

Top Tips for Life

Kate Reardon

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Extract

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TOP TIPS

FOR GIRLS

KATE REARDON

headline

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1

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Contents

Introduction	1
Clothes	5
Accessories	10
Shoes	14
Cooking	18
Gardening	28
Home	33
Cars	52
Health and Fitness	56
Diets	65
Beauty	69
Makeup	84
Nails	89
Dating	93
Relationships	98
Weddings	108
Parenting	112

For Oldies	133
At Work	138
Travel	146
Christmas	152
Present Giving	156
Pets	159
Eco Tips	164
Finances	168
Life	172
With Thanks to . . .	187
Index	189
Notes	198

Introduction

When my brother and I were little and complained of a sore throat my mother would make us sleep wearing her infamous lard and nutmeg plaster around our necks. It was a piece of cotton (usually ripped from an old T-shirt) three to four inches wide, spread with lard and sprinkled with ground nutmeg. Yes, it was disgusting and we fought its application tooth and claw, but more annoyingly it actually worked. She still maintains that it's a Victorian remedy, passed to her from her mother and used as far back as her grandmother's own childhood in 1870.

This is what *Top Tips for Girls* is all about – not necessarily torture of small children with spices and animal fats, but simply about collecting all those little tips and tricks which we either work out for ourselves or which have been passed down the generations.

Due to pressure of work, parenthood or simple geography many women feel isolated, and so, when disaster big or small strikes, we have to reinvent the wheel and figure everything out for ourselves afresh. In the old days we inherited our grandmother's housewifery notes covering everything from furniture polish to beauty tips, complete with additions and corrections from our mothers and aunts. Nowadays, instead of turning to these family-written encyclopaedias, we seek guidance from chic and fabulous lifestyle gurus who can't remember the last time they did their own laundry.

So to create a compendium of real women's hard-won wisdom I started the website toptipsforgirls.com. Covering every conceivable aspect of modern life, the website is written by the women who visit it; none claim to be experts, but some may share the best way to stop a toddler's tantrum and others may have discovered the all-time greatest exfoliation method. *Top Tips for Girls* is about

the sisterhood; it has been created by women all over the world from Honolulu to Beijing – women who may have little in common other than having access to a computer and knowing what it's like to battle unruly hair. They have all been generous enough to share what works for them and for that I thank them wholeheartedly.

A woman's tips can be a window into her personality. There are some from whom the question, How to get revenge? elicits the wholesome advice to live well and be happy. Others prefer taping raw fish under his car seat. When I was starting the website I asked my mother for any more top tips she had, specifically on the subject of parenthood. She replied with this corker, 'How to get your teenager to communicate: Talk to your teenagers while you're apparently absorbed in something else (cooking, ironing, sewing, driving etc). You'll get more information without eye contact.' I merrily typed it into the site and then it dawned on me – virtually every single important conversation I had had with my mother up to the age of about twenty-five was to the back of her head.

This book is a compilation of the best tips so far submitted to the website. They run from the straightforwardly practical, such as How to remove fake tan streaks, to the more poignant, such as How to cope with bereavement. Some may seem pretty weird, but worth a try – who knew that you could iron your clothes using hair straighteners? As in life, sometimes there are multiple solutions for one problem, such as: How to get over him and How to be happy.

As one wise tipster said, 'We're here for a good time, not for a long time.' So don't learn everything the hard way, listen to the women who have been there, done that and washed the stained T-shirt.

Here are my all-time favourite top ten tips. Some I owe to wonderful friends, my mother, grandmother or even great-grandmother, while others I worked out for myself by virtue of being on a date and having food stuck in my teeth.

How to get food out of your teeth when you're nowhere near a toothbrush

This is the **SOLE** benefit of being a smoker . . . you can use the cellophane from a packet of cigarettes as emergency dental floss.

How to pull clothes over your head without ruining your makeup

If you need to pull clothes over your head and you've already done your makeup, put a large old pair of knickers on your head so that they cover your face. They will protect your clothes and your makeup.

