

Athlete^{NEWS}**tech**

Wellness Outlook Report 2023



SPONSORED BY



SWEATHOUZ
INFRARED SAUNA + COLD PLUNGE





EDITORIAL

Executive Editor

Josh Liberatore

josh@athletechnews.com

Staff Writer

Courtney Rehfeldt

courtney@athletechnews.com

Contributors

Judith Russell

Elizabeth Ostertag

Mindy Antimie, MS, RDN

BUSINESS

Edward Hertzman

Founder & CEO

edward@athletechnews.com

Kathleen Ferguson

Director of Business Development

kathleen@athletechnews.com

Leah Lehman

Head of Partnerships & Events

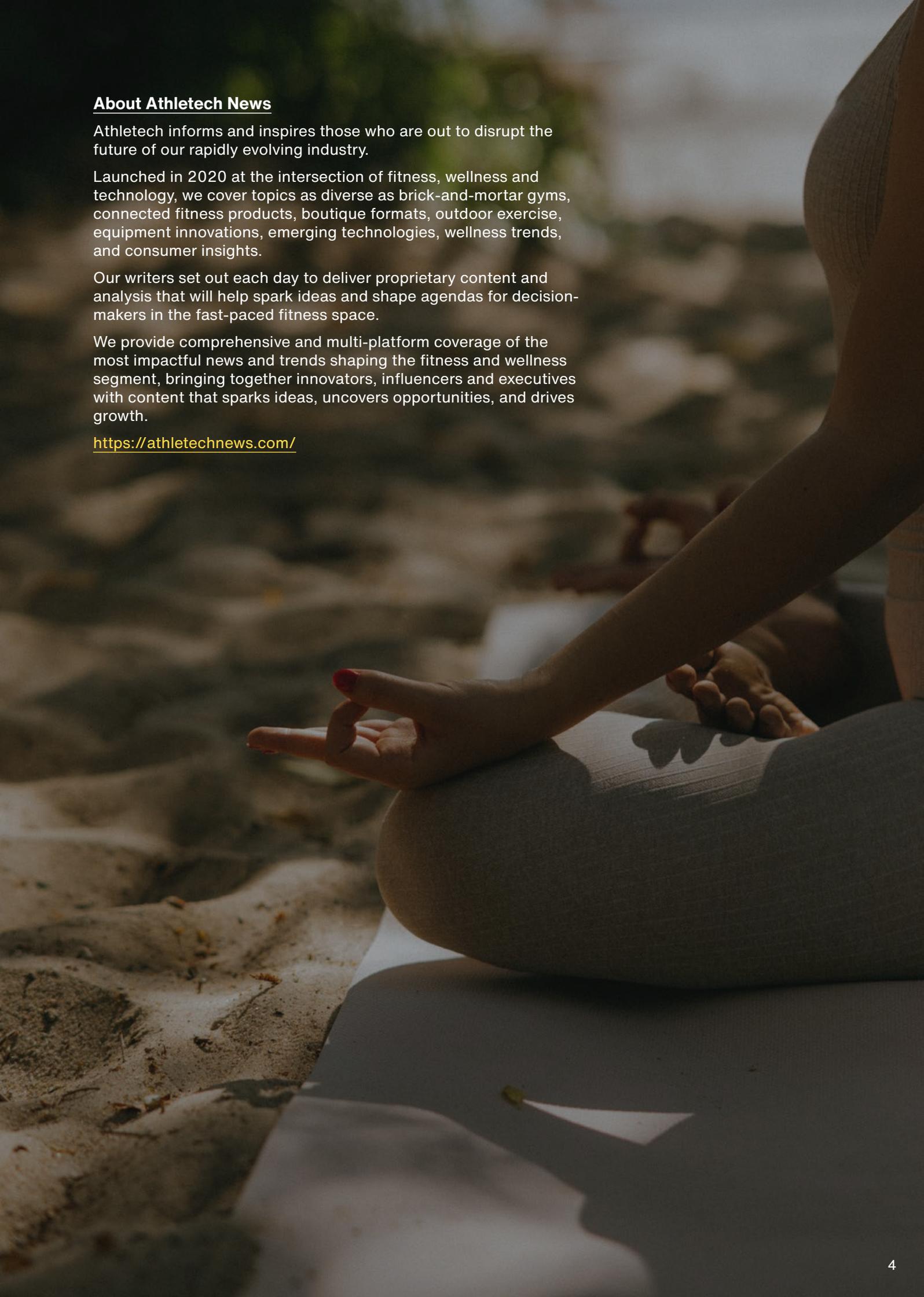
leah@athletechnews.com

Sarah Sloand

Customer Success Manager

Table Of Contents

About Athletech News	04
Letter from the Editor	05
The Fitness Industry's Role in the Health Crisis	06
The Future of Wearables & Wellness	13
Hyperice CEO on the Future of Recovery	16
SweatHouz Poised for Rapid Expansion	19
Lifesum Makes Healthy Eating the New Normal	23
Aktiv Helps Operators Build for the Next Gen of Fitness & Wellness	26
The Rise of Boutique Wellness Studios	29
Plunge CEO on the Growth of Cold Therapy	35
With Youll, Wellness Creators Turn Content Into Cash	38
The Science of Hot & Cold: Examining the Evidence	41
Sunlighten Is Redefining 'Smart' Wellness	45
Ozempic & The Future of Weight Loss	47



About Athletech News

Athletech informs and inspires those who are out to disrupt the future of our rapidly evolving industry.

Launched in 2020 at the intersection of fitness, wellness and technology, we cover topics as diverse as brick-and-mortar gyms, connected fitness products, boutique formats, outdoor exercise, equipment innovations, emerging technologies, wellness trends, and consumer insights.

Our writers set out each day to deliver proprietary content and analysis that will help spark ideas and shape agendas for decision-makers in the fast-paced fitness space.

We provide comprehensive and multi-platform coverage of the most impactful news and trends shaping the fitness and wellness segment, bringing together innovators, influencers and executives with content that sparks ideas, uncovers opportunities, and drives growth.

<https://athletechnews.com/>

Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

For Athletech's inaugural Wellness Outlook Report, we spoke with top founders and executives whose companies are transforming how consumers take charge of their own health and well-being inside and outside of the gym.

The leaders of brands like Therabody, Hyperice and Plunge give their thoughts on the dynamic recovery space, Technogym's founder and CEO explains why fitness and wellness are essentially one and the same, and Whoop's founder and CEO shares why his company is best-in-class when it comes to health monitoring.

Among the key themes that emerged from our conversations with these industry leaders and many others:

Wellness and recovery services are more accessible now than they've ever been, whether that's due to the rise of boutique wellness studios delivering spa-level comforts like sauna and IV drips at a relatively low cost or innovative brands bringing recovery tools fit for world-class athletes to the masses.

Traditional fitness industry players are inserting themselves into the wellness conversation too, stretching the bounds of what gyms can and should do to support members on their health journeys. Gone are the days when gyms could offer a foam rolling station and protein shake kiosk and market themselves as offering holistic wellness services.

Meanwhile, the rise of corporate wellness platforms has led to new levels of cooperation between traditional fitness industry players like gyms and the broader healthcare ecosystem.

Wellness is also becoming more high-tech and connected; wearable companies and even tech giants like Apple and Google are giving consumers access to data on their sleep quality, heart health and overall physical functioning.

At the same time, digital nutrition and telehealth startups are making it easier for people to manage their weight and other health conditions, either through food coaching, pharmaceutical interventions, or both.

Read on to learn more about the emerging world of wellness and how new modalities and ways of doing business are changing the industry.

Be well,

Josh Liberatore



The Fitness Industry's Role in the Health Crisis

Here's how top fitness companies are leveraging exercise and wellness as tools to combat chronic disease and rising healthcare costs

By Courtney Rehfeldt

As Americans face rising healthcare costs, an increase in obesity, associated health problems and mental health issues, fitness businesses and wellness platforms are leading the way to get people back on track mentally and physically.

In conjunction with a startling statistic from the AAPA that 73% of adults in the U.S. feel the healthcare system fails them in some way, the fitness and wellness industry is primed to offer solution-based, non-invasive methods for disenchanted Americans.

While at-home fitness may have reigned supreme between 2020 and 2022 with consumers left to their own devices, Americans now prefer flexibility and support in getting back into a health routine, and employees have come to expect corporate wellness programs from their employers.

Industry leaders, including gyms, smart fitness equipment manufacturers and corporate wellness providers are listening and taking action, focused on transforming the health and lives of consumers who feel their needs aren't being met by the current healthcare system.

Read on to discover how four leading fitness companies are responding to the health crisis and working to supplement the ongoing challenges in healthcare.

Gympass Sees Fitness as a Necessity in the Modern Workplace

Gympass has made it a mission to champion corporate wellness programs.

The leading employee wellness platform recently emphasized the importance of health-centered programs in a study revealing that wellness has become a non-negotiable for employers and brings countless benefits to both employees and employers.

Earlier this year, Gympass added MyFitnessPal as one of its 50,000 partners.

“Employee well-being is now a necessity, causing employers to double down on their wellness benefits,” said Carolee Gearhart, Gympass Chief Revenue Officer. “This has sparked massive growth for Gympass, and this year we surpassed a quarter of a billion (250 million member check-ins) to our network of 50,000+ partners. This milestone comes just 18 months after we reached 100 million total check-ins, indicating that we’re growing 10x faster today than we did in our first nine years in business. Beyond this, our paid, active subscriber growth nearly doubled year-over-year.”

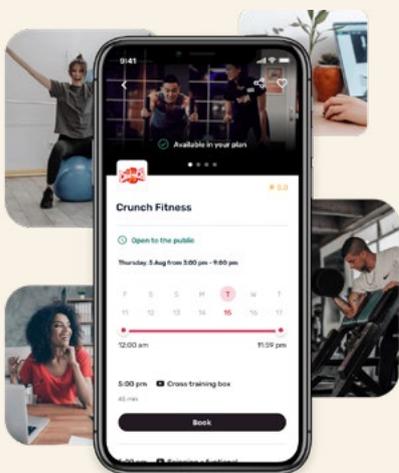


Photo courtesy of Gympass

Gearhart points out that more than four out of five employees globally believe well-being is equally important to salary, and 53% of U.S. workers and 44% globally reported that they’re stressed daily.

“Today’s employees understand the value of well-being and demand it, which is putting pressure on employers to adapt,” Gearhart said, adding that from an employer’s perspective, this necessitates a shift from reactive and traditional healthcare benefits that increase costs to more holistic and preventative wellness benefits that reduce costs and improve employee well-being and productivity.

“There is a growing demand for comprehensive wellness benefits encompassing mental health support, meditation guides, nutritional advice, sleep aids and financial literacy programs,” Gearhart notes. “Offering these resources can directly bolster employee engagement, satisfaction and productivity, thereby proving beneficial for both the employers and their staff.”

Perhaps most importantly, wellness programs

go beyond just positively impacting employee acquisition, satisfaction and retention – they also decrease healthcare costs for the entire organization, which, as Gearhart points out, comes when these savings are desperately needed.

“I’m constantly talking to employers who are bracing for significant healthcare cost increases in 2024, and they’re worried,” she said. “But here’s the thing: Gallup estimates that a whopping 75% of company healthcare costs stem from preventable conditions. If they’re preventable... then let’s prevent them!”

Gympass, she explains, offers a solution for employers who connect preventative healthcare as a cost-reduction measure while also boosting employee happiness and engagement.

“And we have the data to back it up: physically active employees can reduce healthcare costs by 35%,” Gearhart said. “It’s a win-win-win for everyone involved, and 90% of the companies that measure their wellness program’s return on investment see a positive return.”

Corporate wellness programs have the potential to reshape how companies approach employee health benefits by encouraging the adoption of preventative wellness benefits. One Gympass study found that employees who engage in physical activities at least five times a month can help reduce a company’s healthcare costs by 35% over a 12-month period.

“There are a number of reasons why companies experience ROI on these wellness programs, with one of the primary reasons being that it actually saves businesses money in the long run,” Gearhart said, sharing that 78% of global human resource leaders surveyed said their wellness program reduced their health care costs, and 85% reported decreased utilization of sick days.

While employee priorities have changed, especially in response to the pandemic, Gearhart says the key trends in corporate wellness include flexibility, accessibility and personalization.

“Gympass lowers barriers to fitness and wellness by offering a variety of live, digital or on-demand solutions in subscriptions that cost employees up to 50% less than traditional memberships,” she said. “With over 60% of new subscribers not having a gym membership before subscribing, Gympass more than doubles the number of employees engaged in wellness.”

As Gympass looks ahead, the wellness platform expects well-being programs to grow in the coming years.

“Our aim is to make employee well-being universal, creating an environment where employees feel empowered to prioritize their overall health,” Gearhart said.

“I’m constantly talking to employers who are bracing for significant healthcare cost increases in 2024, and they’re worried. But here’s the thing: Gallup estimates that a whopping 75% of company healthcare costs stem from preventable conditions. If they’re preventable... then let’s prevent them!”

— Carolee Gearhart, Chief Revenue Officer, Gympass



Photo courtesy of Gympass

For Technogym, Fitness is the ‘New Medicine’

Technogym, a leading smart fitness equipment and digital tech provider, is founded on the principles of wellness.

“Technogym is the new medicine,” says the company’s founder and CEO Nerio Alessandri.

Technogym has been named the official and exclusive supporter of cardio, strength and functional training equipment for athletes competing in the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games and introduced Technogym Run in the first half of the year.

Alessandri stated at a recent investor day that the company continues to invest in skills and research on the basis that a healthy lifestyle proves to be the most sustainable medicine for people, companies and governments.

“Some particularly forward-looking countries have already activated the medical prescription of physical exercise as a real cure for many pathologies.”

— Nerio Alessandri, founder & CEO, Technogym

According to Technogym, the fitness and wellness industry has enormous potential, but while wellness is now a top priority for many people, the medical community is not leveraging the industry as an opportunity.

