

INSTRUCTIONS: Winter outdoor swimming (www.tukes.fi 26.10.2016)

Interest in outdoor swimming in a hole in the ice or 'ice pool' has grown from one year to the next and the number of such swimming holes in Finland has increased. Winter outdoor swimming is suitable for almost everyone but if you suspect problems in regard to your health, contact a doctor first and discuss the risks associated with this activity. The effects of winter outdoor swimming are individual and they also depend on the number of times the person enters the water, the time spent there, and how the sauna is used for warming up the body. Listen to your own body and find out what suits you best.

Do not go into a swimming hole in the ice after drinking alcohol or while ill with flu, fever, or some other illness. If you suffer from heart or blood vessel complaints, first discuss your intentions with your doctor in regard to winter outdoor swimming. Supervise children using a swimming hole in the ice. A panicking child may easily forget how to swim.

Guidelines for winter outdoor swimming

- Before entering the water read any rules there might be and obey them. These may vary from place to place.
- It is a good idea to warm up your muscles before entering the water, e.g. with a walk using walking poles, or by skiing.
- Take a companion with you when going swimming in a hole in the ice, so that if something should happen your companion can assist you.
- You should not go too quickly from the sauna into the water or vice versa because the temperature difference between the sauna and the water may stress the heart and the change in blood pressure can cause dizziness.
- It is best to use shoes or woollen socks for walking to the hole in the ice. Special slippers are available for winter swimmers which also protect the wearer's feet against slipperiness, sharp stones and salt.
- When walking to the ice hole remember that paths and steps may be slippery. Walk slowly and carefully.
- Never dive head first into a swimming hole in the ice. Diving and getting your head wet is not recommended, since this increases heat loss and can lead to cold shock.
- When first entering the water take a quick 'dip' but do not swim. This is because the cold water can cause perfectly normal, harmless gasping for breath. Once your body has adjusted to the cold, you can gradually increase the time you spend in the water.
- After going to the sauna and having a swim put on warm clothing and if necessary drink a warm beverage.
- For safety reasons, if you observe any deficiencies in the facility, you should immediately inform the supervisor.
- In an emergency call for help immediately. Before you go swimming, make sure you know how to summon help. The emergency services number is 112.