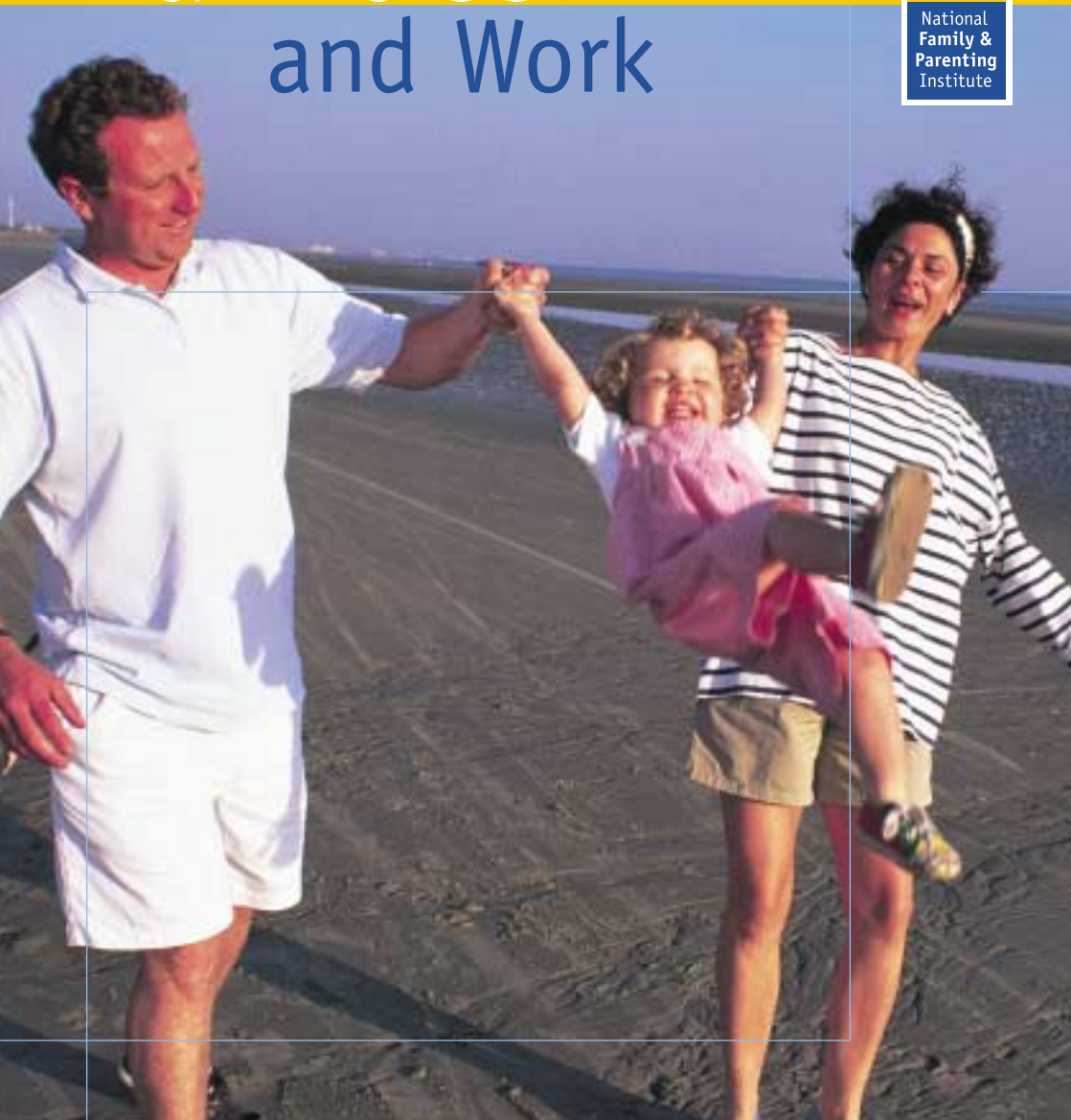


# Families and Work



**A survival kit for parents who work or  
who want to return to work**

## **Published by the National Family and Parenting Institute**

The National Family and Parenting Institute (NFPI) is an independent charity set up to enhance the value and quality of family life. We are working to support parents in bringing up their children, to promote the well-being of families and to make society more family-friendly.

