

The Athlete's Chiropractor Talks Infrared Sauna Therapy

The DPHL interview with Olympian and Tour de France team doctor Jeff Spencer, DC

by Alex Muniz



Known throughout the sports medicine world as “America’s Champion Builder,” Dr. Spencer’s purpose-built, customized success programs have helped athletes, entertainers, and even businesspeople get to the top—and stay on the top—and have been responsible for 40 world championships in sports ranging from baseball to motocross. Perhaps most impressive is Dr. Spencer’s role as team doctor on eight consecutive Tour de France victories, including the seven won by Lance Armstrong.

Dr. Spencer himself owns nearly as many laurels as his clients. In fact, he is a true scholar-athlete. While representing our country in cycling at the 1972 Munich Olympics, and winning the 1973 California Sprint Cycling Championship, Dr. Spencer earned his undergraduate degree and then his Masters in sports medicine at the University of Southern California. Dr. Spencer went on to receive a Doctorate in Chiropractic Medicine from Cleveland Chiropractic College in Los Angeles, ultimately being named “2004’s Sports Chiropractor of the Year” by the International Chiropractors Association.

For Dr. Spencer, being the best at helping others become the best requires methods on the leading edge of mental and physical training. To this end, Dr. Spencer is a strong proponent of Sunlighten infrared saunas for general wellness and recovery in his clients’ success programs.

Taking a break from crisscrossing the country, Dr. Spencer was gracious enough to talk with *The Doctors’ Prescription for Healthy Living* about how infrared saunas are helping those with active lifestyles become peak performers, in both body and mind.

Few wellness influencers so expertly juggle the fields of sports medicine, self-improvement, and personal training like Jeff Spencer, MA, DC

Doctors’ Prescription for Healthy Living Thank you so much for talking to us, Dr. Spencer. Before we get into infrared saunas, our readers might be interested to learn how you first go about developing a customized success program for the athletes that come to you.

Jeff Spencer Well, my program is for anybody who wants to take their life and game to a higher level. It’s not just athletes; the rules are the same for everybody. But, generally speaking, the most important thing is to go through a history of where the client’s been and what they’ve been doing. I look at any injuries and hospitalizations they’ve had, their occupation, their experience with fitness. And then, we do an examination to bring up other things that may not be quite so obvious through that historical account. Finally, from all that, we develop a hierarchy of importance of what to go after first to get the person back to being a peak performer, and we outline a course-of-care that is doable for the individual and within their scope of capacity and compliance.

DPHL And once you begin these courses-of-care, what role do infrared saunas play?

JS Well, generally, we use them in two different ways: therapeutically, to help recovery from an

existing condition, or pro-actively, to support general wellness.

DPHL Have you found a difference in how you use infrared saunas for recovery with someone active in endurance/aerobic sports, versus someone more into anaerobic activities, like sprinting?

JS That’s a great question, but the body’s the body. People may have genetic inclinations or predispositions to aerobic ability versus anaerobic, but generally, the concept of getting well and staying well is the same, even if the specifics of training are different. The whole idea of therapeutic sauna use is to accelerate the body’s recovery as quickly as possible. So, whether we’re treating the stress of training for competition, micro-trauma, or some other type of injury, it’s always the same application.

DPHL What about using infrared saunas beyond recovery—for weight-loss, or even for “cutting weight,” as can be common in combat sports and those exercising in that style?

JS Well, there’s an ideal power-to-weight ratio where a person performs at their best, and anything that facilitates that is fine. Now, obviously, there’s a difference between someone who’s using a sauna to cut weight—because that’s a water weight

loss—versus someone who's using a sauna to increase their metabolism and lose unnecessary fat. Cutting weight is basically dehydration, which is public enemy number one to peak performance. It's only viable as long as there are provisions to rehydrate promptly and fully. Programs that use infrared saunas to increase metabolism are also structured with the use of different minerals and liquids to make sure that the biochemistry and nutrients are there to complete the weight-loss process without overstressing the body.

DPHL And what of detoxing? Would you also consider that a component of therapeutic sauna use?

JS Actually, it's more on the wellness, or preparation, side. Because, if you look at what it takes to be a consistent peak performer, all the parts that make a body capable of that have to work together correctly. And for sure, if you have a toxic load on the body—which everybody does, because we live in a very toxic world—it's going to steal a percent of your peak performance capacity. You may not even know it. You may be training and thinking to yourself and saying to others, "I can't do anymore. I'm at my limit. There's absolutely no more I can do to get fit." But if you're biased by hidden, toxic burdens on the body, then you don't even know what your peak capacity is. So in my view, anybody that's serious about their health—whether they're an athlete or not—needs to have a regular detoxification program that includes infrared sauna. It's one of the better options because it can combine with nutrients and exercise and clinical procedures to draw out the toxic load from the body.

DPHL With infrared saunas now playing such a role in your work, what was it about them that first attracted you?

JS Anyone creating a comprehensive program—whether it's an athlete or not—to get to the top of their game and stay there, will eventually come across the topic of the infrared sauna. To me, it was a no-brainer—the science speaks for itself. Also, I had very severe mercury poisoning about 12 years ago, and sauna played a vital role in my recovery. So I know the merits of the sauna from my personal experience as the ultimate patient.

DPHL And why do you endorse Sunlighten brand saunas, specifically?

JS The reason I align myself with Sunlighten is because they have been able to step up and answer

the call on many important considerations. They have good science, good training, good methods, and their practices of operation are solid and first rate. Also, Sunlighten is always in the process of doing quality control and upgrades on their products to be one of the leaders in the industry.

DPHL Speaking of upgrades, is there anything in infrared saunas, or how we use them, that you think needs improvement?

JS I think a very important thing is the materials that are used in the creation of the sauna itself. That they be non-toxic and "green" whenever possible, because if you're sitting in a sauna that has toxic load, as the heat gets in there, it increases the motion of the molecules and the off-gassing. Then, you're exposed to another toxic load that you're trying to get rid of!

DPHL And finally—because we'd be remiss if we didn't ask this of a former Olympian and trainer to Lance Armstrong—what is your own exercise routine and diet like?

JS As far as diet goes, variety is the name of the game. As long as you eat as naturally as possible and you get away from things that have artificial additives and hormones, the better it's going to be. For fitness, I spend about thirty minutes doing qigong, first thing in the morning. It's great for creating physical readiness and bringing the mind online to start the day from a position of strength. I ride my bicycle every day, and I do intervals on it every other day, to build my cardiovascular fitness. I also do weight training, and of course, I use my infrared sauna.

I consider it an essential element in anybody's general health care program. ■

Resources

An infrared sauna can be yours for less than one latte a day. Information on Sunlighten's infrared technology can be found at www.sunlighten.com, or call 877-292-0020.

For more information on Dr. Jeffrey Spencer, his success programs, and his speaking engagements, please visit www.jeffspencer.com. Many of Dr. Spencer's tenets and training tips can also be found in his book, *Turn it Up!: How to Perform at Your Highest Levels for a Lifetime*, as well as his audio self-help program, *Top Ten Tactics from the Champions Playbook*, available online at <http://thechampionsplaybook.com>.

