

# Over lunch with... Frank Lipman

**Christina Agnew** meets New York-based holistic doctor and world music freak Frank Lipman, and discovers that this consultant to the stars has substance as well as style



Frank is the founder of the Eleven Eleven Wellness Center in New York, which focuses on preventative health care and patient education.

## Are you Spent?

1. Do you wake up in the morning and not feel refreshed?
2. Do you feel unusually tired most of the time?
3. Do you need coffee, fizzy drinks or sugary snacks to get going and keep going?
4. Although you feel physically exhausted, does your mind continue to race?
5. Do you feel as if you are ageing too quickly?
6. Do you have gas, bloating, constipation and/or indigestion?
7. Is it a struggle to lose weight in spite of dieting and exercise?
8. Do you have achy muscles and/or joints or tension in your body – particularly your neck and shoulders?
9. Do you have a diminished sex drive?
10. Do you often feel depressed or have trouble concentrating or focusing and remembering things?
11. Have you found that little or nothing seems to rejuvenate you?
12. Do you lack motivation to accomplish even small tasks?
13. Do you find that you get sick more frequently and it takes longer to recover?

If you answered yes to more than three of these questions Frank believes you are more than likely Spent and you should seek out help from a holistic doctor.

**F**runk Lipman practises Ubuntu, grooves to reggae and quotes Taoist proverbs. Generally not at the same time. It's not what you'd expect from an orthodox-trained MD promoting a book about overcoming exhaustion. But Frank is not afraid to take the unconventional approach, personally or professionally. He'd like the rest of us to follow his lead, thereby learning how we can better take charge of our own health. "Of course, I believe that everyone needs to eat well

and exercise", Frank says, "but I also believe that health comes from having a dynamic and fulfilling life."

### It's just exhaustion sweetie...

Since he began practising medicine in New York in the 1980s, Frank has noticed an alarming health trend. Despite being apparently disease-free and in the prime of their lives, people in their 30s, 40s and 50s have gone to see him in increasing numbers for help with

complaints like waking up in the morning and not feeling refreshed, needing stimulants to get going and keep going and feeling physically exhausted but struggling with a racing mind. He estimates that 75 per cent of the people he treats are overwhelmed, exhausted and afflicted with a disorder that makes them feel decades older than their years. He calls this "Spent", because that is how the person feels – "your energy account is tapped out", he says.

## We have a disease care system

Frank is a holistic doctor, which he jokes means that people come to him with a whole list of symptoms. He began his professional career as a classically trained doctor in South Africa in the 1980s. In 1984 he and his wife emigrated to the US (because they could no longer continue living under apartheid) and settled in New York. Further evidence of his penchant for the unconventional route: he chose to begin working at a hospital in the South Bronx. There he encountered a group of people with drug and alcohol problems. Something about the scene caught his eye – the addicts didn't have needles in their arms but in their ears, and they were completely calm. It was an acupuncture clinic, and thus an interest in acupuncture was germinated, which flowered into a passion for Traditional Chinese Medicine, functional medicine, nutrition, yoga and meditation.

Frank says through his studies he came to believe passionately that modern Western medicine supports “a disease care system, not a health care system”. He calls it the ‘name it, blame it, tame it’ approach; a reductionist approach in which we see the body as a machine which has various parts that we can treat individually, rather than accepting that everything is connected and looking at the whole person. “At medical schools, we doctors are taught to treat the symptoms of disease, rather than how to create health and prevent people from getting sick.” Frank says that in what he calls “good” medicine: “We use Western medicine for what it is good at - acute

### What is Ubuntu?

“A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed.”

(Archbishop Desmond Tutu)

## “To attain knowledge, add things every day. To attain wisdom, remove things every day.” (Lao Tzu)

medical and surgical emergencies, when you break a bone, when you are acutely ill and so on. But we use a combination of diet, exercise, supplements, stress management, bodywork, acupuncture and other modalities for most other problems.”

Frank first saw the power of alternative modalities back in KwaNdebele, a rural area in South Africa. Many of his patients, who suffered from diseases symptomatic of physical hardship, poverty and malnutrition, didn't get any better when he prescribed the drugs that were his tools at the time. In fact, his supervising GP used to quip that if patients did get better it was in spite of the drugs rather than because of them. Yet the Sangomas, holistic healers practising herbal medicine amongst other things, seemed to make progress where Frank could not.

### The rhythm's gonna get you

Although the people he treated in South Africa faced many challenges, not least relating to their health, Frank wasn't dealing back then with the complaints that he encountered, more and more frequently, in New York. Sitting listening to his music (I imagine – since he has done so obsessively every day from an early age) he pondered how rhythm could be a portal into understanding health. The KwaNdebele villagers lived in accordance with the cycles and rhythms of nature – they had to. They went to bed when it got dark, rose with the sun and ate whatever foods were available in season. Very few of us are living this way today. Instead, we create artificial environments, sitting under fluorescent lights at night and getting very little natural light during the day. We eat fresh strawberries in winter. We are either sedentary or we run marathons. Generally, we pay more attention to the watches on our wrists than our internal body clocks. Consequently, many of us walk around feeling as if we have jet lag half the

## How to take charge of your health

Frank's book contains a six-week healing programme. Here are a few tips:

- Eat in accordance with your body's natural rhythms – have a bigger breakfast and lunch and a smaller dinner.
- Supplement your diet with nutrients - Frank himself takes supplements daily and believes diet alone is not sufficient to achieve optimum health.
- Create regular patterns of sleeping, waking, eating and exercising.
- Stay physically active, play and have fun.
- Spend at least 30-60 minutes outdoors every day.
- Listen to music you enjoy.
- Create a healthy social network.
- Express your emotions appropriately.
- Practice Ubuntu.

time – and when this becomes chronic Frank says we are Spent.

### Daily beats

Frank is confident that by making ordinary changes to our lives we can experience extraordinary healing. “Although we take it for granted, the body is engaged in self-healing all the time. When you cut yourself, your body heals the cut. When you get a cold, the body's immune system usually fights it off after a few days. In fact a lot of what I do in my practice is to remove obstacles to healing so the body can heal itself, whether its toxins that we are exposed to or tension in the body.” The good news is that when prompted correctly with natural light and good food at the correct time, the right supplements, appropriate exercise and exposure to nature, our body clocks can reset themselves.

Is this ground breaking information? Probably not, but it's a very well synthesized reminder that finding your groove isn't just about your (dodgy) dance moves. ■  
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