

What is it?

Naturopathic Hydrotherapeutic treatment has been in practice through trained physicians since the early 1900s. The treatment uses a combination of applying specially timed hot and cold towels to the chest, abdomen and back with the use of a gentle electrical current⁽¹⁾.

Hydrotherapy is a special technique that greatly improves recovery from many illnesses, both acute (short term, such as a cold) and chronic (long term, such as hypothyroidism). It helps to improve circulation, relax and repair the nervous system, stimulate detoxifying and eliminative processes, strengthen and heal the digestive system and stimulate the immune system. This therapy is gentle yet very powerful with almost no potential for harm when overseen by a qualified physician who is specially trained in hydrotherapy and physiotherapy treatment.

How does it work?

Hydrotherapy works because it stimulates the body's own healing mechanisms by improving or restoring normal organ function and circulation. Hydrotherapy is thought to promote the process of detoxification through improved blood flow, increased sweating (to remove toxins through the skin), better absorption of nutrients from food, more regular bowel activity and increased urination. It also helps build the blood by increasing desirable elements, such as red and white blood cells, nutrients and oxygen which can then be delivered to the body's various tissues and organs which need it. In addition, water treatments improve immune functioning by nourishing the reticuloendothelial system, through which our illness-fighting white blood cells recognize invaders and are guided to the tissues where they are needed^(1, 2).

This is combined with particular physiotherapy devices which help to improve nervous system and organ function depending on what is being treated. Each treatment is specific to the individual and their current health.

Although these are proposed mechanisms, and as physicians we have seen excellent clinical results, this treatment is not a standard, recognized form of treatment and is not FDA approved for any condition. Numerous studies have been done on each of the individual elements of the treatment (hot and cold applications, low voltage sinusoidal current, short wave diathermy, etc.), but few formal studies have been done assessing the treatment as a whole. ***As this is not considered a standard, conventional medical treatment, insurance reimbursement for the procedure is not guaranteed.***

The best part is that it is completely drugless, safe for all ages and helpful for a wide variety of conditions!

What should I expect when I schedule a hydrotherapy?

Treatments take about an hour and begin by briefly meeting with the physician who checks in with you, listens to your heart and prescribes the treatment. Treatments are typically carried out by medical assistants who are specially trained in hydrotherapy application. In order to prepare for the treatment you will be given a robe and asked to undress from the waist up. Patient modesty is always exercised during the treatment. We recommend wearing comfortable, loose clothing. Patients often find the treatments very relaxing, and many even fall asleep! Feel free to bring a magazine, book or personal music with headphones to relax during your treatment.

The Use of Physiotherapy Devices

The physiotherapy devices used in hydrotherapy are specific to the individual patient and their condition. One or more of the following devices may be used during your treatment:

Low Voltage Alternating Current (also known as Sine Wave) delivers a non-painful mild electrical current to the muscles, which feels like a buzzing or tickling sensation. Depending on the location of the pads, sine wave is used to improve digestive movement and can even influence the stomach, pancreas, gallbladder, liver, kidneys and adrenal glands (stress glands) through a gentle sensory stimulation of the spinal nerves along the back. Sine wave can also be used over the arms and legs to improve lymphatic flow, reduce swelling and bring extra blood flow to areas requiring healing.

Diathermy creates radio frequency waves which help stimulate movement of white blood cells and red blood cells to a particular area. We commonly use it as our "physiotherapy antibiotic" to treat sinus, throat, lung or gastrointestinal infections, break up mucus and calm overactive bowels. The high frequency radio waves are very safe for most patients and produce a comfortable heat. This heat is also useful for pulled muscles, healing damaged tendons and ligaments.

High Frequency treatment uses ultra high frequency, low amplitude current which relaxes muscles and topically produces ozone which is antimicrobial and antifungal. Studies show use of high frequency current improves blood flow to the area for up to 24 hours after use. Not only do we find it useful in conditions such as acne, but also for deeper structures such as healing muscle injuries and promoting blood flow to particular organs.

Direct Current (Galvanic) treatment uses different polarities (positive or negative) to accomplish different therapeutic effects. It can be helpful to strengthen loose structures such as ligaments and tendons, shrink inflamed, ulcerated tissues, stop bleeding (such as from an ulcer) and can even be used to help push therapeutic medications into tissues (also known as iontophoresis).

