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Detox delight

The Grayshott Programme is a medically researched spa therapy focusing on digestive health as the precursor for overall wellbeing. The accompanying weight loss is an added bonus, as Giselle Whiteaker discovers.

It is with trepidation that I enter Grayshott Spa to begin a detox programme. I have resigned myself to near-starvation and am anticipating feeling weak and fatigued. But it is only as I walk along the high-ceiling reception area of the gorgeous historic country house - once the home of Victorian Poet Laureate Lord Alfred Tennyson - that I realise my self-imposed exile will also not involve coffee.

This significantly increases my anxiety levels. I fancy I can feel the caffeine seeping out of my bloodstream by the second. The staff member on reception senses my panic and gives me a warm, reassuring welcome. I take a few surreptitious deep breaths as she leads me to my lovely room.

This is an old-school style spa. Guests wander around in robes and slippers and everyone enters with a goal, whether it is to lose weight, improve health and wellbeing, or simply escape the stresses of city life and relax in a tranquil location.

Nestled in a pleasant corner of rural England in Surrey, the spa sits on 47 acres of gardens and grounds. It offers a calming ambience without pretension. It has a long history as a recuperative spa, operating for nearly 50 years, constantly refining its offering.



The Grayshott Health Programme starts as a one-week programme, designed to improve the digestive function. The underlying belief builds on naturopathic principles and the foundations of good digestive health.

I soon discover there are also some elements of the 5:2 diet. The fundamental philosophy underpinning the programme is that care of the digestive system is central to well-being. In simple terms if your gut is not working properly neither will anything else.

Day One: After the introductory talk, I click that this is not a weight loss programme. It is a health programme and weight loss, increased energy levels, lower blood pressure, better sleep and all of the other benefits are side effects. The first step is to see how my body is performing and what problems need addressing. In my scheduled health discussion we cover the usual topics and check my blood pressure before I move on to a diagnostic blood analysis.

Nurse Joanie gently pricks my finger with a needle and squeezes the droplets of blood into a small test tube. We are off to a flying start. I watch as Joanie extracts a single drop and drips it onto a sliver of card. She slides the card into a machine to do its magic.

The end result is a comprehensive chart of blood test values. I am pleased to learn my cholesterol levels are within acceptable values and my liver is a picture of health. My only cause for mild concern is my blood sugar levels which are slightly above the normal range. Joanie does not seem perturbed. The levels are not high enough to be indicative of a diabetic disposition. I resolve to eat less chocolate.

Next up is a body composition analysis with Ravi, the Head of Fitness. This is the part I am dreading. Ravi is also equipped with a magic machine. I stand on a base, holding onto two hand grips. My body statistics print out and I am faced with the hard, cold facts. If I were visiting a GP, they would be concerned with my body mass index - the height to weight ratio. Ravi is not. He asserts the muscle to fat ratio is far more important. He recommends I do more weight bearing exercises to build muscle. My body balance is reasonable, although unusually, for a right-handed person, my left side is slightly stronger.

Armed with the facts about my body and health I move to the cinema, doubling as a lecture room. Will and Todd deliver the facts about digestion - how it works and why it is important as a starting point for good health. The lecture has just the right amount of detail.

Unsure whether to dread dinner or welcome it, we move as a group to the conservatory, away from the temptations of the main dining room. Healthy food is served in both, but the conservatory is a more intimate space allowing programme participants to interact with the hosts, tonight Todd and Will. Every meal starts with twenty drops of bitters mixed with water and a small dish of tangy sauerkraut. This is to activate the gut flora so that it is ready to digest.



COMPETITION!

Win a stay for two at Grayshott Spa, Surrey (worth over £600).

Staying one night in a Junior Suite, the prize includes pre-dinner canapés, a three course à la Carte dinner, buffet breakfast and a three course lunch the next day on departure – plus unlimited use of the spa facilities and a Grayshott Classic massage.

To enter please drop your details – Name, Address, Contact Telephone with your answer marked "Grayshott Spa", to your local Guild member.

For details of your nearest agent go to www.guildproperty.co.uk – Find an Agent.

How many acres of gardens and grounds does Grayshott have?

- A) 20 Acres
- B) 34 Acres
- C) 47 Acres

Terms & Conditions
Closing date: 31st July. Entrants must be 18 or over. Prize is a one night stay for two people staying in a Junior Suite, with a 45 minute Grayshott Classic Massage each. All additional charges incurred during the stay are to be paid in departure. The competition prize expires November 30, is subject to availability, excludes Bank Holidays, cannot be re-void or used in conjunction with any other offer. No cash alternatives will be offered. All entrants will be sent information on Grayshott unless requested otherwise in the entry form.

The bitters are not pleasant, but one large gulp and they are down. The sauerkraut on the other hand, is quite tasty.

The food is designed to take pressure off the digestive system, allowing it to rest and heal. Grains and dairy are out, with the exception of well-fermented yogurt. My fear of health food is blaring warning signals, but the meal is delicious. It starts with a thick vegetable soup. I choose beef for my main course. The portions are relatively small, but we have bowls of vegetables to fill up on. The most important lesson is to take our time over the meal; to savour each mouthful and chew thoroughly.

Day Two: To take my mind off my standard morning ritual of coffee, I join in the morning walk at 8.30am. I am the only one from the programme out of bed at this hour. We take a stroll around the grounds and I start looking forward to breakfast. The sauerkraut is somewhat less appealing before eggs.

Today's schedule starts with a hydrotherapy bath. At the spa the therapist leads me into a small room and slathers me with a cool plasma gel. She asks if I am allergic to seafood, before adding a bowl of a fishy liquid into my bath. I climb in and the jets start. I am left alone, the room lights dimmed, the water jets massaging up and down my body. I come very close to sleep.

The next session is a castor oil compress to aid liver detoxification. Another therapist leads the way. Lying on my back on a massage table, he places a heavy face cloth, soaked in oil and warmed, onto my lower stomach. A series of towels and a hot water bottle keep the temperature constant and I am left to relax.

After sauerkraut and a mackerel salad I join the aqua fitness class, rewarding myself with time in the pool, spa bath and steam room. Today's lecture is on nutrition and the conversation over dinner revolves around our therapies, and the semi-fast day to come.

Day Three: I am impressed with my energy levels in the morning. Whilst I would like a coffee, I feel great. I join the walk, choke down the sauerkraut, enjoy the rest of the breakfast, and change back into my robe. Today I have an abdominal massage. While the massage is quite strong, it is surprisingly pleasurable. At the end the therapist here says: "You have a great digestive system. You don't have any problems, right?" I confirm - ten years living in Asia eating street food gives you the constitution of an ox!

The only change for today is dinner. Our evening meal is replaced with a nourishing broth. I won't be asking for the recipe but it sustains me and I have breakfast to look forward to.

Rest of the week: This passes in a blur of educational lectures, aqua fitness classes, walks, therapies and healthy food. I feel great. I am starting to realise that many of the principles I can integrate into my regular life. I'll be giving up sauerkraut, but the pounds are melting away, making it all worthwhile. I'll still be getting a coffee as soon as I leave. ■

For more information about the Grayshott Programme see: www.grayshottspa.com or call 01428 602020