



THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO

Contrast Therapy

Heat, cold, and how to feel good. A simple, friendly guide to sauna and cold plunge from the team at Pulse Club.



WELCOME

You're in exactly the right place.

If you're curious about sauna and cold plunge but not quite sure what to expect, this guide is for you. No jargon, no pressure, and no need to be an athlete or a cold-water hero. Just the simple ideas behind contrast therapy, why it feels so good, and how to do it well.

Read it before your first visit and you'll walk in knowing exactly what to do. Think of us as a friend who's done this a thousand times, showing you the ropes.

So, what is contrast therapy?

It simply means moving between heat and cold: warming up in a sauna, then cooling down in a cold plunge, and repeating. People have done some version of this for thousands of years because it leaves you calm, clear and quietly energised.

The heat relaxes you. The cold wakes you up. Together they do something neither quite manages alone.



THE SHORT VERSION

Warm up, cool down, repeat, and finish feeling better than when you walked in.

WHERE IT COMES FROM

A ritual thousands of years in the making.

The sauna was born in Finland, where people have been heating small wooden rooms for over two thousand years. The earliest were *savusauna*, or “smoke saunas”, dug into the earth or built from logs and warmed by a wood fire with no chimney, the walls darkening gently with every use.



To this day the sauna sits at the heart of Finnish life, a place to clean the body, calm the mind and gather with others, open to everyone regardless of status. With a population of around 5.5 million, Finland has an estimated three million saunas, found in homes, offices and even parliament. In 2020, UNESCO added Finnish sauna culture to its list of the world's intangible cultural heritage.

The cold has always been part of it, too. Between rounds of heat, Finns traditionally cool off in a lake, the sea or the snow: the original cold plunge.

FROM FINLAND TO FULHAM & PUTNEY

That same ancient rhythm (heat, then cold, then rest) is exactly what's waiting for you at Pulse. Same ritual, same good feeling. Just without the frozen lake.

THE SCIENCE

Why it makes you feel good.

Contrast therapy works through a friendly kind of stress. A few minutes of heat, then a short burst of cold, gently challenge the body, and the body responds by adapting and recovering. Scientists call this *hormesis*: a small, manageable stress that leaves you stronger. Here's what's happening.

● The heat

Sitting in a sauna gently raises your heart rate and widens your blood vessels, a little like light exercise. It's deeply relaxing, and large population studies in Finland have linked regular sauna use with better heart health. They're observational, so they show a link rather than firm proof, but most people simply notice looser muscles, lower stress and better sleep.

● The cold

Cold does the opposite, and that's the point. As you cool, your body releases noradrenaline and dopamine, the chemistry behind alertness, focus and a lifted mood. In studies these rises are large and last well beyond the plunge itself, which is why people often feel sharp and upbeat for hours afterwards.

● The contrast

Switching between the two sends your blood vessels opening and closing like a pump, leaving you refreshed and invigorated. And each time you meet the cold and stay calm, it gets a little easier: a small, repeatable win for your resilience.

A NOTE ON THE SCIENCE

Contrast therapy is a wellness practice with real, measurable effects on how you feel, not a medicine or a cure, and the research is still young. Enjoy it for how good it makes you feel, and treat any health condition with your doctor.

THE BENEFITS

What you might feel.

Everyone's different, but here's what people most often notice: some of it straight away as you step out glowing, some of it building gently over weeks of regular visits.

● For the body

- Eased muscle tension and quicker recovery after exercise
- Improved circulation, head to toe
- A natural lift in energy and vitality
- Deeper, more restful sleep
- Linked in research with better heart health
- May support your immune resilience
- That warm, loosened, fully-reset feeling

● For the mind

- Lower stress and a noticeably calmer mind
- A genuine lift in mood
- Sharper focus and mental clarity
- A clean burst of alertness from the cold
- Growing resilience to everyday stress
- A real sense of achievement and confidence
- Dedicated time to switch off and be present

AND IT'S BETTER TOGETHER

Contrast therapy is also a wonderfully social ritual, a screen-free hour to share with a friend, or quiet time just for you. However you do it, you'll leave feeling more like yourself.

HOW TO DO IT

The simple method.

There's no rigid formula: the best routine is the one you enjoy. But if you'd like a starting point, this is a lovely, balanced rhythm for a 75-minute session.

