

# A full-body reset

**Emma Coxon** heads to Combe Grove Metabolic Health Retreat near Bath to reboot her health and fitness – not just for the new year but for the long term

**A**fter a four-year hiatus from my regular exercise routine after the birth of my daughter, coupled with unhealthy eating habits, my health had taken a downturn. My energy levels had hit an all-time low, and a recent visit to my GP unveiled high cholesterol, low phosphate and a BMI exceeding the recommended range. Seeking assistance amid increasing wait times and brief consultation windows with my doctor, I found myself uncertain about how to regain control.

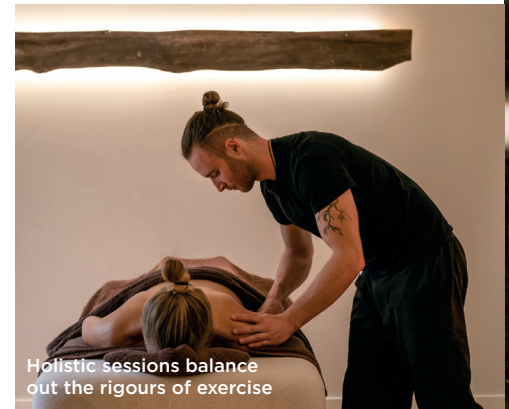
Several months later, I stumble upon the UK's first medical wellness centre, founded by Helen Aylward-Smith, a

visionary and businesswoman, turned philanthropist. Combe Grove offers week-long metabolic health retreats that blend ground-breaking medical research, the rejuvenating power of nature and a dedicated support team of doctors, medical professionals, dieticians, nutritionists and holistic health practitioners. This was precisely what I had been searching for.

Combe Grove's programmes are grounded in the 'Five Roots of Metabolic Health' which are: nutrition, movement, mindset, environment and sleep. Striving for balance in each of these areas aims to restore and sustain homeostasis in the body, fostering improved metabolic health, they say.

## NESTLED IN NATURE

With much anticipation, I arrived at Combe Grove on a cold, crisp autumn morning.



Holistic sessions balance out the rigours of exercise

Situated in the Somerset countryside just outside Bath, the estate's 70 acres of lush woodland and meadows looked resplendent, adorned in autumnal shades of red, yellow and bronze. I was warmly welcomed by Hilary Woods, one of the team leaders, and guided through the week's schedule and then to my room, which was beautifully appointed with views of the woodland in the valley below, and equipped with a king-size bed, balcony and sitting bath.

That evening, at dinner, I met my fellow retreaters in the main house's candlelit orangery. A diverse group of people, we quickly formed a supportive community, providing encouragement to each other throughout the week. Nutrition takes centre stage in Combe Grove's programmes. Delightful dishes, rich in good-quality proteins and healthy fats, and low in carbs, were complemented by the core principle of time-restricted



The retreat centre is surrounded by 70 acres of woodlands and meadows

*'The estate overlooks a beautiful valley with views of the historic city of Bath'*

eating: no breakfast, then brunch at 10.45am and dinner at 5.45pm, finishing by 7pm, allowing our bodies a 16-hour rest-and-reset period.

We savoured an abundance of fresh and flavourful foods, home-grown and harvested from the estate's kitchen garden. Carefully designed by a team of dieticians and nutritionists, my favourite dishes included Fish pie topped with creamy cauliflower mash and Parmesan and Leek, butterbean and celeriac crumble, all served with seasonal vegetables and lovingly prepared by Combe Grove chefs Marco Appel and Rachel Milsom. Each meal is a feast for the senses.

**METABOLIC TESTING**

The first day of the retreat brings eagerly anticipated tests to assess the status of my health and identify areas for improvement. A finger-prick test by medical lead, Dr Campbell Murdoch, reveals slightly



A well-equipped gym caters for every exercise taste

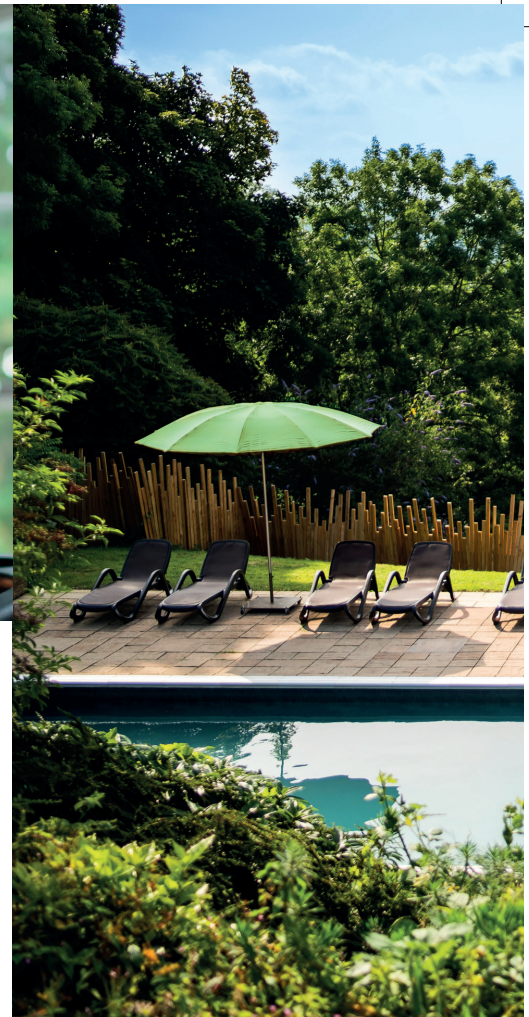
*'A glorious swim in the heated outdoor pool at dusk was accompanied by the sight of geese flying overhead'*

