

THE IV LEAGUE

CELEBS AND ALPHA MALES ARE USING INTRAVENOUS VITAMIN DRIPS TO STAY AT THE TOP OF THEIR GAME, BUT DO THEY WORK AND ARE THEY SAFE? ANDY JONES REPORTS

Flat on my back, staring at a hospital ceiling, needle in the crook of my arm — this isn't how I'd expect to begin one of the busiest weeks of my life.

Tomorrow I have to fly to LA to interview an A-lister, then, on the day I get back to Britain, I have to give a two-hour talk at a university. It's also my girlfriend's birthday, for which I have yet even to begin my surprise plan. I need my A game. Unfortunately I'm currently operating at a "C" or a "D", as this morning I woke up in a field in Somerset after my mate's stag do at Glastonbury.

Any pain now — self-inflicted or at the hands of the needle — will be offset when I manage to pull all this off. Well, that's the plan. I'm at the London Neurology & Pain Clinic in Harley Street having a Vitamin Infusion Treatment, which involves being hooked up to an intravenous drip so a potent blend of vitamins and minerals can be delivered straight into the bloodstream. It's said to be more efficient than taking supplements, and you don't have to be deficient in vitamins to book one.

Previously the preserve of Hollywood suits (Simon Cowell is a fan), the vitamin IV is finding a cult following — Rihanna tweeted a picture of herself hooked up to one — and it is now offered in a number of British clinics.

As the heavy-duty blend of vitamins B12 and C and magnesium enters my bloodstream, my clinician, Margareta Griesz-Brisson, explains why her clients swear by them. "They are popular with executives who fly a lot or even working dads who don't want to catch a cold from their kids. Some will have a shot before and after a party to deaden a hangover. For this, you might have the vitamins blended with milk thistle to stimulate your liver."

I'm an infusion amateur; alpha males and boardroom silverbacks are now dropping into clinics on a monthly basis to ensure they operate at peak levels, whether that's at their desk, on the squash court or in the bedroom. The IVs can be administered in a minimum of 40 minutes — evangelists opt for three hours — and are typically offered in mixes of B vitamins and vitamin C, though they can be manipulated to provide an extra boost in energy and concentration, or to provide a youthful glow.

In fact, such is the demand, some clinics have gone bespoke. Not content with home and office visits, Geeta Sidhu-Robb's the Infusion Clinic will go the extra mile. "One of our regular hedge-funder clients rang saying he needed one, but we couldn't fit into his crazy schedule," she says. "He said, 'If you can do it at my house, why can't you come to an airport?' We met him in the first-class lounge at the terminal."

Office management, keen for their staff to be operating at full tilt, are happy to turn a blind eye to a nurse arriving with a syringe and a drip bag if it keeps their top dogs awake. Some busy suits fly in from Amsterdam, take a shot in London and get on another plane to America.

This year alone, Sidhu-Robb's nurses have arrived at big city firms, Mayfair offices and sprawling Kent mansions to dose up macho customers. "The vitamin IV suits the male mind — they love science and can see the value in putting good into their bodies. They can physically see it going in, like petrol into a sports car. Also, it's fast — you can be in and out within an hour."

Across the rest of her health businesses, Sidhu-Robb has a 95% female client base, but with her IV therapies she sees an enormous number of men,

many whacking down four-figure sums monthly. She says: "My clients include oil traders, hedge-fund managers and bankers. One fund manager came to us with vitamin D deficiency so bad from barely seeing daylight, his doctor said he was on the brink of arthritis. He was only 35. These men's lives hinge on performance, and they want the good stuff fast."

The Infusion Clinic's range of drips are all given names with moreish appeal such as Fit-amin, Pic'n'Mix and Baby Face. All cost north of £100 — the most expensive being £600 — and they variously promise to boost the immune system, provide an energy surge or revive the skin. One vitamin IV can keep you ticking over for a fortnight — many places recommend one a week for a month, then top-up drips thereafter. A clinic in Manchester even offers a Drip and Chill lounge, where patients can have a latte and a vitamin shot while checking emails.

I feel fatigued immediately after my jab — no hassle when you're sitting on a transatlantic flight — but from the next day onwards I am power-charged. I skip around Hollywood Boulevard, pull off my talk and supply a passable birthday for my missus, all without a jarring crash after my Glastonbury excesses. For about six days, I swing out of bed and immediately feel awake, not synthetically wired in the way I would be dosed up on coffee or energy drinks. I laugh more, finish work on time and sleep like the dead. Not once do I catch myself staring dumbly at the internet instead of working.

However, experts such as Dr Adam Cunliffe, principal lecturer in nutrition at London South Bank University, warns the needle offers little more benefit than a balanced diet and a high-street vitamin tablet. "The idea that you can substitute good sleep patterns and a balanced diet with a vitamin IV isn't backed by clinical evidence. A lot of the benefit could simply be a result of the placebo effect or rehydration, as even those who drink their RDA of water are dehydrated because of too much caffeine and alcohol."

While practitioners insist any excess vitamins are flushed harmlessly away, Cunliffe says an overdose is still possible. "A water-soluble vitamin such as vitamin C will typically be passed out by the body, but fat-soluble vitamins such as vitamin A don't, so any excess can become toxic."

Sidhu-Robb says such worries are overstated. "This isn't people throwing parties and doing it with their mates. It is regulated [the drips are prescription drugs, so are regulated by the government and can only be administered by qualified nurses] and malpractice is unlikely unless the consultation is skipped. For example, we greatly reduce the amount of magnesium for those who have low blood pressure, and we can't treat people with epilepsy."

However, those who are addicted to vitamin IVs could be peeing their money away. One mid-ranking City worker tells me he has spent £8,000 on them. "I felt good and I had energy for work, the gym and sex. During months when I was chasing a bonus, I'd go to two different clinics so I could have two IVs in one week. I can handle keeping my arm still for an hour with a needle in it, but I'm not sure my bank balance can handle it."

As I sit coolly focused at my desk, I'm already worrying about when I'll need another one. Sidhu-Robb dismisses my concerns. "Darling, vodka is a crutch. Giving your body what it needs is not." ♦



**FOR SIX DAYS,
I SWING OUT
OF BED AND
IMMEDIATELY
FEEL AWAKE,
NOT WIRED IN
THE WAY I
WOULD ON
COFFEE**