THE INSTITUTE FOR FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE®

Benefits of Hydrotherapy

Hydrotherapy is the therapeutic use of water to deliver heat and cold to the body. It often includes the use of pools or hot baths, sauna, and/or cold and hot packs as a treatment for physical or psychological ailments. It is also used preventatively for health maintenance, stress management, and detoxification. Hydrotherapy is used in rehabilitation after musculoskeletal surgery, to decrease joint or arthritic pain, and increase range of motion.

Sauna alone has been shown to improve aspects of heart health including blood pressure, lung function, decrease inflammation, support detoxification, and generally decrease the risk of death from all causes. Sauna also stimulates the release of endorphins, aiding in relaxation and overall sense of wellbeing.

Benefits of Hydrotherapy

Improves

- Blood pressure
- Blood vessel function
- Mood
- Detoxification
- Rehabilitation after surgery
- Lung function

Decreases

- Inflammation
- Pain
- Risk of stroke
- Risk of Alzheimer's disease
- Symptoms of arthritis
- Symptoms of fibromyalgia

Types of Hydrotherapy

- **Sauna (dry):** Dry sauna, 4-7 times per week, has been shown to lower blood pressure, improve measures of heart health, decrease inflammation, support detoxification, and is associated with a decreased risk of death from all causes. Sauna is also associated with a decreased risk of stroke and Alzheimer's disease.
- **Sauna (wet):** Also referred to as a steam room, or steam bath. Steam baths may aid in relaxation, open the airways, and help to lower blood pressure. The benefits of wet sauna are similar to those of dry sauna.
- **Hot tubs:** Hot tubs offer relaxation, mobility, and pain reduction benefits. Especially for those with limited mobility, hot tubs may offer modest heart and blood sugar benefits, although not as pronounced as saunas.

- **Contrast Water Therapy (CWT):** Also known as contrast showers, or contrast baths. CWT involves alternating between hot (3-5 minutes) and cold water (1-2 minutes). CWT can continue for up to 30 minutes (4-5 cycles of hot and cold) for most healthy individuals. Athletes commonly use contrast showers to assist recovery, reduce inflammation and improve range of motion.
- **Water circuit:** This involves multiple components of hydrotherapy. Typically, an individual will spend 10-20 minutes each in a hot bath, wet sauna, and dry sauna followed by a brief stay (less than 1 minute) in a cold pool. The water circuit is repeated 2-4 times depending on the individual's tolerance.

Tips for Hydrotherapy

- Those with heart conditions, arrhythmias, kidney disease, or seizure disorders should get approval from their doctor before doing any form of hydrotherapy.
- Hydrotherapy is not recommended for pregnant individuals or those trying to conceive.
- Do not exceed the recommended amount of time and exit the sauna, hot bath, or cold pool if you feel uncomfortable.
- Increase your tolerance gradually.
- Do not eat right before hydrotherapy.
- Drink plenty of filtered water.
- Do not wear jewelry or take cell phones into the sauna or hydrotherapy areas.
- Your functional medicine practitioner may recommend electrolytes or other supplements, especially if you will be doing hydrotherapy several times per week.

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