THE STANDARD



LIFESTYLE | WELLNESS

5 health tips from the exclusive (and hardcore) German longevity retreat

Lanserhof Sylt's chief cardiologist Dr Jan Stritzke outlines the retreat's health philosophy and how to follow it at home

One thing is clear, "Sylt is not a holiday," says Dr Jan Stritzke, the chief clinician at the Lanserhof wellness retreat off the coast of North Germany, "but once you visit the clinic, your life may change forever."

You'll find the newest member of the Lanserhof Group — a group of high-end longevity retreats that started in 1982 —on the island of Sylt: a sandy slice of paradise inlaid in the Wadden Sea. But don't be fooled by the panoramic views, long beaches, or Bond villain's lair-style interiors, a week at Lanserhof Sylt is hard work, with their keystone principles of fasting and purging.

LANSERHOF SYLT'S SLICK FACILITIES

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The jury's out that intermittent fasting can deliver major health benefits, from controlling blood sugar levels to improving blood pressure. But Dr Stritzke and the Lanserhof clinic argue it's foundational for a long and healthy life, backed up by a 2021 study in Nature.

“One of the most common reasons why some people age faster than others is gut health,” Dr Stritzke says. “Poor gut health can lead to chronic inflammation, which results in poisons and toxins being reabsorbed in your body. Again, this motors the ageing process.”

Chronic inflammation is effectively your body's immune system stuck in overdrive. It occurs more frequently with age and is often caused by a diet high in refined sugars and ultra-processed foods, along with a lack of exercise and chronic stress. It’s important to note that not all inflammation is bad. In fact, acute inflammation is a vital bodily process which efficiently utilises your immune system to deal with ailments. Chronic inflammation, on the other hand, is far less efficient and deteriorates tissue, eventually leading to heart disease, cancer and Alzheimer’s, as shown in a 2023 study conducted by the University of Manchester.

To stem damaging inflammation, Lanserhof aims to reset guests’ gut health by paying close attention to diet, which will often consist of broths and teas at the beginning of the stay — liquids that facilitate the metabolic process to burn fat and cleanse your gut — before they are weaned onto solids. “We recommend guests stay for at least seven days, which is the minimum amount of time it takes to reset your gut microbiome, and return once a year,” says Dr Stritzke. “Over the course of their stay, we’ll see a significant depletion in sugar levels and inflammation, but it can be very tough, especially for first timers.”



A THERAPY ROOM AT LANSERHOF SYLT

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After an initial consultation upon arrival, a doctor will draft up a schedule of procedures and therapies entirely tailored to the guest's bodily needs. These include massages and skin therapy, oxygen therapy (which speeds up the metabolic process through increasing oxygen levels via a mask to boost mitochondrial efficiency, optimising the metabolism of fat and glucose) and heat or cryotherapy. The latter involves alternating between extremely hot and cold temperatures to boost metabolism, as the body expends energy whilst trying to regulate its internal temperature.

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Being an exclusive haunt of the rich and famous, Sylt is not cheap, costing €4,046 for a seven to nine-day course, excluding accommodation. Fortunately, Dr Stritzke outlines five safe fasting, diet, and lifestyle tips to try out at home if you can't afford the trip — and don't have a cryochamber around the house.



DR JAN STRITZKE, SENIOR CARDIOLOGIST AT LANSERHOF

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Follow a simple diet

While it's difficult to instill the broth and tea diet often used at Sylt in your daily life, "the most easy and obvious place to start a home is cutting out refined sugars and carbohydrates", says Dr Stritzke. Simple sugars like table sugar and processed bread have been proven to be pro-inflammatory, disrupting your gut microbiome and ultimately leading to degenerative illnesses. Taking these out of your diet will hugely benefit your long-term gut health.

Manageable fasting

Fasting sounds intimidating but can be manageable if done properly. While his own regime of fasting for 36 to 40 hours straight is difficult and potentially dangerous for beginners, Dr Stritzke recommends starting with a 16:8 ratio, which means fasting for 16 hours of the day and eating for eight. Alternatively, you could designate a day of the week to fast on entirely for a similar effect.

Regular check-ups

“Even if you’re young, you should definitely go and get your blood tested yearly,” Dr Stritzke advises, allowing you to preemptively detect inflammation. Dr Stritzke also highly recommends other types of preventative diagnostics such as skin checks and colonoscopies, both of which are on offers for Londoners at The London Clinic.

Meticulous mastication

An important part of eating at Lanserhof is chewing — forty times per mouthful to be precise. This helps break down the food before you swallow and allows more nutrients to be absorbed in the digestion process, which has proven long-term benefits for gut health and fighting inflammation, and is a super easy technique you can implement to daily life.

Socialising

It’s a cliche, but no man — or woman for that matter — is an island. While a healthy diet and regular exercise is important, loneliness and poor mental health, through triggering of stress hormones, have been linked to inflammation. Dr Stritzke emphasises the connection between a healthy mind and a long life, making clear social activity is of paramount importance.