

HOW TO EAT WELL



Our modern diet and hectic lifestyles are overloading our digestive systems, leading to a raft of health problems. At the Viva Mayr clinic in Austria, and now London, guests are taught it's not just what you eat, but how you eat it. By **Kate Salter**





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OPEN AIR Above: From its wooden-framed buildings there are fabulous views over Austria's Lake Altaussee at Viva Mayr's newest clinic in the Alps. Guests are encouraged to eat mindfully, detox from technology and make the most of the beautiful surroundings



"MR MAYR"

Dr Harald Stossier, the founder of Viva Mayr, believes a few changes to your daily routine can have a lasting impact on your health.

STAY HEALTHY THE MAYR WAY

CHEW THOROUGHLY. Eat slowly, stop when you feel full.

EAT LIGHT IN THE EVENING. Your last meal should be the smallest. Avoid raw food as your digestion is at its most sluggish.

EAT THREE MEALS A DAY. Try not to snack to let your body fully digest your meals.

DON'T DRINK WATER WITH MEALS. Drink plenty of water, but between meals.

DON'T EAT AT YOUR DESK. Eat away from your workstation, without your phone. Your digestion will thank you.

SWITCH OFF YOUR PHONE AT NIGHT. If you want an even more restful sleep, switch off the WiFi too.

EXERCISE DAILY. Find something you love doing and incorporate it into your daily routine.

Visit any office in central London at lunch time and you will find rows of desks inhabited by people wolfing down a sandwich while looking at their phones or gobbling mouthfuls of food while answering emails. In modern working culture a proper lunch break, it seems, has become a luxury. Dr Harald Stossier, head of the Viva Mayr clinic in Austria, is on a mission to explain why this, and other modern ways of consuming our food, is ruining our health.

It is not just what we eat, but the way we eat it that is the basis of the Mayr 'cure' at Viva Mayr on the shores of beautiful Lake Wörthersee in Southern Austria and at Altaussee in the Alps. Popular with CEOs and celebrities, Viva Mayr is one of the most famous detox clinics in the world. Their philosophy is that good digestion is the key to good health. The clinic treats everything from stress and burnout to infertility, ME and

diabetes with such success that they have an extensive list of loyal clients who return every year for a Mayr 'reboot'.

In 2016, Viva Mayr opened a clinic in Harley Street. Dr Stossier, the medical director, says this offers their UK clients a chance to see what the clinic is about, and to decide whether a stay in Austria might benefit them. "We always had a lot of people from the UK come to us," he says. "But we had growing requests from our guests to be more present in London and to offer aftercare when they had been to Austria."

What does he make of our city's health? "London is an interesting city because it is pulsating, very active and people are more stressed. But go to Mumbai or Moscow and it's a similar thing," he says. "The culture is different but the problems are the same."

The clinic in London offers consultations from £170. Like the Austrian outposts, it is more concerned



NATURAL HIGH Left: The Viva Mayr clinic in Altaussee is surrounded by beauty **Opposite top left:** The London branch in Harley Street

with diagnosing your various deficiencies with blood tests than providing beautifying facials. There is a no-nonsense approach to getting to the root of the problem.

“What we do is not a spa,” says Stossier. “It is a medical treatment. Often we will then refer people to Austria because we can offer some treatments here but not the whole holistic programme and the experience of fasting and cleansing.”

Ah yes, the ‘fasting and cleansing’. As I discovered on a trip to Viva Mayr some years ago – I was writing about it for a newspaper – this is not a spa for people who want to waft about in a dressing gown having pedicures. Cleansing is taken very seriously, which means abdominal massages

and Epsom salts that force you to regularly ‘eliminate’ what might have been in your gut for far too long, and fasting to cleanse the system. As well as a prescribed diet, you are given specific vitamins and minerals that you might lack plus various detoxifying therapies such as deep tissue massages and salt baths.

Modern Mayr medicine is based on principles developed by an Austrian doctor at the turn of the last century. The belief is that because we tend to eat too much, too fast, we gradually wear down our digestion and its ability to absorb nutrients and remove toxins. This leads to a raft of ailments (there are numerous current studies suggesting that improving the gut’s bacteria, for

instance, can help tackle everything from depression to obesity). Great emphasis is placed on eating slowly, chewing your food (up to 30 times to be precise) and eating your smallest meal in the evening when our digestions are at their laziest.

The treatment plan varies from the very strict – only clear broth and herbal tea during the day – to a more gentle version which involves a breakfast of soya yoghurt or an egg, lunch of fish and vegetables, with clear broth for dinner. A staple of the Mayr cure is stale spelt rolls, intended to help guests learn to chew properly, which you come to love or loathe depending on how hungry you are.

“If you chew properly and you stop when you feel full, you automatically eat less,” says Stossier. “There is no need for calorie counting.” And because 60-70 per cent of our body’s energy is used on digestion, once it is given the room to work properly without being bombarded with needless snacks and late night takeaways, as well as losing weight, your body can regenerate itself fully.

As well as teaching their guests how to rest their digestions – Stossier says fasting one day a week can immediately improve your health – Viva Mayr is also about resting your body and mind. One of the most common problems the doctors at Viva Mayr see is stress, and they have a

straightforward battle plan. “If people are stressed, it is not an overload of activity that’s the problem, it’s a lack of regeneration.” Stossier says one of the most effective ways to beat stress is to implement breaks in the daily routine “to offer daily regeneration”. He tells the story of a director of a bank who came to Viva Mayr suffering from sky-high stress levels. “We asked him at the end of his visit ‘what was the best thing during your stay here?’ He said it was the break between 11.30 and 12 o’clock.” At the bank this was the busiest time of the day, with people constantly coming to his office. Stossier suggested that he implement the same break once

he went back to work. “He asked me ‘but how can I do that? What will I tell people?’ I told him, ‘tell them you’re saving the bank’.”

A worrying trend is that the guests coming to Viva Mayr are getting younger. “If I look back ten or 20 years when I started, we had mostly people who were over 55,” Stossier says. “Nowadays it is 30 and even younger. This is not only because the younger ones are more health-conscious, it is because they have more problems than the older ones. Stress is something which influences our health enormously.”

It seems that our relationship with technology is often the

culprit. “With modern technology everything has to be right now,” he continues. “If you get an email everybody expects you to respond within seconds. If you get a phone call, you can’t ignore it, you get a text message and you react. We are more sensitive than people think and I don’t think it’s possible to react that quickly. There is no time to rest, regenerate.”

There is also the fact that we are now surrounded by more electrical devices, WiFi and mobile-phone signals than ever, and Stossier says this has a scientifically proven effect on our bodies and brains. “We know that the pineal gland, responsible for regeneration with hormone production like melatonin and serotonin

responds very directly to the intensity of electro-magnetic fields. Regeneration depends on melatonin so if you’re not able to regenerate, sleep as you should, your ageing process will be accelerated. We have so many strategies for ‘anti-ageing’ but one of the best would be to switch off your mobile and WiFi at night.”

While Stossier is passionate about the benefits a Mayr approach to life can bring, he is also realistic – he says it can be hard for anyone to stick to a new regime. “But very often with lifestyle,” he says, “by changing just a few things it can help a lot.” So are you ready to start chewing? **L**

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