What 20 Minutes in a Sauna Does to Your Body That No Pill Can Replicate Transcript

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Introduction and Guest Background

Hi everyone and welcome to the Future of Menopause Summit. I'm your co-host, Doctor Ben, and I'm joined today by a very special guest, Tess Harris. Tess is a sauna enthusiast at High Tech Health with a background in biochemistry, and she is the senior product specialist at High Tech Health, which makes state of the art far infrared saunas, two of which we have here in our clinic we absolutely love.

Tess, thank you so much for joining us today. We are very, very grateful and excited to have you here to share some of your expertise with us and knowledge.

Welcome. Thank you, Doctor Ben, I'm very excited to be here and share what I know about saunas. All right. So I guess a good place to start is can you tell us, give us a little bit of a background on your company and just, you know, a little bit of a philosophy or your company's expertise as far as you know, how you make your saunas, how you design them?

Absolutely. So we're based in Boulder, Colorado. High Tech Health is one of the oldest sonic companies in the US. We've been designing our own saunas since 1997, and very much a research based company.

So everybody here has a science or medical background. We're very informed by the clinical research about saunas and infrared saunas, and that really drives how we design our saunas.

What goes into them, the details in our technology. So there are a lot of distinctions about our saunas. And I, of course, love talking about all the research and benefits, so we'll share how it all ties together.

Awesome. So I guess a good place to start would be just to say generally or ask rather, what is an infrared sauna? How does it differ from traditional saunas that some people may be using or even, you know, a maybe kind of commonly convoluted therapy, red light therapy?

What Infrared Sauna Therapy Is

As far as you know, people thinking it's the same as like an infrared sauna. Can you, can you go into a little bit of detail on that, please? Yes, absolutely.

So first of all, talk about what an infrared sauna is. So infrared is a pretty wide range of energy that we get from the sun and farm, which is what we use in our our saunas, our heaters.

It has a direct heating effect on our body. So it's something called radiant heat. It's primarily when it touches or hits our skin. It's absorbed and it converts to heat.

And that is elevating our core body temperature as much as a traditional sauna does. And as quickly, the difference being a traditional sauna, we're using very, very hot air and essentially convection.

We're sitting in this hot air and that's what heats our body. Infrared sauna. We're using this radiant heat infrared sauna have been around for a long time.

They're used worldwide. There's clinical research dating back over 50 years. So they're widely used and established. And that is again that far infrared.

So another so infrared as a whole is a pretty wide range of wavelengths of energy that we get from the sun. Near infrared is shorter wavelengths. And that is typically we'll see red light therapy.

Photo by modulation is the type of therapy. So that is actually independent of heat. It affects different biochemical reactions in our cells. And red light therapy is often a term that means both near-infrared and visible red light.

But there can be there's a pretty broad range of products using photo by a modulation out there. Today it is different from sauna therapy. So today we're really here to talk about the benefits that come from the thermal therapy, raising our body temperature and all of the subsequent benefits we get from that.

Awesome. Can you share with us what the latest research is showing as far as the benefits of sauna therapy, you know, either for the general population or if there's more specific benefits for menopausal women.

Could you share some of that with us, please? Absolutely. So one of my favorite studies that I like to reference that really drew a lot of attention to sauna therapy was conducted in Finland with where they have a very large population of sauna users.

They're in almost every home, but typically traditional saunas. But this was a 20 year study following health outcomes for a very large population in Finland.

And they broke it into categories of folks who use saunas once or twice a week, or one times a week, 2 or 3 times a week, and then four or more times a week.

Research-Backed Health Benefits

And across the board, all of the sauna users had better long term health outcomes than the non sauna users, and the most frequent sauna users had the most significant health outcomes, so that really sparked a lot of attention.

The first of those studies was published in 2015, but we see lower risk of cardiovascular disease, heart attack, neurodegenerative diseases and all cause mortality.

So they really started to associate sauna use with better longevity. A lot of research since then has come out about how and why some of this we knew before, but this really sparked a lot of the attention on saunas and looking at what happens in our body.

So when we raise our body temperature quickly and repeatedly, we see some physiological things happen. Our cardiovascular system adapts, we see it mimics cardiovascular exercise, increases cardiac output, helps with endothelial function.

So keeping elasticity in the arteries and lowering blood pressure, we see on a baseline we see lowering inflammation. And we produce these proteins called heat shock proteins which are a type of protein, a chaperon protein in ourselves that they do a lot of protect and repair functions in our bodies, and they naturally make them our whole lives.

