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A Case Developing Acute Respiratory Insufficiency after a Sauna Bath

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Although sauna bath causes various acute and transient, cardiovascular and hormonal changes, it is generally well tolerated by healthy adults and children. The contraindications for a sauna bath are unstable angina pectoris, recent myocardial infarction, severe aortic stenosis, decompensated heart failure and severe orthostatic hypotension in the elderly. The sauna takers are recommended not to take a sauna during an acute respiratory infection. Additionally it should not be forgotten that sympathomimetic drugs may provoke tachycardias and arrhythmias during a sauna bath. The most commonly reported cases with a lung pathology due to sauna baths or hot hubs till now, are those cases with some form of hypersensitivity pneumonitis. Our case who was a healthy young adult, had a syncope immediately after a sauna bath, especially inhaling vaporized menthol during the bath. The patient was applied cold water on his head and after regaining consciousness developed vomiting, dyspnea and hemoptysis and was admitted to a hospital with respiratory insufficiency. A computerized tomography of the patient that was performed upon admission, revealed bilateral, diffuse ground-glass densities showing centrilobular concentration and a bronchovascular distribution. The patient was treated with antibiotics, an antiviral drug, steroids, mucolytics, intravenous hydration and nasal oxygen and was discharged in a few days. Five days after the discharge a control chest X-ray and pulmonary function tests were found normal. The case is reported to be an occasional one with a review of literature, especially discussing conditions which may cause similar clinical and radiological findings.

Keywords: Sauna, respiratory insufficiency, hypersensitivity pneumonitis, pulmonary edema, water aspiration, menthol