# Harnessing Cold Therapy for Stress Relief

Do you feel stressed? Have you considered taking an ice bath to calm your nerves? It might seem like a crazy idea, but it’s becoming a hot trend on social media. Ice baths were popularized in recent years by Wim Hof, a Dutch extreme athlete.

Wim spent decades taking ice baths and noting the reactions in his physiology. He discovered that regular ice baths (11 minutes total per week) help to open the vascular system and optimize its function, improving circulation.

The cold also impacts the nervous system and how our body handles and controls stress.

## How Cold Therapy Leverages the Autonomic Nervous System

The cold impacts the ANS through the sympathetic nervous system response (SNS). The SNS is the part of the ANS that regulates the “fight-or-flight” response. It’s this response that puts us on edge and gives us anxiety disorders.

The cold shocks the SNS into overdrive, and we experience a massive dump of adrenaline and cortisol, removing the triggers of the FoF response. That’s why so many people claim they feel relaxed and calm for the rest of the day after taking an ice bath.

Essentially, you’re stressing the body to release the stressors and create a healing effect for your nervous system and body.

## How to Take an Ice Bath

Sit down in the ice bath as soon as your feet hit the floor. Don’t stand there thinking about it; just do it. The longer you stand there, the more your brain tries to talk you out of it.

When you sit down, submerge yourself to your neck or chin. This ensures the cold gets to the Vagus nerve at the back of your neck, allowing the cold to interact with your sympathetic nervous system.

When you sit down in the water, your body starts gasping; it’s a natural reflex. The idea is to calm your breathing. Take long, deep breaths with even inhales and exhales. Focus on how your body feels and the blood pumping through your veins.

You need at least two minutes in the ice bath; try for three if you can.

## What to Expect After Taking an Ice Bath

After you get out of the cold, do a set of pushups or jumping jacks to get your blood moving. Focus on stimulating the intercostal muscles to activate your brown fat stores. Depending on the time you spend in the ice bath, it could take you up to an hour to feel fully recovered.