

I want boob job to make me womanly



RACHEL EVANS, 34, is an actress, from Blackheath, South East London. She is 5ft 7in and weighs 8 stone.

EVERY day, I catch women staring at me with a look of disgust on their face. It's as if they feel sick looking at my skinny body. Most of the time I ignore it but some days I get home, close the door and burst into tears.

It's pretty lonely being skinny. People don't naturally warm to you and I can't bond with other women when they talk about weight problems.

I've always been tiny. I used to run cross-country to a high standard at school and my body's kept its athletic shape - even after giving birth.

I eat a healthy diet, but lots of it. I devour at least four meals a day but I never put on weight.

I dream of being more curvy - and I'm seriously considering having a boob job to make me feel more womanly. With such a flat chest and mini hips, I sometimes feel like an under-developed teenager. I'd love to wear feminine dresses but most make me look ridiculous - like a child going out to dinner in her mum's girdlers.

I also hate my bony elbows. I saw myself on a video one day and was horrified at how pointy they were. I made myself some elbow pads to stick in my tops to make them look more rounded.

If I was born again, I'd like to come back as J-L-o, with olive skin and curves.

I've got insecurities just like big girls



Miki Morgan, 23, is a model from Manchester. She is 5ft 10in and weighs 9 stone 4lbs.

IF I had my time again I'd rather be an overweight schoolgirl than an underweight one.

When you're skinny, people think it's fine to poke fun. I was called a stick insect and beanpole on a daily basis and it made me really self-conscious about my body.

I tried all sorts of ways to look bigger, even wearing dance tights under my school trousers to add a little extra weight.

And I was really envious of other girls' curves and would feel scrawny when I stood alongside them.

My idol was the film star Doris Day. I wanted to be able to sing like her and to look womanly like her.

I went to the doctor to ask how I might put on fat and he said I just had a fast metabolism but that I could try drinking Guinness. I tried but it didn't work.

Although I earn a living as a model, and I know my skinny body is an asset in that, I still don't think I look attractive. When I look in the mirror all I see are my bony bits.

When I was 16, I finally developed breasts. They grew out of all proportion to the rest of my body - but I love them as they're the only part of my body that feels sexy.

Lots of women envy my figure and I know big girls think that if they looked like me then all their problems would disappear.

But it's not like that. I've got as many insecurities about my body as bigger girls do - if not more.



WE HATE OUR SUPER SLIM BODIES

I'd love to be curvy like Kelly Brook or Beyonce



TWIN Amie Curtis, 24, from Newport, South Wales, works in promotions. She is 5ft 8in and weighs 8 stone 7lb.

SINCE I was a teenager people have assumed that I have an eating disorder. Whenever I'm out for a meal I'm conscious of people staring at me.

Afterwards I try to avoid going to the bathroom, no matter how desperate I am, because I know everyone will think I'm dashing to the loo to throw up all the food. In reality, the only problem I have with food is that I eat lots of rubbish.

Chocolate, crisps, burgers and take-aways are my staple diet. I enjoy them but I also eat them in the hope that they may help me put on weight. Other people's

attitudes to my body over the years have made me really self-conscious.

The other day I was out shopping with friends and a woman shouted out, 'Oh my god, she's way too skinny!' And if I'm in the supermarket with cakes and biscuits in my basket, assistants say things like, 'You could do with eating the lot, love.' It gets really boring.

At school I was nicknamed Olive Oyl after the skinny character in Popeye. I thought my boobs would grow when I reached my 20s but I'm still waiting. I wear two bras sometimes to try to give me a little more up top.

I'd love to be curvy like Kelly Brook or Beyonce. There's been a huge backlash about celebrities losing weight and looking too skinny but some of us can't help it, so give us a break!

I wear baggy clothes that hide my bones



JULIE CURTIS, 24, from Newport, South Wales, works in promotions, as does her twin sister Amie. She is 5ft 8ins and 8st 4lbs.

WHEN I'm out with friends I get a lot of stares and comments from other girls. They always think I'm super-confident and love my body.

But the truth is, I've never been happy with how skinny I am. The only person who truly understands is Amie, who is the same size.

Most of the time, I try to wear clothes which hide my bones. I'm most comfortable in baggy jeans and a jumper.

I never wear pretty or revealing dresses - I don't buy them because anything which accentuates how slim I am would get me more attention and bitchiness. People just don't realise that being slim is not that great.

I'm so flat-chested, I feel boyish. I wear gel implants in my bras to give me shape but, if money wasn't an issue, I'd definitely go under the knife and invest in breast implants.

I'd love to look sexy in the beautiful underwear that's in the shops. An ex-boyfriend bought me a gorgeous corset top and thigh set as a present. I tried it on in private but he never got to see me in it - it looked so awful on me.

And I hate my feet because they look like huge boats at the end of long, thin poles.

My diet now is pretty terrible. I eat about eight packets of crisps a day, chips, chocolate and burgers. I started to feel ill a year ago and went to the doctor, who told me I had high blood pressure. He said my diet would cause me problems in later life. But if I eat really healthily, I'm worried the weight will drop off.

I feel like I'm in a no-win situation.

Why is it OK to slag off skinny people?



VICKIE WILLIAMS, 22, is a clerical assistant from Laindon, Essex. She is 5ft 11in and weighs 8st 4lbs.

WHILE most women feel guilty tucking into take-away food, I feel the complete opposite. I relish every mouthful because I

hope it will help me put on some weight. I'd love to be a curvy 10 or 12 but, ever since I was a small child, I've found it almost impossible to put on any fat.

My mum's a nurse and she was worried I had a rare condition called Marfan Syndrome, which is characterised by above-average height and under-average weight. I went through years of tests but luckily, I don't have it. I'm just really, really skinny.

For years, I've tried over-eating to put on weight - cream cakes, chips, all the fatty foods I could get my hands on.

I've also been to doctors to ask for sensible help but they just say, 'Why don't you eat more?' or 'I'm sure many other women would love to have your problem.' It's so infuriating - and insulting too.

At school I was called the skeleton and out on the streets strangers have called me an anorexic bitch. Why is it that it's deemed wrong to slag off fat people but skinny people are fair game? It makes me so angry.

Clothes are a nightmare for me because nothing fits - and I tend to wear things which don't flaunt just how skinny I am because people stare.

Last year, I finally persuaded my doctor to refer me to a dietician. She prescribed calorie supplements - milkshake drinks - which are normally intended for malnourished patients. There are 2,000 calories in every drink and they've helped me put on a stone.

I'd like to make a stand for skinny people and tell others to stop staring and making snide comments.

