



Beauty Spot

Shine like a star

Scarlett Johansson's Golden Globes glow was all down to Dolce & Gabbana Illuminator in Eva, available for £31.50 at Harrods from February 3

Health & Beauty

WHY THE JUNKYARD IS THE PLACE TO GET FIT ... FACE CREAMS THAT LIVE UP TO THEIR CLAIMS ... TONE UP FOR THE SKI SLOPES

DON'T HOLD YOUR BREATH

Learning a new breathing technique changed **Nirpal Dhaliwal's** life – he's now fitter than ever, has given up smoking and thrown away the asthma inhaler he's had since he was a child



BREATHING is something I've not taken for granted. I was an asthmatic from childhood, prone to attacks until my thirties, especially when struck down with a flu or chest infection. My last attack was only five years ago; I always kept an inhaler at hand, using it frequently. Though I've always known the importance of healthy breathing, I never took steps to learn how I breathed – until last year, when I began a miraculous exercise known as Transformational Breathing.

Now I no longer use an inhaler and suffer none of the chesty colds I usually do in winter. I also no longer smoke (an insane habit for an asthmatic to have had). I am much fitter, too, jogging regularly, and calmer, more at ease. My breathing pattern is fuller and deeper and I am less anxious or riled as a result. I can even meditate now, my

mind no longer buzzing with so many random uncontrollable worries.

It all began with a visit to Alan Dolan, a Transformational Breathing facilitator at the Special Yoga Centre in Kensal Rise, where he is assisted by Aimee Hartley. A cheery, youthful-looking fortysomething, Alan began practising this exercise more than six years ago. He was then a corporate high-flyer, living in Saudi Arabia and driving a Porsche, but once he started breathing more openly, feeling more relaxed and in touch with himself, he gave up the job and the car to retrain and become a facilitator instead.

According to Alan, "on average we use about 25 per cent of our respiratory system, sometimes even less. This fact is even more thought-provoking if you consider that most of our energy comes from what we bring in through the breath and almost 70 per cent of

detoxification occurs via our breath." Most people, apparently, are shallow breathers, breathing mostly into the top half of their bodies, building up tensions and anxieties.

The sessions begin with a mantra and possibly the burning of herbs or incense, the unavoidable decorations of all New Age remedies. But that is where the nod to esoteric mysticism begins and ends. The rest of the session is a highly practical and very physical experience.

Alan got me to breathe deeply into my abdomen, almost into my pelvis, to a beat akin to the rhythm of Queen's classic anthem, We Will Rock You – ie two powerful inhalations and one quick, relaxed exhalation. The knack is to fill your belly with breath, extending your diaphragm, then, at the top of the inhalation, to let the breath instantly go, without forcing it out.

Having got me into deep rhythmical breathing, Alan performed acupuncture on me, pressing his fingers into those parts of my torso that seemed tense and inhibited – my abdomen, solar plexus, my groin, or the base of my throat. Sometimes this application of pressure would lead to a spectacular release, like the uncorking of a shaken champagne bottle, and my breathing suddenly becoming explosively powerful. My body swelling like a balloon, a sense of relief and freedom flooding through me.

The immediate effects of that first session were astonishing. I stopped smoking there and then, and haven't returned to my 10-a-day habit since. Feeling refreshed and brimming with energy, I found myself going for a brisk hour-long jog when I got home that evening – something I hadn't done in years. With an increased breathing

capacity, the run felt astonishingly easy, as if I was a regular jogger. I've continued running since, losing weight and feel so much healthier as a result.

I've had more than half a dozen sessions with Alan and practise the exercise on my own at home most days for 15-20 minutes. I'm now much more aware of my breathing and this awareness makes me queasy at the thought of smoking when before I really enjoyed it. It also keeps me calm in stressful situations, as I'm mindful of breathing a little deeper whenever I'm confronted by someone or something I don't like.

Transformational Breathing, which needs to be explained by a teacher, is becoming increasingly popular among stressed Londoners, and Alan is hold-

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ing a workshop for anyone wanting a taste of its benefits at the Special Yoga Centre this weekend.

