

WELLNESS > HOLISTIC HEALTH

Health Benefits of Infrared Saunas

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HALFPOINT IMAGES / GETTY IMAGES

While traditional saunas heat the air with hot air and steam, infrared
[SKIP TO CONTENT](#) / heat and infrared light to heat your body from the inside

typically between 113-140°F (45-60°C).^[1]

Adding infrared sauna sessions to your self-care routine has gained popularity for muscle recovery, stress reduction, detoxing, and heart health. However, research on the benefits of infrared sauna is still somewhat limited. Research often includes small groups, and sessions have various durations and temperatures.

Before you turn up the heat, here's what science has to say about the potential benefits of infrared saunas. Plus, how to get started.

May Improve Heart Health

As a type of heat therapy, infrared saunas increase body temperature, which dilates blood vessels and increases blood flow. This effect improves circulation and gets the heart pumping similarly to exercise.^[2] Research shows that infrared saunas also help [reduce blood pressure](#) and make the heart work like a [cardio workout](#)—specifically walking at a moderate pace or indoor cycling.^{[3][4]}

A 2018 review of seven studies found five weekly, 15-minute infrared sauna sessions improved cardiovascular function in those with [heart failure](#) after two to four weeks. The study also found infrared sauna sessions reduced stress, [inflammation](#), and blood vessel function. However, the effects were only studied in the short term.^[5]

May Improve Muscle Soreness, Pain, and Recovery

As an infrared sauna session increases circulation, it helps deliver fresh blood, nutrients, and oxygen to your muscles.^[2] Increased circulation also helps reduce [lactic acid](#) levels that can contribute to [muscle soreness](#).

These effects may help speed up muscle recovery.^[6] However,

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A study including 10 men found completing 30-minute infrared sauna sessions after 24-to 40-minute endurance training sessions helped improve muscle recovery and performance. These results were more effective than traditional [sauna](#) or no sauna. ^[6] Other studies have found infrared sauna helps relieve muscular and joint pain related to musculoskeletal conditions like [osteoarthritis](#), myofascial pain syndrome, and [fibromyalgia](#). ^[7]

May Help Reduce Stress and Promote Relaxation

The act of sitting and relaxing in an infrared sauna can act as a form of [mindfulness and meditation](#), which research shows may help people manage stress and anxiety. ^[8] A 2019 global sauna survey found the top reason people use saunas is for relaxation and stress release. ^[9] In another study that looked at infrared sauna for muscle recovery, participants reported that they found the sessions relaxing. ^[6]

Non-anecdotal research has also found infrared saunas can help reduce the stress hormone [cortisol](#). ^[1] A study of 16 adults also found infrared sauna sessions in a sauna dome (a curved sauna bed that covers the body) helped reduce symptoms in adults with [depression](#). ^[10] Research on the stress and mental health benefits of infrared saunas is slim. We need more research to fully understand how infrared sauna can help reduce [anxiety](#) and [depression symptoms](#). Still, the practice likely helps promote relaxation to some degree.

How Do Infrared Saunas Work?

Infrared saunas heat your body with infrared lamps that emit
ic wavelengths between 760-100,000 nanometers (nm).

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wavelengths heat the body faster than traditional saunas because the radiant heat targets the body, not the air. The human body is made of about 70% water, so theoretically, the body's water molecules can absorb infrared radiation at a level that can alter biological processes. ^[11]^[12]

There are a few different types of infrared wavelengths used in infrared sauna therapy: ^[11]^[12]

Far-infrared sauna: The longest infrared wavelengths at 3000 nm– 0.1 mm penetrate the skin the deepest. This is the most common infrared sauna available.

Mid-infrared sauna: Medium-length wavelengths between 1400– 3000 nm can penetrate the skin, but not as much as far-infrared.

Near-infrared sauna: Shorter wavelengths between 700– 1400 nm are the closest to visible light, but they can still penetrate the upper layers of skin.

Full spectrum infrared sauna: These saunas combine all three infrared wavelength types with different lamps.

