

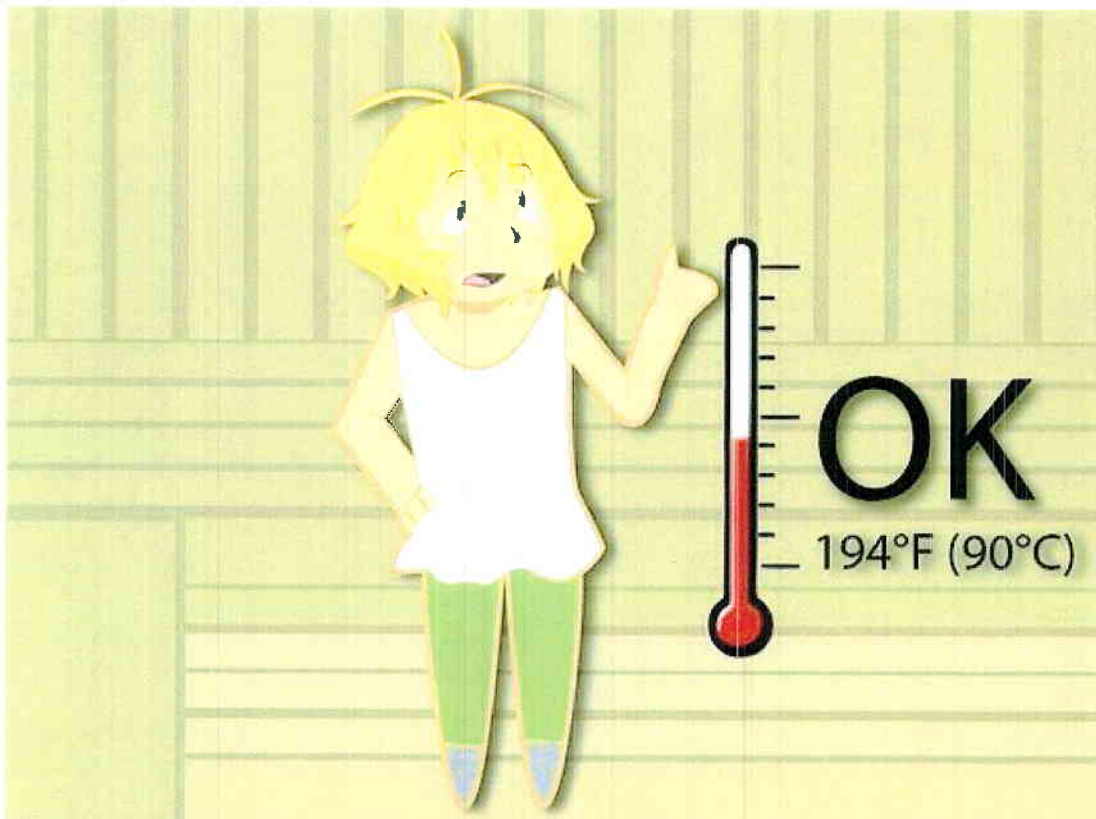
# Use a Sauna Safely

Saunas provide a wonderful way to unwind, relax, and warm up during cold weather. They also provide a great opportunity for a social relaxation occasion. Among many reputed health benefits, saunas are thought capable of relieving pain, improving sports performance, temporarily reducing cold symptoms, and reducing your stress levels through inducing a feeling of relaxation and well-being.<sup>[1]</sup>

Like many good things, however, it's important to use a sauna in moderation because prolonged, improper, or unsafe usage can be a severe health hazard. This article explains how to use a sauna safely.

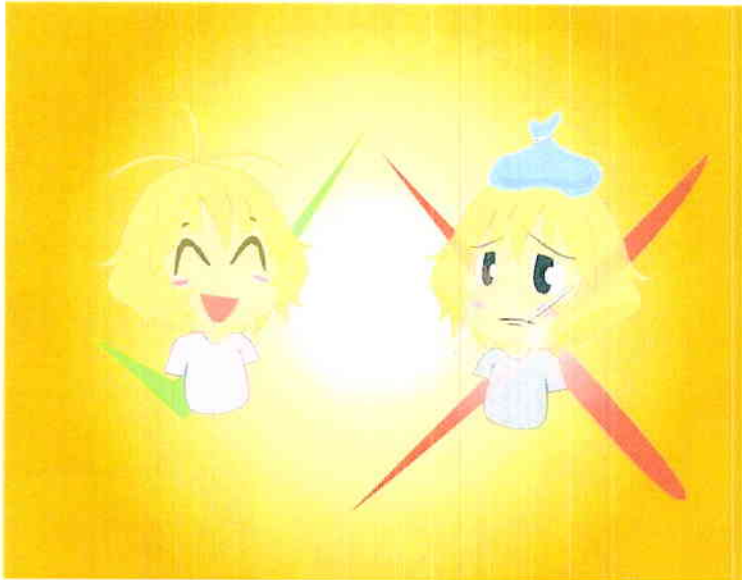
**Read the instructions relating the sauna that you're using.** Most saunas will carry their own health guidelines and warnings. It is important to familiarize yourself with these prior to using the sauna. If you don't see any instructions, ask the person in charge of caring for the sauna for more information.

**Check the temperature.** The maximum allowed sauna temperature in Canada and the United States is 194°F (90°C).<sup>[2]</sup> Some European countries allow much higher temperatures, which can be unsafe.



Does the temperature feel right for you personally, or is it just too hot? If it stays feeling too hot, ask that it be turned down, or keep out.

