

# Hydrotherapy

## What's in this patient handout?

- An overview of hydrotherapy
- Key tips for home hydrotherapy applications
- Wet sock treatment
- Alternating sinus compresses
- Contrast shower
- Headache treatment
- Alternating hot and cold foot baths
- Seek medical care

## An overview of hydrotherapy

Hydrotherapy is the therapeutic use of water to restore and maintain health. In hydrotherapy the properties of water (temperature, pressure, and chemistry) are used to support the body's inbuilt healing mechanisms.

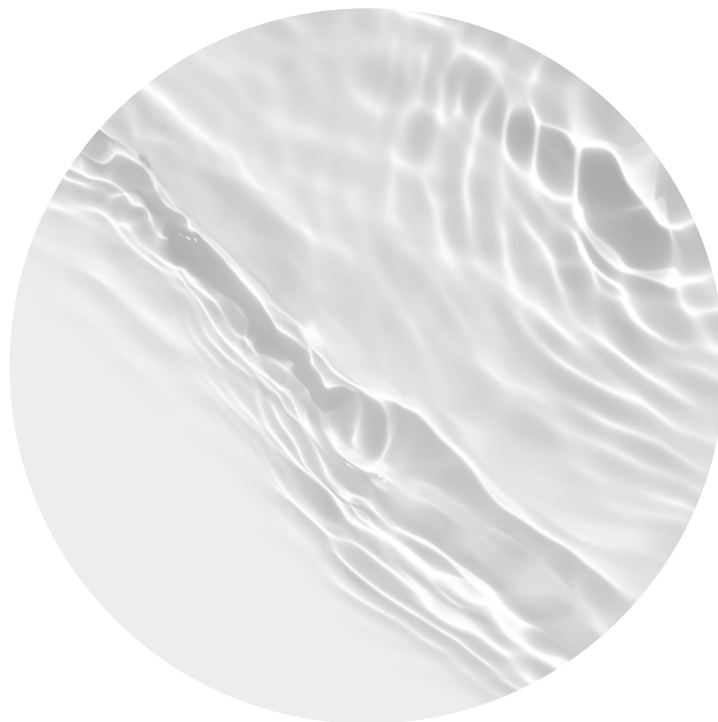
The central effects of hydrotherapy are due to influences on digestion, blood vessels, detoxification, and the immune and nervous systems.

Hydrotherapy has been used in traditional and in current health practices to support and improve many health conditions such as arthritis, lung diseases, muscular injury, fibromyalgia, heart disease, headaches, and stress, depression, and anxiety.

There are many different hydrotherapy applications, and the following protocols are some examples of hydrotherapy treatments tailored by the practitioner for their patient to practice at home.

## Key tips for home hydrotherapy applications

- Try the hydrotherapy application for the first time under supervision of a health practitioner.
- Acknowledge hydrotherapy treatments are part of a treatment plan, used adjunctively with other treatments.
- Start off moderately and increase intensity of hot/cold treatments over time.
- Avoid smoking and eating immediately before and after treatment.
- Common side effects can include light-headedness, headache, nausea, heart palpitations, insomnia, and hyperventilation, particularly in first-time applications. Some of these responses can last 24 hours after your treatment.
- Resting is generally advised for ½ an hour after treatment.