How to Use an Infrared Sauna

Like any wellness routine, a consistent infrared sauna routine is key. Aim for at least two to three sessions a week to get the most benefits from your infrared sauna session. If it's accessible, research shows some people can benefit from daily sessions. If you're ready to try infrared sauna, here's how to get started: ^[1]

1. **Hydrate before your session:** An infrared sauna session will make you sweat, so make sure you've been [drinking water](#) before hopping into the sauna to help prevent dehydration. Never go into the sauna if

2. **Dress or undress for your session:** What you wear into the infrared sauna is up to you (and the facility if you're at a gym or wellness spa). Cover up with a towel, wear a bathing suit, or wear minimal workout clothing.
3. **Set the temperature:** Infrared sauna temperatures usually range between 113°F and 140°F. If you're new, start with the lower temperature setting of 113°F. If you can tolerate the lower temperature, then gradually increase the temperature by about 5-10 degrees every session until you're comfortable or reach 140°F.
4. **Start your timer:** An ideal infrared sauna session lasts 15–30 minutes. First-time infrared sauna users can also start with 5-minute sessions to see how the body reacts. You can add more time to each session before committing to the full 15-30 minutes.
5. **Relax:** While sitting in the sauna, take your mind off the heat by reading a book, meditating, listening to music, or listening to a podcast if the sauna has some sort of bluetooth system. Electronic objects will get very hot and may no longer work inside the sauna. Just make sure you don't fall asleep, which can lead to staying in the sauna for a dangerous period of time.
6. **Get out if things don't feel right:** If you feel sick, extremely lightheaded, or feverish, get out of the sauna. You may be too ill, dehydrated, or overheated to safely continue.
7. **Cool down after your session:** When your time is up, slowly get up and let your body adjust. You may feel lightheaded at first. As your body acclimates to its usual temperature, sit down and drink more water to rehydrate.
8. **Shower or wash up:** Once your body feels at its typical temperature, [hower](#) to wash off any grime from sweating. If you have a ge accessible, this would be a good time to jump in.

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If you have any health conditions or take medication, ask your healthcare provider if using infrared saunas is safe. Infrared sauna sessions are generally considered safe for healthy individuals, but they are not for everyone. ^[1]

Research shows pregnant people should avoid saunas because they can increase body temperature enough to harm a growing fetus—even early in pregnancy. ^[13] Since sauna use can change blood pressure, infrared saunas may not be safe for people with [high blood pressure](#), low blood pressure, or [heart disease](#). People with [kidney disease](#) or taking blood pressure medications should also avoid sauna sessions. ^[1]^[14]

Men who are trying to get their partner pregnant may also want to consider avoiding infrared saunas. Research shows high heat can reduce sperm count and motility (movement) and increase the number of abnormal sperm. It may take up to six months for a person's typical sperm quality to return after sauna use. ^[1]

Other potential risks of infrared sauna sessions include: ^[1]

[Dehydration](#)

Mild to moderate heat discomfort or [overheating](#)

Low blood pressure

Light-headedness

Irritated airways

Leg pain

Claustrophobia

A Quick Review

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sauna session is typically between 15 and 30 minutes long at a temperature between 113°F and 140°F (45°C and 60°C). As a heat therapy, infrared saunas help increase body temperature and improve circulation to organs and muscles. As a result, an infrared sauna may help improve your heart health, muscle recovery, and pain. Sitting in a sauna may also have relaxation benefits to reduce stress. Overall, more research is needed to prove the benefits of infrared saunas. Still, the current science shows that infrared sauna sessions likely improve relaxation and benefit cardiovascular and muscular health.

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therapist is
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 Shungite
crumbs on a white
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receiving a
massage

 Person sitting
with eyes closed,
waving palo santo
stick for relaxation

 Young
multiracial or
Latina woman
meditating at

 An Asian woman
practicing
mindfulness by a
window

 A black woman
using a gua sha
tool on her face

 Person meeting
with holistic
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