**Be in good health.** Saunas are generally safe for most users but some people need to take extra precautions, or perhaps not even use the sauna. In particular, you need to reconsider using a sauna if:

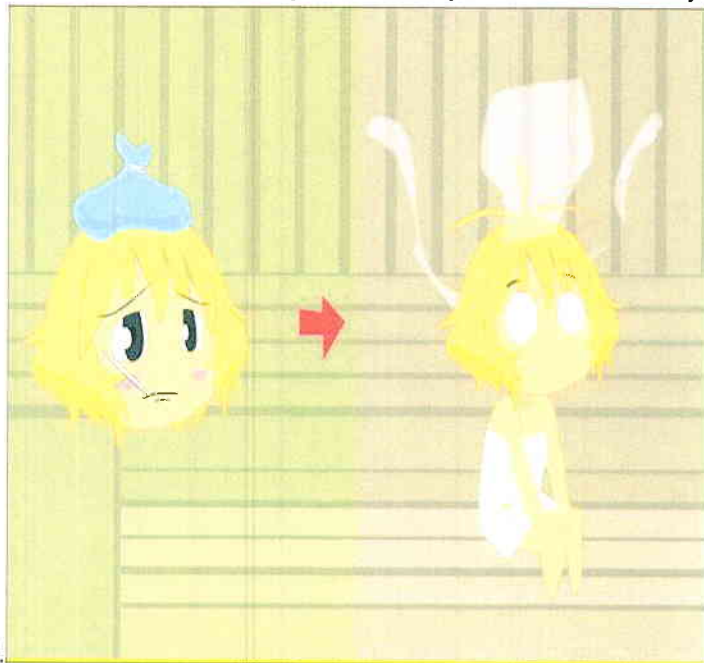


- You have unstable angina pectoris, poorly controlled **blood pressure**, abnormal heart rhythms, advanced heart failure, recent myocardial infarction, and severe aortic stenosis.
- You are pregnant or trying to conceive (you risk raising your body core temperature, fainting, having cramps, suffering from **heat exhaustion** or heat stroke).
- You are a child, or are responsible for children. Many places won't allow children under a certain age to use the sauna.
- You are unwell for any reason. Ask for your doctor's advice, as some illnesses such as a cold might benefit from a short visit.
- You feel ill at any time during the sauna – get out straight away.

**Stay well hydrated.** It is possible to suffer from **dehydration** in a sauna. This can lead to heat stroke if you do not replenish with liquids. Water and isotonic drinks are suitable, but never consume alcohol before or during your use of a sauna. It is also advisable not to use a sauna if you have a hangover.<sup>[3]</sup> Drink about two to four glasses of water after the sauna.<sup>[4]</sup>



**Don't use a sauna if you are using medication.** Unless you have your doctor's go-ahead, err on the side of caution. Some medications can impair your sweating and cause you to overheat very



quickly.<sup>[5]</sup> Get your doctor's all clear first.

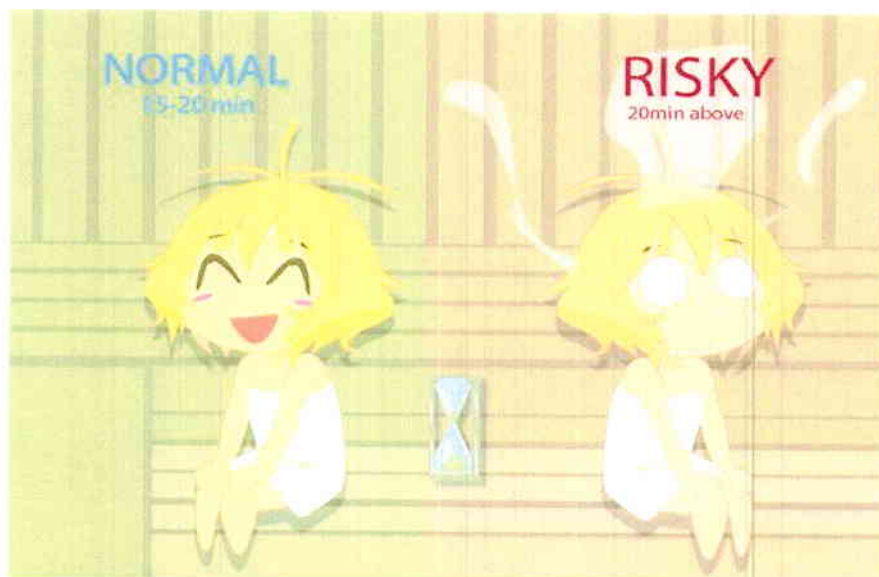
**Wear suitable attire.** If you are not convinced of the cleanliness of the sauna, it is a good idea to wear flip flops, or similar items on your feet. Some sauna experiences are naked - apart from your own personal feelings about that, you might consider leaving some clothing on if you're concerned about the hygiene in a public sauna.



Consider sitting on a towel in a public sauna, rather than sitting directly on the bench.



**Avoid overstaying your welcome.** The appropriate amount of time to spend in the sauna is around 15–20 minutes at the most,<sup>[6]</sup> and less if you feel too hot or uncomfortable. It is better to go in and out, taking cooling down breaks, than to roast in it for too long.



**Cool down gradually after the sauna.** Some people like to have a warm shower before getting dressed after a sauna. It's up to how comfortable you feel but it's not a good idea to go straight from the sauna into a shock of freezing cold air outdoors.

