



NEW

BEA

AGE

(OF)

UTY

Beauty treatments no longer just make you look good. *Stylist's* beauty director Samantha Silver explores whether beauty can heal our mental aches as well as our physical appearances

There was the routine visit to the dentist where he pointed out that I grind my teeth badly. An adrenal test that showed my stress levels were off the chart. But when I burst into tears for no reason while unpacking the dishwasher I realised that *maybe* it was time to do something. My thoughts were scattered around my head like a deck of playing cards and I couldn't sleep, even though I was exhausted.

It's not news that we're a nation of stressed women. Our work lives are so all-consuming (five million people put in an average of 7.7 hours overtime a week) that professionals have noted an increase in women suffering from stress, anxiety and even depression.

The consumer industry has responded by selling us the idea of 'wellness' to combat this. We drink 'wellness' tea, we take 'mindful' body wash into the shower and even Wagamama sold noodles last year with the line 'from bowl to soul'. And the beauty industry is not one to be left behind. While the majority of us still visit spas and salons to look better or to relax, there is now a new breed of treatments and practitioners emerging who promise more. These 'wellbeing' practitioners boast of being able to resolve psychological problems, boost spirituality and improve happiness. Their clients see them not just for skin-brightening facials but for mind-coaching, positivity exercise and mental organisation. Friends boast about the life-changing properties of crystals, touch therapy and intuitive healing. In 2017, the worlds of beauty and therapy are merging. But can it really heal my stressed-out mind?

Emotional response

It's via the intuitive hands of leading holistic therapist Anastasia Achilleos that I have my first 'beauty therapy' experience. Achilleos has spent 20 years perfecting 'The Method', a powerful treatment (incorporating touch therapy, craniosacral therapy, acupressure and massage), designed to re-energise body and mind by touching certain response paths along the body with her hands (£475 for 90 minutes).

At first, I don't notice anything different. I lie on my back and Achilleos' low-key, gentle, repetitive strokes on my scalp, shoulders and as she reaches underneath me, my coccyx, are soothing but not extraordinary. Then she tells me she won't talk any more as she wants me to gain the most I can from the treatment. And then, my memory becomes hazy. I drift into a sort of calm, tranquil bubble. Every so often my mind snaps back to something, an errand I need to remember to run, but just as the picture comes into focus, I'm dragged back into this other world. The thoughts scattered in my mind all of a sudden visibly fall into a neatly stacked pile. I see a bright, white light and, unprompted, I take a huge intake of breath (I can only liken this to a newborn baby taking its first breath) and then, I cry. An hour later, the treatment slowly draws to an end. All I can say is, "Wow". I feel embarrassed for having such a moment on the couch. Achilleos explains that by using her technique of touch

BRUSH UP ON CRYSTAL POWER

With a bit of knowledge you can target your gemstone treatment directly

ROSE QUARTZ

The crystal of love and beauty, it's said to keep worries at bay and curb resentment and jealousy.



JADE

The 'prosperity stone' can sharpen mental faculties and improve decision-making.



AMBER

Both energising and calming, this grounding stone is great for achieving clarity.



AMETHYST

Healing amethyst is said to ward off negative vibes and help banish self-destructive thoughts.



GARNET

With its luscious red colour and luxurious finish, it's the stone of passion and sensuality.



TOURMALINE

Said to boast protective qualities, slip it into your pocket during turbulent times.



she was able to reconnect my energy in a way that it never had been before. "We swallow life, we say we're fine when in fact we aren't really. We're so unconnected to ourselves that we don't even know that ourselves," she says. In the Ayurvedic tradition, the body has seven centres of spiritual power called 'chakras', and the way Achilleos touches is designed to address all seven of these, tapping into my energy fields and readdressing my balance.

The human touch

I know this is all starting to sound a bit hippy-dippy but psychotherapist and mind coach Jess Henley corroborates Achilleos' method. "Touch can release a build up of the mind," she tells me. "With the kind of energy generated in these treatments, you go beyond

the mind into the body and the connective tissue, which is where our bodies store our emotions and experiences that have never been processed. Touch means that you start to release some of that emotion, which can be really healing." Achilleos agrees: "Your shoulders were locked. I could feel it in your chest, there was a need to protect yourself as you grew up. [As I touched] I felt the tissue go from hard to soft, the diaphragm release and we went back in time to release the tension." This isn't the first time I've been told that my current mental state is tied up with my past. I saw hypnotherapist Marisa Peer last year who discovered that my habit of chewing my nails was born from my high-pressure, private school education and the constant feeling that within a tribe of over-achieving peers, I was never good enough.

