

Hot Soak vs. Ice Bath

You finish a hard workout - doesn't matter what it is - a long run in your marathon training program, a long bike ride or any other exercise or activity that makes your body ache.

What is best for relieving the pain ?

A long soak in a hot tub or the opposite - an ice bath. Before you just shiver and exclaim - No Way - elite athletes believe cold is better.

An article in the Toronto Globe and Mail notes that the muscle micro-tears that result from a hard workout are actually good as they are what stimulates new muscle growth. The damage from those micro-tears are also what produces that muscle soreness that peaks one or two days after your hard workout.

Dr. Greg Wells, an exercise physiologist at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto indicates that cold causes blood vessels to constrict which forces waste products out of the affected areas. Then when the area warms, new blood moves into the affected area to help in the healing process.

Scientific research using ice baths in lab conditions though have resulted in mixed results. Studies in Australia have not found significant reduction in pain, swelling or muscles impairment in their work with short ice baths and athletes. Another study using longer immersion in an ice bath found some small reduction in pain and swelling and faster restoration of strength and power in their athletes.

Overall, the experts looking at ice baths do encourage their use. For athletes, it will come down to a try it approach. If it works and helps you to get back to your workout program quicker and with less pain, then just do it. One rule, typical ice bath temperatures will range from 54-59 degrees. Pushing the temperature too low can actually cause tissue damage - never go below 41 degrees when using an ice bath.

So, your choice. go for the warmth of a long hot soak or add some teeth-chattering, BRRR to your post work out. Just do what is best for you !!