



Being Alive. We are born with this condition — and it's fatal Deborah Ross



So according to the latest health advice eating seven portions of fruit and vegetables a day "lowers death risk", as Sky News put it or, as Radio 4's *Today* put it, "lowers risk of mortality", by which time I was thinking: whoa, hold your horses, unhand that apple, set that banana free, send that pear on its way. What is this "risk of death" you speak of? Am I at risk of death? Since when? Somewhat uncharacteristically — because I am lazy so prefer to take everything at face value — I decided to do some research on this "death risk" and you know what? I now wish I hadn't. I so wish I hadn't. In fact, if you are nervous of disposition and easily distressed I suggest you look away now because what I have to report is not good, not good at all, and it is this: life is 100 per cent fatal and there is absolutely nothing you can do about it. There is no way you can reduce the "risk". Yes, I was as shocked as you are — I'm going to die! Me!

— but the facts are out there if you look for them, as I so foolishly did. (Never again.) Apparently — and don't blame me for this, I am only diligently reporting back — we are all born with a condition known as "Being Alive", and it is this Being Alive that is going to do for us, every time, without exception. Indeed, of the more than 500,000 people who died in the UK last year, every single one had previously shown signs of Being Alive.

Many famous people throughout history have also experienced Being Alive and its fatal consequences. Charles Darwin died of Being Alive in 1882. William Shakespeare died of Being Alive in 1616. King Harold II stopped Being Alive in 1066 after receiving an arrow to the eye. And although it isn't certain when Homer died exactly — somewhere around the 7th or 8th century BC — I think it would be self-deceiving if we allowed ourselves to believe he had somehow ever avoided Being Alive.

So — and I'm sorry to be the one to have to break this to you — Being Alive always leads to not being alive any more, a condition otherwise known as Being Dead. This is a metabolic affliction characterised by the cessation of all bodily functions. Seriously. I'm not joking. Look into it yourself if you don't believe me. I'm not playing games here. And I'm glad that those of a nervous disposition, who are easily distressed, have already looked away because it seems that Being Dead is just as commonplace as Being Alive. It is even looking as if you can't have one without the other.

Yes, I'm as shocked as you are. Who knew? Tell you what, why don't we just not talk about it? Why don't we forget I ever discovered any of this? As self-reflexive, conscious beings we're only going to find it upsetting and frightening, so why don't we make like Being Dead doesn't happen?

Here's a plan: instead of discussing how we might best die, or how we might wish to die when the time comes, or how we might reasonably hurry death along in those circumstances where it would be merciful, why don't we pretend it is possible to live indefinitely if we eat lots of this, none of that, and blueberries on the hour every hour?

And while we are about it we could also pretend it will buy us so much more than just a few extra months of being ancient, infirm and mistreated in some awful care home? Deal? Great. It was a close shave for a minute there, though. Phew.

I'm too old for child's play

The number of women having babies in their fifties has doubled in the past six years and hats off to each and every one of them. I sincerely mean that. I am spilling over with admiration. Although I don't look it — ask anyone — I am around that age but just couldn't do it now.

Last week, I looked after my neighbour's three-year-old daughter for just one day — one measly day! — and was so exhausted by the evening I could barely keep my eyes open for *The One Show* and actually didn't make it to *Lambing Live*. (What happened? Was a lamb born, live?)

It wasn't so much the physical activity, though I had forgotten what a business that can be. We went to the park, where she announced she needed a "poo" so it was away to the ghastly toilets where it was coat off, then jumper, because she was wearing dungarees, then dungarees down, then tights, because blow me if she wasn't wearing tights under her dungarees, and then, after all that, she did one tiny, whispery fart before announcing "finished". (Actually, it was "ninished", but I knew what she meant.)

Then I had to do everything again in reverse, and that was before we even got to the playground.

So there was that, but also the mental energy: playing the same dinosaur memory game over and over, even though she was useless; playing catch with a ball in the garden for a good hour even though she couldn't catch (that was fun!); reading the same *Postman Pat* book 96 times; dissuading her from playing the piano with a cricket bat; dissuading her from riding the dog.

By the time her mother picked her up, I was on my knees. "I'm on my knees," I said, as I pushed them out the door. I didn't even have the strength to add: "What kind of mother hands over a child wearing a jumper on top of dungarees?" That's how tired I was.

