

What's the Deal with IV Vitamin Drips?

IV vitamin therapy is growing in popularity at gyms, medispas, and even music festivals. Providers claim that these intravenous infusions can cure hangovers, help fight exhaustion, offer anti-aging properties, and boost the immune system. Multiple sessions are typically recommended, and each infusion takes 20 minutes to an hour, with effects supposedly lasting up to a few days.

Is this an innovative way to supplement the nutrients in your diet, a dangerous trend, or simply a waste of time and money?

“If done appropriately, many vitamins and minerals can be delivered via the IV route,” says Michelle Pearlman, M.D., a gastroenterologist with the University of Miami Health System. “These include B vitamins, iron, calcium, potassium, sodium chloride, and magnesium, to name a few.”

Who benefits from IV vitamin therapy?

“IV supplementation or replacement is more common and sometimes required for those unable to tolerate adequate oral intake,” Dr. Pearlman says.

Your doctor might recommend IV drips as an alternative to oral supplements if you're experiencing nausea, vomiting, delayed gastric emptying, or a systemic GI motility disorder.

“Chronic diarrhea, for example, can lead to fecal loss of certain nutrients and proteins in patients with celiac disease or Crohn's disease, among other conditions.

In addition, those who've had intestinal surgeries like gastric bypass can develop iron deficiency anemia, vitamin D deficiency, and/or B12 deficiency."

For patients with these conditions, IV or subcutaneous (under the skin) treatments can sometimes be helpful if nutrient levels are deficient and they do not respond adequately or have side effects from the oral formulation.

If you're not having difficulty digesting or absorbing all the vitamins and minerals your body needs, is there any real benefit to nutrient infusions?

"In general, oral supplementation is sufficient for replacing nutrients or deficiencies in those with normal digestion and absorption," Dr. Pearlman says.

If you don't require IV treatment for medical reasons, there's no evidence that they are more effective than eating a diet rich in vitamins and minerals. You can supplement any nutritional gaps with pills, powders, or extracts that are made of quality ingredients.

IV vitamin therapy does have risks.

"Sometimes excess supplementation can lead to toxicities," Dr. Pearlman says. "You need to be careful of taking in an excessive amount of fluids. This can alter sodium levels and lead to fluid retention — particularly for those with heart, liver, and kidney disease."

In addition, vitamin and mineral IV infusions administered outside of a medical facility or without physician orders are not regulated.

There's no oversight for IV therapies offered at gyms, spas, and other recreational or private settings.

“Many times, you may not be aware of what an infusion actually contains,” says Dr. Pearlman. “This could lead to allergic reactions or other side effects.”

If you're still wondering if IV vitamin therapy is right for you, ask your healthcare provider about the potential benefits and risks based on your specific nutritional needs and any underlying health conditions.

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