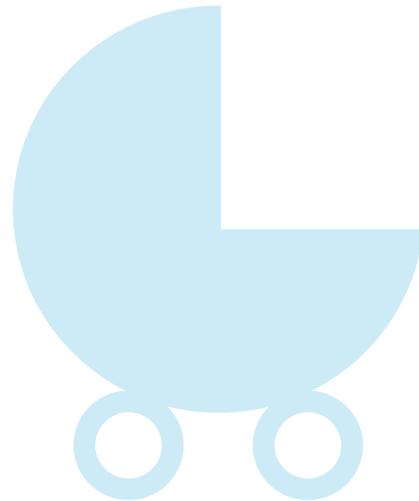


Beating the Baby Blues



Sally Hunter was knocked sideways by postnatal depression but Reiki has helped to get her back on her feet

The first time I had Reiki it was like seeing an oasis after lying parched in a desert. The buzzing of self-recrimination stopped and for a blissful hour I felt at peace, thought-free and nurtured. Colours and shapes drifted through my mind and body and afterwards I felt relaxed yet energised and went out to face the world wearing the smile I thought I had lost for ever.

I've always held it together pretty well so when I fell apart three months after having my second child it was a shock. I had terrible postnatal depression. I felt like the world's worst, most incompetent and inadequate mother. Getting through the day felt like climbing a mountain and sometimes I didn't even have the strength to get out of bed. My sense of self was blown apart and I thought that the person behind my usual defences, if there was one, was not up to the job of bringing up two children. My beautiful daughter Frankie is now 20 months old and lovely Joe is four and it's been a slog, but I feel like I've come through a transformational period. Both children had reflux and as I struggled desperately to soothe Frankie while torturing myself with thoughts of my own inadequacies in those first weeks I couldn't have imagined that in less than two years I would be sitting in the same room with a treatment table calmly giving Reiki to my first client.

Postnatal depression forced me to do many things I have never done before, not least ask for help, and I am grateful to so many people. My husband has been amazing in so many ways, as have friends and family. I grasped at everything and anyone that might help: antidepressants, CBT, psychotherapy, parenting classes, hormone treatment, self-help books, art, yoga, running, meditation. But in doing so, sometimes I only added to my sense of being overwhelmed.

Then, last March, in a half-hearted attempt to regain some semblance of interest or pride in my appearance I got out of my dressing gown and went to the hairdresser. Studiously avoiding my reflection in the mirror, my eye was caught by Geraldine McMahon's leaflet, which offered the prospect of a "secret that ... can help defeat depression" [check] – SOLD, to the lady with the gaunt and petrified face, no appetite and insomnia.

So it was that I found myself lying on a treatment table, wondering how the heck Geraldine was able to put her hands on both my knees and my feet at the same time; there was so much warmth in my knees I had to open my eyes to check that she didn't have four hands or some kind of heat pad. Geraldine uses Reiki in combination with other healing methods. I was hooked and when in a subsequent session she suggested that I could learn it myself, I was inspired.

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I found Mamta Nanda through a Google search and knew as soon as I heard her soothing tones on the phone that I wanted to learn from her. My first treatment from her in January was a profound experience and I felt like I was finally finding my path. Learning Reiki Level I was wonderful. After the initiations I had shivers down my spine every couple of minutes for hours on end, as my body released old patterns. People started to notice a difference, asking whether I had been on holiday or had my hair cut, and I felt empowered, nurturing and far more relaxed.

I started to give Reiki to Joe and Frankie: It has made bedtime much smoother and calmer and they go to sleep quicker. I have been giving treatments to family and friends and set up an oasis room of my own where I am practising publicly. I hope I can help other people in the way numerous lovely healing women have helped me.

Reiki, along with other things, has helped me put my life back together in a more meaningful way. The Reiki principles dovetail with modern CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) and at times I've chanted them mantra-like to fight my demons.

These days, instead of waking up with a feeling of dread I'm hearing the birdsong, seeing the blossom and loving the ground under my feet. I have felt desperately guilty



for the effect of PND on my children and family, but now I'm also strangely grateful for it because it has taught me so much. Instead of trying to be the perfect, immaculate, Supernanny mum, I'm learning to be the real me: yes, there may be chaos, there is definitely mess, we live mostly on pasta and pesto, but now I'm also learning to live in the moment, enjoy my creativity and let the love flow. □

Sally Hunter offers Reiki treatments from her home in Harringay. To contact her call 07958 441 666