



# TRAVELLING TO BETTER HEALTH

A health improvement guide written  
by Gypsies and Travellers for  
Gypsies and Travellers



PHOTOGRAPHS

FRONT COVER: Three generations of the James family in Devon.

LEFT: The James family selling flowers in Devon in 1910.

THIS IMAGE: The Small family of Bovey Tracey.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The Broadway family on Epsom Downs.

# 1. The shocking truth!

The Government says that:

- Gypsies and Travellers suffer from poor health and die sooner than most people.
- A lot of us get diabetes and other serious illnesses.
- We lose more children through miscarriages and still births than others.
- We suffer a lot with our nerves, with depression, stress and anxiety.
- We are often afraid to go to the doctor so we leave it too late...

**You can change this – for yourself, your family, and the next generation.**

We made this booklet because we all know family and friends who have been affected by serious illnesses and early death. We didn't know that it was different for Gorja people; we thought everyone had ill health like us. When we heard the statistics from the Department of Health we decided to do something to help ourselves and our own people.

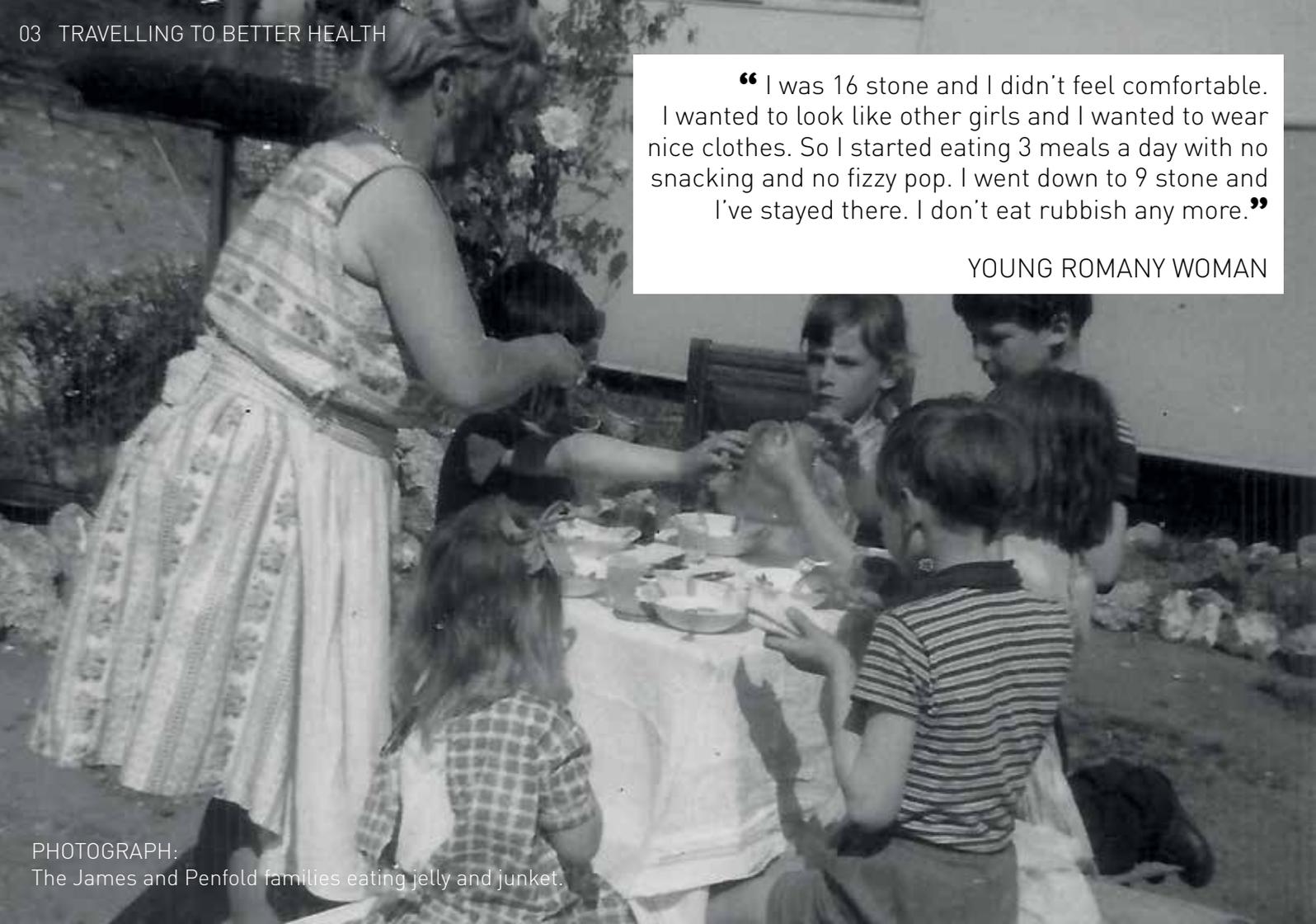
This booklet gives a few guidelines on some really important health issues. We can use it to improve our health by making some small changes to our diet and lifestyle. It's not too difficult, but it could make a real difference to our health and help us beat illness, live longer and be there for our children and grandchildren.

