

Five months, three detox programs, a whole lot of kale. This road test happened on the path to wellness

words Megan Anderson



I don't want to drink lemon potions all day long. I don't want to stir herbs into my tea or get rear-ended by a plastic hose and be 'irrigated' from the outside in. I just want to feel more radiant and energised, less tired and sluggish. Being more blissed-out would be good. I could drop a few kilos.

I'm thinking 'detox', because 'diet' is so passe (unless you're Dr protein-diet-of-the-moment Dukan, in which case it's just another word for 'royalty cheque'). Perhaps clearing out some toxins is the way forward – a kind of purifying cleanse before carrying on in a newly enlightened way, unburdened by an unhealthy dependence on coffee, wine, carbohydrates and sugar.

There's a maze of information and misinformation out there, so I seek help from some experts. Each has a slightly different take on wellness. None of them comes near me with a hose.

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The taster

WHAT Living Synergy 'Dip Your Toe In' retreat.

WHERE Dunsborough.

DURATION Two days.

COST From \$725.

ACCOMMODATION A comfortable room in a modern home overlooking Geographe Bay.

A maximum of four people per retreat.

CONTACT livingsynergy.com.au.

THE ETHOS Take a rest. "It's about what you leave out," says host Jenny Keenan. The idea is to slow down for a while and take a load off your digestive system.

THE EXPERIENCE There's only one other person dipping their toe in on the weekend I attend. It's intimate, but relaxed. The loose schedule includes such things as nipping to Meelup for a coastal walk, swimming at Smiths Beach, napping, and hanging about in restful yoga poses.

Mostly it's about not doing things – not watching telly, not checking your email, not wading through the weekend papers, not flitting between social engagements, not self-medicating with sugar, stimulants or pacifying substances.

It's extraordinary how plump the days feel when you extract your normal routine and just focus on wellness. Jenny isn't a qualified practitioner, but has a bookcase laden with nutrition and wellness tomes and a litany of health guru contacts around the world. She's eager to share the knowledge she's been gathering since she suffered from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome more than a decade ago and set about finding a path to good health.

Jenny also gives a great massage (an optional extra), and morning meditation and yoga sessions in the light-filled lounge room (also extra) make a magnificent start to the days.

A weekend doesn't seem long to change much, but I know something is working when I wander past a cafe selling schnitzel and burgers and

suddenly it all looks toxic and unappealing. There's a subtle indoctrination going on, even while I'm being fed pizza, burritos, chocolate mousse and (nut milk) ice cream, all of which meet the retreat's exacting dietary criteria.

ON THE MENU Raw food. That is to say, food that hasn't been heated to more than 45 degrees at any stage. Jenny eats this way 100 per cent of the time, so we eat like she does: with simple but voluminous dishes that we could happily reproduce at home (we procure more exotic fare from Samudra cafe in town). I'm introduced to the green smoothie – a nutrient-packed drink that's really palatable. Getting the proportions right is the trick (60 per cent fruit, like banana, mango and pear, 40 per cent greens like kale or spinach). I resolve to get a decent blender and make this a daily habit. It's said that this alone can make a big impact on wellbeing.

RESULT Long sleeps, long walks, daily yoga and plenty of fresh food conspire to bring on triumphs in the evacuation department which, according to Jenny, should be a thrice-daily occurrence. By Sunday evening I feel like I'm walking on air – lighter, happier and energised. Despite the volume of food that gets put away over the two days, I manage to lose a kilogram. On the drive back to Perth I'm already thinking about returning for a seven-day juice cleanse, one of the offerings that follows this dip-your-toe-in encounter. How amazing must that feel?

I stay off wine and coffee for a few days after the retreat, just to prolong the virtue. I do buy a blender, plant my own kale (the most nutrient rich thing you can eat) and keep the green smoothie habit, but my afterglow fades as I re-establish a hearty coffee, wine and chocolate routine. Six weeks pass. I seek out the solidarity of a group retreat.