

- Hydrotherapy / Baths

The safest way to keep your cool in icy waters DESOUZA

Before you take the chilliest plunge, has gathered tips from the experts

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Ice baths are all the rage on Tiktok, with many people hopping – or more likely – edging themselves into a tub of cold water chilled with ice, or just taking a very cold shower.



On a physical level, exposure to extreme cold therapy is said to help “ease sore and aching inflamed muscles, tendons and joints,” explains Helena Eflerova, an aquatic bodywork therapist and founder of HE AQUATICS.

“Ice baths also help the central nervous system by assisting in sleep and relaxation, and help to reduce tiredness.”

Before ice bath amateurs take the plunge, it is important to be aware of the risks...

DO build up slowly: Anna Gough, a breath facilitator and cold water therapist at Breathing Tree, recommends turning down the temperature for the last minute during your shower, where you can more safely work on controlling your breathing when the cold shock hits (which can naturally cause an involuntary gasp reaction, followed by rapid breathing).

When it comes to actual ice baths, Helena says you “could start off by gradually introducing your body to the ice water – feet, then legs, then torso and so on. Don’t feel like you have to fully submerge on your first few attempts.”

DO be mindful of your breathing: “How we breathe is often a very accurate indicator of how we are in our mind. So if we’re breathing fast and rapidly, then that means we’re feeling quite frantic in our heads.

“If our breath is nice and slow and smooth and deep, we are maintaining an element of homeostasis in our body, which keeps us calm,” says Anna.

DON’T try going into the cold water alone:

Anna advises: “Make sure you have somebody there, or find a coach or practitioner,” who can give guidance and help if needed.

DO take your experience into account when deciding what temperature to set your ice bath: For those who have never been exposed to any sort of cold water, Anna says she would put the bath at around 10°C. “If somebody has done the cold showers, then I would probably start them at 6°C, or a bit lower. And then for the pros... I would get the tank as cold as possible.”

DON’T use an ice bath if you are suffering from pre-existing cardiovascular disease or high blood pressure:

“The decrease in core temperature and body immersion in ice constricts blood vessels and slows the flow of blood in the body. People with type one and type two diabetes also need to be careful as they may have reduced ability to maintain core temperature,” warns Helena.

DO know your limits and don’t stay in too long:

“You’ll get those mental health benefits in the first two to three minutes, so there’s no need to stay in for a long time,” says Dr Rhianna Mcclymont, lead GP at online healthcare provider Livi. Even people with long-established cold water routines might just stay in for a few minutes, and for ice baths, Healthline warns to stay submerged for only 10 to 15 minutes maximum.

Everyone needs to be wary of the effects of cold shock too, and ignoring safety guidance can be dangerous. Some of these dangers, says Dr Mcclymont, include “cardiac arrest or stroke, especially for anyone suffering from pre-existing cardiovascular disease or high blood pressure”.

DON’T jump straight into a warm shower or bath afterwards:

This may reduce the effects of cold therapy – and there is also a strong possibility that you may “pass out”, according to Anna, because of the rapid change in temperatures. Helena recommends waiting two hours before taking a warm bath or shower.

DO warm up properly though: Dry off and wrap up pronto.

Check with your doctor before trying ice baths to make sure it is safe for you