

Chapter Sixteen

Hydrotherapy Treatment of Chronic Disease



While in our treatment of **acute** diseases we use wet packs and cold ablutions to promote the radiation of heat and thereby to reduce the fever temperature, our aim in the treatment of **chronic** diseases is to arouse the system to acute eliminative effort. In other words, while in acute disease our hydrotherapeutic treatment is sedative, in chronic diseases it is stimulative.

The Good Effects of Cold-Water Applications

(1) **Stimulation of the Circulation.** As before stated, cold water applied to the surface of the body arouses and stimulates the circulation all over the system. Blood counts before and after a cold-water application show a very marked increase in the number of red and white blood corpuscles. This does not mean that the cold water has in a moment created new blood cells, but it means that the blood has been stirred up and sent hurrying through the system, that the lazy blood cells which were lying inactively in the sluggish and stagnant blood stream and in the clogged and obstructed tissues are aroused to increased activity.

Undoubtedly, the invigorating and stimulating influence of cold sprays, ablutions, sitz baths, barefoot walking in the dewy grass or on wet stones and all other cold-water applications depends largely upon their electromagnetic effects upon the system. This has been explained in Chapter Ten, "Natural Treatment of Acute Diseases."

(2) **Elimination of Impurities.** As the cold water drives the blood with increased force through the system, it flushes the capillaries in the tissues and cleanses them from the accumulations of

morbid matter and poisons which are one of the primary causes of acute and chronic diseases.

As the blood rushes back to the surface it suffuses the skin, opens and relaxes the pores and the minute blood vessels or capillaries and thus unloads its impurities through the skin.

Why We Favor Cold Water

In the treatment of chronic diseases some advocates of natural methods of healing still favor warm or hot applications in the form of hot-water baths, different kinds of steam or sweat baths, electric light baths, hot compresses, fomentations, etc.

However, the great majority of Nature Cure practitioners in Germany have abandoned hot applications of any kind almost entirely because of their weakening and enervating aftereffects and because in many instances they have not only failed to produce the expected results, but aggravated the disease conditions.

We can explain the different effects of hot and cold water as well as of all other therapeutic agents upon the system by the Law of Action and Reaction.

Applied to physics, this law reads: "Action and reaction are equal but opposite." I have adapted the Law of Action and Reaction to therapeutics in a somewhat circumscribed way as follows: "Every therapeutic agent affecting the human organism has a primary, **temporary**, and a secondary, **permanent** effect. The secondary, lasting effect is contrary to the primary, transient effect."

The first, temporary effect of warmth above the body temperature, whether it be applied in the form of hot air or water, steam or light, is to draw the blood into the surface. Immediately after such an application the skin will be red and hot.

The secondary and lasting effect, however (in accordance with the Law of Action and Reaction), is that the blood recedes into the interior of the body and leaves the skin in a bloodless and enervated condition subject to chills and predisposed to "catching cold."

On the other hand, the first, transient effect of cold-water applications upon the body as a whole or any particular part is to chill the surface and send the blood scurrying inward, leaving the skin in a chilled, bloodless condition. This lack of blood and sensation of cold are at once telegraphed over the afferent nerves to headquarters in the brain, and from there the command goes forth

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to the nerve centers regulating the circulation: "Send blood into the surface!"

As a result, the circulation is stirred up and accelerated throughout the system and the blood rushes with force into the depleted skin, flushing the surface of the body with warm, red blood and restoring to it the rosy color of health. **This is the secondary effect.** In other words, the well-applied cold-water treatment is followed by a good reaction and this is accompanied by many permanent beneficial results.

The drawing and eliminating primary effect of **hot** applications, of sweat baths, etc., is at best only **temporary**, lasting only a few minutes and is always followed by a weakening reaction, while the drawing and eliminating action of the **cold-water** applications, being the secondary, **lasting** effect, exerts an enduring, invigorating and tonic influence upon the skin which enables it to throw off morbid matter not merely for ten or fifteen minutes, as in the sweat bath under the influence of excessive heat, but continually, by day and night.