Scheduling:

Your physician may recommend a therapeutic trial of treatments to assess whether Naturopathic Hydrotherapy will be helpful for your condition. **A therapeutic trial will consist of 5 to 15 in-office treatments, depending on the severity of your condition.** An appointment for re-evaluation will then be completed to assess both subjective and objective improvement in your condition. If the therapeutic trial is positive, your physician may recommend additional treatments if needed.

The order of therapeutics used and the specific electrical therapy used depends on the individual patient and their current condition.

Treatments build upon each subsequent treatment, but the best clinical result is generally seen when treatments are "stacked together". **If you can schedule two treatments per week, it best to do so on consecutive days (such as Thursday and Friday) instead of spacing them out.** Although this is not necessary, it does seem to provide better clinical outcomes.

Who Should NOT Receive Naturopathic Hydrotherapy

Naturopathic Hydrotherapy is **contraindicated** in the following conditions or circumstances, these contraindications are mostly related to the electrical therapy component:

- Acute emergencies requiring emergency medical treatment (MI, stroke, severe trauma, hemorrhaging, etc.)
- Lack of normal sensation over treatment area.
- Certain medical devices, such as pacemakers.
- Pregnancy (only if diathermy is to be used, sine wave therapy is safe when used by a trained individual)
- Metal Implants (only if diathermy is to be used)
- DVT or thrombophlebitis
- Breast implants (only if diathermy is to be used over the chest)

If you have any questions about this, please discuss it with your provider BEFORE the hydrotherapy is administered.

Hydrotherapy Research

Studies done have shown that hydrotherapy raises a low basal body temperature, moderates low or high blood sugar and blood pressure. Hydrotherapy researchers have shown that a reflex increase in blood flow occurs in internal organs when the circulation to the overlying skin is stimulated. This internal reaction is responsible for the long lasting and cumulative effects of a series of hydrotherapy treatments. Research has further shown that the beneficial effects on the immune system last for up to 24 hours making this a very effective therapy for any disorder involving immune function. Additionally, 2-8 hours after a single hydrotherapy treatment, one can expect an increase in white blood cells at an average of 10,000 more cells released into circulation. Thus, hydrotherapy is a rapid way to boost your immune function and fight any infection, including common colds and flus as well as antibiotic resistant bacteria. One study demonstrates that hydrotherapy will boost immune function, eliminate excess fluid, and reduce the incidence of colds and flu by 50%.

If you begin to feel the onset of a cold or flu, have a pulled muscle or sprained ankle, allergies are acting up or are looking for long term health and overall improvement in body and organ function - schedule yourself a hydrotherapy treatment!

Research has shown that either hydrotherapy or the use of various electrical currents **may be indicated** for the following conditions:

- Musculoskeletal disorders including strain, sprain, spasm, or weakness and joint aches/pains^(2,3,4,5,6,7), osteoarthritis, pain, rheumatoid arthritis, hematomas, soft tissue injury, bursitis, tendonitis, fracture healing, low back pain and surgical healing⁽¹⁸⁾
- Digestive complaints such as chronic constipation, IBS, slow peristalsis, dyspepsia, Crohn's disease and Ulcerative Colitis.^(1,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15)
- Female reproductive disorders such as PMS, dysmenorrhea, infertility⁽¹⁾
- Kidney stones⁽¹⁶⁾
- Wound healing^(17,18)
- Chronic migraines⁽²⁰⁾
- HIV/AIDs⁽²²⁾
- Improve immunity, including acute and chronic infections, common colds^(21,23,24,25,26, 27, 28)
- Pain management⁽¹⁹⁾
- Lung conditions such as COPD, bronchitis, asthma^(29,30)
- Hemorrhoids and varicose veins, Raynaud's disease^(1,29)
- Cardiac conditions such as CHF, MI, high cholesterol and high BP^(1,31,32,33,34)
- Chronic fatigue, depression and anxiety^(35,36,37)
- Fibromyalgia^(38,39)
- Adrenal/HPA Axis dysfunction⁽⁴⁰⁾
- Endocrine/Hormone dysfunction⁽⁴¹⁾
- Improved cognition⁽⁴²⁾

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