



WELLNESS

## In The Depths Of Grief, The Mayr Cure Led Me Back To Myself

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Once a year, I pack myself off to the [Original FX Mayr Clinic](#) in Austria for a five to seven day reset. The timing is usually dictated by how many extra kilos I am carrying; however, this time was different. The driving force for doing “the cure” was to address the torturous emotional turmoil caused by my sister’s impending death.

I am no stranger to loss. In the last decade, one brother died by suicide, my parents are gone, and I left my job after 25 years. However, my sister Constance’s terminal illness has rendered me emotionally rudderless and struggling to cope. In 2014, she was diagnosed with PPA, Primary Progressive Aphasia, a rare form of early-onset dementia; she was 50. Though I have lost her in bits and pieces over the last eight years, nothing prepared me for the tsunami of [grief](#) that came with knowing Constance is in the final stage of her life.

Grief for me breeds mental chaos; I was at sea. I needed the structure and regimen of the Mayr cure to reclaim my mental and emotional clarity. I knew from my previous visits that the friendly, intimate cosiness of Original FX Mayr, underpinned by the ineffable kindness and sensitivity of the staff, was what would help.

Opened in 1976 on Lake Wörthersee by Dr Erich Rauch, a student of the eponymous Dr Franz Xaver Mayr, the Original FX Mayr was the global launchpad for the Mayr “cure”. Based on the belief that a bad diet is the root of many health problems – insomnia, IBS, high blood pressure and heart disease – it is a 21-day programme that clears the body and mind through detoxification and de-acidification. The belief that fasting, silence and a steady rhythm allows one to heal and reconnect with oneself is an abiding Mayr precept. Supporting the link between fasting and brain health are the research findings of Mark Mattson, a scientist at the National Institute of Aging. According to Mattson, “Fasting increases BDNF, a crucial protein for learning and protection against age-related cognitive decline. When the brain goes under energy restriction, we see neural activity associated with protection against degeneration from stroke and ageing.”

On arrival at the clinic, I was blessed to be, once again, in the care of Dr Ursula Muntean-Rock, the extraordinary medical director. She was particularly empathetic to my emotional rollercoaster and advised that this visit would be a healing journey with no undue stress. Though I would adhere to the universal Mayr maxims of Epsom salts, gluten-free buckwheat rolls and relentless chewing, instead of the soup and vegetable spread of the Intensive Weight Loss Programme, at midday, I would be allowed Chef Andreas Wolff’s creation of the day. A full schedule of treatments from body acupuncture and shiatsu to energy and detox drips and regular sessions with Claudia, the eminently elegant Wellbeing Cure coach, filled out the rest of my week.

The first two days were punishing. Despite detoxing before I arrived, my organs struggled to flush out the lingering toxins caused by sugar, caffeine, and alcohol. My initial sessions with Claudia were arduous as I struggled to enunciate my angst. As the oldest of seven children, I had assumed the role of surrogate mother, and I consider my siblings the children I never had. I was seven when Constance was born, and I finally had the sister I wanted. I dressed her up; I spoiled her; I protected her. But now, I am powerless as I witness the quiet, inescapable certainty of her death. I vacillate between incredulity and grief. I live with a heartache so indescribable and profound that I feel I may implode. Despite recognising the wisdom in writer Anne Lamott’s words, “We cannot arrange lasting safety or happiness for our most beloved people,” I am broken because irrationally, a part of me feels that I have failed as the family fixer.

As the week progressed and I benefitted from the physical exhilaration of cryotherapy and wild swimming, the healing hands of osteopath Gutfreund and Dr Muntean-Rock's acupuncture needles, I began to emerge from the fog of sadness that had held me captive. I did an aqua cycling session with Nikolai, had a hot stone massage in the Sleek Beach House on Lake Wörthersee, and hiked through the Dellach hills against the backdrop of the Alps. Every lunch was a delicious triumph, with Thursday's nouvelle cuisine-sized potato blinis with caviar, quail egg, beetroot ragout, and horseradish foam my favourite. The ubiquitous vegetable bouillon served in the evening miraculously sustained me while allowing my digestive system to rest for the requisite 16 hours to achieve ketosis, whereby the body burns fat, aka intermittent fasting.

Dr Muntean-Rock prescribed mitochondrial therapy and Ortho-Bionomy massage, both new offerings since my last visit. The former is a medically-based application that promotes energy metabolism. While resting in an armchair, it simulates altitude training by changing the oxygen level in the air we breathe. The therapy provides for the mitochondrias' regulation and performance increase, which also counteracts a state of exhaustion and sleep disturbances. Ortho-Bionomy uses gentle but targeted impulses and movements to release blockages and tensions. After each, I was ragdoll-relaxed but energised.

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As my stay came to an end, I felt back on course. I had regained most of my old self through the combination of collective compassion and highly advanced treatments that are the sharp edge of science. With Original FX Mayr's wise words resonating in my head, "Abstinence does not always mean deficit: most of the time, it is the biggest benefit." My week at the Original FX Mayr had armed me with the emotional strength to accept Constance's imminent passing.