The Danger of Prolonged or Excessively Cold Applications

As we have pointed out in the chapter dealing with water treatment in acute diseases, only water at ordinary temperature, as it comes from well or faucet, should be used in hydropathic applications. It is positively dangerous to apply ice bags to an inflamed organ or to use icy water for packs and ablutions in febrile conditions.¹

Likewise, ice or icy water should not be used in the hydropathic treatment of chronic diseases. Excessive cold is as suppressive in its effects upon the organism as are poisonous antiseptics or antifever medicines.

¹ Ice was once a popular treatment for many conditions and then, with the advent of antibiotics and other wonder drugs, it lost favor. Recently, ice has been rediscovered for traumatic injuries, particularly sports injuries. It *will* keep the swelling in such injuries to a minimum, but we might wonder if the ice does not retard the body's ability to carry out the needed repair through the process of inflammation as described by Dr. Lindlahr? Is it not possible that the ice, particularly if continued too long into the process, may prevent a complete recovery from the injury, leaving the patient with a chronic weakness?

The baths, sprays, douches, etc., should not be kept up too long. The duration of the cold-water applications must be regulated by the individual conditions of the patient and by his powers of reaction; but it should be borne in mind that it is the short, quick application that produces the stimulating, electromagnetic effects upon the system.

In the following pages are described some of the baths and other cold-water applications that are especially adapted to the treatment of chronic diseases.

How to Keep the Feet Warm

The proverb says: "Keep the head cool and the feet warm." This is good advice, but most people attempt to follow it by "doctoring" their cold feet with hot-water bottles, warming pans, hot bricks or irons, etc. These are excellent means of making the feet still colder, because "heat makes cold and cold makes heat."

In accordance with the Law of Action and Reaction, hot applications drive the blood away from the feet, while cold applications draw the blood to the feet. Therefore, if your feet are cold and bloodless (which means that the blood is congested in other parts of the body), walk barefoot in the dewy grass, in a cool brook, on wet stone pavements or on the snow.

Instead of putting a hot-water bottle to the feet of a bedridden invalid, bathe his feet with cold water, adding a little salt for its electric effect, then rub and knead (massage), and finish with a magnetic treatment by holding his feet between your hands and willing the blood to flow into them. This will have a lasting good effect not only upon the feet, but upon the entire organism.²

The following cold-water applications are very effective for curing chronic cold feet:

(1) Foot Bath

Stand in cold water reaching up to the ankle for one minute only. Dry the feet with a coarse towel and rub them vigorously with the hands, or walk about briskly for a few minutes. Repeat if necessary.³

² For decades Dr. Lindlahr was the butt of jokes and guffaws for such instructions. Now they are state-of-the art among advanced thinkers.

³ We vary this by having patients run an inch or two of cold water in their bathtub and walking back and forth for a minute or two.

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(2) Leg Bath

- (a) Stand in water up to the calves, then proceed as above.
- (b) Stand in water up to the knees, then rub vigorously or walk as directed.

(3) Barefoot Walking

Walk barefoot in wet grass or on wet stone pavements several times a day, from ten to twenty minutes at a time, or less in case of weakness. The early morning dew upon the grass is especially beneficial; later in the day wet the grass or pavement with a hose.

After barefoot walking, dry and rub the feet thoroughly and take a short, brisk walk in shoes and stockings.

(4) Indoor Water-Treading

Stand in a bathtub or large foottub containing about two inches of cold water, step and splash vigorously for several minutes, then dry and rub the feet and increase the circulation by walking around the room a few times.⁴

(5) Foot Spray

Turn the full force of water from a hydrant or hose first on one foot, then on the other. Let the stream play alternately on the upper part of the feet and on the soles. The coldness and force of the water will draw the blood to the feet.

These applications are excellent as a means of stimulating and equalizing the circulation and a sure cure for cold and clammy feet, as well as for sweaty feet.⁴

In this connection, we warn our readers most strongly against the use of drying powders or antiseptic washes to suppress foot-sweat. Epilepsy and other serious nervous disorders have been traced to this practice.

(6) Partial Ablutions

Partial ablutions with cold water are very useful in many instances, especially in local inflammation or where local congestion is to be relieved. The “Kalte Guss” [cold water splashing] forms an important feature of the Kneipp system of water cure.

