



# COLD AS ICE!

KRIOTHERAPY, A NEW TREATMENT FROM EASTERN EUROPE, IS SAID TO WORK WONDERS WITH ITS SUB-ZERO TEMPERATURES. BUT WHAT EXACTLY IS IT? **PATRICIA CARSWELL** FINDS OUT

★ I'm standing next to a rather fit-looking Frank Bruno. We're wearing just enough to cover our extremities and our modesty, and are drying our near-naked bodies in front of an electric fan. We're about to step into a sauna-like chamber frozen to temperatures far lower than any naturally occurring on Earth.

This is not some weird, surreal dream: it's terrifyingly real. I'm about to experience kriotherapy, a treatment that exposes the body to temperatures ranging from  $-110^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $-149^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

## Scared stiff

For several nights I've had nightmares about it, in which my skin melts like wax and my nipples fall off. Renata, the relentlessly cheerful Polish therapist who runs the unit at the Champneys resort, laughs when I tell her. Frank joins in loudly. 'You'll be fine,' he bellows, pointing out the panic buttons, which shut the cooling system down instantly in an emergency. More laughter. I've rarely been anywhere so hearty.

Frank is in first at a blood-tingling  $-135^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The larger and fitter you are, the more you can withstand, and for a man who took on Mike Tyson I'm guessing this is easy. Renata takes one look at me and switches it to  $-110^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

'This had better work,' I mutter through gritted teeth. I'm not doing this for fun; having

recovered from ME, I still suffer from the occasional relapse and am looking for a bit of oomph to get me through the rest of the winter.

Kriotherapy promises to deliver. It is said to help with an impressive list of ailments, including fatigue, depression, backache, insomnia, arthritis and many more. Olympic athletes and sportsmen also use it to treat injuries.

The science behind it seems deceptively simple. When the skin feels the extreme cold, its temperature receptors cause the brain to respond as if under threat. Blood is then pumped around the body at an increased rate; Renata tells me that the veins expand to four times their usual size, giving the body a huge oxygen rush.

## Into the cold

My turn arrives. 'Lady, you come with me,' cries Renata, and opens the door. A huge rush of cold steam billows out across the floor. Renata grasps my hand, initially leading me into an antechamber at  $-60^{\circ}\text{C}$  and then through another door into the deep freeze. The cold is intense and I can barely see the other side of the room through the swirling dry ice. For three minutes we march round the small space, swinging our arms and occasionally squatting to feel the colder air close to

the floor. It's a dry cold, much easier to withstand than the usual British damp, but after a while my fingers are numb and my skin is burning a little.

'One minute,' calls Renata. I'm glad she's there with me. We stomp some more and suddenly we're doing the countdown. We spend a few more seconds in the anteroom to acclimatise and then burst into the warmth.

There's ice on my socks and my skin is glowing a vivid red, but I'm still alive and, happily, my extremities are intact.

I warm up with a rather vigorous half-hour session on the VibroGym (a type of Power Plate machine). Within five minutes I'm back to normal and more concerned with my burning stomach muscles. The cold forgotten, I bounce back for a further session just two days later – this time at  $-125^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

## Happy customer

Having started out scared and sceptical, I've become something of a kriotherapy convert. There's been a definite spring in my step since I braved the big chill and I don't think it was just the luxurious surroundings of Champneys. My stamina has noticeably improved and I've been sleeping more soundly, too.

After years of exhaustion I'd have done almost anything to get my mojo back. Kriotherapy turned out to be a surprisingly painless way of doing it, and I didn't even have to sacrifice my nipples to achieve it! ☺

## Kriotherapy – the facts

- ★ Kriotherapy involves spending two to three minutes at temperatures between  $-110^{\circ}\text{C}$  and  $-149^{\circ}\text{C}$ , depending on your size and fitness level.
- ★ It's recommended for a wide range of disorders, including fatigue, insomnia, depression and muscle injury.
- ★ It isn't suitable for sufferers of claustrophobia, circulatory disorders, epilepsy, auto-immune disorders and some other conditions – always seek advice prior to booking if you're concerned.
- ★ Available at Champneys, Tring, Hertfordshire, £35 per treatment, [www.champneys.com](http://www.champneys.com)

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