

FEELGOOD FACTOR

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Sophie Goodchild tries a facial therapy that uses water rather than chemicals

HYDRO-DERMABRASION

What is it?

A less scary version of microdermabrasion, the facial therapy that literally resurfaces your skin by blasting away the dead skin using exfoliating particles at super high pressure. Hydro-dermabrasion does the same job but uses water instead.

What does it claim?

The brainchild of two former pharmacists, this new treatment uses high-pressure water jets to buff away skin cells. Traditional facial peels rely on harsh acids, derived from fruit or milk, to strip away the skin's outer layer. But hydro-dermabrasion is free from chemicals as well as minerals that turn water "hard", such as calcium.

This absence of harsh chemicals results in a gentler form of exfoliation. The risk of discomfort and redness associated with chemical peels is reduced. Also claims to refine structure of skin, remove fine lines and even acne scars. The humidity from the water jets can help heal damaged skin.

Any science to it?

This skin therapy works by targeting compressed sterile water at the skin. Tiny droplets of water containing saline and oxygen are forced through a special nozzle at 200 metres per second.

The nozzle makes the treatment more accurate and can be targeted at problem areas, especially scars and acne. Pressure from the jet stream of pure water stretches the skin, triggering a drop in temperature of up to 8F (4.4C). This stimulates blood circulation, hydrates the skin and removes impurities by forcing them out of the pores.

What is it like?

My therapist is Amo Khan, the man who helped found Hydrohealing and whose philosophy is "wellness through water". As I



On target: high-pressure water jet

lie down on the treatment couch, he starts by explaining that the aim of the treatment is to hydrate and rejuvenate the skin.

First, I am treated to a gentle skin-cleanse to remove any traces of make-up. Because I have overly sensitive skin, I am slightly apprehensive when Amo produces the high-speed water jet. It resembles a see-through pen and there is a slight tingling as the water droplets hit my skin. But the sensation is not unpleasant and my skin feels plumped and dewy at the end of the session and although the transformation was not dramatic, my skin felt firmer.

Amo recommends between three and six treatments if you want to see a big difference. A good alternative to the chemical peel.

Cost and contact

£80 an hour for treatment including initial cleanse, toner, eye cream and moisturiser. Hydrohealing, 216a Kensington Park Road, London W11 (www.hydrohealing.com, 020 7727 2570).

My spine is in

When you have had back pain from the age of 10 and the NHS can't help, it's good to know that there are professionals out there on whom you can really lean

CHARLOTTE ROSS



AS A CHILD I remember being told not to slouch, to stand up straight, not to hold my head to one side. Then, aged about 10 and with an aching back, I saw the doctor: I wasn't slouching, it turned out. I had a spine condition called scoliosis.

That was 28 years ago and since then I've tried scores of treatments, therapies and activities in a bid to help my back. Although the NHS treated me for a few teenage years, it soon reduced its input to advice — take exercise, stay slim, try painkillers when it gets bad. Common sense, but not much help. So instead I embarked on my own lifelong experiment to combat back pain. It's taken huge reserves of patience, cost me tens of thousands of pounds and led me to some extraordinary people.

Not everything has worked but none of the sometimes unusual techniques I've tried caused me any harm, either. And though some of the exercises have been painful, most of the therapies have provided me with hugely welcome, if temporary, relief from the aches that plagued my adult life. Although I believe the practitioners I profile do work that would benefit any sufferer of chronic back pain, they've been particularly useful to me and my scoliosis.

Scoliosis is a spinal curvature, one that goes side-to-side, like an elongated S. Although it's common — at least two in every 100 girls develop it — it ranges widely in severity, so many people don't know they have it. I often see them walking down the street, with one shoulder higher than the other, a slight prominence on the upper back ribs — the result of the spine taking a spiral route instead of a straight one.

My curves — there are often two, a main one and a milder, compensatory kink — while not disfiguring, were severe enough to warrant action. Much to my horror I was fitted with a Milwaukee brace, which turned out to be a full set of body armour — a construct of metal bars and solid plastic corsetry that ran the length of my upper body. The idea was it would hold the body and therefore the spine, rigid, preventing it from growing worse. For the next few years, I wore it 23 hours a day — one hour off to have a bath.

Though I hated it, the brace did its work and my curves didn't get too much worse. But it was throughout this period that back pain became a constant companion. As my spine tried to go its own anarchic way, the brace battled it. My upper right back developed an exquisite ache that matured into a deep burning pain between spine and shoulder blade.

Since I discarded the brace I've suf-

fered almost constantly from back pain. Sometimes just the familiar ache, made worse by tiredness, stress and cold, damp weather. At other times it's been episodes of acute agony caused by my wonky spine pinching nerves or seizing up. Back pain doesn't just affect the back, either. What starts as a little localised ache can end up with a whole symphony of agonies as muscles tighten into defensive knots and spasms across your body. For several years it hurt every time I breathed, because the tissue around my ribcage had become so taut.

I'll never be able to straighten my spine — the bones fused into a set position when I stopped growing — but there's plenty I can do to keep it mobile, healthy and to reduce the pain I suffer.

Pilates, as almost anyone with a health background will now tell you, is one of the best things you can do for most types of back pain. I've been practising it for seven years and it helps immensely. Massage is another thing everyone with a bad back is drawn to. There are hundreds of different types but, ultimately, it depends on the practitioner. If you find one you click with, who understands your body, that's the best you can do.