MOST OF US WOULD LOVE TO LOOK LIKE THIS, SO WHY ARE THESE WOMEN SO UNHAPPY? **BY KIM JONES**

Pictures: BOB POWELL

LOVE CURED MY PHOBIA OF DYING... TURN OVER THE PAGE

HOW WE GOT pregnant

...APART FROM THE OBVIOUS

TOLD THAT THE CHANCES OF THEM CONCEIVING NATURALLY WERE NIL, THESE THREE WOMEN TURNED TO ALTERNATIVE METHODS TO HELP THEM START THEIR FAMILIES.

BY KIM JONES

Acupuncture got my ovary working

MARY Stewart, 32, is mum to Sam, 21 months, and four-month-old Zara. She lives in Wimbledon, South London, with her husband Jeremy, 37, an accountant. Mary says...

I HAD three ectopic pregnancies, my right fallopian tube was removed in 2002 and I wasn't ovulating from my left ovary. Doctors told me the chances of me conceiving naturally were virtually zero.

IVF was our only option. I'd read that the ancient Chinese art of acupuncture can help prepare women undergoing IVF, so I went to see Jo George at her Life Medicine Clinic in North London. Fine needles were inserted into parts of my body and I had to drink an infusion of Chinese herbs - they smelt disgusting.

Our first attempt at IVF failed but I continued to attend Jo's clinic. She had been trying to stimulate my lazy left ovary using electro-acupuncture, where tiny currents zap through the needles. It didn't hurt, I just felt a tingling.

Amazingly, it did the trick - tests showed my ovary was ovulating. Just before I was due for my second lot of IVF I found out I was expecting. I had Sam in April 2004 and eight months later I was pregnant with Zara. I believe I'd never have my babies if it wasn't for acupuncture.



Picture: HARRY PAGE



Picture: PAUL COUSANS

My fertility

TRACEY Gibson, 34, is mum to Caleb, 10 months, and Katie, aged nine. Husband Mark is a 33-year-old lift engineer. They live in Oldham, Manchester.

I FELT pregnant with my daughter Katie with no problems. When she was one, I decided to come off the Pill and try for a brother or sister for her. I thought it would be easy, but nothing happened.

We kept trying, then my

BABY BLOCK UNLOCKED BY HYPNOSIS

FULL-TIME mum Alison Mitchell gave birth to Millie nine months ago. The 33-year-old lives in Rochester, Kent, with her husband Martin, 37, a therapist.

AFTER three miscarriages in three years, I was desperate for a baby. Each time I'd fallen pregnant quickly but when we tried for our fourth pregnancy, nothing happened.

We went for tests but doctors could find nothing wrong, so we decided that the trauma of the miscarriages had given me a mental block about falling pregnant.

Martin is a counsellor and hypnotherapist. He came across a form of hypnosis called Hypnobirthing Fertility which has helped people like us. The process is designed to reduce stress - a barrier to conception.

Martin trained in it and I had my first session with him in June 2004.

He taught me to imagine myself on a sun-drenched, deserted beach surrounded by only the sound of water lapping on the shore where I was happy and relaxed. I did this whenever I felt stressed.

And when I felt overcome by the pressure to have a baby, I'd learn to switch off and unwind too.

Being so relaxed, I learned to trust my body and let it do what it is naturally meant to. After just four sessions during a month of treatment, I was pregnant.

Thankfully, I managed to carry Millie full-term - I think being calm and relaxed helped me to do that.

She was born in April last year weighing 8lbs 14oz. I feel so lucky to have her after everything I have been through.

Martin is so convinced by the technique, he now offers the service to couples at his clinic.

I'd like a brother or sister for Millie so I'll be booking an appointment with Martin again soon!



MIND OVER MATTER: Alison, Martin and Millie

MORE INFO

- FOR more information on acupuncture with Jo George, visit www.lifemedicineclinic.co.uk or call 020 8374 4566.
- GET details of hypnobirthing fertility from Martin Phillips on freephone 0800 1978858 or www.tryforababy.co.uk
- If you are interested in the Vitamine diet for PCOS sufferers, visit www.pcos-vitamine.com or call 0161 292 4918.

Picture: KENT NEWS AND PICTURES

returned after I lost three stone with diet

periods became really irregular - and after two years they stopped completely. As time passed, I began comfort-eating in an attempt to ease the disappointment I felt because I couldn't get pregnant.

I put on masses of weight and felt even worse about myself.

When Katie was five I was referred to the hospital for tests. I was diagnosed with polycystic ovarian syndrome - one of the major causes of infertility in women.

I had two large clusters of cysts on each ovary. They couldn't be removed so I just had to live with them, though the doctors

did say that losing weight might help reduce the symptoms of the condition.

But that was much easier said than done. I tried several diets but I always put the weight back on. Then I read a newspaper article about a diet which had been devised particularly for women with my condition.

When I saw that a woman who had been on the diet had managed to fall pregnant and had a baby, I was determined to give it a go.

At the beginning of 2004, weighing more than 16 stone, I went along to a Vitamine

