

# HYDROTHERAPY

## **What is hydrotherapy?**

Hydrotherapy is the use of water for restoring, maintaining, and regulating health. Treatments include hot and cold compresses, steam baths, and saunas among others. Water is used both internally and externally in many different forms, such as ice, liquid or steam. Many people use hydrotherapy in many different ways, and it can be carried out both by a professional and at home.

## **Who can benefit from hydrotherapy?**

Anyone can benefit from the wide array of hydrotherapy treatments available, whether you take a hot bath to unwind after a stressful day, use an ice pack on a swollen ankle, or go to a spa for a specific medical condition.

## **What are the types of hydrotherapy?**

### ***Heat therapy***

Heat therapy, also known as thermotherapy, works by improving circulation and blood flow to a particular area due to increased temperature. Increasing the temperature of the afflicted area even slightly can soothe discomfort and increase muscle flexibility. Heat therapy can relax and soothe muscles and heal damaged tissue.

There are two different types of heat therapy: dry heat and moist heat. Both types of heat therapy should aim for “warm” as the ideal temperature instead of “hot.”

- Dry heat includes sources like heating pads, microwaveable heating packs, and saunas.
- Moist heat includes sources like steamed towels, moist heating packs, or hot baths. Moist heat may be slightly more effective as well as require less application time for the same results.

When applying heat therapy, you can choose to use local, regional, or whole body treatment. Local therapy is best for small areas of pain, like one stiff muscle. You could use small heated gel packs or a hot water bottle if you only want to treat an injury locally. Regional treatment is best for more widespread pain or stiffness, and could be achieved with a steamed towel, large heating pad, or heat wraps. Full body treatment would include options like saunas or a hot bath.

There are certain cases where heat therapy should not be used. If the area in question is either bruised or swollen (or both), it may be better to use cold therapy. Heat therapy also shouldn't be applied to an area with an open wound.

People with certain pre-existing conditions should not use heat therapy due to higher risk of burns or complications due to heat application. These conditions include:

- diabetes
- dermatitis
- vascular diseases
- deep vein thrombosis
- multiple sclerosis (MS)

Heat therapy is often most beneficial when used for longer periods of time, unlike cold therapy, which needs to be limited.

Minor stiffness or tension can often be relieved with only 15 to 20 minutes of heat therapy. Moderate to severe pain can benefit from longer sessions of heat therapy like warm bath, lasting between 30 minutes and two hours.

### ***Cold therapy***

Cold therapy is also known as cryotherapy. It works by reducing blood flow to a particular area, which can significantly reduce inflammation and swelling that causes pain, especially around a joint or a tendon. It can temporarily reduce nerve activity, which can also relieve pain.

There are a number of different ways to apply cold therapy to an affected area. Treatment options include:

- ice packs or frozen gel packs
- ice massage
- ice baths

For home treatment, apply an ice pack wrapped in a towel or ice bath to the affected area. You should never apply a frozen item directly to the skin, as it can cause damage to the skin and tissues. Apply cold treatment as soon as possible after an injury.

Use cold therapy for short periods of time, several times a day. Ten to 15 minutes is fine, and no more than 20 minutes of cold therapy should be used at a time to prevent nerve, tissue, and skin damage. For best results, elevate affected area during cold therapy.

**Blair “Rusty” Stacks**

**Licensed Massage Therapist**

206-294-1500

MassageByRusty.com