*All details were checked at time of printing, but contacts can change. Please visit the NFPI website at [www.e-parents.org](http://www.e-parents.org) for up-to-date addresses, phone numbers, website and e-mail contacts.*

*Written by Anne Page*

*Research by Tessa Hall*

*With thanks to everyone who helped in the production of this booklet. June 2001*

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# Families and work

*In 21st century Britain the majority of mothers and fathers work.*

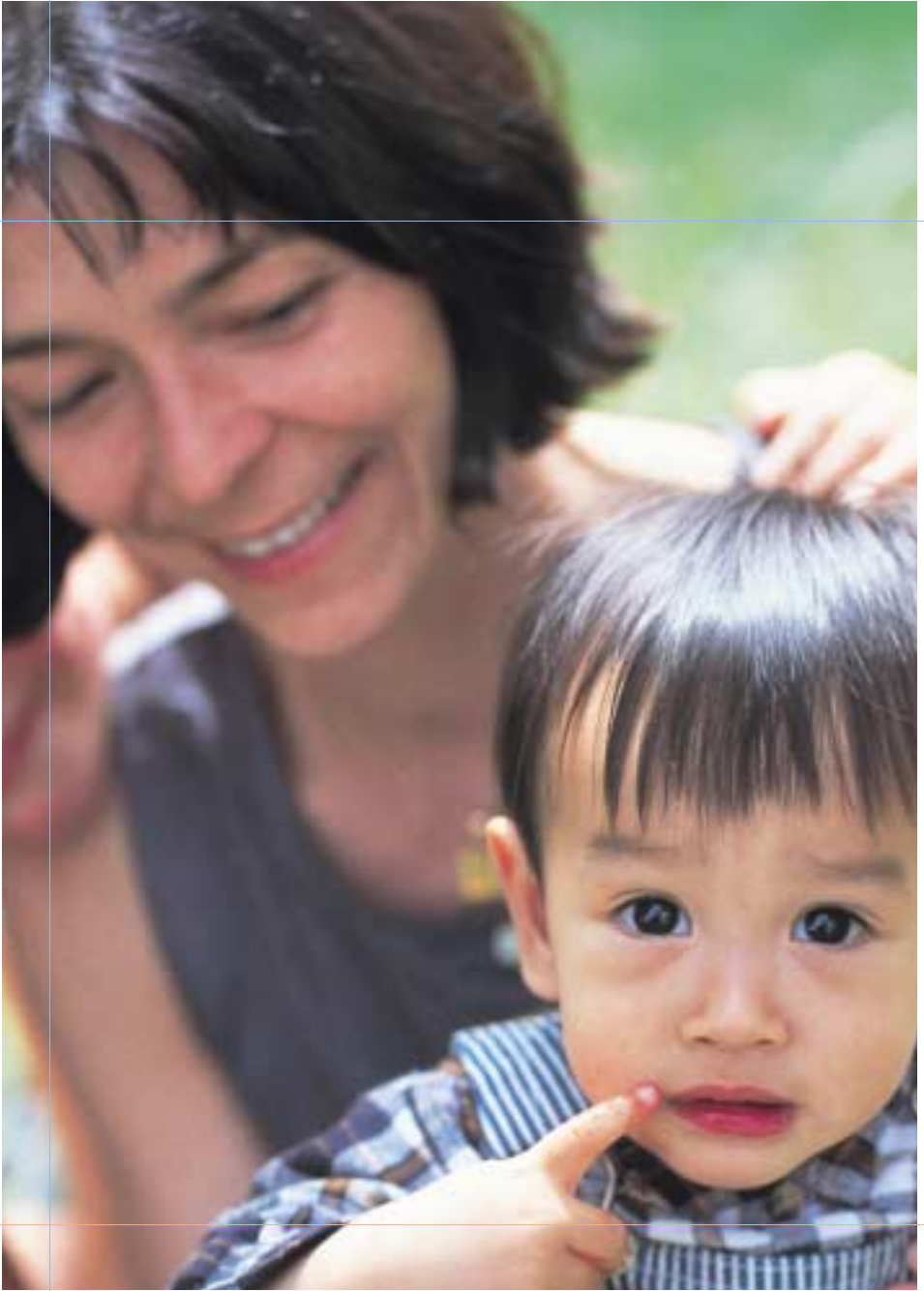
*Most families with school-age children face the questions of how to get the balance right. Naturally parents want to provide the best that is possible – that means both emotional and financial security. It's natural to hope for a happy, healthy and successful life for our children and for ourselves.*