Anne Crocker, Elizabeth Isaacs, Helen Halkes, Helen Bellamy, Linda Broadway and Kristal Birch.



“ I was 16 stone and I didn't feel comfortable. I wanted to look like other girls and I wanted to wear nice clothes. So I started eating 3 meals a day with no snacking and no fizzy pop. I went down to 9 stone and I've stayed there. I don't eat rubbish any more.”

YOUNG ROMANY WOMAN



PHOTOGRAPH:  
The James and Penfold families eating jelly and junket.

## 2. What you eat matters

### GUIDELINES

- Healthy eating is good for your mind and body.
- Breakfast is the most important meal of the day – make it a healthy one!
- Aim for at least 5 handfuls of different fruit and veg every day frozen, fresh or tinned are all ok. BUT, for tinned fruit, avoid the ones in syrup.
- Do drink lots of water!
- Don't pile up your plate! Eat slowly and chew every mouthful and you will feel full more quickly.
- LIMIT Ready meals, takeaways, cakes, chocolate and biscuits. They often contain unneeded fat, salt or sugar.
- Only eat at mealtimes – or occasionally snack on healthy vegetable sticks, fruit, unsalted nuts or seeds.
- Set a good example for your kids. If they see you eating and drinking healthily, they will too.

### WARNING!

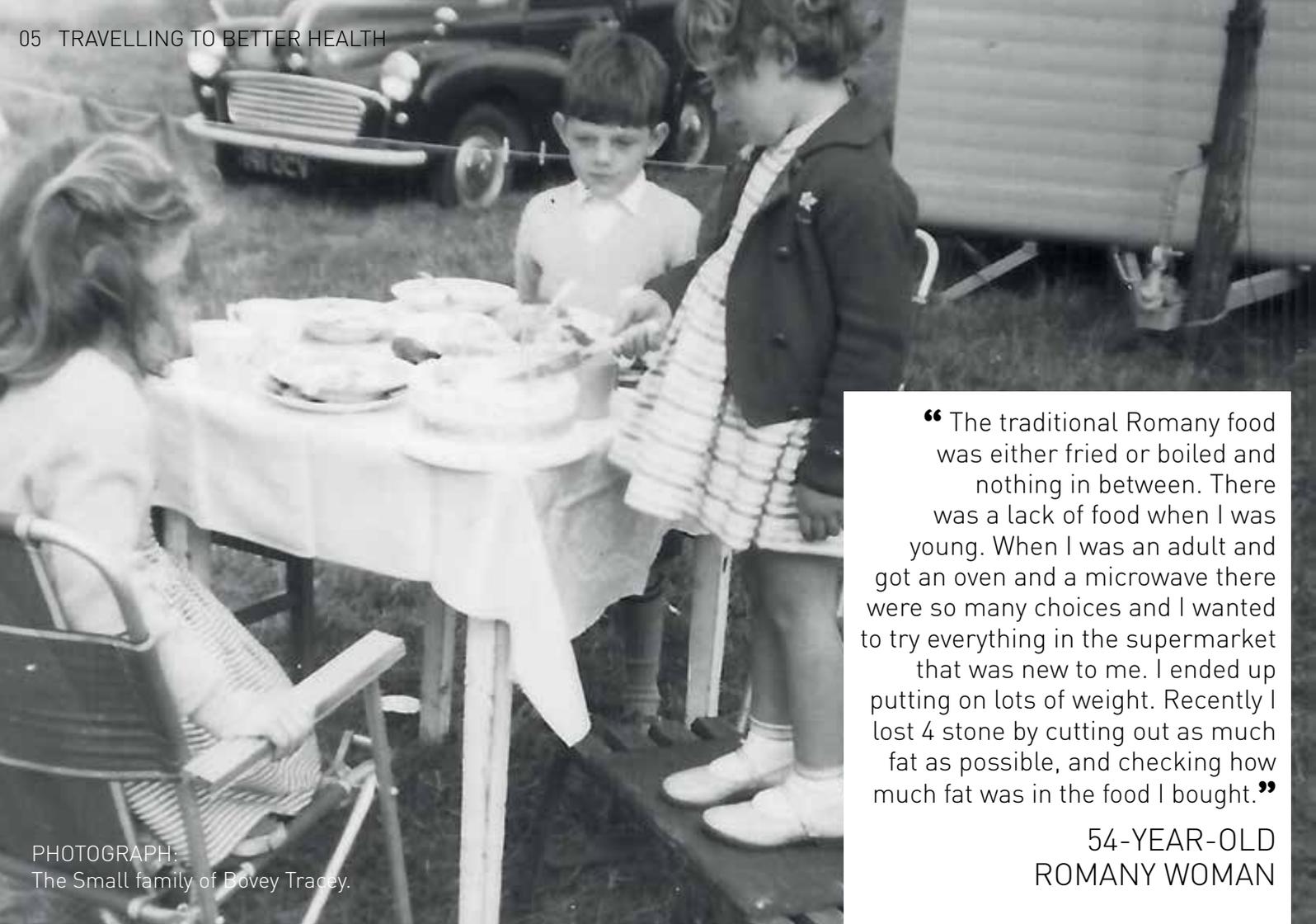
If your pany is dark you might be dehydrated.

