

THE WAKING DEAD

THE INDIVIDUAL An older working mother who's left blank from deep and utter exhaustion

THE REMEDY A dedicated sleep programme at SHA, Spain's foremost medi-clinic

It feels like a hangover, doesn't it? That rising nausea and dizziness known to everyone who suffers chronic interrupted sleep. I am blessed with good sleeper genes. But take one late-life pregnancy (now one toddler) and one full-time job and I've turned into a dead sleeper. Within minutes of lying down, darkness slams me into dreamless oblivion until shrieking from my little one's bedroom jolts me into changing a nappy faster than a Ferrari pit stop. Although I'm never awake for long, waking rejuvenated is but a dream. Instead, I get out of bed each morning exhausted and dragging.

I've signed up for a seven-day sleep programme at the SHA Wellness Clinic near Alicante. It's a multi-pronged attack devised with a personal agenda planner: I opt for sessions of nutrition, sleep analysis, psychotherapy, meditation, mindfulness, acupuncture and massage. No sugar, alcohol or caffeine are permitted so thankfully, like the majority of guests, I am here alone to nurse the skull-crushing withdrawal headache that leaves me snarly for three days. But that's as punishing as it gets. The diet is super-luxe macrobiotic served in the chicest surroundings you'll ever wear a white robe in. Onion ravioli with consommé and slices of autumn fruit, anyone? After a general health check, we start to dig deeper. According to health and nutrition consultant

Mario Lopez, 70 per cent of guests have sleep problems. He ponders my case with Poirot-like brilliance. I had been going to bed early to beat the inevitable 11.30pm wake-up from my daughter, but that was interrupting my deep-sleep cycle, he deduced. It's that part of the night which is the most crucial, hence the old wives' tale: one hour of sleep before midnight is worth two after. Consider going to bed later, he proposes.

Breakfast can also have a hugely positive effect. Miso soup taken before my muesli would give me stamina. Carrot, apple and ginger juice provide some zing. Eating root vegetables such as sweet potatoes and parsnips would ground me. I learn that beans, oily fish, sesame seeds, watercress and rocket are high in the amino acid needed to make the sleep-inducing melatonin hormone. And Lopez believes an overactive brain is egging my body on to keep going long after it is spent. So a coffee leaves me with plummeting sugar levels and a brain trying to ditch surplus fuel. Eating an apple before I leave the office

with a ginger or liquorice tea, Lopez says, will see me home. He hands me a health plan thicker than the Chilcot Inquiry.

During the first of many deep-tissue massages where my shoulders crunch like pebbles on a beach, I realise I haven't properly relaxed since my daughter was born. Could that really affect my sleep? The sleep-analysis device I am given to wear overnight is cumbersome, but I tell myself the cannula taped to my nostrils to measure oxygen and breathing, the pulse clip strapped to my finger and the heart monitor all perform a vital job. A curious night of half-sleep follows as I try not to squash the machine. The collected data is examined the next morning by sleep specialist Vicente Mera, who reveals I snored 139 times in three hours and have mild non-obstructive sleep apnea, a common condition suffered by one in three people who are overweight. This is not my issue, so he suggests solutions such as acupuncture or a mouth guard.

The mindfulness session with Beatrice is calming and makes perfect sense. It is a shower for the mind, she says. Observing and acknowledging our feelings makes us feel more present. She whispers me through a meditation designed for bedtime. My shoulders inch down. My jaw unclenches. But meditation with another star, Nieves González, goes from relaxing to challenging. After a visualisation with eyes closed she demands an

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answer: 'Why are you a controller? Your mind gives your body orders and tells it when to get up! You show kindness to others, why not yourself?' With so much to process, I swim for an hour.

I dread the session of psychotherapy. Dr Joaquin Julia's questions are frank. 'What else is going on here?' he coaxes. I miss the bliss of sliding into sleep, I blurt out. Of dreaming. We work on a list of goals. Short-term, medium-term, long-term. We stare at a blank piece of paper. I have no plans. I have no time to imagine any. He passes the tissues. He talks about why people get sick when no viruses are around. Repressing emotions. Saying no to their aspirations. He passes more tissues. Without raising an eyebrow he gently steers me through the session so I do end up with a plan and leave smiling and apologetic.

How naïve I was to think refreshing sleep could be won without my own hard work. But SHA sets me on a positive path. I no longer drink coffee. I eat sleepy foods. And I even stay awake long enough to meditate. How refreshing.

BOOK IT Healing Holidays (+44 20 7843 3592; healingholidays.co.uk/condenast) offers a four-day Discovery programme at SHA Wellness Clinic from £1,699 per person, prescribed full board, including flights, transfers, and all treatments as per the programme. **HEALING HOLIDAYS EXCLUSIVE** Book a seven-night programme and receive a complimentary room upgrade, 50-minute massage and early check in/late check out.