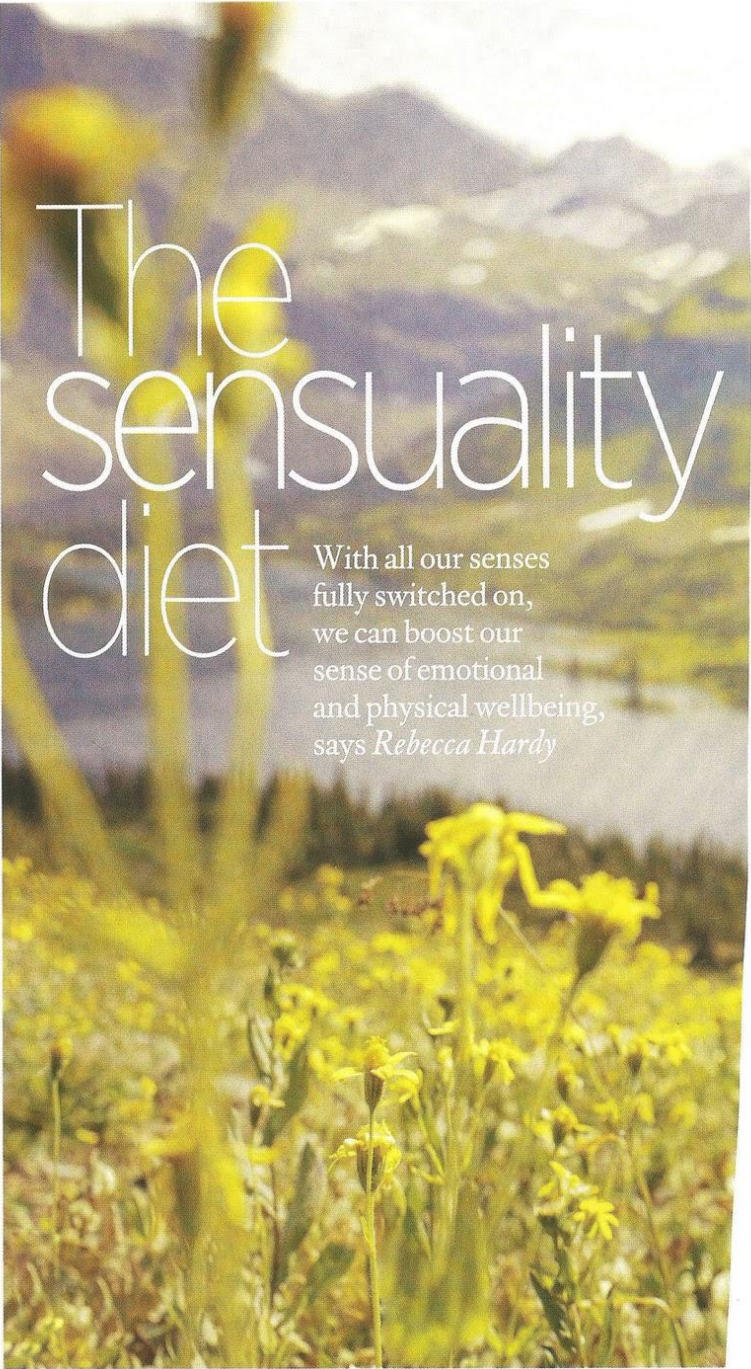


When Zoe, 33, had her first baby, there was one thing that kept her sane – walking in the park and soaking up the beauty of her natural surroundings. ‘My baby would cry for hours on end, but walking in the park helped me relax,’ she says. ‘It was a beautiful summer so getting out in the sun really rejuvenated me. I remember loving the sensation of the sun on my skin, and how I used to focus on the colours of the flowers. Everything had this lovely, fresh, meadowy smell. Being outside felt like such an escape and helped me feel in control. I stopped worrying about being a mother and just accepted the situation.’