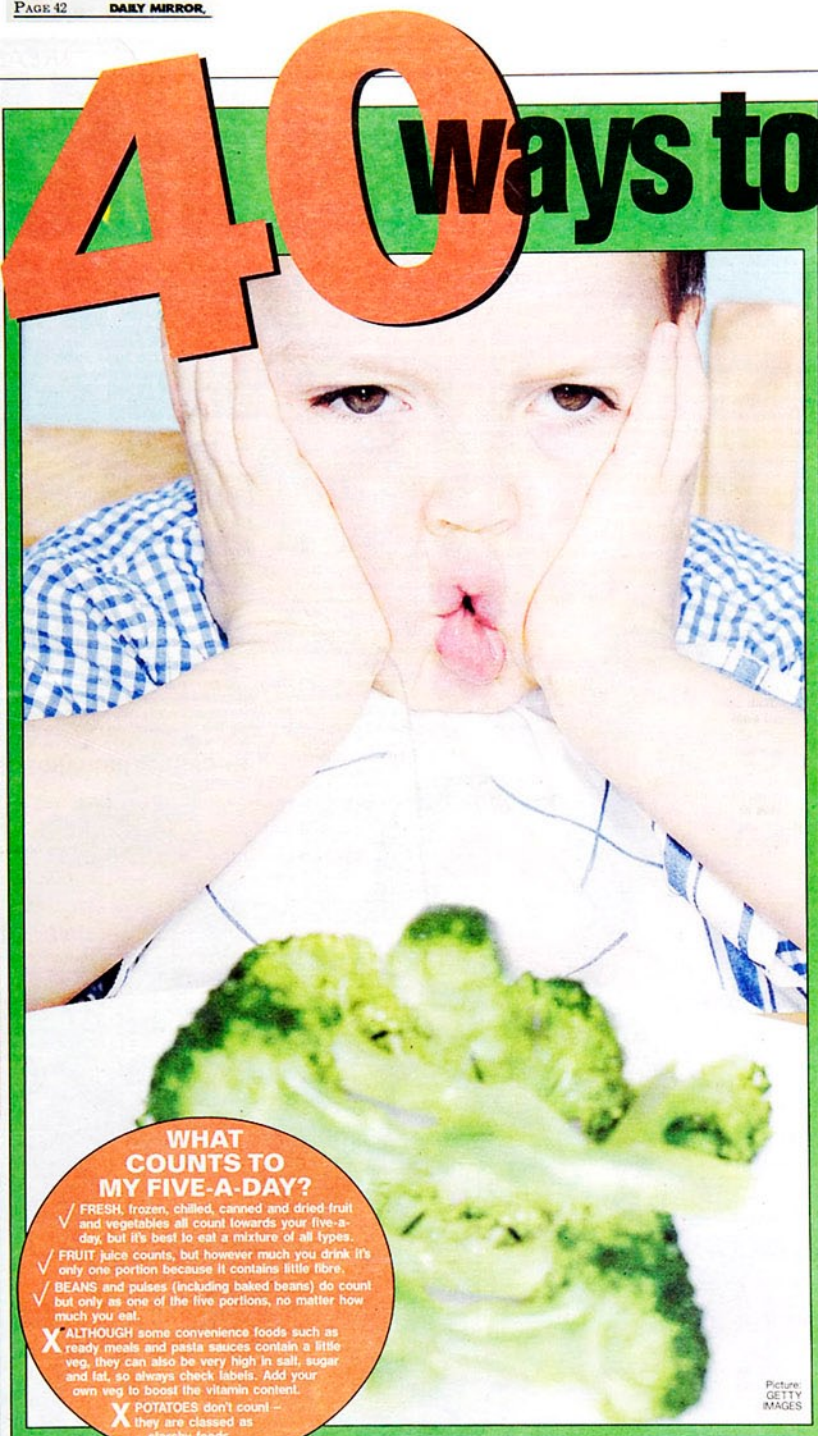
clinic and started on a low-fat diet with no yeast and no carbohydrates after lunch.

Snacking on small amounts of protein throughout the day meant I never felt ravenous and the weight dropped off.

In fact, I lost more than three stone and within five months my periods returned.

A month after that I was pregnant. After seven years of trying, it was a dream come true. Caleb was born - weighing 9lbs 2oz - in March last year.

I'm so glad I lost that weight. Otherwise I might never have got my big, beautiful baby.



sneak five-a-day

GETTING through the recommended five portions of fruit and veg a day can be difficult enough for adults. But trying to persuade kids to eat their greens can quickly descend into chaos.

There is one answer, though – trick them. Here's our guide to serving your children a healthy diet without them ever suspecting a thing...

- 1 **MAKE** your own pizzas. Puree cooked tomatoes, peppers, carrots and a little broccoli and smear the resulting sauce on a pizza base. Add some cheese then get the kids to help you make a picture with veggie toppings (peppers, mushrooms, etc).
- 2 **GRATE** an apple, using the finest side of your grater, and mix the mush into your kids' favourite yoghurt or fromage frais. Chances are they won't even notice it's there.
- 3 **BLEND** together a banana, a handful of strawberries and some orange juice, then add crushed ice to create a cool fruit smoothie. Tinned or frozen fruit is fine to use, too.
- 4 **IF** your kids eat mashed potato but won't touch swede or parsnip, mash a little of both cooked veg into the potato and you'll get away with it.
- 5 **INSTEAD** of topping ice-cream with a sugar-laden syrup, puree a bag of frozen and defrosted summer fruits into a sauce.
- 6 **SNEAK** chopped, dried apricots, raisins or prunes into homemade chocolate cornflake cakes or crispy cakes.
- 7 **HIDE** veg in homemade potato-cake dishes, such as bubble and squeak or sweetcorn fritters.
- 8 **WHEN** making pancakes, grate some apple or pear into the batter before cooking for invisible fruity nutrition.
- 9 **FOR** a veggie-packed pasta sauce that's full of goodness, cook stuff they wouldn't normally try – such as celery, roasted peppers and courgettes – then puree the lot and pour it over cooked pasta.
- 10 **CLEAR** your cupboards of sugary jam and make your own fruit butter instead. Cook raspberries in a little water and sugar until soft, allow them to cool then mix with butter and pop into the fridge. Spread on toast, muffins and crumpets. Or try Sunwheel 100 per cent fruit spread (£159 from health shops and branches of Waitrose).
- 11 **NEXT** time you make chili con carne or spaghetti bolognese add a little grated carrot – they won't notice it's there.
- 12 **MAKE** healthy ice lollies by pouring fresh fruit juice or fruit smoothies into lolly moulds.
- 13 **SCAN** supermarkets for brightly packaged "ideal for lunch-boxes" fruit snacks. Avoid anything with added sugar, salt or fat. Try Humzingers Fruit Stix (£175 for a box of 10, from supermarkets and Boots) or Marvel Heroes Fruit Bars (59p from Sainsbury's).
- 14 **IF** your kids love curry but tend to pick out the veg in it, puree some cooked cauliflower and add it to the curry – hey presto, invisible vitamins.
- 15 **WHEN** it comes to giving your kids desserts, ditch the doughnuts and go back to basics. Serve your youngsters old-fashioned puddings that are packed with fruity goodness, such as apple pie or blackberry crumble and custard.

Picture: GETTY IMAGES

HOW TO TRICK YOUR KIDS INTO EATING FRUIT AND VEG

- 16 **TOP** off your fairy cakes with pieces of dried fruit stuck into icing sugar. Try Fruit Drenchers – strawberries, raspberries and cherries drenched in real fruit juices and dried (69p per 20g bag from Tesco). They're the closest a piece of fruit gets to looking like a sweet.
- 17 **SOME** so-called fruit yoghurts can be full of sugar and contain little fruit. Add pureed strawberries, raspberries, pineapple or banana with some honey to a low-fat natural yoghurt instead.
- 18 **MAKE** veggieburgers or mix veg into the mince mix before you cook. Or try Sainsbury's Kids Beef Burgers which contain hidden carrot, swede, sweet potato and onion (£129 for four).
- 19 **CHOP** a fresh pineapple into tiny pieces and add it to ice-cream. Scoop into cornets and you've got homemade tutti-frutti flavour ices for a summer treat.
- 20 **MOST** kids love eating with their fingers, so give them carrot and celery sticks or toasted strips of tortilla bread with vitamin-packed fresh tomato salsa, hummus or guacamole.
- 21 **INSTEAD** of adding syrup to their milkshakes use real fruit. Blend strawberries, raspberries or banana with vanilla ice-cream and semi-skimmed milk until the mixture is smooth.
- 22 **BAKE** healthier – carrot cake, banana bread and muffins filled with pieces of dried fruit make for more nutritious cakes.
- 23 **AS** an alternative to sweets, give your children strawberries or other fruits dipped in melted chocolate. Try Humzingers Dipping Chocolate in a handy microwaveable pot (£179 from Sainsbury's).

