

March 30, 2023

Benefits of cold water: Health guru and extreme athlete Wim Hof says we have ‘power within’ to heal disease

By Angelica Stabile

Wim Hof, Dutch athlete and wellness guru, is on a mission to 'change the world'

The ability to control our health could be right inside us.

This is according to the philosophy and practices of Dutch athlete Wim Hof, father of the Wim Hof Method.

Hof, 63, revealed how his teachings have revolutionized public health in an on-camera interview from the Netherlands with Fox News Digital.

The Wim Hof Method has three pillars: cold plunging, breathing and mindset.

The method has been proven scientifically — according to numerous medical journals, including the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) — to have monumental impacts on mental and physical health.



Wim Hof, known as the "Iceman" for his ability to withstand seemingly impossible levels of cold, demonstrates at a hotel in Kathmandu in May 2007. (DEVENDRA MAN SINGH./AFP via Getty Images)

Nicknamed "the Iceman," Hof shared that one chief benefit of his method is reducing inflammation. It's the leading cause of most ailments and autoimmune diseases, he noted.

"I'm bringing my knowledge from nature through science to global health care, showing that through science — no speculation — we are able to do so much more within our physiology," he said.

"And I think it's time to have that get out to the world to bring people some consolation in these confusing times, that there is much more autonomy over mind and body," he said.

"I'm a man on a mission. I want everybody to be happy, strong and healthy."



Wim Hof joined Fox News Digital from the Netherlands for an on-camera interview on March 27, 2023. (Angelica Stabile/Fox News Digital)

His "powerful" techniques are "available for anybody" worldwide, he said. All it takes is commitment and a little cold water.

Who is Wim Hof?

Hof is best known for his daring physical feats, such as running marathons while barefoot beyond the polar circle and climbing through the "death zone" of Mt. Everest in only his shorts.

"I began to have control over my emotions."

The extreme athlete first felt the pull to immerse himself in the cold as a kid growing up in Sittard, Netherlands, according to his book, "The Wim Hof Method."

At 17, Hof took his first cold plunge on a Sunday morning in winter at Beatrixpark in Almere, Netherlands — and discovered the power of cold water.

Hof met his wife, Olaya, when he was 22 years old. The couple had four children together.

Olaya struggled with depression — and in 1995, she fell victim to the illness and committed suicide.

"The whole of psychiatry could not help [Olaya]," he said. "How broken I was in my heart and there was nothing that could help me."

He continued, "I had no money. I had four kids left behind and the love of my life — gone."

This "devastating" moment expanded his method to include mental health.



Dutch world record holder Wim Hof, known as "The Ice Man," speaks as he tries to set a new world record for the longest and largest ice bath on April 21, 2015, in Eindhoven. (Koen van Weel/AFP via Getty Images)

What helped him cope the most was "going into the cold," he said.

"Because then, at that moment, you are surviving," he said. "You learn to survive instead of being taken on by your emotional agony," he continued.

"The emotional agony eats you alive and that will make you, finally, depressed. It will take the life force out of you," he said.

With cold water plunging, "you open up to peace inside — and that inaugurates the healing," he said.

"I began to have control over my emotions," he added.



Hof said facing the cold as a group triggers pre-historic togetherness, as demonstrated by cold plunge group Sunday Swim on Long Island, New York. (Fernando Vasquez/Sunday Swim)

The cold exposure boosted Hof's mental wellness as well as his energy levels, which started him on a journey of spreading the word to others who were experiencing similar hardships.

"After 49 years ... all these moments of faith, like drops, [have become] a tsunami," he said.

Since then, the method has caught fire across the world. Hof said people have thanked him "straight from the heart" for changing and saving their lives.

"They give me tears and all," he said. "It's real."

Many communities, like New York's Sunday Swim, preach the positive effects of cold-water therapy by practicing cold plunging in large groups.

This method is so powerful as practiced in groups due to our pre-historic beginnings, noted Hof.



The Wim Hof Method is broken down into three pillars: cold water immersion, breathing and mindset. Long Island polar plunge group Sunday Swim practices breathing on the beach on a cold day in March 2023. (Fernando Vasquez/Sunday Swim)

"The cold in pre-historics was our enemy and that brought people together," he said.

"It creates a natural camaraderie because the opposing force is out there, and once you begin to act like a community, you become stronger."

The cold, Hof said, "wakes up" the feeling of togetherness in a world that's become "over-individualized."

What happens to the body in the cold

The cold awakens the human cardiovascular system, which is made up of 70,000 miles of arteries, veins and capillaries, Hof said, noting that this system is long enough to wrap around planet Earth twice.

"My group of people was 100% not sick."

Comprised of what Hof called "millions of little muscles," this system is only awakened in the cold — and successive generations of warming up in the colder months have put those muscles to rest.

"You feel your cardiovascular system bringing the blood flow to all cells, which is the life force," he said.

"Then an explosion of energy happens because they get fed greatly ... The heart is a muscle, so all the little muscles are being stimulated."

When the body enters cold temperatures, he said, "the heart rate goes down, energy goes up."

This also expels stress, benefiting mood and mental state.

Proven 'scientifically effective'

While cardiovascular illnesses are the number-one killer in America, Hof has faced skepticism about his method.

For this reason, he's accepted invitations from multiple scientists who have studied his lifestyle to prove its credibility, he said.

