

INSPIRE

Necklace that TEXTS your friends

And other clever devices to keep us safe now we're out at night

THE murder of Sarah Everard last month has left many women more nervous than ever about going out alone after dark — though after lockdown, no one wants to feel trapped at home.

So should you carry a personal attack alarm? Is a colour spray more effective? And could you be prosecuted for carrying a metal pen to use in self-defence?

Ex-policeman Steve Helliwell, who runs a personal protection company called Aldermans, says your first focus should be on prevention.

He recommends sticking with other people whenever possible, and having a 'buddy system', so one member of the group is nominated to stay sober enough to watch out for others. You should also tell friends where you go and who you might meet.

If you are approached by someone and feel unsafe, make as much fuss and noise as you can. 'Scream at the top of your lungs,' says Steve, 'and fight like hell.'

He suggests carrying a personal alarm attached to a keyring or belt. The best way to use an attack alarm is to hold it close to the attacker's face, then drop it by their feet and run to a busy area if you can. To attract attention, shout 'call the police!' or 'I'm being attacked'.

Steve warns that any potential 'weapon' you carry in self-defence needs to have an innocent use. Pepper spray is no longer sold in the UK but you'll find adverts online for reinforced metal 'pens' advertised as being strong enough to break glass if you are trapped in a car. You could still end up in trouble with the police if you use them in self-defence, though Steve says no one could argue with your decision to carry an ordinary (if robust) metal pen.

We asked Steve to rate some personal protection devices...

CHARM ALARM

Invisawear pendant, £110, invisawear.com

A GOLD-plated pendant (see picture above) that you wear on a chain around your neck or on a bracelet, which has a hidden button on the back. Pair it with the Invisawear app (via Bluetooth) and input the names and numbers of five friends/family.

Push it twice and the charm will text these contacts, telling them you need help and giving your GPS location, saying 'if you are unable to contact XX, please send help to their location'.

EXPERT VERDICT: This is discreet, but you need to wear it every time you go out — and always have your phone with you, as it uses the phone's GPS tracker.

A premium plan (an additional



Pendant power: The necklace can send an alert to family

by Louise Atkinson

£20 per month) will link you with a dedicated security responder.

MY VERDICT: This is costly and you can't recharge or replace the battery, so it has a limited life (one to two years). On the plus side, I wouldn't be likely to set it off accidentally. 3/5

KEEP TRACK

Cheetah Personal GPS tracker, £99.99, amazon.co.uk

A KEY fob that's rechargeable, with an SOS button which texts and phones up to three contacts in turn until one answers. A two-way speaker in the device allows you to communicate without using your phone.

The tracker has a SIM card that links to a phone app called LocateIt (it also has a fall detection alert useful for the elderly or infirm) and the option of geofencing, which triggers an alarm if the wearer strays or is taken outside a set area.

EXPERT VERDICT: A belt-and-braces device ideal for group nights out and awayday trips.

MY VERDICT: Expensive but thorough. All options covered. 5/5

MAKE A NOISE

Police Approved Personal Alarm With Torch, £5.24, nrshealthcare.co.uk

A SMALL keyring torch with a 128-decibel alarm when you pull

out the chain. The alarm stops if you plug the chain back in.

EXPERT VERDICT: Inexpensive, small and very loud, with reasonable battery life, but could easily be damaged.

MY VERDICT: What if the chain came out and triggered the alarm? 4/5

STICK TOGETHER

Alphahom Care Go, £39.99, amazon.co.uk

A LIPSTICK-sized device that links to a (free) app on your iPhone, it pushes an SOS alert and GPS location to any number of contacts provided they also download the app.

When you pull the top outwards, it will alert your emergency contacts with real-time GPS tracking — or twist the top to trigger a 'follow me' function which allows them to follow your progress on a map on their phone via GPS.

EXPERT VERDICT: Small and with a good battery life, but it won't work with Android phones.

MY VERDICT: Not likely to be set off accidentally, and suitable for children and the elderly. 4/5

RED ALERT

Farbgel red dye colour spray, £10.15, amazon.co.uk

A MINI-spray can of red dye which, sprayed on an attacker (aim for the face or hands), is hard to wash off, making them easy to identify if caught.