Belly fat is dangerous! It could mean you are more than twice as likely to die early from heart disease, high blood pressure, or some cancers.

### HELP & SUPPORT

[www.healthpromotion  
devon.nhs.uk/health-trainers](http://www.healthpromotiondevon.nhs.uk/health-trainers)  
(support in Devon to help you improve your health) or call 01884 836024 to talk to someone.





“The traditional Romany food was either fried or boiled and nothing in between. There was a lack of food when I was young. When I was an adult and got an oven and a microwave there were so many choices and I wanted to try everything in the supermarket that was new to me. I ended up putting on lots of weight. Recently I lost 4 stone by cutting out as much fat as possible, and checking how much fat was in the food I bought.”

54-YEAR-OLD  
ROMANY WOMAN

PHOTOGRAPH:  
The Small family of Bovey Tracey.

## 3. Healthy swaps

Messages about what food is healthy can be confusing and they often change. We are all different and what suits one person might not suit another. BUT, making small changes to your diet could lead to big results and could give your children a healthier start in life.

### WARNING!

Be aware of how much sugar and fat are in what you eat and what your children eat!

### HELP & SUPPORT

[www.nhs.uk/livewell](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell)

(lots of useful information, recipes and ideas about healthy eating)



### GUIDELINES

- Swap full fat milk for semi skimmed.
- Swap sugary drinks for a sugar free squash, but water is best.
- Swap white bread for brown.
- Swap sugary cereals for whole-wheat cereals or oats.
- Swap lots of cooking fat for less fat.
- Swap fried food for steamed, grilled, baked or poached (this means you will be eating less fat).
- Swap fatty meats for chicken or fish (including oily fish like salmon, tuna and sardines and mackerel).
- Swap streaky bacon for back bacon.
- Swap fried chips for oven or microwave chips or try jacket potatoes instead.
- Swap salt for herbs and spices.
- Swap salted crisps for unsalted crisps or try unsalted nuts.

## 4. Alcohol – think before you drink!

Drinking too much alcohol can cause cancer, including cancer of the mouth and throat, breast cancer in women, liver disease, high blood pressure and stroke. Drinking too much alcohol can lead to violent behaviour, accidents, depression and early ageing.

“ I went to the doctor because of my temper. I kept hurting people around me and getting into trouble. My doctor realised I was an alcoholic when he examined me, and he said if I didn't give up drinking I'd be dead in 6 months and I'd lose my wife and kids. So I gave up. The shock made me do it. It's the best thing I ever did. I can't stand the smell of alcohol now. We take alcohol for granted but it can be a man's worst enemy and I'd hate to see anyone else going through what I did.”

