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David Bowie arriving for the *Lazarus* premiere in New York last month

even-day NHS", redefining it to mean the provision of emergency care - which is what the health service does already. Now it is necessary for him to concede proposals to abolish the distinction between "normal" and "out-of-hours" working and the route should be resolved. There are certainly more substantial issues he needs to address, such as the merry-go-round revealed last week where directors and managers, having collected substantial redundancy payments (up to £600,000), are then promptly rehired at a generous salary in their post.

ear, hear

The disorienting fluctuation in hearing - one moment clear as a bell, a few hours later deaf as a post - as recently featured in my column, has prompted a similar account from a reader who says her poor hearing markedly improves when bending down, with the Valsalva manoeuvre (pinching the nose and blowing hard). This is, of course, strongly suggestive of glue ear, otherwise known as Chronic Serous Otitis Media, where obstruction to the tiny eustachian tube that carries fluid from the middle ear causes it to accumulate behind the eardrum. With the manoeuvres described, I believe the obstruction, as well as the regular use of a

steroid nasal spray or salt water inhalation.

Meanwhile, another reader advises cutting out dairy foods (implicated in mucous formation) which, she found, so improved her hearing that she was able to dispense with her aids. For all that, the hearing mechanism in those with age-related deafness is apparently prone to "fatigue", which would account for why some find their hearing to be so much better in the morning than later in the day.

Rough medicine

Further to the inadvertent cure of a reader's frozen shoulder during a boisterous rendering of *Auld Lang Syne*, a physiotherapist writes to tell of the experience of one of her patients, who unwisely opted to have a massage when on holiday in Russia. The masseuse, a muscular non-English speaker, hauled her around, vigorously manipulating her shoulder and paying no heed to her piteous requests to desist. The following day, she was very, very sore, but a fortnight later, her frozen shoulder was frozen no more.

Email medical questions confidentially to Dr James Le Fanu at drjames@telegraph.co.uk. Answers will be published on the Telegraph website every Friday, at telegraph.co.uk/health

MIND HEALING

How to beat Blue Monday



Linda Blair

Today is Blue Monday, which is supposedly the most depressing day of the year.

It may be useful to know that the concept of Blue Monday was in fact created in 2005 by a British holiday company. The idea was derived not from the results of any in-depth research, but instead by using a calculation involving such factors as current weather conditions and debt levels. While it had no basis in science, the idea caught on, and now many of us have come to dread it.

However, you could enjoy

'If you smile, you'll feel good and help others feel better too'

it - in different ways perhaps, but just as much as you would enjoy a warm summer's day. How can that be possible?

First, because you're in control here. You can choose either to believe that today will be grim and depressing - and that's what you'll look out for, so that's what you'll find - or you can choose to believe that it will be a nice day, in which case you'll be more likely to notice the high points. And although I could offer some



psychological research to back up what I am saying, there's no need. This truth - which is, by the way, at the core of most psychological therapies - was first given to us not by a psychologist but by a playwright and poet.

In Act 2 of *Hamlet*, the Prince is talking to his two friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, complaining that for him, Denmark has become a prison. They don't see it that way at all and disagree. Hamlet then offers up the cure for his dark mood - although he declines to take it himself - when he replies: "Why, then, 'tis none to you, for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

It really is up to you whether you exist in a prison today, or you enjoy yourself. If you prefer the latter, here are some suggestions that might make things even better:

1 Capitalise on the light

Natural light helps to stabilise serotonin and triggers endorphin, both mood-boosting hormones. See if you can get outside for at least 10 minutes today. You could enhance the positive effects by combining your time outside with my next suggestion.

2 Take aerobic exercise

Any steady movement you enjoy - walking, jogging, swimming, cycling - will also boost endorphins, and leave you feeling calmer and happier. Your efforts may even mean you'll include the next suggestion automatically.

3 Smile

When you smile, you release a cascade of feel-good chemicals in your brain. Your body relaxes, and blood pressure may be lowered. Smiling is contagious, too, so if you smile at others, you'll help them feel better as well.

4 Be grateful

Recent research has shown that when you take time to appreciate what you already have, you'll feel more energetic and optimistic. Make a list of things you're grateful for, and people you're grateful to know.

5 Practise altruism

There's a growing body of research that links altruistic behaviour with improved health and a greater sense of wellbeing. Offer someone a genuine compliment, and/or make a contribution to a charity. Enjoy your day!

Linda Blair is a clinical psychologist. To order her book

Love your joints