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Why you need to know fashion's
next top model

Coming clean

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If the wellness wave of the past several years has taught us anything, it's that there's no human limitation that cannot be soothed by in-ear meditation guides, activated charcoal, transcendental yoga positions or extortionate creams with mythical properties.

Then there's the gamut of detox diets which yours truly has spurred through over the years, with the aim of restoring the body to its pure form – intermittent fasting, juicing, the cotton ball diet (hunger pangs relieved when you pop a zero-calorie cotton ball. True story) and the ice cube diet (chew on ice long enough and you'll trick your stomach into thinking it's full.) – I've done them all with varying

results. Continuity, for me, however, persists in being the problem thereafter. And the lack of it, is the reason why the end results wane back to pre-detox conditions.

For a three-day detox programme, I headed to Azerbaijan's densely forested Gabala, to clean my internal pipes so to speak, at the Chenot Palace Health Wellness Hotel under the famously hardcore Chenot method which affords you an unwavering 800 calories-a-day interspersed with medical and spa treatments to complement your experience. It's said to treat the ills of the ultra-high net worth individuals. A week here will set you back an average of Dhs20,000.

After nearly a year of aggregate comfort eating since I moved to

The eternal pursuit of a happy mind, body and soul has reached extreme zeniths. *EW* begins at gut level and embarks on an 800 calorie-a-day detox at Azerbaijan's Chenot Palace Health Wellness Hotel. This is how we got on...



Dubai, this felt essential (the Dubai stone and I are well acquainted, but are not on speaking terms right now). So, I kept a detox diary to chart my nutritional travails, mood swings and changing shape.

DAY ONE My heartrate flickers arrhythmically and my blood pressure is low. My doctor, Dr Saida, clad in head-to-toe alabaster white is a little concerned. "I arrived last night and gave myself a head start on the whole limited intake thing 24 hours earlier," I explain, so she doesn't think that my health's natural state is all gloom and doom. She giggles the giggle of someone who doesn't know what to say. A moment later: "You're committed, aren't you?" Fake blush. I'd be lying if I said

a surge of pride didn't bolt through my body. "Well, I didn't want to have a huge shock and suffer more than I feel like I will." She takes her stethoscope and puts its tingling cool surface between my shoulder blades and commands me to cough. We discuss my goals for the three-day programme - feel cleansed, maybe lose a kilo or two, stop craving gargantuan portions of food? As far as your run-of-the-mill medical check-ups, this was without anxiety.

I'm in the medical wing of Chenot Palace's lower ground spa where a crack team of eminent therapists and doctors of alternative studies are giving me a breakdown of my 28-year-old health. The night before, when I arrived at the hotel, against an ink black sky enveloped

around me, a small folder with a typed-up schedule was resting on my bedside table. The first day is about getting through the rubric of the medical side of the Chenot method – a method that verges on the old fashioned, including: three (small) square meals a day and no opportunity to graze – unless you count filling yourself up with buckets of barely coffee at breaking-point intervals.

Post consultation, I move to Dr Ioannis Feroukas' room for a bioenergy check-up. A doctor of alternative medicine and naturopathy, Dr Ioannis' research into the human body has taken him from the bottom to the top ends of the world in the most obscure places. His assessment involves me taking a hold of two metal prongs connected to a machine to feel my energy. The vibes are good he says. The whites of my eyes are "pearly perfect".

Staying on the same floor, I move to the spa section and begin a round of treatments which I am to do every day after breakfast to take me through to lunch.

The hydro-aromatherapy bath, administered by the full-wattage Zara (one of the spa therapists) is a 20-minute session of jets shooting at the lumps and bumps of my legs, bum and tum. Zara fills the bath with premium soaps that smell like freshly washed linen. She leaves me to it – the jets increase in shooting power and I unapologetically squat in position so the jets are practically drill into my thighs – "pain and gain" I chant to myself.

I dawdle over to the next-door room to do a Phyto-mud wrap treatment. Zara lathers me in tepid coats of what looks like a combination of seaweed and spinach – as if they were blended together on high speed. I'm mummified in sheets of plastic, atop an undulating water bed and have a 20-minute cocooned snooze.

I'm then hosed down with a super high-pressure jet in a white-tiled wet room (which doesn't look too dissimilar to a firing squad room – just saying) and I feel quite light-headed after being mercilessly pummelled by water. Treatments in the spa are done – and now onto a clockwork of very measured food. Out on the terrace overlooking the infinity pool I start with a peach and vanilla tapioca with maracuja. Interesting. It's in reverse. I'm happy I get my sweet, albeit, clean treat first but I wonder if I'll experience a moment of anti-climactic despair after my main is followed by a digestive herbal tea.

A vegetable paella quinoa comes in a golf ball size on a plate thrice its dimensions – very tasty, although I sprinkle the masala, turmeric and cumin seasonings (your salt and pepper equivalent, available at every meal bar breakfast) with a very heavy hand. The sweet potato gnocchi with sun dried tomatoes and rucola pesto as my main is very satisfying and yummy. And that's it until dinner.

