



BETTER HEALTH AND SKIN WITH SALT

BY LEO TONKIN

SALT IS AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT TO ALL LIVING CREATURES ON EARTH. IT HAS A LONG HISTORY, WHERE IT HAS PLAYED A ROLE: AS CURRENCY, IN RELIGIOUS RITUALS, AS A PRESERVATIVE AND FOR HEALTH AND WELLNESS.

Many people are familiar with salt's health uses in baths, as a saline solution, in neti pots, for gargling, and for cleaning and exfoliating the skin.

HISTORY OF HALOTHERAPY

Dry salt therapy, or *halotherapy*, is being embraced across the United States as a modern modality for health and wellness, but this practice started a long time ago—in Eastern Europe's salt mines.

In the early 1800s, workers were deep underground mining, grinding and cultivating. Small salt particles were being inhaled and landing on these miners' skin. It was not long before physicians began noticing how healthy the miners were and conveying those findings to the rest of the population. The doctors discovered

that dry salt has unique properties that differ from the ocean's wet or moist salt. Soon, medical clinics were being established deep underground to care for patients that would benefit from dry salt therapy.¹

In the mid 1900s, Russian researchers began working on technology to bring the effects of dry salt therapy to ground level and make it available to the greater population that were not able to travel to the mines. The first halogenerator was developed in Odessa, Ukraine.¹ Halo is derived from the Greek word *halos*, which means salt. A halogenerator crushes and grinds dry salt into specific micronized particles and disperses the salt into a room or chamber. Thus, halotherapy was born and soon spread throughout Eastern Europe, where there are thousands of facilities



with salt therapy—from resort spas and fitness centers to day care centers and clinics.

RESPIRATORY AND HEALTH BENEFITS

Dry salt therapy is a natural, complimentary method for providing wellness. When pure, dry sodium chloride (NaCl) is crushed into micronized particles and dispersed into a room or chamber, it can be inhaled into the respiratory system. It not only absorbs foreign particles there, but it also serves antibacterial and anti-inflammatory roles.

Dry salt acts like a sponge as it traverses down the respiratory tract, where it absorbs excess mucus and foreign elements, removing them of the system. Dry salt is antibacterial, allowing it to target viruses and other bacteria in the system. It is also anti-inflammatory, which helps open restricted airways to provide relief for those with asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, bronchitis, cystic fibrosis, allergies and other respiratory conditions.

DRY SALT ACTS LIKE A SPONGE AS IT TRAVERSES DOWN THE RESPIRATORY TRACT.

Interestingly, athletes have begun using dry salt therapy to maintain their respiratory hygiene. In addition, the treatment helps support faster recovery time.

SKIN BENEFITS

While halotherapy provides great benefits for those with respiratory conditions, its unique properties also promote healthy skin. When the skin is exposed to dry salt microparticles, they penetrate deep into the epidermal layers to draw out excess fluid and oils, kill bacteria and increase skin cell microcirculation.



A salt grotto



Salt cave at Bien Soigné, a day spa and salon in Salem, New Hampshire.

Dry salt also helps maintaining skin rigidity. Halotherapy has been known to reduce skin swelling and inflammation to help relieve conditions such as psoriasis, eczema and acne.

SALT INSTALLATIONS

Facilities across the country are bringing salt therapy to their businesses, including: day spas, medical spas, destination spas, wellness centers, skin facilities, massage centers and yoga studios. Yoga studios and massage therapists are incorporating dry salt therapy as part of their sessions, and other facilities are conducting meditation, reiki, qigong and other activities inside of salt rooms.

In addition to spa and wellness centers, physicians and alternative health care providers such as chiropractors are also recognizing the benefits of dry salt therapy and adding this service to their practice. A facility may have a salt room or “cave” or dry salt therapy equipment that their clients can visit for a single session, multiple sessions or a membership.

Salt room. The primary benefit of being in a salt room is being exposed to the salt particles provided from the halogenerator. The room is designed to allow for proper air circulation, humidity and temperature control.

The décor elements for a salt room are diverse. Many people have learned about salt therapy through the term “salt cave;” however, this is a style of a décor theme. There are some salt rooms that are minimal in décor elements and others have elaborate back-lighted Himalayan salt



walls. Others still have European styles of rock salt permanently adhered to the walls. Some facilities in the United States have built large, cave-like structures without a halogenerator, which is all for naught—no halogenerator means no halotherapy.

Salt session. Typically, a dry salt therapy session lasts up to 45 minutes, and much like other areas of a spa, only small groups of people (4–8) can benefit from the service at a time. There are some facilities that offer private room settings as well as those that offer individual, private and customized salt therapy sessions that can deliver effective salt therapy in as little as 15 minutes.

Fees for salt therapy sessions are usually based on local demographics and markets, ranging from \$20–60 per session depending on the client’s age (child, adult or senior), groups, private sessions, and special offers or packages.

A SAFE, ALTERNATIVE WAY TO WELLNESS

There are many research articles that have been published in well-known medical journals, mostly in Europe.² Thousands of people going to salt rooms on a daily basis, and the results speak for themselves. Recently, the Salt Therapy Association was formed to support the industry and create standards. In addition, the association will be conducting further research of halotherapy. While the United States has been behind Europe in adopting this wellness treatment, it certainly is catching up.

In 2011, SpaFinder highlighted salt therapy as one of the top five trends for 2011.³ The salt therapy industry is rapidly growing. A few years ago, there was just a handful of facilities offering salt therapy throughout the United States and Canada. Today, there are more than 130 facilities offering dry salt therapy, whether as a stand-alone salt therapy center or as an add-on to an existing business or concept. Its health benefits are being recognized, and it is being observed as a safe, effective and alternative way to wellness. ✂

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Leo Tonkin is the chairman of the Salt Therapy Association. Two years ago, he partnered with Ülle Pukk to form Salt Chamber, LLC, where he is CEO.