⁴ We have found these application to be a very good cure for athlete’s foot. The fungus that is the agent in this condition does not like the cold water or the drying after the immersion.

Sprays or showers may be administered to the head, arms, chest, back, thighs, knees or wherever indicated, with a dipper, a sprinkler or a hose attached to the faucet or hydrant. The water should be of natural temperature and the "guss" of short duration.

(7) Limb Bath

Take up cold water in the hollow of the hands from a running faucet or a bucket filled with water, rub arms and legs briskly for a few minutes.

(8) Upper Body Bath

Stand in an empty tub, take water in the hollow of the hands from a running faucet or a bucket filled with cold water and rub briskly the upper half of the body from neck to hips, for two or three minutes. Use a towel or brush for those parts of the body that you cannot reach with the hands.

(9) Lower Body Bath

Proceed as in (8), rubbing the lower part of the body from the waist downward.

(10) Hip Bath

Sit in a large basin or in the bathtub in enough water to cover the hips completely, the legs resting on the door or against the sides of the tub. While taking the hip bath, knead and rub the abdomen.

Dry with a coarse towel, then rub and pat the skin with the hands for a few minutes. The duration of the hip bath and the temperature of the water must be adapted to individual conditions. Until you are accustomed to cold water, use water as cool as can be borne without discomfort.

(11) The Morning Cold Rub

The essentials for a cold rub, and in fact for every cold-water treatment, are warmth of the body before the application, coolness of the water (natural temperature), rapidity of action and friction or exercise to stimulate the circulation. No cold-water treatment should be taken when the body is in a chilled condition.

Directly from the warmth of the bed, or after sunbath and exercise have produced a pleasant glow, go to the bathroom, sit in the empty tub with the stopper in place, turn on the cold water, and as it flows into the tub, catch it in the hollow of the hands and wash first the limbs, then the abdomen, then chest and back. Throw the

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water all over the body and rub the skin with the hands like you wash your face.

Do this quickly but thoroughly. The entire procedure need not take up more than a few minutes. By the time the bath is finished, there may be from two to four inches of water in the tub. Use a towel or brush for the back if you cannot reach it otherwise.

As long as there is a good reaction, the "cold rub" may be taken in an unheated bathroom even in cold weather.

After the bath, dry the body quickly with a coarse towel and finish by rubbing with the hands until the skin is dry and smooth and you are aglow with the exercise, or expose the wet body to the fresh air before an open window and rub with the hands until dry and warm.

A bath taken in this manner combines the beneficial effects of cold water, air, exercise and the magnetic friction of the hands on the body (life on life). No lifeless instrument or mechanical appliance can equal the dexterity, warmth and magnetism of the human hand.

The bath must be so conducted that it is followed by a feeling of warmth and comfort. Some persons will be benefited by additional exercise or, better still, a brisk walk in the open air, while others will get better results by returning to the warmth of the bed.

There is no better means for stimulating the general circulation and for increasing the eliminative activities of the system than this cold morning rub at the beginning of the day after the night's rest. If kept up regularly, its good effects will soon become apparent.

This method of taking a morning bath is to be preferred to the plunge into a tub filled with cold water. While persons with very strong constitutions may experience no ill effects, to those who are weak and do not react readily, the cold plunge might prove a severe shock and strain upon the system.

When a bathtub is not available, take the morning cold rub in the following manner:

Stand in an empty washtub. In front of you, in the tub, place a basin or bucket filled with cold water. Wet the hands or a towel and wash the body, part by part, from the feet upward, then dry and rub with the hands as directed.

(12) The Evening Sitz Bath

The morning cold rub is stimulating in its effects, the

evening sitz bath is quieting and relaxing. The latter is therefore especially beneficial if taken just before going to bed.

The cold water draws the blood from brain and spinal cord and thereby insures better rest and sleep. It cools and relaxes the abdominal organs, sphincters, and orifices, stimulates gently and naturally the action of the bowels and of the urinary tract, and is equally effective in chronic constipation and in affections of the kidneys or bladder.

