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ISPIRE

Nature gives you the face you have at 20; it is up to you to merit the face you have at 50.

COCO CHANEL

Wise words: Lawyer Sheela

Mackintosh-Stewart



S A seasoned divorce lawyer, I should have seen my own divorce coming, yet I was completely blindsided.

It was an ordinary Thursday morning in 2003. I'd been busy getting our daughters, then aged four and eight, ready for school and I popped my head round my ex-husband's study door to ask what he'd like for supper later. Instead of the reply I was expecting, he said: 'This isn't working.' isn't working

In an instant, his totally unexpected

by Sheela Mackintosh-Stewart

and devastating words changed the

lives of me and my children.

After 13 years of marriage, despite all the usual struggles of balancing work, family and life, I had thought

we were doing fine.

My initial reaction was utter disbelief and I asked: 'Is this some kind of joke?' But I'd seen that steely, hardened look on client's faces and I - with horror and deep sorrow

— that he had already mentally checked out of our relationship.

In fact, he had been planning that bombshell for some time and I was served with divorce papers soon after.

Sadly, mine is not an uncommon divorce scenario.

On reflection, I am still astonished

TURN TO NEXT PAGE

Think again. As our beauty routines get more compli-cated, we need to be wary of inadvertently overdosing on ingredients, or mixing and matching products with potentially dangerous results.

We're loading ourselves up with too many topical products and insane amounts of supplements,' says aesthetic expert Dr Mervyn Patterson, of Woodford Medical. He warns this can cause skin damage, interfere with medical tests and possibly lead to serious health problems.

Read on to find out more..

BE BIOTIN AWARE

BIOTIN, or B7, is a popular vitamin widely used in sup-plements for hair, skin and nails. It is water-soluble, which means it doesn't build up in the body and you don't need huge amounts.

'Biotin is only useful as a supplement if you have a deficiency,' says nutritionist Emma Bardwell, who warns excess use can come with dangers, including interference with thyroid and heart tests.

Last year, the British

Generic Manufacturers Association wrote to healthcare professionals warning that biotin can affect thyroid function results, and urged them to ask patients about biotin or skin, nail and hair supplement use before testing.

Biotin can also interfere with heart test results. In 2019, the U.S. Food & Drug Administration said that high doses could interfere with tests used to measure troponin (a protein in heart muscle that's during a heart attack), with high or low results depending

'If you go to hospital with pain, your troponin levels will be measured,' says Dr Oliver Guttmann, consultant cardiologist at The Wellington Hospital, part of HCA Healthcare UK. 'Biotin might be used to check these levels, so a biotin supplement can affect the measurement. The concern is falsely low/negative levels of troponin, as heart attacks can be missed.'

Similarly, biotin is used to check the thyroid, so wrong measurements can occur. The NHS says that less than 0.9 mg of biotin daily is unlikely to cause harm. But in the wild west of the supplement world, you can buy tablets containing up to 12 mg.
While packaging on such

products recommends consulting a doctor or pharmacist if you are on medication or have medical conditions, we're so conditioned to view supplements as safe, how many of us actually do so? Make sure to follow their advice.

KEEP AN EYE ON VIT A

HAILED as a skincare wonder ingredient, retinol (vitamin A)

increases collagen production.
But in April the EU warned of overexposure, and is implementing new legislation to limit retinol levels in products.
'The contribution of vitamin A from cosmetic products to scurvy' says Ms Bardwell.



Hidden dangers of your beauty supplements

by Alice Smellie

the overall consumer expoconcern for consumers with the highest exposure to vitamin A (5 per cent of the total population) from food and food supplements, the Scientific Committee on Consumer

'If you have too high a concentration in your system it can damage the liver and cause bone-thinning. I wouldn't be worried about skin irritation so much as the systemic effect,' says Dr Patterson, although he warns overuse of retinol can irritate and thin skin.

The recommended daily amount (RDA) for British women is 600 microgrammes (mcg) or 700 mcg for men, while the NHS website says not to exceed 1,500 mcg. The Mayo Clinic warns more than 3,000 mcg daily on a long-term basis can cause the problems mentioned, as well as joint and bone pain, headaches,

Vitamin A is often marketed as a beauty supplement which can be bought cheaply and in very high doses. Taking one along with a multivitamin (providing more than 100 per cent of your daily needs). eating a portion of spinach and carrots and using a topical retinol cream could add up to almost 10,000 mcg.

DON'T OVERDO VIT C

'THE RDA for adults is 40 mg daily, but this is the lowest level, to prevent things like

'There's a trend for taking a very high dose of vitamin C for skin health and immunity. The upper limit is 2,000 mg a day but even 1,000 mg can cause stomach problems. It's easy to consume these levels, especially in powder form.'

DON'T MIX AND MATCH

IF YOU'RE a fan of the Tik-Tok trend for layering on skincare products, beware, as mixing ingredients can be harmful 'The skin can only absorb so much.' says Dr Patterson.

