

Hydrotherapy

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What is Hydrotherapy? Why Use It?

You may have heard of using a hot pack or ice pack on an injury, or sat in a sauna or hot bath to relax. What you may not have known is that all of these are forms of hydrotherapy, a treatment modality that has been used for thousands of years.

Formally put, hydrotherapy is the use of water, either on the body or taken internally, to prevent and treat disease or injury. The water may be in the form of ice, steam, or liquid.

Hydrotherapy is an effective way to help the body maintain its balance, or homeostasis. The body naturally releases or stores heat to ensure proper functioning. Hydrotherapy applications help with this delicate balance, and also help with circulation, waste removal, and metabolism, processes which are all effected by body heat.

The very nature of water makes hydrotherapy an adaptable and easy to use tool. It

can easily change temperature and is readily available. Even if you don't have any specialized equipment, you can still use hydrotherapy applications as a part of your daily care.



Cautions: People with heart conditions, blood pressure problems, or sensory or motor deficiencies should consult their health care team prior to **any** hydrotherapy treatments.

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Ice? Heat? Contrast?

You may be aware that these types of applications exist, but you may not know when to use them.

Ice is best used after an acute injury, as it helps to decrease swelling, redness, and nerve conduction, which reduces pain levels. Frozen gel packs and ice cubes are common methods of ice hydrotherapy.

Heat is best used on tight, sore muscles to help them relax. It can also be used to warm an area before applying an ice treatment. However, heat

should never be used if there is inflammation present; if in doubt, ice only! Hot baths or showers, hydrocollators, thermophores, and hot compresses are all methods of heat application.

Contrast applications involve alternating between warm and cold treatments. They are best used with subacute conditions (10-14 days after the injury occurred). These may be in the form of alternating hot and cold compresses, showers, or baths. Before attempting a contrast application, discuss it with your health care team.

Whirlpools and Saunas

You're probably more familiar with whirlpools and saunas as used at a spa or your local gym. But did you know these treatments have more applications than just for fun or relaxation?

Whirlpool Baths involve the use of air jets in a tub of water. They are great for increasing your overall circulation. They can also relax muscles and help with pain levels, due to their sedating effect. Whirlpools are a great 'warm-up' prior to exercise, stretching, or massage.

When using the whirlpool, make sure you take a glass of water with you, and sip at it periodically to prevent dehydration. Make sure you don't overuse a whirlpool; while it may be fun, don't stay in longer than 10-20 minutes at a time.

For safety reasons, you should monitor your pulse while using a whirlpool bath. Your pulse should never go over 170 beats per minute minus your age (for example, a 30-year-old's maximum would be $170-30=140$). Also, if you feel dizzy, thirsty, or generally unwell while using a whirlpool, stop the treatment.

Saunas involve the use of dry moist air in a wooden room. They were common in Europe during the Middle Ages, especially in Finland, where they were used for everything from curing food to giving birth! Today there are millions of saunas found all over the world.

As you probably already know, saunas increase perspira-

tion, which helps eliminate waste products. What you may not know is they also stimulate metabolism and the im-

mune system, increase heart rate, and relax nerves and muscles. They are also an excellent treatment for the skin, as the heat increases blood flow and therefore stimulates nutrition.



For best effects, try a two hour contrast treatment. Start with a five to fifteen minute sit in the sauna (until you start sweating), then take a break for ten minutes and have a cool shower and drink some water. Repeat this three times. If you don't have two

hours to spend, a single treatment of five to fifteen minutes will still give some benefit.

Like with the whirlpool bath, make sure you bring plenty of cool drinking water with you to the sauna and monitor your pulse.

Water Stepping

Water stepping is an age-old treatment for circulatory problems in the legs. If you have spider veins, varicose veins, or hot, swollen feet, you might want to try this!

First, warm your bathroom by running the shower for a few minutes. Your body needs to be warm when you start this treatment. Next, fill your bathtub with cold water to below knee level. Step carefully into the tub; having something to hold onto for safety is recommended. Next, walk in place, making sure you lift each leg out of the water with your steps. Continue this for about 10-

20 seconds, or as long as you feel comfortable. End your treatment by drying off and putting on warm socks. Done regularly, many people find this treatment helps with circulation and general health, and even reduces stress!

Cryotherapy (Icing)

Icing is generally used on acute injuries for pain reduction. If you don't have an ice pack at home, you can use a bag of frozen vegetables, a styrofoam cup with water frozen in it, or simply a plastic bag with ice in it.

