

No pain, no gain - and no fun either

TOP of every list of New Year's resolutions I have ever made is a determined pronouncement to get healthy, eat better and do more exercise - and this year was no exception. But without fail by mid-January the booze is back, winter blues have made chocolate a necessity and the last place I want to venture on a dark morning is the gym.

So this year it was time for extreme measures, clearly I was incapable of detoxing my poor liver alone - I needed a push.

The detox weekend from Hampstead based Fitness-12 promised just this. Dreaming of spa days, fresh fruit smoothies and some Spanish sunshine I happily signed up.

How wrong I was. The Fitness-12 programme is a bespoke designed plan which incorporates five days in Spain. Its aim is to cleanse your diet, remove toxins and give your liver a break. Unfortunately, though, that is not achieved through smoothies and spa treatments. There's some hard work involved too.

The first stage of the programme starts three days before your arrival at the retreat with a specially designed menu and supplement shake programme.

Quickly I realised that things with toxins in them tend to be some of the very best bits in life. Wine, chocolate and cheese are key parts of my diet - although I do throw a few green vegetables in there for a bit of a change.

The first three days were not fun - food choices were restricted heavily and caffeine, alcohol and dairy were firmly off the menu. Lunches consisted of lentil soups, baked falafel or grilled chicken and breakfast was fruit salad.

Caffeine withdrawal began in earnest on day two. The constant low level headache shocked me into realising quite how dependent I was on the stuff - and a heavy workload led to my first slip up,

Georgia Graham gave up all of her vices to tackle a detox weekend in La Manga - but smoothies, spa days and Spanish sunshine this certainly was not...



a cup of tea mid-afternoon to get me through.

After two days, two terrifying tubs of supplements arrived from the team and director Steve Halsall, who was taking me and the other recruits on the retreat, gave me a call.

Charming, if more pro-detox than I ever thought possible, Steve chatted me through my symptoms and put my conscience at ease about my tea-with-milk slip up.

"It happens to everyone," he said, "this is about doing something positive for your body and giving it a chance to refresh. But we know that people have busy lives, and that if you're working late you might end up at your desk with a cup of coffee and a muffin. You just have to be careful not to do it too often."

Then he moved on to the supplements. One huge tub of liver-cleansing powder to be taken three times a day and an ominous green powder which Steve cheerfully suggested I mix with apple juice because "that way it doesn't taste quite as much like pond scum".

After religiously following the diet, it was time for the fun bit. Off to sunny Spain for a long

weekend of relaxation and a quick fitness shock to get me into my trainers and on the treadmill.

Except it wasn't sunny, it was the coldest weekend Alicante had seen in years and the beautiful La Manga resort - where the detox breaks are based - was covered in a freezing drizzle.

Steve picked me up from the airport and we chatted about my goals for fitness, health and how I was doing on the programme. At La Manga my fellow detoxers were eagerly awaiting my arrival so that they could be fed.

A lovely mother and daughter who were bravely spending a bonding week not eating and working out together, and a Camden charity leader, who had so much energy he reminded me of a detoxified Tigger, greeted me with a friendly chat around the table while 'super Steve' as he was soon dubbed, prepared our evening meal.

The break at La Manga, Spain's top sports resort, is designed to make the most of the brilliant facilities on offer. Bright and early each day at 7am we woke up and drank a chalky cleansing shake and then it was off to a beach on a nature reserve



Detox delights ... clockwise from top, La Manga resort, the Fitness-12 director Steve Halsall, Georgia and her co-detoxers and a fridge full of green goodies.

nearby for a pre-breakfast run.

I don't run at the best of times, let alone pre-breakfast but there was something about the wild beach as the sun rose that got me going and I jogged most of it, enjoying my thoughts and watching my break-mates clearly take pleasure in the experience.

Days were then spent with two further trips to the gym, desperately awaited lunch, and dinner and hydrotherapy in the pools.

On the middle day it was time for a semi-fast and nothing passed our lips that wasn't soup or fruit. An uplifting walk through the nature park and 'breakfast' of an apple on a wind-swept hillside was the highlight of the trip.

But that night caffeine withdrawal suddenly kicked in. I lay in bed for hours with a brutal headache and rumbling tummy but also a strange sense of achievement.

The mantra of "no pain no gain" had transformed my ache into a sort of masochistic pleasure.

The next day clutching my personalised fitness plan Steve had worked out for me I headed home with a belief that a detoxified life was the only way to live.

Home again, I started to realise the detox was working. Unprompted people commented on my eyes being brighter - I hadn't been aware that they were dull, but a compliment's a compliment - my skin clearer and I was suddenly able to sleep properly for the first time in years.

I've had insomnia for more years than I care to remember, trying everything from herbal remedies to spiky sleep relaxation mats (a desperate attempt from my mum, because they were buy one get one free at a health shop) and nothing had ever worked.

Suddenly, after 10 days of a cleansed liver, regular exercise - and because fun dinners or wine were off the menu - bed became a treat, a place of sanctuary that I actually looked forward to rather than feared. I was sleeping through the night from 11pm and waking before my alarm. Twice I went to the gym before work.

But then came my first bit of temptation - Burns night. Half Scottish with a dad who has always been partial to celebrating Rabbie's birthday in style, I have inherited the tradition.

This year a friend was holding the night at her flat. I hadn't been

out socially since I began, too terrified of the food and drinks that would tempt me off my plan, but this time I couldn't resist.

Armed with a bottle of apple juice and a kindly chef whipping up a vegetarian haggis I arrived. Everyone in the room had a glass of wine or a tumbler of whisky, homemade tablet (essentially sugar and condensed milk) stared at me from a counter and a huge vat of creamy tatties (potatoes to you) were warming on the hob.

And as I sipped my apple juice and tucked into my entrail-free haggis I realised that no matter how shiny my eyes, no matter how happily my head hit the pillow I would always be a toxic person, because toxins are fun.

It was a brilliant kick start to get me thinking about what I put in my body and how hard it can be for my poor little liver to break it all down - plus I lost an inch and a half off my waist - but I must say I enjoyed the re-toxing the following week quite a bit more.

For more information or to book a trip visit www.fitness12retreats.com or call 020-7788 4087.