

living

health & wellbeing

doctor's notes

► **THERE** were an estimated 78,000 new cases of swine flu in England in the past week, according to figures released yesterday. This is up from 53,000 in the week before, but falls short of the 100,000 cases at the peak of swine flu in July. There are currently 751 people in hospital with the virus, of which 157 are in intensive care. The number of swine flu deaths in England now stands at 97.

► **DENTISTS** warned this week of an "unacceptable and growing chasm" between those with good and poor dental health. The British Dental Association (BDA) said people in the most deprived areas were more likely to have tooth decay than those in the least deprived. Differences are particularly marked among children, it said, with 50% more five-year-olds in the poorest parts showing decay signs than those in more affluent areas. Older people and those with disabilities are also at risk from poor oral health and need more attention and treatment, the BDA report found. Professor Damien Walmsley, scientific adviser to the BDA, said: "There has been a significant improvement in the nation's overall oral health over the last 30 years, but despite that we still see a huge disparity that is all-too-often related to social deprivation. "It is completely unacceptable that in Britain, in 2009, such a wide gap should exist."

► **A SUGARY** ingredient in processed foods and soft drinks could be a recipe for high blood pressure, research suggests. High fructose corn syrup (HFCS) is abundant in many types of foods and beverages and was originally viewed as a "healthy" method of sweetening. Its introduction 20 years ago has caused consumption of the fruit sugar fructose to rise sharply, alongside increasing levels of obesity. Although healthy amounts of fructose exist naturally in fruit, excessive amounts of the sugar may be harmful. Large quantities of fructose cause the liver to pump fats into the bloodstream that may damage arteries.

► **MICHELLE** Obama is just one famous fan of hula-hooping, which is emerging as the hottest new craze for exercise-junkies as well as others looking for a fun alternative to gym. America's First Lady has been pictured getting in the swing of this workout on the White House lawn, as part of her campaign to encourage children to exercise. And the President has praised his wife's hula skills, revealing that "once she gets the rhythm going she can drop to her knees" and still carry on hooping. Apparently, Michelle can manage an impressive 142 swivels at a time. If you want to join the craze, try Hoopnotica Travel Hula Hoop, which claims to be a good fat-burning cardio workout that's good for the joints. Visit www.victoriahealth.com



TRAINING GROUND: Westwell Hall, in Ilfracombe, Devon, a picture-perfect setting to embark on a new healthy living regime

In a deep, dark corner of north Devon lies a weight-loss spa with a difference – a boot camp that kicks your ass but manages to pamper you at the same time.

There's no screaming at NuBeginnings, no rolling car tyres up steep hills, and certainly no credit-card-sized portions of inedible cardboard masquerading as food.

Instead, the camp uses a holistic weight-loss routine with exercise, diet and what I initially regarded cynically as some hippy-dippy stuff like hypnotherapy – but was confounded when it actually seemed to work.

"Step inside your aura and see if there are any cracks or holes that need fixing," the hypnotherapist cooed gently. "If you find any around your stomach, then you know that's where your problems with food lie."

Never the best at DIY, I tried not to giggle as I mentally took a virtual vial of Superglue to my aura in order to mend the cracks and attempted to 'become whole again'.

It seemed the wackiest way to spend a Monday afternoon, but then at NuBeginnings, even wacky therapy can be successful when it comes to shedding pounds.

Accommodated in a handsome 19th-century manor house, Westwell Hall in Ilfracombe, clients follow a programme which includes lectures on mindful eating, pilates and qi-gong (a Taoist breathing and exercise technique to harness energy), as well as attending healthy cooking classes.

I had a one-week stay – you can opt for two or four weeks – and my seven fellow 'boot campers' were all women, although that's rare according to the staff.

One woman wanted to lose the weight gained from her daily tippie of a bottle of wine, while another hoped to lose four stone by Christmas.

I came to regulate my blood sugar

health focus

► **KATE HODAL** takes a brave plunge into a world of diet and exercise

levels, as my busy lifestyle means I only eat once or twice a day, and suffer stomach bloating as well as poor concentration and energy levels.

We were warned that we might suffer detox symptoms in the first few days due to the combination of daily exercise and a strict diet of low-glycaemic organic index foods (whole grains, fresh fruit, veg and no sugars).

That proved correct. After years of indulging in my weaknesses – pints of Guinness, chocolate pastries and endless cups of tea – as well as not being allowed coffee, junk food or any TV, the regime felt tough.

Mornings were spent with personal female trainers Lou and Zoe, who led us on a high-octane fitness regime of intense cardio and resistance training.

All of us whimpered after about 10 minutes, but there was a compensation to heaving our way up sand dunes or through 'Burpees' (Army-style half press-ups/half star-jumps).

Almost all our cardio sessions were outdoors with the spectacular North Devon coastline as a backdrop, and we also hiked over the red fern-covered hills of Exmoor or march along the sea-hugging cliffs with an expert local guide, Keith.

In the afternoons, there were lectures on nutrition, massages and group acupuncture sessions where we thought of an addiction we'd like to lose – white bread was the most popular.

NuBeginnings takes only 10 campers at a time, which helped us bond quickly and support each other.

Losing weight, toning up and learning about our own – and others' – addictions to food made us feel less isolated with our problems.

During the week, our skin became clearer, moods lightened and motivation rose.

Founder Victoria Wills, who once weighed 21 stone and shed eight stone on the programme, summed up the philosophy of the programme: "It focuses on your mindset, which forces you to use the power of your subconscious mind to ensure you succeed."

Afterwards a support network, Inner Circle, allows 'graduates' to keep in contact.

Two weeks later I'm still following the healthy eating guidelines and haven't regained the five pounds I shed, and I've shaved 4cm off my waist and 3cm from my hips. Also, I've surprised myself by enjoying running regularly and continuing Lou and Zoe's resistance training exercises three times a week.

This sort of effort would have been unthinkable before NuBeginnings. Now, if I could just attend to those cracks in my aura...

► One week at NuBeginnings, in Ilfracombe, Devon, starts at £1,895. Call (01271) 862 792 or see www.nubeginnings.co.uk for more details.



NEW LIMITS: One of the campers during their exercise training, and inset, Kate Hodal, who took place in the boot