk buying your clothes may lead to problems with quality. A division of the Chinese army recently appeared in public wearing new uniforms, according to a news report sent to me by a reader. When the men were ordered to sit down, more than 100 pairs of trousers simultaneously tore, bringing about new

meaning to the term "let rip". You could hear them tear, the paper reported. I'm SO glad I wasn't there, as I would have laughed out loud – not a good idea when you're facing a group of angry men. What the commanding officer should have done, of course, was to use the magic phrase: "It's fashion, look it up."

Now if you'll excuse me, I'm low on cash and might just hang out in the gentlemen's room in the hotel next door for a while. Towel, sir?

Nury Vittachi is a Hong Kong-based author. Read his blog at Mrjam.org

In London, the current fashion (and when I say current, I mean for the past 40 years) is to dress like a homeless person

THE DIGEST

HEALTH

HOT TOPIC

Q: What Started the Myth of Vaccines Causing Autism?

A: The possibility that vaccines might be linked to autism was first published in 1998 in the *Lancet*, a well-respected medical journal. The paper looked at 12 children with developmental problems who had been vaccinated with the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine, some of whom had autism. It wasn't a clinical study, merely a report of the cases. However, this was picked up by the media and the subsequent furore caused many parents to assume there was a link.

WHAT'S THE TRUTH?

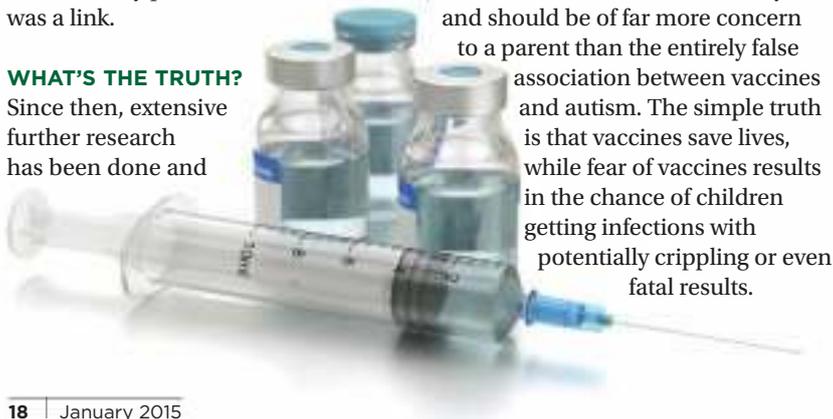
Since then, extensive further research has been done and

absolutely no link has been found. Studies involving hundreds of thousands of children have now been conducted – and have discredited any connection. Ten of the 12 doctors involved in the original *Lancet* publication have retracted it. The lead author has been discredited and struck off the medical register.

SO, THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

The risks of complications from childhood diseases are very real and should be of far more concern to a parent than the entirely false

association between vaccines and autism. The simple truth is that vaccines save lives, while fear of vaccines results in the chance of children getting infections with potentially crippling or even fatal results.



PHOTOS: THINKSTOCK

Ways to improve your mental performance

3 Tricks for a Better Memory

1 Use it or lose it. The brain functions like a muscle – the more you use it, the stronger it gets. Learning new things, varying your routine, having heated debates, going on trips and playing an instrument all help your brain to make new connections and function better.

2 Eat healthy carbohydrates to boost brain cells. A Canadian study found that older people whose diets contained the greatest percentage of kilojoules as carbohydrates did best on memory and task tests. However, make sure you're getting these carbohydrates from fruits, vegetables and wholegrains – these release glucose to the brain gradually. Sugary cakes or ice-cream may provide a quick fix, but are often followed by a slump and loss of concentration. Eating oil-rich fish once a week will also help the grey matter.



3 Develop strategies. Counter senior or fuzzy moments by doing one thing at a time – research finds that multitasking hinders memory and concentration. Stop for a second after an introduction and repeat the person's name out loud. Read or work in a quiet room – noise exposure can slow your ability to rehearse things in your mind, a way of building memory.

“WHAT THE HECK IS HIS NAME?”

Pay attention. When you're introduced to someone, really listen to the person's name. Then, to get a better grasp, picture the spelling. Ask, “Is that Kathy with a K or a C?” Make a remark about the name to help lock it in (“Oh, Laura – that was my childhood best friend's name”), and use the name a few times during the conversation and when you say goodbye.

