

Athletes' "Magic Box"

Some athletes have renamed the hyperbaric chamber into a magic box. And with good reason, as it helps them recuperate after strenuous workout and with faster post-injury recovery.

Hyperbaric chambers, in which the customer breathes pure oxygen under pressure, are nothing new. However, they have gained in popularity in the past ten years, also because of many athletes, who with the help of oxygen therapy in a hyperbaric chamber recuperate easier after strenuous exercise and recover faster after injuries.

How does it work?

Hyperbaric oxygen therapy enables muscles to get additional oxygen. This colorless, odorless and flavorless gas combines with pyruvic acid and together they form adenosine triphosphate, which releases muscle energy. Without additional oxygen pyruvic acid transforms into lactic acid, the consequences of which are fatigued and sore muscles. The lack of oxygen also lowers the body's ability of regeneration. The oxygen the body receives in the hyperbaric chamber helps ward off infections (it stimulates white blood cell production), regenerate bones, muscles and stimulates cell growth.

Who uses it?

As more and more athletes and their trainers are gaining knowledge about this, especially portable hyperbaric chambers are gaining on popularity. Some, for example American football star Darren Sharper, even take them with them, while travelling to other states for matches. Sharper spends two to three hours a day in a chamber and states that he feels a lot better and wakes up rested and relaxed in the morning.

Two more athletes, who admitted they use portable hyperbaric chambers, are cyclist Lance Armstrong and the famous golf player Tiger Woods. The latter states that hyperbaric therapy helped him recover faster after multiple injuries. "It [hyperbaric chamber] does help you heal faster and I did everything possible to heal faster," shared Tiger Woods at the 2010 Masters Tournament.

American basketball player Dirk Nowitzki also spent some time in a hyperbaric chamber. It helped him recover faster after an injured ankle and knee. After four chamber treatments it was revealed that he will be able to play again after only 11 days, although recovery after such injuries usually takes weeks.

They also use altitude chambers ...

Some athletes take things to the next level. Michael Phelps, the winner of 16 Olympic medals, benefits from hyperbaric as well as hypobaric chamber therapy while training. The difference is that in a hyperbaric chamber the user breathes pure oxygen while pressurized, while in an altitude chamber there is less oxygen, which stimulates red blood cell production. When an athlete returns from such a chamber, his body needs more time to tire as more oxygen begins to circulate through it. Phelps even slept in such a chamber during preparations for the last Olympics, which was similar to spending each night at 2400 meters.

Some do even more. Tennis player Novak Đoković admitted that he gets ready for matches in a special hyperbaric device – an egg-like chamber which simulates high altitude environment and has inside a vacuum pump, which constricts muscles in rhythmic intervals. "*I think it really helps—not with muscle but more with recovery after an exhausting set,*" he revealed for the online edition of the Wall Street Journal. "*It's like a spaceship. It's very interesting technology.*"

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