

FEELGOOD FACTOR

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Victoria Stewart finds reasons to be cheerful in a workout session that's not just for high-school girls

CHEERLEADING CLASSES

What is it? An open cheerleading class for adults aimed at complete beginners. A qualified coach covers all elements including cheers, dancing, jumps and basic stunting. **What does it claim?** Cheerleading is slowly developing into a national obsession. This class claims "you'll learn basic techniques and work in groups to build impressive stunts. Whatever happens you are guaranteed to have a laugh."

What's it like? I turned up to find several other equally bemused cheerleading hopefuls waiting outside the class. We were all slightly stunned when the beautiful Greta walked in to



In the pink: Victoria, left, gets in on the action at Pineapple Dance Studios

teach us the moves. She directed us to a pile of fluorescent pink pom-poms and introduced us to the Cheer: "OK?" she shouted. And all together, as if by magic, 25 giggling women shouted "Ready" in unison. After chanting a nonsensical rhyme about the Cookie Monster in time to some side steps, we were ready to get down to

business. A gentle warm-up led me to believe that cheerleading was easy but I shouldn't have been so quick to judge. After a five-minute stretch we were suddenly catapulted into stunt positions — me as the "base" in the lunge position, with another girl as the "flyer" standing on my thigh and jumping up. I feared I'd fall over but

a smiling Greta was there to support us both. Then, just as I'd begun to get used to the pace, we started the cheek-reddening pom-pom routine to Katy Perry's I Kissed a Girl. This consisted of some sweat-inducing side-kicks akin to aerobics, bum and hip shakes and jumps, and all co-ordinated with the arms, which were busy shaking pom-poms. After a few repetitions you get the hang of it.

Verdict: Although we'd cheered for an hour my muscles didn't hurt at all the next day, thanks to the stretches, which is a rarity. A fellow classmate said at the end: "If you don't try it you're missing out." I think I'd have to agree and I'm tempted to return next week to brush up on my stunt skills. I now appreciate that there's more to the American high-school "popular girl" than just pom-poms.

When: Saturdays, 12pm (private classes and hen parties also available for groups of eight-plus).

Where: Pineapple Dance Studios, Langley Street, WC2 (020 7836 4004, www.pineapple.uk.com).

Cost: £6 per class plus £2 off-peak/£4 peak day fee.

SET against the backdrop of last week's heavy grey rainclouds, the profusion of rose-print dresses, shoes and bags in the high street shop windows is a gorgeous boost for the spirits. It's roses all the way on the beauty counters, too, both for their nurturing benefits and a spot of feelgood decoration.

SERIOUS SERUMS

Rose oil is not cheap but its fans say the bloom it can bring to skin makes it worth every penny. Omorovicza's Rose Lifting Serum tones skin and relaxes muscles — actually, just the smell would do that (£65 at Liberty 020 7734 1234). Cosmetics à la Carte's Rose

Elixir is a mixture of rose absolute, to repair broken capillaries, and restorative rose hip oil, to calm the skin (£35; www.cosmeticsalacarte.com). Ila's Face Oil is made with rose otto rather than rose absolute — rare in these

budget-conscious times, but it gives it extra oomph (£53.83, www.cultbeauty.co.uk).



Coming up roses

Take your pick of these latest blooming marvels on a beauty counter near you

ALICE HART-DAVIS



for a glorious fresh smell that will linger on the skin, try Tisserand Replenishing body lotion, with Wild Rose and Lemon Leaf (£8 at Boots).

EVERYDAY FACE AND BODYCARE

Neal's Yard Remedies, whose rosewater has long been the foundation of many a natural-beauty skincare regime, is expanding the range with a delicious-smelling Rehydrating Rose Daily Moisture cream designed to soften dehydrated skin (£18, in store from May, www.nealsyardremedies.com). Compagnie de Provence's Savon de Marseille Extra Pur Rose (£12.50 at John Lewis) reduces the drying effect of hand-washing and

**PRETTY-PRETTY MAKE-UP**

Roses have clambered into make-up, too. Prescriptives' In Bloom Cheek Color Duo (£23, www.prescriptives.co.uk) is a delight to use and Korres has introduced a Wild Rose line of cosmetics based on the magic (wild rose oil) ingredient in its popular Wild Rose cream. There's foundation, concealer and powder (£18-£20, www.beautyexpert.co.uk). It doesn't smell of rose but the Body Shop's Roseflower lipstick is stand-out pretty and comes in three shades (£10, www.thebodyshop.co.uk). The bargain option, but oddly beguiling, is Vaseline Rosy Lips (£1.49 a tin at Superdrug).

