

Benefits and risks of using a sauna

Saunas are a popular attraction in hotels, spas and health & fitness clubs around the UK and world. Enthusiasts say there is little that can pamper your body and soul like a trip to the sauna, which is traditionally a wooden room infused with dry heat that can get as high as 185° F.

It is the intense dry heat that is said to open your pores and purify your body of toxins while prompting the release of endorphins, your body's natural pain relievers. This same heat, however, may pose a hidden danger to certain people.

Seven Healthy Reasons to Use a Sauna

There is no question that saunas prompt real changes in your body functions. Within minutes, for instance, your skin temperature can reach about 104° F, and your pulse rate can climb by 30%. This causes your heart to double the amount of blood it pumps each minute. You can also expect to lose at least a pint of sweat during a sauna session.

What are the beneficial results of all of this on your health?

1. A Cardio Workout for Your Heart

As your heart rate increases during your sauna session, this increases your need for oxygen. As a result, your heart gets a workout while it pumps blood around your body. Meanwhile, Finnish researchers have found that regular use of saunas helps keep your blood vessels more elastic and pliable as a result of the repeated heating and cooling of your body.

2. Increased Resistance to Illness

According to Finnish and German studies, saunas put your body into a "fever state" that stimulates your immune system. As a result, regular sauna users have a 30 percent less chance of getting a cold or the flu.

3. Improved Circulation and Lower Blood Pressure

A sauna's heat causes your blood vessels to dilate and circulation to your extremities to improve. Saunas also cause a temporary decrease in your blood pressure, but, according to some studies, this decrease may last longer with frequent sauna sessions.

4. Support Your Kidney Function

The sweat you release during a sauna session excretes wastes and reduces the load put on your kidneys, according to a Society study.

5. Burn More Calories

Due to your increased heart rate and perspiration, a single sauna session can burn up to 300 calories, according to research. However, most weight loss that occurs during a sauna session is water, and will be gained back when you eat and drink.

6. Relive Stress and Sleep Better

Sauna enthusiasts maintain that they are an excellent tool for stress relief and promoting a sense of well-being. A sauna before bed may also help you to get a good night's sleep. Saunas may help to detoxify your body of impurities while promoting a sense of calm and well-being.

7. Soothe Aches and Pains

Because saunas increase your circulation, they may help with pain relief. You should limit your sauna session to 15 or 20 minutes, then cool down by drinking two to four glasses of cool water.

When Can a Sauna be Harmful?

If you enjoy saunas and they make you feel good, you can therefore continue this practice. However, certain groups of people, especially those with heart conditions, need to be cautious.

People with poorly controlled blood pressure, abnormal heart rhythms, unstable angina, and advanced heart failure or heart valve disease should carefully monitor their sauna times, those with heart patients check with their doctors before using a sauna.

Meanwhile, according to the Finnish Sauna Society, "People who should avoid the sauna completely are people running fever or having inflammatory diseases or injuries. Anybody with a contagious disease should only use their own sauna. Also people under the influence of alcohol should not use a sauna, there is no evidence that the sauna would help in a hangover."

To ensure that your sauna session is a relaxing treat, be sure to follow these tips:

- Avoid alcohol before and after your sauna, as this can impair your sweating and lead to your overheating.
- Limit your session to 15-20 minutes.
- Drink two to four glasses of cool water after your session.
- Avoid the sauna if you don't feel well, and leave immediately during your sauna if you feel ill
- Always be aware that heat rises and therefore sitting up on a two tier seating position will increase your exposure to heat. If you begin to feel dizzy, woozy or develop respiratory issues then either leave the sauna completely to rest or sit on the lower bench