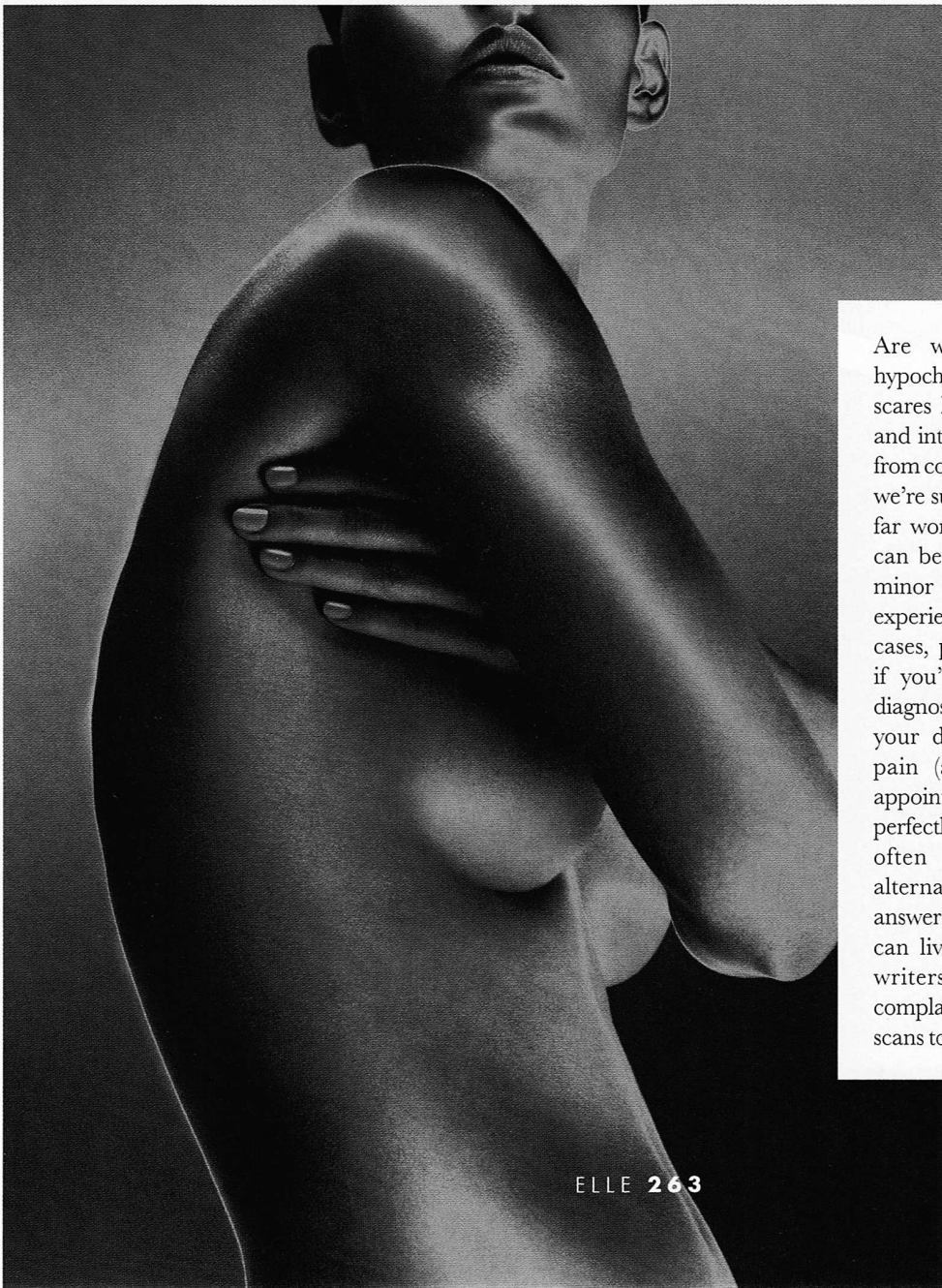


CAN A HOLISTIC HEALTH CHECK WORK?

