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IV 'rocket fuel' gains popularity

When Elaine Kunda felt a cold coming on early in the winter, she decided to be proactive about her health and get a vitamin intravenous.



SARAH DEA/CNS FILES

Many patients are opting for intravenous vitamin infusions to prevent illness and treat chronic conditions such as fatigue.

The 36-year old CEO of communications firm b5media said she was busy, stressed out and not sleeping or eating properly.

She heard about these socalled " vitamin cocktails" through friends who had similar get-up-and-go lifestyles.

" I felt better almost immediately," Kunda said about the first infusion she received from her naturopath, a doctor who uses natural substances to treat and prevent illness.

Constantly on the move between Toronto and New York on business, Kunda said she can't afford to be sick.

" Energy is critical for my success, to be functioning and aware and not to be exhausted," she said.

Although vitamin infusions have been around for decades — they are popular with many professional athletes — they're gaining mainstream interest from patients looking for preventive treatments and natural ways to deal with chronic conditions, according to John Dempster, a naturopathic doctor based in Toronto.

Dempster said intravenous vitamin therapy — a mixture of vitamins and minerals administered

intravenously — is fast becoming one of his most requested remedies to treat such conditions as fatigue, fibromyalgia and depression and chronic diseases such as cancer.

According to a recent report by Statistics Canada, more Canadians are consulting with alternative practitioners. The report indicates about 20 per cent of the nation's population aged 12 or older have used some form of alternative health care in the span of a year. Alternative practitioners were defined in the report as chiropractors, massage therapists, acupuncturists, homeopaths and naturopaths.

The Myers Cocktail is the most popular of Dempster's vitamin infusions and runs between \$ 100 to \$ 145 per session. A mix of B vitamins, vitamin C, magnesium and calcium, Myers is used to ward off viruses and treat patients for such conditions as burnout, depression, acute asthma and fibromyalgia.

Dempster said some of his patients call the IVs their "rocket fuel."

Another vitamin intravenous gaining popularity is one that includes high doses of vitamin C to treat and prevent cancer, said Dempster.

"This is a very safe alternative to chemo," said Dempster. "And it's something you can do with chemo."

Dr. Brian Davies, a naturopathic doctor in Vancouver, said he gives cancer patients around 25 grams of vitamin C through an intravenous in one sitting, usually three times a week for a period of roughly three months, and will then reevaluate the treatment.

"I've seen [cancer] patients have better appetites, increased energy, have sleep improvement and a reduction in pain," Davies said.

He said in a week he'll administer about 60 or more vitamin infusions to patients to treat a variety of ailments.

Many in Canada's medical community question the merits of such treatments.

"Most decisions we as medical doctors try to make are based on some scientific evidence. I'm not aware of any randomly assigned double-blind control trials that show IV vitamins are helpful," said Dr. Mel Borins, a family physician based in Toronto.

Dr. Charles Blanke, head of medical oncology at the BC Cancer Agency, said: "No I would not suggest it," when asked about the use of vitamin C infusions to treat cancer. "I would if I saw scientific evidence."

"If you want strong, hard evidence it [vitamin C infusions] will treat cancer, it doesn't exist," Blanke added. "If it's used with chemo, there is strong data suggesting vitamin C can harm patients by nullifying chemo."

Blanke said although he strongly advocates a diet high in fruits and vegetables and low in meats and fats to help prevent cancer, once a person has an active malignancy, there is little if any evidence that vitamins will fight cancer directly.

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