The sitz bath is best taken in the regular sitz bathtub made for the purpose, but an ordinary bathtub or a washtub or pan may be used with equally good effect.

Pour into the vessel a few inches of water at natural temperature, as it comes from the faucet, and sit in the water until a good reaction takes place—that is, until the first sensation of cold is followed by a feeling of warmth. This may take from a few seconds to a few minutes, according to the temperature of the water and the individual powers of reaction.

Dry with a coarse towel, rub and pat the skin with the hands, then, in order to establish good reaction, practice deep breathing for a few minutes, alternating with the internal massage described in a later chapter.

(13) The Head Bath

Loss or discoloration of the hair is generally due to the lack of hair-building elements in the blood or to sluggish circulation in the scalp and a diseased condition of the hair follicles. Nothing more effectually stimulates the flow of blood to brain and scalp or promotes the elimination of waste matter and poisons from these parts than the head bath together with scalp massage.

Under no circumstances use hair tonics, dandruff or eczema cures, or hair dyes. All such preparations contain poisons or at any rate strong antiseptics and germicides. Dandruff is a form of elimination and should not be suppressed. When the scalp is in good condition, it will disappear of its own accord.

The Diagnosis from the Eye reveals the fact that glycerine, quinine, resorcin and other poisonous antiseptics and stimulants absorbed from scalp cures and hair tonics and deposited in the brain are in many cases the real cause of chronic headaches, neuralgia,

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dizziness, roaring in the ears, loss of hearing and sight, mental depression, irritability and even insanity.

Cold water is an absolutely safe and at the same time a most effective means to promote the growth of hair, as many of our patients can testify.

Whenever you have occasion to wash the face, wash also the head thoroughly with cold water. While doing so, vigorously pinch, knead and massage the scalp with the finger tips. When feasible, turn the stream from a hydrant or a hose upon the head. This will add the good effect of friction to the coldness of the water.

Have your hair cut only during the third quarter of the moon. The ladies may clip off the ends of their hair during that period. Skeptics may smile at this as another evidence of ignorance and superstition. However, "fools deride," etc. The country people in many parts of Europe, who are much closer and wiser observers of Nature and her ways than the conceited wise men of the schools, do their sowing and reaping in accordance with the phases of the moon. In order to insure vigorous growth, they sow and plant during the growing moon; but their cutting and reaping is done during the waning moon.

(14) The Eye Bath

For the eye bath the temperature of the water should be as cold as the sensitive eyeball can stand, but not cold enough to cause serious discomfort. A few grains of salt may be added to make the water slightly saline.

(a) Submerge forehead and eyes in a basin of water, open and close the lids under water from six to eight times; repeat a few times.

(b) Bend over a basin filled with water and with the hands dash the water into the open eyes.

(c) Fill a glass eye-cup (which can be bought in any drug store or department store) with water, bend the head forward and press the cup securely against the eye; then bend backward and open and shut the lid a number of times.

Many ailments of the eyes, for instance, the much-dreaded cataract, are caused by defective circulation and the accumulation of impurities and poisons in the system in general and in the mechanism of the eyes in particular. All such cases yield readily to

our combination of natural methods of treatment, such as water applications, massage and special exercises, combined with the general Nature Cure regimen.⁵

In a large number of cases treated in our sanitarium, patients who had worn glasses for years were able to discard them. Weakened eyesight and many serious so-called incurable affections of the eye, including cataract and glaucoma, have been permanently cured.⁵



⁵ As much as I would like it to be true, I don't think we can cure cataract by these water treatments. However, along with the proper nutritional supplements and other therapies these water treatments may well serve to slow or even stop the growth of cataracts.

While we do not doubt Dr. Lindlahr's veracity, we have found that glaucoma is very difficult to treat by natural means. Dr. Finnell, who taught me natural eye, ear, nose and throat treatments, traveled all over to find a good natural glaucoma therapy but was not successful. This is not to discourage any patient with glaucoma from using the cold-water eye treatment as suggested by Dr. Lindlahr, but only that it be done in conjunction with more orthodox treatment and even then only under the care of a Nature Cure doctor.