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## Home Hydrotherapy Guide

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Hydrotherapy is a powerful, accessible, and low cost therapy that supports the body's innate ability to heal. It comes in many forms and can be used to both aid disease and promote wellness.

Below you will find some of my favorite hydrotherapy treatments with instructions for how to try them at home. Please use caution when trying any new treatments, and be sure to consult your doctor (or Dr. Casey) prior to administration to be sure it's a good fit for you and your current treatment plan.

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### Contrast Showers

**What are contrast showers?** One of the most powerful and accessible forms of hydrotherapy, contrast showers are done by immersing the body in alternating hot and cold water.

**How do they work?** The application of hot water causes dilation of the blood vessels, sending blood out to the surface of the skin, whereas cold water application causes constriction of the blood vessels, driving blood toward the internal (vital) organs.

**What are the benefits?** Increased circulation, increased immune function, increased metabolism/GI function, increased detoxification, and increased energy.

**How do I do them at home?** The easiest way to do contrast showers at home is to take a shower as normal, in hot or warm water, and then just before exiting, turn the dial to cool or cold water for 20 seconds- 1 minute. Then, exit the shower and towel-off as normal. Another option is to alternate between hot and cold for the duration of the shower. Start with hot or warm water for 3-5 minutes, then switch to cold for 20 seconds- 1 minute. Repeat this 3 times, ending with cold. Then, exit the shower and towel-off as normal.

**What if I don't like cold water?** You don't have to use ice cold water in order for contrast showers to be beneficial. And you also don't need to apply the cold water to your entire body. If you're new

to contrast showers, start slow and pay attention to what feels good for you. Sometimes starting with lukewarm or cool water, or only rinsing your feet and lower legs are great places to start!

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## Steam Inhalation

**What is steam inhalation?** A hot, moist air bath for the respiratory tract.

**What is it used for?** You know when you're at the end of a cold and you have all that junk still hanging out in your chest, nose or sinuses? This is what steam inhalation is used for! It's also great for coughs, sore throats, sinus congestion, chest congestion, and laryngitis.

**How does it work?** The condensing steam heats the respiratory tract as it is breathed in. This increases circulation to the lungs and nasal passages and decreases congestion. The heat of the steam also thins mucus, making it easier to get out via coughing or blowing your nose.

### How do I do it at home?

1. Boil a few inches of water in a large pot.
2. Remove from stove and place on a heat resistant surface or trivet.
3. Carefully position your head over the pot and cover with a large towel to trap in the steam.
4. Breathe in slowly and deeply.
5. Continue for 10- 20 minutes, or until you feel too warm or the steam becomes too intense. Then, dry your face and rest for 30 minutes.

**Can I add herbs to my steam inhalation?** Absolutely! Herbs and essential oils can be great additions to steam inhalation. If choosing to add essential oils, add 2 drops of your choice to the pot after removing from heat. If choosing to add herbs, make a tea by adding herbs to the boiling water and covering for 1-3 minutes before starting treatment. Some of my favorite herbs to add include peppermint, eucalyptus, thyme, oregano, rosemary, and basil.

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## Baths & Foot Soaks

**What are baths and foot soaks used for?** Compared to other hydrotherapy treatments, baths and foot soaks are commonly used for a prolonged period of time, and this is precisely where their benefit comes from. Prolonged applications of hot or cold water either drive blood into (cold) or away from (hot) specific organs or areas of the body. A prime example is a hot foot bath for the

purpose of relieving head congestion: the hot water applied to the feet draws the blood down into the lower body, relieving pressure and congestion in the head.

Baths can also be used to help administer treatments such as Epsom salts (magnesium), Peat (therapeutic mud), and herbs such as Avena sativa (oats).

**What are the benefits?** Hot water relieves congestion. Cold water increases blood flow.

**How do I do them at home?**

1. For a bath or full body soak, fill your tub with desired temperature of water. You can fill to just above the hips for a modified sitz bath, or fill to cover the whole body.
  2. For a foot soak, you can use a small plastic tub (these are commonly sold in stores near the dish racks), bucket, or your bathtub. Fill with desired temperature of water to completely cover feet up to the ankles.
  3. If desired, add Epsom salts, essential oils, or herbs to bath to enhance the experience or aid symptoms. Epsom salts are great for muscle relaxation and oats work beautifully to calm itchy skin.
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## Arm Baths

**What are arm baths?** Brief immersion of the lower arms in cold water.

**What are the benefits?** Arm baths are associated with a form of hydrotherapy from Bad Worishofen, Germany that was founded by Father Kneipp. Father Kneipp believed water applied to the upper portion of the body had a stimulating effect, and water applied to the lower portion of the body had a sedating effect. Following these principles, arm baths are a stimulating treatment. Often referred to as the “Kneipp Espresso”, arm baths are invigorating and great for that mid-morning or early-afternoon pick-me-up. In addition to refreshing fatigue and exhaustion, they have also been shown to promote blood circulation, especially in the heart and upper body, stimulate metabolism, and strengthen the immune defenses of the upper airways.

**How do I do them at home?**

1. Fill a basin or sink with cold water.
2. Ensure your arms and hands are warm.
3. Submerge your lower arms to just above the elbow in water and then wait until a cold feeling becomes noticeable, about 30-40 seconds.

4. Remove from water and let air-dry.

\*Note: Movement of the arms while drying is encouraged!

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## **Warming Socks**

**What are warming socks?** A simple treatment great for kids and adults involving the application of cold, wet socks to the feet.

**What are they used for?** To boost the immune system, often at the onset of a cold.

**How do they work?** The cold water application to the feet calls attention to the body's thermoregulation mechanisms. It sends energy and warmth to the lower body to warm them up, relieving congestion and pressure in the upper body. As the feet warm and blood returns to the upper body, the increased circulation brings with it more immune cells, thus boosting the immune response.

### **How do I do them at home?**

1. Ensure your feet are warm and dry.
  2. Thoroughly wet thin, cotton socks with cold water and lightly ring out so they aren't dripping.
  3. Apply cold socks to feet and cover with warm, dry socks, preferably wool.
  4. Bundle up and go to sleep!
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### References:

1. Boyle W, Saine A. *Lectures In Naturopathic Hydrotherapy*. 1st ed. East Palestine, Ohio: Buckeye Naturopathic Press; 1988.
2. Pizzorno J, Murray M. *Textbook Of Natural Medicine*. St. Louis, Mo.: Churchill Livingstone/Elsevier; 2006:401-413.