HOW MUCH IS A PORTION?

Portion sizes are approximate and are recommended for adults, so portions can be a bit smaller for children...

- Two satsumas
- One large apple
- One large banana
- One tablespoon raisins
- Eight segments of tinned grapefruit
- Three heaped tbsps carrots or peas
- Four broccoli or cauliflower florets

24 **CHOPPED** spring onions are easy to sneak into dishes – add to grated cheese for cheese on toast with a twist.

25 **MOST** children enjoy baked potatoes, so get sneaky... Scoop out the potato from its skin, mash it with cooked cauliflower, carrot, parsnip or swede, fill up the skin with the mashed veg, top with cheese and grill.

26 **GET** juicing. Try unusual combinations such as carrot, orange and ginger.

27 **PASTA** bakes are great when it comes to concealing vegetables. Sneak in lots of peas, carrots and sweetcorn.

28 **ROAST** sliced carrots and parsnips in olive oil as an alternative to homemade chips.

29 **BANANA** fritters served with syrup or a healthy fruit puree make a great dessert.

30 **TRY** battering broccoli and cauliflower florets then frying them in olive oil for some instant vegetable tempura.

31 **CHOP** fruit into tiny pieces and add it to a jelly mix before it sets. Choose your colours carefully and they won't even notice the fruit's been added.

32 **CHOPPED** prunes stirred into a chocolate cake mix can be passed off as chocolate chips.

33 **SWAP** potato crisps for Peter Rabbit Garden Vegetable Crisps (59p from most supermarkets), or Tyrrel's Mixed Root Vegetable Chips (99p from Waitrose) – a colourful blend of parsnip, carrot and beetroot.

34 **MASH** a banana until smooth and stir into your children's breakfast porridge or Ready Brek.

35 **SMEAR** pureed apple or berries instead of chocolate spread on to a crepe for a fruity pancake treat.

36 **KIDS** usually love the lip-smacking taste of sweet and sour chicken. Mash up pieces of pineapple into the sauce and mix well.

37 **HOMEMADE** vegetable soup is easy to make. Fry an onion and leek in olive oil, add vegetable stock, chopped swede, carrot, peas and potato. If they won't go for the lumps, puree until smooth.

38 **TOP** burgers with a fresh tomato salsa. Mix chopped tomatoes and red onion with coriander, parsley, lime juice and olive oil.

39 **JARS** of curry and pasta sauces are so convenient, but don't just add chicken. Fry some onion, chopped carrot and tomato in the pan, too.

40 **TRY** tempting them with a mashed banana sandwich – call it banana jam and they may not run a mile.

BY KIM JONES

● FOR more information visit the website www.5aday.nhs.uk The book *The Art Of Hiding Vegetables* by Karen Ball and Sally Child (White Ladder Press, £7.99) also has lots of hints, tips and recipes.

SEND YOUR TOP TIPS FOR

COPING WITH KIDS TO YOURLIFE@MIRROR.CO.UK

expressyourself Get the life you want

I like to play matchmaker

SUSIE AMBROSE, 39, runs Seventy Thirty, a dating agency designed for millionaires. She is married to Michael, 36, a property developer. They live in Goffs Oak, Herts

BEFORE I set up the agency, I was working as a psychotherapist. Most of my clients were attractive, successful and ambitious people. Yet so many were single because they had busy careers and weren't meeting the right people. I was looking for a new challenge, and wanted to give men and women the chance to find their perfect partners.

I set up Seventy Thirty in October last year. The name comes from research which shows that a lot of affluent, professional people spend 70 per cent of their time working, leaving only 30 per cent for their personal lives. What made Seventy Thirty different was that it was only open to millionaires. Membership costs between £10,000 and £60,000 a year but I offer a highly personalised service. For instance, if a male client met a woman he liked while he was in business in Australia, we could send a psychotherapist out to see if they would make a good match.

I employ behavioural experts, psychotherapists and life coaches to act as matchmakers. This means all our members are psychologically profiled to ensure that they are only matched with people they are likely to get on with. As the months passed, I realised that many of my wealthy clients wanted to date people outside of their usual circles. That's why I set up a sister company called Aspire 70-30. This is designed for people who are not millionaires but would like the chance to meet one. In contrast, membership costs between £25 and £1,000 a year.

We're keen to avoid recruiting gold-diggers so we vet prospective members carefully. Most members are women who are looking for ambitious, self-assured partners.

We share the same outlook

LINDSAY SMITH, 27, a primary school teacher from London, is a

How to marry a millionaire

Ever wondered how to meet a tycoon? **KIM JONES** gets the low down on a new dating agency for the rich and successful

member of Aspire 70-30 and has just started dating a millionaire

MY PREVIOUS relationships have all ended for the same reason: the men I dated just didn't seem to want the same things in life as me. I believe it's important to enjoy what you do and look for new challenges. I'm not the kind of person to flop in front of the telly when I get home from work. Instead I take evening classes and do voluntary work.

I want to find a partner who shares my zest for life. But most of the men I've been out with have lacked get-up-and-go. Then there were the guys who didn't think about the future.

One evening I found out about Aspire 70-30 on the internet and thought it was a great idea. Although I wasn't interested in signing up just to meet someone who was rich, I must admit I do enjoy the good things in life. I joined the agency at the end of April for £500.

After a fortnight the agency called to say they had matched me up with Justin, a 35-year-old entrepreneur. When I saw his photo I was really excited. He had dark hair with twinkly blue eyes and a confident smile. I knew I would find him attractive. To make sure I was prepared for the date, I was given a coaching session with a specialist. I

was taught relaxation techniques and breathing exercises and we did a role play of a mock date. After that, I was taken out with an image consultant, to shop for an outfit.

When I set off for the date, at a trendy restaurant in Soho, I was prepared and relaxed. And from the moment I met Justin, I felt an instant chemistry between us. We didn't stop chatting all night and shared the same quirky sense of humour. But that wasn't all. We had the same outlook on life, too.

The date was a huge success - I couldn't believe how well we'd been matched. We are planning to go on a second date in the next couple of weeks. Now I'm recommending the agency to my friends. After all, what woman wouldn't jump at the chance to meet a handsome millionaire?

