Cryotherapy’s shockingly cold truth

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Quarantine is bumming a lot of us out. Even the most optimistic, upbeat people are getting into funks. The narrative is different for everyone, but usually, we’ll ask ourselves some combination of the following questions:

- When is this thing going to end?
- When can I get back to visiting friends and family?
- When will I feel normal again?

Personally, it hits me in the evening time. Not sure why; maybe work keeps me busy during the day? But little bouts of sadness creep in at nightfall. Luckily, my bathtub has substituted for a therapist’s sofa. My answer is cold therapy, or more specifically, hydrotherapy, which was used on one of the most famous painters of all time.

Be like Van Gogh, sort of

In 1889, Vincent Van Gogh admitted himself to Saint-Remy-de-Provence, a mental hospital in France. He suffered from depression and isolation, and as a result, cut off part of his own ear.

Van Gogh stayed at Saint-Remy-de-Provence for just over a year, leaving in 1890. But while admitted, he experienced a shock to his body, which no doubt had a profound effect on the narrative he was telling himself.

The hydrotherapy used on Van Gogh came in two forms, or two temperatures, I should say. Warm baths were used to quiet the mind and soothe the body. But on the flip side, Van Gogh would also receive the "cold treatment," where ice and cold water filled the tub. The thought was an ice bath could invigorate and shock the body and brain to tell itself a new story.

And now more than ever, sometimes we need a little icy shock to get us out of our own heads.

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Cold and bold

"The cold from whole body cryotherapy stimulates the body's nervous system. It helps release endorphins, adrenaline and noradrenaline, which can help improve energy and mood," says Jim Donnelly, co-founder and CEO of Restore Hyper Wellness + Cryotherapy.

Through my experience doing cryotherapy, Donnelly is spot on. Until COVID-19 hit, I was a sporadic visitor to cryotherapy chambers, going about once every other week. When people asked me what it was like, the best response I could give them was "an ice pack for your entire body."

I'd usually do cryo when I was feeling sore from a workout or in a little mental funk. But once I got in the cold tube and it was turned up, or should I say down, to -150° Celsius or so, my outlook changed from sad to freezing!

I haven't been to cryotherapy since COVID started, but thousands of others have.

"We have seen tremendous growth in new customers and the number of services that customers use in order to manage their wellness from improving immunity to managing stress and anxiety," said Donnelly.

“Since March, Restore serviced over 118,000 wellness appointments. Of those, over 75,000 were cryotherapy appointments.”

A cold compliment

Whether you prefer to freeze in a cryo-chamber or in a bathtub, it’s important to remember diet, exercise and sleep all play important roles, too. For me, cold therapy is a nice complementary self-care tool that helps restore body and mind. Here are three things I’ve learned from my chilling experience:

1. **It feels good to get the blood flowing.** Sitting in cold water, or standing in a cryotherapy chamber, causes the blood vessels to constrict. When you get out, the blood vessels open back up or dilate. The surge in blood flow provides your cells with nutrients and more oxygen. Think of how you feel after a massage. Sometimes you just have to get stuff moving.
2. **Our bodies are tougher than we think.** The mere thought of being submerged in -150° temperatures probably just made you shiver. And the first time you do it, wow! And if quarantine has taught us anything, it’s that we can acclimate to just about anything if we do it consistently.
3. **Endorphins are welcomed!** The mental side of cold therapy is perhaps the biggest benefit of all. When you’re done, you simply feel better. As Donnelly said, the cold stimulates the body’s nervous system. At some point, we’re going to feel sluggish or down. Cold therapy is a great way to reset your outlook.

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I know cryotherapy and cold baths aren’t for everyone. But COVID has a lot of us getting creative on how we do things. If

you’re looking for a challenge for both body and mind, give it a shot. It’s a great chance to see what you’re made of, or more accurately, to really see if you have ice in your veins.

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