

Reap the benefits of essential oils and a serious massage rolled into one - and no whale music

EDITED BY GABY SOUTAR

Aromatherapy massage gets a bit of a bad press. All that flouncing around with pretty smells, over-priced candles and whale music when what you want, surely, is to actually FEEL it working; someone to pummel away the tension from your tired, stressed shoulders and painful lower back.

Fortunately, therapist Claire Hay understands the need for pressure as well as knowing exactly which essential oils will make the most difference to each client's individual physical and mental needs.

Which is why, even before I've kicked off my shoes to climb on to the massage table, we talk. The consultation includes questions about my job and my lifestyle, about any aches and pains I have (plenty) and, on a scale of one to ten, how stressed I am (try eight). As part of her signature 90-minute aromassage treatment, Claire then tailormakes a blend of oils according to the answers I've given her.

Opening her case of bottles, she picks out a tiny container of basil for, she explains, stiffness and mental fatigue. Then there's a drop or two of cypress, which has a warming woody scent and is good for my circulatory

Claire Hay's aromassage treatment costs £45 for 90 mins



Under pressure

problems. And, since I am going home to bed afterwards, there's some mandarin in there which, as well as smelling wonderful, is gentle, comforting and stress-relieving (if I was heading out, she might have chosen grapefruit instead, an uplifting, energising oil).

This is a back massage, and I can choose whether I want Claire to concentrate on my lower or upper back. The shoulders get the nod - knotted and painful after hours spent hunched over a keyboard at work. And

so she gradually works her way up and down my spine and across my shoulders, easing out the tension as the oils work their magic. I'm less aware of the scent than of Claire's hands and fingers encouraging my body to relax and let go.

Once she's finished with my back, it's time for a facial massage - this time using apricot kernel oil as a base and frankincense for cell renewal (she's too polite to say it's for older skin) - followed by a head massage.

She's always gentle but firm, not too flouncy but never painful either. The hour and a half passes far too quickly, bringing my stress levels back down below five and my shoulders back where they should be. I smell pretty good too. I float out into the cold night an aromatherapy convert.

RUTH WALKER

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BEAUTY

SAVE OUR SKINS

The perfect cocktail for dry skin? Freezing weather, central heating and dehydration. As the antidote, we're giving our skin some good loving, with the help of Clinique's new Moisture Surge Overnight Mask. Just slick on a thick layer and off to bed. While you're counting sheep, this potion, containing aloe barbadensis leaf water, murumuru seed butter, and other goodies, will be working its quenching magic. £28, www.clinique.co.uk



HEALTH

SOUPER IDEA

If you're attempting to curb your calorie intake, then try the New York Soup Co's new Skinny Range. They're inspired by New York deli counters, with flavours including New England Butternut Squash, Route 66 Red Pepper and Chunky Chicken Minestrone. The latter contains chicken, cannellini beans and pasta, yet clocks in at 90 calories per half tub, while the other two recipes weigh in at 123 and 110 calories respectively. £2.20 for 600g, Tesco (www.tesco.com)



FITNESS

STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD

Workout gear can look a bit samey. However, Primal Europe are breaking the mould with their range of cycling and gym apparel for men and women. We like this Maori tattoo-inspired tank, which features two rear pockets (great for your gym locker key) and an inner support bra. It's made from a Vectro-Sensor MicroGrid fabric which wicks sweat away from your skin, yet feels stretchy and light. £47.99, www.primaleurope.com

