



Dr. Rachel West Advocates Infrared Sauna How Infrared Sauna Helps Special-Needs Children

by the Health Experts at Healthy Living Magazine



Dr. Rachel West

As a parent of a child with behavioral or physical challenges, you might be interested in knowing that many kids benefit from infrared sauna as part of an overall program for health maintenance. Special-needs children include those with conditions such as autism, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder and Asperger's syndrome that doctors like Rachel West, D.O., of Los Angeles, California, work with daily. In fact, Dr. West is regarded nationally as the doctor to go to for special-needs kids. Dr. West combines many therapies and modalities together with diet and nutrition—and she frequently uses infrared sauna as part of her healthy child programs because of its overall health-promoting benefits.

In some sense, she says, “We do the same kind of detox for kids as we do for adults.”

And special-needs kids invariably benefit when their body's elimination pathways are working optimally. Indeed, some of the most recent research suggests that the environment plays a powerful role in causing or exacerbating these health challenges that involve behavioral, neurological and physical symptoms.

Dr. West is a strong believer in an environmental link with our most difficult childhood neurological and behavioral health challenges. Her views are bolstered by a July 2011 study published online in the Archives of General Psychiatry. Researchers looked at some 192 sets of twins in California. In each pair, one twin was autistic. “The study sought to determine how likely the second twin was to have some form of autism. If autism was highly heritable, identical twins should have been far more likely to both have autism than fraternal twins. But the researchers found that fraternal twins

were unexpectedly likely to both have autism,” notes an article in The New York Times.

The implication is that something in their common gestational or early childhood experience may have contributed to this similarity.

Says Dr. West, “We now believe there are a lot of environmental influences. This can include prenatal exposures to chemicals, microbes and stress. Some of the environmental influences and chemicals thus far linked to autism are, for example, rubella infection during pregnancy, and medications and dysbiosis in the child’s gut. Two drugs that might be used during pregnancy that come to mind are thalidomide and valproic acid.” Air pollution and exposure to certain pesticides and other chemicals, have been found to be associated with autism too, note experts. In a 2010 paper in the journal *Neuro-Toxicology*, Dr. Amir Miodovnik, a pediatrician at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, and his colleagues showed that children who had been exposed to high levels of phthalates prenatally were more likely to show social impairments at seven to nine years of age, according to the study. Dr. West also considers viruses, heavy metals, preservatives and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) from plastics as other top environmental influences.

It doesn’t really matter though to the child, who just wants to have his or her health. Whether we are looking at cause and effect or exacerbation, special-needs kids benefit from having as low levels as possible of chemical toxins. Many chemical toxins are secreted via the skin and perspiration. Our skin is our largest detoxification organ after all. Detoxification, in this sense, is one benefit for special-needs kids. But there are many others for children, according to Dr. West.

“The nice thing is that far infrared actually penetrates at cellular levels so it will help clean out organ tissues and disconnect cells from toxins that may be blocking pathways and at very low heat, which is safe for children,” says Dr. West.

THE RELAXATION RESPONSE

“I work with a lot of special-needs kids,” she says. “One of the nice things is that infrared sauna is so relaxing to kids, all kids. It doesn’t have to be that long to get some kind of effect and it is like lying in the sun. The nice thing is that since kids are difficult to get medicine into without using tons of sugar or bribing them in another way, with the sauna, there is no bribery required. You just basically use the sauna as a gentle detoxification.” This gets the blood moving through the pathways of elimination including liver, kidneys, gastrointestinal tract, colon and, of course, skin.

“But another one of the really beautiful things about the infrared sauna that works so well for my special-needs kids who might be injured or recovering from an injury or accident, or who find walking or exercising difficult, is that a session in the sauna is just like exercise for getting the blood moving and improving their mood. The kids love being in a sauna because they feel much better right away. The infrared sauna’s low heat penetrates at the cellular level, which is safe for kids. We have kids with Achilles heel conditions where they have difficulty walking or in wheelchairs who don’t get enough exercise, and they find the infrared sauna incredibly restorative. The infrared sauna is a relaxing, restorative experience.”

But there’s more. “Your daughter or son with blemishes may find the sauna works just really well for skin conditions,” adds Dr. West. Teenagers going through hormonal changes benefit. Kids (and adults) with psoriasis benefit.

Also, just remember, the doctor adds, “Kids need down time too. The saunas can be a relaxing, calming experience for teens, letting them close their eyes and meditate or de-stress. It is important to remember that even children need some time to recuperate and recharge if they grow up in a stressful environment, as most of our kids do. Many kids are running on adrenaline all day. Their adrenals will be taxed if they don’t de-stress, so it is important to let them have down time. Infrared sauna is critical.”

WORKING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Dr. West says some conditions set in as early as three years of age, and that she works with parents to teach them how to be with their child. For example, she recommends reading them a story.

A lot of kids’ bodies are so toxic they are building up lactic acid, which can cause them to engage in repetitive movement. “The lactic acid makes kids feel like they want a massage, and the saunas feel great on their joints and muscles,” she says. “And keep in mind it isn’t the heat that counts, but the penetration and the benefits of infrared sauna that can occur at low heat. We see oxygenation of cells and better sleep,” she says. “Since sauna restores and calms the nervous system and heat is nurturing, many parents have their kids take a sauna in preparation for bedtime or before their evening bath or shower.”

Remember, the infrared sauna is used with an entire health program. Dr. West says taking a sauna three times a week, for twenty minutes to start, is a good regimen for kids.