My mum is with me but is not subscribing to the detox menu – she does BioLite – a menu that proffers an additional 300 calories – but her stomach is still a tad cavernous. We go to a fish restaurant somewhere on the foothills of Gabala's punchy mountains. She orders a sparkly fish that comes with a bevy of sides including crisp roast potatoes and a smooth aubergine dip with walnut halves scooped into its mushiness. I don't look directly at them. I think of the delights of detox. But then temptation suddenly hijacks my body and I furtively have three roast potatoes, gulping them down like all the staff at Chenot are hiding behind bushes, ready to launch at me for going against the regime.

"All the previous food debris in my stomach has been dissolved and now my pipes are as clean as a kitchen scrubbed down with limescale"

I feel so guilty when we get back, I cycle around the hotel's perimeter with extra resistance to undo that oh-so-good crispiness.

Dinner? As above. But the main is a bean burger with diced vegetables. I love it. But I wish there was more.

My mum and I then retire to the hotel's beautiful Alpine-chic lounge and I speak in borderline shrill tones to cover up my stomach rumbles.

DAY TWO *The Hunger Games* are real now. I have a slow-burning headache in the back of my eyes. If you think I've skipped breakfast, I have not – no way. But beyond the fact that I get a fruit puree and a shamrock of waters: normal, apple cider vinegar or lemon infused, there's not much else to report – except that I am starting to feel the portion sizes are normal and that I don't need anymore. The awakening begins.

Barley coffee ties me over for an additional hour but all I am doing is going to the toilet every 10 minutes – I'm not a liquid person, I don't drink lots of water ever, but here I am turning myself into a human fountain.

The treatments have now become muscle memory – the hydro-aromatherapy bath and mud wrap feel good – even the painful hose blast energises me. Today, there's an addendum to the treatments: a Chenot energetic massage using suction cups. I've never done this before but it looks sore. My therapist applies the cups all over my back, one at a time and yanks them off when my skin can be stretched no more. It only hurts on my podgy bits (love handles). She massages my skin as she moves along so I don't have a single cup mark on my body. I then



#chenotpalace



“I don’t look directly at the potatoes. I think of the delights of detox. But then temptation suddenly hijacks my body”



have the same treatment on my face: facial draining, it’s called. The bags under my eyes are very grateful for this. Lunch is a smorgasbord of carrot soup spiced up with ginger, mushrooms filled with flecks of tofu and a couple of quinoa dolma. I Hoover it up in what I think is a moderate pace but my mum side-eyes me indicating that I need to take my foot off the pedal and actually chew – this is reportedly the most important part of the digestive process.

Between lunch and dinner, I take a dip in the indoor pool. I love that there’s no chlorine (instead they use ozone, far purer) because I forgot my goggles but I can see underwater without my eyes throbbing afterwards. I do 10 very considered laps and head back to my room and sit on the balcony and drink in the lake view. Normally I crave adrenalised holidays hiking up mountains, but here my inner sloth emerges. I sit there for three (three!) hours in meditative silence until the call of dinner takes me away from deep-seated zen.

DAY THREE How on earth am I supposed to do an anti-gravity and vacuum run? According to my schedule, I am due a trip to the gym. I arrive with my personal trainer waiting to assist me into the high-tech equipment. I’m zipped up and plonked into the machines – the vacuum machine is cool. In under five minutes I burn 100 calories at a pretty glacial pace. I stop soon after because I fear I am heading into a dangerous caloric deficit.

For lunch I have the best meal so far: lasagne – but the gluten, dairy, salt, sugar-free kind. It’s heaped on the plate, so I politely go to town on it with both hands. It’s over too quickly. Although where the food lacks in calories, it’s made up for in a surplus of service by the Chenot Palace staff. We’ve gotten to know each other fairly well and by today, they feel like friendly village neighbours. We even joke about former Chenot guests begging for kebabs on the sly.

I cheat this afternoon with watermelon and cucumber (read: water) when my mum orders her own food at another restaurant outside the premises. It’s fine, I tell myself, because at this point, all the previous food debris in my stomach has been dissolved and my pipes are as clean as a kitchen scrubbed down with limescale.

Back at the hotel, it’s our last night. We are flying out of Baku to Dubai the next morning and I’m already Googling the restaurants at

the airport, revving up for my reunion with food. But, my stomach isn’t rumbling and I can feel a very good sleep coming on.

DAY FOUR This morning I go on the scales down in the spa. I have lost 1.5kg. I can feel it too. The treatments definitely cinched me up well. I have my last fruit puree breakfast and leave Chenot and begin my reintegration into the world of normal eating.

On the drive into Baku I feel out of sorts. I see people cradling wraps, eating chips on-the-go and downing pop. I don’t want my newfound discipline to fall by the wayside, not after three days of militant methodology.

At the airport I’m a kid in a candy shop. I don’t know what to do with all this choice screaming at me. We sit at a restaurant and I order a ‘slow-entry-back-to-reality’ salad.

It arrives in a sloppy pile-up. At this point I can’t imagine subsisting on any more than I have become used to. I take three big mouthfuls of my parmesan-loaded Caesar salad and a food coma grips me good. The real test awaits me back in Dubai.

DAY EIGHTEEN No. I haven’t taken it to next-level extremes. I am not on the 800 calorie plan right now. Going back to reality wasn’t a slippery slope either. My cravings have abated and I don’t have this desire to eat everything in plain (and hidden) sight. If detox is about stripping you bare and starting from ground zero, then I have been detoxed and retoxed. Chenot, thank you.