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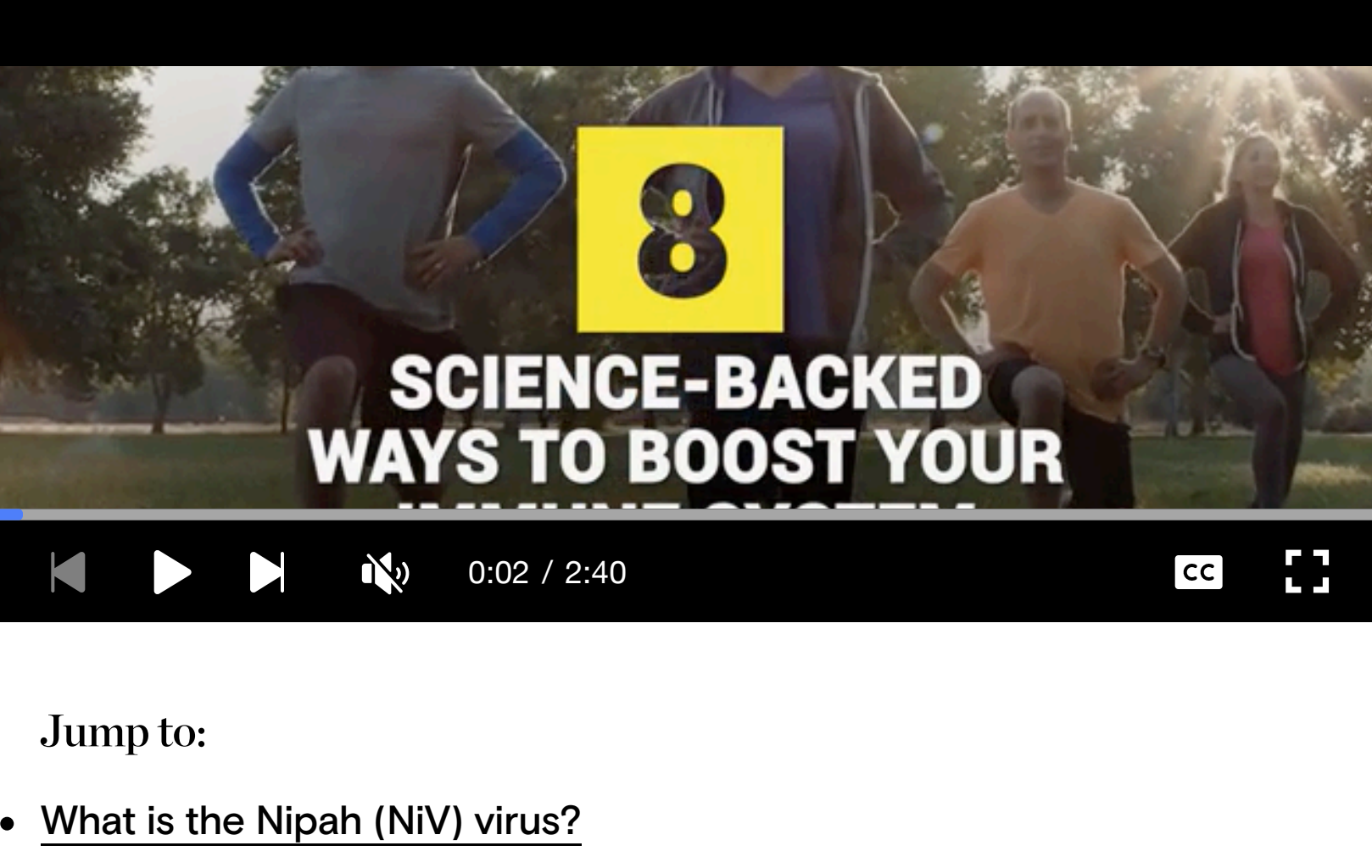
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Deadly “high risk” Nipah virus sparks global concern: 11 important symptoms to know about

