



# STEAM BATH

## HEALTHY, RE-VITALIZING STEAM

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•What is a Steam Bath? •Temperature is Critical! •Effects of a Steam Bath •The Correct Way...

### BACKGROUND

The history of the steam bath can be traced far back into the mists of time. Popular with the ancient Greeks, the steam bath was subsequently adopted by the Romans as the "Sudatorium" which almost invariably formed part of the Roman baths of the period throughout the entire sphere of influence of the Roman Empire. In Turkey, the steam bath, or "Hamam" has survived the thousands of years, and with it our continued use of the term "Turkish bath". The practice spread to northern Russia too, where it was known as the "Banja". While steam baths were also built in Europe, their expansion was probably limited in the first instance by technical problems (chiefly in regulating the steam temperature) and because of the high investment costs involved. Today though, new developments in steam generating technology have made it possible to install steam baths almost anywhere at reasonable cost.

### WHAT IS A STEAMBATH?

Not unlike a sauna in that it induces sweating, but with entirely different atmospheric conditions, the steam bath not only relaxes you and renews your energy, but also promotes your health and beauty as well. It is operating most effectively at temperatures of between 43C(110F) and 46C(116F) and a relative humidity above 100%. In a steam bath, steam (or to be more scientifically correct, MIST) should be permanently present. This requires an efficient steam generator, a precise control system and a steam-tight cabin to prevent steam escaping and damaging the fabric of the surrounding room.

### SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Between 1983 and 1986, at the University of Munich's Institute of Medical Balneology and Climatology a comprehensive series of comparative tests were conducted to determine the effects of the sauna, steam bath and whirlpool bath on the human body in view of a considerable uncertainty which had previously surrounded the steam bath. Steam baths should not be recommended or prescribed to clients with known cardiac pathology. Steam baths are recommended wherever generalized moist heat applications are indicated.

Physical agents act directly with a physical effect; that is, radiant energy becomes heat when absorbed by living cells. Physical agents may in addition indirectly influence the AUTONOMIC AND ENDOCRINE SYSTEMS as well as the ELECTROLYTE balance. The BIOLOGIC RESPONSE to the "push" of physical stimulation of the VEGETATIVE HORMONAL SYSTEM is an adaptive reaction to stress, which involves the adrenal cortex and increases blood steroids. In fact, the interrelationship between adrenal and blood steroids may be an important factor in the hit-and-miss success of this form of hydrotherapy. If so, the intensity (or dose) of physical stimulation will determine the "stress" of this hydrotherapy program.

## **TEMPERATURE IS CRITICAL**

### **Physiologic Effects**

The body tries to increase its heat loss through all possible avenues-especially the skin and lungs. If the environmental temperature exceeds that of the body, the only way to lose heat is through sweating. The body cannot maintain a constant temperature when the environmental temperature is as high as that reached in a steam bath or sauna, and so the body temperature begins to rise. As the cutaneous circulation increases, heat is accepted more readily by the body from the environment. A reduced skin circulation would reduce the rise of body temperature, but this is not possible. The rise in body temperature depends mainly on (a) the temperature and humidity content of the steam bath, (b) the sweating capability of the bather, and (c) the bathing time. Body temperatures have been found to range from 37.6C (99.6F) to 40C (104F). Thus, the physiologic changes that occur during the bath are due in part to the rise in body temperature and in part to the influence of the reflexes of the hormonal and nervous systems, which attempt to increase the heat loss.

The research results revealed that, given the correct choice of temperature and duration, a steam bath produces the same thermal effect on the body as a sauna and is equally beneficial. This is due to the fact that the saturated level of humidity in a steam bath is markedly counter-balanced by lower temperatures than in a sauna. The enjoyment and benefits that the steam bath affords thus depend critically on the correct temperature being set and maintained. In a steam bath, the optimum temperature lies within a narrow 43-46C(110-116F) range. These temperatures are not only experienced as the most pleasant, they are also the most beneficial. If the maximum temperature is exceeded by as little as 2-3C, the atmosphere is felt to be too hot. Proper steam bath control systems prevent such a temperature rise and maintain the optimum conditions with the utmost reliability, regulating the temperature, the supply and density of the steam, the intake of fresh air and the extraction of spent air entirely automatically.

## **EFFECTS OF A STEAMBATH**

A steam bath is health giving as well as enjoyable. As a supportive activity, a steam bath is especially recommended to alleviate the conditions listed below by virtue of its high steam content and the general benefits of moist heat. The list was confirmed by the research carried out at the Institute of Medical Balneology and Climatology at the University of Munich: Bronchial asthma, bronchitis, catarrh of the upper respiratory tract, coughs, hoarseness, expectoration (particularly with the assistance of essential oils) non-acute rheumatic complaints and restricted or painful movements of the joints.

In addition, again as a supportive measure the steam bath is beneficial for persons suffering from:

- sleeping disorders, particularly through over excitability
- poor skin circulation
- dry, chapped skin
- muscular tension
- muscular weakness in the subcutaneous blood vessels
- sensitivity to sudden changes of temperature

A great advantage of the steam bath lies in its highly beneficial effect on the skin, a feature particularly appreciated by women. The moist heat stimulates the subcutaneous blood flow and cleanses the skin intensively, opening the pores, removing dead skin and impurities and leaving the skin feeling soft, clean and silky smooth.

## **THE CORRECT WAY TO TAKE A STEAMBATH**

The method that has proved successful for the sauna applies to the steam bath, too and you should practice this regimen in order to recommend it to your clients:

- shower before the first session
- time the stay in the steam bath in accordance with your personal sensitivity
- do not exceed 15-20minutes
- cool off with cool fresh air and cool water without shocking the system and avoid shivering
- take a warm foot bath if you have cold feet- do not take more than 2-3 sessions in the steam bath.

In the case of combined facilities like sauna and steam bath, which provide for different types of bath, you may also switch from one type to another.

What is essential though, is that you cool off thoroughly after each session. Never start a fresh session if your body is warm (or worse still, hot) and never change from one type of bath to another until you have cooled down properly. To do so could overtax your circulation. Unless the body has cooled down properly after a steam bath, even a swim in a heated pool could be physically harmful as it can be after a sauna.

Enjoyed correctly, a steam bath will help to overcome the stresses of everyday life, to relax and recover and to gain new strength and improve general physical and mental well being. And what's more, a steam bath can also be fun.

**STEAM AHEAD...**

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