

RISK FACTORS

Sauna bathing associated with reduced cardiovascular mortality

Increased frequency and duration of sauna bathing is associated with a reduced risk of sudden cardiac death (SCD), fatal coronary heart disease (CHD), and fatal cardiovascular disease (CVD). This finding comes from the prospective Finnish Kuopio Ischemic Heart Disease Risk Factor Study.

The investigators recruited 2,315 middle-aged men (aged 42–60 years) between March 1984 and December 1989 from Eastern Finland. During follow-up (mean 20.7 years), 601 participants had a sauna once per week, 1,513 had a sauna 2–3 times per week, and 201 had a sauna 4–7 times per week. Also during this period, 190, 281, 407, and 929 participants died from SCD, CHD, CVD, or any cause, respectively. Compared with those who had a sauna once per week, men who had a sauna 2–3 times per week or 4–7 times per week had a significantly reduced risk of SCD (HR 0.78 and 0.37),

fatal CHD (HR 0.77 and 0.52), fatal CVD (HR 0.73 and 0.50), and all-cause mortality (HR 0.76 and 0.60). Moreover, longer duration of sauna bathing (>19 min) was associated with a reduced risk of SCD, fatal CHD, and fatal CVD (but not all-cause mortality) compared with shorter duration.

Long-term sauna bathing has been shown to lower blood pressure and enhance left ventricular and endothelial function. The investigators conclude that “sauna bathing is a recommendable health habit”, but further studies involving women and those unaccustomed to sauna bathing are needed.

Gregory B. Lim

Original article Laukkanen, T. *et al.* Association between sauna bathing and fatal cardiovascular and all-cause mortality events. *JAMA Intern. Med.* doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2014.8187