The company has created a digital ecosystem that includes connected equipment, apps and on-demand video content while promoting a personalized approach to training.

The open platform is able to integrate software applications including membership software, marketing and payment platforms, body analysis and assessment devices, fitness equipment from any manufacturer, consumer apps and wearable devices.

“Some particularly forward-looking countries have already activated the medical prescription of physical exercise as a real cure for many pathologies, in line with the ‘Exercise is Medicine’ program, launched by Technogym over 15 years ago,” Alessandri said. “It is a win-win system for the patient and for the healthcare system which will involve many more countries in the medium term.”



Photo courtesy of Technogym



Photo courtesy of Crunch Fitness

Crunch Fitness Pushes Further Into Corporate Wellness

Crunch Fitness, currently focused on an aggressive expansion plan, is contributing to the current health crisis by taking a comprehensive look at the contributing factors, including mental and emotional health.

“Prioritizing our members’ mental health and well-being is a continued focal point for us, so we try to infuse a community-centered, holistic wellness approach into all of our gym offerings,” said Mike Neff, Executive VP of Member Services for Crunch Fitness.

Neff adds that the isolation many faced during the pandemic contributed to an epidemic of loneliness with lingering effects. In response, Crunch Fitness has been mindful of its communication across various mediums, including its Gym Shorts newsletter and member app. The fitness company also created and provided classes through its social media platforms and offered complimentary access to its on-demand workout platform during the pandemic.

Post-pandemic, Crunch is seeing an increased interest in its corporate wellness arm, especially as many companies have continued pushing a return-to-work model.

“We continue to get our message out that Crunch can play a very big part as an added benefit to employees who are returning to work to provide that balance between living a healthy lifestyle as well as their commitment to their careers,” Neff explains.

He points to studies showing increased productivity by introducing a workout routine.

“Crunch provides classes that not only fit during one’s busy work day, but we also provide full-service locker rooms with amenities so that we can provide a means for individuals to get away from their desks for an hour and return completely rejuvenated to complete their day.”

— Mike Neff, Executive VP of Member Services, Crunch Fitness

“Crunch provides classes that not only fit during one’s busy work day, but we also provide full-service locker rooms with amenities so that we can provide a means for individuals to get away from their desks for an hour and return completely rejuvenated to complete their day,” he said.

The fitness company continues to meet members where they are, whether it’s in one of its 400+ clubs or on its new digital platform, Crunch+, which offers on-demand and live-streamed workouts.

In early 2022, Crunch met with its healthcare partners, deciding to have all nationwide Crunch locations participate in programs geared towards a healthier lifestyle for participants.

“We have always partnered with many of the healthcare plans with whichever clubs choose to participate,” Neff said. “We felt it was very important to do our part in helping our communities live a better lifestyle through exercise.”

The wellness programs provide fully-subsidized memberships to Medicare/Medicaid participants in every club that Crunch operates in the U.S.

“We have also partnered with groups that develop programs for corporations that allow their employees to use Crunch gyms as an added benefit to their employment,” Neff said. “Some are subsidized whereas others provide partial subsidy.”

As Crunch remained a steady force for members during a challenging time, the fitness company is showing up in a new way, with special amenities for its members. Relax & Recover, which promotes well-being through popular spa-like offerings, gives Crunch Fitness members time to restore and create a self-care habit that supports overall well-being.

“Between the red-light therapy saunas, spray tanning, UV tanning, massage chairs, HydroMassage, and stretch tables, plus performance tools, such as Hyperice’s Normatec Recovery System and Hypervolt, we understand the value of recovery that can aid in mental and emotional health issues and we aim to continue providing a wide assortment of wellness offerings to our members,” Neff said.

Active&Fit Connects Gyms With Healthcare Providers

Active&Fit, a product of American Specialty Health, provides options for health plans, employer groups and other associations that want to provide fitness

and well-being benefits to their members. The company serves clients and members in various areas with three product lines: Active&Fit Enterprise, Active&Fit Direct and Active&Fit Now.

“We’ve had hundreds of clients from health plans, employer groups and associations — and what we’re hearing from them is their members are really looking for help getting back into their fitness routines post-pandemic.”

— Troy Sechrist, VP of Strategic Partnerships, Active&Fit

Active&Fit Enterprise is a client-subsidized product that can be offered by health plans to their employer groups and directly to employer groups and other organizations interested in providing a financial subsidy to reduce the overall cost of this program to their employees or affiliated members.

Active&Fit Direct is a client-sponsored, member self-pay product offered to health plans, employer groups, associations or other affiliate organizations that have commercial membership or employee populations to provide a member self-pay offering without a subsidy.

Active&Fit Now – Similar to Active&Fit Direct, this is a member self-pay program and is a direct-to-consumer product. Active&Fit Now is offered directly to the adult general public through multiple marketing channels and organizations with open websites to promote and encourage affiliated members to join.

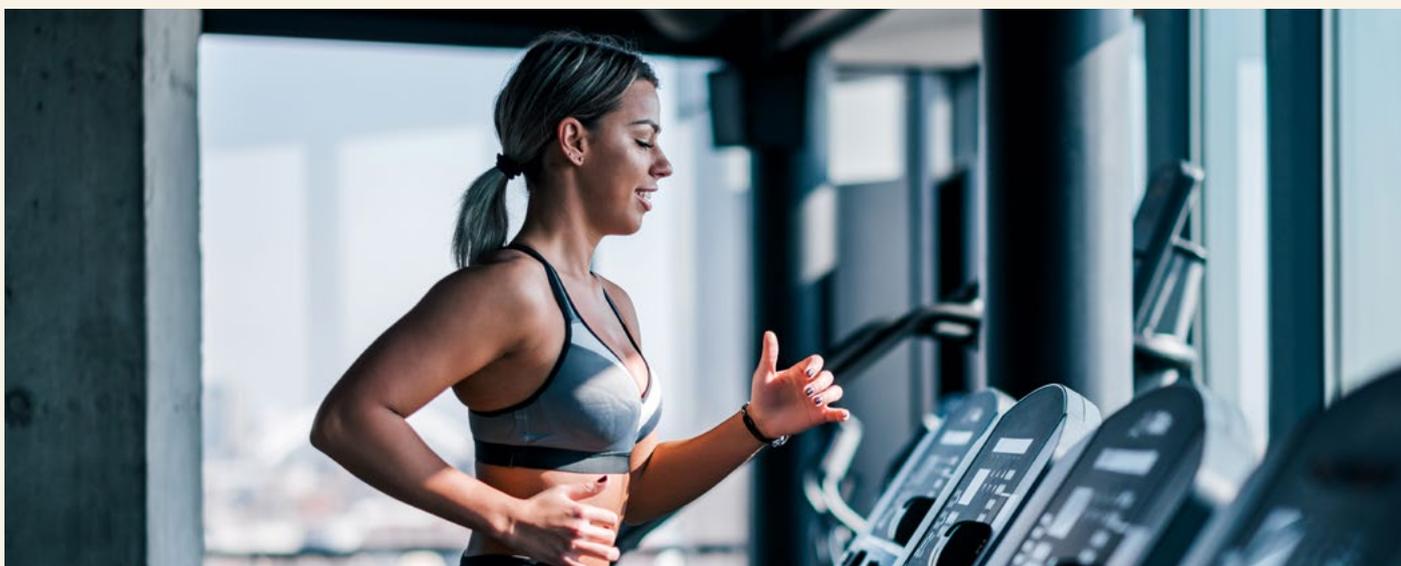




Photo courtesy of Active&Fit

The Active&Fit programs are specially designed to meet members where they are on their individual fitness journeys so that they can find the perfect fit, harnessing a flexible approach.

“Flexibility is a critical aspect of providing members with a program that allows them to find a gym that best suits them, leverage on-demand fitness classes from brand-name fitness leaders and provide support along the way through well-being coaching to give them the motivation when and where they need it,” said Troy Sechrist, VP of Strategic Partnerships at Active&Fit.

“We believe these aspects of the programs, along with technologically-enabled features like syncing to top fitness trackers, are the perfect mix to help Americans live healthier,” Sechrist added.

Employers who offer fitness and wellness programs can mitigate medical expenses, as sedentary lifestyles can lead to cardiovascular diseases and metabolic disorders. Plus, such program offerings can also promote positive mental health.

Sechrist reports increased interest in the programs over the last few years.

“We’ve had hundreds of clients from health plans, employer groups and associations — and what we’re

hearing from them is their members are really looking for help getting back into their fitness routines post-pandemic,” he shared, adding that Active&Fit has also bolstered and increased its digital fitness video offerings to make wellness more accessible.

As clients look to provide variety and flexibility for members and support the reduction of healthcare costs, Active&Fit has included its well-being program as part of its active programs at no additional cost. It’s an addition that enables people to have a weekly check-in with a coach, opening the door to overall wellness.

“It could be anything fitness-related, setting goals, helping with diet, nutrition, even sleep and anxiety,” Sechrist explained.

The service even caters to the needs of people not yet ready to join a gym or begin a fitness routine. However, once they realize the benefits of coaches assisting them with other aspects of their well-being, they may be more inclined to embark on a wellness journey.

“We’re always adding capabilities and features. So there will be more innovation to come,” Sechrist said of Active&Fit’s vast offerings. “We’re thrilled that we’re able to meet the needs of our clients and members.”

Your wellness oasis awaits.



sunlighten

Perfect your wellness routine with an infrared sauna. Sunlighten's elegant modern design gives you the ultimate self-care stack before or after a workout. Cabin and custom saunas available from the world's premier manufacturer.

[Scan QR code to learn more.](#)





Photo courtesy of Oura

The Future of Wearables & Wellness

By Elizabeth Ostertag

Though it seems like just yesterday that wearables came on the health and wellness scene, activity trackers as we know them have been around since 2014, when users could first view their steps, walking speed, heart rates and sleeping patterns. Wearables have evolved drastically in the last nine years, with more offerings than ever before. But where is the wearables industry going? Could wearables become more accepted and used by healthcare professionals to enhance and improve wellness?

Consumers use wearables for varying purposes: getting fit, losing weight, and meeting—or beating—athletic goals. Increasingly, however, people are using wearables to monitor their health. New hardware, software and apps have allowed wearables to act more like personalized health clinics. Heart rate monitors are standard on most wearables, and some have FDA approval for detecting abnormalities like atrial fibrillation, a major cause of strokes. Wearables are also increasingly monitoring other metrics like blood oxygen saturation (SpO2). During the pandemic, consumers, not surprisingly, purchased more wearables than ever before.

Today, wearables are taking on larger roles than just fitness and sleep tracking. Jason Russell, Senior

Director of Product at Oura, spoke about the ring's value-add to healthcare in general.

“The finger is the best place to capture heart rate



Photo courtesy of Oura

data, allowing us to deliver state-of-the-art accuracy in our data and insights. Our superior wearing comfort and battery life means you can wear it 24/7, which makes it especially useful for understanding and improving your sleep,” Russell said. “This has allowed us to lead the wearable domain beyond tracking and towards a solution for managing your holistic health and well-being.”

Russell added that through the insights and new features Oura provides, as well as the company’s many partnerships within the health space, he foresees the Oura Ring as a tool revolutionizing members’ ability to proactively manage their health on their own terms and, in turn, to reframe how they partner with their medical providers.

“We work with insurers all over the world to leverage wearable tech to improve overall health and patient outcomes to reduce healthcare costs.”

— Jason Russell, Senior Director of Product, Oura

Whoop has also prioritized integrating overall health and well-being features.

“I’m lucky to hear from Whoop members on a daily basis about how Whoop has improved their health,” said Will Ahmed, co-founder and CEO of Whoop. “Members have access to an incredible feature, called Health Monitor. Health Monitor provides members with a daily update on all of their metrics. Our members can send this report as a PDF right to their doctor or a medical professional.”

Wearables companies are turning to research studies to leverage the vast quantities of data at their fingertips to influence the larger world of health and wellness. Apple has conducted several groundbreaking studies, including the Apple Women’s Health Study, the Apple Heart and Movement Study and the Apple Hearing Study. Users can download the Apple Research App from the App Store and join relevant studies to contribute to the field of medical research.

Garmin is also leveraging its data to drive medical research. “Our Garmin Health B2B team has supported over 500 research studies using wearables and smartwatches to help researchers better understand everything from sleep patterns in older populations and to manage diseases from diabetes to Parkinson’s,” said Scott Burgett, Garmin’s Senior

Director of Garmin Health Engineering. “We work with insurers all over the world to leverage wearable tech to improve overall health and patient outcomes to reduce healthcare costs.”

Burgett noted that a new area for Garmin is remote patient monitoring.

“We are seeing promising results working with hospitals and care facilities that are leveraging wearable technology to remotely monitor patient’s activity levels and sleep patterns to ensure patients are responding well to their therapies and to rapidly intervene if a decline is observed,” he said. With so many devices being launched, the market is becoming a bit saturated, presenting consumers with lots of choices to make when they set out to purchase a wearable. What differentiates some of the major players?

The Oura Ring is known for emphasizing rest and recovery.

“This resonates with the growing societal trend around taking a more comprehensive view of health and a greater emphasis on maintaining balance,” Russell said.



For Garmin, it’s about peak performance and a full ecosystem of offerings.

“Every Garmin watch is purpose-built for a specific customer base and also includes extensive health and wellness features powered by Firstbeat Analytics, so customers can enjoy science-backed insights to help them reach peak performance day in and day out,” said Burgett. “Another huge differentiator for Garmin is exceptional battery life. We measure battery life in weeks and sometimes even months thanks to solar charging.”

Whoop, meanwhile, has become increasingly popular in the weightlifting community. In spring 2023, the brand introduced its Strength Trainer, a new way to quantify the impact of your strength training. The feature quantifies both cardiovascular and muscular load for a comprehensive view of one’s training.

