

Live longer. Take Anna Martin's advice

The inside story

Just celebrated an important birthday? Or maybe you're beginning to see a few of your contemporaries suffering health problems? Now is the time to give yourself the best present ever — the chance of a longer life. Preventicum is a new type of screening clinic, offering radiation-free, non-invasive health screening, using some of the world's most advanced technology, in luxurious hotel-like surroundings.

Preventicum screening is a day-long experience, beginning with the arrival of a cab to bring you straight to the Shepherd's Bush clinic. On my arrival, I was shown to my spacious room, with every comfort, from TV and computer with internet to magazines, newspapers and mineral water — and was invited to change into Preventicum's soft, fluffy leisurewear.

Senior nurse Julie Morton took blood samples, on which more than 30 tests were carried out (same-day results), checking aspects such as iron, sodium, potassium, liver function, blood sugar, cholesterol and thyroxine. Blood pressure, temperature, height and weight were measured.

A meeting with friendly, approachable medical director Garry Savin followed, where he explained the centrepiece of Preventicum's screening — the MRI scans.

"The main beauty of these is that there is no radiation," explains Dr Savin. "Our cutting-edge scanner can look at all the organs of the body. MRI gives a whole new dimension. The scanner uses a powerful magnet that lines up the water molecules in your body. A radio wave is fired at you and the scanner detects the reflections and can build up a picture of your brain, nervous system, organs and vascular tree (arteries). The scanner can film your heart moving. You

can detect whether it is enlarged, beating the right way, whether it has valve problems, if you have had any previous heart attacks..."

The MRI includes a colonoscopy — giving a picture of the inside of your colon, to see if there are any cancers or polyps. "The older you are, the more you're at risk of bowel cancer," says Dr Savin. "Bowel cancer is the most common cause of morbidity in non-smokers." But most bowel cancers are preventable.

Before the scan, he runs through my medical history. Do I smoke? No. Drink? No? Exercise? Well — no. "Oh dear! We were doing so well until then," he muses. "Thirty minutes of exercise a day will protect against most health problems. Get a pedometer and try to take 10,000 steps a day, at least five days a week."

I also had as much time as I wanted to ask the doctor's advice on health problems and I was given a thorough physical examination.

For the MRI, I had been warned to remove all metal objects, since the scanner works magnetically, but had been struggling with a recalcitrant ring. Luckily, this was allowed to stay and I was shown how to lie on the sliding platform of the scanner. It was a bit like being slid into a washing machine (without the spinning). I'm not the most relaxed person when it comes to closed-in spaces. But I felt completely at ease in the scanner — though if I had been worried, there were ingenious mirrored glasses, to give a view of the world outside. With my choice of music played through headphones and a large sponge rest under my knees to keep them comfy, I would probably have fallen asleep if it hadn't been for the

Continued on page vi

Continued from page i

clunks of the magnets, which sounded a bit like someone moving furniture in a flat above, and the interruptions to the music from the radiologist, telling me to breathe out or explaining how long the next scan would take. There were regular breaks when I could come out of the scanner — though I was so relaxed, I didn't especially want to! For some scans, contrast dye was injected through a cannula in the arm (not painful or unpleasant).

After the MRI came a selection of ultrasound scans. I'd had ultrasound in pregnancy, but the pictures were clearer than I'd seen before and the ultrasonographer even showed me the eggs in my ovaries. I could almost start knitting...

Included in the ultrasound were the carotids, thyroid and abdominal organs, too. It's important to check for furring of the carotids, the arteries that lead to the brain, as if "fur" breaks away, it can lodge in the brain and cause a stroke. If there'd been stones in the gall-bladder, or liver abnormalities, these could have shown up now.

After a magnificent healthy lunch, I was full of energy for the ECG and exercise session, designed to detect early signs of coronary heart disease, measure fitness and



Preventicum's MRI scanner: comprehensive imaging with no radiation

define my safe exercise level. My lung function, eye health and hearing were also tested.

Finally, Dr Joerg Kandyba took me on a virtual tour inside my body, an awesome, mysterious country, filled with graceful, plant-like structures and traceries. Any damage to the heart, blood supply, and so on, would have been displayed, so that I could take action to reverse it, perhaps by changing my lifestyle. Happily, all was working well. I thought of the berachah *asher yotzar*, thanking God for making

our bodies work, and it took on extra (magnetic?) resonance.

My test results were ready and I was given full advice from Dr Savin on how to respond, in terms of lifestyle, diet and further checks. There was ample time for discussion, with a written report to follow. All that remained was to step back into the cab and be driven home. Feeling full of life.

A Preventicum screening usually costs £2,750. Mention the JC for details of special rates