Having experienced its wonders, I can't recommend it enough.

■ specialyogacentre.org.uk; 020 8968 1900. Alan Dolan: breathguru.com

THREE STEPS TO EASIER BREATHING

1. Sit up erect or lie on your back and, as you inhale, allow the belly to fill with air, drawing it deep into the lower lungs. As you exhale, allow the belly to deflate like a balloon. Repeat this exercise

several times, keeping the breath smooth and relaxed, and never straining.

2. Breathe into your belly as in step one but also expand the mid-chest region by allowing the ribcage to open outward to the sides. Exhale and repeat several times.

3. Follow steps one and two and continue inhaling by opening the clavicular region or upper chest. Exhale and repeat. Combine all three steps into one continuous flow, maintaining it for 10-15 minutes.



NICK CUNARD

Air necessities: Nirpal is put through his Transformational Breathing exercises

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CASH FOR EGGS: THERE ARE SO MANY ISSUES

Dr Christian Jessen



VITAL SIGNS

FERTILITY and its management is always an emotive subject that polarises opinion. The views of the public are currently being sought on surrogacy – in the spotlight again following Nicole Kidman's announcement that her second daughter was carried this way – as well as the use of donor eggs and sperm to enable infertile couples to have a baby. More ethical issues are being explored, including whether close relatives should donate eggs or sperm to each other, and if it is acceptable for a baby to be born, through egg donation, to a woman who is also its grandmother.

The debate follows a high court ruling that may have opened the way for surrogate mothers to be paid, a practice which had been banned. If the public concede, then women could be set to receive thousands of pounds for donating their eggs.

Currently, British clinics are banned from paying for eggs and sperm directly but can pay up to £250 in expenses – which hasn't exactly filled potential donors with a desire to go through with the process of donation.

The problem with the "cash for eggs" proposal will not be with the well-meaning majority but the unscrupulous few, who will lure in women by making egg donation seem like an easy way to earn money – without any explanation of what actually is involved. Worrying, too, is the possibility of "designer genes" being offered to couples prepared to pay exorbitant fees for the perfect combination of brains and beauty;

the higher your exam marks and the better your bone structure, the more your eggs could be worth.

I'm not sure money is the main issue, however. While it's mainly the small amount of cash currently offered to donors that has been blamed for the shortage of eggs, I suspect a greater problem is the recent change in UK law which requires the identity of sperm or egg donors to be revealed to their children – the idea of a load of "surprise" children showing up years after donation undoubtedly puts off many would-be donors.

Maybe the issue is being looked at from the wrong angle, in London at least. The stats for maternal age show that in the UK London has the lowest number of births per 1,000 women aged 25 to 29, and the highest birth rate for women aged 35 to 39. This implies London women are leaving pregnancy until much later, a known risk for fertility issues and the need for donor eggs or even surrogacy. Many have argued that more should be done to cure infertility and to encourage women to have children when they are young and their eggs are still in good condition, instead of worrying about turning body parts into tradable commodities.

Surrogacy for a star: Nicole Kidman



REX FEATURES

FEELGOOD FACTOR

THE ELECTRIC EXPRESS BLOW-DRY WITH MANI/PEDI

Beauty powers: promising to be one of the fastest mani/pedis in London, with a blow-dry thrown in, this is the ultimate quick-fix if you have a chock-full diary. **The process:** the treatment begins with a personal hair consultation from one of the Electric Hairdressing team. Then an express buff and polish on my toes was done while I had my hair washed (and my scalp luxuriously massaged). Back in the chair for the blow-dry, my fingernails were shaped and painted. I left with ready-to-go hair – and perfect nails to match.

Any surprises? the ultimate in pampering, having one's hair, hands and toes done at the same time. Very backstage, darling.

Cost/contact: The Electric Express Blow Dry, Electric Hairdressing, 29 Thayer Street, W1 (020 7935 001, electric-hair.com), salons also in Brighton and Reading. From £50.

Deborah Colcutt



Speedy blow-dry: Electric Hairdressing

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