Many other wearables are better for cardiovascular activities, as opposed to strength training. In addition, Whoop is a light wrist wearable without a watch face, which is less likely to interfere with one's training.

Similar to other wearables, Whoop measures sleep, recovery and daily effort to figure out how best to optimize one's performance. It uses metrics like HRV and resting heart rate to determine a daily recovery score. It also uses blood oxygen levels, skin temperature and more to enhance health tracking.

“Whoop doesn't have 100 apps. It doesn't do push notifications or messages. It doesn't have a high-resolution screen or microphone. But when it comes to health monitoring, Whoop is the best game in town. We designed Whoop to never be taken off.”

— Will Ahmed, co-founder and CEO, Whoop

Community and metrics-sharing have also become increasingly relevant in the world of wearables. Garmin offers Garmin Connect, a free online community for users. Garmin Connect displays vital health data and entries for easy viewing. Users can compete against friends or family in step and distance challenges, create groups or cheer each other on with likes and comments.

Apple Watch allows users to share their activity with family, friends, or even coaches. Users get notifications when others reach their goals, finish workouts and earn achievements. For now, the community features on many wearables are fairly simple. However, sharing data with medical providers, coaches, nutritionists, or other professionals has the potential to change the industry.

For many users, accountability is one of the most challenging aspects of staying healthy and fit. Accountability can also have larger implications for health and wellness.

Oura launched Circles earlier this year, where members can share high-level data, like “Readiness,” “Sleep” and “Activity” scores with friends and family who also use Oura Rings.

One Oura Ring user shared his Oura Scores with friends. When he noticed the discrepancy between his resting heart rate (RHR) and those of his friends, he sought medical advice and learned of his atrial

fibrillation. The discovery may have saved his life.

Wearables only provide benefits if they're used, however, and a Gartner study shows that up to 30% of consumers stop wearing their devices after six months. Many consumers cite anxiety as one of the main reasons they abandon wearables, particularly in terms of their sleep. Others predict that media device fatigue has been deterring some consumers who have tired of constant technological tracking and evaluation. Others are annoyed that they need to frequently charge their devices, which might explain the popularity of Whoop and the Oura Ring, which require only weekly charging (as opposed to the Apple Watch, which requires charging daily or every few days). Whoop is the only wearable that can be charged while being worn.

Whoop's Ahmed said one of the product's differentiating features is its specialized approach to health and fitness.



Photo courtesy of Whoop

“We are great at all the things we do for all the things we don't do,” he said. “Whoop doesn't have 100 apps. It doesn't do push notifications or messages. It doesn't have a high-resolution screen or microphone. But when it comes to health monitoring, Whoop is the best game in town. We designed Whoop to never be taken off.”

The future of the wearables industry appears to be one of constant innovation to meet consumer needs.

“One of the largest challenges today is getting wearables to be smaller and increasing battery life,” Ahmed said. “This will continue to be a challenge over the next five years too.”

Due to the saturated nature of the wearables market, each major player needs to offer new features and higher accuracy to users.

“Bringing new health solutions to the market requires constant investment in innovation, new features, and pushing the needle on what can be achieved in a wearable,” noted Oura's Russell. “We have an incredible research and development group that continues to push the boundaries here and we're excited for the road ahead.”

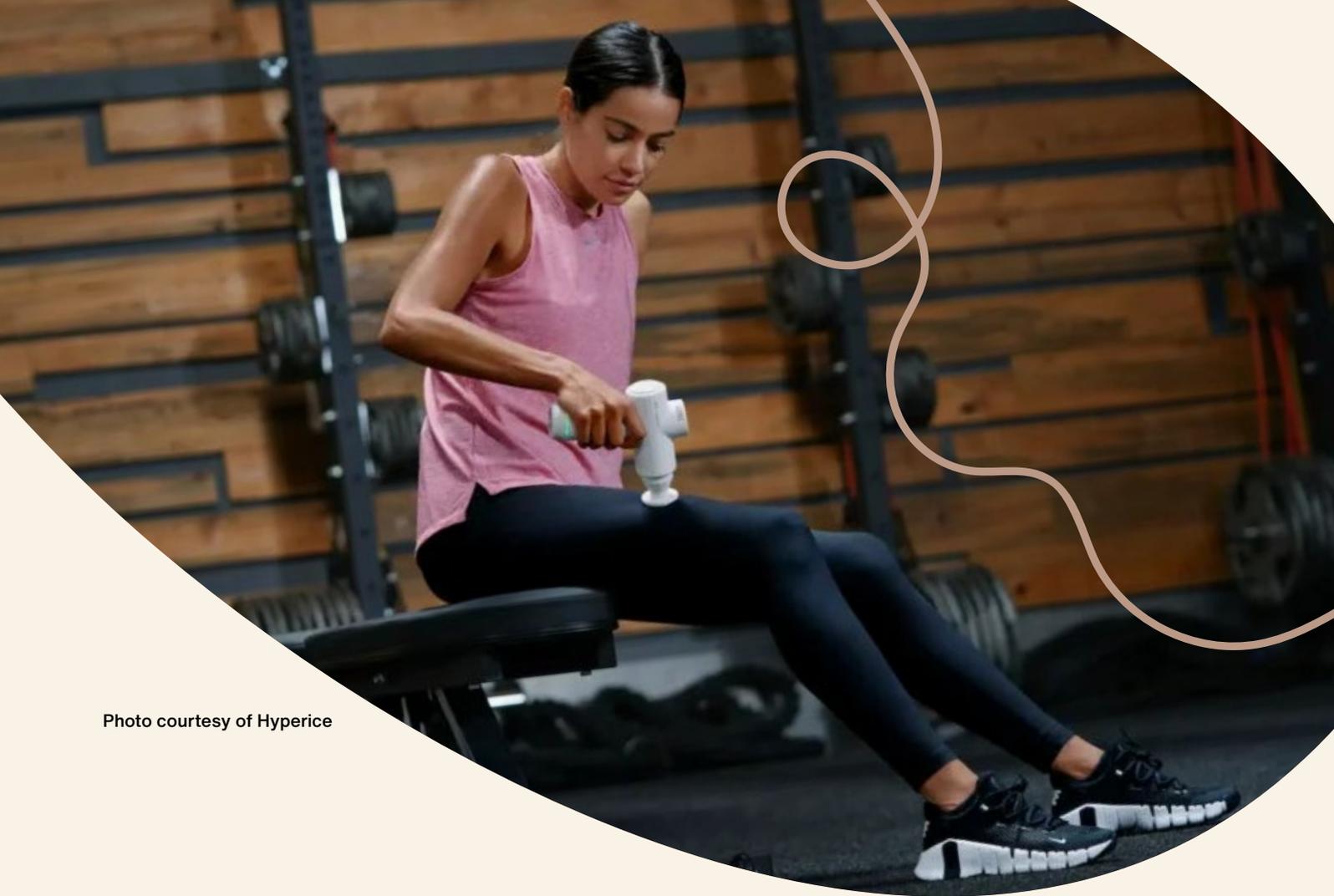


Photo courtesy of Hyperice

Hyperice CEO on the Future of Recovery

Jim Huether believes recovery rooms will become standard inside fitness facilities as gyms look to keep members healthy and happy

By Josh Liberatore

Founded in 2011, Hyperice is one of the pioneers and leaders in the rapidly growing recovery space. The recovery technology company's products can be seen on the sidelines of the biggest sports leagues in the world, in fitness facilities and wellness studios, and in the homes of athletes and everyday consumers alike.

Hyperice CEO Jim Huether has been the driving force behind much of that growth since he took over in 2015. Under Huether's stewardship, Hyperice raised \$48 million in Series A funding in 2020 at a valuation of \$700 million and has signed numerous deals with high-profile athletes and leagues including the NBA and NFL.

At the same time, Hyperice has made fitness and wellness a priority. The brand has partnerships with some of the biggest fitness brands in the world, including Equinox, Life Time and Xponential, where its products are used to help members recover from their workouts and generally get more out of their wellness experience.

Huether spoke with Athletech News about a range of topics, including how Hyperice has leveraged its relationships with top athletes, how its products can be used to help fitness facilities provide a better experience for their members and where the dynamic recovery space may be heading in the near future.

The following conversation has been lightly edited for clarity and brevity

Athletech News: What’s been behind Hyperice’s impressive growth over the past decade?

Jim Huether: Our commitment to innovation is a differentiator for the company and is part of our ethos. By innovation, it’s not just that we work relentlessly to develop the best products. It’s also innovation around how we create new processes and how we approach strategic partnerships, like we have with the NBA, to bring them to life in a unique way. We define the word innovation within our organization as thinking outside the box, being ultra creative and trying to find interesting ways to bring our products and technologies to life for the everyday consumer.

Also, our relationships with some of the world’s best athletes, sports-performance experts and fitness experts have allowed us to see around the corner on product development. We have a unique level of access to training rooms and to some of the leading minds in the physio and sports performance space. Many top athletes are investors in Hyperice and they work with us on product development and innovation, giving us amazing feedback. Patrick Mahomes had the very first Hyperice X that we ever made. Erling Haaland is testing a new product for us right now that’s going to launch in 2024. We take those (athlete) learnings and apply them to our consumer products.

ATN: Hyperice is well-known for its roster of athlete investors and its partnerships with leagues like the NBA and NFL. Why has sports been a priority for the company?

JH: It started authentically because our founder, Anthony Katz, had a connection with Kobe Bryant, who helped popularize our first Hyperice device way back in the early stages of the company. So we’ve always had that relationship with the athlete. But as time went on, we learned that athletes can be a huge contributor to product development. Our model, where we bring on pro athletes to invest in the company, is also important. As opposed to traditional sponsorships where you pay the athlete, they take an equity interest in helping us grow, which incentivizes them to help drive awareness.

The league deals gave us a lot of exposure and credibility early on as a company because you could see our products on the sidelines. People associate Venom technology, for example, with the NBA. We were able to use our partnerships with sports leagues and the associated media and TV exposure to amplify our message early on.

ATN: How does Hyperice strike a balance between designing products for high-performance athletes compared to everyday consumers?

“The mission of the company is to help everyone on Earth move and live better. We started out in sports performance, and we still address that market. But the big opportunity is to help every human that moves.”

— Jim Huether, CEO, Hyperice



Photo courtesy of Hyperice

JH: The mission of the company is to help everyone on Earth move and live better. We started out in sports performance, and we still address that market. Sports – pro, college and youth – represents about 7% of our total revenue. But the big opportunity is to help every human that moves. You’ll see different lines within our product mix. The Pro product generally has the most features and is meant for athletes. Our Go product line is for the everyday user who’s traveling or using Hyperice day-to-day as part of their lifestyle.

ATN: Hyperice is highly involved in the fitness space. How can gyms and studios use Hyperice products to better engage their members?

JH: We have strategic partnerships with some of the biggest names in fitness, including Xponential, Equinox, Life Time, LA Fitness, Crunch and UFC Gym. Hyperice products really elevate the (in-gym) experience. If you can recover faster, perform better and live a healthier lifestyle through the use of our technologies, you’re going to more thoroughly enjoy your experience at the gym.

It also really helps with usage because when people feel like their bodies are fully recovered and fully healthy, they're going to utilize the facilities more often, engage in more classes, engage in those classes more thoroughly and just generally enjoy their experience more. So Hyperice products are not just an added service that can generate revenue for the business and draw new people in as a differentiator, they also elevate everything else the gym or facility is offering. It's very experiential but it's very value-added. That's one of the reasons we've seen such a big adoption in the fitness community.

“The emergence of recovery and wellness rooms and facilities is going to continue to grow to where they become the standard. I think we're going to see tens of thousands of recovery rooms and services throughout the world.”

— Jim Huether

ATN: Why did Hyperice partner with Whoop? What excites you about the relationship between wearables and recovery?

JH: I've known Will Ahmed, the founder and CEO of Whoop, for around seven or eight years now. He a progressive, innovative mind, and Whoop has been relentless in its approach to disrupt the wearable technology market. They have such a good handle on data and what's happening with the human body, and we have technologies that can improve the data and move the data in one direction or another. With Whoop, we're tracking how our technologies impact sleep, performance and soon, longevity, which is a big value-add for the user. For example, if your recovery score is X and you slept this amount of hours and your body is fatigued because you had a three-mile run, using the Hypervolt or Normatec can improve your analytics around recovery and health.

We also connect to the Apple Watch, Strava and Garmin. We're working closely with those entities to provide the consumer with something interesting around data and technology. We have a technology called HyperSmart, which is an app that reads and interprets your personalized activity and recommends specific routines with our products based on your activity. If you ran three miles, your heart rate was X, you slept a certain amount of hours and you love tennis, HyperSmart will be able to provide you with a specific routine based on your analytics and, eventually, with a piece of content from your favorite tennis player.



Photo courtesy of Hyperice

ATN: Why did Hyperice decide to get involved in the mental wellness space with the acquisition of Core?

JH: We've had so many athletes and fitness experts tell us that mental recovery is just as important as physical and that they're symbiotic. Rory McIlroy and Naomi Osaka, who are on our athlete roster as investors, are both big advocates for mental health. They felt Hyperice could do a good job in the mental wellness space.

But we wanted to do it in an innovative way that was (true to) us. So we made the acquisition of Core in 2021 and brought it into the Hyperice ecosystem. Core has also introduced us to biometrics because it measures your heart rate and your body's physiological response to meditation and breath training. So we're now able to offer a holistic solution between mental and physical.

ATN: How do you see the recovery space evolving over the next 5-10 years?

JH: We're in the very early stages. It's an exciting space that is going to get very, very big. We love how the ecosystem is expanding. There's a lot to do around data and biometrics, and recommendations on things you can do to improve your overall health. I also think corporate wellness is going to expand.