#### FEELING ALIVE

Living with this kind of sensory awareness is something most of us only do when we’re on holiday. Half the reason we go away is to immerse ourselves in the sensory experiences around us – the waves lapping against the shore, the salty lick of the sea, the sights, sounds and smells of an unfamiliar land where every moment is strange and new. Once we are home, however, we tend to neglect this same need. Life can take on a grey drabness as we switch back onto autopilot, and become disconnected from the full range of our senses.

‘Many of us are living without feeling fully alive,’ says Lori Bryant-Woolridge, sensuality coach and



# The sensuality diet

With all our senses fully switched on, we can boost our sense of emotional and physical wellbeing, says *Rebecca Hardy*

## Coming to our senses

- 1 In his book *The Endorphin Effect* (Piatkus), William Bloom recommends that we find our 'strawberries', those things that actively bring us pleasure. This could be simply stroking a cat, listening to beautiful music, singing or dancing. The crucial thing is that you find what you enjoy, build more moments into your life, and immerse yourself in the experience.
- 2 'It is possible to train your nose – and brain – to notice smells more,' says Alan Hirsch, founder of The Smell And Taste Treatment And Research Foundation in Chicago. He recommends sniffing something with a strong odour for a couple of minutes a few times a day, and after two or three months you should notice your sense of smell improving.
- 3 'It's the little things that make life more pleasurable,' says sensuality coach Lori Bryant-Woolridge. 'Even doing the laundry, we can notice the colours rather than a puddle of dirty clothes on the floor.'
- 4 'To help your sense of taste, drink a glass of water every hour or so,' says Evan Reiter at Virginia Commonwealth University in the US. A dry mouth can adversely affect your sense of taste.
- 5 Try eating oysters, lentils, sunflower seeds and brazil nuts. These foods are all rich sources of zinc, and a deficiency in this mineral can contribute to a bad sense of smell.

## Learning to live sensually

'We need to separate our sensuality from our sexuality,' says Woolridge. 'We tend to think sensuality is only useful to enhance sex. But living sensually is about so much more than that. It's about slowing down and enjoying the senses, training ourselves to notice and enjoy the experiences around us. We can start with nature and then extend it to our daily routine. While you're eating, for example, savour the taste and texture of the food. We can integrate our sensual self into all aspects of our everyday routine.'

➔ author of *Weapons Of Mass Seduction* (Harlem Moon). 'But there is so much joy buried beneath the everyday reality of our lives. When we walk to the Tube or bus stop, for example, most people don't notice what's around them – the birds singing, the sky, flowers in bloom, the sounds of the city. But our sensuality is such a gift.'

Sensuous living is about creating those sensory moments that we know give us pleasure. 'If we do this, two things happen,' says psychologist and life coach Dr Sally Ann Law. 'First, we appreciate more of the world around us, which adds to the quality of our lives,

'There is so much joy buried beneath the everyday reality of our lives'

and second, we make better decisions based on our whole, authentic selves, rather than just part of ourselves. We have all our five senses because they help us, from an evolutionary point of view, so we should try to use them.'

Author and holistic teacher William Bloom says living in this way also triggers endorphins, the feel-good



hormones. 'Endorphins are the body's natural hormones that are responsible for the physical sensations of pleasure. They also anaesthetise pain, strengthen the immune system and are the opposite of the stress hormone cortisol. Children have high levels of endorphins, but a 30-year-old's levels only recover by about the tenth day of their holiday, when the cortisol is finally replaced by endorphins.'

### ENJOY AND APPRECIATE

It may take time to build this new awareness into our lives so, once a week, set aside a few hours and consciously decide to be fully aware of your senses. Fill your environment with beautiful objects and sensory experiences – play music you love, burn an aromatherapy oil, bake some bread and be aware of the feel of the dough and the smells drifting through the kitchen. 'Incorporate things that speak to your sensual self – textures, colours, music, scents,' says Woolridge.

Alternatively, have a massage, or go swimming and feel your body gliding through the water. 'The trick is to consciously guide yourself to have the sensations and notice you are feeling them,' says Bloom. 'Even if you are out pushing your child's pushchair in the park, just take a mental pause, slow down your breathing, then look. Trees, grass, sky. Enjoy and appreciate.' ■