

# Whole body cryotherapy is becoming a popular add-on treatment for pain relief

The benefits of using ice to help heal localised inflammation after an injury is an accepted medical practice. But in Germany and Eastern Europe 'cryotherapy' – that is the use of temperatures well below freezing to treat the whole body has been a part of health spa culture for decades.

But subjecting the whole body to freezing temperatures is increasingly being used in Europe as an supplementary treatment to relieve debilitating pain in conditions such as rheumatoid and osteo arthritis, fibromyalgia, ankylosing spondylitis and psoriasis. It is also a popular treatment for athletes who receive it as as part of the physio following an injury or training. Some teams even have their own 'cryo-pod- the British & Irish Lions being one.

London's BMI Garden Hospital, in Hendon, has Britain's first full-body cryo-chamber, where it's on offer as part of the physiotherapy for private patients.

Iain Casey, is managing director of CryoClinics, the company pioneering the use of the chamber, which he tells me works like a large freezer. Patients wear a swimsuit, so that as much skin as possible is exposed to the freezing air, (with extremities in gloves and socks), which can go as low as -120 degrees celsius. In this pod patients are only subjected to -80 degrees celsius for 3-5 minutes.

Although there is, to date, no definitive science, on how subjecting the body to these freezing temperatures works, Iain tells me the theory: that the blood in the body retreats to protect the vital organs and returns oxygen, enzyme and nutrient rich. In addition, the endocrine system releases hormones into the blood. All this manifests as an anti-inflammatory response, the release of endorphins, giving pain relief and faster recover from training and injury.

So I get to try it out – reluctantly as I am cold adverse. I am told that I should try jumping around and even do a dance while I am in there. When I first enter the pod and the door closes behind me the air fills with a white foggy mist, which is actually my breath freezing and turning to snow. I do jump around a bit because although 3 minutes doesn't sound very long, it does help pass the time. I can see the hairs on my bare arms standing on end but actually it is not as cold as I imagined and that is because its a dry cold. While you are inside there is always a nurse outside supervising your treatment and letting you know how much time is left.

Standing half-naked in temperatures of minus 80 degrees C may not sound like the ideal way to treat the pain of arthritis. But patients are seeing incredible results from these three-minute treatments.

The Jamaican sprinter, Usain Bolt was said to have used a mobile whole-body cryotherapy unit at the London Olympics to help him recover from a back injury. And opera singer Katherine Jenkins used the treatment during her stint on US show Dancing With The Stars to cope with the brutal training regime.

In Germany whole body cryotherapy is still used to help slow up the degenerative process of arthritis, enabling sufferers to stay mobile for longer.

It's recommended to have at least three treatments so that you feel a real benefit. And it is affordable with a single treatment costing £25.