The emergence of recovery and wellness rooms and facilities is going to continue to grow to where they become the standard. You're seeing leading fitness players now integrate recovery and wellness rooms into their facilities. So you'll have add-on services, some of them paid, some of them free as value-adds. I think we're going to see tens of thousands of recovery rooms and services throughout the world. We're starting to see some expansion in the European markets now around recovery rooms. It's going to be fun.



Photo courtesy of SweatHouz

SweatHouz Poised for Rapid Expansion

By Athletech Studio

SweatHouz creator Jamie Weeks knows a good fitness and wellness franchising opportunity when he sees one.

Weeks founded Honors Holdings, which is now the largest Orangetheory Fitness franchisee in the world with over 140 studios.

Weeks, who likes to call himself a “serial operator of franchise businesses,” got a new business idea after regular trips to the infrared sauna helped him get better, longer sleep at night while lowering his resting heart rate from 63 beats per minute down to the low 50s.

“Here I am getting older, when it should be getting harder to sleep, and I’m sleeping longer, with a lower resting heart rate,” Weeks, now 48, recalls. “It’s crazy

to think that just 30 to 45 minutes in a sauna is what’s doing that.”

Inspired by that experience, Weeks created SweatHouz, a chain of infrared sauna and cold plunge studios, in 2019.

SweatHouz currently has 13 studios up and running and plans to have 25 to 30 opened by the end of this year. The company didn’t start franchising until the summer of 2022, but things are already moving fast, with more than 100 licenses sold in territories across the country.

“We hope to get 100 studios opened by the end of 2024,” Weeks says. “In 2024 and 2025, you’re going to start seeing SweatHouz locations pop up everywhere.”

In February, SweatHouz partnered with Hyperice. As part of the agreement, SweatHouz studios now feature Recovery Rooms outfitted with Hyperice products like the recovery brand's Normatec air compression sleeves, portable Hypervolt massager and Venom, a heat and vibration wrap.

According to Weeks, the early success of the SweatHouz brand is a function of a few things: the benefits of hot and cold therapy, his team's expertise as franchise operators and a strategic influx of private equity money to fuel growth.

“Here I am getting older, when it should be getting harder to sleep, and I’m sleeping longer, with a lower resting heart rate. It’s crazy to think that just 30 to 45 minutes in a sauna is what’s doing that.”

— Jamie Weeks, founder, SweatHouz



Photo courtesy of SweatHouz

Hot and Cold: The New Wave in Wellness

Scientists, doctors and influencers alike have extolled the many benefits of sauna sessions and cold plunges, including their abilities to promote recovery, help manage chronic pain and even improve mental health.

There are some encouraging findings from the

medical community to support those claims.

Regular sauna use can increase healthspan and has been linked to a 30-50% decrease in cardiovascular disease and related deaths, according to a 2021 study. A meta-analysis conducted in 2022 showed that cold plunging was an effective recovery tool after high-intensity exercise, reducing muscle soreness, speeding up perceived recovery and even lowering inflammatory markers.

“The growth is not going to slow down any time soon, because it’s more than just recovery,” Weeks says of hot and cold therapy. “For some people, it’s recovery from working out. For others, it’s just being able to go into a sauna and meditate for 30 minutes after a long day, or cold plunging and feeling the endorphins and the dopamine rush. It’s all those things.”

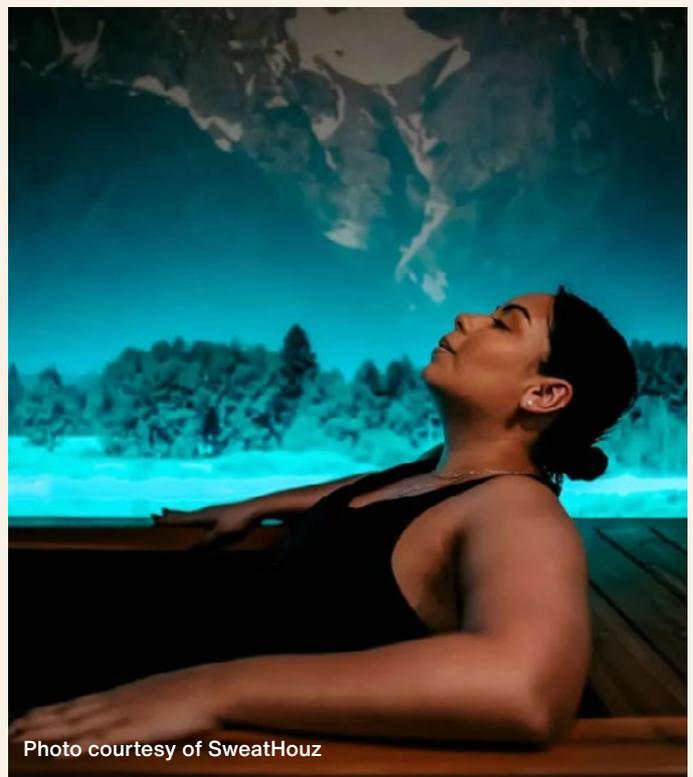


Photo courtesy of SweatHouz

The many benefits of hot and cold therapy allow SweatHouz to attract members from all walks of life, from the hardcore fitness enthusiast to the novice looking to unwind from a stressful day at work.

“It’s for the young CrossFit-er who’s doing muscle ups seven days a week and needs all the recovery they can get, but it’s also for the person who does very little working out and they’re getting their Zone 2 cardio workout while they’re sitting in an infrared sauna for 45 minutes,” Weeks says.

An Operator at Heart

Weeks knows what it takes to operate successful fitness and wellness franchises, as evidenced by his success with Orangetheory. Part of Weeks’ vision is for SweatHouz to have a limited number of

franchisees, but who control multiple units, similar to his own experience with Orangetheory.

For example, Weeks and his team are in talks with a group that would bring up to 20 SweatHouz locations to New Jersey.

“We’ve sold just over 100 licenses, but we’ve done it with only 15 franchisees,” Weeks noted.

Franchisees should have confidence in Weeks’ vision for SweatHouz because he’s putting his own time and money on the line. Weeks is planning to open at least 100 SweatHouz studios himself, through Legacy Franchise Concepts (LFC), a company he co-created alongside private equity firm Prospect Hill Growth Partners, because he’s so bullish on the concept.

“If Corporate LFC is going to open 100 SweatHouzes, that should tell you everything you need to know from a franchisor standpoint,” he says. “At the end of the day, we’re operators and my team is made up of entrepreneurial people who know how to operate businesses.”

“There aren’t many recovery brands out there that are able to offer an infrared sauna, cold plunge, Hyperice Recovery Rooms and a Vitamin C shower. Last month, we did 7,200 cold plunges in 13 studios. We’re leading the cold plunge industry in the United States.”

— Jamie Weeks, SweatHouz

Private Equity Support Fuels Growth

Weeks partnered with Prospect Hill Growth Partners in February 2022, a firm he had an existing relationship with through Honors Holdings. The sides combined to form LFC, which operates the global rights to SweatHouz.

The support from Prospect Hill has helped SweatHouz scale up over the past year and a half, improving the quantity and quality of wellness services it can offer to customers.

“There aren’t many recovery brands out there that are able to offer an infrared sauna, cold plunge, Hyperice Recovery Rooms and a Vitamin C shower,” Weeks said. “Last month, we did 7,200 cold plunges in 13 studios. We’re leading the cold plunge industry in the United States.”

SweatHouz plans to keep innovating with new services in the years to come.

One of those services could be bringing on coaches who work with SweatHouz members on guided stretching and flexibility routines, Weeks said. The wellness brand may also look to add coaches certified in breathwork who can help members employ breathing techniques to lower their resting heart rates.

“We want to always be evolving and keeping with technology,” Weeks says. “Having a private equity partner that allows me to have that vision and go do those things is really important.”

In the fitness industry, as in life, evolution is the key to long-term success.

“I’ve seen fitness concepts that just do one thing for 5 or 10 years and they don’t change anything,” Weeks cautions. “Those brands struggle to continue growing.”

youll.

is for Wellness
professionals.

Build your own app in 30 days.
No code. Hassle free.

youll.com





Photo courtesy of Lifesum

Lifesum Makes Healthy Eating the New Normal

By Josh Liberatore

The rise of modern-day technology has been blamed for many of society's current health problems, including the obesity epidemic and rampant chronic disease, but perhaps it can also be the cure.

Lifesum, a highly popular healthy eating platform, was founded on a pair of defining principles: that nutrition is the most important part of living a healthy life and that in order to encourage good food choices, people need a digital experience that's fun, engaging and drives motivation.

Founded in 2013 by tech entrepreneurs with experience in online entertainment, including a former Spotify executive, Lifesum is in the game of "democratizing healthy eating," as the company

puts it. Today, the Lifesum app has over 60 million global users, the majority of which are in the U.S. and European markets, whose populations are increasingly embracing personalized nutrition, alongside food education and inspiration, to eat healthier and make smarter food choices.

The idea behind Lifesum, according to the platform's co-founder and CIO Marcus Gners, was to bring some of the tech learnings and design elements that have made entertainment apps, like the Spotifys of the world, so popular and bring those features to nutrition. Gners himself has a background in internet gaming, having previously held an executive position at Stardoll, a popular online fashion game.

“We saw an opportunity to apply top-grade consumer web knowledge to something as serious as health,” Gners told Athletech News, adding that the company believes nutrition is the best way to influence health outcomes for the majority of the population.

“We think nutrition isn’t just a part of health and wellness, it’s at the center of it,” Gners says. “What you eat dictates how fast you run, how heavy the weights you lift are, how energized you feel, what mood you’re in and how long you live. Nutrition is the most difficult part (of health), but it’s also the most important part.”

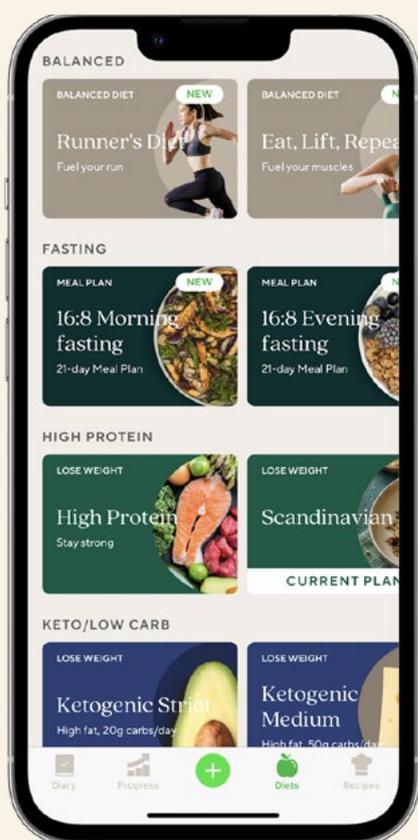


Photo courtesy of Lifesum

The Lifesum app helps users lose weight or generally improve their overall health through a host of features, including calorie and macronutrient tracking. The platform also offers recipes, meal plan templates and diet plans, as well as sleep and activity tracking by syncing with Apple Health and Google Fit data.

Despite its food-tracking features, Gners says Lifesum is designed around the notion that “a calorie is not a calorie.” In the app, users receive guidance and feedback about the types of foods they’re eating and how those choices fit into their overall health goals. That includes a food rating system where a user’s food choices are measured based on things like satiety and how well they fit into a particular meal plan.

“We do the numerical breakdown of macros, but we try to keep that in the background as much as

possible,” Gners explains. “It’s about putting the macros into context with things like recipes and meal plans.”

Perhaps drawing upon Gners’ experience in the online gaming world, one of Lifesum’s core features is what it calls a “Life Score,” a number users get after signing in to the platform for the first time and answering a series of questions about their recent eating habits, like how many times they ate vegetables or candy during the prior week. The app then gives users suggestions on habits they can adopt to improve their Life Score, such as eating more protein. Importantly, the Life Score changes over time, giving users real-time feedback, in an engaging way, on the impact their food choices are having on their overall health.

Gners contrasts Lifesum’s user-centric approach with the way healthcare systems and diet companies in the modern world have tended to approach weight loss and healthy eating, which he says is based on using “fear, guilt and shame” to drive motivation.

“Nike isn’t the brand they are because they fear and guilt people,” the Lifesum co-founder says. “We thought we should take the guilt and shame out of health and nutrition and talk to the user with empathy. From a Millennial and Gen Z perspective, that has been very appealing.”

Lifesum’s approach also includes “putting a lot of emphasis on design” and the way the app looks and feels, Gners says, so users want to keep logging in day after day to track and improve their nutrition.

The Lifesum app has received over 850,000 reviews on the Apple App Store and Google Play Store, with ratings of 4.6 stars and 4.3 stars, respectively.

Lifesum and the Rise of Corporate Wellness

While Lifesum’s consumer app is highly popular, as its 60-million-plus user base would attest to, the company recently saw another way to get its product into the hands of even more people: corporate wellness.

A few years ago, the platform launched Lifesum for Work, an enterprise version of its product that allows companies to purchase a Lifesum Premium subscription (normally \$8.33 a month for an individual user) and give it to their workers as part of an employee wellness package.

As employee wellness becomes increasingly important post-pandemic, Lifesum says its product helps businesses increase employee engagement, lower absenteeism and churn, and boost productivity.

From the user’s perspective, accessing Lifesum for Work isn’t much different than using the normal consumer app, except that your company foots the bill for a premium subscription and there are some

additional functionalities. As part of a push to offer added value to companies who sign-up, Lifesum for Work includes exclusive content like cookalongs, webinars and additional recipes that aren't available in the consumer version of the product.

Gners notes that companies, including customers like Google, Amazon and GE, tend to be happy to partner with Lifesum over pure B2B corporate health platforms, since Lifesum's product is already battle-tested in the consumer space.

"It's a competitive advantage because we've made our living making a product that's great for the consumer market, where we've had to live and die with every click," he says. "If you do that, over the years, with millions of users, the product becomes really good."

