

Cold is a Dose, Not a Dare

A doctor's quick guide to using cold well · Dr. Sara Hazel · Barefoot Sage Center, Flagstaff

Cold is one of the oldest natural therapies we have — and one of the easiest to overdo. Used well, it is medicine. Used as a dare, it can leave you worse, not better. Here is the short version.

What cold does — when it's dosed right

A good cold dose isn't just one you recover from. It's one that activates the surface circulation with a **rebound dilation**. Done right, cold can:

- Raise metabolism
- Lower inflammation
- Strengthen the immune response
- Build brown fat (more calories burned)
- Shift mood through neurotransmitters
- Support hormone regulation
- Trigger protective **cold-shock proteins**

In the language of the old doctors: it increases your **vital force**. Cold works the way exercise works — a brief, deliberate stress your body answers by getting stronger.

The test: thirty seconds you finish calmly beats five minutes you white-knuckle. If you can't rewarm easily afterward — that wasn't a dose. It was an overdose.

The dose — how to actually do it

Temperature. Just **55–60°F** can produce many of the best results. If you're weak, ill, or fragile, even that can be too much. Start *cool to the touch* — refreshing, not scream-worthy.

Warm up first. Be at least **97°F** core temperature — **98–99°F** is ideal — with a hot shower, bath, sauna, hot drink, exercise, or hot pack. Be warm and feel warm before the challenge.

Time. Begin with **30–60 seconds**. Treat cold as *training*: a 5-lb weight before a 20-lb one. Some thrive on a near-icy plunge for 1–3 minutes; many do not. Build slowly.

The secret — what you do after. Let your body rewarm *itself* first. Lie or sit for **3–8 minutes** before any hot tub, shower, or sauna. This is where the multi-system magic happens.

The old workhorse: contrast therapy

Hot, then cold, then hot again — and maybe cold again. **Three to five rounds.** Alternation moves blood the way a pump moves water — gentler and more useful for more bodies than heroic cold alone. It's treated more injuries, infections, and pain conditions than I can count, in clinics and even in hospitals. The rhythm of timing and temperature is everything.

Who should be careful

Cold is not for every body, every day. **Certain heart and circulation conditions, Raynaud's, thyroid trouble,** and other situations change the math entirely. That's the difference between a therapy and a stunt — a therapy has contraindications, and someone who knows both you and the mechanisms. Cold can do remarkable things even for fragile and ill people, in the right hands. **A note for women:** a woman's hormones and nervous system can read cold differently than a man's. Low thyroid function, the second half of the cycle, or too little estrogen with too much cortisol can all change how well she responds. The goal is a stress that builds function, not one that depletes.

This guide is health education, not personal medical advice — your situation may change what's safe for you. Questions? Reach out. · **Barefoot Sage Center** · 14 E. Birch Avenue, Flagstaff · barefootsagecenter.com