

Magic Socks: Make Your Winter Colds Disappear.

by Amy E Chadwick, ND

“If there is magic on the planet, it is contained in the water.” Loren Easley

Why would anyone put cold, wet socks on their feet and jump into bed? Because their doctor told them to!

Indeed the ‘magic sock’ treatment is just one form of an easy home-health hydrotherapy remedy that promote healthy circulation, make a fever efficient, decrease head congestion, improve sleep, and - most importantly - help the body heal.

Hydrotherapy - or, using water for soothing pains and treating disease - may be the oldest form of medical treatment. Recorded in ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman civilizations, hydrotherapy is also one of the primary modalities in Naturopathic Medicine. Basically, hydrotherapy uses water as a medium for heat and cold to enhance the body’s ability to heal. Sounds simple but - how does this really work?

Health and healing is proportional to the normal flow of healthy blood in the body. More than just soothing a sore muscle or decreasing swelling, water treatments affect the quality of circulating blood. That is, heat and cold transferred to the body via water enhances blood flow through the organs of elimination - such as the skin, liver, kidney and bowels. Detoxification (and thereby improvement of the blood) thus takes place. In addition to improving blood quality by eliminating undesirable waste products, water treatments can also help enrich the blood by increasing oxygen, nutrients, red cells, and white cells. In short, naturopathic hydrotherapy works because it optimizes the quality of blood while improving the efficiency of its circulation.

Heat and cold applied to the skin affect peripheral circulation via dilating or constricting peripheral blood vessels. When peripheral blood vessels are dilated, they become a reservoir for blood, reducing the load on the heart. When they are constricted, blood is returned to the heart faster. Therefore, through the use of hot and cold water, circulation and metabolism are optimized, the immune system is primed and ready to fight disease, and the body detoxifies itself gently and appropriately. 1830’s Hydrotherapist Frederick Erdman stated “the rate of the flow of the blood determines the state of nutrition and the functioning of every cell in the body.”

Blood makes up approximately 8 percent of total body weight. Lymph fluid makes up approximately 3 percent of the total body weight. The blood carries oxygen, nutrients and immune cells to the peripheral tissues. Waste products are returned via the blood to the liver, the kidneys and the lymph. Lymph is the body’s garbage system. Each cell in the body dumps the waste of the day into the lymph, which is circulated back to the heart and then to the liver, kidneys and digestive tract to be excreted. The lymph also circulates through the lymph nodes where white blood cells hang out scanning for foreign objects which might cause disease, such as bacteria, viruses and fungi. Healthy

lymphatic flow is essential for a strong immune system and for detoxification. Because hydrotherapy works primarily on blood and lymph, it is a very powerful tool for health.

All of us have experienced some form of hydrotherapy in our lives; sitting in a steam bath or sauna; exercising in a swimming pool; taking a warm bath; inhaling steam; putting an ice pack on a sprained ankle; playing in the sprinkler; or even something so simple as drinking a glass of water. While some of these things we may have done for the specific purpose of health and well-being, others we did just for fun. Sometimes hydrotherapy even occurs 'accidentally' - such as a cold shock of water in the shower as hot water is directed to another sink in the house. When used intentionally, however, hydrotherapy is a powerful tool for treating acute illness, assisting in the reversal of chronic disease and helping to prevent disease and maintain wellness.

Northern cultures are well known for their uses of hydrotherapy. In Scandinavian countries, the sauna is a staple of most homes. Native Alaskans also use steam baths for bathing, social interaction, relaxation and health. The word 'sauna' means the act of exposing your body to hot steam followed by cold water. Sauna can also denote a room or hollow in which to experience the hot steam. The application of moist heat and cold water stimulates the immune system, primes the circulation, and calms the nervous system. We in Alaska would be wise to learn from our northern friends and incorporate hydrotherapy into our daily routine!

Some simple home hydrotherapy techniques designed to help you through winter cold and flu season are described below. When trying these techniques, however, please remember that each person is individual in his or her state of wellness and response to treatment. So, let your body be your guide. If a treatment does not feel right, stop and seek help from a physician or healer familiar with hydrotherapy.

Magic Sock Treatment:

Indications: Use at the first sign of a head or chest cold, earache, headache, sinus congestion, and/or fever. This can also improve sleep, especially during an upper respiratory infection. This is a wonderful - and fun - treatment for kids!

Contraindications: Don't use in babies under 4 months of age or on someone with poor circulation unless directed by a doctor.

Equipment:

Large tub or bucket to soak feet, filled with warm water (see instructions)

One pair thin cotton socks (do not use acrylic or polyester!)

One pair thick wool socks

Small bowl of icy water

Towel

Instructions:

1. Warm the feet. This can be done by soaking the feet in tolerably hot/warm water until the skin is pink (about 5-10 minutes). While care should be taken not to burn the skin or cause any discomfort, it is very important that the feet are very warm before continuing. This will greatly increase the effectiveness of the treatment and prevent possible harm.
2. While warming the feet, soak a pair of light cotton socks in icy cold water.
3. When feet are warm, use a towel to dry completely.
4. Take cold-soaked socks out of water and wring out well.
5. Put cold socks on dry, warm feet.
6. Quick, pull a pair of thick, wool socks over the cold socks.
7. Go to bed. Be sure to cover up well and don't get chilled. You will find your feet warm up very quickly and the socks will be 'magically' dry by morning, if not sooner.
8. Repeat at least 3 nights in a row for an optimum positive effect on the immune system.

Alternatives: You can use this same principle to create a warming compress for the throat or the chest. Again, make sure the skin is warm. Place a well wrung-out cold t-shirt or towel over the affected region of the body and cover with wool. Avoid getting chilled by curling up in a blanket or snuggling into bed.

Cold Water Rinse:

Indications: This is a general immune and circulation tonic that help prevent colds and flus.

Instructions: End your hot shower, sauna or bath each day with a cool/cold rinse. The more contrast in temperatures, the stronger the treatment. So, start with less contrast and work up as you become stronger and healthier.

Remember: optimum healing comes to us in many ways - through water in all its abundance and affordability; through clean air, simple foods, movement and laughter; and, through a connection to spirit. May the powers of water bring you health this winter!

Bio

Dr Amy E Chadwick, ND is a Naturopathic Physician in Palmer, AK, treating children and adults in all stages of the healing journey. For more information, contact Amy at 745-3999 or www.soaringcraneclinic.com.