

ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

RELAX ME BREAK

WHO says taking care of yourself has to be all pain and no pleasure? In this weekly feature, we trial the very best therapies that promise to deliver sterling results without the hint of a needle or a knife



by Jacqueline Strawbridge

Let the 'body whisperer' rein in your raging stress and tighten loose screws

I ARRIVED at the Serenity Spa in Glashule, Dublin, with just seven minutes to spare before my first rendez-vous with the Relax Me Break — offered in conjunction with Fitzpatrick Castle Hotel — was due to begin.

Seven minutes is just enough time to get some coffee from the café next door, which I was determined to do, even though it meant elbowing in front of a sweet old lady to get it. Upon arrival at the spa, I was ushered into the peaceful back room to change into a fluffy robe.

I trotted back out again to meet Dr Raju, a qualified naturopath and yoga therapist, who is known amongst his clients as the Body Whisperer, because he is said to make even the most stressed clients feel deeply relaxed.

I followed him upstairs to a beautifully lit room, coffee clutched resolutely in hand. Then as I sat on the bed, I snapped. Was this cup of coffee going to have to be surgically removed? It was a symbol of everything that was wrong in my life: even in a spa, I had to hold on to stress.

I poured it down the sink. What a terrible waste of €2.75, I thought bleakly.

Dr Raju, who trained at the University of Health Sciences in Hyderabad, India, asked me what kind of massage I would like, reeling off a list of enticingly soothing titles — Swedish, pressure point, lavender. When he said 'abhyanga' I nodded eagerly — this is an Ayurvedic massage from the 5,000-year-old traditional medicine of India, which nourishes, detoxes and relieves fatigue.

Dr Raju uses sesame oil, suitable for my Ayurvedic 'type' (mine is vata — google 'vata

people' and Woody Allen's name comes up — you get the picture). It was a thorough deep tissue massage which had made me feel super-energised afterwards: usually massages make me want to crawl into bed.

The abhyanga was followed by an Indian head massage, of which Dr Raju is a master. Patting, pressing, rubbing and even pulling my hair, it was wonderful. At one point he was gently tapping my 'crown chakra' at the top of my head with his fist, and it was like a screw had been loosened (maybe it had been) and he was hammering it back into place again.

The on-the-go facial, carried out by senior therapist Vimi Govinden, a Mauritian girl who looked so fabulously healthy it is as if she just stepped off the beach.

Using SkinCeutical products, full of antioxidant-rich vitamin C, it was a thorough cleanse, scrub and tone with a zesty vitamin C masque and moisturiser to finish, and it did the job perfectly. I left the spa feeling

like I had been taken apart, my creaky joints oiled and put back to their fully functioning glory.

I felt fantastic, ready for a night out at the Fitzpatrick Castle Hotel in Killiney. It's a huge hotel which manages to retain a cosy atmosphere.

The sumptuous room had a sweet little balcony with a stunning view of Killiney Bay.

The Dungeon Grill in the hotel was mobbed — not relaxing, but a very good sign.

I sat on the balcony after my hearty dinner of Dublin Bay prawn cocktail, hake with fennel mash and strawberries and cream, sipping on a glass of white wine with my friend, who was with me on the break. 'Aren't we lucky?' she said. 'Yes,' I replied.

THE COST: €275 per person sharing/€305 single.
THE LOCATION: Nuala Woulfe Serenity Day Spa, 55 Glashule Road, Sandycove, Co. Dublin, visit serenityspa.ie or call 01 230 0255. Fitzpatrick Castle Hotel, Killiney, Co. Dublin, visit fitzpatrickcastle.com or call 01 230 5556

■ The Relax Me Break includes an overnight stay with dinner and breakfast, and three treatments. The Get In Shape break is also available, see the websites above for details

Breton tops

Blue and white boat neck, €15, little woods ireland.ie



Navy and grey, €35, topshop.com

Yellow, €22, oasis-stores.com



Aubin & Wills, purple, €54, net-a-porter.com

DKNY red and white, €110, my-wardrobe.com



Blue and white, €43, french connection.com

J Crew black and white, €48, net-a-porter.com



Styling: BARBARA MCMILLAN

Think your man should be your priority? Big mistake, says LINDA KELSEY

ONE weekend, a couple of months after my partner of 23 years had walked out, I didn't have a single plan to see anyone. It was unusually sunny for late March, so after walking my dog one Saturday afternoon, I stopped at a busy café.

The tables were all filled — with couples, groups of friends, families. No one was sitting there by themselves.

Finally, I got a table and sat down, feeling more lonely than I could ever remember. I looked at my mobile: no texts, no missed calls. By the time my hot chocolate had arrived, tears of self-pity were dribbling down my face.

And then the phone rang. It was Natalie, my best friend of more than 30 years, just back from a business trip to Paris. I'd been determined not to bother her as she'd been away from her husband and children all week.

'What are you doing, misery guts?' she chortled. 'Unless you have a hot date, it's supper, here, 7.30pm. And no excuses.'

I'd been rescued. Without my long-term loyal pals as a lifeline, I'm not sure I would have been able to put my life back in order after the breakdown of my second marriage.

YET again, I was reminded how, in the age of divorce, friendship seems to have much sturdier foundations than marriage does.

We've all witnessed couples who begin a relationship with a big social circle that gets whittled away, so when the partnership breaks down, there is no one to turn to. My advice would be to bind your friends to you with hoops of steel, because the threads of marriage really are gossamer thin.

Caught in the bubble of a heady new romance, of course, there's often only ever room for two. A study led by Robin Dunbar, head of the Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology at Oxford University in England, revealed that, on average, having a new romantic partner pushes out two close friends, leaving lovers with a smaller circle of people they can turn to in crisis.

For divorcee Karen Iverson, the dangers of abandoning your friends for a lover became clear only when it was too late.

When she met David at 35, Karen fell headlong in love, moving in to his

TAKE COVER

THIS Spud raincoat is made out of potato starch bioplastic and is just the thing for these late summer showers we seem to be having. But its versatility does not end there. Besides being waterproof, it is biodegradable and even comes with a small seed ball to grow your own plants.

■ FROM nigelsecostore.com for €10.99

