

THE DETOX TEST



Can a cure-all Austrian medi-spa and fresh Alpine air relieve **Sharon Walker** of her health niggles?

I first heard about the modern Mayr method many moons ago, from a friend who raved about it. So evangelical was she, I was sure she'd joined a strange Austrian health cult. Since then, the 'The Cure' has reached mythical status, with celebrities from all corners of the globe flocking to detox according to the principles of the famous Austrian physician **FX Mayr (1875-1965)**.

I've always been a little sceptical about hardcore detox regimes, believing a balanced diet is best but, like many people who find their way to the Park Igls, in the Tirolean Alps, I was suffering from health problems for which my GP had no answers. I'd had success with the Mayr method once before and I wanted someone to wave a magic wand over my bloated, irritable belly, and to leave in its place a well-behaved, flat stomach. But I was also hacking away like a 60-a-day smoker, with a chronic bronchitis that returns to haunt me every winter. In other words, they had their work cut out.

A reassuring mix of Western medicine and alternative treatments, Park Igls has four in-house doctors and plentiful spa treatments. I'm assigned to the jolly Dr Peter Gartner who, even before I raise the delicate issue of my wayward intestine, immediately diagnoses the problem. A raised left shoulder like mine is a dead giveaway. 'It shows there's gas gathered in the higher leg of the large intestine,' Dr Gartner tells me, tapping my stomach with his finger. 'See how hollow it sounds?' I'm sent away with instructions to 'chew, chew, chew', since good digestion begins in the mouth.

DETOX TREATMENTS

From here on in, my days begin with a glass of the dreaded Bitter Wasser – a ghastly tasting concoction of Epsom salts, which speeds up the elimination process. 'It's like having a big dose of Delhi belly,' my friend Jenny complains over a breakfast, breaking the first rule of dining Mayr style, which means no chatting. 'I haven't had the runs like this since I was

backpacking in India.' It's best – or should I say imperative – to be within sprinting distance of a loo, as we soon discover on the Nordic walk!

The days pass in a flurry of detox treatments, abdominal therapy and lung-boosting inhalations. Everything here is geared towards jump-starting circulation and bidding toxins a swift farewell. When I'm not cocooned in towels with a hot compress on my liver, I'm sitting with my feet in a bucket of hot water or marching around in a freezing cold shallow pool like someone from the Ministry of Silly Walks. This Kneipp pool is strangely exhilarating, and made all the more pleasant by the lovely spa staff, who bring us endless cups of herbal teas and vegetable broth.

STRICT DIET REGIME

Despite the diet – there are eight stages, starting from fasting on tea only, graduating to vegetable soups, bread rolls and protein portions (such as goat's cheese, sheep's yoghurt or trout spread) right through to three full meals – I rather enjoy the strict regime, feeling, rightly, that it's doing me good. But my spa-virgin friend is soon threatening to nip out to a local restaurant. 'I will not allow it!' I bark across the elegant starched tablecloth in the otherwise silent room (the better-behaved diners are busy chewing). I may be feeling just a tad hungry, or perhaps it's the bronchitis making me edgy.

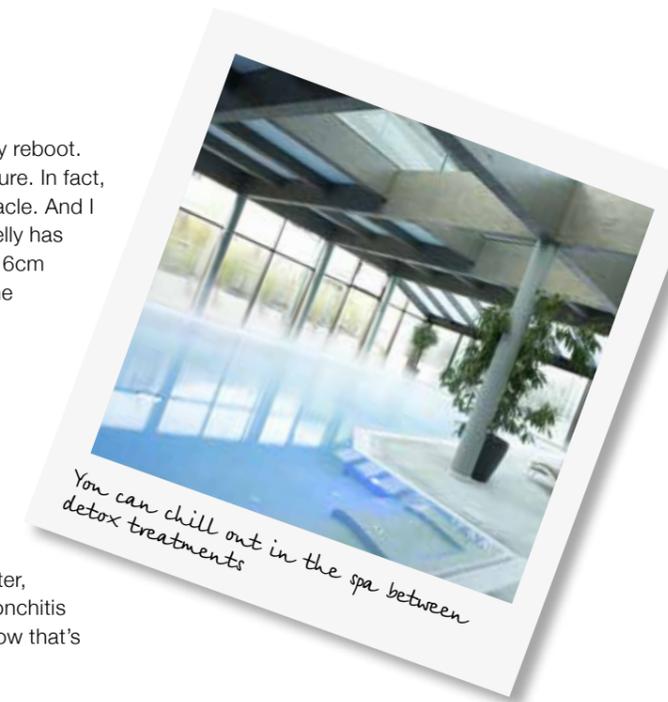
Either way, once past the day three slump, there's no temptation to cheat, as Dr Gartner switches us to the food-combining plan with delicately-proportioned, delicious dishes that rival any gastronomic restaurant. The idea is that you move through the gut-renewing treatment programme and gradually return to normal healthy eating over a period of two weeks.

SUCCESS STORY

It seems that everyone I talk to has a Park Igls success story. There's the 22-year-old Oxford student who'd come crippled with (previously undiagnosed) rheumatoid arthritis, barely able to walk, and who is now striding purposefully next to us on the Nordic walks, then there's Herr Schmidt who announces that his depression has lifted over the course of the week. Others speak of allergies being miraculously cured.

Not that you need to be suffering to appreciate Park Igls, with its relaxed vibe and impressive fitness programme, from Nordic walking to yoga and muscle-toning kyBoots (cushioned shoes that help improve your circulation and balance) you could as easily come here to enjoy the

scenery and for a quick body reboot. But I, too, am hoping for a cure. In fact, I'm hoping for an all-out miracle. And I get it. By day five, my IBS belly has noticeably deflated, I've lost 6cm from my waist and 2kg on the scales (that's a lot of toxins). Dr Gartner pronounces me: 'Untreatably healthy'. And, despite the lingering cough, I feel as if I've been given a new lease of life – as if my intestines have been taken apart, given a good polish and put back together, minus the IBS. And, soon after, for the first time ever, the bronchitis clears without antibiotics. Now that's a result.



TRY THE MAYR METHOD AT HOME

- Chew each piece of food to a pulp before you swallow. Digestion starts in the mouth.
- Put your knife and fork down between mouthfuls as this will stop you eating too quickly.
- Avoid raw food at night.
- Skip dinner twice a week. A 12-14 hour 'fast' will give the chance for your gut to rest and regenerate.
- Avoid snacking in between meals, as this stresses your gut.
- Eat seasonally with plenty of green vegetables. Your plate should be 80 per cent vegetables.
- Avoid eating processed foods and refined sugar.

FACT FILE

- Sharon flew with Easyjet from Gatwick to Innsbruck. A complimentary 20-minute transfer is organised by Park Igls. The Basic programme at Park Igls, including medical examinations, daily Kneipp hydrotherapy, fitness classes and the Mayr nutrition programme (food) plus lectures, costs £1,793 in a single room for a week. For more information, visit park-igls.at.

