The Truth About IV Drip Spas, According to Yale Researchers

5 MIN READ

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Sleek wellness promises with a messy evidence base, here’s what you should know before you plug in to an IV drip.

Picture this: you walk into a chic IV hydration lounge, the kind that’s popped up near trendy hotel lobbies or luxury gyms. You’re welcomed with ambient lighting and a list of “drips” that promise to erase your hangover, boost immunity, elevate energy, and detox your system—all in one 30-minute intravenous bag. If only it were so simple.

At Super Age, we prioritize real over rigid. That means curiosity, smart questions, and science-grounded choices. A new investigation published in ***JAMA Internal Medicine*** reveals that the rapidly expanding industry of IV hydration spas is operating in a regulatory grey zone, and the evidence for their health claims is thin.

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Reality Behind the Spas

Researchers led by **Joseph S. Ross, MD, MHS**, professor of medicine and public health, and a member of the Center for Outcomes Research and Evaluation at the Yale-New Haven Hospital, and colleagues carried out **a mixed-method study** across all 50 U.S. states plus D.C., reviewing state policies, spa websites, and conducting “secret-shopper” phone calls.

Here are the key findings:

- Not a single state had dedicated legislation specifically for IV hydration spas; only four states (Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Vermont) offered guidance covering all four oversight categories: facility governance, prescriber credentials, dispensing, and compounding.
- Of 255 spa websites reviewed, 57% offered IV hydration therapy with added magnesium, 53.7% offered glutathione, and 63.5% also offered vitamin injections. Yet only 0.8% of websites provided citations for the health-benefit claims they made.
- In phone calls to 87 randomly selected spas, 86.2% recommended specific therapies for vague symptoms (detox, dehydration, hangovers, headaches, colds). Just 27.6% required a prior consultation with a licensed medical professional and only 24.4% disclosed any potential risks.
- Pricing: A single-session cost of IV hydration spa treatments was reported at about $179 in other reporting, though costs can be higher.

"Consumers should be very wary of paying often high fees for services that might appear to be clinically appropriate but generally are not offered by trained clinicians or even overseen by them," **says study co-author** Howard Forman, MD.

The IV process is far less vetted than you might expect, and that's a red flag for informed wellness seekers in the longevity space.

Do IV Drips Actually Work? It Depends

The marketing around "glowing skin," "detox," "immune boost," and "hangover cure" set high expectations, but the scientific foundation is weak in most healthy individuals.

What we *do* know:

- In clinical settings, IV fluids and nutrients have established benefits for people who are

dehydrated, malnourished, or acutely ill. IV therapy is **standard care**.

- Therapeutic IV vitamin infusions (e.g., for very low vitamin B12 or folate levels) or for people after bariatric surgery have shown **benefit in some research**. But other reviews have found IV multivitamin or micronutrient supplementation **results unclear**.
- We do not have high-quality evidence showing that IV vitamin drips or hydration infusions in *healthy or moderately stressed* adults lead to meaningful improvements in energy, immunity, or longevity. **A recent review**: "There is a lack of high-quality evidence to suggest that high-dose vitamin infusions are necessary or offer any health benefit in the absence of a specific vitamin deficiency or medical condition."

There is no solid data that fancy "cocktails" (vitamin C + glutathione + NAD+, etc) outperform a nutritious diet or oral vitamin supplementation. The **Merck Manual**, the world's gold-standard medical resource, states that for "IV vitamin therapy… in people who do not have a vitamin or mineral deficiency… no published evidence so far has shown that this therapy is effective for any serious illness or chronic disease."

What Are the Risks of IV Drip Therapy from Spas?

Medical toxicologist **Kelly Krisna Johnson-Arbor, MD, says** she's talked to many people who have had medical complications after visiting an IV hydration spa: "For many people, it's innocuous, but for some, it can be harmful," she said, adding, "Just because glutathione or magnesium or NAD may have been shown to have benefits in a basic science study, that doesn't translate into a human clinical benefit," Risks with IV treatments can come from IV placement, causing bruising, bleeding, or infection. They can also cause **kidney damage and heart rhythm abnormalities**, meaning an escalation plan should be in place.

With no regulation, it's hard to know what's actually in the bag. Johnson-Arbor says the "actual ingredients in these cocktails can vary from facility to facility, so individuals may not know what they're getting." Some IV "wellness" drips **use compounded mixes** not approved by the FDA, with variable oversight on quality,

dosing, sterility.

How to Navigate the IV Drip World Safely:

IV hydration or vitamin infusions *might* help if you're medically depleted, dehydrated, malabsorbing nutrients, or recovering from real strain. But for most healthy, aging-optimised adults, who are focused on long-term vitality, not fast wellness fixes, the evidence just isn't there to support routine use. Proceed only if you've done your homework:

- **Don't assume all IV drips are equal.** Ask smart questions before you plug into a drip.
    - Who is prescribing and supervising?
    - What exactly is in the bag (fluids, electrolytes, vitamins, compounding)?
    - Has your practitioner verified your lab values, ruled out contraindications (kidney disease, heart disease, electrolyte abnormalities)?
    - Are they disclosing risks? Are the claimed benefits backed by citations?
    - Is there a backup plan if something goes wrong? (e.g., medical supervision, emergency protocols)
- **Talk to your primary care or longevity clinician**: Ask whether you have measurable nutrient or hydration deficits that *might* justify IV therapy. If you're generally healthy, eating well, training smart, and recovering adequately, the incremental benefit of a wellness-drip may be negligible, especially given the cost and risk.
- **Compare the cost and risk of IV drips with evidence-based practices**: Sleep quality, hydration strategy, micronutrient-rich diet, resistance training, sauna/heat/cold recovery, all of which show stronger support in healthy adults. Consider whether there are less-invasive alternatives.
- **If you do choose an IV spa:** Request a full ingredient list, lab work-insight, credentials of supervising clinician, informed consent and emergency plan.
- **Understand the value proposition:** Given the average cost ($179+ per session)

multiplied over months, the financial burden adds up with little guarantee of outcome. Ask yourself if it's truly a smart investment, and if so, do your homework to find a credible facility.

- **If you are truly needing to replenish your vitamins or are severely dehydrated**: Peter Lurie, MD, MPH, president and executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest and a coauthor on the JAMA study says, "I can't see any compelling reason why getting a therapy this way [IV] would be preferable to getting it at a registered medical facility."

Regulation doesn't guarantee safety, but lack of regulation amplifies the need for due diligence**.** The new *JAMA* study shows wide regulatory variation, meaning your state might offer little oversight.

The allure of "quick-fix" IV drips is understandable, especially when you're juggling work, travel, workouts, and longevity goals. But the science and regulation lag behind the marketing. Before you sign up for the next IV wellness trend, ask: "Is this moving me toward better aging and is the cost really worth the result?"

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