



YOU'VE BEEN JUDGED

If a panel of experts rated the key areas of your life, how do you think you'd score? *MF* sent one typical chap to have his health, stress, fitness, social skills, intelligence and image evaluated – all so he could pass on tips from the top

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When we're being honest with ourselves, most of us have a rough idea of where we're at life-wise. The average MF reader, for example, exercises regularly, eats well and tries to look his best. But we're all guilty of self-deception - whether it's thinking we genuinely have a chance with Kelly Brook, or claiming we don't drink that much while we're legless in the pub for the fourth night in a row.

So what would happen if the typical MF reader sought an objective view from independent experts? To find out, a 34-year-old professional who has a reasonably healthy diet and exercises three times a week (me) asked experts in the key areas of life - stress, intelligence, health, fitness, social skills and image - to judge my aptitude. Each gave a mark out of ten and advised me how I could improve. Some of the results were sobering, some surprising, but all were honest.

Health



It's a long time since I last stood in my boxer shorts while a doctor asked me to cough, but that's one of the 31 tests in BUPA's Key Health Assessment. This evaluation - which anyone can take - aims to give a general picture of health and possible future risks.

I dutifully provide blood and urine samples for a nurse, who also does a body fat reading, takes my blood pressure, gives me an electrocardiogram to check my heart's electrical activity and gets me to blow into a tube to check my lung function.

Then it's time for the physical examination with Jonathan Warren, a doctor at BUPA's Wellness Clinic at Gray's Inn Road, London. Everything seems to be going fine until he identifies the ball of wax in my right ear and the varicose veins in my legs. I'm 34 going on 70. Thankfully my blood test shows I haven't got gout. Yet.

We then talk through my results. I'm just over 1.8m tall and weigh 91.6kg, so - according to the Body Mass Index - I'm overweight. And although my body fat (16.6 per cent) is in the healthy range, Warren still advises me to drop half a stone.

My total cholesterol level - 4.7 millimoles per litre (mmol/l) - is excellent, although I need to raise my high-density lipoprotein (HDL), or good cholesterol, within that to above 25 per cent by

cutting down on saturated fat. My blood tests also suggest that my liver is under strain. Warren advises me to lay off the booze for a few weeks. Being an occasional binge drinker who puts away four or more pints in a session doesn't help. My blood pressure, at 140/90, is at the high end of normal, and he recommends that I have this reviewed by my GP in a few months.

All in all, with a few stresses and strains relating to my lifestyle rather than any major warning signs, and a few spare pounds, the doc gives me a not-too-bad but could-do-better 6.

HEALTH: 6/10

Stress



Stress isn't all bad. At least, that's what I tell myself after meeting Dr Rosemary Anderson, founder of stress management consultancy Anderson Peak Performance. She points out that momentary pressure, such as when deadlines approach, can be helpful. The 'fight or flight' mechanism kicks in, the pulse quickens and we perform better. But long-term - over a period of weeks or months - these changes weaken your cardiovascular system. They increase your heart rate and cause your arteries to narrow, which blocks the flow of blood to your heart.

Stress triggers can be external (life events) and internal (your reaction to events). To find out how both apply to me I complete a series of psychology-derived attitude and lifestyle tests. I score highly on the life events survey, but work is the spoiler - as a freelance journalist I have to deal with anxiety about deadlines and finances while working on my own for much of the time.

My internal stress triggers are evaluated with a series of online 'personal drivers' tests. These involve responding to various statements (such as 'The way life goes is largely down to fate') on a scale of agreement. The results show that I tend to be a perfectionist, which could be problem when I fail to meet the high standards I set myself - but what's wrong with wanting to be the best? Sorry, there I go again.

Anderson gives me a slightly uptight 6. She recommends that I build up a network of other freelancers who I can share problems with. And for those moments when I feel myself tensing up, she advises breathing deeply (see the box on page 66) or running up and down the stairs. Shame I live in a ground floor flat...

STRESS: 6/10

Intelligence



To see how well my grey matter is working, I meet Roy Childs, managing director of business psychology outfit Team Focus. His company uses psychometric and other psychological assessments to help businesses get the most out of their current workers and employ the right ones in the future. He tells me that 70 per cent of large organisations now use psychometric testing as part of their recruitment process, so having a high IQ clearly isn't just something to boast about at dinner parties.

I complete a series of online psychometric tests. Each lasts 15 minutes and involves multiple-choice questions based on either passages of text (verbal reasoning), graphs or charts (numerical reasoning) and sets of shapes (abstract reasoning).

