

Twin Tower Toxins

by Lucretia Schanfarber

Six years after what has become known simply as 9/11, the devastating effects of the many toxic chemicals released by the burning and collapse of New York City's World Trade Center are still being felt.

For thousands of firefighters, rescuers, office workers, and residents, the nightmare of 9/11 lives on as they now battle the burden of deadly toxins left in their bodies. Detoxification and healing, however, are being found in a regimen that incorporates the age-old tradition of sauna treatments.

Toxic Time Bombs

Images of the huge cloud of smoke and debris that rose into the air as the Twin Towers burned and collapsed live on in our memories. While the emotional wounds of 9/11 continue to heal, a toxic time bomb is ticking in thousands of New Yorkers. A 2004 report by the US Government Accounting Office estimates that up to 400,000 people were exposed to toxic pollution emanating from ground zero. Asbestos, radionuclides, benzene, dioxins, PCBs, fiberglass, mercury, lead, silicon, and sulphuric acid are some of the recognized contaminants that were spewed into the air, settling onto streets, drifting into homes and offices, and being inhaled by men, women, children, and pets.

These substances show signs of affecting not only lung health but also being absorbed by the blood and circulated to bone, fatty tissue, brain, and internal organs. This chemical cocktail is implicated in growing reports of serious ailments, including pulmonary (lung) and respiratory disorders, skin afflictions, and cancers amongst first responders and those living and working in the area.

Safely eliminating these bioaccumulated toxins is a critical step on the road to recovery. But how? Enter the simple sauna.

Sauna Culture

We mainly have the Finns to thank for saunas, although many other cultures, including native Americans, Japanese, and Russians, have long incorporated sauna-like structures and practices into their daily lives.

While there are variations and versions on the traditional sauna concept, a sauna is basically a specially built, insulated room or structure that is heated to 160 to 212 F (71 to 100 C) by means of heated rocks or an alternate heat source.

Finnish saunas are used for bathing nude in the hot air, with intermittent steam generated from throwing water on the rocks. The lighting in a sauna is soft and diffused, and Finns prefer to sit or recline in the sauna in relative silence. Sauna treatments are renowned for stimulating circulation, deep cleansing through the skin, and providing a profound sense of mental and physical relaxation.

Sauna Therapy for Sick Heroes

There are dozens of published articles pertaining to the beneficial and safe use of saunas for improving overall health. A particularly interesting report published in the *Townsend Letter for Doctors* (November 2002; online December 2006) points to the effective use of a sauna detoxification program for New York City rescue workers exposed to World Trade Center (WTC) contaminants and apparently suffering from 9/11 toxicant-induced illnesses.

This program, the Hubbard Sauna Regimen, also incorporates exercise and nutritional therapy into the detoxifying protocol. While some may be uncomfortable with the program's link to L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of the Scientology movement, a review of the results is nonetheless encouraging. The authors of the *Townsend Letter* article credit the sauna detox system with vast improvements in both the physical and mental health status of the 484 male and female rescue workers who participated in the program.

Improved Quality of Life

Although the data collected from WTC participants was conducted as part of a “routine outcome monitoring,” rather than in a controlled study, individuals who completed the program reported a range of combined benefits that added up to improved quality of life and job fitness. Eighty-four percent of those individuals on medications prescribed to manage symptoms related to WTC exposure were able to discontinue their use. Upon completion of the sauna detox program, 72 percent of those individuals who had required multiple pulmonary medications achieved “near-normal pulmonary functions” and were medication-free. Other notable results of the program included fewer sick days, better thyroid function, increased cognitive function, and improved balance. Conversely, the article points out, a large percentage of those exposed to 9/11 toxins showed little or no improvement after more than four years of standard medical treatments. Possibly, suggest the article’s authors, “syndromes being treated as ‘post- traumatic stress’ are in fact the result of toxin-induced damage... This argues strongly for and adds urgency to this [sauna-based therapy] initiative.”

Twenty Reasons to Sweat It Out

Dr. Andrew Weil, a leading integrative health physician, author, and teacher enthusiastically condones “sweat bathing” in saunas or steam rooms.

Here are 20 reasons many natural health experts believe in the healing and revitalizing power of saunas:

1. help eliminate drugs and other toxins from the body
2. cleanse the skin
3. soothe sore muscles
4. promote deep relaxation
5. alleviate arthritis symptoms
6. improve asthmatic conditions
7. reduce respiratory infections
8. aid digestion
9. rid the body of excess sodium
10. reduce the workload of the kidneys and liver
11. dilate blood vessels
12. reduce blood pressure
13. improve circulation
14. increase energy levels
15. reduce stress
16. enhance relaxation
17. promote restful sleep
18. regulate appetite
19. normalize weight
20. promote healthy heart function

Sauna Tips and Advice

- Only stay in the sauna for 10 to 20 minutes at a time. That’s enough time to work up a therapeutic sweat.
- The heat from a sauna can cause circulatory changes, including an increased heart rate. If you have high blood pressure or a heart problem, be sure to check with your physician before going to a sauna or steam room.
- Drink plenty of water before, during, and after your sweat.
- It’s generally safe for healthy, pregnant women to take saunas.

http://www.alive.com/articles/view/21550/twin_tower_toxins