

DR MARK PORTER'S
MEDICAL NOTES

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Check if
you are in a
radon zone

COMMUTERS can now check out whether their house contains dangerous levels of an invisible, odourless gas thought to be responsible for as many as 2,000 deaths a year in the UK. Radon, a radioactive gas, is the second-most common cause of lung cancer after smoking.

The Health Protection Agency has teamed up with the British Geological Society to provide a website-based service to tell users whether or not they live in a high-risk area. For £3.53 visitors to www.ukradon.org can find out if their home or office is likely to be affected, and what to do about it.

Radon levels in London homes are among the lowest in the country but as many as one in 30 homes in parts of the surrounding commuter-belt have higher than recommended levels, with hot spots in Hampshire, Sussex, Kent, Hertfordshire and the Thames Valley.

Cost of
botched
cosmetic
surgery

BRITISH cosmetic surgeons are increasingly being asked to repair botched operations as more patients travel abroad for procedures such as face lifts, liposuction and breast implants.

Those returning from Poland and South Africa seem to make up the lion's share of the workload, according to the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS).

Two of my patients developed complications recently after having surgery overseas. The first was a woman whose breast implant was left plainly visible and open to infection after her stitches came apart. And the other couldn't close her eyes properly following over-enthusiastic eye bag removal.

Both required further surgery here in the UK to address the problems, but in the case of the lady with the over-tight eyelids the damage may be permanent.

Choosing a clinic solely on the basis of a brochure, advert or the recommendation of an agency, is daft. Britain is an expensive place to have any private operation but it also has some of the best surgeons in the business. And, at the very least, you get to meet and assess them before committing. I am all for saving money where you can but this is one area where it pays not to economise. My patients certainly wished they hadn't.

■ Visit www.baaps.org.uk for a list of qualified cosmetic surgeons in the UK.

Nature or science?

We all want to look younger — but does a natural approach give you better results than high-tech treatments? Two writers put their wrinkles to the test

THE MOST important beauty issue for women approaching 40 is how to reverse the ageing process. Increasing numbers of Londoners are opting for surgery to banish wrinkles and sagging skin but there are less drastic options if you want to look 10 years younger.

The natural path involves using creams and trying holistic health treatments to improve the appearance of skin. Or there is the scientific approach — cutting-edge anti-ageing technology such as oxygen treatments and chemical peels.

So is natural or hi-tech more effective? We asked **Liz Hoggard** and **Caroline Phillips** to try the latest rejuvenation treatments and report on the results.

NATURAL ANTI-AGEING
PROGRAMME, NEAL'S YARD

The problem: It was being photographed in direct sunlight at 8am that did it. Last summer I did a shoot outdoors for this newspaper and the results were terrifying. For years I had battled oily, teenage skin but now suddenly I had the ravaged complexion of Rider Haggard's She. I knew I'd been overdoing the fun but I hadn't realised quite how washed out I looked.

What is it? Neal's Yard tailor-made me a six-week anti-ageing programme, based around its holistic treatments and remedies. Aimed at the more "mature" woman (euphemism for anyone who feels their skin may be losing its bloom and needs to shed a few pounds), the programme sets out to boost your energy and vitality over six weeks using herbal remedies, essential oils and other therapies, thereby rejuvenating skin and perking up sagging muscle systems. In short: no Botox, no bullying.

Who does it? Initially I went for a consultation with homeopath Susan Curtis, director of medicines at Neal's Yard. She quickly identified that I have quite a bonkers lifestyle, which was probably contributing to signs of ageing, so it was a question of making subtle changes that I could manage.

This meant dropping the quick fixes — caffeine, alcohol, tobacco — which rob your body of key stress-busting nutrients — stress is a key factor in the ageing process.

She also gave me practical advice on everything from diet (cut out soya to avoid bloating) and joints (take up yoga) to eyesight (eating blueberries offers major benefits in preventing and treating eye disorders).

