

CONVERSATIONS
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Legal highs: cryotherapy

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You will rarely see the phrases “legal high”, “weight loss” and “cheese fondue” in the same sentence, but that’s where I am going with this one. Bear with me.

In my relentless quest to uncover highs that involve neither drugs nor alcohol, I happened upon a remedial treatment known as cryotherapy. Even though being cold for me ranks alongside nausea and toothache, I decided to explore this phenomenon for you, my favourite reader.



ALAMY

I took myself off to [lll, a cryo centre](#) (fourth floor of Harvey Nichols), paid a small fortune (sadly unclaimable), took off my clothes (awks), put on the provided gloves, socks, sports bra and shorts (the shame), walked inside a big cupboard filled with liquid nitrogen vapour that made the temperature plummet to minus 85C (not a typo) and stood in it for three minutes (weird). The science behind cryotherapy is that, as your skin temperature drops, it induces the primal fight-or-flight instinct. Blood floods to your organs to protect them, a rush of adrenaline provides clarity and focus, a rush of oxygen boosts your circulation, a rush of dopamine tries to convince your brain that you can deal with this and, as the metabolism speeds up, trying to warm your body, you burn up to 800 calories.

Inevitably, after about 90 seconds, the notion of cheese fondue came into my mind - a favoured food in the (chilly) Alps. First I started to think of the joy of a regular gruyère and kirsch fondue with a hot crusty baguette. But as my skin temperature dropped, I began to fantasise about a cheddar and ale fondue with new potatoes, and by the time the freezer door opened I was deep in a reverie that centred on a port and stilton fondue with mini frankfurters to dip. I know, crazy. The dopamine had kicked in so hard that after the nice lady measured my skin temperature (it had dropped by 20C; apparently that was #goals) I was so happy I nearly hugged her. It wasn't just the joy that the treatment was over, or the knowledge that I had burnt an exercise class worth of calories. It was a genuinely gorgeous happy-to-be-alive endorphin-fuelled glow, just as promised in the brochure.

And that bright, buzzing feeling of joy kept me company all the way to La Fromagerie in Marylebone, where I wolfed a four-cheese fondue with crusty bread, coming in at about who-knows-how-many calories. Win/win/win/win/win.

A cryotherapy session costs £95 at Harvey Nichols, London SW1 (020 7201 8489); cheese fondue, from £18.50 (lafromagerie.co.uk)