

Christian Healthy Lifestyle Episode:

David (00:00.91)

Cold plunging can be challenging, but the reward is well worth the price. We've all heard the expression practice makes perfect, but that's actually not true. Practice makes progress. So wouldn't it make sense that if our bodies get practice at keeping us alive, that that would create in us more resilience and lead to more physical vitality? I believe the obvious answer to that is yes, it does.

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Welcome to the Christian Healthy lifestyle podcast where I help people opt out of the medical matrix and take control of their own health so they can avoid chronic disease, age gracefully, and live abundantly. I'm your host, David Sandstrom, naturopathic doctor and certified nutritional counselor, and this is episode number 171. Today we're going to be diving in the deep end of the health benefits of cold plunging, pun intended. So before we jump in, get it?

I want to remind you about my new membership club. I'm starting an online community of like-minded believers who want to uncouple themselves from dependence on the medical system and pursue health and wellness naturally the way God intended. Inside the health club, you'll have unlimited access to a series of online courses that I'm in the process of creating now, as well as monthly live Q and A's hosted by me. And I'll have some of the guests that I have on the show on, you can ask them questions as well.

And of course we'll have a community of like-minded believers who are pursuing natural health God's way. I'm also considering things like a weekly newsletter. I have an office hours where you can schedule an appointment with me and talk with me one-on-one. It's brand new, so right now I don't know all the specifics. That's why I'm looking for founding members to help me shape what the community turns into. Now, membership hasn't started yet, but you can sign up to be on the wait list.

Everyone who signs up on the wait list will be eligible to join as a founding member when it opens. Founders will lock in the lowest price that'll ever be available for the membership and that price will never go up for

founding members. If that sounds like something you'd be interested in and you'd like to be a part of that, go to my website chlpodcast.com forward slash membership and sign up for the wait list today. I look forward to hearing from you. So let's get into our topic of the day, which is cold plunging.

Cold plunging is one of those things that has benefit for all three parts of the human condition, spirit, mind and body. So let's go over each one, one at a time. Let's start with the body. What exactly is going on inside our bodies that has so many health benefits that everyone's talking about these days? A cold plunge becomes therapeutic when the water temperature is 59 degrees Fahrenheit or 15 degrees Celsius or colder. Above that there's

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Very little therapeutic impact. It's just a cool swim at that point. The first thing that happens when you get in the cold water is our sympathetic nervous system or our fight or flight reflex kicks in. Another word for the fight or flight reflex is our body's stress response. During the stress response, catecholamines are released, specifically the stress hormones adrenaline and noradrenaline, as well as cortisol. A short time later, calming neurotransmitters will follow.

Endorphins like dopamine and serotonin are released. Now, endorphins give us a feeling of happiness and calm and mental balance. Endorphins are more potent than morphine and they're very addictive. Normally when we think of addictions, we think of a bad thing, but getting addicted to a healthy practice like cold plunging is a very good thing. Adrenaline and noradrenaline have a similar impact on our physiology.

They both activate a kind of survival mechanism in the body. Our heart rate and blood pressure go up temporarily. We have a heightened sense of alertness and we have a surge in energy because our body is preparing us for a fight or flight. Now adrenaline mobilizes stored glucose reserves and that gives ourselves the fuel they need to make energy. Without something as shocking as a cold plunge nor adrenaline levels,

wouldn't rise very much. They stay relatively constant and ordinary stress doesn't really produce a large amount of noradrenaline. But with cold plunging, the cold water on the skin activates a surge in noradrenaline and

that enhances the cold shock response. That's a feature that makes cold plunging very special. It gives our body's survival mechanisms practice or training at keeping us alive. It's like,

exercise for our nervous system and our stress response. We've all heard the expression practice makes perfect, but that's actually not true. Practice makes progress. So wouldn't it make sense that if our bodies get practice at keeping us alive, that that would create in us more resilience and lead to more physical vitality? I believe the obvious answer to that is yes, it does. Since the surge in our adrenaline and

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noradrenaline levels come from a reduction in temperature on the skin and not our core body temperature, we don't need to spend that much time in the cold water to extract the desired benefit. Two or three or maybe four minutes is long enough. Long sessions like 15 minutes or more in cold water are just not necessary. Dr. Susanna Soberg has done a great deal of research on cold plunging and she wrote a book called Winter Swimming. It's a great read. I'll put a link in the show notes if you want to pick up a copy.

