

6 reasons to put Infrared Saunas on your must-do list

by Dr. Frank Lipman, physician and author specializing in the field of integrative medicine

Saunas. They're relaxing, rejuvenating and can even feel a little indulgent. But did you know a regular sauna routine is also a very pleasurable way to enhance health? As you're probably aware, I'm a big believer in engaging in as many good-for-you activities as possible, and saunas, particularly infrared saunas, are high on the good-for-you-to-do list. Why infrared? Because its radiant heat is known to penetrate the skin more deeply than traditional saunas, better aiding in a number of restorative body processes. Here are just a few ways infrared saunas can benefit your body — and why I encourage many of my patients to make them part of their health-supporting routines:

1. You'll flush out toxins

Saunas, infrared or otherwise, make you sweat. Sweating helps flush out toxins from the body and in so doing reduces its toxic load. With infrared saunas, the sweating is deeper and more profuse, enabling your body to excrete a higher percentage of toxins than with a conventional sauna. Infrared saunas are also a great alternative for those who don't like high temperatures or need to avoid them for medical reasons. The gentler heat of infrared saunas runs roughly 20 – 60 degrees lower, making them easier to tolerate. But no matter which type you choose, remember to get the OK from your doctor first before diving into a regular sauna routine.

2. Blood pressure will lower and muscles will unwind, without a pharmaceutical assist

You don't have to sit in an infrared sauna for hours on end to reap the benefits. For most people, all that's needed are a few 15 – 20 minute sessions a week. During your sauna, as you sweat, you'll be stimulating better blood flow and circulation throughout your body. That increased circulation will help lower blood pressure, and make you feel good all over, relaxing tight muscles and easing minor aches and pains to boot. If you're troubled by muscle or joint pain, or more chronic conditions like arthritis, infrared heat from the sauna can provide drug-free pain relief, reducing stiffness and inflammation.

3. Cut a cold or flu off at the pass

Feeling like you're on the verge of getting sick? Then head to the nearest infrared sauna as early as possible. Why? Because the infrared's radiant heat will stimulate circulation, rev up the production of white blood cells and rally your immune system's response to invaders. All that action will make your body a much less hospitable environment for germs to grow – and a great place for them to die. Even if you're not on the verge of coming down with something, remember that infrared saunas, and the increased circulation that comes with regular use, are also great for speeding muscle recovery too.

4. Look younger, no "beauty" creams required

Infrared saunas offer a wonderful bonus for the skin: they help improve skin tone and reduce signs of aging by stimulating better circulation, blood flow and increased collagen production – all of which improve the look of your skin. The increased circulation, elimination of toxins and flushing out of cellular debris enhance overall skin health, giving it a more radiant appearance, without a trip to Sephora!

5. Drop a little weight effortlessly

The plentiful sweating you'll do during a sauna session will register immediately on the scale as weight loss. However, most of the weight loss will be "water weight" which will return when you re-

hydrate. However, there is evidence that infrared saunas, because of their ability to penetrate the skin more deeply, increase metabolic rate and can help the body burn off anywhere from 200 – 600 calories in a half hour session. Keep in mind though, while a regular infrared sauna routine won't melt off a spare tire, it can support a sensible diet and exercise plan by giving your metabolism a little extra boost while you literally sit and relax. And remember, hydration is essential if you're using infrared (or conventional) saunas, so never skimp on liquids just for the sake of seeing lower numbers on the scale. Drink up before, during and after — no exceptions!

6. An infrared sauna is an investment in your health

Infrared saunas could be seen as an indulgence, with topquality units starting at about \$1,800. But I see them as a great investment in your health. Infrared saunas tend to be compact, and require little maintenance and no water or plumbing. Not only do infrareds offer more body benefits than conventional saunas, but also they're less of a drain on resources. Many are made with sustainable materials and most run on normal household current and cost just a few pennies per hour to run. Because I am such a big believer in them, I recently got a Clearlight Infrared Sauna and I am absolutely thrilled with it — I look forward to using it every chance I get. If installing your own isn't an option, consider joining a gym or visiting day spas, specialized yoga studios and/or resorts with infrared sauna facilities. ♦