Warning signs of the Nipah infection

BY COSMOPOLITAN | PUBLISHED: 26 JANUARY 2026



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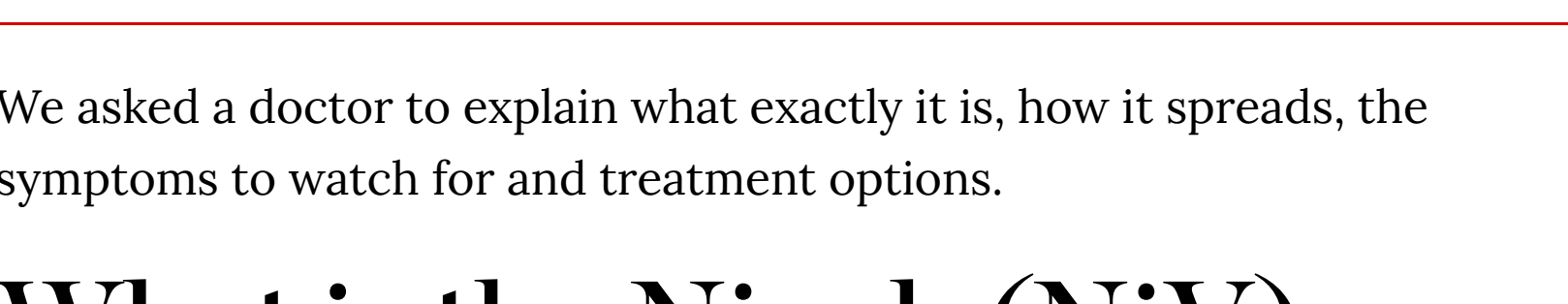
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If you’ve seen headlines about Nipah virus (NiV) cases rising in India, you’re not alone in wondering what it’s all about – and whether it’s something to be concerned about here in the UK. After all, following on from the Covid pandemic and a recent surge in Adenovirus cases, we’re all more alert than ever when it comes to viruses.

The Nipah infection is rare, but it can be serious – and the World Health Organization considers it a “high risk” pathogen.

Recent clusters in India’s Kerala state have put it back in the spotlight, but what actually is the Nipah virus and is it something we need to worry about in the UK?

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We asked a doctor to explain what exactly it is, how it spreads, the symptoms to watch for and treatment options.

What is the Nipah (NiV) virus?

Nipah is a zoonotic virus, meaning it can spread from animals (notably bats and pigs) to humans.

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“It was first identified in Malaysia in 1999 after outbreaks in pig farmers and has since been responsible for occasional, localised outbreaks in parts of South and Southeast Asia, particularly in India and Bangladesh,” explains Dr Suzanne Wylie, GP and medical adviser for IQdoctor. “These outbreaks are generally linked to close contact with infected animals, especially fruit bats (Pteropus species), or through person-to-person spread in healthcare or household settings.”

The result can see illnesses range from mild or even symptom-free to severe respiratory disease and encephalitis (brain inflammation).



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How common is Nipah?

“Nipah virus infections are very uncommon globally and have occurred only sporadically in specific regions over the past two decades. Even in areas where outbreaks have happened previously, the number of cases has tended to be small and contained quickly with appropriate public health measures,” says Dr Wylie.

Earlier this month, almost 100 people were quarantined after five cases were confirmed in West Bengal, according to a [report](#) by *The Independent*.

[Data from the World Health Organization](#) states that Kerala has reported multiple outbreaks since 2018, and in 2025 there were four confirmed cases (two deaths) reported across two districts, including a district reporting its first known cases.

Globally, Nipah has caused only a limited number of known outbreaks, mainly in parts of South Asia, but it’s closely watched because it can be severe and can spread person-to-person in certain circumstances.

“Nipah virus infection can be very serious: past outbreaks have been associated with high mortality rates (40–75 %), though the exact risk varies by outbreak and healthcare setting,” Dr Wylie continues. “Some survivors may experience long-term neurological effects after acute illness.

“That said, these severe outcomes are seen in a small number of people overall, and aggressive public health control can limit spread rapidly.”

What are the symptoms of Nipah virus?

“Symptoms often begin abruptly, typically 4 to 14 days after exposure,” says Dr Wylie. “Early signs resemble a non-specific flu-like illness, fever, headache, muscle aches, sore throat and fatigue.

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“Some people develop respiratory symptoms such as cough and difficulty breathing. In more severe cases, the virus can cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), leading to confusion, drowsiness, seizures and potentially coma.”

To recap, symptoms can start like many other infections, which is part of what makes it tricky to detect.

Early symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Vomiting
- Sore throat

Some people then develop more serious signs, such as:

- Drowsiness
- Confusion
- Neurological symptoms consistent with encephalitis
- Cough
- Breathing difficulties
- Severe respiratory illness (in some cases)

It’s worth noting that symptoms alone don’t mean Nipah and they can overlap with many other conditions, especially the earliest signs.



