How to safely combine a sauna and cold plunge in Cavan

Understanding the basics of sauna and cold exposure

Combining heat and cold has become a popular wellness practice, and for good reason. A session that moves from a hot sauna into a cold lake or plunge pool can leave you feeling alert, relaxed, and refreshed. But doing it safely matters more than doing it quickly. The goal is not to test your limits, but to find a rhythm that works for your body. This is especially true when you are trying it for the first time or returning after a break.

In Cavan, Brackley Lake offers a setting where people can experience this contrast in a natural environment. The key principle to hold onto is heat then cold, at your own pace. Rushing either phase can lead to discomfort or even risk. Below is a step-by-step approach to help you get the most from the session while staying safe.

Step 1: Prepare before you arrive

Preparation starts at home. What you bring and how you hydrate will affect how your body handles the temperature shifts. Drink water in the hours before your session, but avoid heavy meals right beforehand. A full stomach can make the heat feel uncomfortable and may increase the chance of feeling dizzy.

Pack swimwear, a towel to dry off with, and a separate towel to sit on in the sauna. Sitting on a towel is a simple hygiene practice that also protects the wood from sweat and moisture. Bring a water bottle to stay hydrated between rounds. Leave jewellery and metal objects in a bag, as they can heat up quickly in the sauna and cause burns.

View the location on Google Maps

If you have any medical conditions, especially heart or blood pressure issues, check with your doctor before trying contrast bathing. The same applies if you are pregnant or have a history of seizures. Knowing your own health baseline is the first safety step.

Step 2: Start with the sauna

Begin your session in the sauna, not in the cold water. Enter slowly and sit or lie at a lower bench if you are new to it. Heat rises, so the higher benches are hotter. Give yourself time to adjust. Stay in for 5 to 10 minutes on your first round. Listen to your body, not the clock. If you feel lightheaded, nauseous, or overly uncomfortable, step out earlier.

Breathe normally through your nose. The dry heat can feel intense, but slow breathing helps your body regulate. Do not pour water on the sauna stones unless you know it is a wood-fired sauna designed for that. Some saunas are dry by design, and adding water may not be appropriate.

When you feel ready to leave, stand up slowly. Sudden movements can cause a drop in blood pressure and make you feel faint. Open the door and step out carefully. Take a moment to sit or stand outside the sauna before moving toward the water.

Step 3: Cool down before the plunge

After the sauna, your skin will be hot and your blood vessels dilated. Going straight into cold water can be a shock to the system. Instead, spend a minute or two cooling down in the open air. Walk slowly toward the lake or plunge area. Let your body temperature start to drop naturally.

If you are at Brackley Lake, the cold dip is optional. Some people prefer to stay dry and just enjoy the sauna. Others like to wade in gradually. There is no right or wrong, only what feels safe for you. The key is to avoid jumping in headfirst. Enter the water slowly, ideally up to your waist first, and let your breathing adjust before going deeper.

Live Lagom Sauna is also on Instagram.

Cold water immersion triggers a gasp reflex. If you go in too fast, you may inhale water or feel a surge of panic. Controlled entry helps you manage that reflex. Stay in the cold water for a short time, usually 30 seconds to 2 minutes. Longer is not better. Your body will tell you when it is time to get out.

Step 4: Warm up naturally after the cold dip

Once you step out of the cold water, dry off with a towel and put on a warm layer if you have one. Do not rush back into the sauna immediately. Walk around gently to let your body rewarm on its own. Shivering is a sign that your body is working to generate heat. It is normal, but if it continues for more than a few minutes, wrap up in a towel or change into dry clothes.

Some people like to repeat the cycle two or three times. If you do, keep each round shorter than the first. Your body will be more sensitive after repeated exposure. Always return to the sauna at your own pace, not because others are doing another round.

Step 5: Know when to stop

One of the most important skills in contrast bathing is knowing when to stop. Signs that you should end your session include feeling dizzy, having chills that do not stop, feeling numb in your fingers or toes, or experiencing chest discomfort. These are not signs to push through. They are signals to rest and rehydrate.

Do not use alcohol before or during a sauna and cold plunge session. Alcohol affects your body's ability to regulate temperature and increases the risk of dehydration and poor judgment. Stick to water or an electrolyte drink if you need it.

If you are trying this for the first time, aim for just one cycle: sauna, cool down, short dip, and rest. You can always do more on your next visit. Building up gradually is safer and more enjoyable than trying to do too much too soon.

What to watch for at each stage

Each stage of the session has its own risks. In the sauna, watch for overheating. Signs include headache, nausea, rapid pulse, and confusion. If you notice any of these, leave the sauna immediately and cool down in the open air. In the cold water, watch for gasping, hyperventilation, or inability to control your breathing. These are signs that the cold is too intense. Get out and warm up slowly.

Between rounds, watch for dizziness when standing. Move slowly and hold onto a railing or stable surface if you feel unsteady. After the session, watch for prolonged shivering or skin that stays cold to the touch. These can indicate that your body is struggling to rewarm.

If you are with others, keep an eye on each other. It is easy to lose track of time when you are relaxed, and a friend may notice signs you miss.

Making the most of the experience

The real benefit of a sauna and cold dip session comes from consistency, not intensity. Regular, gentle exposure helps your body adapt over time. The phrase to remember is heat then cold, at your own pace. It keeps the focus on your own comfort rather than on comparison with others.

Brackley Lake in Co. Cavan provides a natural setting for this practice. The lake water is clean and cool, and the surrounding area offers space to rest between rounds. Whether you are a regular or a first-timer, the same safety principles apply: hydrate, go slow, listen to your body, and never force yourself to stay in heat or cold longer than feels right.

For those interested in trying a wood-fired sauna experience near the lake, Live Lagom Sauna operates weekend sessions at Brackley Lake. The address is 47RX+3R location on N87, Lake

Car Park, Brackley, Bawnboy, Co. Cavan, Ireland. You can reach them at +353 83 022 5026 for more information.