EXPERT VERDICT: Paint can make an attacker think twice but in fact the dye isn't that hard to remove and you're relying on the police to search for the offender before they manage to do so.

MY VERDICT: Wouldn't be enough to make me feel safe. 2/5

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

someone to hack away at her marked her out as a victim.

A victim of the belief that a woman who no longer looks young and beautiful is a woman of no worth. A victim of the idea that ageing is an ugly thing rather than a potentially proud manifestation of having lived a long and productive life. And a victim of the curse of social media and the Photoshopped selfie, which even oldies post these days on their Facebook pages to hoodwink themselves and us.

That's the fury. The fretfulness is to do with the fact that Susan is now 71, a decade older, and has something called atrial fibrillation, which affects the rhythm of her heart and makes undergoing any kind of operation a bigger deal.

The truth is I hoped that, by now, she would have accepted her age and the face that goes with it.

How wrong I was. Her latest excuse is her droopy eyelids, which will now be tightened and lifted.

SOMETIMES I wonder how I've reached my own great age of 69 without any interventions. Not a single filler, other than in my teeth. And the only place I've had Botox is in the sole of my right foot — to treat a movement disorder called dystonia, which affected my ability to walk and was mercifully cured by regular jabs of botulinum toxin.

But my sister, as always when she makes up her mind, is unstoppable. Honestly, I cried when I saw her bruised post-operative face the first time around.

Yet for all my fury and my fretting, I have to own up to something else. While I genuinely worry for her welfare, it is also possible that I'm rather jealous.

Three years my sister's junior, I have always looked younger than her. When we were small, grown-ups were forever telling me how pretty I was, what big eyes I had, and what lovely glossy dark hair.

Could it be that part of the reason why I hate her having all this stuff done is because I'm still that little girl yearning for the competitive advantage over my big sister?

Is it possible that, even more than I hate her going under the knife, I loathe the idea that people are going to start thinking I'm the badly weathered one with a younger-looking older sister?

Since her first surgery, my face, which held up OK until I was in my 50s, has collapsed. My partner Ronny doesn't pretend he hasn't noticed but says that, as we both age, my wrinkles diminish neither his desire nor his love for me. I'm a lucky woman in that respect.

But, some days, I fear my principles are about to collapse in the same way as my face.

I seem to spend half my life pulling at my baggy bits in the bathroom mirror to demonstrate how much better I'd look with tighter skin. And, in moments of full honesty, I wonder whether I might actually have preferred Susan's course of action to my insistence on clinging to the moral high ground.

It certainly gets ever more difficult to become a twerk-refuser.

The feminist author Caitlin Moran

once denounced women who have Botox as 'losers'. Now she has hit her 40s, she has embraced the plumping power of Botox to rid herself of 'facial bunchiness'. I am beginning to feel like a dinosaur.

Every time someone I know fiddles with her face, it makes me more self-conscious about my own. Surely a real act of sisterhood, in both feminist and sibling terms, would be to eschew surgery and grow older gracefully together?

But no. Women such as Moran and my sister are upping the anti-ageing stakes so high, the few of us who remain unstructured resemble the wrinkled remnants of a bygone age. So many of my friends have had tweaks here and there, I am starting to feel like a minority of one. Sad and a bit lonely.

Susan recovers much quicker from this op than she did from her last. Her heart is fine and it is less invasive than the first one. Within two hours, she is sending me frankly frightening selfies, and I have to ask her to stop because they make me feel queasy. 'I'd rather see you in the flesh,' I tell her.

The next day she is home and when I visit, she's not looking too battered. And she is cock-a-hoop.

One month later, I admit that having proper eyelids really does make her look a lot better. But then comes a troubling moment. I catch her prodding her undereye bags and lamenting how her lower face lift has worn off. That's the thing about trying to hold back the years — it's a never-ending battle.

WHY I CHOSE TO GO UNDER THE KNIFE

By Linda's sister Susan Graff, a designer and married mother of three.

'OCCHI bella' ('beautiful eyes'), said the handsome boy who stopped in front of my little sister as we walked along a street in Italy, on holiday. She was ten, I was 13 — and it was then that I realised she was beautiful and that men would always be attracted to her.