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Should we worry about the Nipah virus in the UK?

For most of us in the UK, the risk is very low, says the GP. “Nipah outbreaks have historically been geographically restricted to parts of Asia, and there is no evidence of sustained transmission outside these areas.

“Public health authorities (such as the UK Health Security Agency and NHS) have processes in place to assess and manage infections brought into the country via travel, and clinicians are trained to consider rare infections like NiV in the right clinical and exposure context.”

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The WHO has assessed recent events in India as a localised risk, with the overall risk to broader populations remaining low, and has not recommended travel or trade restrictions based on the available information.

That said, public health teams take it seriously because:

- It can cause severe disease
- Outbreaks can occur from repeated “spillover” events from animals
- It can spread through close contact, particularly where infection control is challenged

“There is no need for public alarm in the UK, and ongoing surveillance and infection control measures aim to keep risk very low,” concludes Dr Wylie. “Prompt medical attention should always be sought for severe symptoms after travel to affected regions.”

How is Nipah virus treated?

Researchers are working on vaccines and treatments, but for now, the biggest tools are early detection, infection control, and supportive hospital care, says the expert.

“There is currently no specific antiviral treatment or licensed vaccine for Nipah virus,” Dr Wylie highlights. “Clinical care focuses on supportive treatment, managing symptoms and complications (for example, respiratory support or treatment of encephalitis), often in specialist infectious disease units for severe cases.

“Experimental treatments and vaccines are under investigation, but none are widely available yet.”

This article is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice or diagnosis. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.