ROMANY MAN

### WARNING!

**Drink does not solve problems, it can make them worse.**

### WARNING!

**Drinking alcohol in pregnancy can damage your unborn child.**

### WARNING!

**Binge drinking is bad for your health and should be avoided. Do not save up all your units for the week and drink them all in one go.**

### GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES

**Men and women: no more than 14 units of alcohol a week. That means 5 pints of lager or one and a half bottles of wine. We should be having at least 3 days a week with NO ALCOHOL.**

### HELP & SUPPORT

**It's never too late to ask for help. Drink Wise Age Well (Devon) 0800 304 7034\*. Help and advice for you, or if you are worried about someone else.**

\* Free from land lines and mobiles.

[drinkwiseagewell.org.uk](http://drinkwiseagewell.org.uk) 

[www.nhs.uk/livewell](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell)  
(go to 'Choose Less Booze')

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

## 5. Stop smoking

Smoking can cause cancer, heart disease, strokes, lung disease and more...

Smoking shortens your life, destroys your teeth and gums, and damages your skin.

BUT, giving up or cutting down can really improve your health WITHIN DAYS so it's never too late to stop and there is help available. Think about the money: 20 cigarettes a day = over £3,000 a year. What else could you do with that money?

“ I wanted to give up smoking because I couldn't breathe well and I kept coughing. The Stop Smoking lady gave me patches and I stopped after about 5 weeks. I'm a lot healthier now and I've saved around £32 a week.”

29-YEAR-OLD ROMANY MAN

### WARNING!

**Cigarette smoke contains poison including cyanide – that is what was used in the gas chambers.**

### WARNING!

**Smoke lingers in the air, on your clothes, and in the car – your children will be breathing this in.**

### WARNING!

**Smoking in pregnancy damages your unborn child.**

### E CIGARETTES

While vaping may not be 100% safe, e-cigs seem to be much safer than smoking as the most harmful chemicals aren't there. e-cigarettes are a very popular way to give up. But, using local stop smoking services is the best way to quit – and it's free.

### HELP & SUPPORT

**Talk to someone: you can call the Devon Stop Smoking Service on 01884 836024 or your GP may be able to help.**

[www.nhs.uk/smokefree](http://www.nhs.uk/smokefree)





PHOTOGRAPH:  
The James family on Ideford Common.

## 6. Be more active

Not being active enough could lead to obesity, diabetes, stroke, heart disease and cancer.

BUT, it's easy to be more active. Try:

- going for a walk
- walking to the school and the shops, or parking a bit further away from them
- joining a gym or exercise class – look for free classes or taster sessions and go along with a friend!
- dancing or swimming
- riding a bike
- taking the stairs instead of the lift.

Try 30 minutes of physical activity every day – you will notice the difference. Set yourself a challenge – get a pedometer (which measures

how many steps you take) and see if you can increase the number of steps you take every day.

“ I When I was 16 I was too big to do my landscaping job properly and I couldn't climb trees any more so it was hard to get work. I decided to lose weight. I went running and I joined a gym at the leisure centre. I lost lots of weight and felt much healthier and I could earn my living properly.”

YOUNG ROMANY MAN

### WARNING!

**Your children are at risk if they aren't active. Turn off the TV, turn off the gadgets, and get them outside playing or exercising.**

### DID YOU KNOW?

**Did you know that: cleaning the trailer, washing the windows, washing or vacuuming floors and gardening all count as physical activity?**

### HELP & SUPPORT

[www.nhs.uk/change4life](http://www.nhs.uk/change4life) has lots of good ideas for being more active – for children and adults.

For support in Devon to help you improve your health visit [www.healthpromotiondevon.nhs.uk/health-trainers](http://www.healthpromotiondevon.nhs.uk/health-trainers) or call 01884 836024 to talk to someone.



## 7. Your mental health is important – for you & your family

Gypsies and Travellers often suffer in silence because we feel ashamed of talking about our mental health and we are afraid of being judged – let's change this outdated attitude!

### Feeling bad:

Sad, hopeless, lonely, stressed, anxious, mood swings, fearful, poor sleep, unable to cope, tired, feeling panicky.

### Feeling good:

Positive, confident, energetic, cheerful, sociable, sleeping well.