Smell burning?

Naomi Watts is a fan, so is Rachel Weisz — but would the Triad skin treatment do anything for Barbara McMahon?

Dr David Colbert took care of Angelina Jolie's delicate skin when she wore latex prosthetics on the set of the spy thriller *Salt*, made sure that Jennifer Lawrence didn't break out in hives after she painted her body blue for the forthcoming *X-Men* film and has removed blemishes from the faces of actors such as Daniel Craig and Russell Crowe.

The dermatologist to the stars knows a thing or two about complexion perfection — which is just as well because he is hovering over my face with a laser and, rather alarmingly, warns me that I am about to smell burning. "That'll be the laser picking up the tiny vellus hairs all over your face, but don't worry, nothing's on fire," he assures me. I am about to experience Colbert's signature Triad facial, which can cost an eye-watering \$1,000 (£600) and which is said to be the secret weapon of many A-list stars.

So dependent are some celebrities on its rejuvenating properties that the Manhattan-based doctor sets up a temporary clinic in Beverly Hills before the Academy Awards every year so that they can have the treatment before stepping on to the red carpet. People behind the camera such as publicists, studio executives and agents also clamour for it so that they can look their best at the after-parties. And this Oscar winner of facials is coming to Britain this summer. Space NK, which already sells Colbert's range of skincare products, is to offer a version in its stores that have spas.

It is up to me to test the Triad before it reaches our shores, which is why I am lying prone in a consulting room in Colbert's glamorous dermatology practice in

downtown Manhattan. Staff in scrubs and white coats are everywhere but Colbert is in civvies, wearing a sharp pair of Brazilian jeans, a Paul Smith cashmere sweater and colourful Asics trainers. "It drives me crazy to wear a white coat," he says rather dramatically. "I have to be able to move my arms and be free."

I have already had microdermabrasion, the first part of the treatment, where mechanical exfoliation removes dead skin cells, cleans out pores and treats fine lines and hyper-pigmentation. It feels like a miniature vacuum cleaner is being run all over the surface of my face, and some of the crystals used in the treatment get in my mouth, even though I've kept my lips closed. I discreetly spit some out and swallow others.

Colbert, his medical aesthetician Lauren and I are wearing eye shields for part two of the facial: the laser treatment. It's a first for me and there is indeed the smell of singed hair. Colbert says it will feel like "multiple warm raindrops falling on the skin", but it's less pleasant than that and when the laser passes over my mouth, I feel a twinge in my teeth. Colbert tells me that the laser is passing through the surface of my skin into the dermis, where it will help to stimulate collagen growth. In a few days, my pores will be smaller and my skin will be plumper and more firm. "You're going to look all dewy and glowy."

The cost of the Triad depends on the number of pulses of laser you're given and the strength of the chemical peel used in the third stage. I have had 3,000 laser pulses and now my face is being swabbed with a 20 per cent glycolic peel scented with lavender.

I feel a tingling and my face begins to itch, but the peel is wiped off almost immediately. This helps to dissolve the rest of the dead skin cells and to stimulate fresh cells and collagen, apparently. I am cooled down with a hydrating mist full of antioxidants and minerals, and sunscreen is applied.

The Triad has become popular because of its celebrity association. Michelle Williams had it before appearing on the cover of *American Vogue*. Rachel Weisz and Sienna Miller are regulars and Naomi Watts gushed about the treatment in *Vanity Fair*.

"It really brings my skin back to life... it's one of my secret weapons," the alabaster-skinned actress said. Lingerie models for Victoria's Secret have full-body



Yes, it's the Hollywood facial



Triad treatments before their annual fashion show.

Colbert theatrically zips his lips when I ask about his other big-name clients. Then, since he knows that I am from a British newspaper, he nods in the direction of a cutting sitting on a shelf in the consulting room. It's from a fashion magazine that claims members of the Royal Family have bought his products. His list is also rumoured to include numerous Hollywood A-listers, but Colbert says that most of his clients are ordinary men and women who come in three or four times a year for the treatment.

The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery reports that the popularity of laser treatments is rising every year. Dr Goessel Anson, a plastic surgeon in Las Vegas, says these ever more sophisticated machines can fix many skin problems. "They're great for broken blood vessels, large pores and the red and brown spots caused by sun damage," she says. "We're not there yet with them, however, in terms of skin tightening."

