

Are they just pulling my leg?

Going straight: We've had Pilates, chiropractors, osteopaths and the Alexander technique. Now **HELEN CROYDON** tries the latest alternative health craze - divine straightening

Straight spines seem to be at the centre of all the latest alternative health fads, so my appointment with Alexander and Carolin Toskar to be 'divinely straightened' feels like a secret meeting. I make my way to the Park Plaza Hotel in Victoria, London. The pair book the same space for their five visits a year to the capital and there is always a scramble for appointments. Based in Germany, they are the only people in the world who offer the miracle-promising divine straightening.

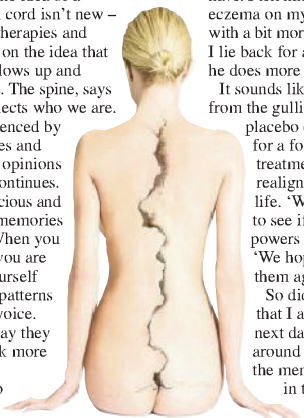
Just ahead of me are an eager mother and her teenage son. 'My elder son had the treatment last year. He gets injured all the time at football but since the treatment, his body seems to heal so fast,' she says.

Divine straightening works on the premise of bringing mind and body into harmony to enable us to realise our innate healing potential.

'We don't treat diseases,' says Alexander, 'we treat the invisible causes behind the disease. These are blockages in the spinal cord which lead to imbalances.' The idea of a spiritual spinal cord isn't new - many ancient therapies and religions draw on the idea that our life force flows up and down the spine. The spine, says Alexander, reflects who we are.

'We are influenced by past experiences and exposed to the opinions of others,' he continues. 'We store conscious and subconscious memories in our spine. When you release these, you are able to free yourself from negative patterns and find your voice. Many people say they think and speak more clearly.'

Sceptical? So was I. I'm



given tea and a chocolate brownie and laid on a couch. Alexander pulls both my legs (not metaphorically, one hopes) and, with a black marker pen, shows how my left is 2cm shorter than my right. This, apparently, is because I have a twist in my spine which means my pelvis is out of place.

'Even newborn babies are out of balance,' explains Carol. 'An embryo is exposed to parents' emotions and experiences and it absorbs microshocks into the spine. The treatment restores the innate intelligence of our cells so our bodies can get back to the state we were supposed to be in.'

I lie back while Alexander does things with his hands a foot above my head for two minutes. There is no contact with the body. Like Reiki - another health craze that has grown in the past decade - it is all done through a supposed channelling of energy. Call it the power of placebo but boy, did my forehead feel hot.

This two-minute burst of energy seems to have 'fixed' my bendy spine because when I sit up, my legs are the same length. Alexander then asks what other ailments I have. I tell him I have occasional stubborn eczema on my eyelids and that I could do with a bit more mental focus. He nods and I lie back for another 15 minutes while he does more heat generating.

It sounds like a fad - extracting money from the gullible with the all-powerful placebo effect. But there is no push for a follow-up. One 20-minute treatment for £80 will apparently realign my 'spiritual spine' for life. 'We wait at least six months to see if the client's own healing powers can take over,' says Carol. 'We hope we never have to see them again.'

So did it work? I like to maintain that I am a rational sceptic but the next day any red eczema traces around my eyes were gone. As for the mental focus, well, I wrote this in the flick of a page.

www.toskarhealing.com

Trainer's tip

Nike master trainer Brian Cochrane shares his top tip about footwear. 'Most people train in the wrong footwear, opting for plimsolls and fashion sneakers for their gym workout. You'll also see people training in their running trainers, which they think is perfectly fine. In reality, to avoid injury, it is important to wear the correct type of trainers for the type of activity you are doing. Running trainers

support your feet in a forward motion but the majority do not offer the multi-directional or lateral support needed for most gym workouts. Look for a training shoe that is versatile, lightweight and features longitudinal flex grooves, which let the foot push off in multiple directions. That way you'll greatly reduce the potential for ankle/foot and knee injuries when moving in multiple planes.'



WHAT'S UP, D
Dr Anura...

reports of...
In Britain, an eating o... to be a gro... given the o... the disord...

It's not ju... suffer, eith... ten years, a 66 per ce... men being... eating disc... the past th... than 2,100... treated for... before they...

So what signs? Sus... behaviours... wearing ba... clothes, be...

HP reco...

AVA... or...

The HP Pavil... and the HP P...

©2011 Hewlett-Pack... Corporation in the U...