Retinol (or other forms of vitamin A) and vitamin C cream applied at the same time might cause irritation, as might vitamin C and AHAs [alpha hydroxy acids], or retinol and salicylic acid, which can dry out the skin.

Dr Patterson recommends using 'five basics from the same range'

FISHY BEHAVIOUR

IDEALLY, we ought to be eating our omega-3s. Suppledry skin and boost hair and nail health - should be taken with caution by those using blood-thinners due to fears of an increased risk of bleeding.

the way in which it's used by warfarin more potent,' says

The British Heart Foundation recommends those taking omega-3 supplements to aim for 450 mg per day, and to choose ones containing DHA [docosahexaenoic acid] and EPA [eicosapentaenoic acid] omega-3s.

It is known that fish oil can thin blood: a study of 56 healthy adults taking 640mg a day for a month found clot-

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

that, despite my decades of experience immersed in the turmoil of unhappy and warring couples, I could have missed the warning signs. Perhaps, like many of my clients, I'd chosen to ignore or overlook them. It is clear to me now that I had been sleepwalking my way into divorce.

My own experience of divorce has undoubtedly deepened comprehension and empathy for the pain and suffering my clients experience, making me a better divorce lawyer. And today I actively work to heln divorce-proof marriages.

The latest statistics show that one in three marriages break up, and, if my observations are correct, at least one of the other two in three marriages are not particularly happy either.

In my 30-year legal career I've advised more than 400 couples, guiding them through some very complex, high-profile cases involving multi-million-pound settlements, and behavioural patterns that can so easily derail relationships.

Sometimes, by the time a person seeks my advice, it's too late to save their marriage. But in my experience, if your relationship has been going sour, you usually have 18 months to two years of persistent disgruntle ment and discontent before either of

you completely checks out.

This critical 'relationship rescue' window is your chance to try to repair those fractures, perhaps even pull your relationship back from

Here's what to do if you find yourself

PUT YOUR EYE BACK ON THE BALL

MY FIRST plea is vigilance: don't let a good relationship fall into a state of disrepair while you're preoccupied

If you've taken on the role of bringing up children, running the house and also trying to keep your career bubbling, as I did, it's all too easy to lose sight of prioritising

your relationship.

I see it all the time. If I'm brutally honest, this was one reason why my previous marriage failed.

I'd taken charge of the day-to-day care of our children, but I was determined not to give up my thriving legal career.

Yet, at times of high stress (setting off for a long day at court as the nanny calls in sick), I did resent my ex-hus band for not leaning in more to help with the girls. His frequent work travel added to the strain.

When he finally dropped his 'this is not working' bombshell, it was already too late to work on our marriage, despite my best efforts.

In hindsight, we didn't dedicate enough time or energy to better communicate and repair our relationship frustrations. Make sure *uou* do.

MAKE YOUR SEX LIFE SIZZLE

IT WOULD be a mistake to underestimate the importance of sex in

In my professional experience, I've noticed a massive connection between the loss of interest in sex by one of you, and the appeal, for the other of having an affair to make up for the lack of intimacy.

A sexless marriage doesn't always spell doom and it is not unusual for the volume on sex to dial down with time, but a mismatch of sexual needs and desires can cause resentment and frustration.

I'll never forget one woman who came to me for advice because a friend had spotted her husband at an

industry function, on the dancefloor in a passionate clinch with a blonde. The friend was gushing about how smooching with her husband after all

My client — who also has blonde hair — hadn't been at that party. He was clearly having an affair. In cases like these. I always ask if

the couple share a marital bed (if the answer is 'no' that's a red flag for me). any more. I shut up that shop ten can Netflix together?'

Because she had lost interest in sex, she had wrongly and naively assumed

Sadly, she'd left it too late to fix the marriage. By the time she filed for divorce, her husband had moved in with his mistress and already started shifting assets around to thwart her from getting too much of 'his' wealth.

I listen to women complaining that they're not attracted to their husband any more (he no longer smells good, he's gained weight, he leaves toenail clippings in the bathroom...), but if you want to make a marriage work, ou've got to look for ways to maintain and build an emotional and sexual connection.

Better still, don't ever get out of the habit of having sex—it's a relationship muscle that must be exercised.

To keep the flames of intimacy roaring, you've got to stoke that fire regularly.

This doesn't mean gritting your

teeth and doing something you don't want to do, but it does mean honestly discussing the subject, and getting counselling if necessary.

If you are not in the mood for sex. tell him gently why. He's not a mind-reader. Share with each other how your needs and desires may have changed over time and discuss possible ways to better satisfy each other.

HELP HIM THROUGH HIS MIDLIFE CRISIS

NEVER underestimate the impact of midlife crisis on men. It affects more than half of them and can strike at any time, usually from 40 onwards. Common triggers range from the

IF YOU'VE tried the above and failed, you need to act quickly and quietly. If you're looking to separate, it's time to prepare uour defences and put uourself in the strongest possible position both emotionally and financially — so you are on the front foot in the event of a split.