The treatment: I had a detox aromatherapy massage, where essential oils are applied to your skin to alleviate stress and eliminate toxins. Emma the therapist spent time finding out my mood and background, before making up a blend of neroli (to soothe), cardamom (to comfort) and mandarin (to refresh).

On my second visit, she did a facial diagnosis to check for any signs of inner health problems, then applied Palmarosa Purifying Mask to my oily T-Zone and White Tea Enriching Facial Mask on cheeks and forehead (to counteract the crumbly effect spotted in the photos). For daytime she recommended using Orange Flower Facial Oil, which reduces fine lines and balances moisture levels.

Both treatments leave you feeling



fantastic. But learning to relax was trickier: Emma teased that just as she was still saying, "So if you'd like to get up slowly," I was already upright in my shoes, raring to get out the door.

Does it work? Being listened to and pampered is incredibly good for you. And Neal's Yard has just the right combination of tact and insight. When women spend a terrifying £539 million a year going under the knife, it seems a far more humane alternative. No, of course I haven't done the yoga. But I am trying to relax and burning organic essential oils at night.

But the real find is the Organic Beauty Oil (£8.95 for 200ml), which you take internally as a supplement. A cold-pressed oil made from flax, hemp, pumpkin, avocado and evening primrose oil, it is the most disgusting thing I have ever tasted, but my skin seems clearer and less sensitive after a month. Hardcore fans suggest you sprinkle it as a salad dressing if you really can't bear the taste.

■ Neal's Yard Remedies, Covent Garden, Blackheath, Richmond and Foubert's Place (www.nealsyardremedies.com; 0845 262 3145). £65 for an hour's holistic massage including consultation; £50 for an aromatherapy massage; £160 for a tailored anti-ageing package. **LH**

Facing the future: Neal's Yard Remedies include Organic Beauty Oil, inset

& Gabbana suit. The first doctor to practise Carboxy Therapy (CO₂) in the UK and a grand fromage in "the happiness business".

The treatment: "Ha! You're having the needle today," laughs Dr Sister, after gleefully showing me photos of clients' faces and chicken-wing upper arms that he has turned into spring-chicken ones with his magical needles. I'm a wimp so I've opted for carbon dioxide (invisible and odourless gas that's in the air) being injected subcutaneously into my face with a weeny needle — the latest weapon of Hollywood A-listers.

The gas apparently improves blood flow, bringing a rush of oxygen, helping the body's drainage system, promoting the renewal of elastin fibres and collagen and mechanically breaking down fat cells.

The doctor sticks 10 needles into my face in as many minutes. These injections sting, like mosquito bites. Then gas bubbles through my skin

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which the good doctor massages to distribute the gas. I have five sessions of CO₂ (twice weekly) for 15 minutes. Sometimes I end up with tiny bruises on my jaw, as if my children have pinched me.

This gentle torture is combined with four 90-minute monthly sessions of UFL. This involves three different types of laser therapy for different layers of the skin. With the Aurora part of the treatment, which reduces surface blemishes, a headpiece is pressed against my face for 20 minutes. It throws out a flash of red light and heat, and feels like a slight electric shock or being pricked with hot needles.

In Act II, the ReFirme part of the treatment, RF (Radio Frequency) and IR (infrared) heat the dermal tissue to 55 degrees to stimulate collagen production and tighten the skin. Next anaesthetic cream is smeared on my skin and I walk up the corridor for Polaris treatment with Dr Sister. This uses a RF laser light which works even deeper into the dermis to stimulate more collagen and "rub out" my remaining wrinkles.

Does it work? Brilliantly. Although it takes seven hours 15 minutes (less than the average working day) in total, results are seen almost immediately. My skin looks brighter, fresher, smoother, firmer and younger. Forty-two years old, perhaps. My nine-year-old scrutinises my face and, unprompted, tells me my "wriggles" (wrinkles) are disappearing. But my husband still hasn't noticed.

■ Notting Hill's BeautyWorksWest (www.beautyworkswest.com; 020 7221 2248). Five x CO₂ at £100 per session, four x UFL at £450 per session, grand total: £2,300. Top-up is recommended after six months. **CP**

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