I recommend you read it. She says that 11 minutes a week is sufficient to reach the benefits of cold water therapy. So four three-minute sessions a week would give you 12 minutes and you'd reach the therapeutic levels of cold shock training. In fact, anything more than that would probably be counterproductive because cold plunging raises cortisol levels and chronically high cortisol is not a good thing. But

Temporary surges in cortisol are very useful and consistent with our divine design. Remember, when it comes to building health and wellness, we want to cooperate with our body's God-given natural design and not work against it. Short bursts of cold shock response provide a real benefit to our bodies and our minds. So just because something is beneficial doesn't mean that more is always better.

we want to find the sweet spot where we're maximizing the benefits and avoiding the downside of too much stress. Cortisol is also anti-inflammatory, which is very useful for people experiencing joint pain like osteoarthritis. It's also the reason why people see a reduction in blood pressure when they get adapted to regular cold plunging as a habit. With

lower systemic inflammation, our arteries become more malleable, more flexible,

similar to the impact that the sauna has. So sauna bathing and cold plunging both, they have the same effect on lowering blood pressure. If you have listened to the last episode, episode 170, I talked about heat therapy or sauna bathing. You may want to check that one out if you haven't listened. So you may be saying, wait a minute, Dave, you just said that adrenaline surge increases blood pressure. And now you're saying cold plunging decreases blood pressure. So which is it? Well,

David (07:43.886)

It's not either or, but both. Yes, blood pressure does rise during the initial cold shock response, but that only lasts a couple of minutes and common neurotransmitters linger for hours after the plunge. Cortisol gives us energy. It's what wakes us up in the morning and it gives us sustained energy. The dopamine hit and the serotonin surge also lasts for hours. So overall, there's a dramatic net benefit

when it comes to heart health and mental health when it comes to cold plunging. Now there's an ebb and a flow to our cold shock response where the sympathetic nervous system or our fight or flight mechanism gets us jacked up, but the response is balanced out by a longer term activation of the parasympathetic nervous system or our rest and digest side and that calms us down. The results of that ebb and flow to our nervous systems mimics moderate exercise or working out at the gym.

In fact, the effects of cold plunging and sauna bathing are similar to moderate exercise on the body and the mind. Now there's another thing I'd like to mention about the cold shock response and that's what happens with our brown fat. Fat cells, just like all cells, have mitochondria, which are miniature power plants inside our cells. White fat mitochondria produce ATP or adenosine triphosphate and our body uses that for energy production.

Our brown fat is brown because it's loaded with mitochondria. And during the cold shock response, brown fat mitochondria also produce ATP, but that ATP is used to produce heat instead of energy. The process is called thermogenesis and it uses a lot of energy. When we expose ourselves to

cold, like during cold splunching or walking outside on a cold morning, our bodies activate our brown fat.

So here's what happens. The cold triggers our brown fat to start burning calories to warm us up. Unlike regular white fat that just stores energy, brown fat actively burns both glucose, sugar, and white fat to produce heat. That process requires a lot of energy. So we're burning calories even when we're not moving when we have more brown fat. The amount of brown fat we have decreases with age.

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But here's the cool part, regular cold exposure can actually increase the amount of brown fat our bodies have. More brown fat means a higher resting metabolic rate will burn more calories even when we're not cold. Think about it this way, God designed our bodies with this amazing internal heater that helps us maintain a healthy weight. In episodes 168 and 169, I talked about

some of the reasons why counting calories is not effective. And I suggested a more productive approach to proper weight management. And in those episodes, I said, we don't lose weight to get healthy. We get healthy in order to lose weight. This brown fat activation is one of the reasons why that's true. A person that's embracing a healthy lifestyle that includes cold plunging will have more brown fat and therefore increase their resting metabolic rate

