

A photograph of a wooden sauna interior. The walls, ceiling, and benches are made of light-colored wood. On the left, a white towel is neatly folded on a bench. In the background, a warm, glowing light source, possibly a heater or a window, is visible on the right wall. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is centered over the image, containing text.

Ice Bath vs. Sauna

Which is best?

LEARN THE
BENEFITS OF EACH
AND HOW TO
KNOW WHICH IS
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ICE BATH VS SAUNA

Which is Better?

Biohacking has taken over the wellness world, and ice baths and saunas are leading the pack. Both are excellent alternative therapies with many benefits. But which is better?

Well, it depends on your goal. Ice baths and saunas both help **improve athletic performance and recovery**. Yet that's just the tip of the iceberg (or ice bath 😊). They also boast benefits for **mental health, resilience, immune health, weight loss, detox**, and much more.

But in terms of how they work, they're polar opposites. Ice baths constrict blood vessels and slow blood flow. Saunas, on the other hand, dilate blood vessels and improve blood flow.

While they're quite different methods there is a common denominator: *they both promote hormesis.*

What is Hormesis?

Hormesis is an adaptive response that happens when exposed to low doses of stress. The stress could be physical, like an intense workout or intermittent fasting. But temperature changes can trigger hormesis too.

Slipping into a cold plunge or sweating it out in a sauna are both forms of stress. Positive stress yes, but still stress. Your body is then forced to bounce back from the stress to regain balance. Over time, this builds resilience, helping you adapt to other stressors better.

This guide will break down the benefits of ice baths and saunas along with the best times to use them. That way, you can decide which is the right for YOU.

ICE BATHS 101

The Basics

Ice baths and cold plunges are a form of cold water therapy, also known as cold water immersion or cryotherapy.

They involve submerging your body into cold water anywhere between 30 seconds to 10 minutes.

Cold plunging may be popular these days. But it's nothing new. Cold water immersion has been used for centuries for its therapeutic effects. Here's how it works:



When you submerge yourself in cold water, *your body temperature drops*. This makes your blood vessels constrict in order to retain body heat. As your blood vessels constrict, blood flow slows down. This can **ease soreness, swelling, and inflammation**, which is why cold plunges are so popular post-workout.

Ice Bath Beginner's Tips

- **Pick your plunge.** There are tons of options. You can use a bathtub filled with ice water, a cold lake, river or ocean, invest in an at-home cold plunge, or just take a cold shower!
- **Pick the right temp.** Most experts say to start with water between 50 to 59°F (10-15°C).
- **Start slow.** If you're new to ice baths, 30 seconds to 1 minute is a good starting point. As your body adjusts, you can gradually work your way up to 2-5 minutes.



ICE BATH BENEFITS

- 1 – **Reduces inflammation.** Cold water constricts your blood vessels, which can reduce swelling and inflammation. This may help relieve pain and help you recover faster from workouts.
- 2 – **Relieves sore muscles.** When you get out of an ice bath, your blood vessels dilate, boosting circulation. This delivers oxygen and nutrients to your muscles and helps remove metabolic waste that can build up from exercise. In fact, cold plunging is shown to relieve post-workout soreness better than compression garments.
- 3 – **Elevates mood.** Cold water immersion increases mood-boosting chemicals in your brain. In one study, it increased the feel-good neurotransmitter dopamine by 250%! On top of that, it lowered the stress hormone cortisol.
- 4 – **Boosts energy and focus.** The same study found cold plunging can increase norepinephrine by 530%. This can give you more energy and enhance focus and attention.
- 5 – **May enhance immune health.** Some research shows cold water therapy increases immune cells that help you fight off infections.
- 6 – **Activates brown fat.** Cold plunging turn on brown fat, which burns energy. This may increase your metabolism.
- 7 – **Improves mental resilience.** Ice baths are the ultimate mental challenge. When you're in icy cold water, all you want to do is get out. But each time you sit there, calm yourself, and breathe through it, you build mental resilience. Over time, this can help you bounce back from other forms of stress.

