

The value of infra-red saunas in detoxification of heavy metals.

A lot is talked about the toxicity of heavy metals and how this compromises the immune system, causing a lot of the symptoms that are synonymous with chronic fatigue syndromes; dizziness, cold hands and feet, brain fog, etc. In recent months we have heard a lot about chelation therapy (pronounced 'key-lation) which aims to enhance the detoxification of the body by binding to heavy metals and transporting them out through the kidneys in urine. EDTA is one such chelator promoted by Dr Garry Gordon in the USⁱ and Dr. Mercola promotes his own range of products as do several UK suppliersⁱⁱ. We know that these work but they are very expensive and they mean you have to take a lot of tablets which may be difficult if you are already taking supplements. So, what are the alternatives?

One that I think is not so commonly known about is the far infra-red (FIR) sauna which is particularly good way of detoxing for slow metabolisers (people whose detox channels may already be compromised or whose enzyme systems are genetically less active). Compared to a traditional sauna which operates at around 80-90 °C, infrared saunas are low heat saunas that operate at 40-50°C. Which, if you're anything like me and find it difficult to tolerate the heat and steam of a traditional sauna, is a considerable advantage. According to Scientific American the difference is "Instead of heating the air with a powerful heating element, infrared saunas use infrared radiation to heat the body directly, which is more efficient and uses much less energy than a traditional sauna. In an infrared sauna, the IR radiation emitted from ceramic plates penetrates the outer two inches of your body, where it is converted into heat energy and stimulates the sweat glands. Since the air in an IR sauna does not feel hot, like in a traditional sauna, there is no shock to the cardiovascular system; you feel comfortable warmth as opposed to the intense, burning heat of a traditional sauna, and you sweat profusely. You will actually start sweating before you feel warm (I can corroborate this – my experience is that the sweating begins almost immediately – although this ability is variable and depends on how much toxic load you have).

Most people cannot tolerate the high heat of a traditional sauna long enough to break into a significant sweat, hence the development of the infrared variety. Since sweat is a major route of elimination, the IR sauna "detoxifies" the body by enhancing sweating. The IR sauna also stimulates lipolysis (breakdown of fat). Heavy metals are stored in our fat tissue. Gradual fat breakdown releases them to the circulatory system for excretion by the liver, kidneys, or sweat, depending on the metabolic processes that act on the "toxin" in question. Sauna therapy is not just for detoxification however. There are many articles on PubMed of studies on its clinical application in pain management and cardiovascular disease.

If you are concerned that they cost a lot then you should be pleasantly surprised. You can buy the portable (collapsible material) type for just over £100. To buy a more permanent wooden structure will cost more but you can get good second hand ones for around £500. Obviously it depends on size and quality. Running costs are also surprisingly low as the ceramic heating element is around 1400W

A few caveats; firstly more is not necessarily better. According to Dr Brian Clement, head of the world-famous Hippocrates Instituteⁱⁱⁱ "if you've never taken a sauna before, you only want to spend a few minutes in there—about four minutes tops. Then, for each subsequent sauna, add about 30 seconds, and slowly work your way up to somewhere between 15 to 30 minutes". What can happen if you overdo is that you will overwhelm your detoxification mechanisms and become quite unwell. This happened to me when I had my first sauna in a spa – because I'd paid to be there for the day I thought I'd make the most of it. I came away feeling great – I'd spent probably around 2 hours in there all told. But the next day my

fibroid was painfully enlarged and I felt very sluggish. (Fibroids are another sign of toxicity – usually heavy metals – stored in the fatty tissue of the uterine fibroid). It took me nearly a week to get back to normal.

Also, be aware that a lot of sauna manufacturer's claims are unfounded- the idea that you sweat 20% toxins has not been proven and is a bit unlikely. It does certainly enhance fat soluble toxin removal from your body – apart from heavy metals that includes pesticides, PCB's, POP's (persistent organic pollutants), *and* some minerals like calcium – but usually it will be the non-natural forms added to foods rather than natural calcium which means it is not a problem. However, you should always replenish your body afterwards – "The three electrolytes that you need to take when you're taking saunas, are calcium, magnesium, and potassium... These should be whole food ionic forms...."ⁱⁱⁱ Chemical supplements like those sold in supermarkets are often made of petrochemicals and non-assimilable forms– try the wholefood varieties instead like chlorella, kelp, raw cacao, maca, etc. Mineral water can also be beneficial, especially those containing electrolytes as can spraying with Magnesium oil (hydrolysed spray version absorbed by the skin – better if your gut is compromised).

You can also boost the detox effect by getting a massage just after the sauna. In my practice I have installed a sauna that people can have a look at prior to buying one for themselves – it is not a good idea to share a sauna – this can be a problem in spa's where they are not cleaned regularly enough. If someone's sweat is in there make sure you sit on towels and wipe down afterwards (and shower of course). If you do have a massage make sure you don't go for the sometimes heavily perfumed/ chemical products made by the big companies to entice you. I use only natural massage wax in my clinic made with natural essential oils and which doesn't go everywhere (often a problem when hot) and usually magnesium spray as it adds a lovely muscle relaxant effect. This is particularly valuable for my Fibromyalgia clients whose muscles are often in spasm.

Please also note that the sauna will not necessarily replace a full detoxification protocol if you are unwell with CFRS, which represents a high level of toxicity. You should consult a nutritional therapist in conjunction with your sauna use in order to maintain a controlled detoxification process AND look at your stress issues with a psychotherapist. Better still consult a qualified Chrysalis Effect Practitioner or similar who deals with all these issues together I am one – see my specialist website for more details (www.mecfsrecovery.co.uk)

ⁱ <http://www.gordonresearch.com/index.cfm?siteId=502&itemCategory=46421&priorId=0>

ⁱⁱ I use www.revital.com

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2012/03/21/dr-clement-on-detoxification.aspx>