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The Rising Popularity of Infrared Saunas

If you belong to a modern gym, chances are you've used or at least heard about infrared saunas. In recent decades, they've enjoyed a surge in popularity over traditional saunas. Many upscale homeowners are even installing them for personal use in their private home gyms and spas.

What is Infrared?

Infrared radiation (sometimes referred to as IR) is emitted by nearly everything around us, even our own bodies, although it's released at different levels depending on the source. Infrared heaters make use of a special type of infrared radiation called far infrared. Newborn babies are warmed by IR incubators in hospitals, and today's infrared saunas garner their energy sources from this far infrared technology.

How are Infrared Saunas Different than Traditional Saunas?

Back when the earliest saunas were introduced, they used primitive methods of heating rocks and stones in an enclosed, wood-lined room. Water poured on the hot rocks generated steam, which warmed the air and, in turn, the bodies of the people inside the room. Later versions of these "rock saunas," also known as "Finnish saunas," began to use more advanced methods of heating the stones, such as wood burning stoves or traditional electric heaters. Electric heated saunas are the most common variation today, although they still rely on rocks and stones as a "middle man" to convey heat to the air first, and then to the body. In a traditional rock sauna, temperatures are escalated to anywhere from 169°F to 200°F to induce sweating. Rock sauna sessions are often followed by cool-downs in a pool or chilly shower.

At first glance, infrared saunas may look very similar to rock saunas, as they are usually contained in a small wooden room or enclosure to simulate the feel of a traditional sauna. However, with an infrared sauna, a special infrared heater is used to convey far infrared heat waves directly to the body through a process called conversion, where traditional saunas heat the air first. Infrared saunas don't need to generate the same high temperatures as rock saunas, usually topping out at 130°F. Due to their lower temperatures, infrared saunas can be used for longer sessions than traditional saunas.

Traditional vs. Infrared Saunas: At a Glance

Traditional Saunas:	**Infrared Saunas:**
Use hot water and rocks to generate steam, which warms the ambient air before warming the body	Use special far infrared heaters to penetrate directly into the body, without the use of steam
Heat only the surface of the body	Penetrate up to 1.5 inches into the body, heating the core as well as the surface

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Generate temperatures up to 200°F	Generate temperatures up to 130°F
Generally require a large space or dedicated room	Can be used in smaller, more portable freestanding enclosures, making home installations easier and less expensive
Require a large amount of energy to power the heaters	Operate at a much more cost-effective rate, costing only pennies per hour
Can pose a hazardous bacterial breeding ground	Are generally more hygienic and sanitary

Are Infrared Saunas Safe?

There has been no research to show that infrared saunas are unsafe. Indeed, the radiant energy produced from an infrared sauna is even safer than the heat generated by the sun, as it contains none of the potentially harmful ultraviolet rays.

Health Benefits of Infrared Saunas

In today's hectic, fast-paced environment, infrared saunas provide a safe, effective way to relax and unwind after a long, hard day. Besides the obvious stress-busting advantages, infrared saunas have been linked to a wide range of health benefits to increase our overall well-being:

- The heat from infrared saunas penetrates deep into the body, helping to loosen the toxins that are then emitted from the body through sweating
- Infrared heat has been effectively used as therapeutic treatment for arthritis, joint stiffness, back pain, and deep tissue injuries
- They have been linked to improved circulation, which promotes a healthy heart and overall improved fitness levels
- Personal infrared saunas are much more cost-effective to operate than traditional saunas, costing just pennies an hour
- They have been linked to accelerated weight loss, burning up to 1,000 calories an hour
- Infrared saunas are preferred by many athletes as a way of aiding in muscle recovery after strenuous workouts