



Sweating Your Way to Health

by Keith Waller

Anyone who has enjoyed a spa sauna knows how soothing and relaxing the heat can be, and how it helps to flush out pores with free flowing sweat. In fact, a good cleansing sweat can be a welcome ritual after a hard workout, and a healthful way to create an artificial fever when sinus and cold symptoms aggravate respiration.

South Carolina, possibly due to the lack of powdery snow, or little enthusiasm for birch flogging and steamed vodka. Even so, the health benefits of a sauna's heat endure, though in a more genteel and gracious southern style.

In our modern, energy conscious world, heating a room to 200 degrees seems wasteful and foolish, but tech-

Only 20% of conventional sauna's heat energy penetrates the skin past a shallow depth, but 93% of FIR heat energy penetrates deeply into joints, blood vessels, fat and muscles.

Though similar, the hot Finnish Sauna has a history that may be less familiar. Historically, old Finnish saunas were log- or wood-lined buildings, kept hot inside with rocks heated over a fire beforehand. The entire family would gather, naked, in the sauna, while they flogged one another with birch or eucalyptus branches (gulp!). For a shocking burst of heat and steam, water would be thrown on the hot rocks, sometimes along with a small amount of vodka for a quick high. Once thoroughly steamed, heated and fumed with vodka, the family would race naked from the sauna to roll in the powdery snow. This process was repeated, again and again, often to exhaustion.

This tradition never caught on in

nology offers a better alternative. We are already familiar with radiant heat, and sometimes used in home heating where the floor or ceiling is warmed in order to save energy while achieving the same comfortable ambiance. A high-tech version of this principle is the Far Infra Red, or FIR, heated sauna. Instead of heating a room full of air, FIR uses invisible radiant heat, like the warmth you feel when passing by a hot oven. This type of heat warms more deeply and safely than heating an entire room, and uses a fraction of the energy.

FIR heat isn't space age technology, but is simply focused radiant heat, and your own body radiates FIR energy, too. When this energy is amplified and directed back to the body, it seems to

have regenerative and health boosting effects. Things such as increased blood flow, pain relief and weight loss are often experienced, as well as the generally relaxing effects of warmth and the opening of the skin's sweat pores.

Ambient air temperature in the FIR sauna may only measure just over 100 degrees, but the radiant heat penetrates the skin and body more deeply than that in a traditional sauna, providing increased circulation and warmth to joints and deep tissues. This is of particular interest to those suffering from joint pain. Only 20% of conventional sauna's heat energy penetrates the skin past a shallow depth, but 93% of FIR heat energy penetrates deeply into joints, blood vessels, fat and muscles.

The calories expended by the body in an FIR sauna are equal to a traditionally heated sauna as well. This means that a 20 to 40 minute sauna session is roughly equivalent to running several miles or rowing a boat for 30 minutes. The deep heating effects of FIR reach down into fat cells, bringing them to a more liquid state, and along with increased circulation, add up to a formula for more effective weight loss. And let's not discount the positive effects that sweating has on the skin or the physical benefits of the detox aspect of a sauna, especially when combined with drinking plenty of pure water and following it with a massage.

"It has awesome benefits," says Mary Whitlock of Atlanta, who uses FIR saunas at home and on the Grand Strand when she vacations here. "I had terrible back pain from an injury, and the heat from the sauna, along with massage, is the only thing that works for me." Mary, who also rides motorcycles, explained that heat and massage treatments made it possible for her to ride again without pain. "I tried a Jacuzzi and hot saunas, but the FIR was better, and I've been using it for several years now." She takes the therapy seriously to keep the pain at bay. "You're gonna sweat," she says, "but after the heat and the massage, I'm totally relaxed and it is gradually helping me heal."

For information and to try FIR sauna and massage contact Rebecca Jennings, LMT at M.I.S.C. Studio in Murrells Inlet, (843) 651-7809. See ad page 35.