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Daisy Goodwin: I tried the new spa treatments for Ozempic users

At the luxurious Lanserhof clinic in Austria, a targeted retreat aims to boost the benefits of weight-loss drugs while tackling the side effects. Here's what happened



My stomach made a loud gurgle as my doctor, the fabulously named Perpetua Walser, pressed down on my vagus nerve. I apologised, and she laughed. "We call that the Lanserhof symphony."

I was having one of the daily stomach manipulations that are part of the regime for those taking the cure at the Lanserhof clinic in Lans in the Austrian Tyrol. I was here to try out a new seven-night programme designed for people like me who are taking one of the new weight-loss drugs.

The greige serenity of the luxury wellness world has been ruffled by the arrival of these drugs. Clinics that have become famous for welcoming celebrities and others who are prepared to pay good money to lose unwanted pounds are having to adjust to a world where waistlines can be regained through weekly injections of Ozempic or Mounjaro.

I went to another Lanserhof clinic near Munich in Germany about three years ago and lost 3kg, which worked out at about £40 a gram — on a par with the most expensive wagyu beef. Contrast that with the 20kg or so I lost using Mounjaro for about £1,000, the same price as a night at the Lanserhof.



Many people who start taking these drugs do so without telling their doctors, getting them from online apps such as Juniper. Although these online prescribers have strict medical guidelines, the recent deaths that have been linked to weight-loss drugs show that a face-to-face consultation with a doctor is vital if you have any serious health conditions.

The Lanserhof medical director Dr Katharina Sandtner tells me that some of her regular patients (about 50 per cent of clients at the clinic are repeat customers) have shown up dramatically thinner but have been too ashamed to admit their secret. She wants to lift the veil surrounding these drugs and help people to use them safely, so she has designed a programme that enhances their results while managing the side-effects, alongside the regular Lanserhof regime. That is all about encouraging the body to heal itself through a general detox: no caffeine, alcohol or raw food in the evening, and much mastication.

I have been on Mounjaro for eight months and had side-effects including digestive disturbances, nausea and nasty sulphuric burps. These got worse as I increased my dose but have now largely disappeared. Still, I was curious to see how Lanserhof would help.

On arrival I am put through a series of tests and scans to check for any hidden side-effects. First up is an abdominal ultrasound, after which a rather stern doctor says that my pancreas, liver, kidneys and stomach look in good shape. Then she scans my thyroid, which is also normal. When I smile in relief, she says grimly that she would advise having a scan like this *before* starting on the drug because of the “cancer risk”. This is clearly sensible, as there have been small studies that show a connection but not a correlation between weight-loss drugs and medullary thyroid tumours, but that caution should be weighed against the known cancer risk of being overweight.

Next comes a bioelectrical impedance body analysis from Alina Walbrun. She is a personal trainer, so she wears black Hugo Boss workout kit; the doctors and other medical staff wear pure white, and the receptionists and others wear blue. As pretty much everybody who works at Lanserhof is slim, clear-eyed and glowingly healthy, the colour coding is helpful.



For the first time probably ever, I get on the scales without fear. The really good news is that despite my weight loss my muscle mass has remained pretty much constant, thanks to the boxing and weight training I do at home. My programme here includes two sessions with Walbrun in the gym. She tells me that building up muscle is one of the best ways to keep the weight off after stopping the drug, as muscle mass raises your metabolism. She says she can tell I am a writer from the way I stand, and gives me some really effective stretching exercises to counteract tech neck. She recommends sitting on a kind of whoopee cushion while I write so that I have to engage my core.

Next is a bone-density scan with another black-clad trainer who, after struggling to locate my femur, pronounces me normal for my age (63) and sex. When I ask if I can be better than normal (competitive, moi?), he tells me to hop, skip or jump. Load-bearing exercise is the answer to healthy bones. I run upstairs to my room, which is a symphony in taupe, and hop around the cashmere blanketed bed while admiring the fabulous mountain view. The Stubai glacier, which has great skiing, is 40 minutes up the valley and the ravishing medieval university town of Innsbruck 20 minutes the other way. During my stay I went to a world-class concert of Mozart and Haydn there played to a full house of locals with a Captain Von Trapp vibe of loden mantles and dirndls.