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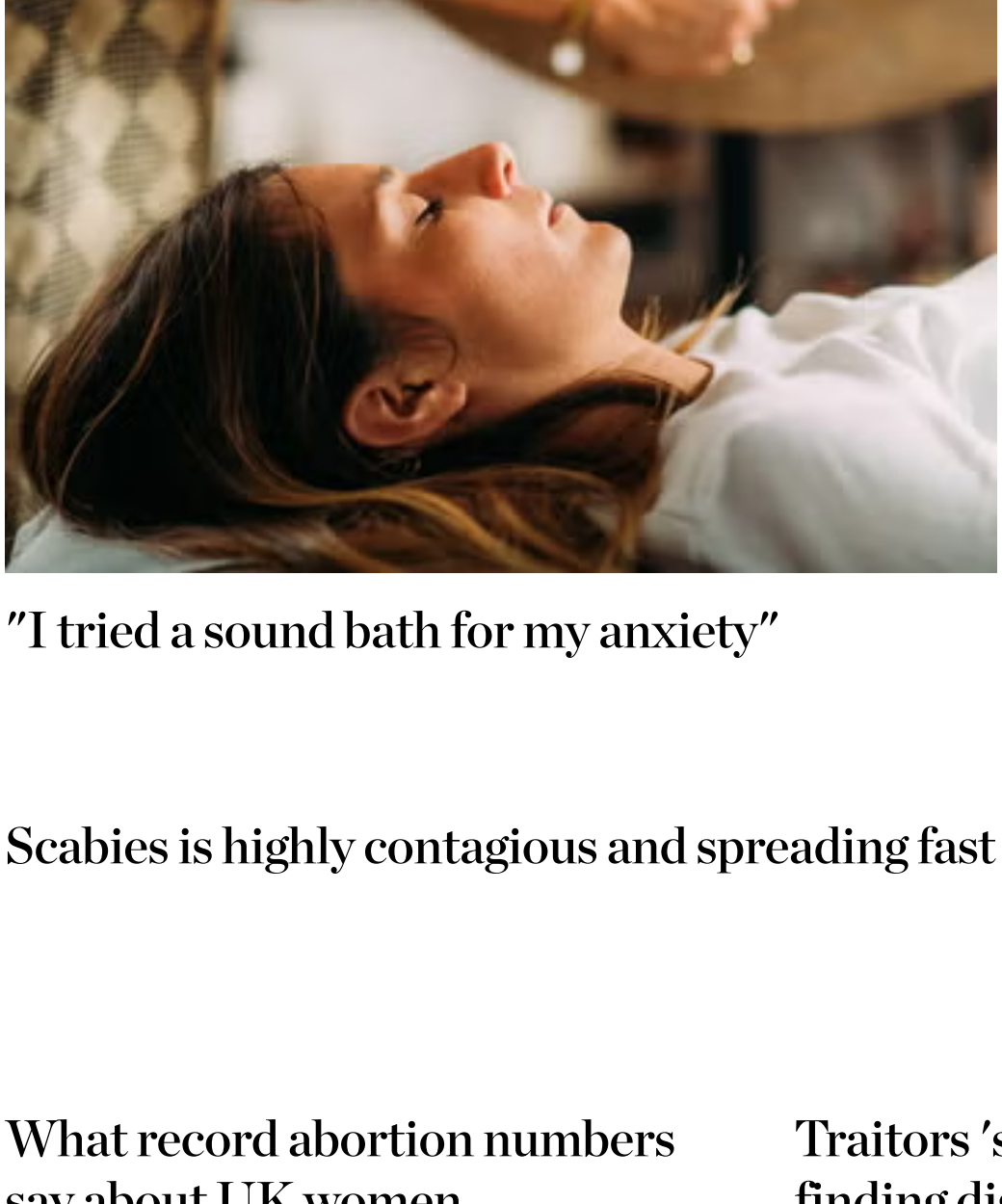
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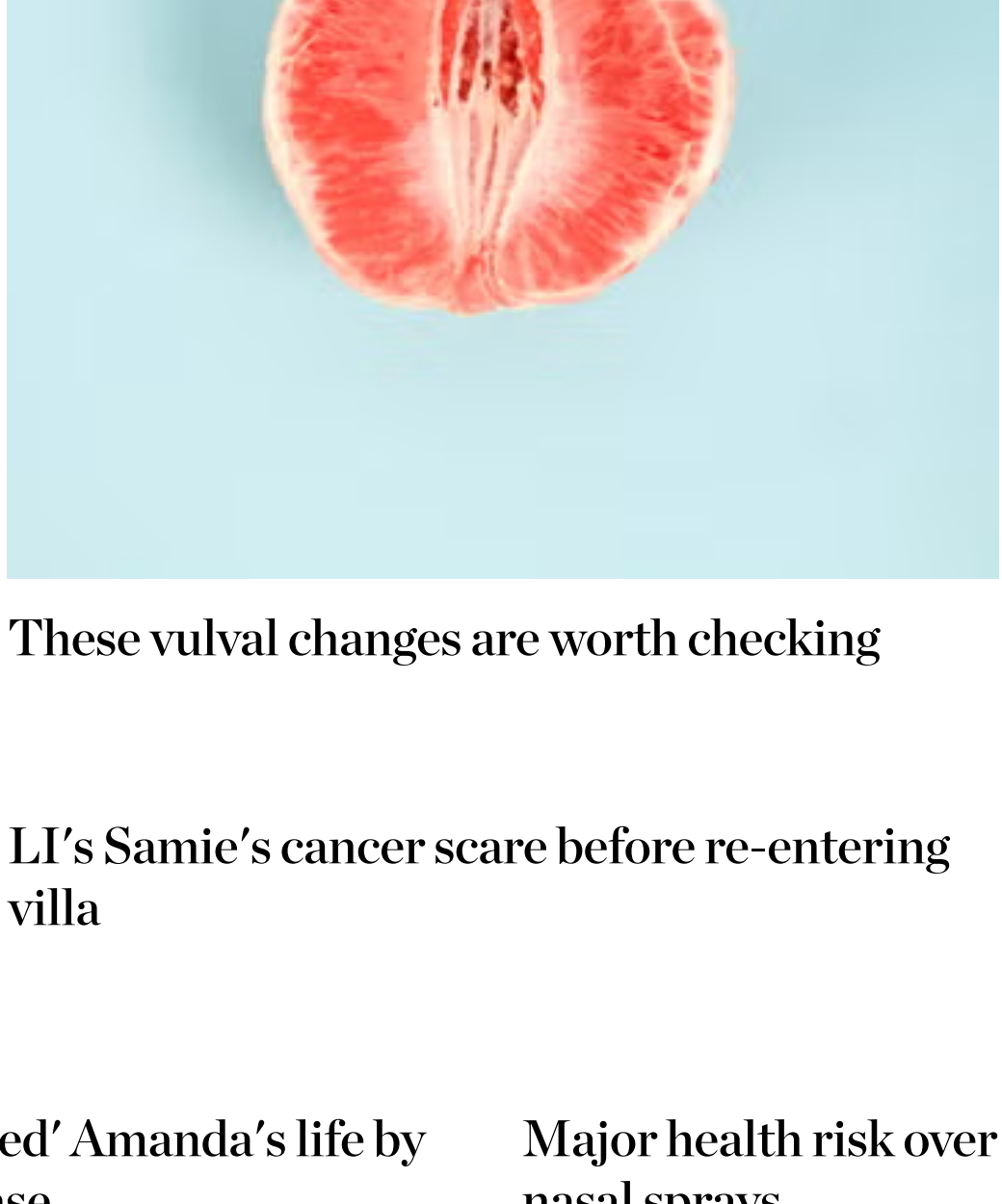