*This guide brings together the best of what parents already know about coping with work and family life and looks at what the experts have to say.*

***Kim is married with two girls age 8 and 11. She is an ex-Post Office counter clerk who works part-time, term-time only, as a midday assistant serving school dinners at her daughters' school.***

“I gave up work after I had my second baby. I would have liked to work part-time, but it wasn't worth it financially as I had no relatives nearby to help out. When my youngest daughter went to school I started working as a midday assistant. I don't like it but it fits in with the children. I'm planning to retrain for admin or office

work next year. My older daughter is more self-sufficient but the younger one is used to me being there. My children appreciate me going to sports day and concerts – one thing I can give them is my time. Going back to work is for me as well – I want something that will get my brain ticking over.”



# Facts and figures about working families

- 65% of mothers work.
- 54.4% of mothers with children under five work.
- 20% of women with school-age children work full-time.
- Four out of five mothers work part-time through choice.
- In 1997 two out of every three mothers with children under five were working part-time.

*Global statistics show that the majority of mothers work. The International Labour Organisation predicts that in just over 10 years 80% of all women in western countries, including the UK, will combine employment with being a parent. However, mothers are much more likely than fathers to have flexible working patterns, either flexi-time or part-time working, including term-time only hours.*

## ***Kirstie is an NHS Manager with one daughter aged 6.***

“I work full-time – 9.30 am to 5.30 pm – and I am a single parent.

I took 18 weeks maternity leave when my daughter was born. I would have preferred to take less before and more afterwards – I went back to work 12 weeks after the birth. I couldn’t afford to take any longer – as I didn’t have any choice it was an easier decision! I hope there is more

flexibility for pregnant women now.

My daughter has mixed feelings about my job. She is proud and interested in my work. She has been into my office and came to a meeting with me once. She likes to meet my colleagues. She is also cross that she has to go to the after school club everyday. Although she enjoys it she is not always in the mood.”

# Who looks after the children?



*"It would have been easier to carry on working with help from relatives or reducing my hours. School holiday schemes would help when I do go back to work full-time. It seems a shame that mothers especially end up doing a job just for the money and to fit in with school hours."*  
**Kim, two children**

- Nearly half of all parents of pre-school children use daycare in term-time.
- Nearly one in five pre-school children are looked after by relatives.
- Nearly one in four pre-school children attend nurseries, playgroup or parent and toddler groups.
- 11% of pre-school children are cared for by a registered childminder, a friend or a neighbour.
- Nearly a third of all children aged four-13 use after school clubs.
- The National Childcare Strategy was launched in May 1998 in the UK and aims to provide childcare places for children up to 14 years (or 16 years for children with special needs) in every area by 2002, including in 20,000 kids' clubs after school and during the holidays.

# When is the best time to go back to work after having a baby?

*Very young babies learn to recognise a few people early on in their lives. One of those people may be a grandparent or a carer. But for many families, the first few months of a baby's life are a chance for parents to get to know their child. When the time comes for someone else to take care of a baby while the parents return to work, it is a big change from a baby's point of view. Unfamiliar people and places can be frightening for a very young child at first. Yet the way a parent leaves a child, and how a good carer handles the situation, can make all the difference to making the changeover as good as it can be for everyone.*

*"I would have liked more maternity leave. I would have liked a buddy – a woman with the experience of returning from maternity leave herself. I would have liked a conversation with a boss who said 'Welcome back – we value you and want to support you returning to work...'"*  
*Kirstie, one daughter*

## What do the experts say?

Some parents are sceptical about expert opinion or simply too busy to keep up-to-date with the latest news reports; but the results of research can have long-term knock-on effects for parents. For example, they can affect the numbers of childcare places available. Research can also give lots of clues about what works best for children and families – including choosing childcare and helping your child to thrive.