FIRST, THINK FINANCES

MANY women willingly give up their careers to raise children and support their high-earning husbands. They might get envious looking lifestyles with nannies cleaners and gardeners to help them manage their multi-million

A generous monthly lump drops into her bank account, and she has free rein with his credit cards. She has everything she could possibly need — except financial

WISE UP ON FAMILY FUNDS

THE worst cases — and the ones I see so, so often — are women who are completely in the dark about family finances. This might seem fine when things

are going well, but it can be disastrous if he decides to leave and shuts down payments and credit card access as he goes.

One client had spent years enjoying a life of luxury and



Don't ever get out of the habit of having sex. You've got to stoke that fire regularly.

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trivial (the onset of hair loss) to super-stressors like the death of a friend or parent, overwhelming pressure to maintain a lavish life-pressure to maintain a lavish life-on the lookout for mood swings, a

nurturing wife can make a huge difference. But if you're preoccupied or distracted, things can swiftly spiral out of control

Many clients I see don't talk much with their partners, but good communication and active

Start the ball rolling by check ing in with him. Try 'I can see you're troubled, tell me what I can do to help you' — or sit down together with a bottle of wine and ask him about one aspect of your relationship he would like to see improved (more time and space, a reignited sex life, getting finances under control)

If you suspect he might be having an affair, ask him outright. Many women overlook signs or avoid confrontation, but addressing underlying marital issues now may save you heartache later.

REMEMBER THE GRASS IS NOT GREENER

IT IS unwise to think that if as fulfilling as it once was, or life has become dull and boring, that you should wriggle out of this marriage and look for a better one.

This is especially true for women in their 50s. Unless the marriage is toxic or abusive, it is often wiser to nurture your own patch

of lawn.
The truth is that no matter how well-off you are post-divorce, a split yields no winners.

Your confused mutual friends may take sides, your children will be worried about how it will affect them, and many struggle

to cope.

Besides, the grass isn't always greener. Many divorced women find the search for suitable partners frustrating and end up feeling lonely. They tell me they don't want to take on a younger man's children once theirs have grown up, and they certainly don't for an older man past his prime.



Immediate

Moisture, £19,

aesop.com

Missed your relationship rescue window? Don't tell him it's over until you've read this!

a mistress.

But only when he started bragging to their grown-up sons about his sexual exploits with running to me.

He immediately cut off her payments and overnight she was left with nothing. The poor woman had to resort to borrowing from friends and selling her designer handbags and clothes to make ends meet until the divorce was finalised.

So many clients who come to me are financially clueless sometimes they don't even know how much their husbands earn.

Whatever the state of your relationship, you should absolutely know where the money is and how to access it. And if things aren't going well, you can't use 'hope' as a strategy. You've got to get financially savvy because once that gun is

fired, your hands will be tied. If your relationship has been

going bad, there's every chance vour husband might already siphoning-off funds and taking steps to minimise his

No need to arouse his suspicion but start information-gathering on marital assets, income, liabilities and debts.

Start asking questions; make enquiries. Other properties? Offshore accounts? Pensions? Bitcoin accounts? Loans?

Try saying: 'The husband of one of my friends dropped dead on the tennis court last week and I'm really worried — what will I do if you go under a bus? Where do I even start to find out what we own and access monies

Then gently suggest you work together to create a 'death file' containing financial and practical documents (birth and marriage certificates, share either of you can easily access if disaster strikes. No need to tell him this is your

WHO OWNS THE HOUSE?

THE matrimonial home is often the biggest asset in any marriage, but if the house is solely in his name, there's nothing stopping him from selling, renting it out or borrowing off the value of the property without your consent You need to protect your occupation of it.

Never assume your home is registered in both your names (even if he tells you it is). To find out, go to the Land Registry (gov.uk). For a £3 fee you can ask for a property title deed to be sent to you.

If you discover the house is in

his name and not both your names, you can fill out a (HR1 form) which registers your ■ AS TOLD to Louise Atkinson.

right of occupation in your You can do this without your

husband's permission or consent, but he will be notified when the request goes through.

The service is free but you need your marriage certificate as proof. It takes around

FATTEN 'RAINY DAY' FUND

six weeks.

EVERY woman should prioritise having her own personal bank account with enough money to support herself if her

I've advised my daughters (now 24 and 28) to build a ringfenced 'rainy day' emergency fund before committing to longterm partnerships.

It's crucial to fatten this safety net continually.

It's never too late to start bolstering it with your

own earnings. Always strive to stay in work, even if it is part-time, because once you switch off that tap, it can be very difficult to turn it back on again and re-enter

the workforce.
Or you could siphon off small portions of your 'housekeeping on a regular basis.