After a reasonably confident effort with words and numbers, the wheels come off during the abstract test. The aim of this task is to match shapes according to common characteristics within a time limit. By the end, the increasingly complicated shapes are swimming in front of my eyes and I'm reduced to making wild guesses.

I meet Childs a few days later to discuss my scores. He emphasises that IQ is meaningful only in terms of how it compares with the general population (Mensa accepts only the top two per cent). I feel as if he's trying to soften the blow, but then he reveals that in verbal reasoning I have a percentile score of 96.8, in numerical reasoning 94.1 and abstract reasoning 88.5. He gives me a 10. Result!

But just as I'm about to ring Steven Hawking and ask him to move aside while I solve the inner workings of the universe during my lunch break, Childs explains that this simply means I'm in the top ten per cent in the country. Just me and six million others. And that my score wouldn't get me into Mensa.

Still, while IQ is partly hereditary, studies have shown that consistent stimulation of the mind sharpens mental acuity by getting the neural pathways - a series of connections between nerve cells in the brain - firing. Childs says that the stimulation can be anything from learning a language to playing an instrument. Even new physical skills, such as taking up salsa lessons or yoga, can help keep your brain challenged and those all-important pathways working.

INTELLIGENCE: 10/10

Image



'When people look at what you're wearing they immediately judge you,' says Michaela Jednak, the founder of Joy of Colour image consultants, who has worked with corporate clients such as British Airways and UBS. I could be in trouble here.

She explains that good style is about choosing clothes that are right for your body shape and colours that suit your tone. She tells me I have 'clear' colouring - brown hair, pale skin and blue eyes. Colours such as charcoal grey, dark brown, white and icy blues work best. I should avoid muddy colours, salmon pinks and peachy hues and - above all - 'yellowy reds'.

To prove it, she sits me in front of a full-length mirror, covers me in a white shawl and lays colour swatches across my front. A muddy plum colour instantly makes me look as radiant as Pete Doherty after a binge.

Then it's the moment of truth. She whisks away the shawl and quickly appraises how well my own clothes work with my natural colouring. She seems impressed by my grey V-neck, white shirt with blue stripe and dark jeans.

She says that because I've got broad shoulders, I should wear clothes with plenty of detail in this area - deep V-neck jumpers, double-breasted jackets and epaulettes are good. Visually these features will break my shoulders down into smaller sections so they don't look out of proportion to the rest of my body.

In general, Jednak says men should avoid wearing more than one pattern in their suit, shirt and tie because it breaks up the harmony of an outfit. And we should never try to squeeze into jeans we've outgrown: 'There's nothing more appalling than things that are too tight.'

She adds, 'Your choice of clothing was spot on today,' and, to my surprise, gives me a 9. Good job she didn't see the purple spray-on jeans I was planning to wear before common sense prevailed.

IMAGE: 9/10

Fitness



To get an idea of my fitness levels I meet Sion Colenso, who runs a personal training consultancy, SC Active. Colenso takes me through the assessment he does with all new clients. A

questionnaire establishes that, apart from the odd fry-up, I eat reasonably well, I play football most weekends and go to the gym twice a week.

My resting pulse is a decent 68 beats per minute (bpm) - less than 72bpm is desirable. Colenso watches my form for weakness as I do 20 lunges and 30 crunches. Then it's Superstars time - how many press-ups and squat thrusts can I do in a minute? I manage 38 of the former before my arms give up. And while I'm no Paddy Doyle when it comes to squat thrusts, I manage to squeeze out 39. By the end it feels as if I'm about to pop a hip, and my pulse has shot up to 159bpm.

Colenso reckons these results are good and, combined with my overall lifestyle, he gives me a solid 7. 'Your basic fitness is fine,' he explains. 'You could bring down your body fat a little and, with some minor tweaks, get toned in about a month.'

He recommends introducing strength work into my predominantly cardio regime. This doesn't have to involve the gym - a ten-minute home circuit can be just as effective (see the box below). Diet-wise he suggests fruit smoothies and protein-packed fish such as sardines, mackerel and tuna to aid muscle definition.

FITNESS: 7/10

Etiquette



I meet Edward Cyster for a posh lunch. He's the head of business development at the Finishing Academy, a company that runs courses to improve etiquette and social skills. The aim of this assessment is for him to observe my manners during the meal and pick up on any failings.

When we meet, Cyster says my handshake is good and firm without crossing over into a 'powershake' - when you subliminally try to point-score against your shake by ensuring, literally, that you have the upper hand. Apparently Idi Amin was notorious for it. 'But you are slightly hunched,' he says. 'Remember to pull your shoulders back and stand up straight.'

