

HOW TO ENJOY THE BEST IN SAUNAS... THE FINNISH WAY

Every sauna enthusiast will develop their own style once fully acquainted and confident with the sauna process. There are no fixed rules to follow for enjoying the sauna -everyone should be free to experiment to get the maximum enjoyment out of their sauna.

This also applies to sauna "regulars". There are nights when you just can't take it as hot, as well as days when you wonder how you found all of your extra energy. The sauna can be relaxing or invigorating - depending on you. One should never take more heat than is comfortable and enjoyable and never, ever push the limits of endurance.

BEFORE YOU START

1. Be prepared to give the sauna plenty of time to do its work - a leisurely sauna is far more beneficial. One to 2 1/2 hours of time is ideal for total relaxation. A number of sessions can be spent in the sauna with short, cooling-off and rest periods in between. A longer drying off and rest period is very relaxing once the sauna is finished.

2. Always wait at least one hour after eating a large meal before using the sauna. Some people find that a sauna first thing in the morning is very invigorating and a great way to start the day. Another ideal time is in the evening - it beats any sedative.

3. Preheat the sauna to a temperature of your liking by setting the thermostat. Most regular sauna users enjoy the heat around 180F (82C) although the popular temperature range is from 170 to 190 F (77C to 88C).

4. Bathers not accustomed to sauna heat should start at a lower temperature around 160F (70C) and allow their capacity for enjoying hotter temperatures to develop. Take as much heat as you find comfortable.

5. Wear as little as possible - preferably nothing. A loose towel can be used if necessary. Remove watches, pendants, bracelets, earrings, jewelry and glasses that would become uncomfortably hot in the sauna.

6. CAUTION - If you have any medical condition or disorder, you should consult your doctor before using the sauna if you are not accustomed to it.

THE SAUNA WAY

7. Many bathers start with a brief warm shower to wash off body oils and dirt.

8. Enter the sauna and relax on the top level for 10 to 15 minutes (or the lower level if you prefer moderate heat). Many bathers spend about half of their total time lying down. A large towel placed under you will preserve the cedar appearance and absorb sweat. The dry heat will increase the blood circulation and will eventually bring the body to the perspiration point. Otherwise, do not expect to perspire heavily in the dry heat of the first session.

Do not stay longer than 30 minutes - the sauna is not a test of toughness. Any exposure beyond that time can become hazardous as well as beyond all levels of comfort and enjoyment.

The feet should be raised above head level by using permanent foot rests installed on the wall or by placing a portable foot rest under the ankles. Portable back and head rests are ideal for greater levels of personal comfort and enjoyment and are available from Homecraft.

9. Shower again, or take a cool refreshing swim (hardy types may take an icy dip or a roll in fresh snow). Sudden temperature changes can be bracing and invigorating. Any extreme cold must be followed by sauna heat to avoid catching a chill.

10. Rest for 10 to 15 minutes to allow your body to cool down slowly and then repeat the cycle of heat, shower and rest.

11. When returning to the sauna, throw on several scoops of water with the sauna ladle to increase the humidity in the room. Bringing the humidity level from a low 5 to 8% to a more comfortable 15% will allow your skin to remain completely wet with perspiration. You should develop a heat and humidity combination that will bring you the most enjoyment. Some bathers will like it super-dry and some will like it quite humid.

12. The birch wisk or "vihta" can now be used to stimulate the blood circulation on the skin. Whisking the entire body will also induce very heavy perspiration (as a result of the heat and the exertion).

13. Once the body is warm, the pores of the skin will be completely open. This is the time to vigorously scrub the entire body clean. Don't forget to offer to wash your companion's back.

14. Experienced sauna users know that the final cleansing of the skin and pores happens during the heat of the sauna session that follows a vigorous wash.

15. The last shower should be a warm one followed by a cooler shower to close the pores of your skin without chilling the body. Avoid extreme coolness or drafts until the body has returned to normal temperature.

AFTER THE SAUNA

16. Your body should be allowed to dry without hard towelling. Give yourself at least 20 minutes to relax and cool down before getting dressed. If you are at home, you will be able to climb right into bed for a very deep and refreshing sleep.

17. A light snack is often served after the sauna. Small salty sausages or crackers are delicious with a refreshing cool beverage. The body will need to replace the water and salts that were lost during the sauna.

18. Lighting in and around the sauna should be subdued to develop greater levels of relaxation. Soft background music is also ideal.

19. The sauna is recommended for those suffering from tension, adolescent skin problems, tiredness or those having trouble sleeping soundly. Arthritis and rheumatism sufferers as well as those with sore muscles and joints from physical over exertion, will find the sauna heat very relaxing.