

Sauna: The Age-Old Cure-All

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Most athletes don't have to worry about working up a sweat. They sweat profusely every time they exercise, as the process of calorie burning generates heat and the body responds by cooling itself down with perspiration.

Sweating is one of the body's healthiest reactions. For optimal health and athletic performance capabilities, athletes should be especially aware of the benefits of far infrared radiant heat (which differs from the typical sauna).

Studies conducted indicate that profuse sweating in an infrared sauna room produces many beneficial reactions for athletes. Their studies showed that far infrared (radiant) heat creates low-level thermal radiation that penetrates 1½ inches into the body, stimulating sweating without the feelings of suffocation and the discomfort of high temperatures of standard saunas. It does so by setting up a vibratory resonance between your own body's infrared emissions and those of the sauna. Heat, they concluded, is not the important factor. Instead, the vibratory stimulation deep under the skin appears to be.

Heat, however, has been shown to be an extremely important therapy over millennia of time. Sweating in a sauna room is one of the oldest folk remedies in the world. "Give me a chance to create fever, and I will cure any disease," said Parmenides, 2,000 years ago.

EFFECTS OF SWEATING

Sweating by overheating the body produces these effects:

- Burns calories, and therefore assists in fat loss programs.
- Speeds up metabolic processes of vital organs and endocrine glands.
- Places demands upon the cardiovascular system, making the heart pump harder and producing a drop in diastolic blood pressure.
- Creates a "fever" reaction that kills potentially dangerous viruses and bacteria and increases the number of leucocytes in the blood, thereby strengthening the immune system important for fighting colds, flu, and cancer and bolstering resistance to infections.
- Excretes toxins from the body, including cadmium, lead, zinc, nickel, sodium, sulfuric acid and cholesterol.
- Stimulates vasodilation of peripheral vessels, which relieves pain and speeds healing of sprains, strains, bursitis, peripheral vascular diseases, arthritis, and muscle pain.
- Promotes relaxation, thereby lending a feeling of well-being.

Nobel-Prize winner Dr. Andre Lwoff, a French virologist, believes that high temperature during infection helps combat the growth of virus. "Therefore, fever should not be brought down with drugs," he said.

Two medical doctors, Werner Zable and Josef Issels, have this to say about fever: "Artificially induced fever has the greatest potential in the treatment of many diseases including cancer."

A German physical education professor named Ernst has found that there are no cancer patients among marathon runners. He conducted a study of marathoners who logged about 20 miles a day. Analyzing their sweat, he found it contained cadmium, lead, zinc and nickel.

Ernst concluded that these athletes excreted these potential cancer-causing elements from their bodies by perspiring. He and other scientists conclude that it is necessary to sweat profusely at least once a day to maintain good health.

Ward Dean, MD, a US Army flight surgeon who has researched the physiological effects of sweating in a sauna, finds that it can be as effective as regular exercise in conditioning the cardiovascular system and burning calories. Sweating in a sauna, he says, is a good workout for people unable to exercise, such as disabled people in wheelchairs or immobilized athletes recovering from injuries.

Dr. Paavo Airola, an authority on holistic health, says that sweating in a sauna stimulates the body's own healing systems. The healing of many chronic and acute conditions, such as colds, infections, rheumatic diseases and cancer, is accelerated by the body's own forces.

"Many toxins, accumulated in the system as a result of metabolic wastes and sluggish elimination, are thrown out of the body with perspiration," says Airola. "The sauna increases the eliminative, detoxifying and cleansing capacity of the skin by the stimulating action on the sweat glands."

We like the sauna simply because of its relaxing, soothing effect. We find that taking a 20-minute sauna and engaging in some visualization training while doing so after intense training sessions improves recovery time.