

preventing health issues in the first place.

Last month I removed a tumor from the brain of a woman who had smoked for decades. Had she quit a few years earlier, she would have considerably reduced her chances of ever ending up on my operating table. It was a sharp reminder that we all can take steps not just to give up vices, but also to *optimize* our well-being by striving to be in the best possible health. You already know how effective diet and exercise can be (if all Americans worked out for 30 minutes a day, we could reduce our incidence of heart attacks by as much as 30 to 40 percent), but have you ever considered newer solutions for staying well, like taking probiotics or using a standing desk at work? Ingenious innovations are emerging all the time, and there's now a world of wellness strategies that can help you be happier, healthier, and less stressed.

Here's my challenge to you: Do something different every day to surprise and strengthen both your body and your mind. You may not always get results, but I predict you'll make real progress in the quest to feel your best. Don't get me wrong—if you're sick, you should understand your options, take your medicine, and undergo the appropriate tests and procedures. And, of course, you should never blindly try something simply because your sister's friend's cousin said it worked for her. Do your homework and ask the hard questions, but remember that we're at the frontier of an exciting new era in medicine. And it begins with you.

I Survived a

For *O* executive editor **Amy Maclin**, healthy living meant diet soda and fat-free brownies. Until, feeling sluggish and “toxic,” she flew to Texas for an extravaganza of juicing, spa treatments, and colonics.

I ONCE GREETED THE DAY with sugar-free Red Bull, followed by a few visits with (Diet!) Dr Pepper. Then I sloshed home to Kim Crawford, my favorite Sauvignon Blanc. I needed the caffeine because I was groggy in the morning; I needed the wine because I was wired at night. I can hear you thinking, *Hey, Judy Garland, that's what happens when you're hooked on uppers and downers!* However, I was too far over the rainbow to stop. I tried to eat at least a reasonably healthy diet, choosing energy bars over cheese curls, and the finest fat-free brownies science could engineer.

Most of the time I felt well enough, but I never felt *well*. I wanted a dietary do-over. Though my spirit was willing, my flesh was weak; I knew I couldn't effect change without a break from the concerns of everyday living. I needed to retreat—to go, as Thoreau did, to the woods in order to live deliberately.

Which is how I find myself at an organic spa, mixing their detox drink out of what appears to be ground particleboard. Nestled in the woods north of Houston, Deer Lake Lodge is like an upscale summer camp for grown-ups: sweet cabins made from reclaimed barn wood, everything smelling pleasantly of resin and virtue. In the homey lounge, I mix my powdered concoction of acacia, flaxseed, and calcium bentonite clay (meant to absorb toxins) with organic olive oil, “ionic minerals,” apple cider vinegar, and warm water. The resulting brew tastes rich and loamy, like feed for a pampered farm animal. For lunch I'll have another detox drink and green juice; for dinner, raw soup. Also included are energy-boosting teas, liquefied greens (for antioxidants), and fiber regulators (self-explanatory).

Anyone who's come within spitting distance of a Whole Foods Market recently knows that *detox* is the health watchword these days. According to proponents of de-

toxification diets, we're all full of poisons from the stuff we put in our bodies, and periodically we need to give the digestive system a break to purge them. It's like hitting an internal reset button, says Pamela Girouard, Deer Lake's wellness director, who claims that my 30-foot intestinal tract is about to get a new lease on life. According to Pamela, my intestinal walls (and yours, too, by the way) are covered in residue in which toxins love to congregate, so they need an occasional deep cleaning. Thus, colonics.

Most Western-medicine doctors aren't high on colonics. Mine had described them using an unprintable word and assured me that if I ate plenty of fiber, my waste-eliminating organs could do a tip-top job all by themselves, in the privacy of my own home. But I'd committed to this detoxifying journey, and I wanted to follow the spa's protocol.

Pamela explains that I'll lie on my back on an exam table outfitted with a kind of bedpan/toilet seat; that's where the key end of me will rest. I'll impale myself on a small tube that leads to a larger tube, then pull a lever to release a stream of water into my colon, cleansing my digestive tract in what Pamela calls an “internal baptism.” Even better, the tube is transparent, so I can witness the fantastic voyage. “Once the show starts,” Pamela says, “you won't be able to take your eyes off it.”

I haven't felt so physically vulnerable since childhood. *Don't make me do it*, I silently beg. *It'll hurt*. (So far, this entire spa experience is like returning to infancy: gum-mable foods, fluffy booties, a caring authority figure who's obsessed with my poop.) But half an hour and some mild cramping later, I hop off the table feeling zesty and buoyant and, honestly, reborn.

There are times of overwhelming hunger. (Did you know that Thoreau once set fire to 300 acres of his beloved woods while trying to cook something to eat?) I fantasize about

Wellness Retreat

Mexico, not so far away, the land of enchiladas and discount pharmaceuticals. But like storms, the pangs pass. Without the organizing principle of eating, the hours seem infinitely expandable. Life is something that is constantly unfolding before me, not just a diversion to occupy the interstices between mealtimes. I'm in my body in a moment-by-moment way that makes the world almost psychedelic, the air so fresh it should be a controlled substance, the wild mushrooms so orange, the berries so very purple. *Why, hellooooo there, Mr. Wood Slug!* I feel an ethereal, Stevie Nicks sort of lightness.

When I'm not busy tripping in the forest, there are classes and consultations in yoga (delightful), aromatherapy (incredibly delightful), raw-food prep (pornographically delightful), and conscious language (in which I learn to make manifest my desires in the universe). I also have some soulful chats in the fasting lounge with my fellow travelers: One woman wants to kick a sugar addiction; another took charge of her health after doctors discovered benign tumors in her liver. Everyone is possessed of both Texan joie de vivre and the propensity to make statements like, "There's positive and negative in every thing. That's what moves the universe."

The lessons we are learning are based on an elaborate cosmology made up, as far as I can tell, of universal vibrations, quantum mechanics, and enzymes. Yet the takeaways are so simple: Eat leafy greens. Chew before you swallow. Stop beating yourself up. I visit a practitioner of iridology, in which the irises of one's eyes are used to diagnose health issues throughout the body. She tells me that I have circulation problems and a yeast overgrowth and should increase my cardio and cut back on refined carbs. I dutifully make notes and promise to take better care of myself—two things I have never done in a doctor's office, though I've

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gotten identical advice there. But this feels so radically different from having a stethoscoped guy pull out a BMI chart and tell me to lay off the dinner rolls. It feels like a quest that demands my curiosity and engagement; it

makes me the hero of my own life.

On the fourth day, we break the fast with a raw "pasta" of zucchini and cucumber. It tastes fresh and tangy, sharp and alive. It also feels, well, healing. (Do I *talk* this way now?) Including my prefasting diet, I've been off alcohol, refined sugar, and fake diet food for a couple of weeks. I can't remember feeling

healthier or more awake. This is galling, as I'd secretly hoped the nutrition rules wouldn't apply to me, the way everybody hopes she'll be the one to cheat death. I get, for the first time in 43 years, that I really am what I eat.

This lesson alone would be worth the cost of the trip, which is similar to a four-day package to Walt Disney World, that other Magic Kingdom. On the way home, I realize that even if my digestive system hasn't been reset, my palate has: I crave the crunch of vegetables, not the ooze of cheese or the buttery pillow of a baked good. In fact, I walk right past the cinnamon buns and find the least depressed prepackaged salad in George Bush Intercontinental Airport. Out here in the real world, it's harder to live deliberately. But I've never been more willing to try.