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New ager: colonic irrigation

(Filed: 22/07/2006)

Judith Woods on the best alternative therapies

What is it?

Colonic irrigation was regarded in the 1990s as the height of celebrity self-indulgence. Demi Moore, Goldie Hawn and Kim Basinger were among those who reportedly extolled its virtues. Nowadays, however, it is increasingly referred to as colonic hydrotherapy, and has largely shed its elitist image.

The colon is cleansed of waste material by repeated, gentle flushing with water. This dislodges any impacted faecal matter that may be inhibiting muscular action and causing sluggish bowel movements, bloating and constipation.

Stored faeces are also believed to create intestinal toxicity: instead of being expelled, toxins re-enter the bloodstream, making a person feel ill and lethargic.

What are the benefits?

Colonic irrigation is commonly used for detoxification. It is said to be effective for a range of conditions, including headaches, bloating, abdominal wind, diarrhoea, fatigue and back pain.

What does it involve?

Therapists first take a detailed medical history. After changing into gowns provided, the clients lie on their side on a treatment table and a tube is inserted into the rectum. Around 15 gallons of warm, purified water are used to flush out the rectum over a 45-minute session.

The therapist will gently massage the abdomen and other pressure points to work loose waste matter, which is then expelled through the tube.

The therapist may use herbs or probiotics implants - live bacterial cultures that promote the health of the gut - to support the colon, and will also give diet and lifestyle advice. A session costs from £50 to £75.

Who does it?

To become a member of the Association of Colon Hydrotherapists, a practitioner must undertake a postgraduate training course, available only to those trained in conventional medicine or graduates of a therapy course that includes in-depth anatomy and physiology.

For details of therapists, contact the Association and Register of Colon Hydrotherapists at www.colonic-association.org.

Is there proof that it works?

Although clients variously report a feeling of lightness, greater energy, clear skin and improved mental clarity, there's no scientific proof that colonic irrigation actually works.

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