

The Guardian & Observer guides to

Massage & Relaxation

part two



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Hydrotherapy in your own home

A long soak in the tub is great, but why not get a little more experimental the next time you run a bath? Hydrotherapist **Cheryl Cole** explains



Shower power: wash away your worries with hydrotherapy at home

Hydrotherapy is one of the easiest therapies to emulate at home. It involves immersion in warm or cool water, or an invigorating contrast of the two (but do take care never to get into water that is very hot or cold).

The effects of warm water

Temperature ranges between 37C and 38C are relaxing, soothing and calming to both the mind and body, creating an indulgent, cosseted sensation. Even a 20-minute dip in a deep bath can encourage your stresses to ebb away, your skin to soften and your muscles to relax.

Raising the temperature by just a couple of degrees to between 39C and 40C has a deeply relaxing and sedative effect, but can cause exhaustion if indulged for too long. Immersion should not exceed 15 minutes (five minutes for higher temperatures). The temperature rise initially heightens and then lowers the blood pressure, shunting the blood to the extremities before gradually returning to normal as the temperature stabilises.

The effects of cool water

Temperatures lower than body temperature (34C to 36C) will have the effect of cooling and tightening the body. Immersion in cool water should be kept to short bursts of one to two minutes. A drop of only a few degrees will calm a racing pulse, reduce redness or refresh tired swollen feet. Immediately afterwards, you will often experience a revival of energy and vigour. Locally-applied cold compresses can also be used to relieve inflammation or ease pressure on joints.

Dashing and splashing

If you're after an invigorating experience, contrast bathing is your answer. The idea is to switch from one sensation to another, dashing and splashing between a cool shower and a warm bath. The duration of each stage will vary, depending on the temperatures you choose. You can spend up to five minutes in warm water and one minute in the cold shower. Repeat at least twice. This will achieve a flushing effect on your

circulation, firming the skin and assisting the drainage of toxins. Reduce water wastage by sharing your bath water and turning the shower off between dashes!

Cool your boots

After a long day on your feet, there's nothing as rewarding as a cool water foot-soak. Sore feet and puffy ankles are soon eased as the circulation shunts the excess fluid away and your body temperature gradually reduces.

No trouble bubbles

Those with a long-standing love of warm bubbles might decide to equip themselves with their very own hot tub. Hot tubs operate at the same temperature ranges as described earlier, but offer the additional benefit of underwater massage. Models vary widely: you can find a simple hot tub for two, or opt for a pimped version with mood lighting, television screen, built-in stereo and fountains ...

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Make the most of your soak

When trying hydrotherapy in the home, don't just turn on the taps and hope for the best – set the ambiance. Invest in aromatherapy bath oils, bubbles and candles. The addition of aromas or bath salts changes the feel of the water and stimulates the senses. You could even buy a little bath pillow to rest your head on. This will make it easier to conjure up your own personal retreat and stop you thinking about the chaos beyond the bathroom door. Most of all switch off, unwind and enjoy.