



### **Constitutional Hydrotherapy**

Constitutional hydrotherapy is one of the oldest “tricks of the (naturopathic) trade,” and one of the most gently powerful healing modalities we have. One of many forms of hydrotherapy, this treatment utilizes water’s ability to affect our physiology to our benefit.

Constitutional hydrotherapy primarily uses alternating hot and cold towels to activate and strengthen the body’s vital force. In naturopathic medicine, we call this healing force the *vis*. This therapy helps balance the autonomic nervous system, so it’s great for reducing anxiety, promoting sleep, and inducing parasympathetic or “rest and digest” mode. It gives the immune system a gentle boost. It increases circulation of blood and lymph, supports detoxification and healthy digestion, and over time reduces inflammation.

While there are some contraindications (acute or cold-induced asthma, severe autoimmunity, serious illness or otherwise severely weakened vitality, severe hypertension, extremely high fever), the vast majority of us would benefit from regular constitutional hydrotherapy. It’s easy to perform and painless and relaxing to receive. It does require a time commitment, but consider it a minor, worthwhile investment in your health.

## MATERIALS

- ★ About **½ hour free per person receiving treatment**, not including prep/clean-up (this treatment is much easier if you can get someone to perform it on you, but certainly do-able solo)
- ★ **9 towels per person, water to moisten them, and a way to keep 6 of them hot and 2 of them cold** (the last one remains dry and neutral temperature) (yes, this treatment is heavy duty in the laundry department ..)
- ★ A comfortable place where you can lay both on your back and your front (a **treatment table** with a headpiece is ideal)
- ★ **Sheets** (a constitutional hydrotherapy table is set up much like a bed) and a warm, preferably wool, **blanket**

## INSTRUCTIONS

Set the space. The only real requirement here is that you make the “bed”: the way I like to set this up is on a treatment table, with a sheet below the patient, a sheet above, and 2 blankets on top (one felt or fleece blanket below one wool blanket). If you don't have these exact blanket types, use what you've got! Also pleasant and therapeutic in setting your scene is getting your space set up for relaxation; if possible, dim the lights, play calming music, diffuse calming essential oils .. whatever that healing space looks like for you.

Prepare your towels. Remember, you will need 9 towels total per treatment: 6 of these will need to be moist and hot, 2 will need to be moist and cold, and 1 stays dry and neutral. These towels should be small to medium in size; ideally, they cover the torso from neck to pelvis. To prepare the 8 moist towels, run them under a faucet until they're wet all the way through, wring out very well, and place into the appropriate temperature preparations. For the hot towels in a clinical setting, we warm them all up in the microwave first (until they're almost too hot to touch), then place them in a special warming unit. For at home use, this is tricky if you're doing the treatment solo, but if you have a partner, have them warm up the appropriate towels throughout the session, as each warm application approaches. For the cold towels, after rinsing them and wringing them out, place in a bucket of ice water. When it comes time to apply the cold towels out of the ice bucket, they will need to be wrung out well. The neutral, dry towel, PHEW, is the easiest.

Begin your treatment! The recipient gets into the “bed” and lays on his/her back, unclad from the waist up, and draws the covers up to his/her neck. (If you’re doing this on a friend, let him/her disrobe and crawl into the “bed” before entering the room. There are discreet ways of changing the towels so that females are never exposed; practice switching towels before attempting on a live person!). The first two towels to be placed on the person’s chest/torso are 2 of the hot towels, one on top of the other. Apply the double layer of towels, cover the recipient back up with the blankets, and let him/her rest for 5 minutes.

After 5 minutes, the patient gets a “hot flash.” This is done with the third hot towel. Replace the two initial hot towels on the chest/torso with the third hot towel. This towel will only remain in place briefly (hence the “flash”), as you get ready to replace it with the first cold towel. Since it’s coming straight from the ice bucket (and being wrung out, remember!), it will feel quite cold to the patient. Ask him/her to take a deep breath and on the exhale, do the towel change. Cover the patient up again with the blankets.

Leave the cold towel in place for 10 minutes. During this time, the patient’s body should warm the cold towel up quite nicely. This is an important part of the treatment. You get to see the body’s vibrant, vital forces in action!

After 10 minutes, remove the cold towel (now largely warmed) and have the patient flip onto his/her stomach. Repeat the entire sequence with the person face down.

At the end, once you’ve removed the final cold towel, use the dry/neutral towel to give the patient a nice, strong “friction rub.” This is a quick, firm rubbing of the back to help dry the patient and also bring lots of good circulation to the area.

At this point, the treatment is done, and you can leave your (hopefully relaxed and revitalized) patient to get re-dressed!

## **ABBREVIATED INSTRUCTIONS:**

**(for once you get the hang of the little details!)**

### Patient on back:

5 minutes – two hot towels

Hot flash

10 minutes – one cold towel

### Patient on stomach:

5 minutes – two hot towels

Hot flash

10 minutes – one cold towel

Friction rub

## **Important Notes**

The patient should always start and end the treatment warm. If someone is chilled at the outset, and you don't have a way to thoroughly warm them before starting, postpone the treatment. At the end of a treatment, the patient should always have warm, dry clothes to ensure they don't feel chilled afterward.

Always abide by the contraindications listed previously, and heed your doctor's specific advice for YOU. Not every treatment is a good fit for every person, so it's important to get the green light from a medical professional before beginning new health practices.

Constitutional hydrotherapy, especially when performed regularly, is a powerful healing modality. *The body knows what to do to heal.* In most cases, we just need to get out of its way. This means removing obstacles to cure, detoxing wastes, supplying the body with what it needs, and, in a lot of cases, giving that vital force a little nudge to re-awaken to all its glorious vitality. Constitutional hydrotherapy is an exceptional way to achieve the latter!