

Cold Water Therapy

Cold therapy is also known as cryotherapy. It works by reducing blood flow to a particular area, which can significantly reduce inflammation and swelling that causes pain, especially around a joint or a tendon. It can temporarily reduce nerve activity, which can also relieve pain.

Even more interesting cold therapy has recently been proven in combination with breath work to allow us to actually control the immune response and so consciously recover faster. Interested? So was I. My search led me to this guy...

At this point I have to introduce you to a man named Wim Hof. Something of a legend among bio hackers worldwide. Before Wim was born it was believed that "Both the autonomic nervous system and innate immune system ere regarded as systems that cannot be voluntarily influenced."

Put simply it was believed that you were simply at the mercy of the bugs floating around out there and while having a strong body could help there was very little you could actually do to prevent the flu (or man flu in my case!).

Wim claimed this was all rubbish and set out to show them.

In 2007 the first scientific analysis was done at Feinstein Institute in New York. In 2011 the University Medical Centre St Radboud in Nijmegen expanded on the research and after running several tests had to admit that Wim (and crucially those he taught) were able to actively influence their autonomic nervous system.

How does he do this?

Welcome to The Wim Hof Method.

First up let me say this is not a complete methodology (I suggest you visit one of Wim's workshops for that) but this will certainly speed up your recovery time substantially:

The Method

The Wim Hof Method is similar to Tummo (inner heat) Meditation and Pranayama (yogic breathing). Yet it is something else entirely. While Wim has studied yoga and meditation for many years, this technique primordially comes from what he terms 'cold hard nature'. By subjecting himself to the bitter conditions of nature, he learned to withstand the extreme forces of cold, heat and fear. If you learn this method or technique correctly, it will empower you do to the same.

The first part is a breathing exercise which can be likened to controlled hyperventilation. This is, of course, an oxymoron. Hyperventilation is something which happens involuntarily. But just imagine the breathing part, without any of stress triggers that normally cause this way of breathing. The image will consist of rapid breathing that makes one languid, invigorates one, makes one high on oxygen. One mechanism of this practice is the complete oxygenation of your blood and cells.

Before you try this at home make sure that you don't do this:

- * underwater
- * while driving
- * while standing up
- * without approval of your medical caregiver

Please be mindful that practicing this method is completely your own risk.

1) Get comfortable and close your eyes

Sit in a meditation posture, whatever is most comfortable for you. Make sure you can expand your lungs freely without feeling any constriction. It is recommended to do this practice right after waking up since your stomach is still empty.

2) Warm Up

Inhale deeply. Really draw the breath in until you feel a slight pressure from inside your chest on your solar plexus. Hold this for a moment and then exhale completely. Push the air out as much as you can. Hold this for a moment. Repeat this warm up round 15 times.

3) 30 Power Breaths

Imagine you're blowing up a balloon. Inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth in short but powerful bursts. The belly is pulled inward when you are breathing out and is pulled outward when you are breathing in. Keep a steady pace and use your midriff fully. Close your eyes and do this around 30 times or until you feel your body is saturated with oxygen. Symptoms could be light-headedness, tingling sensations in the body, electrical surges of energy.

4) Scan your body

During the 30 power breaths, delve into your body and become aware of it as possible. Trace your awareness up and down your body and use your intuition as to what parts lack energy and what parts are overflowing. Scan for any blockage between the two. Try to send energy/warmth to those blockages. Then release them deeper and deeper. Tremors, traumas and emotional releases can come up. It can be likened to kundalini rising. Feel the whole body fill up with warmth and love. Feel the negativity burn away.

Often people report swirling colors and other visual imagery during this exercise. Once you encounter them, go into them, embrace them, merge with them. Get to know this inner world and how it correlates to the feeling of tension or blockages in your body.

5) The Hold

After the the 30 rapid succession of breath cycles, draw the breath in once more and fill the lungs to maximum capacity without using too much force. Then push all of the air out and hold for as long as you can. Draw the chin in a bit so as to prevent air from coming in again. Really relax and open all energy channels in your body. Notice how all the oxygen is spreading around in your body. Hold the breath until you experience the gasp reflex on the top of your chest.

