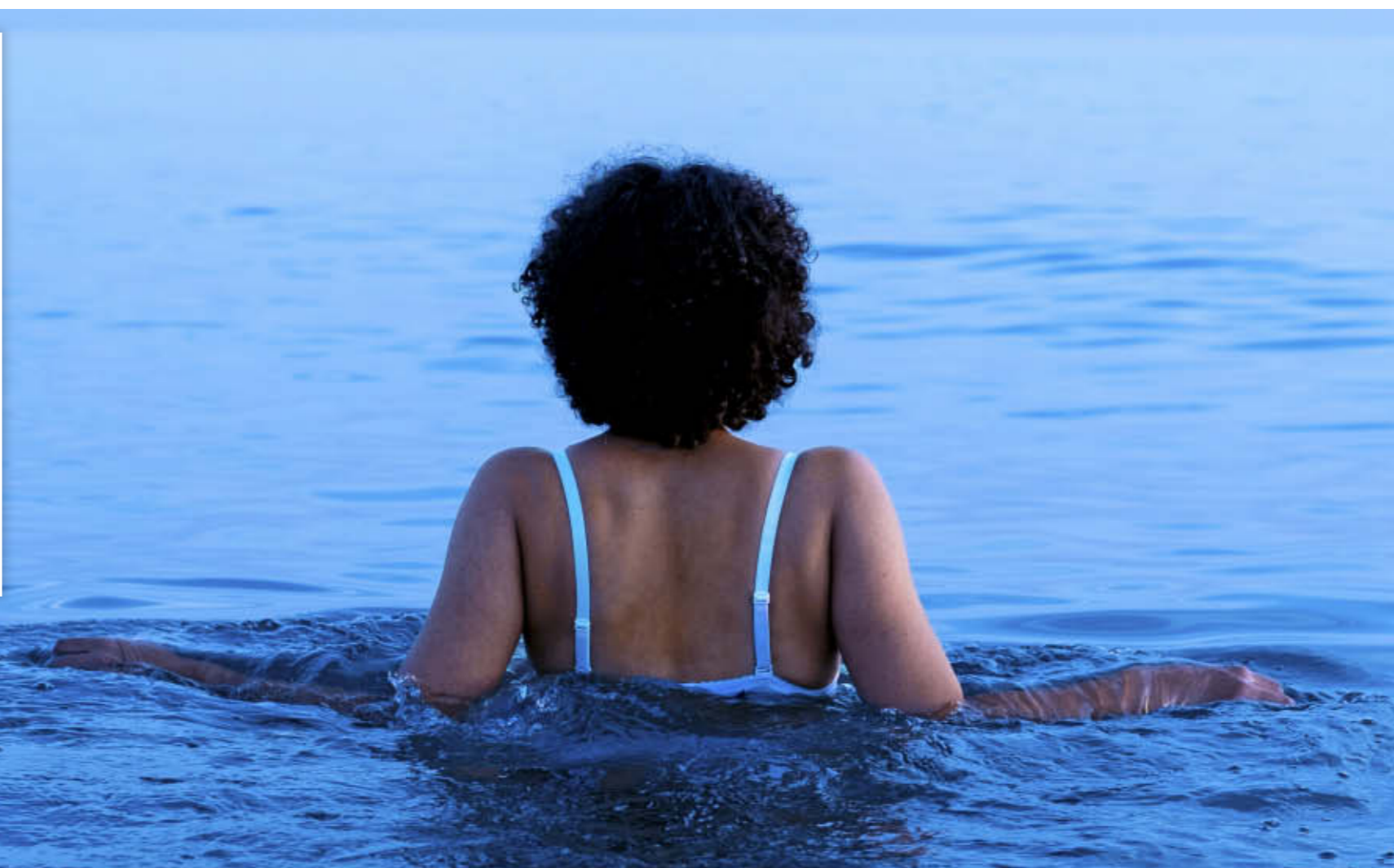




Fearne Cotton is a fan of cold water dips...



And Nicole Scherzinger takes ice baths



THE BIG CHILL

PLUNGING YOUR BODY INTO ICY WATER COULD BE THE ANSWER TO GETTING FIT AND BEATING THE BLUES THIS WINTER

Fearne Cotton often shares her wellbeing tips on her Happy Place podcast, but there's one which will send shivers down your spine – quite literally. The former Radio 1 DJ is a big fan of immersing herself in cold water, whether that's in the privacy of her own bathroom or at the English seaside.

