
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Are saunas good for you?



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This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Georgie

And I'm Georgie. In winter, people find different ways of keeping warm, like wearing extra clothes or staying indoors, but in some countries there's another way of keeping the cold out – going for a sauna.

Neil

Yes, Nordic countries like Sweden and Finland have a long history of taking saunas, but now they're popping up in Britain too. Have you ever been for a sauna, Georgie?

Georgie

I have, yes. And if I'm honest, I'm not a huge fan. I don't really like being too hot. It's uncomfortable. What about you, Neil?

Neil

Oh really? I quite like a sauna. You feel really refreshed afterwards.

Georgie

So, what is a sauna? Well, a typical sauna is a small wooden room heated with steam to around 80°C. It's hot enough to make anyone sweat, but are saunas good for your health as well? That's what James Gallagher wanted to find out for BBC Radio 4 programme Inside Health.

James Gallagher

We're seeing what saunas do to the human body. They're popping up all over the country with claims that high temperatures boost your health and well-being, but are they **all they're cracked up to be?**

Neil

James wants to find out if saunas are **all they're cracked up to be**. He means, "Are they as good as people say?" And that's exactly what we'll be finding out in this episode, along with some useful new words and phrases.

Georgie

And remember, you can practise all the new vocabulary from this episode with the quiz and worksheet on our website, bbclearningenglish.com.

Neil

But now I have a question for you, Georgie. The word sauna comes from the Finnish language, but what does it mean? Does it mean:

- a) sweat,
- b) hot water, or
- c) bathhouse?

Georgie

Ooh, I'm going to guess c) bathhouse.

Neil

OK. Well, we'll find out if you're right at the end of the programme. In recent winters, saunas have grown in popularity in the UK. BBC reporter James Gallagher met some people going to Môr A Sawna, a beach sauna in South Wales. He asked them why they love saunas so much.

James Gallagher

Hello everyone!

Everyone

Hello!

James Gallagher

Who loves a sauna?

Everyone

Me!

James Gallagher

Tell me why.

Speaker 1

Ah, it's just so relaxing. It just makes you feel **at ease**.

Speaker 2

It's also great for relaxing muscles if you're **tense** or anything like that at all.

Speaker 3

Yeah, I always love coming down here when I'm a bit stressed out, and by the time that I'm finished, I feel like I've completely **reset**. It's wonderful.

Georgie

The first speaker says saunas make her feel **at ease** – a phrase meaning comfortable and relaxed. And the next speaker thinks saunas are great if you feel **tense** – an adjective meaning worried and unable to relax.

Neil

Saunas make the final speaker feel like she's **reset**. You might already know the word **reset** to mean turning a computer off and on again when it's not working, but used in connection with a person, **reset** means to start again after a rest, so that you feel better about life.

Georgie

So, it seems saunas do help people feel better, but is there actual medical evidence that it's good for us? Here's James Gallagher again, speaking with Professor Damian Bailey, an expert in human physiology for BBC Radio 4 programme Inside Health.

James Gallagher

When we start to connect this to the arguments around health benefits, is there a health benefit to going in the sauna?

Damian Bailey

Yeah. I mean, I looked at the research really closely. I was fascinated by the evidence – huge benefits. I mean really huge benefits. And it's cultural, of course. Five million people in Finland – 90% of them use saunas. Maybe we should be copying what the Finns do, because there's a 40% reduction in all-cause mortality with the sauna-goers. Now, this is what we would call **observational data**, but it's based on thousands and thousands of sauna-goers. These are **observational data sets**, so we really do need what we call RCTs – randomised controlled trials – so everything, just as you've mentioned there, everything is absolutely controlled. But we can't **turn our noses up** at the current data – the **observational data**.

Neil

Damian discusses the evidence from Finland, a country where 90% of the population are regular sauna-goers, and it's impressive – a 40% reduction in deaths from all causes. But it's important to remember that this is based on **observational data** – information collected from watching people's natural behaviour and not from controlled medical trials.

Georgie

Nevertheless, this **observational data** is based on evidence from thousands and thousands of Finns over many years. That's why Damian thinks we shouldn't **turn our noses up at** it. We shouldn't reject it simply because we think it's not good enough for us. Well, all this talk about saunas has made me want to give it another try, but not before you reveal the answer to your question, **Neil**.

Neil

I asked you what the Finnish word sauna means. Is it: a) sweat, b) hot water, or c) bathhouse?

Georgie

And I said bathhouse. Am I right?

Neil

You are absolutely correct. Well done!

Georgie

Yay!

Neil

OK. Let's recap the vocabulary we've learned in this episode. If something is **not all it's cracked up to be**, it isn't as good as people say.

Georgie

When someone's **at ease**, they feel comfortable and unstressed, whereas a **tense** person is worried and unable to relax.

Neil

When someone **resets**, they start again after a rest which has made them feel better about life.

Georgie

Observational data is information collected from watching people's natural behaviour without interfering in it.

Neil

And finally, if you **turn your nose up at** something, you reject it because you think it's not good enough for you. Once again, our six minutes are up. But if you want to improve your English with more trending topics and useful vocabulary, you'll find plenty on our website, bbclearningenglish.com. See you again soon. But for now, it's goodbye.

Georgie

Goodbye!

VOCABULARY

not all it's cracked up to be

(idiom) not as good as (many) people say it is

at ease

comfortable and relaxed

tense

worried and unable to relax

reset

start again after a rest, so that you feel better about life

observational data

information collected from watching people's natural behaviour without interfering in it

turn your nose up at (something)

(idiom) reject something because you think that it's not good enough for you