

Red

JANUARY 2023 £5.99

23
HOT
TRENDS
FOR
2023

CULT BRANDS!
COOL CITIES!
COLOUR COMBO!
OH, AND
SPEED DATING
IS BACK!


Party Mood!

VA-VA-VOOM OUTFITS,
CLASSY COCKTAILS,
STYLISH IDEAS FOR BIG (& SMALL) SOIREEs,
FEASTING PLATTERS, FANCY GLASSWARE
PLUS THE NEW RULES OF HOSTING

**THE RED
BEAUTY
AWARDS**

(WHAT
WE TRIED,
LOVED &
CAN'T LIVE
WITHOUT)



A person with dark skin is shown from the waist up, performing a backbend. They are wearing a white, ribbed, tank-style top. Their arms are raised and bent at the elbows, with their hands near their feet. The background is a plain, light color.

Time for a health MOT?

FULL-BODY HEALTH ASSESSMENTS ARE
POPPING UP EVERYWHERE. BUT
ARE THEY REALLY WORTH IT? FOUR
WRITERS PUT THEM TO THE TEST

In recent years, we've become more health-conscious than ever before. But beyond the usual advice of eating healthily and exercising more, it can be difficult to know what we actually need to do to ward off disease and live better for longer. It seems logical (and ideal) to approach our health in a personalised way, learning about what is happening in our own bodies and receiving tailored advice accordingly.

To some degree, this is already offered on the NHS: everyone aged between 40 and 74 can take up a health check, designed to spot the early signs of stroke, kidney disease, heart disease, type 2 diabetes and dementia. But given that this is still a relatively basic offering, and that the NHS is so overstretched, many private clinics have long been stepping in to plug the gap.

There are myriad full-body health assessments on offer, ranging in price from under £100 to several thousands. Many of them include blood tests you can do at home and in-person appointments to chat through multiple concerns within one session (in contrast to a GP visit, in which you are often restricted to discussing a single ailment), and some of the pricier options include full-body scans that check for possible issues in all key organs.

This is a desirable proposition, given that we know most illnesses – from cancers to diabetes – have better outcomes when caught early. But even if your tests come up with no major causes for concern, they promise to still be useful, offering suggestions for lifestyle changes you can make to feel better long-term.

So, is it worth booking yourself on to one in a bid to stay healthier and for peace of mind, or could the battery of tests actually trigger unnecessary anxiety? We sent four writers to try health MOTs at varying price points to see which, if any, are worth the spend.

THE 'PRIVATE JET' OF HEALTH CHECKS

Fashion director **Danagh Brennan** tries the Echelon Platinum Health Assessment Optimum Package

'Count me in!' I enthuse, when my editor asks if I'd be interested in reviewing a health assessment for the magazine. I have visions of detoxing in the Alps wearing dark glasses, wrapped in a cashmere blanket, drinking green juice while I await news of my magnesium levels. What a treat!

Fast-forward to a few days later and I'm at home doing a very unglamorous colon cleanse (which involves drinking a nose-wrinklingly disgusting liquid and being very close to the loo at all times) with the prospect of a full day of scary-sounding medical tests ahead of me. I've been instructed to eat a low-fibre diet for two days, which means no wholegrains, vegetables, fruit, nuts or seeds, followed by a 24-hour fast. Apparently, this powerful cleansing mixture will purge my bowel in order to provide a clear view during my upcoming procedure. I've been assigned the £14,000 Echelon Optimum Package, which includes the Platinum Health Assessment – and, if I'm honest, I'm terrified (and starving).

This is the medical assessment to end all medical assessments: it includes every test you could possibly think of, from blood tests to MRIs and CT scans, and claims to detect 96% of the leading causes of premature death in women (92% in men).

As an anxious person, forever Googling 'signs you might have [insert latest worry]', I like the idea of understanding what is going on in my body and putting some worries to rest – like whether the cigarettes I smoked in my 20s have permanently damaged my lungs. But I'm also scared that it could reveal something I'm not ready to deal with. Is it better to live in ignorant bliss?

