

IV THERAPY, THE NEW CHAPTER OF INDIA'S WELLNESS JOURNEY

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At first, IV therapy sounds like a gimmick or a wellness celebrity craze pushed by the likes of Gwyneth Paltrow and Khloé Kardashian. Social media gave a glancing view of the intravenous wellness trip that reportedly had users glowing from within, feeling like they can compete in the Olympics, or helping them recover from a hangover.

So when Happy Head Clinic, Hyderabad was launched in February 2021 by founder Dr Venkaiah Mulakalapalli (with the Bengaluru setup having opened in November 2021), I was curious to understand IV therapy through a first-hand experience. While the clinic does both on-site and at-home procedures, I opted to visit the space. The clinic is also open to collaborating for curated gatherings or events; for example, in 2021, Happy Head went to Goa, at the request of a family hosting a wedding, with the 'Nutri Glow', 'Hangover', 'Myers' Cocktail' and 'Cleanser' IV bags for the guests.

As I stepped in, I was met with a minimalist and spa-like space spread across three floors; there is a consulting space, a curtained-off section for one-shot vitamin injections, a few rooms with recliners for solo or group sessions, an *al fresco* space for those wanting to bask in the sun while they get their drip done, a pathology lab for blood work, and even an oxygen bar.

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As I fill out a consent form for the clinic (detailing my allergies and other aspects of medical history), I am handed a brochure that lists 13 IV therapies. Each aims to deliver unique combinations of essential vitamins, minerals, and amino acids directly into the bloodstream for health, wellness, and healing. For example, the 'Hangover' therapy includes vitamin B6, Thiamine, Magnesium and Glutathione, while 'Nutri Glow' offers Glutathione, vitamin C and Alpha Lipoic Acid (ALA). The clinic can also mix the therapies, if advised by a doctor.

Going through all the permutation-combinations of vitamins and minerals can feel like brain overload: Happy Head encouraged me to consult with their in-house doctor about which one therapy would work best for me. Dr Mounica Vadlamudi recommended the Myers' Cocktail – a concoction of B vitamins, vitamin C, Zinc and Magnesium – given that I had been feeling low on energy while fighting through waves of migraines for the past few weeks.

Though IV therapy is recommended for migranes and chronic fatigue, Dr Vadlamudi says they offer a wide spectrum of treatments for people who are well, but want an easy boost. Most IV drips contain magnesium, vitamin C, calcium and some B vitamins, which are all beneficial. So, she says, people who want to boost their athletic performance, for instance, can also benefit from IV therapy.”

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A quick Internet search of IV therapy in India does bring up other names such as pan-Indian Dr Jamuna Pai's Skin Lab — which mainly offers Glutathione and Vitamin C combos for aesthetic functions — or Reviv — a US-based brand that has clinics in Las Vegas, Mumbai, Nairobi, Dubai, New York and Sydney — among other cities. However, Happy Head is Hyderabad's first homegrown IV wellness clinic. Dr Vadlamudi says, “After the consultation, we personalise each

drip depending on the symptoms, concerns and health requirements of the client.”

Dr Vadlamudi also breaks down the benefits of IV therapy, “While we may do our best by popping supplements to increase immunity, we may absorb only 30 to 40% of oral supplements. With this process, she claims, your body absorbs a higher percentage of these nutrients.”

I am escorted to a private room where a nurse records my blood pressure and weight. She has me extending my arm where the IV drip will go. She numbs and gently disinfects the area around the medial cubital vein and in no time – with barely a prick – the needle is inserted. She shows me the 500ml bag of the Myers’ Cocktail and hooks it up to the IV stand. “This whole procedure will take about 45 minutes,” she explains, “and if you feel any nausea or headaches, which is rare, please let us know immediately. We will also be in shortly to adjust the flow of the drip.” Sometimes, she says, people are advised to take 1000ml if their hydration levels are extremely low.

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She then leaves the room, but not before handing me a remote to the wall-mounted television. But I forego the streaming and instead opt to relax with my eyes closed. Forty-five minutes and a flow adjustment later, the nurse gently removes the IV needle and places a bandaid on my inner arm. I do not feel dizzy nor do I feel any migraine coming on. I walk around the space.

By the time I head home, my skin looks less dull. Could it be the hydration and vitamin boost? For the next few nights, I also find myself sleeping better, as promised by the magnesium boost. Some Google and deep dives into Reddit (which included people suggesting you “just go eat your fruits and vegetables instead”) reveal there are people who have experienced similar results with IV therapy. (That said, the therapy is not designed to replace a healthy lifestyle and balanced diet. You can just eat your fruits and vegetables instead, for optimum health.)

Nevertheless, IV drips are becoming increasingly popular as luxury wellness merges with medical treatments in an endless quest for effective beauty hacks. Actor Rana Daggubati, who has been open about his own health struggles, had long been vocal about bringing new-age legitimate wellness solutions to India. Perhaps, that explains why the actor is on board as a brand ambassador and early investor.

The IV therapies at Happy Head Clinic institutes in Hyderabad and Bengaluru are priced between 6,000 and 13,000, depending on which is suggested for your overall health’s needs and goals. Visit www.happyhead.in for more information.

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