



IT of THE GLOOM

TRITIONISTS AND HEALERS ARE THE NEW TALK THERAPISTS. **AMANDA FORTINI** CONFESSES.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY **GRANT CORNETT**

At least twice a month, and more if my life is skidding into crisis, I sit on a couch in a sunny, incense-scented office (or call in for a phone session from home) and tell my doctor all. I tell him when I'm feeling anxious or depressed, when my boyfriend and I have argued, when I've lost it with my mother. I tell him when I'm feeling stuck in a piece of writing, that I'm trying to create better boundaries for myself, that I want to make more money. I tell him when I've been staying up

late, and that I loathe any day that I have to wake up. I tell him nearly every last thing I consume, from organic sweets to approved-of supplements. After a bad breakup several years ago, I confessed to him that I was smoking in the odd cigarette, and that I'd occasionally used an herb less legal than tobacco. Surely by now, he's thinking, She's talking about her shrink. But you'd be wrong. I'm talking about my homeopath.

He's not the only one with an alternative health practitioner who has become her de facto therapist. If you've gone to a summer party lately or shared a meal with a friend, the conversation has likely dominated the conversation—not just the food being ordered, served or eaten, but also the conversation being eaten. It seems like nearly everyone is dabbling in an elimination diet of some kind—gluten-free,

sugar-free, wheat-free, dairy-free, a detox or a cleanse—for reasons of health or weight loss. Because these regimens tend to be administered by professionals who require regular visits, clients frequently develop a therapy-like relationship with their practitioner, telling him or her far more than how many calories they've consumed. "I don't see a shrink but I feel like she's become like my shrink," says a 30-something publishing professional, whom we'll call "Fiona," about her relationship with her nutritionist, New York City-based Keri Glassman. (Names and identifying characteristics have been changed at the subjects' request.) "She knows so much about me: She knows how I sleep, if I take a bath before bed, she knows *so much*."

Clients often come to view their healer or nutritionist as a guru of sorts and talk about him or her (and the

ostensibly life-altering diet being touted) in the reverential, mildly obsessed way inhabitants of a bygone era nattered on about their analysts and analysis. "It's now very chic to have to see your acupuncturist or herbalist or naturopath," says Dr. Joy Jacobs, a clinical psychologist and assistant clinical professor at the University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine who specializes in eating disorders, weight management and healthy lifestyles. It's as though we've taken our anxieties about all the things we can't control (money, illness, other people—to name a few) and channeled them into an area we can control: what we put in our mouths. Indeed, for reasons cultural, social and practical, the healer has become the new shrink, and dieting the new therapy.

"That's just normal, that you become part therapist to your patients. That's just part of what happens," says Dr. Frank Lipman, a doctor of integrative medicine whose New York City practice, Eleven Eleven Wellness Center, counts Gwyneth Paltrow, Kyra Sedgwick and Maggie Gyllenhaal among its clients. "You can't separate emotional, psychological health from physical health—it's all part of the same thing. You're not happy in your relationship or you're having a problem at work, it often presents physically." In other words, according to this holistic point of view, because the mind and body are so entwined, trying to get to the root of physical problems—whether a serious health matter or those last few clingy pounds—can mean a necessary confrontation with emotional ones.

"People come, they usually think, to deal with weight issues," says Miami Beach psychotherapist and doctor of holistic nutrition Dr. Etti Orya, who simply goes by Dr. Etti (though people also call her "The Juice Goddess"). But once her clients start fasting, she explains, they frequently find themselves flooded with feelings: "Everything comes up. [One's] relationship with food, relationship with one's self, relationships with your family, your loved ones, your children, everything." Anyone who has ever found themselves inexplicably bawling midway through a juice fast knows exactly what she's talking about.

But if the mind-body connection seems too woo-woo to you, it's likely still obvious why talking about one's diet would lead to confessing about one's life. For starters, how and what we eat is clearly determined, to a great extent, by the way we live. If you work from home and have time to prepare a meal for yourself, you're likely going to make healthier choices than if you're forced to wolf down your lunch at your

desk while your boss hollers in the background. Likewise, a late-night carouser who comes home with the munchies is going to eat differently than a more regimented, early-to-bed soul. "I ask myself, Am I looking at a person that is in this position because they're an obsessive-compulsive eater or are they eating because of stress?" says David Allen, a Woodland Hills, California, nutritionist whose services are so in demand he recently created a concierge package that includes texting, e-mailing and round-the-clock availability, even on the weekends. "What's going on in their lives? Are they going through divorce? Did they get a job that's so stressful they don't eat for nine hours? Do they sit there and eat the last two hours before going to bed? Are they emotional eaters? What's driving their habits?"

