

FAST TRACK

(Or how I survived for 10 days without food)

WHEN I arrived for my appointment at the Balance clinic on the King's Road, director Amanda Griggs said apologetically: "I'm just finishing with a client."

A few seconds later, the door to the treatment room burst open and the most beautiful woman I have ever seen emerged, screeching with laughter and clutching a handful of herbal supplements.

She had skin as smooth as a 14-year-old's, a mane of glossy, golden hair and the unmistakable, Australian drawl of Elle Macpherson — yes, it was The Body herself. "I'll have whatever you just gave her!" I screeched.

THE CLINIC

THIS was my first visit to Balance, a favourite for beauty editors and celebrities, offering everything from waxing to Botox. I had come to test drive a rather more unusual idea: assisted fasting.

Since the dawn of time, people have fasted for medical and spiritual reasons, believing it can detoxify the cells and rejuvenate organs, while allowing the digestive system to rest. In other words, it makes you thin and sorts out your spots — it sounded very appealing to me.

Balance believes fasting is a serious business and shouldn't be attempted solo,

BY ALICE VON SIMSON

but should be carefully planned and monitored to ensure the health of the client. "It also makes it a bit easier to stick to if you're not doing it alone," added Amanda.

MY BESPOKE PLAN

FIRST you're assessed by one of the clinic's health practitioners to ensure you're fit enough for the regime. They then prescribe one of their fasts and detoxes. These range from the more popular weekend juice fasts to the scary 10-day lemon detox — made famous by Lesley Knollys, who lost a stone-and-a-half. Prices are from £150 to £250, including an initial consultation, herbal supplements and support.

You also choose two complementary treatments from deep tissue massage, acupuncture, manual lymphatic drainage sessions with a chiropractor or osteopath, detox wraps or colonic irrigation. Coupled with the detox, these are meant to encourage the cleansing and weight loss.

On my first visit, Amanda closed my eyes and assessed my skin (blotchy, a bit spotted) and tongue (furry). She said my lymphatic system was sluggish, which is often due to lack of exercise, but also due to excess waste or fluid in the system.

If your lymph glands don't function properly and massaging doesn't help, you can suffer cellulite and hip and thigh pain. I was horrified. But Amanda promised to kick-start my lazy lymphatics.

"How do you feel about the lemon detox coupled with a colonic irrigation?" she asked casually. I opened my mouth to protest about the colonic, but then remembered Elle Macpherson's words: "I'll have whatever you just gave her." I agreed sheepishly.

THE LEMON DETOX

FOR the next 10 days, I was to consume nothing but home-made lemonade consisting of water, two tablespoons of lemon juice, two tablespoons of Madal Bal Natural Tree Syrup, the sap of maple and palm tree oil and a pinch of cayenne pepper.

My ration was six to 12 glasses a day, the only other things that passed my lips being water and

Lite lunch

BOOTS SHAPERS HOUMOUS AND CHARGRILLED VEGETABLE WRAP, £1.90

The veggies in this wrap are really tasty, and spinach adds a bit of extra crunch. At only 250 calories, this is a winning choice in the diet stakes.



LOW CALORIE ✓ LOW FAT ✓
LOW CARB ✓ LOW SALT ✓

UNAPPETISING WAY TO A FLAT STOMACH... BUT IT GETS RESULTS

Nil by mouth:
The diet tested
by Alice, left,
might not be for
everyone, but
fasting can be a
good way
to detox



speed up metabolism for a few hours after drinking, the maple syrup gives you energy and the lemon is supposed to make the drink taste nice.

The first few days passed quite quickly and I didn't feel hungry. The lemonade mixture seemed to fill me up. But by day four I'd begun to struggle.

I craved every food on the planet, but the lemonade was now a huge turn-off. I called Amanda. She said this was all normal, but encouraged me to drink as much lemonade and water as possible to prevent dehydration. Lack of food made me light-headed. I spent the day floating around, wittering to myself and tripping over things.

THE TREATMENT

MY TREATMENTS were booked for day six. Amanda had said it would be helpful to have a treat to look forward to. Can anyone actually look forward to a colonic? This involved pumping

60 litres of water up my bottom through a tube and flushing everything out.

It was a little uncomfortable, but not as bad as I had feared. I much preferred my second treatment, a relaxing body wrap. I was covered in clay designed to suck out nasty toxins through my skin. My whole body felt silky-smooth afterwards.

THE VERDICT

AT THE end of my fast, my skin looked clearer and brighter, and I had lost eight pounds. It's now three months post-detox and yet the weight has stayed off. Fasting has encouraged me to notice how much I eat and, as a consequence, I've stopped over-eating.

I'd lost weight and felt fine, but is fasting like this good for you? I asked nutritionist Rebecca Burn (healthydirect.com). She said: "This programme gives the digestive system a break which can help with constipa-

tion, indigestion and bloating. By taking in extra fluid, symptoms of dehydration such as congested skin, food cravings, weight gain and poor digestion can be reduced.

"My concern is the lemon detox is not a detox, but more of a diet. As the main organ of detoxification, the liver needs nutrients to fulfil its role — nutrients not available on this diet. I'd recommend that it is not followed for more than three days."

So, the lemon detox may not be the cure-all some have billed it as. But if, like me, you like to get things done quickly and you're up for a bit of a challenge, it is an effective — if not necessarily fully healthy — way to lose weight.

● **Lemon detox programme**, £249. 020 7565 0333, balancetheclinic.com



Regime: celebs like
Elle Macpherson
the Balance clinic

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