“ I knew I didn't feel right, my brain was going round like a roundabout with hundreds of thoughts but not making any sense, I convinced myself I had cancer and was dying. I went to the doctor. He asked my symptoms and I said my whole body was on alert and I was fearful. He said I had depression but I still thought I had cancer until he took a blood test and I saw the results were negative. He suggested counselling; I was worried about talking to a stranger but I did go and I did keep going to my doctor as well. It was bad and it took time and rest, but I came out stronger and wiser.”

ROMANY WOMAN

### DID YOU KNOW?

1 in 4 people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year.

If you act quickly it can and does get better; there is lots that can help.

### HELP & SUPPORT

[www.nhs.uk/livewell/mentalhealth](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/mentalhealth)



(go to the mental health section)  
If you are worried about yourself, or people you are close to, this NHS website has a lot of useful information and it can direct you to local services.

[www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org) has useful information and you can look up what local services are available. You can call on 0300 5000 927.\*

\* Free from landlines and mobiles.

## 8. Mental health – keeping healthy

### GUIDELINES

- Avoid too much alcohol and eat healthily.
- Know your limits – don't take on too much.
- If your household tasks are piling up, ask for a helping hand.
- Make time for yourself and do things you enjoy.
- Keep active.
- Don't be afraid to be proud of the good things you've done.
- If you are tired, take a break!
- Share your problems with people you are close to. Don't be afraid to talk about it!

### WARNING!

If you feel suicidal or you can't cope get medical help urgently.

### HELP & SUPPORT

Help is available through your GP. In an emergency you can contact your GP's out-of-hours service.

Devon's Depression & Anxiety Service offers free one-to-one sessions with a therapist. Your GP can refer you.

You can also refer yourself. Search online for 'Devon's Depression & Anxiety Service'.



## 9. Vaccinations & screening: are you protected?

### Vaccinations

There is a series of vaccinations to protect babies and children which your health visitor or your GP will tell you about. But, did you know...

**Young children:** a nasal spray to protect against flu is available for all 2, 3 and 4 year olds. It is also given to children in years 1 and 2 at primary school.

**Girls of 12-13 years old** can get protection against cervical cancer with the HPV vaccine. Although you have the vaccine when you are young it will protect you later in your life. About 8 women are found to have cervical cancer EVERY DAY in the UK.

**Boys and girls of 13-18 years** can get protection against diphtheria, tetanus and polio with the 3-in-1 teenage booster, and protection against 4 different causes of meningitis and septicaemia with the Men ACWY vaccine.

#### WARNING!

**Some vaccines are offered through schools. If your kids don't go to school check with your GP how to get them!**

**The flu jab:** this is available free every year if you are over 65, if you are pregnant, or if you have certain medical conditions. Ask your GP!

**Men and women over 65** can have a pneumococcal vaccination which protects against pneumococcal infections.

**Men and women over 70:** your GP will offer you a shingles vaccine. Shingles is a very painful skin rash which often affects older people.

## Screening

Screening is a way of finding out if you are at risk of a health problem, and, if you are, then early treatment can be offered and could save your life. Some illnesses and conditions run in families, so giving a family history to your GP is important and sometimes extra screening may be advised.

For pregnant women and babies, check with your midwife, health visitor or GP.

**Women aged 25-64:** cervical screening. This is to reduce the number of women who get cervical cancer, by detecting problems early. Some of us find this subject embarrassing but it can save your life and it's important even if you are not in a relationship.

**Women aged 50-70:** breast screening. This is to detect early signs of breast cancer.

You should also be regularly checking for lumps yourself.

**Men and women aged 60-74:** bowel cancer screening. This is done with a home testing kit which will be sent to you in the post.

**Men aged 65:** AAA screening. This is a quick, easy scan to see if you have a dangerous swelling in the aorta which is a blood

vessel which runs from your heart to your abdomen and then to the rest of your body.

### WARNING!

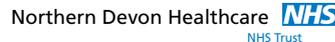
**Don't ignore letters from your GP or the NHS – they could have vital information about your health, about screening, or treatment you need.**

This project was co-ordinated by Plymouth  
& Devon Racial Equality Council.

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We would like to thank Health Promotion Devon  
and Devon County Council for their support.



Incorporating community services in Exeter, East and Mid Devon

