

THERAPY: INFRARED SAUNA

CONDITION: CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH

ARTICLE LINK: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2718593/>

Far-infrared saunas for treatment of cardiovascular risk factors - summary of published evidence

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE

To review the literature about the health benefits of far-infrared sauna (FIRS) use.

QUALITY OF EVIDENCE

A search of Web of Science, EBSCO, Ovid MEDLINE, Ovid HealthSTAR, and EMBASE using the terms *far-infrared* and *sauna*, refined by limiting the search to studies of humans published in English, yielded 9 relevant papers (level I or level II evidence).

MAIN MESSAGE

Far-infrared saunas are approved by the Canadian Standards Association and are sold to the public. The manufacturers claim numerous health benefits; however, the published evidence to substantiate these claims is limited.

Four papers support the use of FIRS therapy for those with congestive heart failure and 5 papers support its use for those with coronary risk factors.

CONCLUSION

There is limited moderate evidence supporting FIRS efficacy in normalizing blood pressure and treating congestive heart failure; fair evidence, from a single study, supporting FIRS therapy in chronic pain; weak evidence, from a single study, supporting FIRS therapy in chronic fatigue syndrome; weak evidence, from a single study, supporting FIRS therapy for obesity; and consistent fair evidence to refute claims regarding the role of FIRSs in cholesterol reduction.

EDITOR'S KEY POINTS

Because infrared heat penetrates more deeply than warmed air, users of far-infrared saunas (FIRSs) develop a more vigorous sweat at a lower temperature than users of traditional saunas. The cardiovascular demand imparted by thermoregulatory homeostasis is similar to that achieved by walking at a moderate pace. As such, FIRSs might be of particular benefit to those who are sedentary due to various medical conditions like osteoarthritis or cardiovascular or respiratory problems.

Although the evidence is limited, it does suggest a number of benefits of FIRS use, including effects on systolic hypertension, New York Heart Association class and clinical symptoms of congestive heart failure, premature ventricular contractions, brain natriuretic peptide levels, vascular endothelial function, exercise tolerance, oxidative stress, chronic pain, and possibly weight loss and chronic fatigue. No adverse events were reported in any of the studies.

All of the studies reviewed are limited by small sample sizes, short duration, unvalidated symptom scales, the fact that they were conducted by the same core research group, and the fact that many relied on captive hospitalized populations.