So we make more of them when we raise our body temperature. But our the amount we make declines as we age. And using saunas regularly, we increase the baseline of how many, how much of these proteins are or cells are making.

And that can sort of counteract some of the decline which these proteins do a lot of protect and repair. Essentially, they make ourselves more resilient to stress.

They're fixing damage. They're helping with just basically making our bodies more resilient to stress. So that's the sort of on the physiological like on the cellular level.

What we're seeing is happening when we use saunas regularly. And I can talk more about the specific findings, but it's pretty exciting. These heat shock proteins are associated with a lot of benefits that we get from soreness. So awesome.

Can you speak more specifically to what menopausal women are likely to notice as a result of using sauna therapy? Because, you know, I'm sure you're aware hot flashes are maybe the number one symptom that we see in menopausal women.

And it certainly would stand to reason that a menopausal women might say, well, hold on a minute, I'm already dealing with hot flashes. The last thing I want to do is get in the sauna.

Can you go explore that a little bit for us? Yeah, absolutely. It is counterintuitive to want to get in a sauna when you're dealing with hot flashes, but using saunas regularly actually helps with a better thermoregulation response in our bodies.

That's one of the things that happens with the frequency of use, is we actually deal with that better, and it can actually lower the incidence and intensity of hot flashes.

And so that is actually a really good benefit that we get from sauna therapies that better heat tolerance and better thermoregulation in our body. There are a lot of things I know.

So I already touched on cardiovascular benefits, low risk, you know, as as hormones change and drop, we can increase risk of cardiovascular disease. So it's on a therapy again already is helping maintain cardiac function and mimics cardiovascular exercise.

So using saunas actually while you're in there it's mimicking moderate cardiovascular exercise. There are a lot of cognitive benefits as well. I already mentioned lowering incidence of dementia.

That was up to 66% lower risk of dementia in the most frequent sauna users. But it increases BDNF, which is brain derived neurotrophic factor, which can help with neuroplasticity.

Better cognition increases endorphins, so mood feel good hormones. So that's another benefit we get from sauna therapy as we're aging in general and metabolic benefits so we burn calories when we're in the sauna.

Estimates between 300 to 600 calories in a single session, but it also increases our baseline metabolism. So again, as hormones change drop, we can see more higher incidence of metabolic conditions.

Heat shock proteins those magic little proteins are also associated with better insulin sensitivity. Let's see if I can talk about benefits all day. Probably one of the topics that is really one of my favorites to talk about is detoxification.

So we just in the world, we get a lot of exposure to environmental toxins and toxic hints, whether it's metals, food packaging, personal care products, clothing, you name it, air pollution, water sonnets.

Yep. Everywhere. Yeah. And a lot of the compounds that were exposed to can accumulate in our bodies in complex ways. And many of them are endocrine disrupting chemicals so they can interfere with hormones and saunas.

Menopause Relief and Hot Flash Support

So passive sweating, when we're not making all the byproducts of exercise, can be a very effective pathway for eliminating a lot of toxins from our body.

There's a really interesting category of research called blood urine, sweat studies comparing levels in our bloodstream to what we're excreting in urine, to what we're excreting in sweat.

And that was sweat from infrared sauna across the board. All heavy metals were found in the highest quantities in sweat, phthalates, other plasticizers, flame retardants like that are carbon treated with many pesticides.

Essentially everything they tested for, we found high quality sweat. So this can be a powerful tool to support

detoxification, lower our toxic burden.

There is a link between a higher toxic load and earlier onset of menopause, and also more intense symptoms during menopause. So detoxing can be a really effective tool for navigating menopause as well.

Absolutely, absolutely. I know you guys design your saunas to be very, very low EMF, which of course we love. You know, I would say most people are I would imagine are generally aware like, okay, high emfs bad.

And then, you know, the conversation kind of stops there. Can you explain to us, you know, why specifically for sauna therapy or even in general, if you like, why it is so important to have low EMF exposure in the sauna?

From the standpoint of the the difference in benefits you might see with one of your saunas versus one that maybe isn't focusing so much on reducing the EMF exposure.

Absolutely. This is a big topic and it can be a bit confusing. So when we're talking about EMF relevant to the saunas, the big deal usually comes from the heaters.

So the heaters are running on electricity. It's, you know, just like a desk lamp or a toaster hairdryer. This would be considered low frequency EMF. So it's actually two things, two parts of components that happen simultaneously electric fields and magnetic fields.

They're both happening. Together they can affect us through space. They particularly affect heart cells and brain cells. So what happens with the EMF exposure is it opens these channels on our cell membranes called voltage gated calcium channels.

