

NEVER USE THE SAUNA AT YOUR GYM? HERE'S WHY TO START

Buh-bye deep muscle pain.

Posted by *Julianne Mele* on 2/23/2012 at 3:23PM | [1 Comment](#)

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The sauna can seem like an enigma to someone who's never experienced it before. I mean, when you think about it, a hot box with half-naked (or fully naked) people dripping in sweat *is* a little strange. I was skeptical of its usefulness until I entered one for the first time a year ago—and I've been addicted ever since. Why? Because I experienced the benefits. From relieving pesky back pain to giving you flawless skin, saunas can do wonders for your health—here's how.

Poof—Pain Is Gone

One of the best times to use the sauna is after a tough workout. Mario Sarno, fitness director at Rittenhouse Square Fitness Club, says that a sauna session can help relax and loosen muscles to prevent soreness, as well as alleviate deep muscle pain and achy joints. The heat causes your body temperature to rise, which then forces blood vessels to dilate. The increased blood circulation accelerates the body's natural healing process, which is why you won't feel so beaten up the next day.

You can save time by completing your stretches while in the sauna, although Sarno says it doesn't matter if you stretch before or afterward. "There's no one set of rules, it's up to an individual person's

preference,” he says. Sauna sessions get your body ready for the next workout sooner and can help prevent injuries, so they’re especially useful if you’re attempting new exercises or augmenting your training program.

Sweat for Your Skin

There’s a reason why the sauna is sometimes referred to as a sweat bath. Each session cleanses your skin through deep sweating by rinsing out bacteria and replacing dead skin cells, resulting in a healthy glow after use. Danuta Mieloch, owner of Rescue Rittenhouse Spa in Center City, says heat opens up pores and softens the skin.

“Heat speeds up circulation, and any time the skin’s circulation is improved, color and texture are improved, as well,” Mieloch says. She adds that sauna use can be an excellent way to clear up acne but advises going in sans makeup because products could clog pores as your skin tries to sweat. Using the sauna is especially great in the winter, since your skin doesn’t have as much opportunity for increased circulation in the cold weather.

Body and Mind

The sauna’s health benefits extend beyond muscle and skin care. According to this [study](#), regular sauna sessions can help people suffering from hypertension and congestive heart failure, and can be useful in care after heart attacks. Of course, you’ll want to consult your doctor before beginning regular sauna sessions if you have a health condition.

Don’t forget about the sauna’s mental benefits, too. The high temperatures cause your brain to release feel-good endorphins, and the atmosphere provides a place to de-stress and relax.

Advice for Sauna Use

Before you start soaking up the heat, you’ll want to take several precautions. Sarno says to make sure that you drink plenty of water to replenish all the fluid lost, especially since you might already be a little dehydrated post-workout. Don’t use a sauna as a weight-loss tool, since the water weight will be replaced as soon as you drink or eat something. While saunas do raise your metabolic rate for a short period of time because your body is working hard to cool down, diet and exercise are more important for healthy, long-term weight loss.

The first time you try out the sauna, aim for staying in for about five to ten minutes. When you begin building a tolerance for the heat, you can work yourself up to safely staying in there for half an hour. Of course, you should listen to your body. If you feel dizzy or faint after fifteen minutes, take a break. Everyone’s different.

So what are you waiting for? Grab your water bottle, and plant yourself in that little dark room. I promise—it’s totally worth it.