## Wet sock treatment

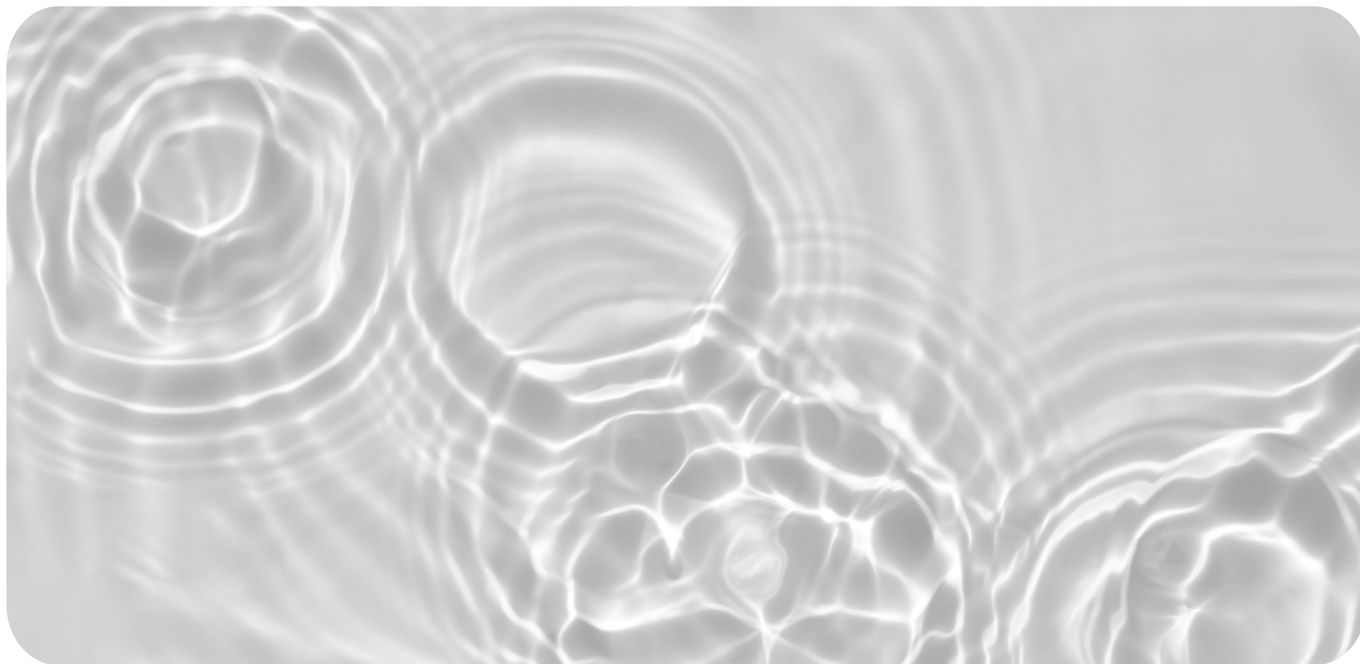
Traditional use: Colds, headaches, sore throats, ear infections

- Wet thin cotton socks with cold water, wring out well and place in freezer for 30 minutes.
- After warming in a hot bath or shower, place the cold socks from the freezer on feet.
- Damp socks are covered with a thick pair of wool socks and left overnight (these warm quickly and are typically dry in the morning, with an improvement in head congestion and pain)

## Alternating sinus compresses

Traditional use: Hydrotherapy is often used in conjunction with steam or a neti pot to facilitate sinus relief.

- Two cloths are required: one heated (soaked in hot water) and one cold (soaked in ice water).
- Place hot water cloth over face and sinuses (carefully wring using tongs) and leave in place 3 minutes.
- Remove hot water cloth and place cold water cloth over the same area of the face for 30 seconds.
- Repeat this alternating sequence two more times for a total of three alternating sequences of three minutes hot and 30 seconds cold.



## Contrast shower

**Traditional use:** Improve the parasympathetic nervous system, support immune function and improve circulation, digestion, elimination and sleep.

- Shower in hot water for approximately 5 minutes, with water running from the base of the neck down the front and back of the trunk.
- Follow the hot shower with a cold shower for 1-1.5 minutes, applying water in the same pattern.
- After the cold shower, dry off quickly and dress immediately to prevent getting chilled.
- Contrast showering is best done in the morning as it can be stimulating.
- It is important to note that the hot phase must be longer than the cool phase and that the process must finish with the cold shower.
- Larger contrasts in temperature between the hot and cold phases increase the therapeutic benefit. If done daily, the contrast can be increased as vitality increases.
- Most people gain benefit from this daily practice with only one round of hot and cold.

## Headache treatment

**Traditional use:** Relieve both muscular and vascular headaches.

### Migraine or vascular headache

- Soak one towel in a basin of ice water, wring out and place on the back of the neck. At the same time place feet in a basin of hot tap water (no more than 46°C). Leave for 20 minutes.
- If this does not bring relief then soak one towel in hot water. Place the hot wrung towel on the back of the neck and soak the feet in a basin of ice water for 20 minutes.

### Tension headache

- Fill one basin with ice water and one basin with hot water (no more than 46°C). Soak one towel in each basin. Wring out hot towel and place on the back of the neck for 3 minutes.
- Remove this towel and replace it with the iced towel for 30 seconds. The hot and cold applications should be repeated three times each.

### Alternating hot and cold foot baths

**Traditional use:** Circulatory and nervous effects; local effects, particularly for local injuries or inflammation.

- Immerse hands in water to just above wrists or immerse feet from toes to just above the ankle or calf.
- Immerse in hot water for 3 minutes, followed by cold water for 30 seconds, and repeat three times.
- Always end the treatment with cold water immersion.
- Note foot baths are best performed at night to prepare for sleep, while hand baths are more stimulating and are best done earlier in the day.

### Seek Medical Care

There are few contraindications for naturopathic hydrotherapy, however, all recommendations should be carried out concomitant to, and not replace medical treatment. Avoid or use with caution in certain conditions including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, pregnancy, menstruation, kidney disease, and open wounds.

Please consult your health care practitioner for information on the most appropriate hydrotherapy treatment for improving and maintain your health and wellbeing.