



## **Water Therapy**

Water therapy (Hydrotherapy) has been used for thousands of years to heal the body. The use of water has been mentioned in writings about the Greek Gods, where Greek civilizations would use water in various temperatures in pools to promote health.

Hydrotherapy is most commonly used in our time for the same reason, to create balances of temperature which accelerates healing. The body is equipped with a negative feedback loop which tells our brain when the temperature in our body or muscles is too high or too low causing the body to adjust its processes to bring our temperature back to normal.

### **Common Types of Hydrotherapy Treatments:**

**ICE:** Ice packs are commonly used for muscular conditions involving inflammation. When ice is applied over an area, it should be wrapped in a towel to prevent “burning” the skin due to severe cold. When ice is applied our body’s initial response is to constrict the blood vessels which decreased circulation. This response occurs during the first 10 minutes of icing. Ice slows down the cell’s metabolism in the area of injury, which lowers the need for oxygen in the area preventing further tissue breakdown and limiting bruising. Because the bruising and blood flow is minimized, there are diminished factors which would normally cause pain. Therefore, ice is a natural anesthetic since cold impulses override pain impulses.

#### **Use ice for:**

- acute ligament or tendon pain and inflammation
- acute trauma where there is swelling, tissue damage, muscle spasm and pain
- rheumatoid arthritis
- sports injuries to relieve swelling and bleeding
- after deep soft tissue work applied by a registered massage therapist to aid the healing process

**Caution:** there are some instances where ice should not be used such as impaired circulation, cardiac disorders, some psychological problems and sensory, motor deficiencies and others. Always stop the use of ice if it feels uncomfortable. To prevent discomfort, first apply oil to the area to moisturize and always wrap ice in a towel before applying to the skin.

**HEAT:** Heat is used on the skin in order to dilate the blood vessels. This initially increases circulation to the area treated. After long exposure (over 15 minutes), circulation decreases and metabolism increases. This means that the cells need more nutrients, but less blood is available to provide them. That is why it is recommended to only sit in a hot tub or bath for 10-15 min. intervals to prevent faintness. This increased metabolism is a good thing when it comes to tight muscles, decreasing pain and relieving tension. It is important to note whether there is inflammation, warmth or redness in the area before applying heat. In these instances applying heat will bring more of the cells to the area that can exacerbate the inflammation. If inflammation is present, use ice instead. Applying heat to one area of the body affects the whole body. Heat draws blood away from deeper tissues and organs which can aid in the healthy function of our visceral system.

#### **Use heat for:** chronic muscle tension

- joint pain
- chronic gout (not inflamed)
- arthritis (not rheumatoid)

- tight fascia (such as the IT Band)

**Caution:** do not use heat with conditions where temperature changes cannot be felt as this may cause burning. Do not use heat with acute inflammation, fevers, edema, directly over the heart, athero/arteriosclerosis, varicose veins, or any other conditions with impaired circulation, or with conditions of organ disease as heat can be too taxing on the system. If unsure whether heat is right for your condition, always consult your doctor first.

**CASTOR OIL PACK:** Castor oil compresses are applied to the abdomen or joints to stimulate the immune system and metabolism to encourage healing. Castor oil comes from the castor bean from the palma christi plant. The castor oil is applied externally to draw toxins and impurities from the body. It improves elimination from the digestive system and improves function of major organs and glands. It also improves lymphatic circulation.

**Use castor oil packs:**

- for chronic muscle, tendon or ligament problems
- arthritis when not inflamed
- digestive problems
- constipation
- to increase milk flow if applied to breast tissue, as long as no inflammation to mammary glands is present

**Caution:** do not use castor oil packs with any condition which can be exacerbated by heat. Do not ingest castor oil. It is toxic if taken internally, has in the past been used as a laxative. Castor oil will stain clothing, so protect yours well.

**For instructions on putting together a castor oil pack, see below.**

As part of our massage therapy training, all of our massage therapists know how and when to use hydrotherapy modalities. Hydrotherapy is commonly given to clients as homework along with stretches and strengthening to encourage the client's active participation in their own health care.

## Castor Oil Pack

1. Soak a piece of washcloth/flannel/cotton in castor oil.
2. Place over body part being treated. Be sure not to touch the oil to your clothing as it will stain. You may tuck towels under the edges of your clothes to protect them.
3. Cover cloth with Saran Wrap.
4. Cover the saran wrap with a towel.
5. Place a hot water bottle on top of the towel.
6. Keep on treated area for 30 minutes. You can treat more than one area leaving the castor oil pack on each area for 30 minutes.
7. Wipe off excess oil with a towel after application. You may use cream rinse or soap to remove the oil, but the residue will not harm you if you let it slowly absorb into your skin.

The castor oil cloth can be re-used. Fold it and wrap it in the saran wrap and keep in a zip-lock bag in the fridge. When the cloth seems to have dried out and there is very little excess oil left on your skin, discard the old cloth and start the process over again.

Castor oil can be bought at any pharmacy in small bottles for a reasonable price. Each bottle will soak one cloth.