FRAGRANCE/ROSE ON THE NOSE

Rose-led perfumes are never in short supply. Among the most enticing of the current crop are Givenchy's Very Irresistible 2008 Rosa Damascena Harvest (£62.50 at Harrods). The lengthy title means it's the latest, limited-edition, take on the Very Irresistible fragrance and delicious it is, too, sensuous but fresh, with a hefty rose and patchouli base. In May, L'Occitane launches its Rose Nuit de Mai (£28, www.loccitane.co.uk) which has a woody edge, and there's cinnamon and blackberry in among the rose. And if your nose craves something completely different, go and smell the extraordinary Essence of Rose of Taif at Al Qurashi, opposite Harrods on Brompton Road (020 7589 1315). At £220 for 3ml, you'll only want to smell, rather than buy, but it could just be the start of a whole new olfactory journey.



My nine-year struggle to negotiate London's IVF maze

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you feel terrible that you can't give children to your husband. I used to think, 'If he was with someone else, would he have children by now?' All of these thoughts crowd in on you."

So are employers right to worry when a woman announces treatment? "I can see it from their point of view," says Kate. "And of course IVF also announces an intention to take maternity leave. But women do have babies, and there's a huge lack of sympathy for those who have to try IVF. Employers could definitely be more enlightened. All that's needed is a certain amount of flexibility: the right to switch shifts, say, or to make up lost days later. A woman, or actually a man, who's fundamentally unhappy because they can't have children might well be

underperforming at work anyway."

Four years after that first course of treatment — at the age of 34, and after another two failed attempts — Kate finally became pregnant with Alfie. "And suddenly, miraculously, you feel as though you're a part of normal society. The veil sort of falls away. Of course I was ecstatic."

Her desire for children was now satisfied and she entered into the IVF maze for a second time a far happier person. "Trying to have a second child wasn't remotely as big a deal. I was coming from a different place because I was already a mother."

Yet it was at this stage that she decided to give up work. "I went back after Alfie but doing IVF, working and having a small child is one thing too many. Work was the thing that had to go." Flora — "a

piece of unbelievable luck" — was born three years later, also by IVF.

In total, Kate underwent three cycles of "fresh" IVF, where new eggs are collected and fertilised, and five cycles of "frozen" IVF, a less invasive procedure where existing embryos are thawed and then transferred. The entire treatment, over nine years, cost less than £10,000 but the price of IVF has rocketed in the past decade

'Trying for a second child wasn't as big a deal. I was coming from a different place as I was already a mum'

and a single cycle today will set you back an average of £4,000. Women who need IVF also, very often, need to work.

But I wonder whether women who try IVF simply have to accept a sacrifice, or compromise, albeit temporarily, of some kind in their lives. Is it actually possible to work full-time at full capacity and have fertility treatment?

"If you have a job where you're in the same office every day and it's quite near the clinic, if you're in a sympathetic environment and a colleague can cover for you occasionally, then you can probably do it," says Kate carefully. "But the chances of someone doing a whole IVF cycle without it having any impact on their work at all are pretty slim."

■ *The Complete Guide to IVF, by Kate Brian, is published by Piatkus.*

Our

Rushing about is bad

LONDON has always been the capital of speed. Now the economic downturn means we're working even faster and harder than ever to survive.

Health experts warn that we risk mental and physical burn-out by living life in the fast lane.

A new festival is highlighting the need for Londoners to slow down and create more space in their lives. The 10-day Slow Down London event starts on Friday and includes workshops on how to savour food and appreciate the capital's pleasures.

Co-organiser Tessa Watt, a radio producer turned yoga teacher, says putting on the brakes can make us more effective. "There has to be an end to this incredible spiral of consumerism and work," she says. "We're talking about a speed that's been building up since the Industrial Revolution."

So, we challenged our writers to slow down their daily lives for a week. Here are the results.

TAI CHI

What is it? Developed in the 18th century, yang-style tai chi is a martial art best recognised for its slow, graceful postures that focus the mind to concentrate solely on the body. Tai chi is believed to promote relaxation as well as strengthening muscles, improving circulation and increasing flexibility.

The coach: Practitioner John Linney, or "Prasannavira", a Buddhist with 11 years of yang-style experience, is calm and gentle.

What happened? We started with some loosening exercises before moving on to learn the key postures. Rounded movements are based around sunken shoulders, dropped elbows and lightly upright head. The aim is to link these postures and create a gentle flow of the body — relaxed joints, tensed muscles and focused mind working together as one.

Verdict? I am an instant convert. Relaxation, I've learned, is not about being passive or floppy. It can be active, responsive and structured. I am not a particularly stressed person, but as Prasannavira pointed out, "we can always relax a little bit more". Londoners take note.

Cost/contact:

A special Slow Down London class runs on 25 April at 9am and cost £9 (£6 concs). Five-week courses run with classes on either Monday evenings or Saturday mornings costing from £35. Bodywise Health, 119 Roman Road, E2, 020 8981 6938, www.bodywisehealth.org.

DAISY DUMAS

SLOW EATING

What is it? An "art of eating" session teaches you how to gain health and happiness through food and laughter.

The coach: Harish Chavda gives seminars