that makes it easier to keep the weight off. The amount of brown fat someone has and how often that brown fat is called upon to generate heat is an individual thing, and that'll impact the amount of calories we burn. What's particularly amazing is that brown fat activation doesn't just help with weight. It can also improve insulin sensitivity and blood sugar control, which are critical components of being metabolically healthy. Brown fat is just another example of

how our bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made, Psalm 139, 14. Now let's talk about what happens to our minds during a cold plunge. Cold plunging can raise dopamine levels by upwards of 250%. Dopamine is a hormone and a neurotransmitter, and it's part of our body's reward system. Increased dopamine leads to more feelings of happiness and contentment. In fact, studies are being done

with using cold plunging as a treatment for depression. Isn't that amazing? I can tell you from my personal experience that a dip in the cold plunge can completely change my mood and my outlook. I find it much easier to be content and optimistic after a plunge. It often lifts me out of a funk and that effect is not mild, it's dramatic. Another hormone worth talking about is serotonin. Now serotonin plays an important role in regulating appetite,

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enhancing memory and a whole lot more. It's an important part of encouraging that parasympathetic or rest and digest activation of the autonomic nervous system. Now research shows that serotonin levels rise after a cold plunge, but it's not the cold water that causes the rise. It's the warming process afterward. So cold plunging has application for someone who's on SSRIs and cold plunging is a natural way

to boost serotonin levels. Another way to stimulate natural serotonin production is to get sunlight on your skin, especially midday, breathing exercises, and a massage. I can also tell you this from my personal experience. Cold plunging is an excellent way to develop mental toughness. Now, mental toughness is pillar number four in my nine pillars of health. I talked about mental toughness in episode number 159.

Now it's an important part of building the mental fortitude that's necessary to forge lifelong habits that build health. I love this quote by Jerry Rice, I'm willing to do today what others won't so that later I can have what they can't. Isn't that good? I'm gonna say that again. I'm willing to do today what others won't so that later I can have what others can't.

I often remind myself of that quote when I'm about to jump in the cold water. It really applies here. I'm thinking about having that quote made into something I can hang on the wall and I'm going to hang it right on top of my cold plunge and use it for motivation when I need it. Cold plunging can be challenging, but the reward is well worth the price. So let's talk about what happens to us spiritually when we practice a cold plunging. Well, as we just touched on,

Cold plunging helps with our mental toughness. And mental toughness helps us to be more countercultural by developing more mental-emotional fortitude. 2 Corinthians 5:20 says this, Now then, we are ambassadors for

Christ as though God were pleading through us. What does an ambassador do? They represent their country in a foreign land. As followers of Jesus Christ,

David (14:53.848)

we're called to be in the world, but not of the world. That counter-cultural calling is fundamental to being a Christian in this ABC culture that we live in, where ABC stands for anything but Christianity. Doing cold plunging can give us practice and more confidence at being more counter-cultural and saying no to the world's way of doing things. You know, I often say in the show,

We maximize our health potential by aligning our lives more fully with God's natural design for spirit, and body. That requires a turning away from a lot of the things many people participate in and a move toward God's way of doing things. And of course we know that God loves us enough that he always has our wellbeing in mind. When he tells us to do something, it's for our benefit. If he tells us to avoid something, it's for our protection.

God has our wellbeing in mind and we do well to submit ourselves to his way of doing things. Sometimes that takes courage. It always takes faith. Joshua 1.9 says, have I not commanded you be strong and courageous? Do not be frightened and do not be dismayed for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. Cold plunging can definitely help you be more strong and courageous. We could all use a little more mental toughness

when we're faced with a temptation. Now I don't know about you, but knowing that I'm willing to do something that most people shy away from, like coal plunging, gives me a little more confidence, a confidence to say, no, when the waitress comes around with a tray full of delicious looking desserts, that choice becomes a little easier. Proverbs 3, 5 and 6 says, trust in the Lord with all your heart, do not lean on your own understanding and all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight.