Our first date was fantastic

LYNDA STEER, 47, is the managing director of her own business consultancy. She is divorced and lives in Chertsey, Surrey

ALTHOUGH I've been divorced twice, I am still a romantic at heart

and am convinced that my perfect partner is out there. I just need a bit of help finding him.

But as I'm a successful business woman, a lot of men are intimidated by me, and assume that because I've done well for myself I must be really tough. It's hard to find someone who understands the work pressures I'm under and the hours I have to put in.

I've got loads of wonderful friends but there doesn't seem to be any single men about. I only meet men when I go away on business trips. But a woman alone in a hotel can attract the wrong kind of attention.

Friends have told me that I have a message tattooed on my forehead: "Do not approach. Fierce, successful businesswoman." The irony is that I'm not like that at all.

When my second marriage ended four years ago, I joined a couple of dating agencies, believing that it would be easy to meet a like-minded man. I couldn't have been more wrong. I did eventually meet someone nice, and we were happy for two years. But things didn't work out and I was single again.

This time, though, I couldn't face going on a load of hopeless dates. That's why I decided to join Seventy Thirty. The agency looked far more professional than any of the others I'd joined, and I liked the fact that

everyone was vetted so thoroughly. It wasn't the thought of meeting someone rich that appealed to me, as I've already got enough money.

What I wanted was to meet someone successful and dynamic like myself - a man who was prepared to take risks; someone who would take me canoeing and abseiling; someone who would help me to challenge my boundaries.

A couple of weeks after I joined, I was matched with Simon, who was a few years older than me and who ran his own business, too.

We had a fantastic date, meeting first in a fancy bar to quaff champagne. We then went on to a wonderful restaurant, followed by a jazz club. Simon and I had an absolute ball. Unfortunately there was no chemistry between us but we've become great friends. I'm sure that the agency will find me my perfect man soon. In the meantime I'm happy to mingle with millionaires.

● For more information on the dating agencies: visit www.seventy-thirty.com or www.aspire7030.com

'From the moment I met Justin I could feel the chemistry between us - we didn't stop chatting all night'



STRIKING IT RICH: Lindsay, standing, Susie, left, and Lynda, right

Portrait: GILES PINK. Gowns: Kate Hobbs. Blouse: Papadimitriou and Westhouse. Sofa: from Lizzy Achary

SHOULD THE POLICE TURN A BLIND EYE TO THIS?

Since David Blunkett announced that cannabis is to be downgraded next year, the newspapers have been filled with debate and controversy. Here *Bella* cuts through the waffle and gives you the facts

Picture the scene. Your 17-year-old daughter bursts through the front door. 'Mum, my mates and I were stopped in the street by the police today,' she announces. 'We were smoking a spliff.'

'You what?' you reply, incredulous. 'Don't you know how much trouble you're going to be in?'

'But we're not in any trouble,' she says. 'All they did was take it off us.'

You're shocked and confused. You suppose you should feel relief your daughter's not in trouble with the police. But instead, you're left with a bad taste in your mouth. Welcome to the new-look Britain...

Since David Blunkett announced controversial plans to downgrade cannabis from a Class B to a Class C drug, there have been confusing and contradictory reports on the subject. Is this the start of a downward spiral where Britain's already serious drug problem gets worse? Or, as supporters claim, the only way to free up the police so they can focus on more serious crime?

Here, we answer all your questions and explain how it affects you.

WHAT DOES THIS RECLASSIFICATION MEAN?

From July next year, possessing a small amount of cannabis – for personal use – will no longer automatically be considered an arrestable offence. Instead, police will issue a warning and confiscate the drugs.

This move – indicating that the Government considers cannabis to be among the least harmful of controlled drugs in this country – effectively puts it on a par with anabolic steroids, antidepressants and growth hormones.

While David Blunkett has upped the maximum prison sentence for dealers of Class C drugs from five to 14 years, the new measures, claims the Government, will mean that officers' time is freed up to tackle crimes associated with the harder, more harmful Class A drugs, such as heroin and crack cocaine.

But critics say that the shortage of bobbies on the beat shouldn't be 'solved' by going soft on drugs.

'We've got to ask ourselves what will be next?' says Labour MP Kate Hoey. 'How else will we be trying to save police time? Will we be saying "let's not bother with shoplifting and the like"? None of us wants to see police time wasted, but we shouldn't be changing the law in order to attempt to do it.'

WON'T MORE KIDS BE TEMPTED TO TRY DRUGS?

This is, undoubtedly, the main question on every parent's mind. Will the new, relaxed laws mean that your child is

Cannabis downgraded in drugs law shake-up

Blunkett's great cannabis gamble

'All young people understand is they can use drugs more freely'

more likely to try cannabis – and other, harder drugs in the future?

Those who say this is unlikely tend to look to other countries such as The Netherlands – where a policy of partial decriminalisation hasn't led to any great increase in cannabis use amongst children. In fact, it's had the opposite effect.

'The true story is that in the UK, prohibition for over 30 years has left us with one of the highest uses of cannabis anywhere in the world, far higher than the situation in The Netherlands,' says Paul Flynn MP for Newport West and vice chair of the All-Party Drugs Committee.

Research by the Netherlands Institute of Mental Health and Addiction has indeed found that while 41 per cent of 15 year-olds in the UK had tried cannabis, only 28 per cent of kids in The Netherlands had experimented. And, in the general population (excluding children and the elderly), 25 per cent of people in England

and Wales have tried cannabis, compared with just 19 per cent in The Netherlands.

Campaigners for legalisation of cannabis also say there's no evidence to suggest that cannabis leads to the use of harder drugs. 'There's nothing intrinsic or chemical in cannabis that predisposes a person to take hard drugs – hard drugs are completely different substances, not just a stronger version of cannabis,' says Don Barnard from the Legalise Cannabis Alliance (LCA).

But others argue that teenagers mixing in these circles could be tempted by their dealers into trying harder drugs and be forced to turn to crime to fund their habit. The Police Federation opposes the reclassification. 'We believe the recommendation will send entirely the wrong message to young people,' said Jan Berry, Federation Vice Chair. 'The simple fact remains that cannabis is harmful and has the potential to act as a gateway to other drugs.'

An NOP poll of 500 parents – exclusively for Bella – has revealed that 63 per cent believe the Government was wrong to relax the cannabis laws, while 33 per cent agreed with the change

THE BRITXON EXPERIMENT – HAS IT WORKED?

In July 2001, the Government introduced the Lambeth Cannabis pilot scheme into the London borough, which includes the city's 'drugs capital', Brixton. In the scheme, police officers were told to treat cannabis as a Class C drug, meaning that anyone caught would be cautioned instead of arrested.