How to get to sleep AND be happy

I was recently taught the Horizontal Rule: when you are horizontal you are not allowed to think about anything that requires a solution. This is because, in the middle of the night, your left-side, problem-solving brain is fast asleep and your right-side, drama queen brain is wide awake. Instead, the only thing you are allowed to do is to count your blessings or think of five things you are grateful for that day. If you are still awake you have to think of five things you were grateful for yesterday, and the day before and the day before and so on. Not only does this actually get me to sleep, it makes me a happier, nicer person.

How to stop choking

If you're choking (and there is no obstruction that would require the Heimlich manoeuvre) the quickest way to regain your composure is to raise your arms above your head. It does something to your chest, lungs or diaphragm – whatever, it works.

How to know when you have too many clothes

I have a certain number of 'nice' hangers. When I start having to use those wire ones from the dry cleaners I know it's time for a closet clear-out.

How to make an emergency fluff remover

Wind Sellotape, sticky side out, around your hand a few times and you have an instant fluff/pet hair remover.

How to stop losing your jewellery

If you take your jewellery off to wash your hands in a public bathroom, put it in your mouth. You'll never forget it's there or leave a precious ring in a service-station toilet again.

How to prevent blisters

If you're wearing new shoes without tights, rub your feet with Vaseline. No rubbing = no blisters. You can also use natural lip salve if your shoes start rubbing during the day.

How to measure things to share

The golden rule of sharing between two children is: one cuts, the other chooses.

How to be a popular godparent

Send your godchildren postcards whenever you go away on holiday or business. When you're little it means a lot to get your own mail.

The tips in this book are the opinions of people who have contributed to the website; I haven't rigorously tested all of them, they simply sounded as if they made good sense. So if you make holes in your sweaters, turn your eyebrows green or your family disowns you because you followed any of the tips in this book, then it's not my fault. (And if you chose to smear yourself with lard and nutmeg, my mother would probably like to hear from you.)

Clothes

or

I'm a chic and fabulous woman. And then I wake up

How to decide if you should buy it

The best advice my grandmother gave to me was: 'Just because they make it in your size does not mean you should wear it.' When you're in the changing room, look hard at yourself in the mirror and say those words . . . you'll never buy a mistake again.

vancouvergirl

Only buy clothes that make you want to do a small dance in the changing room.

benjizoot

I ask myself the question – do I look better/nicer in the item than in what I was wearing when I went into the changing room. If it's a yes, then I'll probably buy it. If it's a relief to take it off and get back into my old clothes, then it's a no!

jeyacalder

How to straighten out a collar or edge of clothing without getting the iron out

Use hair straighteners! Not sure if it will damage some fabrics but on cotton tops and stuff this works well.

janine

How to fix a loose thread on a sweater

To put a loose thread (or a pulled line) on a fine knitted sweater/cardigan back into its place, get a needle and push the thread through to the other side (i.e. the inside) and paint it lightly with clear nail varnish. This stops it from coming back out again and is invisible from the outside.

ariel1004

How to stop a ladder in your tights

Liquid glue is a good solution if you don't have any transparent nail varnish with you. You put just a little on both edges and by the inside part, then let the glue/varnish dry and that ladder will not go anywhere.

Xandri

How to unstick a zipper

If your zipper sticks, then rub a lead pencil on either side and it should run smoothly again.

MillieFox

Use a plain white bar of soap. Rub it on the zipper and it will wax it, making it run smoothly.

femme

How to repair or stop a zipper from splitting

I do a lot of dressmaking and find that the only safe way is to replace the zip. However, if it is a lightweight zip and has come apart near the base, you can try stitching over the teeth, as tightly as possible, with stitches very close together to hold it in place.

Finlandia

If the zip has started to part at the bottom, pin a safety-pin across it from the inside, just above the split. Only a tiny bar of metal will show on the outside and it will take the strain, thus stopping the zip from opening further, and also stopping the slider running off the bottom of the zip when you open it.

SallySprogs

How to make an emergency fluff remover

Put on rubber gloves and 'stroke' garment. Hairs and fluff removed.

SOOZ

How to fix a hem in an emergency

If the hem of your skirt or trousers comes undone, pretty much every office and restaurant in the world has a stapler you can borrow in an emergency. If you're wearing tights make sure the prongy bits face outwards.

