

HEALTH ASSURANCE



Looking for reassurance about your health - and willing to pay the price? It's possible to book a check-up that tests everything from your heart to your blood count. James Burgess tests out the new Diagnostic Healthcare clinic in Altrincham

It isn't just me, it's a male thing. We just don't like going to the doctor. Hard to explain why, really. I think it is a form of denial, the rather unwise assumption that if you don't get the bad news from the GP, everything must be all right.

The reality of course, is that we are kidding ourselves. If there is anything wrong, the earlier it is caught, the better.

As a journalist I do a relatively sedentary, stressful job, I work long hours, and probably don't devote as much time to home and family as I would like. So my visit to the sparkling new Diagnostic Healthcare clinic, in Altrincham, for an MOT health check was long overdue.

From the moment you walk into the fresh, light welcome area of the Denmark Street clinic, you are made to feel at home. Receptionist Cheryl Snape sat me down to fill in an introductory questionnaire, asking some basic questions about my lifestyle and medical history, and explained what lay ahead.

Then I was ushered into the first examination room, to begin the serious part of the day's proceedings.

Nurse Letitia Ternent took my blood pressure and some blood samples for testing - a remarkably painless process, I am relieved to report.

You are asked not to eat or drink anything but water for eight hours before your appointment, so next on the agenda was a very welcome 10 minute break for orange juice, coffee and a sandwich, and a quick toilet stop to provide a urine sample.

Then Letitia took me back into her office to put me on the scales, measure my height and fill in some more detailed questions on my own medical history and that of my family. My late father was a diabetic and suffered heart troubles, all of which needs to be taken into account in my own case because of the heredity factor.

Next up was a session with audiologist Anthony Berg, who took me through both eye-sight and hearing tests.

Then it was Letitia's turn once again, to take me to the heart and lung test room, where I had to expel all the air in my lungs into a tube a few times before lying down on a bed to be hooked up for an ECG test.

Print-outs of the findings of these

two tests are added to the blood and urine tests to go off for expert assessment along with the information from the questionnaires. The whole process had taken less than a couple of hours. Six days later, I returned for a very full, painstaking and rather reassuring physical examination from Dr Bruce Jobling, after which he was able to run me through the findings, aided by results from the blood and urine tests which had by now returned from the lab.

The verdict? Basically, I'm ok, but my cholesterol level is too high, and I am a little overweight. I also need to have regular glucose tests against the possibility of developing diabetes like my father.

It wasn't a scary outcome, but it did flag up some warnings, and gave me some very important information about how to look after myself better, in order to help prevent the risk of serious illness. As such, it was probably the most valuable few hours I have spent in a very long time.

Factfile

- The cost for an essential MOT is £290, and it includes 40 different examinations, including a cardiac, eye and lung function test.
- In addition, women who would like to undergo a bone density scan and smear test or men who would like to undergo stress ECG and PSA (prostate test) would pay for the full package (essential MOT + advanced), which costs £470.