Experiments include being encased in ice for 80 minutes for a study at Radboud University Medical Center in Nijmegen, Amsterdam, where he was able to keep his body temperature stable.



Wim Hof submerges himself up to his neck in ice cubes for a Guinness record-breaking 71 minutes on Jan. 26, 2008. (Michael Albans/NY Daily News Archive via Getty Images)



Wim Hof submerges himself in ice cubes for a Guinness record-breaking 71 minutes in New York City on Jan. 26, 2008. (Michael Albans/NY Daily News Archive via Getty Images)

Hof's blood samples from that experiment were then exposed to bacteria known to cause violent reactions — and no reaction took place. The university subsequently invited Hof to participate in another study.

This time, Hof agreed to be injected with E. coli bacteria so that the strength of his immune system while practicing the method could be investigated.

Hof's system, along with those of his panel of 12 trained male subjects, showed no side effects from the bacteria. Previously, it made the other 240 subjects in the study ill.

"I showed no inflammation," he said. "My group of people was 100% not sick."

He added, "This showed for the first time in science that the autonomic nervous and innate immune system [can be controlled]."



Wim Hof during the NDR talk show on Nov. 5, 2019, in Hamburg, Germany. (Getty Images)

The novel findings were published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) in 2014.

The study proved that inflammation can be naturally suppressed, which is the "cause and effect of any disease," he said.

"If it doesn't work, blame me."

This includes conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn's disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's and even cancer.

This ability to ward off illness isn't a trait unique to Hof, who's successfully trained other subjects to adapt their bodies in the same fashion.

He's brought groups of people, some suffering from autoimmune illnesses, to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro by preparing them through the Wim Hof Method, he noted.



Cold plunge group "Sunday Swim" practices Wim Hof's horse stance to induce blood flow while gathered on Robert Moses beach on Long Island, New York, March 12, 2023. (Fernando Vasquez/Sunday Swim)

This includes a 76-year-old Lyme disease sufferer, who joined Hof on his last trek up the mountain. The man was able to summit the mountain in 31 hours — in only shorts — with no prior climbing experience, Hof said.

"That is the power of the mind," Hof added.

The method works in any demographic without limitations, Hof noted. All it takes is about 10 days for the body to "fully uptake" the practice, he said.

Although anyone can practice the Wim Hof Method, its founder said it can be adapted to fit people's individual conditions as well.

A message to the skeptics

Hof suggested that the E. coli study should have "broken open" the scientific world, but modern-day medical rhetoric has hushed the idea of autonomy over the body.

"I want to heal the world and I will bring it on through science, no speculation."

"There's a lot of money going on with disease," he said. "That's what I'm afraid of."

Hof's message to the skeptics is to try his method at least once to discover the untapped power and energy nestled inside the human body.

"You don't need to do it, but I offer you this," he said. "If it doesn't work, blame me."

"This is love," he added. "Love is the ability to bring somebody else into a healthy, happy, strong state of being."

Hof referred to another study, this one from Detroit's Wayne State University called "brain over body," conducted in 2014. Here, he proved he was able to control his body temperature with just his mind.

In response to study results, the university wrote, "The Wim Hof Method may promote the spontaneous release of opioids and cannabinoids in the brain. This effect has the potential to create a feeling of well-being, mood control and reduced anxiety."

Hof said, "You can make the body work from the inside and do the right thing to neutralize the impact. The mind is able to connect with the physical body to make it stronger."

This "willful control" over the body should be studied "so much more" than it has been to date, he suggested.



A group of Long Islanders run into the ocean at Field 5 of Long Island's Robert Moses beach on New Year's Day 2023. (Fernando Vazquez/Certified Distribution)

"I want to bring light into the darkness," he said.

Today's health care system can seem like a "money-making scheme," Hof said, adding that true science should be "what benefits mankind."

He continued, "Not their wallet, not the economy. It should benefit human wellness and the prosperity of health, happiness and strength."

Hof revealed some new studies in the works, including research with UCLA on bipolar conditions and DNA; research on performance and stress resilience with Queensland University; and research in Sydney, Australia, on endometriosis.

"We are built to be in control of ourselves."

New research also includes a Penn State University study in partnership with a Dutch university, set for April 1 and 2, on cognitive ability and enhancement techniques.

"I want to heal the world and I will bring it on through science, no speculation," he said. "Let them all come and prove me wrong. I think faith in the good is [what] will stay forever."

The Wim Hof philosophy

Hof offered his definition of a life well-lived: It's living up to a purpose that "drives you and that pushes you."

"Once you get into the goodness, it comes to you," he said. "And it's big-time love."

He said, "They always say I'm crazy, but I'm bloody f---ing crazy about life and my wife. And that's not crazy at all."



Dutchman Wim Hof, better known as "the Iceman" for his ability to withstand seemingly impossible levels of cold, demonstrates skills at a hotel in Kathmandu in May 2007. (DEVENDRA MAN SINGH./AFP via Getty Images)

Hof, who's almost 64 years old, revealed that he'll be plunging for 64 minutes in icy water in celebration of his life and to show that he's still "bloody strong."

"I'm a simple man, but I'm going to change the world," he said. "That power now is also for anybody else. We are built to be in control of ourselves."

He continued, "We have an innate capacity to have much greater autonomy over mind and body to become happy, strong and healthy, guaranteed. That is what I wish every parent in the world to be able to pass onto their children."

He added, "That is love. That's what I want. And that mountain, I'm going to climb to the summit and enjoy the view."