The scheme was aimed at saving police time by allowing them to focus on more serious drugs and the crimes associated with it. And, in the six months after it began, 1,350 hours of officers' time had been saved, along with 1,150 hours of administrative time.

MP Paul Flynn thinks the scheme was a resounding

success. 'Every objective study shows that it was a popular experiment that produced very good results in freeing police to deal with crimes such as street robberies, muggings and crimes involving killer addictive drugs.'

Marketing assistant Beth Galloway, 24, has lived in Brixton for four-and-a-half years. So has it changed her life for the better?

'I've heard reports that the scheme's freed up enough time for two more bobbies on the beat in Brixton,' she says.

'There's a greater police presence here recently – and that goes a long way to helping people feel more secure. There are worse crimes and problems in this area than people smoking cannabis,

HOW IS CANNABIS HARMFUL?

While the various health benefits of cannabis for certain medical conditions have been well documented, it can also have a negative effect on both your body and your mind.

A recent paper in the *British Journal Of Psychiatry* by Professor Heather Ashton warned that, in some people, cannabis can produce severe anxiety and panic, paranoia and psychosis. Episodes of schizophrenia may also be precipitated or aggravated by cannabis use.

Reports in July this year linked a woman's 17-year cannabis habit with the manslaughter of her father. Ann-Marie Pyle, 42, was jailed for life after attacking her 77-year-old father with knives, a poker and a walking stick, leaving him with 85 separate injuries.

Psychiatrists who examined Pyle said she'd been suffering 'acute paranoid psychosis' at the time of the attack – a condition, they concluded, that had been aggravated by her use of cannabis.

Regular long-term use of the drug has been linked with a greater risk of head, neck, lung, throat and mouth cancers. Fertility in men and women can also be damaged. Repeated use has been shown to impair both long and short-term memory.

'Cannabis is more dangerous than most people, including the Government, realise,' says Peter Stoker, director of the National Drug Prevention Alliance. 'It's not only dangerous to the users, but also to those around them.'

'It's a mind-altering drug, which can result in the user having difficulty relating to others – something that can wreck families, friendships and

Continued overleaf



Beth feels more secure in Brixton since the pilot scheme began

which the police should be using their time to tackle. Hundreds of homeless people and crack addicts roam the streets. It's not cannabis smokers – or dealers – who are causing the problems.'



Cannabis can cause heartache to many (picture posed by models)

'SMOKING CANNABIS CHANGED MY SON'S PERSONALITY'

– says Nicola Ashley, 32, from Leeds

'Daniel left primary school with top SATS marks in all his subjects. Now, aged 14, he hardly goes to school at all and I hate to think of where he'll be in a few years' time.'

Nicola first suspected he'd tried cannabis about 18 months ago. 'He'd come in at about 8.30pm and sit in front of the TV, nodding off, then waking up again, finding it difficult to focus. He said he'd been drinking, but there was no smell of alcohol.'

'I tried to be cool. I know kids try stuff – and just hoped he'd grow out of it quickly. I warned him of the dangers, but he didn't listen.'

'Soon he was playing truant, despite me taking him to school every morning and watching him go through the gate. I tried grounding him, but he just went out anyway.'

'One day, I found out he was getting cannabis from a local address, so I called the police – when I knew Daniel was inside the house – but nothing happened.'

'I don't know how he can afford to buy it, as the only money I give him is £2 to buy his school lunch every day. In desperation, I even sent a photo of him to all the shops in our local shopping centre, warning them that he might be shoplifting, as he's already been arrested for stealing.'

'I think there should be more police on the streets, targeting the dealers, and hopefully the Government's new initiative will enable that to happen.'

'In the meantime, I worry that if Daniel has too much cannabis, he might become immune to the high and want something stronger.'

I got to the point where I couldn't eat a morsel or sip a drink without suffering

SMILES:
Alana is
lucky to
be alive

Pictures:
ALAN LEWIS

The night my secret horror came out..

A BOWEL CONDITION MEANT ALANA WORE PLASTIC BAGS TO COLLECT HER BODY'S WASTE .. BUT SHE DIDN'T TELL THE MAN OF HER DREAMS

It was a moment of pure horror and one that will haunt Alana Lucas for the rest of her life. After a life-threatening bowel disease, the pretty teenager had been forced to wear plastic bags to collect the waste from her intestines.

She had just begun to come to terms with her condition – until she met the man of her dreams. After a night on the town, the love-struck youngsters crashed out on the floor of a friend's house.

"We had only been going out for a couple of weeks and I was planning to tell Jonny all about the bags – but I hadn't quite got round to it."

That night, as they slept in the confines of the cramped downstairs room, the opportunity was taken out of her hands.

"In the middle of the night, Jonny gently nudged me awake to tell me I must have been sick in my sleep," explains Alana.

"I looked down, and my white trousers were a complete mess. Immediately, I knew what had happened. My ileostomy bag had burst and I was covered in pool

"I was absolutely horrified and ran upstairs to the bathroom, locked myself in and bawled my eyes out.

"Jonny knocked on the door and asked to be let in – I sobbed out the whole story and fled home. I guessed I'd never hear from him again."

But early the next morning, Jonny phoned Alana, reassuring her that nothing had changed for him.

"The experience strengthened our relationship," says Alana, now 21. "Jonny boosted my self-esteem so much he helped me feel really well. Four months later, the doctors were so amazed by my recovery, they said I was ready for an operation to get rid of the bags."

Luckily, the op in February last year was a success and now Alana has thrown herself back into life with vigour.

It is an amazing turnaround for the youngster from Portadown, Co Armagh, who had suffered from Crohn's disease – an agonising bowel condition – since she was 14.

At first, doctors thought the sharp pains in her stomach were merely Irritable Bowel Syndrome. But as the years passed, Alana realised her problem was more serious.

"It got to the point where I couldn't eat a morsel or sip a drink without suffering

severe pain," she recalls. "By the time I was 17, I weighed just five stone, I looked half my age and everyone thought I was anorexic."

"My ankle joints swelled up and were so painful I hobbled around like a pensioner. I had severe headaches and skin rashes and felt tired all the time. I felt so ill I couldn't join in with my friends. No one could really tell me why I was in such pain."

In May 2002, mum Heather and dad Alan had had enough – angered at seeing their daughter in constant agony, they demanded Alana was taken to hospital.

Within hours, she was diagnosed with Crohn's disease, a chronic inflammatory illness of the bowel.

Symptoms include constant pain, diarrhoea, sore joints, ulcers and unexplained weight loss – all of which Alana had suffered with for years.

She was given anti-inflammatory drugs and steroids in an attempt to keep her condition under control but her health deteriorated over the following year.