6) Recovery Breath

Inhale to full capacity. Feel your chest expanding. Release any tension in the solar plexus. When you are at full capacity, hold the breath once more. Drop the chin to the chest and hold this for around 15 seconds. Notice that you can direct the energy with your awareness. Use this time to scan the body and see where there is no color, tension or blockages. Feel the edges of this tension, go into it, move the energy towards this black hole. Feel the constrictions burning away, the dark places fill with light. Relax the body deeper as you move further inward, let everything go. Your body knows better than you do. After 15 seconds you have completed the first round.

Start this practice with one or two rounds. Try to do it daily and add two more rounds in a few days. After you feel more comfortable with holding your breath you can start to add exercises and stretches. Work up to a minimum of 15 minutes or 6 rounds with exercises. You can do this practice for how long it pleases you.

If you feel dizziness or pain, get out of the posture and lie on your back. Breathe easily again and stop this practice session.

Reserve at least 5 minutes after this practice to relax and scan the body.

Summary

- * 30 times balloon blowing
- * Breathe in fully
- * Breath out fully and hold until gasp reflex

- * Inhale fully and hold for 10-15 seconds.
- * Repeat until finished
- * Take 5 minutes to relax and scan your body

Bonus Power-ups

- * Add push-ups or yoga poses during the time you are holding your breath until you wait for the gasp reflex. Notice that you are stronger without air than you would normally be if you could breathe!
- * Charge the energy up the spine by holding moola banda, contract the rectum & sex organ and pull the navel inward towards the spine.
- * Stand up in squat position and do the balloon breath. Try to breathe away the burn. (get seated again the moment you continue the cycle, you don't want to be standing and faint) See if you can get the energy overtake the pain. Don't give up easily and see how far you can go if you have the willpower!

Cold Exposure

After the body scan of the previous exercise you are ready let your body embrace the cold. It is very important to try to relax as much as you can, really be with the cold, only then can your body process the signals and start thermogenesis. As Wim says, "the cold is your warm friend!"

Cold Showers

If you are new to cold exposure, start with cold showers. Begin with your feet and then follow with your legs, your stomach, shoulders, neck and back and finally your head. An initial shock, shivering and hyperventilation is normal. Try to remain calm and breathe easily. Close your eyes and really try to embrace the cold.

If you feel any strong physical uncomfortableness, like heavy shivering, numbness or pain, get your body warm again as soon as possible.

Once you are out of the shower, take a moment to do another slow body scan before you dry yourself.

Cold exposure works like weight lifting, you get stronger over time. There are little muscles around your veins that contract when they get into contact with the cold.

After some time (only 1-2 weeks according to Wim) these become stronger, making your veins healthier and reducing the force that your heart has to use to pump blood around your body.

You can increase exposure over time. At one point the cold will feel just as comfortable as wearing your favourite pyjamas and you can skip the warm shower completely.

Notice how you feel amazing after a cold shower and sluggish after a warm one.

Ice Baths

After a few weeks of cold showers you can up the ante to an ice bath. Get 2-3 bags of ice at your local convenience store and put them in a half-full bath tub. Wait until around two thirds is melted or that the water has reached your designated temperature (10 / 12 °C (50 / 59 °F)). You can throw in a couple of handfuls of salt to speed up this process.

As with the cold showers, try to relax as much as you can. Start out with around 10 minutes and increase exposure over time. If you feel uncomfortable or in doubt, get out. After this exercise make sure you do another body scan.

It is normal to feel extra cold after a small period of time after the ice bath. This is called the after-drop. Take a hot glass of raw coca and keep your blood flowing by talking a walk. You'll feel amazing after!

Please be mindful that you are doing this exercises on your own risk. Using any of these exercises while driving or being immersed under water can be extremely dangerous. When in doubt, talk with your medical caregiver.