- Expert studies can give parents more information but can't provide black and white answers – every child is different.

- The relationship between a mother

and child does not always depend on whether a mother works.

- There are many other influences on a child's development such as how much a family earns; where a family lives; a child's own personality and adaptability; how many relatives or good friends live nearby; whether parents use positive discipline – such as praise, affection and hugs; whether parents can manage to resolve their differences amicably.
- Good childcare can give children wider social and educational experiences.
- Older children do not have strong opinions about whether their mothers should work or not, but they do want their parents to leave work behind when they are at home.

*If you would like to know more about research into families and work, visit the NFPI website at [www.nfpi.org](http://www.nfpi.org)*

## Child development

- Researchers have discovered that even newborn babies recognise familiar sounds and smells, especially their mother's voice and sometimes their father's too.
- By the age of three months babies can recognise some people by their faces and voices.
- By the age of six months babies may cry in the company of strangers, but smile at familiar faces and voices.
- By the age of nine months babies become unsettled when familiar people go out of sight.
- By their first birthday babies are shy of new people who want to come too close too quickly, but happy to stay with someone they know well.



The closer the bond between parent and baby, the better equipped a child will be to negotiate the challenges of growing up. Experts agree that a secure bond, or attachment, begins to form in the first few months of a baby's life, but there is no single explanation about what exactly helps or how long it takes. Studies also show that babies are different. A baby that is very demanding of time and attention from adults and carers may not adapt to change as readily as a more easygoing baby.

*“Decisions about going back to work depend on people’s individual situation – finances, work contract, personal beliefs. Choosing childcare and using it is initially very daunting. More information in health centres would help. Using my childcare centre (a local nursery) while working three mornings a week as a supply teacher has been one of my better decisions. It’s made my son and me both happier and more independent.”*

**Leigh, one child**

# What can busy parents do?

*All families will go through many changes – when children start nursery, go to school, change to secondary school and become teenagers. All the excitement that new opportunities bring goes together with the upheaval of change and sometimes the sadness of leaving the past behind. Some families will have to cope with the unexpected – job changes, divorce or accidents. These tips are intended as handy reminders for your family growing up.*

- Trust your own instincts about what is right for you and for your children – there is no one perfect way to be a parent, only what works for each family.
- Be realistic.
- Accept that over time things will change and what is right for you when your baby is six months old will not necessarily be right when your child is six years old and certainly not when they reach 16.
- Share your responsibilities with others and only do what needs doing now. The rest can wait. Remember that happy parents can make for happy children.
- Learn to say no – what suits you and your family may not fit in with other people and you can suggest alternatives.
- Keep talking even when the going gets tough.
- Remember that most working parents will be facing the same dilemmas as you.

## Getting organised for work

- Be organised when you are working.
- Put out everything you will need for the morning the night before.
- Get up half an hour earlier and leave plenty of time for saying goodbye.
- Share the work.
- Give your children the chance to do as much as they can for themselves.
- If you have a long journey home at the end of the day with your child, try to find ways to unwind on the way – snacks, drinks, stories, just chatting – whatever suits your child.
- When you have time off together, relax and enjoy it.

*Marion is married with two small children age 2 and 4 and three older children aged 25, 20 and 16. She is a relief support worker in sheltered accommodation.*

“I work weekends and nights providing emergency cover. I put in between 70 and 170 hours a month. My husband looks after the children. I was a sewing machinist before I had children. I went

back to college and then became a support worker. I enjoy my job, but I work more out of financial necessity at the moment. The children do cry when I leave. I talk to my four-year-old and explain that the money I earn will buy him a new bike, but I worry sometimes that I’m buying toys to compensate. I appreciate it when managers can be flexible. Once I took the baby along to work with a bucket of toys.”

## **Leaving your child in someone else’s care**

- Take as much time as you can after your baby is born. This is a special time and you may be quite tired and emotional for a while. And remember that it is quite normal for you and your child to miss each other when you go back to work.
- The best care comes from a few people who are sensitive to a child’s needs and show a genuine interest as they grow up.

