

THE NORDEN SOUL GUIDE

The Benefits of Daily Sauna Usage.

What the research says about heat therapy, recovery, and long-term wellness — explained in plain language.

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The Benefits of Daily Sauna Usage

A PLAIN-LANGUAGE LOOK AT THE RESEARCH

Sauna use has been part of daily life in Nordic countries for centuries, but it's only in the last couple of decades that researchers have started studying, in large populations and over long periods of time, what regular sauna use is actually associated with. This guide walks through what that research has found, written in plain terms — along with honest context about what the studies can and can't tell us, and how to use a sauna safely.

This guide is for general educational purposes only and is not medical advice. It does not replace guidance from your doctor. A full disclaimer and safety precautions are included at the end of this guide — please read them before starting a sauna practice, especially if you are pregnant or managing a health condition.

01 Heart Health

The most extensively studied benefit of sauna use is cardiovascular health. The largest body of evidence comes from the Kuopio Ischaemic Heart Disease Risk Factor (KIHD) Study, which followed over 2,300 middle-aged Finnish men for roughly two decades, tracking how often they used a sauna and what happened to their long-term health.

~50%

Lower risk of fatal cardiovascular disease among men who used a sauna 4–7 times per week, compared to those who used one once a week.

The same study found a similar pattern for all-cause mortality — frequent sauna users had a meaningfully lower risk of dying from any cause during the follow-up period. Researchers believe part of the effect comes from how sauna heat mimics moderate exercise: heart rate can rise to 100–150 beats per minute during a session, similar to a brisk walk or light jog.

Laukkanen T, et al. "Association Between Sauna Bathing and Fatal Cardiovascular and All-Cause Mortality Events." JAMA Internal Medicine, 2015.

02 Blood Pressure

Using the same long-term Finnish population, researchers also looked specifically at hypertension (high blood pressure) — a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke on its own.

~46%

Lower risk of developing hypertension among frequent sauna users (4–7x/week) versus infrequent users (1x/week), over roughly 22 years of follow-up.

Kunutsor SK, et al. "Sauna Bathing Reduces the Risk of Hypertension." American Journal of Hypertension, 2017.

03 Brain Health & Memory

Perhaps the most striking findings relate to long-term cognitive health. In a follow-up analysis of the KIHHD cohort, researchers tracked which participants went on to develop dementia or Alzheimer's disease over the following two decades.

66% / 65%

Lower risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease, respectively, among men who used a sauna 4–7 times per week compared to once a week.

Researchers theorize that improved cardiovascular and circulatory health — which directly affects blood flow to the brain — may explain much of this association, though the exact mechanism is still being studied.

Laukkanen T, et al. "Sauna Bathing Is Inversely Associated with Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease in Middle-Aged Finnish Men." Age and Ageing, 2017.

04 Stroke Risk

A separate analysis of the same population looked at stroke specifically, and found that more frequent sauna use was associated with a notably lower risk of stroke over the study period, with the strongest association again seen among the most frequent users. As with the other findings in this guide, this is an observed association in a specific population, not a guarantee for any individual.

Kunutsor SK, et al. "Sauna Bathing Reduces the Risk of Stroke in Finnish Men and Women." Neurology, 2018.

05 Respiratory Health

The same long-term research group found that frequent sauna bathers had meaningfully lower rates of respiratory conditions such as pneumonia and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), compared to infrequent users. Researchers suggest the heat and steam may help clear airways and reduce inflammation, though this remains an active area of study.

Kunutsor SK, et al. "Sauna Bathing and Risk of Respiratory Diseases: A Long-Term Prospective Cohort Study." European Journal of Epidemiology, 2017.

06 Muscle Recovery & Exercise Performance

This is a newer and less settled area of research than the cardiovascular findings above. Heat exposure is known to trigger the production of heat shock proteins, which play a role in repairing damaged muscle tissue. Some smaller studies in exercise physiology suggest post-workout heat exposure may reduce perceived muscle soreness and support recovery between training sessions, but the evidence base is still developing and results vary between studies. We mention it here because it's a common reason people use a sauna — not because the research is as conclusive as the cardiovascular findings above.

07 Sleep & Stress

Many regular sauna users report falling asleep faster and sleeping more soundly on days they use the sauna, particularly in the evening. One proposed mechanism: body temperature naturally drops as part of the process of falling asleep, and the rapid cool-down after a hot sauna session may help trigger that drop. Sauna use is also widely reported to reduce subjective stress and improve mood, likely related to the release of endorphins during heat exposure. These effects are harder to measure with the same precision as cardiovascular outcomes, so we present them as commonly reported rather than statistically proven at the same level as the sections above.

08 What "Regular Use" Means in the Research

It's worth being precise about what the studies above actually measured, so this guide doesn't overstate what a single sauna session can do. The strongest associations in the Finnish research were seen in people who used a traditional sauna (roughly 174–212°F / 80–100°C) for about 15–20 minutes per session, 4 to 7 times per week, over many years. Occasional or one-time use was not the group studied, and results in other populations, climates, or sauna types (such as infrared) have not been studied on the same scale. Consistency over time, not a single session, is what the research actually reflects.

09 Using a Sauna Safely

Sauna use is safe for most healthy adults, but a few basic guidelines go a long way:

- Stay hydrated before, during, and after your session — heat exposure increases fluid loss through sweat.
 - If you're new to sauna use, start with shorter sessions (10–15 minutes) and build up gradually as your tolerance increases.
 - Avoid alcohol or sedatives before or during a session — they increase the risk of dehydration, low blood pressure, and fainting.
 - Exit immediately if you feel dizzy, lightheaded, nauseous, or unwell.
 - Avoid sauna use if you have a fever or active illness.
 - Cool down gradually after your session rather than jumping straight into an ice-cold shower if you're new to heat therapy.
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10 Who Should Talk to a Doctor First

Check with your physician before starting a sauna practice if any of the following apply to you:

- You are pregnant.
- You have cardiovascular disease, uncontrolled high or low blood pressure, or have had a recent heart attack or stroke.
- You take medications that affect blood pressure, heart rate, or hydration (including diuretics), as these can increase the risk of dizziness or fainting in heat.
- You have a chronic respiratory, kidney, or other condition affecting your heart or circulation.
- You are supervising a child's use of the sauna — children regulate heat differently than adults and should always be supervised, with shorter session times.

Full Disclaimer

This guide is provided by Norden Soul for general educational and informational purposes only. It summarizes publicly available research and is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease, and it does not constitute medical advice. The studies referenced were conducted on specific populations (primarily middle-aged adults in Finland using traditional saunas) under specific conditions, and individual results will vary. Association is not the same as causation, and no outcome is guaranteed for any individual. Always consult a licensed healthcare provider before beginning any new wellness or heat-therapy routine, particularly if you are pregnant, nursing, managing a chronic health condition, or taking medication. Norden Soul and VILDEN make no representations or warranties regarding specific individual health outcomes from sauna use.

REFS Sources Cited in This Guide

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