We sit down to lunch and I make a mental note to refrain from licking my knife. But a withering looking from Cyster, as I unconsciously plonk my mobile phone down next to my glass, tells me I've sunk to new depths of rudeness. 'It should be switched off and put into your pocket,' he sniffs.

Fortunately, my table manners are not all bad. Cyster compliments me for eating at a speed comparable to his rather than bolting food and finishing early. But my score suffers again when he notices I'm holding my knife like a pen - the right way is to have your index finger on top with the end of the handle pressed into your palm.

As we finish dessert, Cyster gives some other pointers. 'Keep your suit jacket on while eating at a formal occasion, if you pop to the loo leave your napkin on your seat rather than the table and never scrape your plate when finishing your food.'

He concludes that I'm well-groomed and generally well-mannered, but lacking in some of the more technical points of etiquette. It adds up to an inoffensive mark of 7.

ETIQUETTE: 7/10

How good are you?

Find out instantly (and free of charge) by taking this simple test

- 1 Calculate your BMI (divide your weight in kilograms by your height in meters squared). Is your score...**
- 20-25 (which means you're a normal, healthy weight. The Government says so, so it must be true!)
 - 25-30 (which means you're overweight - but hey, it could be worse)
 - 30+ (which means either you're obese or you're Arnold Schwarzenegger. Either way it's bad news)
- 2 When you get stressed, do you...**
- Take deep breaths?

- Have a bit of a panic attack, then tell yourself off for letting things get on top of you?
 - 100 people?
- 3 What's the square root of 64?**
- 8
 - 32
 - Doesn't even square. Haven't you seen Omen 3D?
- 4 Which of the following do you wear most often?**
- Jeans, shirt, good shoes, smiling face
 - Whatever's vaguely clean

- Sportswear, even when you're smoking in the pub
- 5 How many press-ups can you do in 60 seconds?**
- 50+
 - 20-50
 - Less than 20

- 6 When you've finished dinner do you...**
- Align your knife and fork in a noble, tidy way?
 - Scrape up every scrap, while trying not to look as if you haven't eaten for a week?
 - Lick the plate?

AND THESE SCORES JUST IN...

MOSTLY AS You're pretty close to perfection. Give yourself ten out of ten and, if the etiquette coach isn't looking, a pat on the back.

MOSTLY BS You try hard, but every now and then things go wrong. Are you the editor of Men's Fitness in disguise?

MOSTLY CS You're a disaster. It's lucky you're reading this, really.

Must do better

Here's a few tips - from the experts who tested our man - to improve your life



HEALTH

Dr Jonathan Warren from BUPA's Wellness Clinic, Gray's Inn Road, London. 'Prevent your arteries clogging by keeping your cholesterol under control. Eat foods rich in high-density lipoprotein (HDL), such as oats and beans. Limit your intake of saturated fats and cut out junk food and sweets.' For more info call BUPA on 0845 600 3458 or visit bupa.co.uk. A BUPA Key Health Assessment costs £290.



STRESS

Dr Rosemary Anderson, founder of stress management consultancy Anderson Peak Performance. 'If you feel tense, inhale deeply for seven seconds and exhale for 11. This lowers the heart rate and oxygenates the blood, regulating nervous system function and helping you calm down.' For more info call Anderson Peak Performance on 01494 677820 or visit anderson.peakperformance.co.uk.



INTELLIGENCE

Roy Childs, managing director of business psychology outfit Team Focus. 'You can boost your intelligence by developing new skills, such as learning a language or how to play an instrument. Even taking up new physical challenges can get your neural pathways firing.' For more info call Team Focus on 01520 637330 or visit teamfocus.co.uk.



IMAGE

Michaela Jednak, founder of Joy of Colour image consultants. 'When you wear low-slung jeans, combine them with a vest or undershirt to hide your builder's bum. And if you have a short body and long legs, wear baggy trousers - the wide look will give your body the appearance of being in proportion.' For more info call Joy of Colour on 020 7431 6479 or visit joyofcolour.com.



FITNESS

Sion Colenso, director of personal training consultancy SC Active. 'You don't need to go to the gym to improve muscle size and definition. A twice-weekly, ten-minute home circuit involving press-ups, forward and reverse lunges, squat thrusts and crunches - introducing medicine balls or dumb-bells to increase difficulty - can be just as effective.' For more info call SC Active on 077 9868 4474 or visit www.scactive.co.uk.



ETIQUETTE

Edward Cyster, head of business development at etiquette instruction agency the Finishing Academy. 'When you finish your meal, put your knife and fork together pointing to the centre of your plate. Rotate the plate so they don't point at anyone on your table. Being pointed at can make you feel victimised.' For more info call the Finishing Academy on 020 7589 1877 or visit finishingacademy.co.uk.