- When you first leave your child in someone else’s care it can help to start with a few short sessions when you stay until your child feels comfortable.
- Be firm when you leave and always say goodbye – this will reassure your child that everything is fine. Try to set aside your own worries, however hard it may be.
- Stick to a predictable routine so that your child knows what to expect, including special ways of saying

goodbye that your child can join in with, for example always hug or use a special goodbye rhyme.

- Talk to your child about leaving and coming back later. Even though younger children can't understand what you say, they can pick up your mood. If you are calm and relaxed, your child is more likely to follow your example.
- Take along:
  - a familiar, favourite toy
  - a special cup and bowl
  - a special teddy bear or
  - a comfort blanket.
- Give the carer information about routine, your child's likes and dislikes, medical information and emergency numbers. If possible, leave time to exchange information each day about how your child is getting on. Phone during the day or turn up unexpectedly occasionally if you need to reassure yourself that things are OK.
- It can help your child if other children you already know go to the same childminder or nursery.

- If you are concerned about anything, talk to the carer. If things don't improve, think about changing your childcare. By the same token, if your child is happy, remember to let the carer know that her efforts are appreciated.

### **Keeping in touch with older children**

- If you have teenagers, keep in touch by using mobile phones.
- Always tell your children where you will be and how you can be contacted.

### **Making time for the children**

- Don't answer the phone for an hour in the evenings so that you have time to unwind or talk over the day.
- Spend time with your children just doing whatever the children want to do.
- Be a 'positive parent' – give your children lots of praise, be consistent, be firm about what is and is not allowed.

## *Pat is a freelance journalist with two children aged 15 and 17*

“My children take my work for granted. They are really very considerate when I occasionally say I can’t give them a lift. My husband tried as much as possible to work shifts that would enable him to be at home with the children and to help me. I would have liked to talk to more working mothers – I was desperate to share information and receive reassurance that I was not neglecting my children when I returned to work. But it’s also true to say that no one had prepared me for the emotional roller-coaster that becoming a mother entailed. I was absolutely shredded when I returned to full-time employment. I missed the baby terribly – I would follow mothers with prams around Fleet Street at lunchtime just to get a “fix” of a baby! I also missed my older daughter’s first steps – I still haven’t forgiven myself. The nanny told me about it when I returned home in the evening.”

## Coming soon

- *A recent report from the Childcare Commission urged the Government to address the realities of daily life for the majority of working parents in the UK by considering what kinds of childcare and employment practices would best help parents. They propose an increase in financial support for all parents; a toddler tax credit up to three years; and an increase in child benefit for younger children. The Commission also wants to see more public funding for childcare.*
- *The Government has set up a review body to look at parents and work and to find ways of helping parents combine work and family life more easily.*
- *Parents surveyed by the National Family and Parenting Institute say that they want more information about what works best and that family and friends are the first port of call if they are facing difficulties.*

# Useful information

## [www.e-parents.org](http://www.e-parents.org)

*National Family and Parenting Institute website for parents, with agony aunt advice section and information about parental leave.*

**Parents Together** is a new project set up by the BBC with One Plus One and the National Family and Parenting Institute.

*A booklet is available from the National Family and Parenting Institute (send an A4 sae for 81p). Parents Together encourages families to get together for mutual support.*

## [www.nfpi.org](http://www.nfpi.org)

*NFPI website with information about the latest research, projects, conferences and seminars.*

**Parenting Teenagers: a survival guide for mums and dads** is a leaflet available from Parentline Plus on their free helpline: 0808 800 2222, or can be downloaded from their website at

[www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)

**Raising Happy Children: What Every Child Needs Their Parents To Know – from 0-7 years**

*Jan Parker and Jan Stimpson, Hodder & Stoughton, £9.99. From supermarkets, superstores and good bookshops.*

# Useful organisations

## Parents at Work

*5th Floor, 45 Beech Street,*

*London EC2Y 8AD*

**Helpline** 020 7628 2128

*Practical information on childcare options and ways of combining work with home life.*

## National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux

*Myddleton House,*

*115-123 Pentonville Road,*

*London N1 9LZ*

**Tel** 020 7833 2181

**[www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)**

*Citizens' Advice Bureaux website with information about tax credits, benefits, maternity and paternity leave and the law. Look in the phone book or visit your library for where to find your local Bureau.*