Some guidelines to follow when applying ice:

1. ALWAYS protect your skin by placing clothing or a towel between you and the ice source.
2. Apply ice as soon as possible in an injury has occurred.
3. **Important:** Apply ice for **15-20 minutes** every hour when the treatment has started. It is very im-

portant to repeat this process for 4 to 5 hours initially. This will allow for a decrease in inflammation, which is the main cause of your pain.

4. Always use ice for the first 7 days on a new injury.

The sensations you feel when icing are pain, then aching, then a tingling, then finally numbness. When the ice is removed at the 15-20 minute mark, the area should be numb. The body will then start to re-warm the areas slowly by an increase in blood flow. This gentle re-warming will not occur if the ice is left on too long.

Dry Brushing

Dry Brushing doesn't actually involve the use of water, but it is a type of therapy that will increase circulation and rejuvenate skin. It has also been known to have a warming and stimulating effect, so is best done in the morning or during the day and not just before bed.

Using a dry, natural fibre brush or sisal mitten, brush across the skin in a circular pattern, starting at the foot and

working up the leg until the skin becomes flushed. Repeat this procedure with both legs, then circle around the belly button, the chest, the arms, and finally the back and buttocks. Do not dry brush the face, neck, or any other areas where the skin is very sensitive. The total procedure should take no more than five to ten minutes.

Cold Water Rinsing

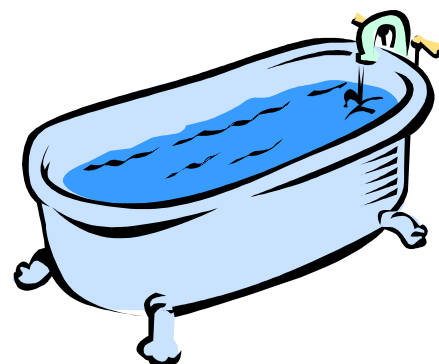
Most people have inadvertently tried a cold water rinse — by having someone else in the house run the hot water while they were in the shower! But did you know this procedure can be therapeutic too? It not only stimulates and energizes but improves circulation too. Some people have even reported it 'toughens them' for the cold weather months, making it easier to deal during the long winter.

To do this procedure most effectively, start by having your usual hot shower or bath. Then, splash a little cold water onto the toes of one foot, gradually moving up to the top of the leg and back down again. Repeat this with your other foot and leg. To make this exercise easier, try using a hand-held shower head to spray the cold water.

Why Epsom Salts Bath?

Epsom salts help the body detoxify by causing an increase in sweating. The high magnesium content in the salts promotes the release of lactic acid from the muscle tissue, while the heat of the water causes you to sweat. Combine these together and you have an increase in waste removal through the skin.

Note: Pregnant women and people with cardiovascular conditions or blood pressure problems should consult their health care team before using an Epsom Salts bath.



Paraffin Wax

Paraffin Wax involves the application of melted wax to create a deep moist heat on a specific area of the body. It is generally only used on small areas or on the hands, feet, or elbows. Along with warming the area it is applied to, it softens the skin, increases local circulation, eases pain, and makes scar tissue more pliable.

The wax used in this treatment is mixed with mineral oil at a ratio of 5 lb of wax to 1 pint of oil. This is to help increase the pliability of the wax to prevent cracking,

and lowers the melting temperature so the skin is not burned.

Paraffin Wax can be applied by dipping the feet, hands, or elbows directly into the wax or by painting it onto the body with a brush. After the wax is applied, it is covered with a warm towel or plastic to help keep the heat in.

Hydrotherapy During Treatments

There are a wide variety of ways hydrotherapy may be used during your treatment.

- Hydrocollators, thermophores, or paraffin wax applications may be used prior to or during a massage treatment to relax tissue and increase local circulation.
- Ice massage may be used following any deep, specific massage, or at any time when inflammation is present, especially in ligaments and tendons.
- Cold applications are useful during or following stretching, to allow the muscle fibers to cool in their lengthened position and help to increase the range of motion gained by the stretch.
- Ice packs are used with acute trauma or pain,

especially directly after an injury occurred.

- Paraffin wax helps scar tissue and adhesions become more pliable, which makes it ideal for use prior to frictioning treatments.



Where In Ottawa?

A number of places in the Ottawa area (or not too far away) offer different sorts of hydrotherapy treatments.

Spas: There are a large number of spas in the Ottawa area, most of which offer some form of hydrotherapy.

Gyms: If you have a gym membership and have never checked out the extra services, take a look next time you go. Most gyms have a sauna, whirlpool bath, or both.

Apartments: Many apartment buildings have saunas, swimming pools, or even whirlpool baths. Maybe yours does too!

Mount Tremblant: If you're heading to Tremblant for a weekend getaway, try visiting the Swedish Baths. They offer a variety of hydrotherapy services, including steam rooms, whirlpool baths, and hot springs.