It can flood ourselves with calcium. And that leads to oxidative stress or damage free radical formation. And those are the precursors for a lot of this other cellular stress.

Low EMF Design and Sauna Safety

So again, sauna therapy a big benefit is getting cellular stress. If we're sitting in a sauna where the heaters are generating very high EMF, we're really counteracting a lot of this benefit or diminishing how much of this benefit we can access.

A lot of the infrared sauna heaters and emitters are notorious for very high EMF. It can be a big problem. They're running a lot of power and we're sitting there.

To them, that is a huge differentiator with us. Our saunas, they're our own technology. They look quite different from other infrared. Sauna is on the market there.

There are a lot of differences in performance with our heaters as well. But solely talking about EMF, ours are the lowest in the industry for both the magnetic and electric field components.

We measure the whole surface of the heater, but we have multiple patents on it. Third party testing. The point that's confusing here is that most of the saunas on the market also advertise that they are low EMF, and many just talk about the magnetic field component, partly because the electric fields tend to be higher and harder to address.

So a lot of saunas that say low might not be low in both parts. As a whole, the industry has gotten better, but there's still nothing even close to the heaters we have in terms of lowering EMF throughout.

There's one more part to EMF, which is a third type, which maybe we hear about more in the narrative, which would be high frequency EMF. So SMF would be Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, cell signals, things like that.

We have a couple models of Banas. They all have the capability to connect for audio with Bluetooth if you want to play audio through your phone, and they all have an option to use it without Bluetooth turned on so you can

connect directly.

Our TRS sauna has an internet connection as well, enabling remote start and a lot of additional features. There's an option to connect with Ethernet, so you don't have to have the Wi-Fi and Bluetooth turned on and still get all this functionality for.

If it's too hard to put in that, we have other options like a smart EMF mode that removes all that when you start your session, but you still get the remote start capability.

So it's a priority for us every moment of our saunas. Yes, beautiful. I know my wife loves being able to play her own music while she's doing her sauna therapy, so that is a very nice bell and whistle you guys have on the song.

I'll say, definitely a huge fan of it. And notice on on your website you guys advertise what you call sauna fitness technology with your saunas. Can you explain that a little in a little bit more detail for us, please?

Yeah, absolutely. This is something that we've developed over the last several years, and it is our basically it is your own tracking technology. So based on a huge amount of clinical research on sauna therapy.

And again, I talked about that big study from Finland. And the most frequent users were seeing the most significant benefits. Well, it turns out something called heat acclimation or heat adaptation is when is how our body physiologically changes.

When we use saunas regularly, we sweat more, we sweat. Sooner we get the better thermoregulation. We get the increased baseline of heat shock proteins.

We really maximize all these benefits. So we built this technology that when you basically you set up a profile in the sauna and it's going to give you real time, very accurate, precise prediction of your core body temperature.

It's going to track your sessions and track your progression personally to getting heat acclimated. So this is our it's like a bio hackers technology where you get all the personal tracking.

It takes all the guesswork out of like, am I doing this right? How often I use it, when should I use it? It comes with the sauna guide calendar that's going to adapt to your use with recommendations to like when to use it next, for how long, the asset a week and come back.

It's going to adjust all the recommendations. So this really is the personal tracking for maximizing benefits. And that is our exclusive technology that I'm very excited about.

It's really taking again, all the guesswork out of it is showing you how to really make the most of the time. That is awesome. Are there any, I'll say, safety concerns or cautions or even just outright contraindications for sauna therapy that people should just generally be aware of?

Yeah. Thankfully, there are very few women who are pregnant and nursing should avoid saunas. They do not ever use a sauna with alcohol consumption. So those are sort of the big the big ones.

And then, you know, some heart conditions, very, very low blood pressure, hemophilia, most others. There are a few conditions where folks might be heat intolerant.

So that would be, of course, to speak with your doctor situation in general.

Sauna Fitness Technology and Usage Tips

If you do have any questions, we always recommend speaking with a doctor, but they're very safe for a wide population. And thankfully with infrared you have a lot more control over.

You can start with short sessions. You don't have to crank the heat up so high, so normal. Infrared session. You might sound at one 2140. It's not 170 to 200 so it can be more comfortable.

You can have a more of a gentle start and build up tolerance. Even folks who find that they have a hard time sweating, you can get to that better heat adapted state where you do sweat and can tolerate the sauna more, so they make it easier to like an easier introduction in general.

Awesome! You've already given us so much great information. As far as you know, the the far infrared light, the low EMF, the customizability with the sauna fitness technology that we want in our sauna.