But in my search I've come across much rarer therapies, often with surprising results. Hellerwork literally unglues your muscles, releasing them back to a more natural, childlike state, while the Grinberg Method, practised in London by Victoria Oldham, is one

'What starts as a little localised ache can end with a symphony of agonies as muscles tighten into knots and spasms across your body'

of the more "miraculous" treatments I've tried. It was this that finally released my ribs and allowed me to breathe without pain. Therapies you associate with other ailments can be effective, too. Acupuncture helps release spasmed muscles, while craniosacral therapy "teaches" your body how not to react to pain — and it has recently allowed me to enjoy four painless weeks in a row. The osteopath who treated me after a couple of bike accidents rejiggered my spine so expertly that I regained full movement in a previously seized-up neck.

Being active is crucial when your back is bad, and many experts believe you need a combination of active and passive therapies to get the maximum benefit from either. Swimming has long been a great love of mine but learning to do front crawl using the Alexander Technique, as taught in the Shaw Method, has been nothing short of a joy. Yoga is great for your back, and now you can take courses designed specifically for spinal health, or, even more specifically, for scoliosis. And a German exercise method called Kieser Training builds a support network for your body using precise exercises on specially calibrated machinery.

I don't see all of these therapists all of the time — neither bank account nor diary would allow it. What I do is try to give my back what it needs. Here are just eight of the people I lean on.



Pictures by Rebecca Reid, Graham Hussey, Tony Buckingham

KAREN WILLIS
OSTEOPATH

MEET THE

KAREN WILLIS

What she does: Karen is trained in kinesiology as well as osteopathy and employs both techniques on patients. Bodily imbalances are detected by pressing down on limbs, then she does lightning "adjustments" of your spine.

How it helps: Karen eradicated particularly nasty neck pain that had been dogging me for years.

Where: The Healthy Living Centre, St Paul's Road, N1; 020 7704 6900, www.thehealthylivingcentre.co.uk. £50 for 40 minutes.

IRA LEINONEN-EVANS

What she does: Kieser Training is a German method that uses specialised machinery to hold the

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HUSEYIN DERMIS
SHAW METHOD TEACHER

MIKA SIMMONS
CRANIOSACRAL THERAPIST

VICTORIA OLDHAM
GRINBERG PRACTITIONER

LOUISA POTTER
PILATES INSTRUCTOR

SUK-CHEE TSANG
MASSAGE THERAPIST

BACK SQUAD – EIGHT TALENTED THERAPISTS WHO CARE FOR MY HEALTH

body in position while you perform multiples of very precise exercises. Ira adjusts and monitors my machines while I strengthen specific parts of my body, such as one side of my neck. **How it helps:** By creating a strong muscular structure you can take pressure off the spine, as well as support it. This method allows you to target imbalances carefully and target key areas of weakness. **Where:** Greater London House, Hampstead Road, NW1; 020 7391 9980, www.kieser-training.com

ADELENE CHEONG
What she does: Adelene also has scoliosis, so developed her own yogic techniques to deal with it. She runs classes and courses which teach

people how to exercise to compensate for a twisted spine. **How it helps:** Yoga is brilliant for balancing the body and stretching the spine, particularly important if it is compressed, as with scoliosis. **Where:** Courses at Triyoga, Primrose Hill, or book private lessons; 07717 411335, www.relaxandrestore.com

HUSEYIN DERMIS
What he does: Although he works as a City systems analyst, in the evenings Huseyin teaches people to swim using the Shaw Method. It employs the Alexander Technique, which emphasises keeping the spine and neck in perfect alignment. **How it helps:** It takes the strain off my neck area and allows the body to

move with incredible ease through the water. As well as improving my front crawl, swimming with the Shaw Method is a truly beautiful feeling. **Where:** See www.artofswimming.com for classes and courses.

MIKA SIMMONS
What she does: Mika uses her hands to sense, then manipulate the flow of energy in your body. During the session physical sensations and emotions can be felt quite intensely, but in an objective, rather than overwhelming way. Craniosacral therapy is a deeply relaxing therapy. **How it helps:** Mika is looking for energy patterns that could relate to accidents, experiences in very early life or even in the womb. She then

works to release blockages, which can lead to a sense of physical and emotional liberation. After several months of Mika, my back pain subsided to a warm buzz. **Where:** Triyoga, Primrose Hill, NW1, 020 7483 3344, www.triyoga.co.uk; and The Hale Clinic, Regent's Park; 020 7631 0156, www.halectinic.com. From £35 for half an hour.

VICTORIA OLDHAM
What she does: By looking at my feet this Grinberg practitioner can "diagnose" what's going on in my body and mind with unnerving accuracy. Either through hands-on exercises or by working directly on my body, Victoria somehow manages to release the pain I'm carrying.

How it helps: Victoria dissolved all the tension around my ribcage which has allowed me to breathe pain-free for the first time in years. I've also learned how not to carry emotional tension in my back. **Where:** Workshops and sessions at Triyoga, 020 7483 3344, www.grinbergmethod.com

LOUISA POTTER
What she does: Like many of the best Pilates teachers, Louisa is a classically trained dancer and has an eagle eye for bad posture. She guides me through exercises which centre on the core stomach muscles, using special machines and equipment. **How it helps:** Pilates is almost universally considered A Good Thing

in relation to back care. When my stomach and back areas are strong, I hold my body more effortlessly. **Where:** Pilates Central, 10-12 Gaskin St N1; 020 7288 8080, www.pilatescentral.co.uk. £25-£60 for 90-min class.

SUK-CHEE TSANG
What she does: Suk-Chee is an expert at unravelling the knots that glue up my back. She has a light but no-nonsense touch and a homing instinct for finding the bits that really hurt. **How it helps:** As well as loosening muscles, massage helps beat stress, keeps the spine flexible and improves healing circulation. **Where:** Healthy Living Centre, St Paul's Road, N1; 020 7704 6900, www.thehealthylivingcentre.co.uk. £55 an hour.