

Is prevention better than cure? We ask London's new and exclusive medical screening clinic

I lead a hectic and busy lifestyle, often rushing from one meeting to the next, only stopping to check where and when my next appointment is. But, I do like to take care of myself; I don't smoke, I eat my five portions of fruit and vegetables a day and exercise regularly. While such a regime may be deemed healthy, I often wonder if it is enough to prevent diseases and ailments.

That's why when a friend mentioned to me a new, unique and radiation-free clinic based in London called Preventicum, I was intrigued and wanted to find out more.

Preventicum is described as the 'Rolls-Royce' of the medical world because it combines the latest medical technology with the ultimate in luxury facilities to offer the most advanced and safest medical check-up available. The emphasis is on you, the client, rather than you, the patient.

Preventicum

Opened in West London in July and founded originally in 2003 at the University of Essen, Germany, the clinic is the latest in medical innovation. A Preventicum experience will include comprehensive blood tests, ECG, exercise test, lung function tests and ultrasound examinations, with the centre-piece of the check-up being a unique, radiation-free MRI scan of the whole body.

Most of Preventicum's clients are over the age of 30. They come from all walks of life, but there are four principal groups: those who are looking for the crème de la crème in medical care, who want to be fully fit to enjoy their luxury lifestyles; sportsmen and women in training; corporations concerned with the health of existing and future senior management and insurance companies. They all have one thing in common however - they value an insight into the current and future state of their health.

In the two years since its opening, Preventicum has now advised nearly 3,000 clients. Amazingly, an ongoing study has revealed that in about 20 percent of all check-ups, the innovative MRI- technology used at Preventicum has led to the diagnosis of conditions that could otherwise have stayed undetected until the probable onset of medical symptoms, when treatment would take a very different track.



Intrigued, I decided to book an appointment.

Naturally, I wasn't quite sure what to expect, but my first impressions were extremely favourable. Situated away from a traditional hospital setting, the clinic wasn't at all intimidating. In fact, it was more like a contemporary boutique hotel than a clinic.

"The idea is to give the client a sense of escape. Discretion is key and we understand that clients need privacy while they are with us," says Dr Michael Clarke, Medical Director. Before my visit, I was slightly concerned that I might see someone from work at the clinic, but I needn't have worried. Appointments are designed so that clients never even have to cross each other in the corridor.

On arrival, I was welcomed by friendly staff and taken to my own private room to settle in and change into comfortable clothing provided by Preventicum. The décor was very contemporary, using warm, earthy colours and there was a view overlooking green space.

The room was fully equipped with a TV and PC with Internet connection, together with newspapers. In fact, there was everything you might expect in a luxury hotel room. I felt like I was in a 5-star hotel rather than a medical clinic.

After I had settled in, Dr Clarke - a private London GP and occupational health doctor, came to conduct my initial consultation. This was extremely thorough and dealt with all my previous medical problems and operations, which I had undergone over the years, right down to a tonsillectomy when I was just five.

When this was complete, Julie, the Preventicum nurse, took all my general statistics, such as blood pressure, height and weight and carried out my blood tests.

Following a physical examination, I had a full-body MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scan. This included the arteries, brain, heart and colon. The scan enables Preventicum doctors to gather detailed information about a client's entire body in just 90 minutes. Amazingly, the MRI scan incorporates angiogram technology that scans the body's whole arterial tree in under 10 minutes.

The scanning, (which is radiation - free) is without any known side effects, unlike other scanning methods such as CT or EBCT. Just one CT scan can give off the equivalent radiation of 400 X-rays, so it is obvious why experts favour MRI.

I then had an ultrasound examination of my thyroid, arteries in my neck and my ovaries (for men, this would be a prostate examination) and from there, I met the cardiac technician for my ECG and exercise test, which involved walking on a treadmill for about 15 minutes.

On completion of all the examinations, Preventicum's on-site radiologist showed me hundreds of images of my own body from my MRI

scan and I was able to ask any questions that I wanted. I even saw my heartbeat in real time! I found this a truly remarkable experience to have a virtual tour of my own body.

Preventicum radiologist, Dr Thomas Egelhof says: "People find it so valuable to see their body in this way. It can be a wake-up call for our clients and really does have an effect on how they lead their lives. We have had clients who change their diet and stop smoking once they see the strain they are putting on their heart.

And the results...

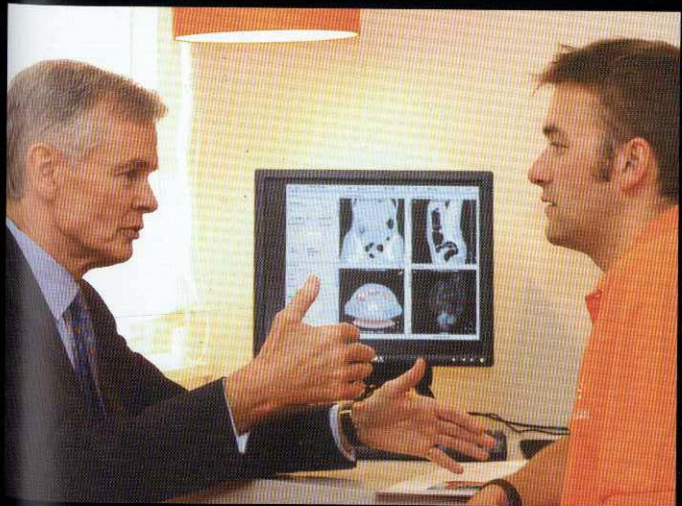
At the end of the relatively quick five-hour session and after my virtual tour, I had a final detailed consultation with Dr Clarke. The results of all my examinations were explained to me and we discussed appropriate lifestyle changes. I know, for example, that I am overweight, so we talked about adjusting my diet. All in all, however, I was given a clean bill of health, which was a great relief.

Had there been any problems, Dr Clarke would have referred me either back to my GP or to a specialist very quickly. "Preventicum is a diagnostic clinic, but we follow up and make sure clients are looked after in all respects. If we detect a problem, we can organise further investigation or treatment without delay. We have had clients who go straight to a cardiologist, for example, from the clinic," Dr Clarke adds. "Over 30 years of GP practice, I have developed a strong network of specialists whom I know and trust. Our Medical Advisory Board, led by Professor Neil Poulter, adds to this and ensures we handle each case appropriately."

I was able to take all my MRI images away with me - fascinating viewing, for me at least! A full written results pack was sent to me the following day, summarising everything I discussed with Dr Clarke on the day.

Throughout my time at the clinic the staff were incredibly helpful and reassuring. I was well looked after and received individual care and attention. I was really made to feel at home and in my final consultation, I was able to ask any questions I had about my scans and test results. I was also advised to return for another check-up in a couple of years' time, which is something I will most certainly do.

The Preventicum check-up was definitely worth it. It gave me a detailed insight into my current and long-term health. The attention I was given was very personal and individual and the check-up was incredibly comprehensive, organised and discreet. Having the results by the end of my half-day session also gave me peace of mind. ■



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