

Fast track to wellbeing

A stunning setting is home to a therapeutic programme that has left our writer feeling positive and rejuvenated

by RAE
FEATHER

JANUARY, it's the month of good intentions. Newspapers, magazines and social media are bursting with information on the latest health fads. Veganuary, dry January, offers on new gym memberships, the new diet that promises 5lbs weight loss in 5 days...

We have never been so informed with ways and means to improve our health and wellbeing or had so much information at our fingertips. Supermarkets, health food stores, restaurants are all rooting for us in our quest to be healthier. That said, the challenges of everyday life can so often get in the way. That time when only pasta will do, or you've had a bad day and the one and only thing you know will hit the spot is a glass of red wine.

A girlfriend came for supper a few weeks ago. She had been through a lot in the last few years, family bereavements, career challenges, a few health issues and weight gain that had spiralled out of control. She walked in and I stood speechless. She was unrecognisable. She had dropped almost 2st, her skin was glowing, her energy levels were bursting and, most importantly, she had never felt so mentally healthy.

Her secret? The Buchinger Wilhelm Clinic.

The word fasting conjures up feelings of abstinence, deprivation — mainly negative connotations. How on earth could anyone go for long periods without food? Well the truth is, an average person carrying an excess of 10kg of body fat can in fact go for 40 days without food.

BUCHINGER Wilhelm's therapeutic fasting is a procedure whereby a person voluntarily goes without food for a certain length of time, living mainly on their fat reserves instead. This stimulates autophagy and detox enzymes, resulting in a deep cleansing of the cells and tissue. At the same time, fasting reduces all inflammatory processes, alleviates pain and improves mobility. The success of fasting depends to a large extent on the four-day period at the end of the fast, during which patients at the clinic gradually start to eat normal meals again.

During this process, dormant stem cells are activated and new structures built up. It is a period of regeneration (also called rejuvenation) with tremendous therapeutic potential.

The Buchinger Wilhelm Clinics are the brainchild of Dr Otto Buchinger, a medical doctor and philosophy guru, his daughter Maria, aka the 'grande dame' of fasting, and Maria's husband Hei-



Idyllic isolation: Walking and art classes are available. Inset above right: Rae Feather

mut Wilhelm. The clinic at Lake Constance in Germany was built in 1953 and is now run by Otto's great-grandson Leonard Wilhelm. His parents Raimund and his physician wife Françoise have built the clinic to be a world leader in therapeutic fasting. There's a sister clinic in Marbella.

My plan was to immerse myself as wholly as I could in the areas I wanted real improvement. Of course, I was hoping to shed a few pounds but in all honesty this was not my focus. I wanted to be almost solitary. I wanted these ten



days for me and me only. To be still, to read, to take things slowly and not feel I had to do anything. At any given time, there might be 150 guests at the property but you don't often see other guests. The silence was for me incredible — the only noise I could hear constantly was that of birdsong. How you spend your days is entirely up to you. You can pack them tight with classes, treatments and seminars or you can

literally vegetate. When was the last time you didn't have to be anywhere at any time?

You have an initial consultation with your allocated doctor who monitors your progress throughout your stay. We spoke comfortably together for a good half hour, getting to know each other a little and then we got to work.

Measurements were taken and I was asked various questions about my health. I had completed a medical questionnaire on arrival so my doctor already had an insight into my history.

The programme starts immediately, however you are broken in gently with light, plant-based foods for two days and then teas and vegetable broths. You're encouraged to drink as much water as possible, which helps eliminate toxins and can aid with the hunger pangs but I did not feel hungry at all. I thought I might miss my afternoon cuppa with a chocolate or maybe my daily glass of red wine. Never, not even once.

There is a constant supply of herbal teas in a station near your room as well as constant supplies of water.

On day two you are given a strong epsom salt drink which

kicks in very quickly. This eliminates any waste that might be there (but it this way you are strongly advised not to leave your room for four hours).

I requested to have all my meals in my room, which became my cocoon as I made a decision to stay as solitary as possible for a few days. You're not completely alone though — friendly nurses come in and out to check on you.

I was incredibly lethargic for a few days and guilt set in — I'm being lazy, I'm not doing enough, etc. So I had a word with myself. This was not a competition. No one was monitoring me.

I spoke to the nurse about this and she fully encouraged me to do as little as I wanted. No one is judging if you stay in bed all day — after all, no one knows!

I made a few rules to start with. Rule one, no matter how I felt, I would swim in the outdoor (heated) pool every day. Early in the week I snailed up and down but by day three I was back to my usual pace.

