How to Do a Sauna and Cold Dip Session Safely

Why Pair Heat and Cold?

Moving between a hot sauna and a cold lake has become a popular way to refresh both body and mind. The contrast wakes up your circulation, eases muscle tension, and can leave you feeling clear-headed and energised. But the practice is more than just hopping from one extreme to the other. Done without care, the shock of cold water after intense heat can strain your system. This article walks through the steps of a safe sauna and cold dip session, with practical tips on what to watch at each stage.

Step 1: Prepare Before You Arrive

Preparation starts at home. Drink plenty of water in the hours before your session. Sauna heat makes you sweat, and cold water immersion increases your metabolic rate, both of which use up fluids. Avoid alcohol and heavy meals beforehand. Alcohol can impair your judgment and affect your body's ability to regulate temperature, while a full stomach diverts blood flow to digestion when you need it elsewhere.

Pack the essentials: swimwear, a large towel for drying off, and a smaller towel to sit on in the sauna. A dry towel between you and the bench keeps the surface clean and prevents burns from hot wood. Bring a water bottle and, if you like, a hat or a warm robe for the time between dips on cooler days. Leave metal jewellery and watches at home; they heat up quickly in the sauna and can cause burns.

Step 2: Start with a Warm-Up

Do not jump straight into the sauna at full heat. Instead, begin with a short warm-up. A gentle walk around the lake or some light stretching gets your blood moving and tells your body that a change is coming. If the air temperature is cool, spend a few minutes outside to let your skin adjust. This reduces the shock when you step into the sauna and helps your cardiovascular system adapt more smoothly.

View the location on Google Maps

Step 3: Enter the Sauna Gradually

When you enter the sauna, choose a lower bench for your first round. Heat rises, so the higher benches are hotter. Sit or lie down comfortably, place your sitting towel on the bench, and close the door behind you. Breathe slowly and evenly. Your first session should be short: five to eight minutes is enough for most people. Listen to your body. If you feel dizzy, nauseous, or

uncomfortably light-headed, step out immediately. Those sensations mean you are pushing too hard or staying too long.

During the sauna, hydrate by sipping water. Do not pour water on the heater stones until you have settled in and know how the steam affects you. A sudden burst of steam can feel intense and may be overwhelming on your first go.

Step 4: Cool Down Before the Cold Dip

After leaving the sauna, do not run straight into the lake. Your skin is hot, your blood vessels are dilated, and your heart rate is elevated. A direct plunge can cause a rapid spike in blood pressure and put stress on your heart. Instead, cool down in stages. Walk outside for a minute or two. Let the air cool your skin. Splash cool water on your arms and legs. Sit on the edge of the lake and dip your feet in. This gradual approach gives your body time to start constricting blood vessels and preparing for the cold.

Step 5: Enter the Cold Water Slowly

When you are ready for the cold dip, enter the water slowly. Wade in rather than diving or jumping. Let the water reach your waist first, then your chest. Take slow, controlled breaths. The initial shock can make you gasp, which is dangerous if your face is underwater. A technique called the "calm breath" helps: inhale through your nose for a count of four, then exhale through your mouth for a count of six. Repeat this several times as you go deeper.

Stay in the cold water for a short duration only. For a first session, one to two minutes is plenty. Even experienced cold dippers rarely stay in longer than five minutes unless they have built up tolerance over many sessions. If you start shivering uncontrollably, or if your fingers and toes become numb, get out right away. Those are signs that your body is losing heat faster than it can produce it.

Step 6: Warm Up Again, Gently

Once you exit the cold water, dry off quickly with your towel and put on a robe or warm clothes. Do not rush back into the sauna. Walk around gently, do some light movement, and let your body temperature stabilise. Many people like to repeat the cycle two or three times, but each round should follow the same careful steps: sauna, gradual cool-down, slow cold dip, and a gentle warm-up in between.

If you choose to go back into the sauna, your second session can be slightly longer than the first, but still keep it under 15 minutes. Overheating is a real risk, especially if you are tired or dehydrated. Always keep your water bottle nearby and sip regularly.

What to Watch For During the Session

Safety is about noticing small signals before they become problems. Here are a few things to keep an eye on:

- **Dizziness or light-headedness:** This can happen if you stay in the sauna too long or stand up too quickly. Sit or lie down, drink water, and step outside to cool off.
- **Nausea:** A sign that your body is struggling with the heat. Leave the sauna immediately and rest in a cool spot.
- **Intense shivering after the cold dip:** Your body is trying to generate heat by contracting muscles. If shivering does not stop within a few minutes of drying and dressing, you stayed in too long. Warm up slowly with movement and warm drinks.
- **Numbness in extremities:** Cold water constricts blood flow to your fingers and toes. If you lose feeling, get out and warm them gradually. Do not use hot water to rewarm; it can cause tissue damage. Gentle rubbing or warm air is safer.
- **Chest pain or palpitations:** The sudden change in temperature can affect heart rhythm in some people. If you feel any chest discomfort, stop the session and seek medical advice if it persists.

Who Should Avoid Sauna and Cold Dips

Sauna and cold water immersion are not for everyone. People with heart conditions, high or low blood pressure, epilepsy, or respiratory issues should check with a doctor before trying this practice. Pregnant women are generally advised to avoid extreme temperature changes. If you have a fever, an infection, or an open wound, wait until you are fully recovered. The cold water can slow healing and the sauna can dehydrate you further.

If you are new to sauna and cold dips, it is wise to go with an experienced friend or attend a session run by people who know the local conditions. A supervised setting gives you a chance to learn the rhythm safely. For example, Live Lagom runs a wood-fired outdoor sauna on the shore of Brackley Lake, near Bawnboy, Co. Cavan, where guests move between the sauna heat and optional cold dips in the lake at their own pace. The weekend sessions provide a structured environment with the lake right there, making it a good place to try the practice for the first time.

After the Session: Recovery and Rehydration

Once your final round is done, take time to recover. Drink water or an electrolyte drink to replace what you lost through sweat. Eat a light meal with some protein and carbohydrates to

help your muscles recover. Rest for a while before driving or doing anything demanding. Your body has been through a series of temperature shifts, and it needs time to reset.

Live Lagom Sauna is also on Instagram.

Some people feel euphoric after a sauna and cold dip session. That feeling comes from a release of endorphins and a drop in cortisol. It is pleasant, but it can also make you underestimate how tired you actually are. Be kind to yourself for the rest of the day. A warm shower, a comfortable chair, and a good book are often the best follow-up.

For those who want to explore this practice regularly, building a routine is key. Start with one round per session and gradually increase the number of rounds over weeks, not days. Pay attention to how your body responds each time. The goal is not to endure discomfort but to feel refreshed and in control.

If you are looking for a place to begin, Live Lagom Sauna at 47RX+3R location on N87, Lake Car Park, Brackley, Bawnboy, Co. Cavan, Ireland, offers weekend sessions where you can experience the sauna and lake cold dip safely. You can reach them at +353 83 022 5026 for more information.