DIY CHECK

Eyes Right

They're more than a window to your soul, so look after them

Changes to the appearance of your eyes can be the first sign of underlying health conditions. If you spot these changes, tell your GP.

SOFT, YELLOW SPOTS ON EYELIDS

Patients with these cholesterol-filled lesions, called xanthelasma, may have a higher risk of heart disease. A 2011 Danish study of nearly 13,000 patients found that about 4% had the spots and that those patients were nearly 70% more likely to develop hardening of the arteries and almost 50% more likely to have a heart attack over the next few decades than patients without them.

EYE BAGS AND PUFFINESS

Tired-looking eyes could be a red flag for chronic allergies, which dilate blood vessels and cause them to leak. In the sensitive skin under your eyes, this creates puffiness and a dark purple-blue hue.



BULGING EYES

Are a common symptom of Grave's disease, more commonly known as hyperthyroidism, or an overactive thyroid. The medical name for the condition is exophthalmos. In addition to the bulging-eyed look, people with Grave's often experience weight loss, nervousness, and a rapid or irregular pulse. Grave's disease is more common in women.

GREY RING

If you have a history of heart conditions in your family, then the appearance of a thin grey ring around the edge of the cornea should send a warning. The ring, referred to as arcus senilis, can be a sign of high cholesterol and triglycerides, as well as an increased risk for heart attack and stroke. If a grey ring develops, your doctor will test for elevated blood lipids. The condition is more prevalent among the over-60s.

PHOTOS: THINKSTOCK

World of Medicine

Long-term Weight Gain and Breast Cancer

A recent study has found that an increase in skirt size can up the risk of developing breast cancer in postmenopausal women. Conducted by academics at the University College, London and published in the *BMJ Open* journal, the study looked at the records of 93,000 women aged in their 50s and 60s who had been through menopause.

It found that jumping one skirt size every ten years between the ages of 25 and 65 increased the risk by 33%.

An expanding waistline is known to boost oestrogen, on which many breast cancer cells rely for fuel. After taking account of other factors, such as infertility treatment, family history, and use of HRT, increases in skirt size emerged as the strongest predictor of breast cancer risk.



Acidic Sports Drinks Damage Athlete's Teeth

Sports drinks are taking their toll on athletes' teeth, according to a report published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*. The UK and US dental health, sports and exercise medicine experts point out that dental consultations accounted for almost a third of all medical visits at the 2012 London Olympics. The evidence showed that poor dental health, including tooth decay, gum disease, enamel erosion and infected wisdom teeth, was widespread.

Researchers suggest the prevalence of poor dental health among athletes was due to the high number of acidic sports drinks (in addition to a high-carb diet) they consume during training and performance, the impact of which is likely to be worsened by a dry mouth during competition.

What's All the Fuss about Spirulina?

TRENDING BY HELEN SIGNY

WHAT IS IT?

This blue-green algae grows in freshwater ponds and lakes and is considered a genuine superfood. Used for centuries as a dietary supplement, it's been taken to space by NASA astronauts, is purported to have kept some Japanese elders alive for decades, and is even being fed to livestock in Tasmania to improve the quality of their meat and milk.

WHY THE HYPE?

This natural, spiral-shaped algae contains more than 100 nutrients. It has more vegetable protein than fish or beef, very high concentrations of vitamins, especially B1 and B2, and a wide range of minerals including iron, potassium, magnesium, sodium and zinc.

WHO IS IT GOOD FOR?

Spirulina can benefit anyone who needs extra nutrition, including picky eaters, seniors and pregnant women. It's also good for vegetarians and athletes who need to keep up their energy levels. But if you have hyperparathyroidism, are seriously



allergic to seafood or seaweed, or have a temperature, avoid taking spirulina. Most of us, though, are very unlikely to experience unpleasant side effects, regardless of how much we eat.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

The main advantage of boosting nutrition is beefing up the immune system. There is some scientific evidence that spirulina can do this, as well as protecting against allergic reactions and viruses. But more research is needed before any of these advantages are conclusively proven.

WHERE DO I GET IT?

Spirulina comes in a tablet or a powder that you can sprinkle onto a smoothie or salad. Like any algae, spirulina sucks up toxic substances or heavy metals present in the water where it grows, so it's important to buy your supply from a trusted source.

PHOTO: THINKSTOCK

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