

Can a cold plunge improve your health? The real answer

OCT 8, 2026



Featured topic

Cold plunges and ice baths are everywhere, with many people claiming they boost energy, improve recovery and build resilience. But what actually happens to your body when you step into cold water?

We break down the science behind cold-water immersion, including how it affects your heart rate, breathing, nervous system and stress response. You'll also learn what the research says about potential benefits, common myths and important safety considerations before taking the plunge.

If you're curious about adding cold therapy to your wellness routine, here's what you should know first.

- What cold plunges do to your body
- Potential benefits of cold-water immersion
- What the science says (and doesn't say)
- Cold plunge risks and safety tips
- Who should talk to a doctor before trying it

Always consult your physician before starting a new health or wellness practice, especially if you have a heart or circulation condition.

Want to dive into more on the cold plunge? [Find out 4 things you should know.](#)

For more expert-backed fitness, health, and wellness content, [subscribe to our channel.](#)

- [Sign up](#) for Morning Rounds and free daily newsletters from the AMA.
- Follow [#AMA](#) on [social media](#).

Transcript

Narrator: Would you willingly climb into a tub of ice cold water? It sounds miserable, but cold plunges have become one of the hottest trends in health and fitness. So what actually happens when you take the plunge? The moment your body hits the cold, your nervous system goes into high alert. Your heart rate and breathing can jump and your blood vessels constrict as your body works to protect its core temperature.

And that intense cold shock is part of what people are looking for. Submerging all the way to your neck helps stimulate the vagus nerve, which regulates your stress response. Cold water immersion may temporarily increase alertness and make you feel more energized. And there's another potential benefit, repeated cold exposure may help your body adapt to stress, but cold plunging is not a magic cure all.

The evidence for many of the bigger claims you hear online, like major weight loss, boosting immunity or dramatically improving overall health is lacking. And cold water can be risky, especially for people with certain heart or circulation problems. If you want to try it, start with water temperatures around 50 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Keep the exposure brief and never treat the plunge like a test of toughness.

Because when it comes to cold therapy, the goal isn't to suffer. It's to use the cold safely and see how your body responds. If you have questions about the cold plunge and if it's a good fit for you, talk to your doctor.

Disclaimer: This video is for educational purposes only and is not medical advice. If you have questions about your health, please consult your doctor.