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ENERGY AND FATIGUE

New Study Shows Infrared Sauna Benefits Patients with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

A number of human studies have been published over the last few years showing that infrared sauna therapy is an effective treatment for a wide range of medical conditions.

By **UHN Staff** • January 5, 2017

Chronic fatigue syndrome is a complex, incapacitating illness. It affects millions of people around the world and may affect up to 4 million people in the United States alone. This disabling disorder features not only unrelenting fatigue lasting for 6 months or more, but also memory and concentration deficits, sleep disturbances, headaches, joint and muscle pain, and gastrointestinal and immune system dysfunction.



Infrared sauna benefits include significant reductions in fatigue in patients with chronic fatigue syndrome.

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There are currently no truly effective conventional treatments for chronic fatigue syndrome—common conventional treatments like psychological counseling, exercise therapies, and antidepressant medications typically lead to only mild improvements. These improvements may be statistically significant in studies, but they rarely make a practical difference in the lives of chronic fatigue sufferers. For this reason, many patients turn to alternative medicine.

What is infrared sauna therapy?

One natural alternative treatment that has been on the fringes but is gaining traction is infrared sauna therapy. A new study has found that infrared sauna benefits include significant reductions in fatigue in patients with chronic fatigue syndrome.[1] In addition, the infrared sauna therapy was found to significantly reduce anxiety and depression.

Infrared saunas warm the body and potentially induce sweating at a lower body temperature. They emit energy in the far-infrared range to heat the air up to about 140°F (60°C), which is lower than that of steam and dry saunas.

The gentle heat is more comfortable and relaxing but is able to increase skin temperature quickly and penetrate deeply because far-infrared rays are absorbed much more by the skin than they are by the air. The heat produced in the skin dilates blood vessels, thus increasing the blood flow in the skin. The blood warmed in the skin subsequently circulates throughout the body, warming other body parts.

What are infrared sauna benefits?

The whole far infrared sauna process warms the body mildly and comfortably, leading to relaxation by shifting autonomic nervous system activity from sympathetic to parasympathetic predominance through sensory nerve endings and increased levels of β -endorphins.[2]

At the same time that relaxation is enhanced, far infrared sauna therapy improves heart and lung function, aiding the endothelial cells that line the inside of blood vessels.[2,3] Meanwhile, the induction of sweating can lead to additional infrared sauna benefits.

Sweating is itself a very therapeutic process that can increase detoxification.[4] The skin is a major organ of detoxification and sweating through the skin allows for the excretion of a vast array of toxins. Studies have confirmed that people's levels of many toxins diminish with therapy to induce sweating.[5]

Researchers from Kagoshima University Faculty of Medicine in Japan have developed a specific therapy using far infrared saunas. The therapeutic process involves warming the entire body in an infrared sauna for about 15 minutes. After the deep-body temperature has increased, the patient exits the sauna and the soothing warmth effects are sustained by resting under blankets for an additional 30 minutes. After that, the patient is given water in an amount that corresponds to body weight lost via perspiration. The therapy is typically performed once a day for three to five days a week over the course of two to six weeks.[6]

A number of human studies have been published over the last few years showing that this particular form of infrared sauna therapy is an effective **treatment for a wide range of medical conditions** including:

- congestive heart failure[2,7]
- **fibromyalgia**[8]
- peripheral artery disease[9]
- chronic obstructive pulmonary disease[3,10]
- Sjogren's syndrome[6]

Infrared sauna for fatigue

In the latest study, the researchers tested whether this protocol for infrared sauna benefits patients with chronic fatigue syndrome.[1] Ten patients stayed in a 60°C far infrared sauna for 15 minutes and then rested on a bed under a blanket for an additional 30 minutes outside the sauna room.

The treatments were performed once a day, five days a week for four weeks. Perceived fatigue was evaluated using a numerical rating scale before, during, and after therapy. Pain level, mood, and other symptoms were also assessed before and after therapy.

Perceived fatigue levels significantly decreased after therapy. On a scale of 1 to 10, the average level of fatigue was reduced from 6.7 to 4.8. Negative mood, including anxiety and depression, significantly improved after therapy. In addition, the patients' ability to carry on normal social life and work activities significantly improved. No patients reported any adverse effects during the therapy.

How to use infrared sauna therapy for chronic fatigue

These study results suggest that far infrared sauna benefits may include reductions in common symptoms of chronic fatigue syndrome, including fatigue and mood symptoms. Indeed, many natural health practitioners and integrative physicians recommend infrared sauna therapy for their patients with chronic fatigue and other chronic health conditions.

If you or someone you care about suffers from chronic fatigue, regular use of an infrared sauna can be a gentle but effective natural therapy that is an excellent complement to a comprehensive chronic fatigue treatment protocol. Aim for 15 minutes in a far infrared sauna followed by a 30 minute rest under some blankets along with a large glass of filtered water.

Originally published in 2015, this post has been updated.

[1] **Intern Med. 2015;54(3):333-8.**

[2] **Int Heart J. 2015;56(2):203-8.**

[3] **Int J Chron Obstruct Pulmon Dis. 2014; 9: 9–15.**

[4] **Altern Med Rev. 2011 Sep;16(3):215-25.**

[5] **J Environ Public Health. 2012; 2012: 356798.**

[6] **Kagoshima University Faculty of Medicine. Waon Therapy.** What is Waon Therapy. (Accessed June 30, 2015).

[7] **J Environ Public Health. 2012; 2012: 356798.**

[8] **J Cardiol. 2009 Apr;53(2):214-8.**

[9] **Intern Med. 2008;47(16):1473-6.**

[10] **J Am Coll Cardiol. 2007 Nov 27;50(22):2169-71.**

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