I'm just curious, are there any other qualities that you would recommend people look for, or just generally be aware of when either you know, going to a med spa to use the sauna or their local gym, or buying one for home use.

Is there any other, you know, like I said, qualities that you would just advise people to be aware of look out for? Yes, absolutely. In terms of choosing a sauna for yourself, I think it's really important to focus on quality building materials.

We talked about EMF, of course, that is a big deal. Beyond that, construction materials not using synthetics. All of our saunas are 100% wood and there are 100% low VOC wood.

You're not getting out gassing from terpenes that can be linear tints and cause a strong would smell cedar and be common for that. This is a popular sauna behind me.

I believe that's what you have in the clinic as well. And we do 100% poplar construction, 100% single wood for all of our sounds. There's never plywood.

There's not wood glue. The things that are plywood and glues, things like that out. Gasper melded especially with the heat. With this we want to be very careful about quality building materials.

Our company is very focused on detoxification, so detoxing. Obviously we don't want to be sitting in an environment where we're just getting more exposure to chemicals and formaldehyde and things like that, right?

There's a lot of detail. The portable saunas are generally made with synthetics, so that can be something to try and steer clear of. Making sure you're using your towels personal and like a public sauna, sit on a towel.

They can, you know, depending on the facility, they can be easier or harder to clean. Absolutely. Yeah. So those those are important factors. Some of the saunas that incorporate near-infrared, you just want to make sure that they're they're understanding doses.

And you're not overdoing it with near-infrared spot. Absolutely. That's kind of a good segue into my next question. How often do you guys generally recommend patients, menopausal women or otherwise, to use on a therapy?

Again, from a from a general standpoint, sure. Everyone's going to be a little different. Our cardinal rule is listen to your body. So guiding someone through starting out, we might encourage you to really short sessions.

But frequently if you can do every other day or every day, great. But you know, some folks twice a week feels right. A good target would be every other day or more, or trying to hit that four times a week threshold.

But again, we always we that's a nice thing with high tech health. We all have a lot of knowledge about saunas and guiding our customers through this.

So every single user gets a product specialist who can help walk you through all of this personally. You get to have conversations you can call, you know, two weeks after you get it, six months after you get on a while, you're setting it up.

We're going to guide you through all of this and help you find the right, the right routine to work for each individual. But, you know, I'd say as much as you can do and feel good is the right answer.

I'm all for that.

Choosing a Quality Sauna and Closing Remarks

Are there any myths with sauna therapy that you just, you know, you see online all the time, or you hear people saying that you can debunk for us? Yeah, absolutely.

The temperature threshold part of this is that there's a misinterpretation of sauna therapy. You have to sit in 170 degrees for, you know, x amount of minutes.

Let's say it's 20 minutes. And so a lot of clinical studies done with traditional saunas use a certain time at a certain temperature as the parameters, which are the thresholds for getting these benefits.

It may be true with a traditional sauna, but really the key is those parameters are getting you to raise your body temperature. That's where the benefits come from.

So something we hear with infrared sauna is is oh they don't get hot enough. You can't actually get the benefits. And that's not the case because they elevate our body temperature just as much as a traditional sauna.

So that is a point of confusion. The there are people comparing how infrared elevates our body temperature as much and as quickly, and comparing that we get these outcomes with both types of saunas.

So that is an important distinction that maybe gets misinterpreted sometimes in research. And the narrative about saunas in the maybe longevity space.

Gotcha. Yeah, that's definitely a really good point because I, you know, I was here like, oh, the ambient air has to be, you know, like you say 150, 170 degrees.

And yeah, if the whole point is just to heat the body, who cares about the ambient air? Does my body get up to the correct temperature? So that's such a great point. Thank you so much.

All right. Well, Tess, this has been just an absolutely fascinating conversation. I wish we could keep going, but unfortunately, we are out of time. But I definitely want to mention to our audience, hi Tech Health is offering exclusive pricing for our summit attendees through the end of September, I believe.

Correct. Perfect. So be sure to take advantage of that. I can definitely speak from personal use and hearing from our patients who use the high tech health sounds that we have in our office.

They are absolutely top notch. You're not going to regret it. You can give them a call at (800) 794-5355 and visit their website. High tech health hi spelled g h not just.

Hi Tess. Again, thank you so much for taking the time to share your knowledge and expertise with us. I know we are all the better for it and to our audience.

As always, thank you so much for taking the time out of your day to spend with us and learn about the benefits of sauna therapy to improve your general health.

We're always so grateful to have you guys here, so we will have another very, very informative and fascinating conversation for you soon. But until then, take care and be well everyone.

Thank you Doctor Ben.