"The pain got worse and I was constantly dashing to the toilet with diarrhoea or to vomit," recalls Alana.

Eventually, doctors decided to remove the affected part of her bowel. They cut away eight inches of Alana's inflamed small bowel and one inch of affected large bowel, and then joined the two ends together.

At first, the op in May 2003 seemed to be a success – but four days later, disaster struck.

"I was walking back to my hospital bed when I felt an agonising pop in my stomach,"

remembers Alana. "I knew I would die unless something was done quickly."

She was rushed back to theatre where doctors discovered the join between her large bowel and small bowel had perforated – and the waste leaking from her bowels was poisoning her.

It was too risky to attempt to rejoin the inflamed intestines, so they created an ileostomy – where part of Alana's small intestine was brought out at the skin's surface just to the left of her belly button and a bag attached to collect faeces.

The end of her large bowel was brought out to the right of her belly button and a small pouch attached to collect the mucus which naturally lubricates the bowel.

When Alana came round, she knew she was lucky to be alive but horrified to learn about the

It was disgusting. When I wasn't crying, I was just so angry

SUPPORT:
With her aunt
in hospital



ROMANCE:
Alana with
boyfriend
Jonny

bags. "It was so disgusting, I couldn't even bear to look at them, let alone change them. After all that had happened, I fell into a depression. When I wasn't crying, I was angry."

"I couldn't stop shaking, could barely speak and just wanted the bags to go away. I was in such a state, I had to be sedated for them to be changed."

Two weeks after coming out of intensive care, Alana finally steered herself to change her own bags. In June 2003, she was allowed home – but was desperate to hide the two 14cm-long bags.

"Tops that show off your belly and hipster trousers were absolute no-nos," smiles Alana. "I hunted around for groovy gear I could wear without showing the bags."

With the support of her family and friends, Alana began to enjoy life again and in September she met Jonny, 26, a supervisor in a pharmaceutical factory.

"We hit it off a straightaway," she says. They became an item, but there was one thing Jonny didn't know.

"I tried to find the right time to tell him about my operation and the bags, but the moment never came," admits Alana. "Eventually, it all came out!"

But after that mortifying event, Jonny and Alana grew closer, have bought a house together and plan to marry.

"In the past year I've got a great new job as an administration manager, bought a car, been on holiday, and bought a horse," says Alana. "And I'm taking singing lessons and hope to make it big as a singer."

"There's not a day I don't think how lucky I am to be alive. It could all come back tomorrow – but I won't let that rule my life."

BY KIM JONES

WHAT IS CROHN'S DISEASE?

- Crohn's disease is an inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), the general name for diseases that cause inflammation in the intestines.
- It can be difficult to diagnose because its symptoms are similar to other intestinal disorders. IBD's affect around one in 400 people in the UK.
- It primarily causes breaks in the lining of the small and large intestines, but can affect the digestive system anywhere.
- The most common symptoms of Crohn's disease are abdominal pain and diarrhoea. Rectal bleeding, weight loss, and fever may also occur.
- It's not known what causes Crohn's disease but it is thought to be linked to the body's immune system.
- Treatments attempt to control inflammation, correct nutritional deficiencies, and relieve symptoms like abdominal pain, diarrhoea, and rectal bleeding.

- Some people have long periods of remission – sometimes years – when they are free of symptoms. However, the disease usually recurs at various times over a person's lifetime.
- For more info visit the website for the National Association for Colitis and Crohn's Disease at www.nacc.org.uk

YourLIFE REAL STORIES.. REAL PEOPLE.. EVERY DAY

ON TEST

Home health kits

We asked **woman** expert, Michael van Straten if self-testing kits are worth doing



Home tests can give you peace of mind

Menopause Test SELFCheck

Claims: Determines whether you've reached the post-menopause stage.

How to use it: Two test strips are used two weeks apart, detecting FSH (follicle stimulating hormone) in urine. An increase implies the change.

Van Straten verdict: This test can't tell you for sure, so why waste your money?
Score: 0/10



Diabetes Screening Test Homecheck

Claims: A visual test to detect glucose levels in urine and a helpful indicator in the potential early detection of diabetes.

How to use it: A dipstick test that takes one minute.

Van Straten verdict: Can pick up risk but not a definite diagnosis. See your doctor for blood tests.

Score: 9/10



WARNING

If you're particularly anxious or worried about having a certain condition, avoid DIY tests like the plague as you'll probably need counselling before and after doing them.

Biocheck Fertility Test For Women Babystart

Claims: 99% accurate. Two BioCheck screening tests detect raised levels of FSH in urine. The test should be used by women to determine if their level of FSH may be reducing their ability to conceive.

How to use it: Very easy – you simply wee on the midstream test and results will show five minutes later.

Van Straten verdict: A useful guide, but not definitive.
Score: 6/10



Cholesterol Level Test SELFCheck

Claims: Checks whether your overall cholesterol level is within normal limits.

How to use it: Two out of three people in the UK have raised cholesterol levels. This test includes a lancet to prick your finger. You then apply a drop of blood on to the test area of the card enclosed.

Van Straten verdict: Fairly reliable but not a proper diagnosis and results can vary depending on what you've eaten.
Score: 7/10



Allergy Test Imutest

Claims: Shows whether your level of allergy antibodies (IgE) is high or normal. A clinically proven IgE allergy blood test, like those used in hospital labs.

How to use it: You use a finger pricker and test a drop of blood. High levels of IgE antibodies are associated with allergies.

Van Straten verdict: Even specialists have problems diagnosing specific allergens, but an interesting way to confirm an allergy. Leave the specific diagnosis to the specialist though.
Score: 5/10



Osteoporosis Home Test Homecheck

Claims: Detects DpD (Deoxypyridinoline) – an accurate marker of how much bone mass you've lost and whether you have osteoporosis.

How to use it: Send off a urine sample in a pre-paid, pre-addressed postal tube. Results arrive in the post a few days later.

Van Straten verdict: Expensive and not a test for osteoporosis but an indication of bone loss. Could cause you needless worry.
Score: 2/10



Vaginal Discharge Test Vianalyse

Claims: Take the first step towards diagnosing the cause of your discharge.

How to use it: Contains two panty liners. After use and drying, if the indicator strip is blue or green, the infection is probably bacterial or parasitic and you should contact your GP.

Van Straten verdict: Any vaginal discharge needs medical attention. Self-diagnosis and treatment could lead to big problems, even possible sterility.
Score: 0/10



'My cholesterol was very high'

My dad had a medical for a new job and it got me thinking. I bought a SELFCheck Home



Cholesterol test and was shocked to discover my reading was very high. I saw my GP and further tests showed I had high HDL (High-density lipoprotein) cholesterol which, if left undetected, could have developed into angina, heart disease and heart attack. I'm now eating healthily, have joined a gym and my readings are down. I've also dropped a dress size.

