



## Health Advice

# Sweat and boost your immune system

In Finland, the sauna has a long tradition, not only in winter. For the Finns, saunas are mainly about relaxation and fun. They meet friends at the sauna or invite guests to their saunas at home. Regular visits to the sauna not only put us in a good mood on cold winter days, but also have a positive effect on our health: Finnish studies show that they can reduce the risk of high blood pressure or cardiovascular disease and can strengthen the immune system. The warmth and time out in a sauna do us good – and keep us fit at the same time. A study found that a visit to the sauna is just as demanding on the body as a moderate exercise programme. This can have a positive effect on our pulse and blood pressure. “A visit to the sauna puts a strain on our body. In the long term, the positive effects are similar to those of sport,” explains sports scientist Dr. Sascha Ketelhut, head of the study at the University of Halle-Wittenberg.

### What happens to our body in the sauna

Our body wants to stay at a temperature of 37 degrees at all times. But when we visit a sauna at 70 to 80 degrees for 15 to 20 minutes, the temperature on our skin rises by about ten degrees and our body temperature by up to two degrees. This is the same as a medium to high fever. So that we don't overheat, our body releases the heat through our skin by sweating. It is only the process of cooling down afterwards that brings our body temperature back to normal. So it's not the heat alone, but above all alternating between hot and cold when we visit a sauna that has a positive effect on our immune system. Those who go to the sauna once or twice a week can therefore prevent colds, flu-like infections and respiratory infections, according to the German Sauna Association.

What's more, visiting the sauna can relieve pain, reduce stress, improve blood circulation to the skin and mucous membranes and boost the immune system.

### Sauna for everyone? You should bear the following points in mind

- “Anyone who can tolerate moderate physical exertion without feeling any pain can go to the sauna,” explains Sascha Ketelhut from the University of Halle-Wittenberg.
- When you're in the sauna, pay close attention to how long you feel comfortable in the heat.
- When you leave the sauna, first cool down slowly, for example in the cold air outside, and only then take a cold shower to avoid putting too much strain on your heart and circulation with a sudden difference in temperature.
- Finally, make sure you take time to give your body a rest.
- By the way, you should definitely avoid the sauna if you have a flu-like infection or a fever. If you have any pre-existing conditions, it is a good idea to consult your doctor first.