Then it is cryotherapy, which Walser assures me will help with the sagging skin on my deflated stomach and thighs. The chamber is manned by an Ursula Andress lookalike in white who takes my blood pressure and then gives me a face mask and woolly hat and mittens to wear with my swimsuit and trainers, and tells me to choose a morale-boosting song. Feeling like glamour personified, I enter the freezing chamber to the strains of Gloria Gaynor's *I Will Survive*. I am a cold water swimmer so I can cope, just about, with the minus 115C temperature, but only by dancing wildly around my padded freezer. Most people feel energised by the flash freezing (one other guest, a man, was doing it twice a day), but I head back to my room and fall asleep. My skin, I am sad to say, is still saggy.



A detox wrap where I am covered in mud and simmered in a sous vide-like warm bath is more soothing. I ask the therapist where the mud comes from and after a bit of fumbling with Google Translate she says: "From Syria, entranced with the essence of furry marble." My best guess is Syrian mud containing the (ahem) essences of the furry marmoset, but no matter, it felt glorious. Another treatment involves a lymphatic drainage massage, and then the therapist puts suction cups on my back. It's a bit like being embraced by an octopus.

The Lanserhof staff are unfailingly charming but there is loss in translation. My nutritionist asks me if I have had problems with "conurbation" while taking Mounjaro. She is reassuring about coming off the drug, telling me that my stomach will have shrunk after months of eating less, and I will continue to feel full faster. She recommends lots of "fibres" to keep my gut flora flourishing.

On the penultimate day it snows overnight, and I decide to go out on one of the daily activities organised by the clinic: a snowshoeing expedition to a mountaintop monastery in Mühlbachl, which is down to its last monk. I trudge through the virgin snow following our guide, with three other women who are all old Lanserhof lags; one of them is on her sixth visit. They subscribe to the German idea of a regular cure, on the basis that the best medicine is preventive. Some German health insurance plans make these cures mandatory, although I doubt Lanserhof prices are in the premiums. It's a long way from the concept of pampering beloved by the British spa. Not that the Lanserhof is in any way spartan, but the ethos is health not self-indulgence — there are absolutely no bubbles of the alcoholic kind in the outdoor hot tub. My new friends swear that an annual or biannual cure keeps them from what they darkly call "bad habits".

On my previous visit to the German Lanserhof I ate sheep's yoghurt and buckwheat toast for pretty much every meal. This time I am given the "active" diet, which includes delights like sheep's cheese, salmon tartar and a buckwheat bowl with avocado. It is all delicious and surprisingly filling. Every meal comes with instructions to chew every mouthful 30 times — a challenge, especially when it comes to soup. I get the inevitable caffeine withdrawal headache but Walser takes pity on me and I am allowed a "therapeutic espresso" in a hidden corner, with a warning: "Some clients go crazy if they smell the coffee."



One of the most surprising aspects of my "weight-loss journey" is how my anxiety has decreased. It turns out this has basis in science as my blood test shows that my inflammation markers have come right down since I last went to the Lanserhof in 2021. "Fat is an active substance and affects your hormonal balance which in turn controls your mood," Walser explains.

All this detoxing has made me lose 1kg, and 2cm from my waist. More to the point, I glow with righteous smugness now that all my biological markers — my BMI, my muscle-to-fat ratio, and my visceral fat and liver function are in the green zone. My week at the Lanserhof hasn't made my skin taut (miracles are extra), but I feel clear-eyed and full of Tigger-like bounce.

For anyone with the cash who is contemplating taking a weight-loss drug but is apprehensive, or is taking it and struggling with the side-effects, I think the Lanserhof programme is definitely worth it. We all know why we need to lose weight but quantifying the benefits it has on your physical and mental health is hugely motivating. My advice is not to fill the days with treatments but to lie back on the supremely comfortable bed, turn on the groovy fireplace in the wall, cocoon yourself in the cashmere blanket, and ignore the motivational cards which turn up each day saying things like "How many reptiles do you know?" or "What is success?" and instead gaze at the mountains turning pink as the sun sets.

Daisy Goodwin was a guest of Healing Holidays, which has seven nights' full board from £6,999pp on a weight-loss injection management programme, including transfers (healingholidays.com). Fly to Innsbruck

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