In the crystal maze

Buoyed by my positive beauty therapy experience, and with my renewed clarity of mind still strong, I visit facialist Nichola Joss. She is known for using crushed crystals in the bespoke masks she mixes up for her celebrity clientele (from £180 for an hour). "Crystals vibrate at a high rate so their impact on boosting micro-circulation in the skin is tenfold," she tells me. "They actively boost cellular energy and promote cell turnover for a smoother, more radiant complexion." She

"I SEE A BRIGHT LIGHT, THEN TEARS ROLL DOWN MY FACE. AS THE TREATMENT ENDS, ALL I CAN SAY IS, 'WOW'"

mixes a mask with rose quartz (to keep the heart chakra open, calm and balanced), obsidian crystal (for positivity) and a little diamond dust of the highest grade "for the highest vibration". The aim is to tap into my chakras, allowing energy to flow from the top of my head – "from the crown chakra through the body and out through the root chakra. It's a cleansing of the mind, of negativity that circulates your thoughts." I leave with cheekbones higher than they've been in years and with a glow that lasts long after the weekend is over. And my chakras? "Your vibrations are really high," Joss tells me. "Your chakra is really open, your energy is lovely but your solar plexus was a little grumbly," which we put down to my period.

I'm still not sure I buy into this crystal malarkey though. I do a little research. Crystals are millions of years old, forged during the early part of the earth's formation. For millennia the energies of the stones have been used to interact with the human electromagnetic field to bring about subtle energetic changes. They're now infused into your water, your skincare, even your nail polish. The resurgence of these translucent pink chunks and wand-shaped amethyst stones have seen them scattered across desks and bedside tables of high-flying women – even Victoria Beckham keeps

→ a black obsidian crystal in her handbag for 'positivity'. "We have such a cross-section of customers: young girls to older women, bankers, celebrities and even Russian oligarchs. Few fit the hippy stereotype," explains Gabrielle Seymour from Buddha On A Bicycle, a crystal shop in London's Covent Garden. Net-a-Porter has noted a trend in consumers paying more attention to how ingredients benefit them from the inside, selling modern alchemist brands such as Moon Juice, The Beauty Chef and Equi London, while brands infused with crystals promising energy, clarity and calm such as Sjal, Ceremonie and Therapie Roques O'Neil are flying off the shelves.

Intrigued, I send *Stylist's* beauty editor, Shannon Peter, off to visit crystal therapist Junko Furugori for Crystal Sonic Rejuvenation Therapy (£60 for 90 minutes) at Bhuti, a holistic treatment space in Richmond. "She used crystals to massage my jawline and cheeks, applied them to my face in different areas and then continued with reiki. In my head I was thinking how ridiculous it was and that they would fall off my face, but within a minute I was the most relaxed I'd ever been," she reported. Shannon and I are kind of swayed but while recounting all of this in a meeting, my colleagues scoff. I arrange for one of the most cynical – and stressed – to see meditation coach and intuitive healer Emmy-Lou Knowles who, through meditation and lightly pressing on different areas of the fully clothed body, reads

"FOR SOME, TOUCH THERAPY RELEASES A BUILD-UP IN THE MIND IN A WAY OTHER THERAPIES WOULDN'T"

its needs (£POA for 90 mins). She immediately texts me afterwards: "Sort of loved it. Not sure if I feel clearer, but definitely lighter. I'm curious."

For those who hate the idea of voicing their problems, this kind of therapy may be preferable to traditional 'speaking' therapy. "For some people, touch therapy can really help to release a build-up in the mind in a way that they wouldn't, or couldn't, open up without," says Henley. "In the same way you see a personal trainer to get your body in shape, it's important to see a therapist – whether touch or talk – to rebalance your mind."

It's important to note that though a few health insurance plans are beginning to cover healing touch therapy, there is a vast difference between the small pool of intuitive therapists and the vast amount of charlatans promising to transform your world. I advise you to do your research: therapydirectory.org lists alternative practitioners who have proof of qualifications, professional accreditation and insurance.

For an industry often labelled as frivolous, this is another example of how powerful beauty can be. From the mood-boosting powers of a lipstick to the body confidence an impeccable fake tan application can bestow (I'm talking from personal experience) and now, I'm convinced, the act of touch. Defining and defiant, empowering and healing, I don't need any more proof. Beauty is therapy. S

KNOW YOUR CHAKRAS

Suffering from a late night or just a blocked throat chakra? Discover how the seven "centres of spiritual power" can affect you

THIRD EYE CHAKRA

Your third eye (face) is linked to your intuition. When it's blocked, you'll feel you've lost direction in life.

CROWN CHAKRA

The crown (head) is for trust and devotion – when blocked it will lead to a feeling of disconnection.

THROAT CHAKRA

The throat is thought of as the 'pressure valve' of the spiritual body, and is integral to the flow of energy from other chakras.

SOLAR PLEXUS CHAKRA

Governing self-esteem, the solar plexus chakra (stomach) is said to control how 'warrior-like' you feel.

HEART CHAKRA

Encompassing both the heart and the lymphatic system, the heart chakra (chest) is the wellspring of joy, love and warmth.

ROOT CHAKRA

The root chakra (base of spine) is supposedly what makes you feel rooted: the body's centre of security and calm.

SACRAL CHAKRA

Centring your sense of pleasure and intimacy, the sacral chakra (groin) is also said to help boost creativity.