"Nutrition isn't just a part of health and wellness, it's at the center of it. What you eat dictates how fast you run, how heavy the weights you lift are, how energized you feel, what mood you're in and how long you live."

— Marcus Gners, co-founder and CIO, Lifesum



Photo courtesy of Lifesum

Telehealth Could Be on the Horizon

As it looks ahead, Gners says Lifesum will focus on connecting deeper with its users, including exploring more ways to influence healthy eating and looking deeper into the reasons why people make certain food choices in the first place and how they can change.

The company could also look to offer telehealth services or partner with telehealth platforms, although nothing is set in stone yet.

"There's something magical about the combination of human plus machine, but I don't think many telehealth companies have succeeded with that yet," Gners says.

Lifesum isn't scared off by weight loss drugs like Ozempic; on the contrary, the platform views them as a potentially potent one-two punch along with proper nutrition on the road to better health.

"These types of medications can supercharge the Lifesum experience," Gners says, making another nod to his video-game background. "If you have certain issues or conditions, it's not that easy to just eat less and exercise more. There's an opportunity to create fantastic value for our users."

Whether it's through the platform's consumer app, its corporate wellness product or potential telehealth integrations, Gners says everything Lifesum does boils down to its goal of democratizing access to better health through food, which is part of what he and his team call "advanced wellness."

"If you take sports medicine, for example, it's not healthcare or sick care, it's something else that utilizes medicine in a premium way," Gners explains. "That type of thinking, which is not there to diagnose or treat diseases but is about making you as good as you can be, that's something we think should be accessible for normal people, not just LeBron James."

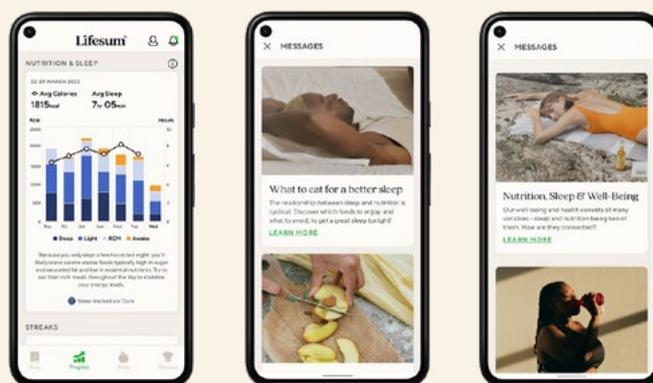


Photo courtesy of Lifesum



Photo courtesy of Aktiv Solutions

Aktiv Helps Operators Build for the Next Gen of Fitness & Wellness

By Athletech Studio

As the tastes and preferences of the modern fitness and wellness consumer evolve, so too must the physical layouts of facilities, whether they be large gyms or amenitized spaces in hotels, corporate wellness centers and apartment complexes.

[Aktiv Solutions](#), a commercial and home gym design company specializing in movement-based training, is helping fitness operators leverage some of the dominant trends in the market today, namely the rise in strength training modalities and the increased importance of recovery.

As strength training explodes in popularity, Aktiv helps fitness facilities build spaces that cater to the many ways consumers engage with the modality, from Olympic lifting to functional training with things like kettlebells, sandbags or even body weight.

Aktiv's founder and CEO Bryan Green believes the physical layout of the fitness floor is as important as the quality of equipment offered.

"Modern fitness floor planning requires a deep understanding of expected simultaneous exercise use and traffic flow," Green says. "Programming for movement-based modality differs greatly from planning rows of cardio or a circuit of selectorized strength machines. With an explosion of workout types that require a large variety of movement patterns, gym design today is far more art than science and demands flexibility to well accommodate consumer expectations".

Strength Training in the Modern Era

According to Green, it's not simply old-school

weight lifting that's become popular post-pandemic, but functional training exercises that incorporate resistance, or what he terms more broadly as "movement with load."

"The pandemic for all its faults also forced an increase in creativity around how to work out with less large format equipment at home," he notes. "This has stimulated a real ascendancy of functional movement and function training types, where you can utilize everything from soup cans to kettlebells."

The increased awareness and subsequent demand for a new level of training variety have pushed commercial fitness facilities to raise the bar in terms of their own creativity, Green believes.

"This wave is still only beginning to force significant change among all operator types," he says. "Not simply in terms of how they approach the re-balancing of equipment on the fitness floor, but how they must guide participants in the training environment through live or increasingly digital-based coaching."

Aktiv, for its part, is helping fitness facilities optimize for space by addressing smart footprints for the equipment it creates. Aktiv's new GYM RAX® FORMA™ Strength Series combines Olympic lifting with bodyweight stations like dips, a pull-up bar, a step-up station and a landmine all in what it says is the smallest functional footprint in the commercial fitness industry.

According to Green, the FORMA line was more generally conceived to cater to the growing functional-movement market.

"Forma is a bridge of sorts for those that want to engage in functional movement, but want to utilize a heavier load more safely," he says. "Olympic training and plate weight training allow for that."

Aktiv's signature Apogee line more broadly accommodates the storage of many different types of equipment, like kettlebells, medicine balls and training mats, all within its highly regarded Bay and Bridge design. The company also more recently released its outdoor fitness solution, Ecosystem, a nature-inspired structure that includes suspension training, tethered resistance and accommodations for modalities as unique as aerial yoga.

Amenitized Spaces Offer New Possibilities

It appears that one thing is for sure: where people intend to work out going forward is far more varied than where they used to do so.

According to Green, exercise space accommodation has become an expectation for many where we live, work, and play.

"Aktiv is a design-first company, and as such the

vast majority of our engagements indicate that the balance is changing dramatically in terms of where new gyms will be found," the Aktiv founder says. "Both in terms of indoor and outdoor spaces, but ultimately convenience is driving a change in the proximity to how operators are meeting consumers where they are."



"This wave is still only beginning to force significant change among all operator types. Not simply in terms of how they approach the re-balancing of equipment on the fitness floor, but how they must guide participants in the training environment through live or increasingly digital-based coaching."

— Bryan Green, founder and CEO, Aktiv Solutions



Aktiv works with leading hotel groups, corporations looking to attract employees back to work and a large variety of mixed-use property developers who must increasingly accommodate residents that expect a great gym steps from their door. Green believes these amenitized spaces are the “most fascinating growing area of the commercial fitness industry,” as consumers are increasingly seeking greater nuance and a more socially driven experience during exercise.

To that end, Aktiv recently partnered with Xponential Fitness to create a specialized X+ Training Bay that includes a personalized functional training pod, custom flooring, and a complete kit of equipment to support a digital training experience, on-demand. As a result of the collaboration, fitness enthusiasts can now engage with Xponential’s ten boutique fitness brands in hotels, universities and corporate wellness centers across the nation.

“It really becomes the participant’s personalized space,” Green says. “You can do virtually any workout you want with one of the best coaches for it on the planet.”



Photo courtesy of Aktiv Solutions

How Can Traditional Gyms Compete?

Large gyms and health clubs are naturally adjusting to attract those seeking all the current fitness and wellness trends, but many are in need of larger adjustments, and in some cases must be willing to let go of old ways of doing business.

For example, many facilities are quickly opening up their fitness floors, ditching some of their weight machines and jettisoning a good amount of single-purpose cardio equipment in favor of more creative functional training spaces.

“There are most certainly some strong examples of large format health clubs that have modernized well and embraced the change,” Green says. “They’re really building interactive ‘adult playgrounds.’”

For those gyms, creating open functional training spaces has the potential to solve a long-running problem in terms of member engagement.

“Gyms still have a lot of folks roaming around their large floor plans with less purpose or comfort towards engaging with the more abstract areas of functional training space,” Green says. “They’re just not clear on what to do with all the equipment and in the absence of effective guidance, many end up spending 30 minutes on the treadmill and call it a day.”

Offering a more interactive and immersive environment seemingly will go a long way toward combating member boredom and confusion, which should in turn reduce churn.

The Rise of Recovery

Another trending area of fitness and wellness is the rise of innovative new recovery modalities, including cold water immersion and percussion therapy. On the recovery side, Aktiv is helping fitness facilities tap into consumers’ increasing demand for pre- and post-workout options that go beyond plain, old foam rolling.

Aktiv also recently partnered with Plunge, a leading maker of cold plunge baths, to bring this emerging recovery modality to fitness operators of all types. Aktiv is now working with clients to design elegant spaces that feature Plunge tubs.

As cold water therapy grows in popularity, Green believes this is an area where gyms can leverage their space to give members access to a premium experience.

“Gyms have large areas that traditionally include locker rooms or wet rooms, and many over time have had pools or saunas,” he notes. “Cold water immersion is now an essential element to consider if you’re fortunate enough to have the space type required to accommodate it.”

Aktiv also has a long-running partnership with Hyperice, designing Recovery Bays that store the wellness tech company’s tools and products.

No matter the modality, merging fitness with recovery can help facilities stand out by offering their members a more holistic wellness experience.

“There’s a gap between what the world thinks of as a spa and what it thinks of as fitness,” Green believes. “The bridge between that gap is active recovery.”

Looking ahead, Aktiv is confident that no matter where the fitness and wellness space heads, its less-is-more approach to gym design will leave its clients in the best long-term position for success.

“We know there’s going to be something new next year and the year after,” Green says. “Our job is to anticipate that so that our customers, the operators, can adapt their businesses without changing their entire infrastructure.”



Photo courtesy of Icebox Cryotherapy

The Rise of Boutique Wellness Studios

By Courtney Rehfeldt

From cold water plunges to peptides, consumers are increasingly seeking non-invasive treatments that promote wellness and longevity — and industry leaders are taking note.

Boutique wellness studios and spas are booming, and the addition of technology is allowing consumers to quickly book a non-invasive appointment leaving them feeling refreshed. Consumers also have the option of purchasing their own devices for wellness on the go or at home, and a trend wellness businesses are jumping on as well.

Here are four companies creating and disrupting the future of the wellness industry, winning over everyday consumers with therapies once reserved for celebrities.

Therabody Brings High-Tech Self-Care Into the Mainstream

Therabody, a wellness technology company renowned for its Theragun massage gun and other high-tech solutions, offers science-backed products that reduce stress, pain and encourages wellness habits.

The company has partnered with top athletes including James Harden, Cristiano Ronaldo and DeAndre Hopkins, and closed a \$165 million growth equity round last year.

Dr. Jason Wersland, Therabody's founder and Chief Wellness Officer, has seen consumers shift their priorities towards wellness, citing the pandemic as

one challenge that empowered people to take charge of their health.

“Wellness is definitely in the greater conversation, culturally,” Dr. Wersland said. “People are exercising more and looking for ways to care for themselves, which is where Therabody comes in. We’re always working on science-backed ways to deliver well-being to as many people as we can.”

Recognizing that Therabody customers lead busy lifestyles, the company has developed wearable product lines such as RecoveryTherm and RecoveryPulse, offering an on-the-go option so people can continue their daily routines while receiving recovery benefits.

“In terms of active recovery, products like the Theragun and TheraCup are really beneficial as well,” Dr. Wersland said. “We also like to make our innovations easy to use, so we have developed a wide range of routines that people can use in the Therabody App. Protocols are tailored to address specific needs and target treatment areas so you can feel better, faster.”



Most importantly, Therabody’s products are suitable for a wide range of consumers and have helped shape the narrative around recovery and self-care.

“While our devices are pro-grade, they’re used by everyone from professional athletes, parents and grandparents, people who work on their feet all day or at a desk,” Dr. Wersland explained. “We have made products that are simple, effective, and convenient so you can easily add self-care into your routine.”

“People are smart and they know quality product, so companies have to deliver on that. I do think wearables are here to stay. Being able to access passive recovery while going about your daily routine is a game-changer for busy people.”

— Dr. Jason Wersland, founder and Chief Wellness Officer, Therabody



As an actively licensed chiropractor, Dr. Wersland points out that none of Therabody’s competitors have a practitioner as their founder, giving Therabody an edge.

“Also, we start with real people who have real pain points, especially around performance, muscle tension and pain, stress and sleep,” he explained. “Our team of scientists and engineers are obsessed with applying science and technology to real human issues. As a result, we’ve grown well beyond Theragun at this point, tapping into new categories including pneumatic compression, TENS therapy and facial health.”

Dr. Wersland also noted the connection between advancing wellness tech and making self-care and clinical-grade recovery more accessible and measurable.

“People are smart and they know quality product, so companies have to deliver on that,” he added. “I do think wearables are here to stay. Being able to access passive recovery while going about your daily routine is a game-changer for busy people.”

As for the future, Therabody is focused beyond the body and to the mind, Dr. Wersland shared.

“TheraMind content in our app pairs with several of our devices to help ease the body into the ideal state to relax and receive maximum benefit from our therapies,” he said. “Our focus is to consistently provide cutting-edge, best-in-class products, content and services that support both mind and body.”

The Covery Brings the Spa Experience to the Masses

The Covery Wellness Spa, an immersive boutique wellness experience, is poised for significant expansion across the Northeast as the demand for comprehensive recovery services continues to surge.

The rapidly developing spa, projected to launch 100 additional locations by year’s end, provides an extensive range of therapeutic services, including cryotherapy, facials, body sculpting, IV therapy, red light therapy and more. All of the therapies at The Covery boast an impressive array of benefits aimed at supporting overall health and wellness, improving recovery and performance, and improving overall aesthetics to help clients live, glow and perform in their everyday lives.



Photo courtesy of The Covery

Ryan Ensmann, Director of Marketing & Operations at The Covery, reports a significant upswing in interest for non-invasive aesthetic therapies and peptides. It appears that an increasing number of consumers are exploring beauty and aesthetic treatments that provide viable alternatives to invasive procedures.

Ensmann highlights how transformative technologies have revolutionized the recovery industry by fostering wellness and healing. Innovations like red light therapy, PEMF therapy, cryotherapy and compression therapy can address a broad spectrum

of issues across diverse lifestyles. These alternatives present an appealing complement or substitute to conventional medicine, with consumers being particularly drawn to non-invasive and effective boutique wellness therapies.

