

Vitality Signs

At Clinique La Prairie, patients fight the aging process inside and out.

IN THE MEDICAL CENTER at Clinique La Prairie in Claren-Montreux, Switzerland, examination rooms are equipped with latest-generation machines: an MRI, a 64-slice CT scanner, and digitalized equipment for bone X-rays and abdominal ultrasounds. A calorimeter calculates your metabolic rate by determining how much oxygen you inspire and how much carbon dioxide you expire. In the fitness center, a body composition analyzer, which resembles a simple scale, assesses your body mass index, measuring muscles, other tissues, and fat limb by limb. But amid all of this state-of-the-art technology, medical director Dr. Thierry Wälli still recognizes the benefits of an old-fashioned approach to good health. Next to his desk sits a crude wooden folding chair with a cutaway seat, under which is poised a clog attached to a lever. "I'm known as someone who simplifies and gets down to essentials," he says, explaining the reason behind the gag gift from a colleague. "Some people need to get kicked in the ass sometimes."

Most of Wälli's patients—entrepreneurs, celebrities, chief executives, and athletes among them—are not slackers, but, he points out, self-judgment does not come easily for many of them. "Executives can make big decisions for thousands of employees," he says, "but they cannot do it for themselves."

This 77-year-old medical center and spa, located a short walk from the center of Montreux, on the shores of Lake Geneva, offers a full medical evaluation—including an electrocardiogram, chest X-ray, abdominal ultrasound, and blood tests. You are assigned a doctor, who consults with specialists to create a customized plan that can include surgical, dental, psychological, nutritional, aesthetic, and spa treatments.

In 2005, Clinique La Prairie expanded its services by opening a \$32 million, 48,000-square-foot facility that houses a spa offering water-based thalassotherapy services,

a restaurant, a fitness center, and a lounge; the clinic also renovated the guest rooms and suites in the neighboring Résidence building.

Almost all Clinique La Prairie patients receive the Revitalization treatment, which entails ingesting an extract derived from the liver cells of fetal sheep. (About 50 pregnant sheep are slain annually to produce enough extract.) The treatment's origins date to 1931, when Paul Niehans,

a Swiss doctor and pioneer of cellular therapy, established the Clinique to treat endocrine disorders by injecting patients with liver cells from fetal sheep. Patients repeatedly commented about feeling energized after they received injections. This response eventually prompted the Clinique to offer, from the 1950s through 1998, injections of fresh sheep liver cells to stimulate patients' metabolic and cellular processes.

In 1999, the Clinique switched to a standardized liver extract called CLP extract, which, it claims, has been scientifically proven to strengthen the human immune system. Last year, the Clinique introduced a form of CLP extract that you swallow after receiving an injection of lipid A, a synthetic form of bacterial endotoxin that also is

supposed to jump-start your immune system and prepare your body for maximum intake of the extract.

The Clinique recommends follow-up treatments about every two years, and about 70 percent of the recipients do return. "Most people start Revitalization treatments in their late 40s and early 50s," says Wälli. "They try it when they start to believe a lifestyle change is not enough. They need sugar on top. They believe it will change everything. It does good, but quitting smoking, for example, has a much greater benefit." —LAURIE KAHLE



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The facility, which is located on the shores of Lake Geneva, combines a state-of-the-art medical center with a full-service spa.