

try it out

detoxing WITH dad

When Michelle Lollo's dad agreed to join her on a detox retreat, he had already overcome his biggest hurdle.

What I thought would be a great way to spend quality time with my dad didn't quite get the reaction I was hoping for.

"I'd rather chew my own leg off," Dad said when I suggested he join me for a week at a health farm. Chasing the last hot chip around a plate of steak and gravy, he added: "Take your mother, she'd enjoy it."

But it was my 65-year old father who I knew would benefit most from what the Hunter Valley's Golden Door Health Retreat: Blysa, had to offer (it wouldn't hurt me either).

Like many men of my father's generation, exercise, health and wellbeing had always taken a backseat to a life of backbreaking work. And when he finally figured out how to put his feet up, Oprah and Dr Phil soon became his new best friends.

But as all encouragement to exercise had been politely refused, I wasn't above bullying him into accompanying me on a week-long detox at The Golden Door.

DAY ONE - ARRIVAL

Dad had been rattled just enough about what lay ahead to take on board Elysia's advice to cut back on alcohol, meat, sugar, salt and caffeine in the lead up to our incarceration. I, on the other hand, had rallied against the brochure's gentle suggestions in the mistaken belief that I didn't need to drag out the pain.

Now, along with 40 other nervous "inmates", we both looked a little wobbly at the prospect of being locked up together without our vices (me wine, Dad steak).

The group orientation did little to allay our fears. The list of contraband - caffeine, alcohol, tobacco, sugar, chocolate and salt - created a ripple effect of shuffling in seats and furtive sideways glances.

Comfort came when I remembered the "healthy" snack bars Mum had tucked away in our suitcases, "just in case". Despite a delicious lunch, Dad cursed himself for not stopping on the way there for a "real feed".

All that was forgotten when we checked into our five-star accommodation, complete with king-sized beds, living room and a mini bar (disappointingly it only stocked mineral



Michelle and her dad bonded over a week of healthy food and exercise - and tried not to kill each other.

water). With TVs in both bedrooms, I wondered

how hard this detox could be?

From the balcony, the irony wasn't lost on us as we gazed across our panoramic valley view to a landscape dotted with some of the finest wineries in the country.

A health assessment by a naturopath and fitness instructor buoyed my hopes when I was deemed "above average". Surprisingly, Dad didn't fare too badly either. Despite a slightly elevated percentage of body fat, he was in "reasonable" shape.

Determined to get fit and lose a few kilos, Dad was ready to hit the ground running... tomorrow. Right now he was only interested in running all the way to the dinner table.

We spent our first night loitering in the lobby before dinner, sipping on mocktails (hardly a dacquiri, but not so bad). There were about twice as many women as men, and I was surprised by the number of young singles here from NSW, Victoria, Queensland and even New Zealand.

Getting to know people was part of the fun, but first everyone was busy rubbing their hands together, having glimpsed prawns on the menu. A dessert of herbal tea had my father screwing up his nose in distaste. We retired early, and my eyes closed as soon as my head hit the pillow.

DAY TWO

The shrill ring of the telephone at 6am catapulted us from sleep. The detoxing process had obviously started because I was ready to tear strips off whoever had dared to call so early. But it was an automated wake-up call for our early morning tai chi class, so my bad mood had to wait.

Joining the other bleary-eyed guests on meditation hill we discovered how to wake up the caffeine-free way. But once my eyes had fully opened up, it was my other senses that needed stalling. Watching Dad struggle to balance on one leg while saluting the sun almost knocked my composure sideways.

For a man who thought meditation meant an extra half hour lying in front of the TV, tai chi's fluid movements were a challenge.

Breakfast was on our minds, but first we had another mountain to climb. Given a choice between deep-water running and a 4.3km walk, we went our separate ways.

Back in the dining room, Dad had already parked in with some new mates, but I was horrified to see his bowl almost spilling over with homemade yoghurt atop his muesli (no fruit for him). Despite instructions from staff to watch portion sizes, it was obviously too early for people to pass comment.

At Golden Door, you can choose to do nothing or make the most of the myriad activities available. I wasn't feeling my energetic best so decided to take in the first day's lifestyle lecture on nutrition, which had most of the guests nodding off. It was all part of the detox, we were told - our bodies getting used to a lack of sugar, or "white poison" as it's known in healthy circles.

Day two without caffeine had given me a cracker headache, not to mention a longing to take it out on someone. Dad was staying well clear of me and took himself off to his first ever yoga class. I would have laughed had my head not hurt so much.

The excitement of surviving day one without killing each other had exhausted me. But I was more than a little surprised by Dad turning in early... without watching TV. I discovered the next day it was his hunger pains that drove him to bed early.

DAYS THREE TO FIVE

Two days of getting up before dawn to stretch had me plotting to pull the plug from the telephone, but my competitive streak wouldn't let me see Dad trot off alone. We were starting to feel a little less prickly, and more alert than we'd both felt in ages.

The downside was that by this time, our bodies were desperately trying to eliminate all the waste we'd accumulated by passing more gas than you would ever think humanly possible. It's also not unusual,

staff pointed out, to empty your bowels up to 10 times a day. When Dad tells me he's been getting up all night to go to the toilet, I remind him some things between fathers and daughters are better left unsaid.

The next day, a lecture on men's health did more than educate Dad. He had found his inner "female" and went to indulge in some pampering treatments. Our Golden Door program included two 50-minute Swedish massages and one 50-minute facial.

Popping in to see the evidence first hand, I stifled a laugh at the sight of my Dad's hair pulled back with an Alice band while a practitioner exfoliated his face.

At dinner, with his skin all soft and supple, his eyes sparkling and more of a spring in his step than I'd seen for a long time, I decided if he got any perkier I'd have to kill him.

DAY SIX

We were waking up early naturally after better sleeps than we'd had in years. Our stomachs had shrunk and we'd stopped craving sweet treats. The delicious meals left us satisfied, the early morning classes were full and short fuses a thing of the past.

By providing a wide range of activities, from pump classes to deep water running, and lighter activities such as belly dancing, guests can experiment out of their comfort zones and have a good time.

I was stunned by Dad's eagerness to try everything on the class menu. With our bodies now finely tuned to appreciate healthy, unprocessed produce, it was amazing to discover that fruit and veggies could taste so good. I was amused to find Dad taking pole position in the front row of a cooking class by the head chef.

"You shouldn't use margarine or vegetable oils," Dad informed me later. "And you can use natural stock to flavour things." Mum's going to love this, I thought.

As we all lined up for the final assessment, everybody was looking better and feeling lighter. Our eyes were white, our skin plumped and hydrated, and bloating a thing of the past. With Dad's body fat percentage down remarkably, his flexibility almost doubled and an improved heart rate, he felt pretty pleased with himself - and rightly so.

Everybody was buoyed by their results and our last dinner was a celebratory affair. It felt like a party without the chips and beer, and discussions on bowel movements were the only signs we were not back in the real world.

THREE MONTHS ON

While falling off the Golden Door wagon has become commonplace for me since my return to real life, Dad has put me to shame. He's got heaps of energy, has lost eight kilos and given up salt completely. He still loves his steak but, much to Mum's delight, is eating more veggies and even cooking them himself. While he hasn't got the portion sizes under control, he insists exercise is next on the agenda. I hate smug people. For more information see www.goldendoor.com.au