Peptides, particularly, are garnering increased attention from consumers.

“Peptides have surged in awareness owing to the rise in popularity of Semaglutide,” Ensmann asserts. “The Covery offers an array of available peptides to help support various health and wellness benefits!”

According to Ensmann, oxygen therapy, IV therapy, and peptides currently rank as some of the most sought-after therapies at The Covery.

The wellness spa employs a hyperbaric oxygen chamber for oxygen therapy, a modality that involves inhaling oxygen at pressures exceeding normal atmospheric levels. This treatment promotes enhanced oxygen distribution throughout the body, especially in areas requiring an energy boost. The result is increased stamina and cognitive function, robust lung health support and expedited recovery from physical exertion.



Photo courtesy of The Covery

The Covery’s IV therapy injects nutrients directly into the bloodstream, optimizing absorption, bolstering immunity, boosting energy, and promoting overall well-being. Peptides, which are short chains of amino acids, can provide an endless number of benefits due to the available variety. Peptides can deliver enhanced immune function, support healthy aging, increase muscle mass and strength, and improve skin elasticity and hydration.

“Every therapy we offer leverages cutting-edge technology,” Ensmann emphasized. “The Covery serves as an ideal hub for health and wellness, offering these and numerous other therapies under one roof, coupled with a convenient membership model that provides easy access to our therapies for all of our members.”

SweatHouz & The Rise of Sauna, Cold Plunge

SweatHouz, a rapidly growing chain of infrared sauna and cold plunge studios, plans to open 25 to 30 locations by the end of the year. The boutique wellness business began franchising last summer,

quickly gaining steam with over 100 licenses sold in territories nationwide.



Photo courtesy of SweatHouz

“We hope to get 100 studios opened by the end of 2024,” Jamie Weeks, SweatHouz founder, has told Athletech News. “In 2024 and 2025, you’re going to start seeing SweatHouz locations pop up everywhere.”

The company also teamed up with Hyperice, a global wellness brand, in a deal where SweatHouz clients will find Hyperice’s tech-based recovery products as additional studio therapies in all SweatHouz locations.

Stefani Rizzi, SweatHouz’s Head of Marketing & Design, says the rising popularity of boutique wellness can be attributed to several factors.

“First and foremost, people are increasingly prioritizing their health and well-being — and they are looking for offerings that make it simple to achieve their goals,” Rizzi said, adding that boutique wellness studios like SweatHouz attract consumers looking to build a wellness routine with ease and comfort in mind.

It’s also SweatHouz’s focus on creating a welcoming and high-end atmosphere that allows for a more personalized client experience, where guests develop a sense of community, ultimately creating client loyalty.

“Over the last few years (SweatHouz) has fully immersed ourselves in the client experience and continues to outperform competitors when it comes to servicing our members and providing a next-level experience for everyone,” Rizzi said. “Service aside — it’s what we do behind the scenes that sets us apart.”

Rizzi explains that SweatHouz’s dedication to science, education and continued development, both operationally and through technology integrations, is a cornerstone of its business model.

“Furthering those investments, as we continue to scale at such a rapid pace, will continue to separate ourselves from other brands,” Rizzi said. “I mean, we didn’t sell 100 licenses in a year through luck or chance — our team at HQ has been hard at work developing a product and service unlike any other.” Based on consumer trends in the wellness industry

within the suites at SweatHouz over the last few years, Rizzi reports a growing interest in holistic wellness and self-care practices.

“You’ve seen it with brands like Orangetheory, Barry’s, SoulCycle and other like-minded fitness brands — but the recovery space is full of untapped potential. There are plenty of fitness concepts and more are emerging almost daily but you are not seeing that in the recovery and mental health space.”

— Stefani Rizzi, Head of Marketing & Design, SweatHouz

“Customers are increasingly seeking natural and non-invasive ways to improve their health and manage stress,” she said. “There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to wellness, which is why a customized experience at SweatHouz makes it easy for the everyday person to find what is going to work best for them to get the results they are looking for.”

Overall, Rizzi says the boutique wellness industry is just heating up.

“You’ve seen it with brands like Orangetheory, Barry’s, SoulCycle, and other like-minded fitness brands — but the recovery space is full of untapped potential,” she said. “There are plenty of fitness concepts and more are emerging almost daily but you are not seeing that in the recovery and mental health space. At SweatHouz, we target it all — from cardiovascular health to injury prevention, muscle recovery, and just a simple escape from the noise of the world. It’s not just about your physical well-being — your mental health has to be a priority too.”

Rizzi adds that the mental health component was an important lesson learned from the pandemic. “You can have all the time in the world, but if you aren’t investing in your mental health, your body will feel that burden.”

She says technology will also significantly enhance the boutique wellness experience with innovations like health metric tracking, virtual wellness options such as meditation apps and personalized wellness initiatives.

“At SweatHouz we are always looking at ways to

incorporate the science and education behind every service offering — if we can merge data with physical results, we're winning every time," Rizzi said.

Icebox Cryotherapy Spreads the Benefits of Cold

While being exposed to ultra-low temperatures may not sound like an enjoyable time, cryotherapy is one of the coolest trends in wellness. With just three minutes, cold therapy can be an effective way to assist in athletic recovery, pain management, beauty and wellness.

It's also a treatment that changed the life of Icebox Cryotherapy Studios founder and CEO Alia Alston.

After being involved in a serious car accident, Alston was left with chronic pain and a debilitating neck injury. Her father, a chiropractor, caught wind of the first cryotherapy sauna in the U.S. and encouraged Alston to give it a try.

Within just a few sessions, she soon discovered the therapeutic abilities of cryotherapy, eventually relieving the numbness in her arm and leg and experiencing a major reduction in pain.

Wanting to help others, Alston developed Icebox as a spa-like wellness studio offering cryotherapy and other services. The cryotherapy company has sold 36 locations through organic sales, with most franchisees being former Icebox members or guests.

By the close of the year, Icebox Therapy will have 20 studios open and more planned for 2024, demonstrating the recent surge in interest in recovery, particularly cold therapy.



Photo courtesy of Icebox Cryotherapy Studios

"People are using various practices and techniques to promote physical and mental healing," Alston said. "Of course, one of the most popular methods is cold therapy, known for its ability to reduce inflammation and speed up healing."

Alston explains that cold therapy has additional benefits, such as improving circulation and boosting endorphin production for pain relief and an improved mood.

"This trend towards holistic health shows a shift away from relying solely on medication or invasive procedures," she said. "People are now seeking

natural and non-invasive methods to improve their well-being."

"This trend towards holistic health shows a shift away from relying solely on medication or invasive procedures. People are now seeking natural and non-invasive methods to improve their well-being."

— Alia Alston, founder and CEO, Icebox Cryotherapy Studios

Alston says the growth of the recovery industry reflects a growing desire for consumers to take control of their health while exploring innovative ways to promote physical and mental recovery.

"That's where Icebox comes in," she said. "It's the perfect fit for all recovery needs!"

Alston predicts that the cryotherapy industry will continue to improve and become more innovative with faster service, discover new ways of administering cold therapy, and hopefully gain more research on its incredible benefits.

"This would give everyone the ability to learn about cryotherapy and experience it for themselves," Alston adds. "Icebox loves innovation, and we are constantly looking at what is being developed and improved."

She points out that new clients to ice therapy are surprised by the instant gratification.

"Many Icebox guests are impressed by how a quick 3-minute treatment a few times a week can greatly decrease inflammation and make them feel incredible," Alston explains. "We love that people can be in and out of our studios in 12 minutes, leaving with a refreshed and rejuvenated look and feel. No need to worry about showers or redoing your makeup. It's that simple!"

As consumers continue to seek out non-invasive wellness treatments like cryotherapy, Icebox is ready to implement a robust franchise development sales strategy that will allow the company to rapidly expand into communities.

"We've dedicated the past four years to building a solid foundation of systems, applications, technology and policies to support our studios," said Alston. "It's important to me that we have a plan and the capability to open all these studios. Franchising is my way of empowering others to have their own business and positively impact their communities."

Aktiv



DESIGNING THE EXERCISE EXPERIENCE[®]

DESIGN

Uniquely experiential, engaging and revenue-generating training spaces.

EQUIPMENT

Premium fitness equipment solutions from the ground up.

PROGRAM

Guided digital training solutions that deliver an immersive exercise experience.



At Aktiv, we create immersive and highly functional training spaces for health clubs that increase membership, boost member loyalty, minimize costs, and much more.

aktivsolutions.com



Photo courtesy of Plunge

Plunge CEO on the Growth of Cold Therapy

Ryan Duey spoke with Athletech News about Plunge's impressive growth, why the cold water therapy market has exploded in popularity and the company's plans to ramp up its B2B sales efforts

By Josh Liberatore

Around three years ago, finding a cold plunge tub for at-home use at a cost of under five figures was difficult, pricing most consumers out of the modality that's seen a surge in popularity due to its beneficial effects on recovery, mental health and overall well-being.

Michael Garrett and Ryan Duey set out to change that, co-founding Plunge in 2020 and creating the brand's signature cold plunge tub, which currently retails for just \$4,990, less than half of what most similar products on the market had been going for.

The Plunge uses cooling, filtration and sanitation technology to create clean, 39-degree water on-demand, which is cold enough for users to reap health benefits but not so cold that ice forms.

Following an early batch of 20 units built in Garrett's garage that they sold to friends and business partners, Garrett and Duey rapidly scaled the business, building production facilities in the Sacramento area and shipping Plunge tubs to consumers – and now businesses – worldwide.

The company is off to a stellar start, experiencing what Duey described as “exponential year-over-year growth” since officially launching in September 2020.

Duey, Plunge's co-CEO, spoke with Athletech News about the brand's genesis and growth, why the cold water therapy market has exploded in popularity and the company's plans to ramp up its B2B sales efforts.

The following conversation has been lightly edited for clarity and brevity

“Look at what the hot tub industry did, especially in the ‘70s and ‘80s, with household penetration. We’re not even a blip on that radar yet. If cold can become even a fraction of that, that’s a market that is far beyond what anyone’s anticipating right now.”

— Ryan Duey, co-CEO, Plunge



Photo courtesy of Plunge

Athletech News: What opportunity did you and Michael Garrett see in the cold water therapy market that convinced you to start Plunge?

Ryan Duey: We saw a major gap. There wasn’t a cold plunge that we could, at the income level we had, really afford that we actually liked. We already knew amongst ourselves and our friends that there was an interest, although we didn’t quite grasp the potential real size of the market, both where it’s at now and where we envision it going. But we knew we wanted a tub that looked really good, was efficient, clean, and had cold, on-demand water, all at a price point that was more affordable than what was on the market at the time. Whereas other people had been charging \$10,000-\$15,000, it was a pretty simple equation for us to get to our price point (\$4,990). We knew what our margins were and we built a company around that.

ATN: Why did you design Plunge tubs to use cold water rather than ice like some of your competitors?

RD: It’s already hard enough to get into an ice bath,

your mind starts making (mental) excuses. We also wanted to take out all the physical excuses that can come into it, which would be the time allocation into going and buying ice, filling it up and waiting for it to cool down. We just thought, “If this was there for me at every single moment, and it was cold and clean at the temperature I wanted, what does that look like?” The unit only requires about 20 minutes of setup, which is mostly filling it up with a hose and plugging it in. It plugs into a 110-volt outlet (U.S. Standard), which is a really important piece, since you don’t need to upgrade your electrical system. It’s a regular appliance that you can purchase and add to your home.

ATN: Why has the cold water therapy market grown so quickly over the last few years, particularly post-pandemic?

RD: It’s definitely accelerated quicker than I anticipated. We knew there was a big market potential here, but we had no real understanding of the timeline of how it would unfold. It’s blown me away because it does take some discipline, courage and commitment to get into the cold water. I didn’t know so many people would adopt that so quickly. And we’re seeing this network effect that’s happening. Right now, I still ask, “How many people do you know with an actual cold plunge?” It’s probably not many, but there’s a lot of conversation around it. So we get really excited when we ship a tub out because that’s probably the first cold plunge that’s going into that neighborhood.

There are also some bigger cultural dynamics going on to put it more at the forefront, whether that’s due to COVID or whether it’s just in the zeitgeist more because of people like Andrew Huberman and Dr. Rhonda Patrick, who are bringing more legitimacy and understanding to the everyday person about the modality.

And at the end of the day, it’s a very impactful modality that works. You go in, and after two minutes, you feel better. You’re getting that dopamine increase, you’re coming out with more clarity, feeling a little more calm but also very alive.



Photo courtesy of Plunge



Photo courtesy of Plunge

ATN: How much bigger can the cold water market get?

RD: We're in the first inning. If you want to trend it out, you could look at what the hot tub industry did, especially in the '70s and '80s, with household penetration. We're not even a blip on that radar yet. If cold can become even a fraction of that, that's a market that is far beyond what anyone's anticipating right now.

“The fire and ice room concept is becoming really popular (in gyms), where you have a room with a sauna and cold plunge, and you can do contrast therapy.”

— Ryan Duey, Plunge

ATN: How is Plunge expanding its B2B efforts and selling to gyms and other facilities?

RD: We've done really well with SMBs (small and midsize businesses). Now, we're starting to focus on the enterprise side, piloting with some of the bigger brands and organizations. We have a new product lineup that's going to be coming out later this year, and one of those products is geared toward commercial entities.

The B2B side has been a real journey because this is a whole new modality for the fitness world; cold hasn't really existed. So it's like, “How does this fit into a gym? Does this go in the locker room? Does this go out on the pool deck? Does this go near the sauna? Is this an upsell in the membership? Is it a fire and ice room that's rented privately?” We've been working with different partners to figure out, for their style of business, what the best way is to monetize (cold plunges) and get their customer base using it. So the commercial side will be a big focus for us the rest of this year and especially in 2024.

