

DIET SAVANTS

The rich have a new kind of bodyguard: Body gurus who use acupuncture, blood tests, and biofeedback to deliver weight loss and energy. **By Judith Newman**

They cajole, they coach—and sometimes they scold. They are the superstar nutritionists, acupuncturists, and food shrinks—the wellness pooh-bahs—whose ultimate goal is to make you (as nutritionist Jairo Rodriguez puts it) TLG: Tight, Lean, and Gorgeous. Their approaches may differ widely, but they have two things in common: a celebrity following and an almost cultlike devotion from those hell-bent on bodily perfection, or at least purification.

There are more private nutrition consultants than ever, and a new study at Tufts University has found that regular dietary counseling results in greater weight loss, at least in the short term, than dieting on one's own. Increasingly, women are looking beyond diet books, personal trainers, and spas to more specialized wellness experts who promise to attack the beauty/aging/health trifecta with an arsenal of treatments that are simultaneously universal (for the Whole You) and individualized (for You You You). Followers of these gurus are most often healthy women (and men) who are seeking five things, according to primo guru Oz Garcia: "Weight loss, energy, immunity"—i.e., stronger immune systems—"help with issues of aging and appearance, and mood. Mood's a big one." The problems, Garcia insists, are interrelated. "In our overobligated, overextended culture, many of us have exercise and eating habits that affect our metabolisms. And we put on weight. And we get depressed. And we may get sick. It's a vicious cycle."

For women who can relate, certain wellness practitioners seem to serve as a combination of cheerleader, guidance counselor, and loving-but-firm parental figure. These five have gained a powerful reputation among those with both extra cash and body fat to burn.

Services: Everyone begins with a blood and body effluvia analysis (saliva, urine, stool), checking particularly for signs of heart disease (elevated homocysteine levels, for example) and hormone imbalance. Garcia also has his clients complete a questionnaire about their dietary habits and asks them to keep food logs. He aims to determine "a person's real age, not just their chronological age," he says. Generally, a client signs up for six months to a year. "We're looking at everything: medication, food, hormones, sunlight, time off, aspects of a person's temperament," Garcia says. After his program, he attests, "people tend to be much more temperamentally even." As a consultant to the rich and richer, he has been known to accompany them as a diet and exercise enforcer on their Gulfstreams.

Products: You name it, and—if it can be considered beauty-, body-, or brain-enhancing—Garcia has probably put his name on it. He sells supplements (that claim to make skin glow, boost memory and energy, defend against stress, and more), shampoo, and even OZ Water (with minerals and electrolytes) on his website, ozgarcia.com. He and chef David Bouley plan to open a restaurant on the Upper West Side late next year with a health lounge serving antioxidant beverages (with and without the booze).

Credentials: Formerly a photographer in the '80s, Garcia turned around his own caffeine-and-cigarette-fueled lifestyle when seeking a cure for persistent and debilitating migraines. His quest led him to study at the Macrobiotic Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts, among other places, and take up macrobiotic cooking, exercise—and a new career, including writing *The Healthy High-Tech Body*, *Look and Feel Fabulous Forever* (both ReganBooks), and *Redesigning 50* (HarperCollins), scheduled to come out in 2008.

Cost: \$12,000 for a full-year program, which may include Garcia's email, phone, and BlackBerry ministrations.

Yeah, but does it work? "I am not aware of studies that have been done to support the implied claims on the label of Oz Garcia's Longevity Pak," says Paul M. Coates, director of the Office of Dietary Supplements at the National Institutes of Health. Garcia responds that "maybe they're not aware of the studies, but everything in there is substantiated by research," although no testing has been done on this exact formulation. The pack of six capsules, including one designed to improve hair and skin and another meant to boost brain functioning, contains many commonly recommended ingredients—vitamins, fish oil, and antioxidants such as green-tea extract, which research suggests may help protect skin from sun damage. Other contents include turmeric extract (shown to reduce stress in rats), acetyl-L-carnitine (which has been found to improve memory in animals and has had mixed results in studies on people with Alzheimer's disease), and MSM, a sulfur compound with purported skin-softening and nail-strengthening abilities, which are not well-supported by research, according to consumerlab.com, an independent supplement tester.

Food logs do help control intake, studies show, and most of Garcia's approaches to weight and "age management" are tried-and-true (rule number one: Get a lot of sleep). Among the less orthodox is the theory that blood type should affect diet—which several nutrition experts, including Katherine Zeratsky, a registered dietitian at the Mayo Clinic, and Walter Willett, professor of epidemiology and nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health, have dismissed. Garcia points to the website dadamo.com (maintained by Peter D'Adamo, the naturopathic physician who created the blood-type diet), which features several interviews with people who say the diet has improved their health. Good news for those of us with O-positive blood: Keep eating steak. OK, that's an oversimplification. But for us, the theory goes, meat's the thing, while those delicate blood-type A's should stick to more vegetables, less protein.