

How are your chakras? Why the new A-list must-have is a healer

Celebrities seeking spiritual wellbeing now want crystals and massage, says Peta Bee

For years, unloading your innermost thoughts to a counsellor was de rigueur for those undergoing the trials of celebrity. Everyone who was anyone had a shrink and the couches of the most coveted were as sought-after as the boutique studios of an in-form personal trainer.

Now, though, enlightened A-listers who have already embraced mindfulness are seeking alternative forms of therapy from gurus who promise to fix their chakras. The hippy-dippy has gone mainstream and its tell-tale signs — crystals and chunks of black tourmaline, said to create positive energy — have been spotted in the possession of stars such as Angelina Jolie and Victoria Beckham. If you want to impress, the question to drop casually into conversation over coffee these days is: "Who's your healer?"

Far from being cornered in a church hall or back-street clinic, they are now cropping up in chic

Kensal Rise, northwest London. Douglas Ballard, a healer based in Canary Wharf, east London, who charges £130 a session, says he's seen "bookings boom lately among actresses and business people, mainly wanting to reduce stress in their lives", while the healing guru of choice for Manhattan-based models, designers and politicians is Olivier Bros, who for several hundred dollars will "check their musculoskeletal, visceral and energy structures for blockages".

Healers promise a spiritual balance via a somewhat diverse set of practices. Some use their hands to realign your energy patterns. I once visited one who tapped my body lightly for what seemed like for ever to unblock my energy channels. It tickled and I had to stifle my laughter. Many offer the take-home trinkets that have become the status symbol of the new breed of healing devotees.

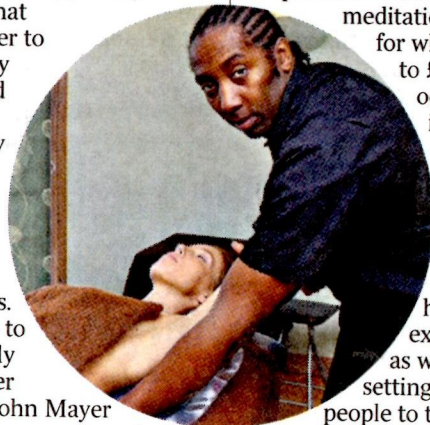
Celebrities seem to have bought heavily into the trend. After breaking up with John Mayer last year, Katy Perry was given the number of a crystal healer by Madonna and claims that she sleeps "with a rose quartz in my hand at night. It's supposed to help you find love and clear your mind".

my crystals with me, which some people might think as odd, but it works for us," she said.

The Los Angeles-based Chanel make-up artist Kara Yoshimoto Bua is prone to whipping out lumps of black tourmaline or spraying essential oils on the set of shoots with Halle Berry, Naomi Watts and Jessica Biel to ensure that everyone's on the same energy wavelength.

Ben Barnett, a former footballer, is based in Grace Belgravia. In addition to Kylie Minogue, he has treated top athletes and celebrities with a treatment that requires his clients to lie on a warm waterbed while he performs a massage with guided meditation. The technique, for which he charges up to £150 an hour, sounds odd, but he has honed it over 20 years and says he gets as many people claiming to feel emotionally healed as physically.

He works as a healer in centres of excellence for sport as well as in clinical settings. "My job is to get people to think outside of how they would normally," Barnett says. "Some of my biggest successes have been with sports people who struggle to deal emotionally with injuries and non-selection or singers and actresses



to them and they talk endlessly about "channelling energy" in order to "realign" the chakras (the body's multiple, invisible energy centres, according to ancient Hindu texts). Some, like Ballard, claim to have cured asthma or to have helped people to walk without crutches.

Sue Knight, the chief executive of



From left: healer Ben Barnett and celebrities who have used healers Katy Perry, Angelina Jolie, Madonna and Kylie Minogue. Right: make-up artist Kara Yoshimoto Bua

some types of massage to practices such as reiki and the use of crystals, all designed to coax the body back to working to its full potential.

Where does this energy come from? "Different healers use different channels," Knight says. "Some believe in a divine power, others think of it as a universal source, but the aim with all is to enable your body and mind to heal themselves."

studies, both meta-analysis trials on the effectiveness of the approach, carried out at the University of Northampton. One of the trials, on plants, seeds and animals, seems barely relevant to the new healing trend, while the other looks at the power of non-touch healing on humans but includes prayer and counselling, neither of which your average guru is offering.

that it works better than chance."

Not according to Dr Guy Staight, who runs a GP practice in south Kensington, southwest London, and dismisses the new studies as "very poor, not hard pieces of scientific research". There is, he says, very little evidence that healing works, although he concedes that some elements of it — talking, meditation, belief — can offer relief to some people.

"In many ways it can be harmless because it has little effect, but there's a certain sadness that people hang on to the belief that healers can offer a magic bullet and will spend a lot of money because of that faith in them."

It's a view shared by Dr Paul Ettlinger, the founder of the London General Practice in central London, who says that few healers have any medical awareness or training. "The best they can offer is a sort of placebo effect, that you feel better just because

“The healer's aim is to enable your body and mind to heal themselves

you are doing something about it," he says. "The risk is that people are diverted from essential medical treatment because they have chosen this route and I have seen this happen among my own patients."

Because the approaches across the board are inexact and unscientific, the medical profession tends to take a dim view of energy healers. Yet healing fervour is unlikely to subside any time soon. Knight thinks celebrity endorsement and crystal-carrying is "a good thing, provided it doesn't make the industry look too wacky".

There is, it seems, little chance of it appearing anything less. Ballard tells me that people ask him if he achieves miracles, and that his reply is: "I think I must." Staight stresses caution: "Use it, but as an additional aid to conventional treatment, if you must," he says. "Don't expect

The healer hot list

Ben Barnett

£150 an hour;

Grace Belgravia;

020-7235 8900

Clients include Kylie Minogue, athletes, footballers

Approach Hydrotherm massage on a warm waterbed, coupled with meditation. Clients select two words or a short phrase — eg, energised, uplifted, positivity — that sums up their desired outcome before treatment begins.

Katie Light

£85 an hour;

Wakeman Road;

020-8964 6740

Clients include the Notting Hill set, fashionistas

Approach Reiki, a treatment in which hands hover over the body to realign your chakras and balance energy.

Seka Nikolic

£143 for half an hour;

sekanikolic.com

Clients include Elite athletes, including Novak Djokovic; the actress Joely Richardson

Approach Bio-energy healing, said to remove negative energy from your body and "flick" it away.

Douglas Ballard

£120 an hour; douglasballard.com

Clients include high-flying business and media types

Approach Uses a variety of approaches to realign energy. Claims particularly good results for conditions such as stress, asthma and migraine.

James Phillip

£95 an hour at Neal's Yard, central London; nealsyardremedies.com;

£25 for a karmic zap energy-healing workshop at triyoga in Camden on May 8; triyoga.co.uk

Clients include actors, television presenters