

HOT (AND COLD) STUFF

Temperature-based therapies are big in the wellness world right now, promising everything from better skin to weight loss. But do they work? We tested two of them to find out...

INFRARED SAUNA

WH Features Writer Anthea England got her sweat on, all in the name of research

I visit the infrared sauna for a couple of reasons: hoping to relieve some niggling pain and boost my glow. Advocates of infrared claim it can also help with weight loss by elevating your metabolic and heart rate, relieve pain by boosting circulation, bolster your immune system by elevating core body temp and help you detox by encouraging your body to sweat out all the toxins.

This ain't your regular sauna. In short: instead of heating the air around you, it heats your body directly. The heating panels emit a type of invisible light that warms the body from the inside out. Yep, it sounds like witchcraft, but essentially it's the opposite of harmful UV rays, which heat

up your body from the outside in.

It's a fairly small box set-up, with space for two people. One of the first things I notice? The air is much drier than some of the steam saunas I've been in before. It's not difficult to breathe. This is one of the main selling points of the infrared - you don't feel you've stuck your head in a dumpling steamer basket. Also, the tech of the infrared sauna means it doesn't need to be searing hot. Although, the temp still reaches 54°C in my session, which is reminiscent of that uncomfortable ill-timed visit I made to Dubai during a major heatwave.

In an infrared sauna session, you can pick from a number of programs, like anti-ageing, fat burning and pain relief. They differ in

lengths and temps - kind of like the different interval programs you might see on a cross-trainer. I suffer from arthritis so I pick the 'pain relief' setting. I generally find that any type of heat, whether it be my adorable panda-shaped heat pack or just the stifling Sydney summer, relieves some of my most niggling symptoms. So unsurprisingly, I definitely feel some short-term benefits, like fewer aches and better joint mobility.

I'm less sold on the detox promise - your liver is pretty great at getting rid of toxins anyway - so I reckon it's not worth it for this benefit alone.

I'm sure zen types would enjoy the sauna, but I get really restless. I'd rather sweat any prosecco out during my morning workouts, TBH.



FREEZE FLAME

CRYOTHERAPY

What happened when WH's Deputy Ed Alice Ellis tried the latest hyper-cooling treatment

How does this sound: stepping inside a freezer-like machine to have your bare body blasted with air that's up to four times colder than Antarctica? Brrrr... unbearable? I'm about to find out - I'm trying cryotherapy, since everyone in the sports and wellness biz is talking about it.

At the Cryo clinic in Edgecliff, Sydney, I strip down to just my undies and socks, and slip on the provided ugg boots and gloves. Then I step into the cryo chamber, shaped a bit like an MRI machine, but upright. You stand in it with your head sticking out.

The technician turns it on, and chilled air starts wrapping around me. For my first session, I'll be exposed to -120°C air for two minutes - and for three minutes by my third session.

But why? Apparently when you're exposed to extreme cold, it activates a survival mechanism that causes the blood

vessels near your skin to contract and reroute blood to your major organs to maintain your core temp - and, says the Cryo info booklet, "During this process, your blood is filtered and filled with oxygen, nutrients and healing enzymes."

Back in room temp, your blood vessels dilate and blood rushes back to your skin. "Blood circulation is naturally stimulated and oxygenated blood is delivered, helping to heal damaged muscles, joints, tendons and ligaments. Endorphins are also released into the bloodstream..."

The key reason people - particularly athletes - try cryo is to speed up muscle recovery and repair. But the Cryo clinic also claims the therapy may be able to assist with weight loss (by raising your metabolic rate), skin rejuvenation, and even some inflammatory diseases.

While I'm in the chamber, the technician chats to me constantly, obviously to distract me from the cold,

and tells me to move around a bit. I do start feeling really chilly - obv - but when I look at the screen I've only got about 30 seconds to go. That went quick!

I do feel rejuvenated afterwards - you know that feeling you get when you step out of a warm, stuffy room into cool, fresh air? But it's amplified, and I feel energised throughout the arvo.

I head back for two more cryo sessions. A total of three sessions, spaced two to three days apart, are recommended for max results. So what did I think? Honestly, I probably didn't have a good enough reason to try cryo and qualify whether or not it benefited me.

I would go back, say, if I was training hard for a marathon and needed help with recovery. But in the meantime, it's probably not worth forking out the \$50 per session (FYI, that's the session rate if you buy a 20-pack). But the experience definitely wasn't unbearable - I was no cryo baby. **WH**