Colbert, 59, was born in Iowa but went to medical school in France. He worked for a year in Chanel's skin technology lab before returning to finish his dermatology studies in the US. He was hired to look after Jolie's skin in 2010; the products he made for her were the inspiration for his skincare range. A blemish on the face of a star can halt production so it's crucial to avoid skin problems, he says.

Word spread around Hollywood about his soothing creams and lotions. Actors, he says, suffer constantly from fatigue. "One day they're in London, the next they're in L.A. I don't know how they do it. I'm constantly amazed by how hard these people work." It doesn't sound difficult to me, I say, but Colbert insists that even luxury travel takes its toll. Actors and models, he says, have the same skin problems as everyone else. "Hyper-pigmentation, broken blood vessels, fine lines and the sun spare no one. Their faces are their calling cards. Part of it is good genes, but the other part is that they take care of themselves." Colbert mixes his



glamorous dermatology work with charity projects. Jolie asked him to participate in a dermatology outreach clinic in Cambodia and he is due to visit a refugee camp in Ramallah, Palestine. "People who have skin problems are marginalised," he says. "Psoriasis might not kill them like malaria does, but it means they can't get a job, they can't find a mate, they can't have children and they stay hidden from society. Some of these conditions can be treated very easily."

A specialist in wound healing, he went to Haiti to help out after the 2010 earthquake and is involved in raising money for prosthetics for those who lost limbs in the disaster.

He was friends with the late L'Wren Scott, who enlisted the help of Mick Jagger and Bono, amongst others, to raise \$500,000 for a prosthetics clinic. "L'Wren is a beautiful spirit who, while on this Earth, gave generously to many charitable causes," he says. "Her legacy as a truly great fashion designer and a humanitarian is a unique one and I'll remember her many acts of kindness."

The secret of Colbert's success is that he has a good eye and a light touch. He says that he can see immediately what will give both men and women the most natural results. I had been sceptical about the Triad — my treatment was free — but the results were astonishing. The rosacea on my cheeks vanished and within a few days my skin really did look plumped up and glowing. Weeks later, it is great fun to look in the mirror. I have learnt that lasers can do the most astonishing job in the right hands.

Recreate the Triad facial at home with Colbert's three-step programme: Intensify Facial Discs (£52), Stimulate Serum (£115) and Illumino Face Oil (£100), all from Space NK

Dr David Colbert and Rachel Weisz, above, Michelle Williams, left, Sienna Miller, right, and Naomi Watts, above right

Laser treatment: where to go in Britain

Forget fillers or Botox, laser is paving the way in 2014. "Lasers treat so many different skin concerns and are a non-invasive option with very little side-effects," says Dr Jules Nabet, a London-based aesthetic doctor with more than 25 years' experience.

It's no surprise these treatments are on the rise. "They are gentler, less painful and you have much less downtime than you needed previously," he says. Laser treatment is great for minimising large pores, red and brown spots caused by sun damage and fine lines.

Staying out of the sun afterwards is strictly advised, and always use a sunscreen. A word of warning too: laser resurfacing isn't recommended for those with a darker skin tone.

Best laser treatments

For rejuvenation

■ **MPX laser treatment at Dr Jules Nabet (julesnabet.com), from £100** The MPX laser (quicker and less painful than other lasers) is the most effective for skin problems such as hair removal, skin rejuvenation, scarring, sagging, pigmentation and acne.

■ **The DNA Ultimate Laser resurfacing treatment by Debbie Thomas (debbiethomas.co.uk), from £395** This laser treatment tightens skin and targets redness, active acne and broken veins. It also helps to reduce the appearance of scarring, fine lines and wrinkles. Expect 2-7 days of downtime.

For stretchmarks, fine lines and wrinkles

■ **Fraxel Laser at EF Medispa (efmedispa.com), £500 per treatment (course recommended)** Great to reduce age spots on your face, décolletage and hands, or to banish fine lines, wrinkles, acne scars and stretchmarks.

For pain-free hair removal

■ **Soprano ICE pain-free laser hair removal at EF Medispa, bikini from £129** A new cooling system makes this the first pain-free laser hair removal system. Medispa is where West London's glosse posse heads to put an end to time-consuming waxing sessions. Carolyn Asome