

Recovered from Covid, They Seek Oxygen High

Benefits of hyperbaric oxygen therapy for post-Covid care are unproven but people are paying up to ₹50,000 for it



**DEEP AIR
CONDITIONING**

Hyperbaric oxygen therapy multichamber, which can hold four persons

Courtesy: POTENZA ADVANCED WELLNESS CLINIC

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New Delhi: Puja Khullar recovered from Covid-19 in December, but the 62-year-old Delhiite was wracked by pain afterwards. Her joints became stiff and began to hurt – a post-Covid symptom. Her sister in Dubai suggested that she try out hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT), which involves breathing highly concentrated oxygen in a pressurised chamber. It is a compression treatment given to athletes, especially divers. High oxygen levels are also considered good for healing stubborn wounds. Its benefits in post-Covid care are as yet unproven. However, Khullar has just completed 10 sessions of HBOT in a chamber that has three times the normal air pressure. She compares going through the treatment to being inside an airplane that is making a landing. Since each

session costs almost as much as a domestic air ticket, she has shelled out ₹50,000 altogether. It has, she says, helped alleviate the pain.



In 2011, the USFDA approved the use of HBOT for crash injuries and carbon monoxide poisoning, among others

Wellness: “If anything, the Covid situation is getting worse. And

Like Khullar, some people who have recovered from Covid are trying out HBOT in metros like Delhi and Mumbai. At Potenza Advanced Wellness in Delhi, where Khullar has had her sessions, at least 20% of its business is now driven by people who are looking for post-Covid recovery. Says Nitin Khanna, director, Potenza Advanced

people are looking for alternative routes to get better. While we are not marketing ourselves very much yet, we think clients are googling for alternative ways and finding hyperbaric oxygen therapy as a possible treatment.” In many wellness centres in Delhi, HBOT costs around ₹5,000 a sitting and can require a minimum of 10 sittings.

Dr Amitabh Partl, director of internal medicine at Fortis Memorial Research Institute, Gurgaon, says in the post-Covid scenario, HBOT is being used as a “reparative process” to treat patients who may have had extensive fibrosis or scar tissues in their lungs. Typically, to regenerate or grow new tissues, adequate ventilation is required. Therefore, breathing exercises are often recommended to promote or encourage the growth of new lung tissue.

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Parti says while the hypothesis behind using HBOT is good, there is lack of clinical data in Covid-recovered patients to say this is a proven method. "Patients, especially the elderly, generally don't have very good lung capacity due to lack of exercise. So just pumping in more oxygen cannot be the solution. It can also be a big financial burden which many patients may not be able to afford," warns Dr Parti.

Dr Tarun Sahni, president of the Hyperbaric Society of India and medical director at Potenza Advanced Wellness, says the therapy is usually targeted at wellness customers. "People are coming in post-Covid and realising that it benefits them. We use a combination of HBOT and photobiomodulation therapy," says Sahni. He is also the head of hyperbaric medicine and senior consultant, internal medicine, at Delhi's Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals.

In the US, pop star Justin Bieber has said that he sleeps in an oxygen chamber to rid his body of toxins and to help him deal with anxiety, although that too is not a proven benefit. Many years ago, actor Keanu Reeves claimed he used HBOT for his insomnia. What studies have found, though, is that HBOT helps patients with about 10 types of ailments like diabetic's foot and diving-related decompression sickness. In 2011, the US FDA approved

its use for crash injuries and carbon monoxide poisoning, among others.

In Mumbai, where Covid numbers have shot up, a wellness concern called Health Culture has been receiving inquiries not just from recovering patients but also other businesses that want to set up HBOT clinics. Swaraj Patil, founder of Health Culture, says the body absorbs more

MANY BENEFITS



Pop star Justin Bieber has said that he sleeps in an oxygen chamber to rid his body of toxins

oxygen than normal under pressure. "We have been using it for four years for wellness-related issues. But can we conclusively say that there is a parameter by which we can give proven results for Covid-recovered patients? The answer is no. There's no guarantee here," says Patil.

Sanjay Sachdeva, founder of Delhi-based Daivam Wellness, runs four such facilities. One of them is his own concern in the capital while three others are run in partnership with Niraamaya Wellness Retreats.

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