If we lean on our own intuition about cold plunging, we'd never do it. When it comes to jumping in the cold water, I would suggest that we have to acknowledge God's exquisite design for our bodies and trust in that. When you first jump into the cold water, especially anything below 50, your

body will be screaming at you saying, what are you trying to do to us? This is dangerous. Get us out of here immediately. But,

David (17:13.268)

If we exercise our agency and our dominion over our thought lives, we can press through that initial shock and enjoy a very tranquil experience. I know that sounds counterintuitive, but I can tell you from experience, it's true. After the initial exhilaration caused by our fight or flight reflex kicking in, the rest and digest side of the autonomic nervous system will take over. And that's an excellent time to enjoy that meditative state and

Be still and know that he is God, Psalm 46:10. I sometimes enjoy meditating on Psalm 23 when I'm in there. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. When I'm sitting in my cold plunge, the water is very still and there's something very tranquil and soothing and peaceful about still water, even when it's cold. Now I remind myself that I'm doing something

very good for my body and my soul. Psalm 23 goes on, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me. I know that I'm not in that tub alone. God is with me. He promised to never leave me or forsake me. And I'm not afraid. I know God has blessed me with a body that knows how to adapt and I'll be out of the water before there's any real danger to me. All I have to do is relax, do my breathing, do my meditating.

and trust in that God-given wisdom of the body. I don't have to teach my body what a cold shock response is. My body already knows what to do and it happens automatically. If you think about it, that God-given built-in wisdom of the body is utterly amazing. A pregnant mother's body knows how to build a human being. A newborn baby knows how to breathe.

If you've ever watched a baby being born, you know what I'm talking about here. And you can appreciate what kind of a miracle the procreation process is and the wisdom and the divine design that God places inside the human body. If you think about it, it's awe inspiring. It's breathtaking. So if you're ready to make cold exposure part of your healthy lifestyle, I suggest starting with a cold shower. It doesn't cost you anything. And it's a good way to become acclimated to the cold shock response.

David (19:38.466)

Now take a shower like you normally would and at the end of the shower, step out of the water stream and turn the water to full cold. You can start just by putting an arm or a shoulder in and when you feel ready, put your back in and your chest or even your head. You can start out staying in the water for just a few seconds. Over time, you become more acclimated and you can stay in longer and longer, but I wouldn't suggest doing it for any longer than two or three minutes. That's enough.

Now, if you're ready to step it up from there, there are some inexpensive inflatable cold plunge tubs online. You've probably seen people in these things on TikTok or on an Instagram reel. make good photographs, but for the most part, those people are just playing around because those tubs are pretty much toys. I don't actually recommend doing it that way. You could also try it in your bathtub, in your house, but you'll need so much ice to get the water cold enough.

that you pretty much need an ice machine in your house. If not, you're going to go broke with bagged ice at the store. I know because I tried that. Those blow up tubs are more like toys and buying bagged ice is such a hassle that you're probably going to give up the practice. So if you're serious about your health and you want to make cold plunging part of your healthy lifestyle, I recommend you consider a tub like mine. It's called the Mod Plunge. Here's a picture of mine.

If you're listening to the audio version, it basically looks like a giant Yeti cooler. Now it works really well. It has a chiller that cools the water off to the temperature you specify. So you don't need any ice. You know, I'm pretty much a do it yourself when it comes to this kind of stuff, but I priced out all the parts that would take to build something like this. And I couldn't build this tub for the price that they sell it for. Frankly, I don't know how they do it. So I bit the bullet and I bought one.

And I couldn't be happier or more satisfied with that purchase. It's a great product. If you'd like to go all into cold plunging, I highly recommend the Mod Plunge. Now I have an affiliate link on my website. You can use my link. You'll get a hundred dollars off on your purchase. Go to my website chlpodcast.com forward slash resources, click on the Mod Plunge and you'll get a discount and you'll be supporting the show in the process

because I get a small commission. While you're on my website, don't forget to get on the wait list for the new membership club.

David (22:04.462)

Joining the waitlist doesn't cost you anything, but when the online community launches, you'll be able to join at founding member pricing, which will be at a substantial discount. Go to my website chlpodcast.com forward slash membership and get on the waitlist today. Now stay tuned for the next episode. I'm doing a lifestyle audit with a member of the natural nation. His name is Dustin Howes. Dustin is working on some ADHD, some depression and asleep.

It's a great conversation. You don't want to miss it. That's it for now. Thank you for listening. I appreciate you. Go out there and live abundantly. I'll talk with you next week. Be blessed.