

THE BODY BEAUTIFUL



Your guide to make-up and more by Lesley Thomas. This week: banishing a pregnant-looking belly

I have a great relationship with my neighbours. We feed each other's cats, sign for one another's parcels, that sort of thing. It's a little bit of village life in the heart of hectic south London.

Anyway, Mrs Neighbour approached me the other day, smiling warmly: "So, are you expecting?"

A look of puzzlement must have crossed my face and before I could say, "Expecting what? An Ocado delivery?", her smile fell in slow motion as the horror of her suggestion dawned on both of us at the same time.

"I'm so sorry, I'm so embarrassed," she muttered.

I wanted to shout: "Newsflash, baby: I'm embarrassed, too." Instead, I just said politely, "What me? Pregnant? No!", and steeled my injured soul for a little self-deprecation, adding something about my fixation with smock tops and pies.

But it got worse. "Are you sure?" she asked. "It's just my husband says you definitely are."

I ran, sobbing, to our garden shed, found our chainsaw, revved it up and rampaged in blind hysteria through her home, slicing up doors, tables and all the white goods that came into view. Of course I didn't. If I had, though, any humane judge would surely have

a woman of being pregnant should be a crime, no?

This, I am ashamed to tell you, was the second time in five days that I had been asked whether I had a bun in the oven. I know that even hard-bodied lovelies such as Madonna and Elizabeth Hurley have in the past been wronged in the same way by the gutter press, but it doesn't make me feel better.

So Operation Gutbust begins. I am not trying to lose weight – though of course it would be a welcome side-effect – I just want to be less convex around the middle.

On a fashionista friend's recommendation, a few days ago I started taking Oxy-Powder (£31.50, chrisbar.com), an oxygen-based supplement, to boost my digestive health. Models use it before shoots, I'm told, and I can already see positive effects upon my bloated belly. I must warn you, though, this is what's known as a "cleansing" product – if you catch my drift – and I am glad I was working from home on day one of the week-long programme.

The promisingly named Flat Tummy, a new supplement, calms bloating caused by poor digestion (£8.49 for 30



Anna Friel: Vacunaut fan

Holland & Barrett, or see naturesdream.co.uk). I'm cutting back on my wheat intake, too, which has worked in the past, but I already miss my daily *pain au chocolat*.

I'll also take a topical approach. I have high hopes of a new product from Bliss called Lovehandler (£28), which contains mint oil to boost circulation and is billed as the "liquid workout for lazy abs". The company's cellulite gel, Fat GirlSlim, has already been hugely

Body Resculpt Abdo, a gel that contains caffeine (£26), is proven to help fat elimination.

I was distraught when I read recently that traditional abdominal crunches actually do very little to flatten the tummy. Some women are throwing money at the problem instead and there are plenty of ways if you have the dough.

Beer-bellied Robbie Williams and post-partum Anna Friel favoured Vacunaut, a ridiculous but highly effective system developed by an Austrian sports scientist to target the middle. You walk on a treadmill wearing something that looks like a thick, rubbery wetsuit. The suit has vacuum chambers around the tummy area which are said to draw blood into the fatty tissues; which is then – supposedly – metabolised faster. A course of 12 40-minute sessions costs £550 (vacunaut.co.uk).

Elle Macpherson and Coleen McLoughlin get themselves beach-ready with "Lipomassage" from a company called Endermologie. Motorised rollers massage "trapped fat" in areas that will not submit to diet and exercise. Six sessions, costing £40 a pop, are recommended (020 8731 5678).

I've got a feeling that my high-volume blouses and tulip dresses are contributing to my five-months-gone look, but they'll be much harder to give up than pastry. I shall, of course, keep you posted