We just launched a partnership with Aktiv Solutions, which is one of the premier organizations in (gym)

space design. It's just getting started, but the interest has been awesome and they're a class-act organization.

ATN: What's the reception been like so far for gyms that have implemented Plunge tubs?

RD: The interest is insane. The units we've placed in different facilities have been completely booked out, there are lines to get in and access Plunge. It's also become a great funnel for commercial facilities on Yelp because people are looking up places in their local region with a cold plunge.

As far as how facilities are using it, it depends, but the fire and ice room concept is becoming really popular, where you have a room with a sauna and cold plunge, and you can do contrast therapy.

Also, a lot of gyms are trying to add more premium memberships within their model, and so these recovery rooms are becoming a big value-add. So you have your base membership and then you pay another \$10-20 more a month, whatever the number is, and you get access to these other rooms. And the premium gyms just need to get this modality to stay up to date with being a premium facility.

ATN: What are your main near-term goals for Plunge?

RD: We're very focused right now on our current roadmap. We're currently at around a five-week lead time, which we're really pushing to get down. We've taken on way more warehouse space and have expanded our staff to try and get it to where you can buy a cold plunge and have it go out ASAP.

There are also a lot of different use cases for cold plunges that we're exploring. Someone who lives in a New York City apartment is very different from someone who lives in the suburbs of Charlotte and has more space. There are different unit types that can match those people. There's a lot of opportunity in the category, which we are attacking.

We also began taking pre-orders on our sauna, so we're no longer just a cold plunge company. We're Plunge, and the brand is around products that create resilience. So big picture, there are new products and new categories that we'll be rolling out.

youll. is for Mindfulness



Photo courtesy of Youll

With Youll, Wellness Creators Turn Content Into Cash

By Athletech Studios

The fitness and wellness space is teeming with talented and passionate creators, many of whom have built impressive audiences through social media. But a large following doesn't always translate into steady income, as creators often struggle to monetize their engagement or worse, they alienate their followers with overt forms of advertising.

Youll, a company created by Work in Progress, the agency behind the Headspace app, helps creators to tap into the lucrative app subscription business with a fraction of the usual barriers to entry. Offering the same quality as top-tier apps like Headspace, Youll provides an affordable alternative to constructing an app from scratch. With the platform, creators can have their own tailor-made, branded app ready to roll in just 30 days.

The platform works with all types of creators, but it's gained significant traction among fitness and wellness professionals, including personal trainers, fitness coaches, yoga instructors, therapists and nutritionists. Youll uses a "no-code" approach to app development, meaning creators don't need any technical knowledge to set their app up or manage it once it's up and running.

"The app can be used to provide exclusive access to content, courses, or programs, which (creators) can charge for on a subscription basis," Alex Bejan, CEO

of Youll, tells Athletech News. "Moreover, by having their own app, they can tap into in-app purchases, upsells and affiliate marketing, adding more streams of revenue."

Building Your Brand

Youll also helps creators create unique experiences for their community members and foster brand loyalty.

"Youll isn't just a tool; it's a bridge between creators and their followers," Bejan says. "By allowing creators to deliver constant and quality content via their customized app, it nurtures a deeper connection."

To help creators build community through their custom app, Youll offers features including push notifications to remind users about new content like workouts or meditation programs. With membership tiers, creators can offer different subscription levels to their followers, including exclusive content for premium subscribers.

Another feature, Journeys, allows creators to design curated content playlists to ensure their followers engage with content in a meaningful sequence, like a "beginner's journey" for someone new to the app. Youll is also leaning into gamification, incorporating things like challenges, badges and leaderboards to

motivate users, encourage consistent app usage and boost overall engagement.

In all, Youll offers more than 100 tools that creators can pick from to ensure their app provides an experience that best speaks to their followers, including a customized home screen with optional user-specific recommendations.

“It’s all about making followers feel they’re part of something bigger - a genuine community,” Bejan says. “This sense of belonging is priceless in building loyalty.”

Put Your Followers First

One of the biggest mistakes creators make when trying to monetize their following is turning away from what originally made them popular, according to Bejan.

“The real pitfall for many creators is forgetting their roots,” he says. “While brand deals can be lucrative, creators often sideline their original content, which is what won their audience over in the first place.”

Fitness and wellness creators that become popular should be wary of “putting dollar signs before genuine content,” Bejan suggests, since they run the risk of losing touch with what their audience truly desires.

“Bombarding followers with endless ads or putting too many things behind a paywall is a surefire way to put off your tribe,” Bejan notes.

The balance between content and business is a tough one for many creators to strike. Youll effectively takes much of that struggle away with the content-monetization features it builds into apps, freeing creators up to spend more time focusing on their art and less on dollars and cents.

Just the Beginning

Youll is just getting started; expect to see more innovations and features down the line as the company listens to feedback from creators and leverages the expertise and relationships of Work in Progress, which has collaborated with organizations including Stanford University, Kama, Bitdefender, Zenefits, and Staples in addition to its work with Headspace.

“Being part of the Work in Progress ecosystem means Youll isn’t just another app; it’s a product built on a history of innovation and excellence,” Bejan says. “This pedigree ensures that Youll not only thrives in the market but also continues to evolve and lead.”

The company is already working with Othership, a boutique wellness studio whose app is built on Youll, to integrate with Apple Vision Pro to deliver

immersive VR content. Youll is also gearing up to release a quick app builder on youll.com, allowing people to experience the company’s app features first-hand and get a feel for their capabilities.

“As always, we’re receptive to feedback and are constantly exploring new features and improvements to empower creators even more,” Bejan says.

“The real pitfall for many creators is forgetting their roots. While brand deals can be lucrative, creators often sideline their original content, which is what won their audience over in the first place.”

— Alex Bejan, CEO, Youll



Photo courtesy of Youll



Photo courtesy of Youll

SWEATHOUZ

INFRARED SAUNA + COLD PLUNGE



CHOOSE YOUR PATH TO WELLNESS

INFRARED SAUNA

REDLIGHT THERAPY

COLD PLUNGE

HYPERICE RECOVERY

HYDROMASSAGE

VITAMIN-C SHOWER



[SWEATHOUZ.COM](https://www.sweathouz.com)





Photo courtesy of Kaspars Grinvalds/shutterstock.com

The Science of Hot & Cold: Examining the Evidence

By Mindy Antimie, MS, RDN

Hot and cold therapies are used by wellness enthusiasts to improve their health, both physical and mental. Using a sauna is the main form of heat therapy. It's believed that saunas were first used in northern Europe around 7000 BC.

Cold water therapy has been used in many cultures throughout history. Many countries in northern Europe regularly use ice bathing as a relaxation technique. Perhaps this is why Finland has been named the happiest country in the world for 6 years in a row.

Whole-body cryotherapy chambers first popped up in Japan as a method to treat rheumatism. People use these chambers because of their purported health benefits.

There are many options when it comes to using extreme temperatures to improve your health. This article explores the science behind the different

types of temperature therapies and the most effective methods.

Comparing Cold Therapies

Cold plunging is when participants immerse themselves up to their necks, sometimes including their hands, in cold water. Whole-body cryotherapy is when you enter a chamber that is often well below -220 degrees Fahrenheit for about 3-4 minutes. For reference, this is about 10 times colder than Antarctica. During this practice, you'll have gloves on, a mask for your ears and nose, and shoes and socks.

Everyone has a base inward temperature that fluctuates throughout the 24-hour circadian cycle. The main temperature gauge in your body is called the preoptic hypothalamus. Receptors from your skin and neurons from all over your body communicate with the preoptic hypothalamus to conduct thermoregulation.

Although our first instinct when we're overheated is to apply cold to our back, necks and head, this may produce the opposite effect than desired. Certain areas of the body have a type of skin called glabrous skin, which is unique in that it cools down your body swiftly. The palms of your hands, the bottom of your feet, and your cheeks all have glabrous skin. Cooling your feet and your hands will help you get colder, faster.

Benefits of Cold Plunging

The ideal way to get health benefits from cold water therapy is to cold plunge in a tub or natural resource at temperatures between 50-59 degrees Fahrenheit. You can still get benefits from exposing yourself to higher temperatures, but they will not be as drastic. It is important to start gradually. You should be uncomfortable and challenged, but not to the point when it could pose health risks. As always, consult your doctor before trying cold plunging.

Over time, your body adapts and will need colder temperatures or a longer amount of time to get similar effects. You may need temperatures below 50 degrees Fahrenheit to challenge yourself, however, this is highly individualized. Plenty of scientific evidence supports that cold therapy has numerous health benefits.

Improves Mental Health and Performance

Anytime you are exposed to cold water an influx of hormones will happen. Namely, the adrenaline hormones epinephrine and norepinephrine will increase. What is interesting about cold-water therapy is that dopamine is also released. Dopamine is the main driver for feelings of motivation, it also makes us feel rewarded and inspires us to pursue objectives.

One study showed that dopamine levels increased by 250% after cold plunging in water that was 57.2 degrees Fahrenheit. Dopamine won't stay that elevated forever, it will eventually taper off, but the improved mood that cold enthusiasts feel is in part due to this hormone.

These hormones can also increase mental focus and performance. When practicing cold water therapy, you're essentially training yourself to overcome stress. As you control yourself by staying in the cold you build mental resilience. This in turn trains your prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for higher decision-making and controlling impulses. As you become stronger in mental resilience, you may feel less stressed, worried and anxious when normal life stresses occur.

Increases Metabolism

When your body becomes cold, it must work harder to reheat. This causes an increase in metabolism. Researchers have found that following a cold

plunge of 57.2 degrees Fahrenheit, metabolism was increased by 350%. Again, it will eventually taper off, but more calories are used during that increase. The temperature of the water does matter when it comes to increasing metabolism. Cold plunging at 68 degrees Fahrenheit only increased metabolism by 93%.

The largest impact on metabolism is through the conversion of white fat cells into brown fat cells. White fat cells are not very metabolically active. Brown fat cells have mitochondria and are used to help raise your body temperature. The more you use cold therapy the more your white fat cells will adapt into brown fat cells. In turn, this will lead to a gradual increase in metabolism in the long term.

It is important to not heat yourself up after cold water therapy but allow your body to naturally do so. This ensures that you're getting the maximum benefit from your shivering.

Faster Muscle Recovery

If you are or used to be an athlete, you may have used cold therapy to recover after a game. A review of the scientific literature found that cold water therapy was effective for recovery after high-intensity exercise. Participants felt less sore and were able to perform again quicker than those who didn't use cold water therapy. This is likely because it can decrease inflammation.

There are mixed results on whether cold water therapy is useful in recovery for all types of exercise. Lower-intensity exercise recovery may not benefit from cold water therapy.

Benefits of Cryotherapy

Whole-body cryotherapy has been claimed to lower inflammation and help decrease feelings of pain. Specifically, in those with arthritis, multiple sclerosis and other autoimmune diseases. It's also currently used to help athletes recover. This is because it may trigger a parasympathetic response after training.

Recovery in Athletes

There are varying results on whether whole-body cryotherapy is more effective than cold water immersion at helping recovery in athletes. Cold exposure shifts the blood flow from your peripheries toward your core, which can help trigger parasympathetic responses. In athletes, triggering a parasympathetic response is sought after for maximum recovery. It's unclear if whole-body cryotherapy or cold water immersion is better at achieving this shift.

Pain relief

Theoretically, the cold stops pain perception in the



Photo courtesy of RossHelen/shutterstock.com

joints by slowing down the flow of blood to the area. Additionally, it would decelerate nerve signaling in pain fibers which would provide pain relief.

One study showed that in those with ankylosing spondylitis, an inflammatory disease, whole-body cryotherapy did provide pain relief. The jury is still undecided on whether it provides pain relief in all types of inflammatory diseases like rheumatoid arthritis. We should also consider how whole-body cryotherapy compares to traditional forms of cold therapy like ice packs and water immersion. For example, a study compared ice application versus whole-body cryotherapy in those with osteoarthritis. The results were that both methods amounted to significant pain relief.

Perhaps the bigger question is whether whole-body cryotherapy is better than cold water immersion or specific ice application.

Whole-Body Cryotherapy vs. Cold Immersion

When someone does whole-body cryotherapy, they wear gloves, socks, and shoes for good reason. The purpose of any cold therapy is to lower your body temperature in an effective way. We know that the skin on the hands and feet should be subjected to the cold if the purpose is to cool the body. With whole-body cryotherapy, the hands and feet need to be covered to prevent damage or injury.

We can thank physics for the fact that cold air isn't nearly as effective as cold water in transferring heat. Studies have shown that whole-body cryotherapy, because it's air-based, is not as effective in lowering temperatures as cold water or ice packs. This doesn't mean that whole-body cryotherapy won't lower your temperature, but it does mean it may not be as successful at it as using water or ice.

The Science of Hot: Saunas, Infrared & Steam Rooms

Heat therapy is commonly used in spas to relax and recover. Using heat therapy for its health benefits has gained popularity and is promoted to be effective in increasing mood, metabolism and guarding against heart disease.

Generally, if using a sauna, infrared sauna or steam room, the temperature should be between 176-212 degrees Fahrenheit. Over time, the body adapts and longer sessions or higher temperatures might be required. If that temperature is intolerable or poses a health risk, then start lower, that just means you might not be heat adapted. The greatest results are seen when switching between hot and cold, such as moving between a hot tub or sauna and a cold tub.

The length of time varies per individual, anywhere from 5-20 minutes should be sufficient. Using a steam room is also effective. This will be different for each person depending on their heat tolerance.

Infrared saunas are just as effective if the heat is high enough. There may be some evidence that infrared waves cause the skin to respond differently and heat your core up quicker, but that is still yet to be confirmed.

Improves mood

When we're exposed to high heat, our body will naturally release endorphins. This is because our body perceives this as a stressor, much like getting a "runner's high." Endorphins make us feel good because they interact with the opioid receptors in the brain. Creating a general feeling of well-being and relaxation.



