

Sarah Jossel

Lymphatic drainage is the popular celebrity treatment that supposedly debloats (and takes inches off your stomach). Time to test!



I am lying on a massage bed while the lymphatic drainage specialist Patricia Mondargan pummels and drains my bum, my tum, my hips, my shoulders, my fingers, my knees, my ears, my big toe, my baby toe, my cheekbones, my collarbone, my every bone. Indeed, there is no body part left untouched after two hours with the A-list favourite, who divides her time between Paris and London to work head to toe on Elle Macpherson, Naomi Campbell and the like.

"Will I look like Elle when you're finished?" I muffle, face down with just enough air to breath.

Silence... except for the sound of Mondargan's fingers vigorously slapping and tapping my tush. Ouch.

Lymphatic drainage is big business among A-listers. They book in before performances and red carpet appearances to shift water retention and clear out toxins and inflammation, with the goal of depuffing and debloating. Forget make-up artists and hairstylists, Nicola Peltz Beckham and Sofia Richie Grainge both flew their lymphatic drainage masseuses (@detoxbyrebecca) to their destination wedding venues the week before so they could be treated daily in the lead-up to their big days.

I've heard quite a bit about the buzzy treatment but I've always been dubious. Isn't it just a fancy massage? "Absolutely not," says Luca Bagnara, the charming lymphatic drainage maestro who has just landed his first UK residency at Claridge's Spa. Bagnara, who regularly rubs and buffs Lily Collins and Karlie Kloss, is renowned for targeting cellulite and slimming down body parts that you didn't know needed slimming. "This treatment is completely different. A traditional massage aims to relax muscle fibres, whereas lymphatic drainage seeks to increase pressure from head to toe, encouraging excess fluid to enter the lymphatic channels. The idea is to pass over each area vigorously again and again to break down excess liquid."

He's right. This was a far-from-typical spa day. I'm partial to a back tickle, but there is absolutely none of that, nor any relaxing Swedish massage techniques. This is more synchronised hand movements working slow then fast then slow, hard then soft then hard, on each area multiple times. There are moments when it's even a little uncomfortable, such as when Mondargan works on my stomach. "I'm using a palpate and roll technique to work on the tissues and organs around the area," she declares.

Just like a facial requires at-home skincare to make the treatment worthwhile, the pros recommend prolonging the benefits with at-home hacks. "For heavy and tired legs, lie on the floor and elevate them separately," Mondargan says. "Also, sweep a body brush upwards from the ankles towards the mid-thighs at least nine times as often as you can. Exercising in water is a good idea too. What most people don't know is that water releases water." And finally the tip I knew was coming: "Drinking water is your best friend," she says. "It's also how you

never, ever replace sugar with synthetic alternatives, even the healthy ones — it would be better to eat the sugar."

drink water that makes a huge difference." A technique for drinking water. Whatever next? "Your kidneys need to be kept like a damp sponge, not drenched and not left to dry out. Have one 250ml glass of water every hour throughout the day and 500ml when you wake in the morning." For those wanting to lose weight: "Start by cutting out inflammatory foods like salt and sugar from your diet, and

By the way, lymphatic drainage also works for the face. "Men and women both regularly ask me for sharp jawlines, water elimination from under the eyes and to concentrate on the neck," Mondargan says. The well-known pros in the UK such as Ada Ooi, Debbie Thomas and Guendalina Gennari, who all have London flagship clinics, offer a mix of lymphatic drainage treatments on either the face or the body.

Now, you know me, I hate to overpromise or sell an unrealistic dream. This is not a quick knead here, knuckle there and voilà. "Clients have to remember that the lymphatic system is connected to the digestive system, so this treatment comes hand in hand with diet, exercise, hormones, hydration and even DNA. What you do after you leave the treatment will affect how long it lasts, but you're looking at about a week to ten days," Mondargan says.

Would I do it again? Not for fun and certainly not for no reason. But sign me up before a special occasion or when I'm wearing something figure-hugging. Water retention is a common issue during pregnancy and the postpartum months. After one treatment my post-pregnancy stomach felt tighter and more streamlined and my general sluggishness lifted. A run-of-the-mill massage this is not. Lymphatic drainage in the right hands is the real deal. ■ @sarahjossel

From £250 for a body treatment, methodmondargan.com