I briefly consider running away when my chauffeur (included in the



price) drops me off at 68 Harley Street. But my fears quickly dissipate when I'm delivered into the caring hands of Hannah, Echelon's client liaison manager, who will keep me laughing and looked-after throughout the day. The clinic is in a traditional Victorian townhouse with a grand and stylishly decorated waiting room that feels more like a welcoming hotel lounge.

Here, I fill out a detailed questionnaire about my health, alongside my family history and lifestyle information, before getting started with a full-body mole screening. Next, I gear up for my heart and abdomen CT scan, which checks everything from my lungs to my spleen, pancreas and kidneys. Lying on the scanner covered in wires, I am given a beta-blocker to slow down my heart rate (daunting enough in itself, since I generally try to avoid taking medication), while my veins are injected with a strange

'IT INCLUDES EVERY TEST YOU COULD THINK OF... PLUS A NIGHT IN A FIVE-STAR HOTEL'

dye to show up my internal organs. This momentarily gives me the sensation of burning inside and I feel as if I've wet myself – perfectly normal, I'm told, but no less disconcerting for that.

Over a five-hour period, I make my way through a colonoscopy (not as bad as I had feared, although being pumped full of gas was a little uncomfortable); a 45-minute MRI on the brain (made bearable by metal-free headphones playing soothing classical music); a full bone and skeleton scan; blood tests to check liver and kidney function, blood count, thyroid levels, hormones and cholesterol; and a thyroid ultrasound.

It's an intense day, but Echelon's nurses, radiologists and radiographers ensure the process is as relaxed and easy to understand as possible.

It's definitely not for the faint-hearted, and you need to come prepared to surrender yourself to the process, dressed in cosy clothes and with something to read or work on during the breaks. The clinic provides whatever you fancy for lunch, plus snacks such as delicious chocolate brownies whenever you need them. I was even given a hot-water bottle to keep me cosy during some of the tests.

The biggest perk, though, is that the Optimum package includes a stay at the five-star Mandarin Oriental in nearby Knightsbridge. After such a full-on day, this is the most welcome treat imaginable and I feel a wonderful sense of calm wash over me as I am shown to my sumptuous suite overlooking Hyde Park. My stomach still feels quite bloated and crampy from the colonoscopy, and my arm is

slightly bruised from the cannula that was inserted during the tests but, after a delicious supper, a good night's sleep and a hearty 'healthy' breakfast (all included in the package), I head home refreshed after the day before.

Next comes the wait. I have to sit tight for a nail-biting week before I can go back to Harley Street to chat to Dr Paul Jenkins, Echelon's medical director, about my results. I'm hugely relieved there's no alarming news, but I still receive plenty of useful information, such as the fact that my thyroid levels need monitoring – surprising to me, as I hadn't identified any symptoms. I'm also told I should have a few suspicious moles removed, plus I have a tiny build-up of plaque in one area of my heart, although I'm assured that this does not need further investigation right now.

I walk away armed with a leather-bound folder full of facts – a detailed analysis of what is going in my body from top to toe, which I can use to

monitor my future health. Being aware of my weak spots and what I need to keep an eye on makes me feel incredibly empowered. Finally, I can turn the volume down on those neurotic thoughts that creep in every time I have a headache or a cough. I head home to celebrate with an extra-large glass of wine (doctor's orders, I promise).

I'm grateful that I was offered the opportunity to test the package for this review and, given that the assessment includes a detailed scan of your entire body and you have access to world-class experts in each field, you can see how the price stacks up. I would say that, if you have the money to spend and you want to feel in control of your health, you might consider it worth the investment.

The Echelon Optimum (full Platinum Assessment with a two-night stay at the Mandarin Oriental and chauffeur) is £14,000. The Platinum Assessment costs £12,000 for men and £11,500 for women. Visit echelon.health