

GIVE IT A GO

# FREEZE THE FEAR & Do It Anyway

Being cold is hot right now thanks to The Wim Hof Method. The aim is ultimate mastery over your body and mind, but can this be achieved in a carpark in Kallang? **JO UPCRAFT** dives in and investigates.



There are many reasons why I moved from the UK to Singapore, and one of them involves the climate. As someone who is perpetually cold, the idea of year-round clement temperatures is an appealing one. No matter that I'm often wrapped in a blanket at work, have been known to experience onset pneumonia at Golden Village Vivocity and am never more than three metres away from a cardigan, I still live a life several degrees warmer than I would back in Blighty.

So how I found myself bikini-clad with my arm elbow-deep in a giant sack of ice in a carpark in Kallang one recent Saturday is still somewhat baffling. Perhaps I was struggling from momentary heatstroke when I agreed to join the Breathwork & Icework (Wim Hof Method) session at wellness studio, Altered States? But there I was. And it wasn't the promise of a cashmere jumper or steaming hot chocolate at the end of it, but rather the potential of increased clarity, focus, calm, positivity, energy, immunity, better sleep patterns and general wellbeing. In short, I was there to be reborn.



## INNER POWER

Welcome to the world of Wim Hof - a Dutch extreme athlete who got his nickname 'The Iceman' by breaking records related to cold exposure. It's safe to say that he's serious about his art: running a half marathon above the Arctic Circle barefoot, climbing Mount Kilimanjaro in shorts, and standing in a container while covered with ice cubes for more than 112 minutes are just some of his party tricks.

Wim's extensive cold training has enabled him to learn to control his breathing, heart rate, and blood circulation and to endure extreme temperatures. "Over time, our relationship with the world has changed," says Wim on his website ([wimhofmethod.com](http://wimhofmethod.com)). "Our lifestyles have disconnected us from the natural environment. Our age-old survival mechanisms are no longer triggered and we've lost touch with our inner power."

Through decades of self-exploration and scientific studies, Wim created The Wim Hof Method, a simple behaviour combining powerful breathing, cold therapy and an unwavering commitment to stimulate our deep physiological processes to realise our full potential. After years of being viewed as completely woo-woo, his method has gained popularity over the past few years. The idea of ice baths has become less crazy and celebrity fans are said to include Oprah Winfrey, David Beckham and Harrison Ford.



"A big portion of participants who try the method here in Singapore are expats, I believe mainly due to Wim's huge influence on international media and personalities around the world," explains our teacher, Wim Hof Method Level 2 Instructor, Chun Yih Tan, who first discovered the practice in 2016 after several failed GP diagnosis' for inflammation. "A smaller portion repeat the experience when they find their personal reasons for doing so. These are usually professionals between 30-50 years old, but I have also guided 5 and 75 year olds."

## INHALES AND EXHALES

Today's session did not begin with Siberian conditions. Rather, a group of sixteen of us kicked off in a comfortable and relaxing room furnished with cushions, throws, and Chun's soothing tones. He explained the theory beyond Wim's method and highlighted its many benefits: clinical trials have proven it to help with depression, anxiety, mood, mental focus, and pain management. "The pandemic definitely accelerated the urge in people to find something that can reduce stress and promote recovery in a short amount of time," says Chun. "What better way to 'biohack' your system than with a method that's practically free, fast, effective and easy?"

To the tranquil sounds of the handpan, Chun guides us through a breathing exercise that involves a variation of specific inhales and exhales. "The goal of Wim Hof Method breathing is to teach you to develop command over your nervous, immune, and cardiovascular systems to help you be happier, stronger, and healthier," he says.

Once mastered, we head outside to waiting bags of ice and paddling



Above: Wim Hof. Right: Our instructor, Chun Yih Tan. Below: Chun takes participants through the breathing exercises with the help of the handpan



pools to put our new skill into practice. We proceed slowly, starting first with sliding our hands and then our arms into a bag of ice. The pace picks up as we step up to our ankles and then our knees in a paddling pool of icy water at a temperature of 3 - 6 degrees Celsius, for around 10 seconds each time. I do a lot of "ooh ooh ooh, ahh ahh arrrrgh!" and promptly forget all we've just learnt.


The session moves quickly. Next, we pair up and sit down in the freezing water. It's a simultaneously oddly stressful, painful and exhilarating feeling. The beauty (and madness) of it is that for the short period (around one and a half minutes) that you're immersed, your brain cannot focus on anything external. I stop thinking about deadlines I have to meet, why I said what I did back in 1998, and why I'm practically naked outside Lucali. Instead I turn all of my attention into, well, staying alive.

## LAZY PERSON'S SPA

The maximum amount of time that anyone needs to stay in the water to reap the full benefits of ice therapy is two minutes. I manage to make it for the duration during our final immersion, although I have to lift my arms out halfway through because they physically hurt. Nevertheless, I do feel pretty proud that I've managed to stay the course and have not had a heart attack.

Chun assures me that he hears a lot of "heart stopping" worries, but explains he has various strategies to help people understand that we all have the power within us to get through.

According to Chun, the key to mastering the Wim Hof Method is authenticity. "If you can fully accept your body's messages of fears, worries, pain and sadness, even if it hits you with guilt, mocks your ego, or dangles death in your eyes, the practice can guide you through some incredible moments," he continues. "After a period of repeated practice, most people perform significantly better in breath exercises and ice dips, and realise that benefits have evolved within them physically, emotionally, mentally and sometimes spiritually. It's the ultimate lazy person's spa!"

While I'm yet to dedicate all of my weekends to my new hypothermic hobby, I would do a Wim Hof session again. For days afterwards, I was buzzing with uplifting endorphins and felt like my body had been 'reset'. Best of all, I didn't even think about slipping into a pair of 40 denier tights for at least a week. Cool, or what? 



## Every Breath You Take

One round of the Wim Hof Method breathing technique includes these steps:

- Take in a strong inhalation through the nose
  - Let out a relaxed exhalation through the mouth
  - Repeat for 30 breaths
  - On the 30th breath, exhale to 90 percent and hold for as long as you can
  - When you feel your body really needs to take a breath, inhale fully and hold for 15 seconds before releasing.
- The basic technique involves three consecutive rounds of the above. Eventually, the breathing may feel like a wave flowing through your lungs.

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The information within this feature is not intended or implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always speak to your doctor or a qualified Wim Hof trainer before embarking on the Wim Hof Method.