Rule two, to sauna every day for 10 minutes followed by a freezing cold shower. This was my only New Year's resolution: a 30-second cold blast at the end of my hot shower every day. It is honestly life-changing, you feel so alive.

Rule three, to read more. I am a



real on/off reader. I go through periods when I can't put books down and then six months or a year goes by and I have ten unfinished books. During my stay, I read three books. I loved every single one and it made me question why on earth I don't do it more regularly. This is undoubtedly one of the things I am desperately going to try to hang on to.

Daily walks are on offer and I did a few early in the week but lagged off. I decided I preferred walks around the local medieval town of Überlingen. I sat on the pier watching the various boats making their voyages across Lake Constance and imagined how different it must be in high summer. Lake Constance is one of Germany's top tourist summer destinations; it is, however, very tranquil in winter.

Every morning you have a little check-in with the nurse during which your blood pressure and weight are taken. You'd imagine that weight loss would be constant but it's not — some days you lose and one day I gained. The nurse laughed and attributed it to my heavier pyjamas.

BUT weight loss is not their focus. They truly want to see improvements in your overall wellbeing. Incidentally, a nurse is on standby 24/7. I woke in the middle of one night with anxiety, which can be a symptom of fasting. I called the nurse and she gave me a few drops, some herbal sleep pills and tucked me in with a hot water bottle.

I have to say the one and only negative I had about the week was that I did not get the quality of sleep I get at home, however this is totally normal. The body is not having to work so hard and as a result has excess energy.

This would really bother me if I was at home knowing I had a 6am alarm call and a full day's work but knowing I could rest and have a nap in the day (which I did every day) made it totally fine. I read at 4am and the odd time I even logged on to Netflix to watch Modern Family on playback.

The clinic is very, very relaxed. There's no pressure to be seen in the newest gym gear. It's like everyone is on their own little journey and this is totally respected. I made a few friends on the last two days, when I finally left my room a bit more.

I met a lovely lady from Dublin and she introduced me to a few others she had met. One was an American lady who proudly announced this was her 14th visit — she checks in every year for three weeks. Others were staying with no planned departure date.

The treatments available are varied, and the choice is good so I had one every other day, including a few massages and a visit to the famous osteopath Dr Kaiser — the

man with magic hands. He worked on my tight jaw, my feet and my knees. He touched them so gently with his eyes tightly shut, a little like he was in a trance, ridding me of all my aches and pains.

The underwater massage is also incredible and so relaxing — I'd highly recommend it.

There is an activity every evening from 7.30pm to 8.30pm, such as cooking demonstrations to aid us in our quest to a healthier diet when we return to reality.

There was also a talk on the limitless qualities of the very under-publicised vitamin D — basically, stock up on it, it's the Don of all vitamins.

Another evening, we took a look at dependency, basically, a little eye-opener about the power of habit and the brain.

One of my main focuses will have to be not to have a glass of red wine every night. I kind of knew but it's purely habit and I'm sure I could easily narrow it down to four nights a week.

Bedtime is recommended at 9pm — which I didn't argue with!

On day seven, the refeeding process begins and your body is slowly introduced to the various food groups. Refeeding is just as important as fasting and in order to really benefit from the fasting, refeeding is key.

I had a meeting with Dr Françoise Wilhelmi de Toledo on my fourth day — she is the brains behind so much of the medical research and ethos supporting the therapy. I found her to be beyond charming, warm, quietly spoken, articulate and approachable.

I asked her what five things did she think guests would take away from the programme:

1. A deep calm and serenity: because of the peace and quiet, and real downtime, this is really true. My soul feels peaceful.
2. Reset of your metabolism
3. Tissue and Cell regeneration: this really kicks in during the refeeding process which is why it's worth sticking with a healthy lifestyle. The hard work is done, so to speak.
4. Weight loss: I lost 5kg and 6cm off my waist. Men can look at weight loss of around 10kg.
5. Energy boost: I feel fantastic. I have definitely got a spring in my step and more than that, my mental attitude is so positive.

In my case, Dr Wilhelmi de Toledo, you've ticked every single box. From a health perspective, both physically and mentally, it is the best thing I have ever done — by miles.

I loved every single second. I feel light. I feel positive. I'm ready for you 2020.

TRAVEL FACTS

Buchinger Wilhelm offers ten-day fasting programmes from €2,795 per person. The price includes two consultations with a doctor, daily nurse check-ups, food/drink, fasting provisions and daily activities. Shorter, non-fasting stays are also available. Call 0049 75518070 or visit buchinger-wilhelmi.com. You can shop Rae Feather's range of holiday essentials at raefeather.com