SAUNA 101

The Basics

Saunas have been used for thousands of years to cleanse and purify the body. While not all saunas are the same, they have the same goal: to make you sweat!

Some people use saunas for relaxation. Others use them to enhance detoxification or speed up workout recovery.

Saunas are typically a small room heated somewhere between 150-195°F (65-90°C). But nowadays, there are many more options available.



Types of Saunas

- **Wood burning saunas:** Use wood or sauna rocks as the heat source, use high temperatures and low humidity.
- **Electrically heated:** Use an electric heater attached to the floor, also use high temperature and low humidity.
- **Infrared saunas:** Use light waves to heat your body, instead of the entire room. Often use lower temperatures than other saunas (like 60° C or 140° F)
- **Steam saunas:** Also called steam rooms, use moist heat and high humidity.

Many gyms and spas offer saunas these days. But there are many at-home options too, like sauna blankets and portable saunas.

A photograph of a wooden sauna interior. The walls and benches are made of light-colored wood. There are two small windows with yellow-tinted glass. A white rectangular text box is centered in the upper half of the image, containing the title 'SAUNA BENEFITS' in a dark serif font.

SAUNA BENEFITS

- 1 – **Promotes heart health:** Saunas make you sweat and increase your body temperature. This causes a physiological change that mimics exercise, which benefits your heart. Done regularly, sauna bathing may reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.
- 2 – **Aids muscle recovery.** The heat in saunas opens blood vessels and increases blood flow. This can relax tight muscles, relieve pain, and help your muscles recover faster.
- 3 – **Supports relaxation.** Sweating it out in a sauna may help you let go of stress. Sauna bathing is shown to reduce the stress hormone cortisol and increase endorphins, your body's natural feel-good chemicals.
- 4 – **Enhances detoxification.** Saunas help eliminate toxins like heavy metals via your sweat.
- 5 – **Boosts immune health.** People who sauna 1-2 times a week are less likely to catch colds. On top of that regular sauna users have a lower risk of upper respiratory infections, like pneumonia.
- 6 – **Promotes resilience.** Like cold plunging, exposing your body to high heat forces your body to adapt to stress. Over time, this builds resilience.
- 7 – **May lower risk of dementia.** In one study, men who sauna bathed 4-7 times a week were 66% less likely to get dementia than those who sauna once a week.

ICE BATH VS SAUNA

Summing it Up

Hot and cold therapy boasts many health benefits. So how do you know which to go with? Here's a brief rundown of how these two methods compare:



Ice Baths

- Energizing effect
- Slows blood flow and reduces inflammation
- Best used in the morning
- Great post workout recovery tool after intense workouts like HIIT, weight lifting, or long-form cardio
- Reduces swelling and can be helpful if you plan to train the following day.



Saunas

- Relaxing effect
- Improves blood flow and helps repair tissues
- Morning use helps gear you up for the day & evening use helps you relax before bed
- Post workout recovery tool that helps relax and repair muscles
- Great to use post workout, game day, or race day if not training the next day.

CONTRAST THERAPY

What is It?

Can't decide between ice baths and saunas? You don't have to! You can get the best of both worlds with contrast therapy.

What is Contrast Therapy?

Contrast therapy, also known as contrast bathing, involves *alternating between a heat source and a cold source*. This could mean following a sauna session with a cold plunge, or simply switching your shower water from warm to cold.

This combo creates a pumping action in your blood vessels: **Heat opens them up, while cold closes them.** Going back and forth between the two extremes can enhance healing and help remove waste, prevent soreness, reduce inflammation, and boost circulation.



Contrast Therapy Tips

- **Start with heat.** The general rule is sauna first, then cold plunge. It's best to allow your body to warm up naturally after an ice bath.
- **Build up your tolerance.** If you're new to contrast therapy, you may want to pick *milder temperatures* at first. For example, if you usually sauna at 150°F, try 140°F to start. You can always dial up the heat as you adjust.
- **Use the right ratio.** Aim for 15-20 minute sauna sessions, followed by 1-5 minutes of a cold plunge.