elevated cholesterol, weight concerns and an excess waist circumference. Despite this, my blood pressure and triglycerides were in a healthy range, providing some relief. The Accuniq machine, measuring total body composition, presented surprising results of high visceral fat, but my skeletal muscle mass within a healthy range. A movement coach later in the week attributed this to my previous fitness level, emphasising the need for regular exercise to maintain it.

Despite initial concerns, Dr Murdoch remained unfazed and expressed genuine belief in my ability to make positive changes. He shared his hope for society's future, recounting impressive results at his own GP practice, where patients managed to reverse type 2 diabetes, lower their blood pressure, achieve weight loss, and improve mental and physical health conditions.

**KEEPING ACTIVE**

The week unfolded with a plethora of informative and interactive workshops that emphasised the importance of each of the five roots, including insightful cookery demonstrations and a fun-filled movement workshop with gym manager Chris Spreadbury. The session included squats, lunges and press-ups, as well as a group fitness activity that built up quite a sweat! We were encouraged to do as little or as much exercise as felt comfortable, with the



aim to maintain a minimum of 120 minutes of movement per week once back home.

Jules Lowrie, studio manager, explained: 'We refer to exercise as "movement" at Combe Grove because the word "exercise" has pre-conceived connotations, which can be negative to someone who has never done "exercise" before, or who has not enjoyed a former experience of exercise. Movement can be anything from a walk to a run, a bicycle ride or a swim, gentle yoga or tennis: it is more about getting the body moving and incorporating movement into your daily life. When we find movement we like and enjoy we are far more likely to continue doing it on a daily/weekly basis.'

The diverse opportunities for movement at Combe Grove include classes from Spin, HIIT, Zumba and Bodypump to yoga and Pilates – all bookable through their app. Plus, superb flood-lit indoor and outdoor



Moving more forms the centrepiece of the exercise programme



Spacious rooms and tranquil decor add to the retreat experience



Meals are a feast for the senses



tennis courts mean you can enjoy a game or two year-round.

**WALKING AND WEIGHTS**

I opted to join the guided walks, including a wildlife walk with Steve Hill, exploring ancient woodland. A glorious swim in the heated outdoor pool at dusk was accompanied by the sight of geese flying overhead; a magical moment that reminded me of my love for spending time in nature. One evening I joined an aqua fit class in the indoor pool; a great workout with lots of laughs as we tried to grapple with inflatable dumbbells.

The well-equipped gym has a good range of equipment, including cardiovascular machines, resistance equipment and fitness aids, catered to individual preferences. Fitted with state-of-the-art SportsArt equipment, the gym's thoughtful design is aimed at fostering a positive and socially responsible environment, with equipment

harnessing energy generated during workouts. The weights area is great and the gym is quiet and not intimidating at all.

As a woman in my 40s, I'm advised to incorporate resistance training and weights into my routine, alongside movement for cardio. 'We are strong advocates of empowering women to lift weights to maintain and build muscle throughout their lives as we know the benefits of resistance training for metabolic health, hormone health and overall health and wellbeing. The benefits of incorporating resistance training as we age, as part of our fitness routine, are phenomenal,' says Jenny Service, gym instructor, PT, naturopathic nutritionist, and team leader at Combe Grove.

**RELAXING THERAPIES**

To balance out the exertion from all the exercise, I also enjoyed some calming holistic treatments. A reflexology session with Rosalind Oxenford left me blissfully relaxed, and a massage with Lucie TePuci Jurickova was one of the best I've ever experienced. An osteopathy session with Oscar Marcus provided insights into my movement patterns, addressing the stiffness in my knees and suggesting exercises.

I left Combe Grove excited about the future and in the knowledge that regaining control of my metabolic health is entirely possible. It was one of the most insightful and transformative experiences of my life, but there's more... the programmes come with 48-weeks of support from the experts after your retreat, so I feel better equipped to maintain my new eating and exercise habits than ever before. 🍷

Combe Grove's year-long Metabolic Health Programme costs from £2,600. It includes a six-night residential retreat, with one consultation with a nutritionist, a one-to-one session with an exercise coach and one treatment with a holistic practitioner. Also included is one year of membership to the Club at Combe Grove with the chance to return for a minimum three-night stay at a discounted rate. Specialist programmes with a focus on menopause or pre-diabetes cost from £2,900, with more to come in future, including fertility and food addiction programmes. For more information go to [combegrove.com](http://combegrove.com)

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