

## A change in me

# PUPS KEEP ME POSITIVE

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### MY PROBLEM

By age 16, depression had already overwhelmed me. I took an overdose and had to have my stomach pumped. My parents must have been devastated.

The GP said I'd grow out of it. However, my depression continued, interspersed with brighter days when I buzzed like a bee, excited and full of ideas.

But the long periods when I was low made it impossible to hold down a full-time job.

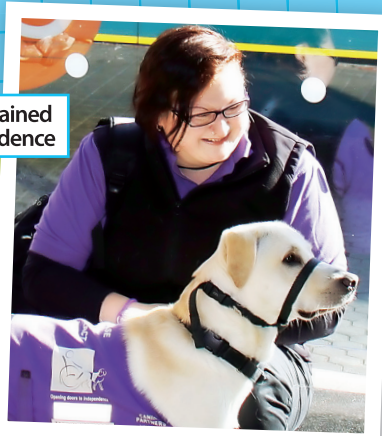
Yet I managed to work part time, and achieved qualifications in animal science and welfare.

Aged 30, I was finally diagnosed with bipolar disorder, explaining the extreme highs and lows. I was given antidepressants, but I still suffered panic attacks in social situations.



My depression was crippling

I've gained confidence



### THE SOLUTION

When I was 31, I had cognitive behavioural therapy to help me think more positively. Instead of dwelling on what I *couldn't* do, I started thinking about what I *could* do. That's when I came across an ad for the charity Canine Partners.

They were recruiting 'Puppy Parents' – volunteers to train dogs to help disabled people. With my background in animal studies, I realised this was something I could do.

The following year, I became the proud temporary parent of Zane, a gorgeous six-month-old labrador. My job was to teach him to toilet on command, fetch things I needed, and play tug-of-war games that would enable him to help his new owner out of bed, get dressed and open doors and drawers.

In return, he more or less cured my panic attacks and I became happy to talk to strangers who wanted to chat about Zane.

After a year, Zane moved on to a new owner for advanced training. Saying goodbye was hard, but knowing I'd prepared him to change the life of a disabled person helped. Now, he's passed all his assessments to be a canine partner, and I'm parenting a new 10-week-old puppy called Metro. Looking after these dogs has made such a difference to me.

● For more info see [caninepartners.org.uk](http://caninepartners.org.uk).

## DOGS IN THE HOUSE

Husband and wife team Dr Mike and Dr Louise tackle your problems – together

### MENINGITIS FEAR

**Q** I took my two-year-old daughter to hospital with symptoms of meningitis, but the tests were negative. What else could it have been?

**DR MIKE** She probably had a viral infection, which can cause headaches, vomiting, rash and high temperature. Children her age can have around 12-15 viral infections a year, although not all are serious enough to be admitted to hospital.

**DR LOUISE** Some viruses cause a symptom called meningism. This leads to headaches and neck stiffness similar to meningitis, but it isn't as serious. She may have had this.

**DR MIKE** You were right to take her straight to A&E. Speed is of the essence with meningitis.

### ALWAYS TIRED

**Q** I feel worn out all the time, but I can't sleep at night. Blood tests have shown nothing. What could cause this?

**DR LOUISE** We see this often in the surgery. Tiredness is often a sign of mild depression. Physical diseases can also be to blame, and I always like to arrange blood tests to make sure I'm not missing anything.

**DR MIKE** Me too. I check for anaemia, diabetes, liver and kidney disease, and thyroid problems – an underactive thyroid is another common cause of tiredness.

**DR LOUISE** Your normal blood tests indicate there's nothing seriously wrong, but I suggest you ask your doctor to assess you for depression.

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**DO IT THIS WEEK! Prevent backache.**

**Bend your knees when lifting something heavy – including children. And if you carry toddlers on your hip, try to use alternate sides to even out the strain.**



## Baby health

**DR LOUISE** Babies are often diagnosed with colic, but it's not always easy for new parents to deal with...

**C**olic is a condition that causes painful spasms in the gut. However, as babies can't tell you if they're in pain, it's difficult for doctors to diagnose. Often I suspect colic in otherwise thriving and healthy babies who cry more than usual. Again, it's difficult to know how much crying is normal



Excessive crying can be a symptom

for a baby, but more than three hours a day is probably higher than average.

It's common for colic to start at around four weeks, and may last up to four months. It's less common in breastfed babies.

Gripe water is an old-fashioned remedy which may help. Even if it doesn't, it's harmless. I usually prescribe medicines containing simethicone (or you can buy remedies such as Infacol), which may give some relief. But generally, if babies are feeding and gaining weight normally I tend not to worry too much – even if they do cry a bit more than usual.