Photo courtesy of ronstik/shutterstock.com

Interestingly, a molecule called dynorphin is also liberated when exposed to high heat. It gives you the feeling of wanting to get out of the heat because it causes you to eventually perceive it as pain. Eventually, the more this is released, the more opioid receptors are created as the body tries to find a way to feel good again. This means that in the long term, you'll have more opioid receptors and the ability for endorphins to bind to those receptors will be easier. Leading to an overall increase in mood.

One study even found that those who use the sauna had a lower risk of developing a psychiatric disorder, especially if the sauna was used four to seven times per week. Although this evidence should be taken with a grain of salt as this was purely correlational, it's still one more reason to try heat therapy.

Increases metabolism

Like cold therapy, heat therapy can also increase your metabolism in the long run. This is great news for those who want to elevate their metabolism, without the frigidness. It does so in a similar way as cold therapy, by converting white fat cells to beige fat, therefore burning more calories. Switching between cold and hot exposure has the highest rates of conversion of white fat to beige fat, so using cold may still be in your best interest.

One study investigated what happens when you apply heat locally to the skin (without damaging it). The participants had an area heated to 105.8 degrees Fahrenheit. They found that this increased the amount of overall beige fat systemically. This may be because it causes a release of heat shock factor 1, which interacts with DNA that controls fat and sugar metabolism. However, this doesn't mean you can convert white fat to beige fat by applying heat to a specific area of the body.

Lowers Risk of Heart Disease

It is well-agreed that heat therapy lowers the risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke. It does so through a few methods. When you are exposed to high heat, your blood vessels dilate, which improves blood flow. Flow-mediated dilation is one measurement that is used to assess someone's risk of cardiovascular disease. This marker is significantly improved after heat exposure. Using heat therapy also improves blood pressure.

According to a study, those who used a sauna 4-7 times per week, for 10-20 minutes each time at a temperature of 176-212 degrees Fahrenheit, were 50% less likely to die from heart disease and stroke. The authors even adjusted the statistics to remove variables that contribute to heart disease, like exercise and smoking.

Final Thoughts

There are benefits to both cold and hot therapies. Using extreme temperatures stresses our bodies in a way that can have long-term health benefits. One of the best methods is to switch between cold and hot, such as between a sauna and a cold tub. These types of wellness practices can be viewed as a way to de-stress and commit time for self-care, knowing that you are improving your long-term health. Always start slow and consult your doctor before beginning these types of therapies.

This article is for informational purposes only and should not be used without the advice of your doctor. It does not claim to treat or cure health conditions.



Photo courtesy of Sunlighten

Sunlighten Is Redefining 'Smart' Wellness

By Athletech Studio

Infrared sauna is among the recovery modalities experiencing a surge in popularity amid the post-pandemic wellness boom, but for Sunlighten, the benefits of light and heat are nothing new.

Inspired by the health transformation her brother experienced as a result of exposure to infrared light, Connie Zack and her husband, Aaron, have been building Sunlighten for nearly twenty-five years, turning the Overland Park, Kansas-based company into a leader in the fast-growing infrared sauna industry.

The wellness company has attracted several high-profile fans, including Bobbi Brown, LeAnn Rimes, Tim McGraw and Damar Hamlin. While it primarily operates as a direct-to-consumer company, shipping saunas directly to people's homes, Sunlighten also has a thriving B2B segment; it has thousands of commercial customers, with a client list including wellness and fitness centers, medical practitioners, functional medicine and chiropractors, hotels and spas, and builders, architects and interior designers all around the world.

Key to Sunlighten's growth has been the Zacks' decades-long commitment to technological innovation and high-quality manufacturing standards,

which ensures customers get the best infrared experience possible.

Sunlighten saunas use the brand's patented SoloCarbon® far infrared heating technology to emit 95-99% infrared, which the brand says is the highest quality and quantity available. Their mPulse saunas offer additional mid and near infrared integrated with red light therapy.

"Our mPulse sauna heaters and light therapy combination is distinctive in the industry in the level of sophistication we achieve in producing precise far, mid, near infrared and red light in one heater in pre-set health programs that deliver the best dosage of each wavelength to achieve specific health benefits," says Kendra Gensemer, Sunlighten's Content Director.

That technology is unique to Sunlighten, Gensemer says, and is based on over 50 data points from nearly 40 studies on how infrared interacts with the body.

Sunlighten also puts a high emphasis on quality craftsmanship, including building its saunas with hand-selected wood and all-natural, non-toxic materials. Sunlighten owns the manufacturing process from design to construction to delivery so

they control all aspects of quality. Every sauna they manufacture is assembled once and quality checked before it is packaged and shipped.

“That level of detail is unmatched in our industry,” Gensemer says.

Innovating in the Infrared Industry

Building on its legacy of innovation, Sunlighten earlier this year released the mPulse Smart Sauna. The mPulse is the world’s first and only dynamic sauna that empowers users to customize each wavelength to optimize specific health benefits, according to Sunlighten.



Photo courtesy of Sunlighten

“Our new Smart Sauna takes the guesswork out of managing your wellness routine by supporting your health goals and guiding you with the use of intelligent technology and data,” Aaron Zack, Sunlighten’s CEO, said of the product when it launched. “All you have to think about is getting in and enjoying it. It will tell you which program is best for the health benefit you want.”

The mPulse contains a built-in tablet that allows users to control the dosages of infrared and red light that get emitted, giving people the power to create a highly personalized wellness routine.

The mPulse currently offers six-preset programs that users can choose from based on their specific health goals. The programs include Cardio, Pain Relief/ Muscle Recovery, Weight Loss, Relaxation, Anti-Aging and Detox.

“The tablet also remembers who you are to track your sessions, allows you to schedule sessions, and offers the ability to create your own custom program,” Gensemer notes.

For example, a user could create a custom program designed for post-workout recovery and choose the wavelengths and time frames that are best for that goal. The mPulse tablet also comes stocked with in-sauna entertainment options, allowing users to stream Netflix shows or meditation sessions.

To bring it all together, Sunlighten offers a mobile app that allows users to schedule sessions, manage their

session calendar and even turn the sauna on from up to 500 meters away. That’s likely just the beginning of what’s possible with the app.

“This version of our app is the foundational version, and we will continue to add features in the future, including wearable data syncing and more,” Gensemer says.

Infrared Offers Many Benefits

As Sunlighten continues to grow – its saunas were being shipped in record numbers to people across the world as a result of the pandemic – the brand is focused on continuing to educate consumers about the benefits of infrared.

Gensemer explains that as our cells absorb infrared light energy and warmth, it activates what she calls “an incredible biochemical cascade that results in overall better functioning of every system.”

“It’s a whole-body benefit, and we also can talk about specific health benefits,” Gensemer says.

Those include detoxification, heart health (including circulation and lower blood pressure), a stronger immune system, anti-aging and skin health benefits, better sleep, decreased inflammation, pain relief and muscle recovery, support for weight management, balancing hormones, stress relief and brain health.

Thanks in part to a global awakening about the importance of holistic wellness following COVID, consumers are more acquainted with and accepting of recovery modalities like infrared now than they were even five or ten years ago.

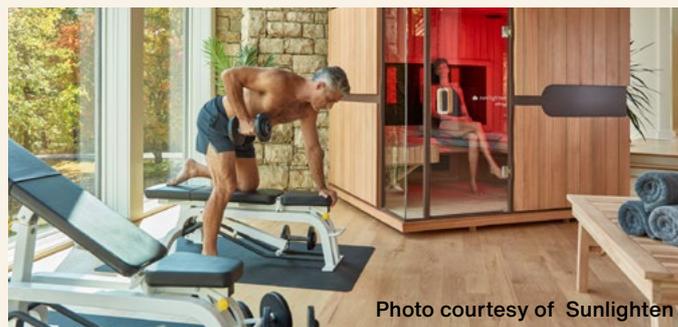


Photo courtesy of Sunlighten

“People are more familiar with the word ‘infrared’ than ever before,” Gensemer notes.

But for Sunlighten, there’s still work to be done to get the word out about the life-changing benefits of infrared that led to the company’s creation back in 1999.

“More than marketing, we take an educational approach to helping people understand the science of infrared light, and what it does for the body,” Gensemer says. “Our goal is to help people feel better so they can do more of what they love and live fully.”



Photo courtesy of myskin/shutterstock.com

Ozempic & The Future of Weight Loss

By Elizabeth Ostertag

Weight loss medications have taken the world by storm. GLP-1 medications support weight loss by sending signals to the brain and body that make patients feel full and satiated longer. Clinical trials revealed that patients could anticipate losing around 10-18% of their body weight with the drugs. For many, the medications have been a last resort after a long history of diet and exercise.

About 100 million Americans, or 42 percent of the adult population, are obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). With the majority of United States adults classified as overweight or obese, the exploding weight loss market could be worth around \$100 billion by 2030. The CDC estimates that the medical cost of obesity hit nearly \$173 billion in 2019.

Novo Nordisk is the established player behind some of the biggest medications in the space. The Danish pharmaceutical company created the blockbuster weight loss injections Ozempic and Wegovy. As it fights to maintain its dominant position in the

industry, its latest announcement is a high-dose experimental obesity pill. It could help overweight or obese adults lose around 15% of their body weight, according to new late-stage clinical results. It plans to file for FDA approval of the drug later this year. Such an innovation could be key for many patients who are averse to using needles.

Other large healthcare players are entering and transforming the market, threatening Novo Nordisk's dominance. WeightWatchers entered the obesity drug market by acquiring Sequence. Meanwhile, Teladoc has expanded its services for employers, now offering weight management and prediabetes services. Mounjaro is Eli Lilly & Co.'s new diabetes drug that the company is hoping will be approved for obesity later this year. A trial showed that the drug's effects do not slow over time, which could revolutionize the space by bringing about more weight loss. Mounjaro works because tirzepatide mimics GLP-1 and glucose-dependent insulinotropic polypeptide.



Photo courtesy of life-literacy/shutterstock.com

Telehealth Companies Spring Into Action

Ro, a digital healthcare company that directly serves patients, introduced Ro Body earlier this year. Its new program grants patients access to GLP-1 medications. To participate, patients begin with an online visit to discuss their health history and goals. They also take an at-home metabolic test, which they then send to a lab for processing, and finally, they have a video consultation with a healthcare provider. Throughout the program, patients receive twenty-four provider consultations per year and monitor their weight loss progress using a connected scale.

Dr. Beverly Tchang, M.D., an endocrinologist and assistant professor of medicine at Weill Cornell Medicine, serves as an advisor to Ro's Body Program. She spoke with Athletech News about how patients are pairing GLP-1s with wellness routines.

"Patients are finding it easier to eat in moderation, implement healthy dietary advice, and engage in physical activity," Dr. Tchang said. "I encourage people to tune into appetite signals-- when they feel hungry versus full, and when they are eating for other reasons (stress, 'food noise,' emotional, etc.). I think these medications are helping them become more aware of these differences and to address them more effectively."

Wegovy and Saxenda are the only drugs to be approved for the treatment of obesity, as Ozempic and Mounjaro are diabetes drugs that bring about weight loss. Novo Nordisk states that doctors in the United States have written around 110,000

prescriptions for the drug. However, the space is also ever-changing.

"The world of GLP-1s is expanding rapidly," Dr. Tchang said. "In the last several months, we've heard about several other new medications (e.g., retatrutide, orforglipron) that take advantage of gut hormones other than GLP-1 to cause even more weight loss than what we've previously seen."

Traditional Weight-Loss Market Suffers

The rise of GLP-1s has had a significant impact on different health businesses, resulting in the downfall of established names like Jenny Craig, which had been a prominent weight-loss brand with a number of celebrity endorsements. Many consumers became impatient and disillusioned with the traditional belief that diet and exercise alone are the most effective means of achieving weight loss.

The South Beach Diet is another example of the swift impact of GLP-1s. In August 2022, South Beach Diet announced a temporary suspension of their home delivery service for meals, further illustrating how the rise of GLP-1s has swiftly reshaped the landscape for established players in the diet industry.

The rise of weight loss drugs, particularly GLP-1 medications, has transformed the weight loss industry. With the majority of adults in the U.S. facing issues with their weight, the medications have promised new results for an old issue. As competition intensifies, the wellness and weight loss medication landscape will certainly continue to evolve.

DISRUPT//2023

THE FUTURE OF WELLNESS & FITNESS

POWERED BY **Athlete** NEWS **tech**

OCTOBER 11 & 12, 12PM (ET)

[REGISTER NOW](#)



Alberto Perlman

Chief Executive Officer
& Co-Founder, Zumba Fitness



Alex Isaly

Vice President of Programming &
Head of Content Xponential Fitness



Anthony Geisler

Xponential Fitness,
Chief Executive Officer & Founder



Brandon Cullen

Co-Founder, Chief Concept Officer,
MADabolic



Bryan Green

Founder & CEO Aktiv Solutions
& FitnessDesignGroup



Carl Hardwick

Chief Executive Officer,
OPEX Fitness & CoachRx



Dan Duran

Head of Academic
& Industry Partnerships, ISSA



Don Faul

Chief Executive Officer,
CrossFit Community and



Jon Canarick

Managing Partner,
North Castle Partners



Krystal Zell

Chief Executive Officer,
Tonal



Randy Hetrick

Founder & CEO,
OutFit Founder & Chairman, TRX

OPEN FOR APPLICATION NOW

Athletech^{NEWS}

The Most Innovative Fitness & Wellness Companies of 2023

Athletech News is highlighting the breakthrough brands and products that will define the industry in the years ahead. We're looking for the companies whose products, services or solutions are transforming health, fitness and wellness with everything from groundbreaking tech to new and enhanced platforms, services and offerings.

APPLY TODAY

DEADLINE: SEPTEMBER 18