Today, at 69, she does have a few baggy bits round the jowls and her neck isn't quite what it used to be. But she still has the eyes.

At 71, my eyes were beginning to resemble those of a St Bernard. They had drooped so dramatically, it had become almost impossible to wear make-up. My eyes used to be my finest feature but, lately, I've been constantly wearing glasses to cover them, even though I don't need to other than for reading.

After about five minutes of deep thinking one morning last November, having had a dispiriting encounter with the bathroom mirror, I made an appointment with a plastic surgeon. All the big decisions in my life are made quickly.

The doctor informed me that it wasn't just the excess skin on my eyelids which needed removing but that, for optimum results, I should have a brow lift as well, as that area was drooping, too. Ten minutes later, I was all signed up.

The problem with ageing and still feeling young and fit is that every time I look in the mirror I get an awful shock. This can't possibly be my face, this is an old person's face!

This is how I felt ten years ago, when I had my first lot of surgery. I



SUSAN BEFORE



BROW LIFT TO BANISH WRINKLES

EYE LIFT FOR DROOPY LIDS

LOWER FACE LIFT FOR SAGGY NECK

...AND AFTER

Women like my sister are upping the anti-ageing stakes so high, the rest of us look like wrinkled remnants

the scars but my hairdresser realised what I was letting myself in for. Like my sister, I had always scoffed at this type of surgery and when visiting my daughter in New York, would pour scorn on the stretched faces of the women walking their poodles up and down Madison Avenue. Now I was about to become one of them.

But I had my facelift. It took a couple of hours, as they cut behind the ear as well as making a small incision under the chin. They tightened the neck muscles and skin and somehow stitched it to keep it out of sight.

My surgeon promised that my husband David would never see

said how well I looked. And, despite what my sister says, the last thing I feel like is a victim.

In fact, I feel empowered.

I've made my own decision about what to do with my own face. I feel no need to justify myself to friends or family. Being a feminist isn't about reading all the tomes my sister educated herself with, it's about making one's own choices. I certainly don't need my husband's permission — I've worked all my life as a fashion designer and I'm financially independent.

That said, I do want him to be happy with my decisions and was pleased he didn't object.

On the day of my brow and

brow lift. I did have a minor last-minute panic about whether stopping the blood thinners I have to take for atrial fibrillation might provoke a stroke. But I reasoned it was too late to worry now.

The operation takes two hours. The first time I look in the mirror post-op, I have the face of a boxer who has just gone several rounds with Tyson Fury. I'm surprised that all I feel is a bit of soreness. And — yes! — I can see my eyelids. The sides of my eyes no longer resemble curtains. I'm elated.

I leave the hospital at 5pm. The doctor tells me to start taking echinacea, use antibiotic cream and cold compresses four times a day for about a week. I have a light supper, go to bed early and am awake all night, having to sleep in a semi-upright position which I find impossible. But there is absolutely no pain or discomfort.

Three weeks later, I meet a close friend in the park. The scars above my eyebrows are practically invisible, so I put on make-up for the first time since the op. My eyelids are a little sore but the change is not far short of miraculous.

My friend cannot get over the difference and says I look ten years younger, which I definitely don't, but her enthusiasm is palpable.

The best thing of all is my husband's reaction. He feels I've got my old eyes back and somehow he has reclaimed a bit of the young girl he met 50 years ago.

Do I think women should have cosmetic surgery? Absolutely not — we should grow old gracefully, embrace our lines and saggy bits, improve our minds and not be so shallow. But if that doesn't work for you, and unless you're my dyed-in-the-wool sister, I'd say, go for it. Find a good surgeon, loo off what you don't like and hang on to what you do.

And as for those eye bags Linda's fretting about, well, let's just say anything's possible...

■ **SISTER Sue And Me, Susan and Linda's no-holds-barred blog about sibling devotion and differences, has just launched at sistersueandme.com.**



Kensington, £79, kurtgeiger.com



Panama, £325, smythson.com



Recycled, £250, anyahindmarch.com

Life's LITTLE luxuries PHONE BAGS



Patent, £85, uk.tommy.com



London, £85, aspinaloflondon.com



Jordan, £120, viviennewestwood.com



Kade, £45, dunelondon.com

Styling: LIZ HEALING/INCS