

Sauna-Induced Sweating Offers Many Health Benefits

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Madison, Wisconsin - If you start to sweat at the thought of your blood pressure skyrocketing, you may be on to something.

Studies by Dr. Walter Crinnion, a naturopathic physician, have shown using a sauna to induce sweating is actually a healthy way to lower blood pressure and relieve other medical problems.

Dr. Luke Fortney, an integrative-medicine practitioner and assistant professor of [family medicine](#) at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, says he has prescribed sauna therapy to a number of patients.

"I've recommended it to people with high blood pressure, muscle spasms, seasonal affective disorder, and high stress levels," he says. "It's also effective at detoxifying the body of chemicals from pollutants in the atmosphere and earth, and it's generally much safer than taking a lot of medications."

Fortney says sauna therapy has been used for centuries to relieve conditions such as joint pain and asthma. It's also commonly used in areas of Scandinavia at so-called sweat lodges where people gather to socialize and perspire together.

"In Finland, one in four households has a sauna," he says. "Yet, sweating in our culture is frowned upon, even if it is hugely beneficial."

While proper diet and exercise are important to good health, 15 to 30 minutes in a sauna three or four times a week can also contribute to increased wellness.

"It raises your heart rate, so it's like exercise, only in a more passive way," says Fortney. "It's also a healthy way to bathe because it releases different toxins, so there are hygienic benefits. Not to mention, it relaxes the mind."

So, how does sweating in a sauna compare with sweating during exercise?

"The sweating that happens in a sauna, steam room or hot-room yoga class is more profuse than typical

exercise," says Fortney. "Exercise is beneficial because of the sweating that happens as a result of moving more vigorously, but sauna therapy is beneficial after exercise to soothe and relax the muscles. Exercise is a form of active internally induced sweating, and sauna is a form of restful externally induced sweating. Rather than an either/or, it's a both/and kind of issue."

One important caution, though: Fortney says novices to sauna therapy should take it easy at first.

"Start with a lower temperature and don't do it by yourself; have someone there with you," he says. "Also, drink enough fluids, so you don't become lightheaded."

Fortney adds that people with a high-risk medical history - including kidney disease, liver failure or cardiac conditions - may not be able to use sauna therapy.

"If you have a lot of medical conditions, definitely talk to your physician first before starting this type of therapy," he says.

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