## National Council for One Parent Families

*255 Kentish Town Road*

*London NW5 2LX*

**Tel** 020 7428 5400

*Information and helpline for single parents, including advice about working, returning to work, training and childcare.*

**[www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk](http://www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk)**

*Includes helpdesk section with information and advice for single parents about work and childcare.*

## Gingerbread

*7 Sovereign Court,*

*Sovereign Close,*

*London E1W 3HW*

**Free helpline** 0800 018 4318 and for details of local single parent support groups.

**[www.gingerbread.org.uk](http://www.gingerbread.org.uk)**

*Includes a back to work discussion group for single parents.*

# Choosing childcare

*Choosing the right kind of affordable care that will be best for your child and fits in with your working hours is a big decision. Naturally all parents want to make sure that they do the best they can. In the end it is an individual decision, but these organisations can help with information and advice about what's available and the best solutions to common dilemmas.*

[www.childcarelink.gov.uk](http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk)

*Information service on local childcare facilities around the country.*

## The Daycare Trust

*21 St George's Road,  
London SE1 6ES*

**Tel** 020 7840 3350

[www.daycaretrust.org.uk](http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk)

*Free advice to all parents on childcare issues; promotes affordable childcare for all.*

## Kids' Clubs Network

*Bellerive House,  
3 Muirfield Crescent,  
London E14 9SZ*

**Tel** 020 7512 2100 for information line about after school clubs for age five upwards.

[www.kidsclubs.co.uk](http://www.kidsclubs.co.uk)

## National Childminding Association

*8 Masons Hill,  
Bromley,*

*Kent BR2 9EY*

**Tel** 0800 169 4486

[www.ncma.org.uk](http://www.ncma.org.uk)

*Free information line for parents, registered childminders and local authority workers.*

## British Association for Early Childhood Education

*136 Cavell Street,  
London E1 2JA*

**Tel** 020 7539 5400

[www.early-education.org.uk/parents.htm](http://www.early-education.org.uk/parents.htm)

*Information about early years for parents, including childcare choices.*

## The Pre-School Learning Alliance

*69 Kings Cross Road,  
London WC1X 9LL*

**Tel** 020 7833 0991

[www.pre-school.org.uk](http://www.pre-school.org.uk)

*Information about playgroups and pre-school learning.*

# Financial help for families

*Recent changes in benefits and tax credits mean that more families can get financial help. Flat-rate maternity pay has almost doubled and for the first time in the UK, fathers will be able to take two weeks' paternity leave.*

## **Maternity pay**

By 2003 all women taking statutory maternity leave will receive a flat-rate payment of £100 a week for 26 weeks. Some women will continue to receive additional payments from their employer.

## **Paternity pay**

From 2003 all working fathers will have an entitlement to two weeks' paid paternity leave at £100 a week.

## **Children's tax credit**

Working parents can claim the new child tax credit from 2001 by filling in a form from their tax office. The credit can be claimed by one parent or shared between both parents, but the higher earning parent must fill in the claim form. Phone your local tax office to request a claim form.

## **Working families tax credit**

Paid to parents in work according to income and number of children in a family; includes a tax credit for up to 70% of childcare costs. Application packs are available from your local Job Centre, social security office or Inland Revenue Enquiry Centre. Phone the tax credit help line on 0845 609 5000 for individual advice and to request an application pack.

## Where to go for information and help

For individual advice about whether you are receiving the right tax credits and other benefits, make an appointment to see an adviser at your local Citizens Advice Bureau or visit [www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)

Child Benefit Helpline 08701 555 501

Debt line 0808 808 4000

Maternity Alliance 020 7588 8582  
information line and up-to-date details  
about maternity and paternity leave.



The parents and work survival kit is a handy, practical guide for busy parents. It brings together the best of what many parents already know about coping – with work, with choosing childcare, with other relationships, with taking time out – and looks at the place of expert opinion. It includes a handy factfile with useful phone numbers and websites for you to keep.

**MARKS &  
SPENCER**

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*For more information or to request copies of this booklet, please contact:*

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