

DIY* London

(*That's Do It For You London)

Our guide to the experts who can help organise your life and prepare you for the Christmas rush

LUCY MAYHEW

WITH the party season approaching, frantic Londoners need the gift of time. But in the festive run-up, the likelihood of such a luxury is slim. When psychologists from Coventry University researched the effects of increased stress levels at this time of the year, they came up with some tips on how to avoid the extra responsibilities and time demands.

Their key advice was: "Don't try to do everything on your own, and try to take time out for yourself."

Easier said than done. But knowing who to turn to is the key to lightening the load. We all try to make Christmas less of a trial by organising office and home life and sorting out the chaos in our lives before another year ends.

We've found some of London's most skilled, deft, amenable and helpful wondermen and women to save us all time and angst. From finding a photographer to shoot a portrait for a present, to a new personal trainer to offset the damage of all those parties and office lunches to come, here are the London life-savers who will get you through the holiday season.



HAND OVER YOUR 'THINGS-TO-DO' LIST

LISA Morel, general manager of Buy:Time, prides herself on having a team of lifestyle managers with outstanding organisational abilities and people skills. Most were formerly PAs to high-ranking members of blue-chip City firms, and as a result they're indefatigable multi-taskers.

"We can take the reins on tasks and missions from the A-Z of life," says Lisa. The non-members' option means clients can buy services by the hour or in discounted blocks of time. Buy:Time will take on your Christmas shopping, bid on ebay, manage properties, find Burmese cats and work with more than 350 suppliers including life coaches, translators and speechwriters.

Cost: From £29 per hour plus VAT (0870 486 2624, www.buy-time.co.uk).

Or try: Alice Burrage (www.ask-alice.com); Cushion the Impact (www.cushiontheimpact.co.uk)



INVISIBLE CHEF

CATERERS and party cooks are forever boasting about hearty British seasonal food, but if you don't have time to

cook it yourself when you're entertaining then put Maria Balfour on speed-dial.

The Duke of Norfolk's daughter needs 48 hours' notice, and will then turn up at your house well in advance of dinner equipped with the entire meal. She will proceed to vanish before the guests arrive, and all you need to do is heat, serve and eat — and decide whether to take the credit for the delicious food or not.

Cost: Minimum order £120 — this could include three courses for six or two-course lunches or suppers (020 7341 0914, www.effortless-eating.com).

Or try: Foodsy (www.foodsy.co.uk); Meike Ford (meike@24carrotcooking.co.uk).



DEPENDABLE HANDYMEN

DO YOU have any unhinged loo-seats, pictures that need hanging, flatpack furniture with double-Dutch

instructions or tiling jobs you just can't face finishing? The handy squad was founded by James Irwin (above) and Rob Roscoe, previously investment bankers who became frustrated by the extortionate charges tradesmen were making for small DIY jobs. Ring them up and one of their multi-tasking handymen for plumbing, electrical, carpentry or odd-jobs will be despatched within the hour.

Cost: £20 call-out plus £25 per half hour. (08000 12 12 12, www.handysquad.com).

Or try: Fix-It Man (www.fix-itman.co.uk); 24/7 Handyman (www.247handyman.co.uk).

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COMPUTER AND GADGET MESSIAH

THERE are few more angelic heroes to the technophobe than the

magicians who can instantly solve your computer and gadget traumas. So unsurprisingly, Scooter Computer has been a rip-roaring success, with turnover tripling in the past 12 months.

Its founder, Will Foot, 28, was on the cusp of joining a large management consultancy firm having worked previously for a media agency. Instead, he set up the technological first-aid service that sends troubleshooting experts — who are banned from using "geek speak" to solve any imaginable IT or technological disaster.

One of their engineers will be with you in less than four hours.

And as well as IT problem-solving (for Macs and PCs), they will help you with digital cameras and iPods. They can also give lessons on how to make the most of Facebook and MySpace, and supply brilliant-value routers and memory upgrades.

If the problem persists the same technician will return for a repeat visit, so you don't have to end up explaining the same problem to a total stranger. Scooter also offers the option of immediate remote support and the company has a no fix, no fee policy. Geek chic, indeed.

Cost: Call out from £69 per hour plus VAT. Remote support £34 per hour + VAT. (020 7384 5949, www.scootercomputer.co.uk).

Or try: Geeks-on-Wheels (www.geeks-on-wheels.com); Jeremy and Rolf Woodward (jwoodward.it-services@virgin.net).



24/7 BEAUTY CALL-OUT

FOR hair, make-up and nails all done in 45 minutes flat, have a team of Anna Tsankova's award-winning

beauty specialists come straight to



Up close and personal: London's army of experts can cater for almost every need

you. The former artist founded her one-stop travelling beauty salon four years ago, and the business has since grown five-fold. The prize-winning team of 25 beauty specialists is on call 24/7 — and they have cut, blow-dried and manicured for London Fashion Week, in top salons and for the likes of Demi Moore and Kylie Minogue.

Cost: Call-outs from £65 (020 8741 5888, www.beautopiauk.com).

Or try: Perfectly at Home (www.perfectlyathome.com); DStress 24 (www.dstress24.com).



INSTANT TONING AND WEIGHT LOSS

GET a personalised programme to fit your timetable from Svetlana Migunova. She has trained out

of-shape urbanites in Switzerland, California and London — all of whom wanted to tone up in short windows between meetings, or before work. You'll burn more calories with her than you would in an hour at the gym.

Cost: From £40 (020 7627 2308, www.powerandbeauty.co.uk).

Or try: Aileen Kilshaw (www.arch-health.com); JL Personal Training (www.jlpersonaltraining.com).