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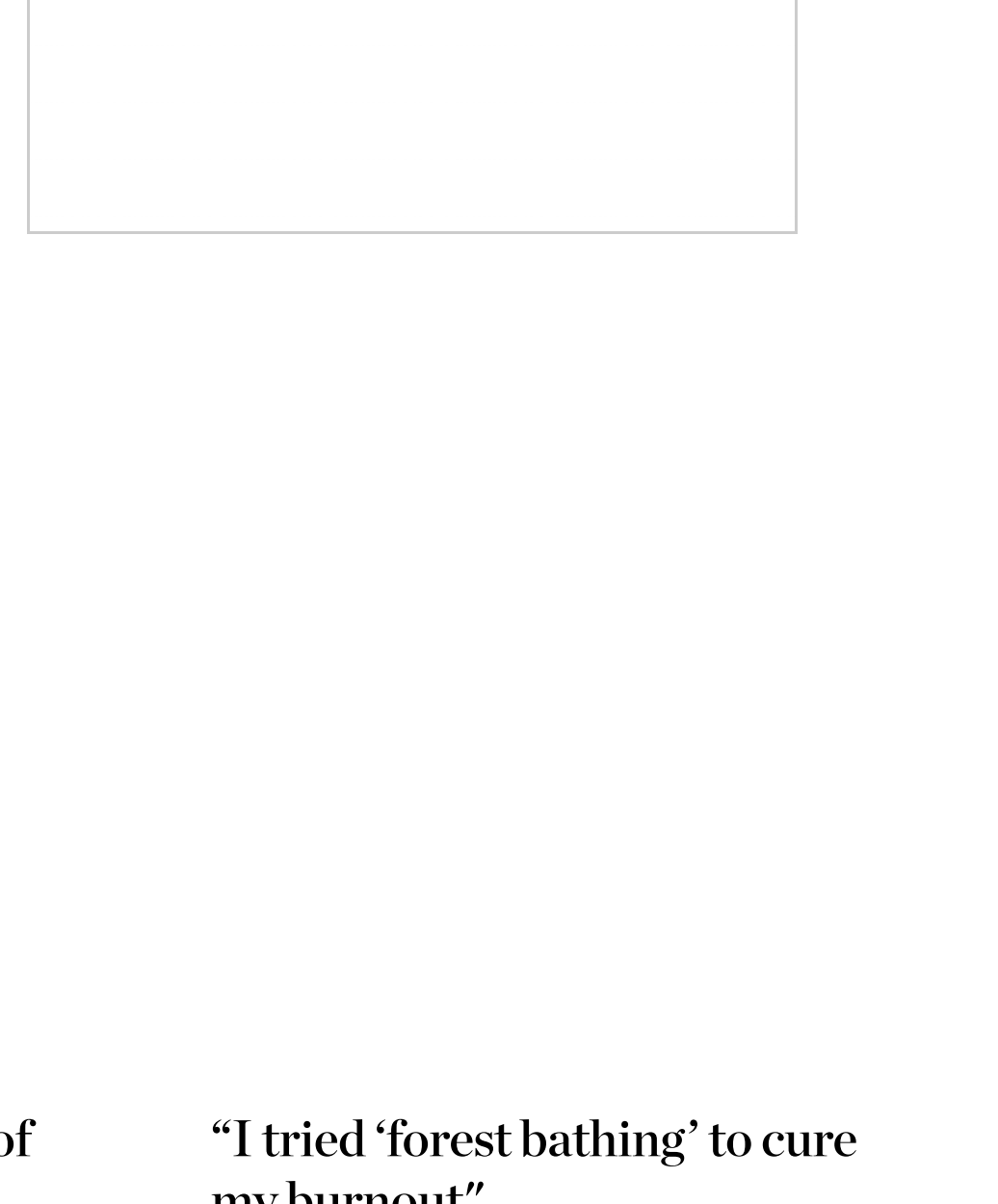
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