Hannah Rees, 28, from Newquay, Cornwall

Our Verdict: Kits stress they're not a replacement for tests carried out by your doctor. They're good for people who have been diagnosed with a condition like high cholesterol and want to monitor it. But they're bad for people who'll use them instead of their GP or who will not act on negative results.

Bowel Health Test SELFCheck

Claims: Detects symptoms of colon polyps.

How to use it: Detects blood in your stools which you can't see. Using a test stick, you take samples, mix them with a solution, and place on to a test cassette. If your result is positive your doctor will examine further.

Van Straten verdict: This is not a suitable area for self diagnosis, and stool could have been contaminated with menstrual blood.
Score: 1/10



THESE 3 WOMEN ARE SUCCESSFUL, BEAUTIFUL, HAPPY...

...so why were they all told that they'd thrown away their futures, were on the scrapheap and would never amount to anything? And how have they managed to turn their lives around?



TURN THE PAGE TO FIND OUT...

'WE WERE ALL TEENAGE MUMS!'

'I love the surprise on people's faces when they realise that, though I'm successful at what I do, I have a five-year-old daughter'



Donna Ali, 30, lives in Cardiff with her daughters, Sinnead, 14, and Bianca, 12. Donna runs a party and beauty company called Little Miss Makeover.

'Everyone was surprised when I became pregnant at 15 – I was the "quiet one", who always had her head in a book. My boyfriend Craig and I had been so petrified, we'd hidden it from everyone for eight months. Then a teacher at the college where I studied beauty spotted my overalls getting tighter. "Are you going to tell your mum?" she said, and I burst into tears.

It was a relief to get it out in the open. And when Sinnead was born, I was thrilled. But Mum took over and insisted I went back to college. For the first two years of Sinnead's life, I was pushed out.

It was when Sinnead said she thought I was her sister that I realised I had to make it on my own. I became pregnant with Bianca and moved into a council flat – but Craig was overwhelmed

Jessica Huie, 24, lives in London with her daughter, Monet, 5. Jessica is a press and public relations consultant for Max Clifford Associates, and is also an entertainment correspondent for BBC London Radio.

'My parents weren't well off, but they gave me every advantage possible and always encouraged me in my schoolwork. So they were really disappointed when I dropped my A-levels to work in a shop – and even more disappointed when I became pregnant at 17. My dad had tears in his eyes when he said: "Now you'll just be another statistic".

At first, I was excited by the pregnancy. But reality soon hit home. My boyfriend wasn't working, there wasn't enough room at his parents, and I couldn't live with mine – they could hardly look me in the eye. So I moved into a hostel in London's King's Cross. Heavily pregnant, I'd wake up to see cockroaches climbing up the walls. It was so depressing.

Finally, we got a council flat and three weeks later, after a 23-hour labour, I gave birth to Monet. Unfortunately, post-natal depression hit me hard and queuing in the Post Office, clutching my benefit book, I felt like the scum of the earth – I'd become one of those teen

mums that they wrote about in the papers, sponging off the state.

Eventually, I saw a counsellor, who suggested I return to college to do my A-levels, because that would restore my self-esteem. So when Monet was nine months old, I was back in class. Within a year, I'd passed two A-levels, and was accepted at the University of Middlesex to study journalism.

By now, I had a job in a bookmaker's, and could come off benefits. I felt as if I was someone again. It was hard work, but I was desperate to be a good role model for Monet. I got my degree, then a full-time job at *Pride* magazine. I've recently started working for Max Clifford Associates, where our clients include Simon Cowell and Bryan and Kerry McFadden. I also do entertainment report slots on radio.

I love the surprise on people's faces when they realise that, while I'm successful, I have a five-year-old daughter. I'd tell other teen mums to follow their dreams – and never feel disheartened by society's negativity.'



'Far from putting pressure on our relationship, I think that having children young has made us closer as a couple'

Sadie Knight, 24, and her husband Justin, 28, a software manager, live in Coventry with their children Callista, 4, and Aiden, 2. Sadie runs her own business, Glassraven Web Design.

'I was 19 and in my first year at uni when I became pregnant. My boyfriend Justin and I were shocked – we'd been taking precautions. We didn't want a termination, so we had to tell our parents. Mum wasn't at all impressed. "What about your degree and your future?" she asked. When Callista was born, it was

the first time I'd held a baby. It was scary, but I just had to get on with it. When she was



eight months old, I returned to uni. With Justin and a very supportive family by my side, I got into a routine of feeds and coursework.

When Callista was a year old, I became pregnant again. People were flabbergasted, and wondered how I'd juggle two children and my studies. But Justin and I wanted a small gap between our children, and we believed we could cope.

Then a few weeks after Aiden was born, Justin was knocked off his motorbike. He shattered his knee and was in plaster for three months. I had to care for him and the children. My studies suffered and I dropped out of uni.

I slipped into a vague depression – everything was much more of a struggle. Because I was so young, I felt alienated from other mums. And I have to admit there were

'I had to get out and make a go of being Sinnead's mum – she thought I was her sister'

by the responsibility, so we split up. I had to support the girls by myself. I moved to London to be a model, but ended up working in a factory. In the evenings, I'd help the girls with their homework, then play games with them. It was all the "social life" I had.

When I was 23, I moved back to Cardiff, got a job as a youth worker and bought my own home. But I wanted more. I had so many business ideas – but no money to get them off the ground.

Then I met a business adviser, who really liked one of my ideas. All little girls love dressing up, and I thought that I could open a salon where they could have birthday parties combined with fun make-up sessions, so they could look like little princesses. The adviser gave me £150 to research the idea. I placed

some ads, and was booked for two parties within a week. I bought a cheap make-up case and went on my first job – a party for nine girls. It was a huge hit, and I earned £80. The second party earned me £120. I paid back my adviser, and applied to the Prince's Trust for a loan. In 2001, Little Miss Makeover was born. I've since held 900 parties, and intend to franchise the business across the country.

I'm extremely driven, and very ambitious for my girls. I want them to be happy and grab life with both hands, before they settle down and have families of their own.'

■ For details of Little Miss Makeover services, call 02920 232 825.



The facts

The UK has one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy and abortion in Europe, with more than 90,000 teenage girls becoming pregnant each year, with 55,000 babies actually born.

■ The UK's rate is twice as high as Germany, three times higher than France and six times higher than Holland

■ In 1999, the UK Government announced plans to halve the rate of teen pregnancy by 2010. Under the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, girls and boys are given advice about the realities of parenthood and contraception. For more information, visit www.teenagepregnancy.net or visit www.gov.uk/