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To address such questions, most healers and nutritionists require that their clients fill out a comprehensive initial questionnaire that asks not only about their diet but also their lifestyle—which, of course, leads back to diet. Allen says he gives new prospects "a huge packet" composed of "every question known to man, from sex drive to everything you can think of. I know everything about them: If their poo is green, you know I know it." Says Latham Thomas, a wellness and birth coach who offers clients nutritional support and yoga instruction: "I'll ask about stress, about their job, what it is they're excited about, what's new and good in their life, what they have anxiety about, what they're stewing about now. It starts casual, but it gives me an entry point and it leads to something deeper." Fiona, the publishing executive, recalls a similar initial experience

with Glassman: "We started going through the usual things—parents, health history, eating habits, my sleeping habits—but then I was up talking about who you're dating, and up all night? Do you do drugs? Do you smoke cigarettes? How much are you drinking? You have to tell her everything." And why not? There is nothing left to hide from someone who knows the vicissitudes of your libido and the frequency with which you visit the bathroom?

It may also be that coming clean about problems is a way of justifying unhealthy choices. "It's like, 'I didn't really start exercising here's why.' You're explaining why you haven't taken care of yourself," says an art director in her late thirties (let's call her "Agnes") who sought a nutritionist to shed her post-baby weight. Suffice it to say, when it comes to food—when it comes to things—our behavior stems from our emotional selves. We eat to celebrate our professional victories, to calm our anxiety at social functions, to assuage the pain of a breakup.

"The reality is that the reasons people are making poor food choices have very little to do with hunger," says Tanya Zuckerbrot, a New York City dietitian whose high-fiber "F-Factor" diet is followed by a passel of high-powered types. "People are usually reacting to an emotion. They're sad, they're lonely, they're frustrated, they're angry. They uncover during sessions what leads to those emotions. That's where people really share the private side of their lives." She sounds uncannily like a traditional psychotherapist. As does Glassman. "You don't know what's going on in someone's life, it's very difficult for you to understand, so when they say they are eating late at night. If they're stressed, their teenage son is out doing drugs...I can't talk to that person, 'Well, you just have to put it away.' Instead, we have to deal with the underlying problem." And so, relationships, parenting, important rites of passage and significant life events—all get discussed. "You'd be surprised how many boxes of tissues I go through," Zuckerbrot tells.

Yet I have a hunch that people are open to naturopaths and nutritionists for a very human reason. Given how busy we are, it's not uncommon to go days without a single person inquiring, with genuine curiosity, how we are. So when someone, even someone we're paying, focuses on us, is ready to listen, we unfurl and maybe a little bit undone. Agnes, the art director, has her members breaking down in tears during the second couple of visits to her nutritionist: "I got

he was like, 'Hi! What can I do for you? What's going on?' And for some reason, it was like the first time since I'd had the baby that I actually took time—besides a manicure or something stupid—for me. So I just kind of let everything come out. I told him about my life, what my last year was about...I remember coming back to the office and saying to a colleague, 'Holy shit, I don't know what happened. I just cried in that guy's office.'"

Since those of us who treat our alternative health practitioners as shrinks have someone to talk to on an almost weekly basis, it can often seem to us like the space in our lives for a therapist has been filled. What's more, we have someone to spill to without ever having to admit a need for a trained professional who would force us to wade into the muck of our darker emotions. But is therapy therapy under any guise? Many clients I interviewed remarked that when their healer began playing the therapist—when he

or she assumed the role the client had put him or her in by gushing—they felt annoyed. It was like revealing too much to a friend and then feeling like you want to avoid her. "He started bothering me when he started to have opinions on my family and stuff," says Agnes. "I was like, 'Why are you judging my husband?' I just kind of wanted him to listen. I didn't want him to give opinions."

"Mark," a 33-year-old New York City publicist for several art galleries, says his "very personal" two-and-a-half-year relationship with a

weight-loss consultant ("after I lost the weight I still kept seeing her for a like a year") "soured," because, as he puts it, "I was gaining all the weight back, and she felt like I wasn't dealing with things in my life that were making me unhappy but I didn't want to deal with them in her way."

For the self-directed, results-oriented person who doesn't want to talk desultorily, the naturopathic approach may in fact be preferable. Kerri Axelrod, a former political communications director who is currently a holistic health coach in Boston, stopped seeing her psychotherapist

She pinpoints the appeal of and-wellness-centric regimen plan, and before long you see After all, changes to our bodies are far more tangible than minds—and the former can have more of an effect on the latter. I've been in therapy, off and on, for 15 years improved upon any of the problems to which I always return when I do a juice fast or stick to a diet not long before I feel like an en



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