1

Warm up

Spend about 10–15 minutes in the sauna, until you feel comfortably, properly warm. Relax, breathe, let your shoulders drop.

2

Cool down

Step into the cold plunge, anywhere from 30 seconds to a couple of minutes. For your first few times, 30–60 seconds is plenty.

3

Rest

Come back to room temperature for a few minutes. Breathe, notice how you feel, and let your body settle.

4

Repeat

Go again. Three to four full rounds makes a wonderful session, but even one round counts.

10–15_{min}

IN THE SAUNA

30s–3_{min}

IN THE PLUNGE

x3–4

ROUNDS

75_{min}

WHOLE SESSION

A LITTLE TIP

Finish on heat if you want to feel calm and sleep well; finish on cold if you want to feel alert and awake. At Pulse, our sauna sits around 80–90°C and our cold plunges between 3–10°C, plenty to work with, whatever your pace.

BREATHING

Meet the cold with your breath.

When you first hit cold water, your body gasps and your breathing quickens. This is the *cold shock response*, and it's completely normal: a reflex, not a problem. It passes within about 15-30 seconds, and the calmer your breathing, the faster it settles. The secret to the cold isn't toughness; it's your breath.

Before you step in

Take a few slow, easy breaths to settle yourself. Make your out-breath longer than your in-breath. This gently tells your nervous system that you're safe and in control.



As you get in

Move in slowly and breathe out as you lower yourself. Keep your shoulders soft, don't hold your breath, and let those first sharp gasps come and go. Within a few seconds your breathing steadies, and so do you.

TRY THIS: A BREATH TO PRACTISE

Breathe in gently through your nose for a count of **4**.

Breathe out slowly through your mouth for a count of **6-8**.

Repeat. Use it before and during the plunge: those long, slow exhales are your anchor.

And here's the lovely part: it genuinely gets easier every single time. After a few sessions your body learns the cold, the gasp fades, and what felt shocking starts to feel exhilarating.

YOUR FIRST VISIT

What to expect, and how to feel at ease.



Come as you are. Bring swimwear (we'll provide the towels), arrive a few minutes early, and take it all at your own pace.

There's no right way to look and nothing to prove. Go in for a silent session to switch off, or with a friend to share it. Stay in the cold for as long as feels good to you, not a second more. Listen to your body; it's wiser than any timer.

● STAYING SAFE & COMFORTABLE

- Have a quick word with your doctor first if you're pregnant, or if you have a heart condition, high or low blood pressure, epilepsy or any serious health concern.
- Never do contrast therapy after drinking alcohol.
- Drink plenty of water before and after your session.
- Step out if you ever feel dizzy, faint or unwell. There's no prize for pushing through.

This guide is general information to help you enjoy contrast therapy, not medical advice.

QUICK ANSWERS

Your questions, answered.

How long should I stay in the sauna?

About 10–15 minutes per round, or simply until you feel comfortably warm. Come out sooner if you'd like to. There are no rules.

How long in the cold plunge?

Anywhere from 30 seconds to a few minutes. When you're starting out, 30–60 seconds is plenty to feel the benefit.

How many rounds should I do?

Three to four makes a great session, but even one round counts. Do what feels good on the day.

Why is it good for me?

Most people find it eases tension, lifts their mood, sharpens focus and helps them sleep. The heat relaxes you; the cold energises you.

Should I finish hot or cold?

End warm to feel calm and sleepy; end cold to feel alert and awake. It's entirely your choice.

What do I wear and bring?

Just swimwear. We provide the towels. Our sessions are for ages 16 and up.

How often should I come?

Whatever fits your life. Even once a week is wonderful. Like most good things, the magic is in the regularity.



READY WHEN YOU ARE

Come and feel it for yourself.

The best way to understand contrast therapy is simply to try it. Your first three sessions are just **£39**, a relaxed, friendly introduction, with no experience needed.

Start with 3 sessions **£39**

[Book the intro · Fulham →](#)

[Book the intro · Putney →](#)

Just want a single session?

[Book now at Fulham](#)

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Warm up, cool down, feel good.

See you soon. The Pulse Club team.

pulseclubsauna.com

[@pulseclubsauna](https://twitter.com/pulseclubsauna)

FIND US

Two clubs in south-west London.

Come and visit us in Fulham or Putney. Here's everything you need to find us, get in touch and book your first session.

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