

## Sweating (out) the small stuff: Perspiration may help pollutants leave the body, study shows



Whether you're sweating it out at the gym, sweltering away in a field exercise or pouring it out your ears in some hell's kitchen downrange, when it comes to perspiration, your body may be doing more than cranking up its built-in cooling system.

Health experts have long tried to dispel the idea that profuse perspiration can help purge toxins from our bodies. But it turns out those Lakota warriors and Viking ax-swingers may have been onto something with their sweat lodges and saunas.

Several recent studies suggest sweating may be a good way to eradicate a variety of nasty pollutants and other toxins, including arsenic, cadmium, lead, and mercury, that can be stored inside body tissue for years.

Now, researchers in Seattle's Bastyr University are exploring whether sweating for up to two hours a day in a sauna can help dislodge dangerous polychlorinated biphenyls — or PCBs — which were banned in the U.S. in 1979 but still commonly show up in our bodies because of lingering industrial pollution.

"Every human carries what we call a 'body burden' of chemicals. There's no way to completely avoid exposure," says chief researcher Dr. Jason Allen. "We're trying to see if we can sweat chemicals out of people."

Troops can be particularly susceptible to exposure to dangerous toxins that can lead to trouble down the road, Allen said. Everything from cancer and infertility to heart disease and brain disorders are linked to synthetic chemicals accumulating in the body.

From depleted uranium to burn pits, Allen says, "military personnel are often exposed to agents that they may or may not even be aware of."

"We get calls and emails from people in the military every day," says Allen, a naturopathic physician in private practice.

Almost always, the question is: "What can we do to get this stuff out of us?"

"Conventional medicine really has no answer," he says. "Alternative medicine has quite a bit to answer it with, but with little evidence."

That's where this study comes in.

In tests funded by the National Institutes of Health, subjects will spend two hours a day, five days a week in a Finnish-style sauna set at 165 degrees with 25 percent humidity. In addition to sweating chemicals out, Allen says extreme heat also causes fat — where toxins can be stored — to break down in a process called lipolysis. Chemicals are then processed through the kidneys and liver.

"What we've seen clinically are really phenomenal results with this kind of treatment," he says. "The fact is, people just feel better. Energy levels change. Sex drive changes. Every single parameter changes. But we don't know if it's because we've actually removed the chemicals through detox, because we haven't been able to test it until now."

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