



Hit the **LIGHTS**

IT'S A LITTLE OUT OF THE ORDINARY, BUT RED-LIGHT THERAPY OFFERS PLENTY OF BENEFITS. LINDA MUSIC TRIES OUT THE COUNTRY'S FIRST LED LIGHT BED

When I first saw a picture of Australia's first LED light bed - a bed that I would soon be trialling - I have to admit alarm bells started ringing. After all, we're taught that not only is red the colour of danger, but it's also hot. Extremely hot. Indeed, the light bed in the picture glowed with such intensity that it reminded me of a giant hotplate. And I was the one about to be cooked.

As I stared at the picture, I considered why I'd subject myself to this potentially scorching experience for even a second, let alone a full 40-minute treatment. The answer is simple. Despite its colour, the light bed isn't hot and it promises many benefits.

Red-light therapy (also known as photobiomodulation) uses lasers or LEDs that are said to reduce wrinkles, tighten skin, accelerate healing, improve post-exercise recovery, reduce blood pressure and improve immunity. The LED bed I trialled at Cryo in the Sydney suburb of Rosebery has also been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to relieve muscle, joint and arthritic pain and stiffness.

The benefits sounded amazing, but I couldn't help but wonder: how can something as simple as red light do all these things? I was eager to find out.

Red-light therapy isn't new. Used for years by dermatologists and plastic surgeons to treat wrinkles and other skin conditions, it works by sending low-power red-light wavelengths through the skin. This kick-starts the recovery process by stimulating



collagen and elastin production, and increasing blood flow.

Armed with this information, I jokingly asked Cryo's operations manager, Ange Bowe, if I'd emerge from my session a new woman, wrinkle-free and 20 years younger. Not surprisingly, I was told that's not how it works. Ange explained that the benefits of red-light therapy come from consistent, regular sessions, rather than a single treatment. As for looking 20 years younger, that definitely wasn't going to happen. Damn!

Although I understood that the treatment wouldn't do anything dramatic to my appearance, I was keen to see what benefits, if any,

I would experience from my session. Having done a strenuous HIIT workout that morning, I hoped the treatment would see me wake up the next day miraculously free of sore muscles.

This, I found out, is possible.

FACT

Infrared light is the part of the electromagnetic spectrum that we encounter most in our daily lives. It's invisible to the eye, but we can feel it as heat.

Increasing evidence shows that red-light therapy aids muscle recovery after exercise, improves athletic performance and enhances muscle growth. According to the research, red-light therapy increases the body's production of antioxidants,

which in turn reduces the oxidative stress associated with tired muscles. At the same time, red and near-infrared light therapy help the mitochondria in our cells produce energy more efficiently.

Studies have also shown that red-light therapy can ease arthritic pain. Researchers from the University of Ottawa found that light therapy was beneficial for participants with rheumatoid arthritis, who saw a 70 per cent reduction in pain after undergoing light therapy. The study also found that morning stiffness was significantly reduced and hand flexibility was improved.

"Our LED bed can assist in reducing inflammation throughout the entire body for the relief of arthritic pain and stiffness," says Ange. "It can also increase local blood circulation, »

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TIP

Although not thought to be bad for your eyes, LED treatments can be quite bright, so make sure you're wearing some form of eye protection during your sessions.



to aid the body's natural healing process by bringing oxygen and nutrients to painful areas. Studies have also shown that LED light can release endorphins that inhibit pain."

So what's it like?

I was taken to the treatment room, where the LED bed glowed an intense red. The picture I'd seen prior to my visit definitely wasn't photoshopped. Even though I'd read the literature, I couldn't help but seek assurance that I wouldn't get burnt. I was promised I'd be fine.

Every comfort was considered when Cryo planned their LED-bed treatment, including the ability to select your own music to listen to throughout, goggles to protect the eyes and a built-in fan in case the temperature gets too warm. There were also

supplies of pre- and post-session face and body serums.

Privacy was guaranteed. I stripped down to my underwear, popped the goggles on my eyes and threw a beach-sized towel over my body while I waited for a female staff member to position an additional LED light above my face.

The treatment itself was relatively simple. After 20 minutes lying on my back, the machine switched off and I had 30 seconds to turn over onto my stomach. At one point, I did feel a bit too warm and slightly uncomfortable, but after I switched on the fan, I was able to drift off into a restful sleep.

Before I knew it, the bed was beeping,

the lights had turned themselves off and my session was over. A look in the mirror revealed the same person who had entered the treatment room 40 minutes earlier. I was slightly flushed, but still the same. Ange was right - it hadn't made me look 20 years younger.

However, the next day I noticed that the two burns on my hand I'd sustained while cooking a few

days earlier were visibly less inflamed. This puzzled me.

How can something that looks like it could cause burns actually help repair them?

Ange explained that the multi-wave technology used in the bed increases nitric oxide levels in the body that help

to increase blood flow, accelerate wound healing, and reduce inflammation, bruising, swelling and redness in the surrounding tissue.

I was pretty impressed with the improvement to my burn wounds, but what excited me even more was that the sore muscles I'd anticipated resulting from my HIIT class didn't eventuate. If I could feel this good after one light-bed session, I was keen to find out what I might experience long-term.

"Results can appear instantaneously or within two months or more, depending on each client's unique physiological response," says Ange. "Each treatment builds on the last to reduce inflammation and promote peak physiological function and wellness."

In a nutshell

I enjoyed my red-light therapy session and will probably go back for more. Although one treatment didn't result in any visible changes to my skin, it definitely helped with my muscle pain, and for someone who often complains of sore muscles, that's a really good thing. As for looking 20 years younger, I've come to terms with the fact that it's never going to happen, but hey, if it's possible, I'll settle for tighter skin and a few less wrinkles.

FACT

There are plenty of light therapies out there. Blue-light therapy is thought to have benefits for treating acne, green light treats pigmentation and yellow light is meant to reduce wrinkles.

OTHER RED-LIGHT THERAPIES

Hand-held devices Small hand-held red-light therapy devices are available that emit frequencies between light red and deep infrared and are said to temporarily relieve arthritic, muscle and joint pain and stiffness, and reduce wrinkles. However, because they are hand-held, they can only be used to treat small areas at a time.

Red-light therapy boards These are designed to be hung over a door or on the wall and vary in size from small to body-length. They're available in different frequencies, depending on your requirements. Those emitting a combination of frequencies are the most expensive and are purported to achieve best results.

Infrared mats Far-infrared mats are said to relieve joint pain and stiffness, and ease minor muscle pain, sprains and strains. They may also reduce stress and fatigue, increase blood circulation and improve sleep.

Infrared saunas Far-infrared saunas emit far-infrared energy that penetrates the skin to increase circulation. They claim to help rid the body of toxins, assist with weight loss, increase metabolism, reduce muscle and joint pain, and ease stiffness.