Do your eyes hold the KEY to your health — or does a psychic? ELLE asks three self-confessed hypochondriacs to try the ALTERNATIVE body checks



Are we turning into a nation of hypochondriacs? With new public health scares hitting the headlines every week, and internet health websites a click away from convincing us that the mild headache we're suffering from is actually something far worse, it's hardly surprising that we can become unduly worried about any minor pains or niggling coughs that we experience. A visit to your GP will, in most cases, put your mind at rest. But what if you're not entirely happy with your diagnosis, or embarrassed about bothering your doctor with every little ache or pain (an estimated one in four GP appointments is taken by someone who is perfectly well)? Private health checks are often prohibitively expensive; but alternative medicine could provide the answers you're looking for at a cost you can live (longer) with. We asked three writers, all with persistent minor complaints, to put the latest holistic body scans to the test. ►

THE IRIDOLOGY TREATMENT

tested by Sali Hughes

When I hit 30, three years ago, I suddenly uncovered my inner hypochondriac. I now no longer have a sore tummy or a headache, I have assumed stomach ulcers or brain tumours in waiting. But after calculating how many Marc Jacobs dresses I could buy with the cost of a single private health check (eight, or 12 in the sales) I've been looking for another way to alleviate my increasingly difficult to ignore anxieties. I do virtually no exercise, regularly enjoy a Rioja or three and my bones feel achy quite a lot of the time. Is my body trying to tell me that there's something serious afoot?

Well, perhaps my eyes will be more forthcoming. Mark Nicholson, a member of the Association of Natural Medicine, conducts health checks with the help of iridology, an alternative medicine technique that examines patterns, colours and irregularities of the iris to provide clues about a patient's wellbeing. Practitioners match their observations to charts, which divide the iris into zones corresponding to parts of the human body (a bit like reflexology does with feet). Iridologists use the eyes to assess the patient's susceptibility to certain illnesses, and believe that they can help predict any problems that may develop. Intrigued, if somewhat dubious, I open my eyes wide and await my health lowdown.

The session is a constant back-and-forth as Mark examines my eyes (from a close-up digital photograph) and then cross-references any red flags with a host of health questions and physical exercises, such as posture straightening and balancing on tiptoes to test my nervous system and muscle strength. Even to a hard-nosed cynic like myself, the process is a revelation. My large pupils apparently indicate a potential potassium deficiency (I need to take mineral supplements) and prompt Mark to ask if I have any back complaints. He

thinks the problem lies in the C5 nerve in my upper spine and pinpoints the exact spot at the base of my neck where I've been complaining of intermittent pain for the past six months. I've previously visited both my GP and a private chiropractor about this, but Mark simply stands behind me and pulls my arms around my body, clicking it back into place.

A small indentation in one of my pupils causes some speculation over whether my right side is working as hard as my left, and several simple physical tests, such as grabbing falling scraps of paper (I can only catch those on the left) and wrestling against Mark's arms, prove that I'm certainly weaker on the right. The dark rim around my iris indicates a problem with my circulation, a long-standing issue for me, as my hands and feet are permanently freezing. On closer inspection, Mark warns me that my breathing is very shallow and I appear to be retaining fluids and suffering from a slowing lymphatic drainage system, which could cause problems later on. All this despite the fact that I told him nothing about myself in advance. I'm forced to concede that the eyes have it.

In 90 minutes, I've received more satisfactory answers to my questions than I have in 10 years of rushed doctor's appointments, and feel surprisingly reassured. It seems that many of the things I'd feared were symptoms of something more serious – aches and pains, dull skin, lethargy – are nothing more than small creases to be ironed out with care. It spurs me on to book a massage (to aid lymphatic drainage) and to buy myself a Pashley bike to give that sluggish circulation a kick-start. There's no chance I'll turn my back on traditional medicine if any serious symptoms arise, but iridology will now always be my first port

of call for a routine service and tune-up. *Initial consultations with Mark Nicholson cost £126 for one hour 35 minutes, £86 for a one-hour follow-up, at The Hale Clinic, London W1. Enq (020) 7631 0156; haleclinic.com*

THE HEALTH PSYCHIC

tested by Claire Sacré

I'm nervously waiting for Anne Bradshaw to call. A psychic who has previously helped the NYPD to solve murder mysteries and find missing persons, Anne also uses a combination of her 'powers' and training (now in her fifties, she's also a qualified nurse) to conduct psychic health checks, during which she claims to determine clients' underlying health issues simply by talking to you on the phone for an hour. Sceptics bear with me...

'In 90 minutes of IRIDOLOGY, I've received more satisfactory answers than in 10 YEARS of rushed doctor's appointments'

Lately, I've been complaining of headaches, stomach aches and various other things that end in 'ache' and, neurotic as it may be, I want peace of mind. Anne's psychic CV – she says she has helped spot abnormalities and symptoms in thousands of women in the US – suggests she might be the real McCoy and I'm willing to suspend my disbelief to find out for sure.

When I answer the phone, there's not a hint of Mystic Meg in Anne's tone. She sounds warm and motherly as she tells me that I have an open heart and am a great person to 'read'. Apparently, she experiences a strobe-like effect when tapping into my energy, meaning that she's able to synchronise with my body and feel what I'm feeling. But she warns me that she can't discriminate between the past and the future ('If you ➤