

# THE CENTER for CLINICAL MASSAGE

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## All about hydrotherapy

Using water to soothe tension, reduce pain

Using water for therapy has endured the test of time. Developed by the ancient Greeks and Romans and studied in modern day clinical research, hydrotherapy has been around for more than 6,000 years. Many people know that ice reduces swelling and inflammation, while heat can soothe tense muscles. Here are some additional techniques that are easy-to-use in everyday life.

**Whirlpool.** Warm air or water from a jet is forced into this bath to make bubbles. The whirlpool is a time-honored therapy for overall relaxation and relieving muscle soreness, fatigue and chronic pain from arthritis and other joint problems.

**Hot foot baths.** Fill a basin with hot water, around 100 degrees. Sitting on a chair, soak the feet for 15–30 minutes. Add herbs or a few drops of essential oils to the water as desired. During the treatment, keeping a cool towel on your forehead and the back of your neck will improve circulation throughout the body. Finish the treatment with a cold sponge bath to the feet and dry off completely. Hot foot baths are used to reduce headaches and cold symptoms.

**Ice massage.** Fill a paper cup with water and freeze it. You can then peel away the cup as you massage with the ice directly on the skin for no longer than 2 minutes or until a numb sensation arises. Ice massage can alleviate inflammation, reduce pain, decrease muscle spasms, and reduce swelling.



*Hot foot baths can help you feel better when you have a headache or a cold.*

**Hot compress.** Towels work well as compresses. Soak a tightly rolled-up towel in hot water, then quickly ring out excess water. Apply to sore and tired muscles for 5 minutes. Gel-filled cloth packs and microwave hot packs can also be used. Hot compresses help you relax while effectively reducing muscle spasm and chronic pain.

**Contrast hydrotherapy.** Use alternate cold and hot applications for areas of chronic tension or pain. Foot baths alternating warm and cool water are a great use of contrast therapy. Or alternate ice packs or ice massage and hot compresses to an area such as the shoulders or back. If it's more comfortable, reduce the temperature of the applications. Alternate every 2–5 minutes several times. In order to avoid a burn, touch the hot application with your hands before applying heat. Contrast hydrotherapy improves circulation, helping in the relaxing and healing of all the tissues in the area.

**A cautionary note.** If you are pregnant, or have a heart condition, diabetes, high blood pressure or Reynaud's disease, consult with your primary health practitioner before using hydrotherapy. Use caution if you have sensitive skin or reduced skin sensations. Be careful with heat applications to avoid burning.



*Whirlpool baths relieve muscle tension, chronic pain and fatigue.*

### RICE: Rest, Ice, Compress, Elevate

This acronym is a great way to remember how to use hydrotherapy to treat swelling, pain and inflammation in a muscular injury.

- R Rest the injury site for 1–2 days.
- I Apply ice directly to the injury.
- C Compress.
- E Elevate the affected area.

Let's say for example you strained a muscle in your calf. You could rest the leg, using pillows to prop it up to 30–45 degrees (above the heart) and apply an ice pack to the injury site.

You may want to wrap, or compress, the muscle with an ace bandage to help keep down any swelling. Keep in mind that many physicians now recommend early movement following injury; check with yours for advice. Apply ice up to 48 hours after the injury for 30 minutes or less at a time, several times throughout the day.

# More hydrotherapy

## Self-care techniques to reduce tension

Here are more tips for using heat or cold to feel better and boost your health!

**Electric heating pads.** The moist heat of a “deep moist” heating pad increases heat penetration, making it an excellent choice to soothe tense muscles. Apply to stiff areas if no inflammation is present for 20–30 minutes.



*Relax and detoxify the body by sweating in a sauna. Complete the healthful regimen by immersing in cool water afterward.*

**Cold immersion.** A really simple cold immersion is to hold your hands, wrists, and forearms under cold tap water for 1–2 minutes every time you wash your hands. This will invigorate your circulation and reduce tension in your hands and arms. For your feet and legs, fill a small tub or basin with cold water. Stand in the water for up to 5 minutes. The effects of cold immersion are reduced swelling, decreased muscle pain and relief of burning and itching. Some people feel it helps them prevent colds and other viruses.

**Sauna.** You sit in a room which is heated up to 180 degrees. While saunas are primarily dry heat, people often toss water over hot rocks to produce steam. Originating from Finland, and now common in spas and athletic clubs, saunas are a great way to relax and detoxify the body through sweating. Following 5–15 minutes in the sauna, finish the treatment by immersing in cool water such as a shower or bath.



*Light of heart approach the shrine of health; So shalt thou leave with body freed from pain.*

*—From the Roman Bath at Caracalla*