Speaking earlier this year to fitness guru Joe Wicks, she said, "I'll have a warm shower and then I put it on the most cold, freezing setting it will go on. I can stay in there now for three minutes and then I get out. It's heaven, you're pumped!"

In October she took her two children Rex and Honey for a bracing dip in the

chilly sea "for clarity, calm vibes and pure exhilaration". She posted a picture on Instagram, adding, "I'm getting more and more into cold water therapy."

Fearne's penchant for wild swimming is shared by many it seems, with a noticeable surge in the potentially nippy pastime since the first lockdown.

What's more, it was recently revealed that more and more celebrities are taking the plunge to invest in outdoor "status lakes" with the Beckhams digging one at their Cotswolds home and Ed Sheeran installing a "nature pond" that could provide the perfect spot for a refreshing morning swim at his Suffolk estate. Even

Great British Bake Off judge Prue Leith has a swimming lake at her Oxfordshire home.

Pussycat Doll Nicole Scherzinger also advocates the practice of cold water therapy, recently sharing a photo of herself braving an ice bath. Brrr!

Emotional trauma and holistic expert Antonia Harman says, "Cold water therapy is a great way to clear your head if you wake up feeling groggy. It can help anything from hangovers to depression and anxiety. Other benefits include boosting the immune system, deepening sleep and reducing inflammation."

Here's a look at how cold water can help improve our health – mind, body and soul.

IMPROVES METABOLISM

Cold showers taken two or three times a week can increase metabolism and, over time, they could help to fight obesity. Antonia explains, "Brown fat [the fat we're born with as opposed to the fat we associate with conditions like heart disease and obesity] burns when we're cold to keep us warm – it's literally our body's stored fuel. Cold exposure increases our metabolic rate from 25-40%, so having a cold shower a day is a great way to get lean!"



BOOSTS CIRCULATION

We're often told cold water does wonders for our circulation – and it's not an old wives' tale. Antonia says, "Cold showers stimulate blood flow as the blood rushes to the vital organs. Your heart is forced to pump more efficiently, pushing blood through your vessels and supplying every part of your body with much-needed oxygen and nutrients." The bottom line is that "regular cold showers promote healthy blood circulation and a healthy body".

HELPS FIGHT COMMON ILLNESS

Taking a cold dip can help your resistance to common illnesses, including colds and flu. Antonia says, "The lymphatic system doesn't have a pump like our cardiovascular system does, so it becomes pretty stagnated unless you move a lot. Another way to get it pumping is via cold water immersion. When cold, the lymph vessels contract, forcing the system to pump fluids through the body, flushing out waste." She goes on to add that, "Cold water exposure also triggers leukocytes (white blood) cells to attack and destroy unwanted substances in the lymph. This means you're better able to fight bugs and infections."

RAMPS UP HAPPINESS LEVELS

You might also find that you have a spring in your step after taking a chilly dip. And it's no coincidence, says Antonia. "The cold water triggers a flood of mood-enhancing neurotransmitters. In short, these make you feel happy."



REDUCES INFLAMMATION AND SWELLING

A cold shower will reduce swelling and inflammation by lowering the temperature of damaged tissue and constricting blood vessels. Antonia explains, "It even numbs nerve endings, bringing immediate relief. That's why some athletes soak in an ice bath after a strenuous workout." Hmm, we're still not sold on that one!

IMPROVES HAIR AND SKIN

Ever noticed how good your skin looks after a wash in chilly water? "A plunge into cold water tightens your skin and reduces pore sizes," explains Antonia. "You're also less likely to have excessive oils, greasy hair and breakouts, compared to washing in hot water. The cold also stimulates follicles, which can increase hair health and thickness." Another benefit is that cold water closes the follicles, making your hair appear shinier.

WHAT ELSE YOU SHOULD KNOW...

Unfortunately cold water therapy isn't a cure all, advises Antonia. "If you've recently been released from hospital, have a heart condition or are immune-compromised then it should be avoided. It's important to know your own body and limits.

"Cold baths, showers and dips also take a little getting used to, so for anyone wanting to try, it may be wise to start slowly – a few seconds at first and then build up from there." **OK!**

ANTONIA HARMAN IS THE FOUNDER OF DIVINEEMPOWERMENT.CO.UK SHE IS AN EMOTIONAL TRAUMA AND HOLISTIC EXPERT

WORDS: CHARLOTTE HULME AND SUSANNA GALTON PHOTOS: GETTY