Trula

How to avoid four butt cheeks

Wear proper sized, proper-fitted knickers. There's no point wearing a micro string thong if you have a lovely sexy curvy but macro-sized ass.

Slothie

How to always look pulled together

Always wear lipstick! The long-lasting ones with glossy topcoat come in neutral colours, and they don't come off every time you take a drink or kiss someone. My mum always told me that I shouldn't leave the house without lipstick, because I look dead without it . . . it took me too long to realise that she was right!

FrancesHouseman

Take a few minutes before bed to set out your outfit and accessories for the next day. Rushing is the easiest way to ruin your look!

CassandraM

How to sort and put away socks while having FUN

If you have a family and kids you can throw all the clean socks in a pile and have a game of ‘matching’ and the one with the most pairs wins. It’s like the game where you turn over cards and find the matching animals or whatever . . . Every week the socks that don’t have mates will be left, sparking a hunt or raising awareness of the socks that are missing in action. Maybe they will be found somewhere hiding!

babycakes

How to really clear out your wardrobe

Get someone else to help. My sister and/or daughter are great – they have no emotional tie with my clothes and have no hesitation if things are past their sell-by date or look awful (I’m sure you get the picture). I have space in my small wardrobe and the charity shop benefits.

Lynda

Don’t forget to get rid of things that are just plain worn out. It’s hard to get rid of something you’ve worn so much, but I always try to look at the thing objectively and I ask myself, ‘If I saw this at the charity shop for £3, would I buy it?’ If the answer is no, it should go in the rubbish.

EmilyD

I cleared out my wardrobe when I was really angry – which made me ruthless.

ahlh

How to achieve the perfect wardrobe

Organise your wardrobe to reflect your lifestyle – like a pie chart. If the majority of your life is spent at work, then the majority of your clothes should be work clothes. Your weekend and evening clothes should then take the minority of the space – and your spangles should take hardly any room at all! If you have more going-out clothes than work clothes and you only go out once a year – you’re going to look great at work!

carriehelen

Accessories

or

Men have team sports, we have handbags

How to accessorise

A great tip about accessorising is to get dressed as normal, and then (if you're worried that you've over-accessorised) turn your back to the mirror. Turn around quickly and take off the first thing you see.

Justine

I work in fashion and have learnt that the key to accessorising is not to overdo it. Pick one great accessory, such as a statement belt or a work-of-art necklace, and focus your outfit on that point. Never wear dangly earrings with a necklace, and keep rings to a minimum.

Blondie

How to polish handbags

Clear furniture polish is the best polish for handbags.

AnyaHindmarch

How to be organised if you use several handbags

I use several favourite handbags and it is a hassle to keep putting the bare necessities into each one (lip gloss, tweezers, breath freshener, plasters etc). So I keep these in a clear plastic cosmetic bag that fits into all of my favourite handbags. When I change bags, I just grab the clear bag and pop it in the handbag that I will be using that day.

terryleecox

I have a few designer bags that I use at the weekend. I have them stocked with some of the essentials – hairbrush, lip gloss, a stash of mad money – so all I have to do is throw in my wallet and mobile phone. I found that it is really helpful to have a few extra sets of keys, so I can keep them in the extra bags as well.

Masi

How to remove water marks from a leather handbag

(I had a similar problem with my leather couch.) A friend told me to use baby wipes that have aloe in to clean it up and it worked like a charm! Using a soft, damp cloth with a couple of drops of baby oil will also do the trick.

maryzeee

How to check if pearls are real or not

Gently rub/tap the pearl against your teeth. If it feels very smooth it's fake. Real pearls feel slightly gritty.

waxyl086

How to look after real pearls

Apply your perfume, hairspray, creams and makeup etc before putting your pearls on. The harsh chemicals can damage the lustre. The nacre can become dull or marked. Don't put perfume on your neck if you are wearing pearls. Store them in a soft silk, satin or velvet pouch; never store them next to metals that can scratch the pearls. Pearls do love natural body oils, so wear them regularly. Clean them with a soft damp cloth after a few wears.

waxyl086

How to store jewellery

If your jewellery is in a mess and all you can see is a big pile of it, you'll never wear any of it. So store small pieces such as earrings and rings in ice cube trays. These stack easily too.

Judith
