



Your Health

Cold Therapy Options

Doctors, athletes and spas have all been talking about cryotherapy aka “cold therapy” as one of the latest trends in self-care and wellness treatments.

Doctors have long used it as a way to freeze off warts or cancerous cells. More recently, though, spas and wellness centers have offered such things as full-body cryotherapy, cryotherapy facials or cryotherapy applied through a wand to targeted body parts experiencing soreness or pain.

Some forms of cryotherapy have been around for ages—applying ice packs, taking an ice bath or cold water plunges or using a coolant spray. It is whole-body cryotherapy that is new. Some athletes use it twice a day or adopt other daily to monthly routines.

WHOLE-BODY TREATMENTS

Whole-body cryotherapy involves entering an enclosed chamber or tank and standing in it for two to four minutes while the temperature drops to between negative 200 to negative 300 degrees F.

It can be used to treat injuries or chronic pain by numbing irritated nerves. Athletes have found it promotes faster healing. Others report that it provides temporary relief to



© ADOBE STOCK

rheumatoid arthritis.

For some, it is an effective short-term treatment for mood disorders such as depression or anxiety as the sub-zero temperatures can cause the release of adrenaline, nor-adrenaline, and endorphins.

Another area of research is into whether it can help prevent dementia and Alzheimer’s because it has an anti-oxidizing and anti-inflammatory effect. Studies are still inconclusive.

Cryotherapy can jump start metabolism, supporting weight loss efforts as the body

works harder to stay warm.

CRYOTHERAPY FACIALS

Some estheticians are incorporating cryotherapy into their facials.

This involves placing ice packs on the face during the treatment, sometimes with a specialized stone mask. Another form involves blowing liquid nitrogen over a person’s face for two to three minutes.

Some people also use cryotherapy tools to massage their face daily to treat puffiness and provide an overall healthier glow to the skin. They can

be stored in a refrigerator and freezer and used as part of a daily facial-care regimen.

Some studies have shown that cryotherapy can help treat acne and eczema. It can tighten and brighten the skin by increasing blood flow to the face.

RISKS OF CRYOTHERAPY

One should never fall asleep during whole-body cryotherapy or stay in the chamber for longer than four minutes, as it could cause death. Typically at a spa, an attendant or esthetician is present for the entire

treatment and can stop it if it gets too uncomfortable.

If you have a nerve condition or diabetes, cryotherapy isn’t recommended as it could further nerve damage. It is also not recommended for pregnant people, children, people with high blood pressure and people with heart conditions.

Some people experience numbness, tingling, irritation of the skin or redness—side effects that usually go away within 24 hours or less. If they don’t, one should consult a doctor.

Keep Stress Away

Few people get through life without some stress. In fact, the American Psychological Association, which conducts annual studies on stress, found most people experience stress.

According to their studies, Americans rank among the most stressed-out people in the world, with our stress level 20 percentage points higher than the global average. During any given day, 55 percent of Americans are stressed, with that stress causing 57 percent of respondents to feel paralyzed. Work stress is so bad that 63 percent of U.S. workers are ready to quit their job over it and 94 percent of workers report that they experience it.

While some stress is useful, constant stress is bad for the body. It can cause chronic inflammation of the brain, a persistent activation of the immune system and an increased risk for dementia, heart disease and stroke.

PHYSICAL STRESS FIGHTERS

Stress takes place in and affects the body, which is why a physical response can help alleviate symptoms and help you feel stressed less often.

Get a good night's sleep.



© ADOBE STOCK

Exercise helps produce more endorphins and natural chemicals that make you feel better. Mayo Clinic recommends such physical activity as walking, jogging, gardening, housecleaning, biking, swimming or weightlifting. Non-competitive aerobic exercise like tai chi or yoga can help you stay calm.

Simple stretches with deep breathing can help relieve stress. Roll your shoulders. Squeeze a stress ball. Give yourself a hand massage--apply some lotion and rub the area under your thumb. Drip cold water on your wrists or behind your earlobes.

Relax your muscles with massage, warm baths or stretching. Learn progressive muscle relaxation.

Avoid alcohol, smoking and caffeine.

Take a quick walk—if possible, get outside and take in some sun.

Eat a small amount of dark chocolate. Drink green tea. Cuddle with a pet. Chew gum.

MENTAL STRESS FIGHTERS

Stress affects the brain and the emotions. Various health organizations from Harvard Medical School to Mayo Health Clinic to Cleveland Clinic and the American Psychological Association recommend the following activities.

Stay socially connected. Spend time with friends and family members and develop a network of support. Seek out

balanced relationships where people help you and you help them, as both are good for reducing stress. Support might include providing a home-cooked meal or an hour of child care or even just listening and sympathizing.

Volunteer for charitable organizations as doing things for others can make you feel good.

Laugh. Listen to comedy or a funny television show. Spend time with people who make you laugh. Read jokes. Fake it if you have to. There is even such a thing as laughter yoga. Focus on being positive and grateful.

Control your environment. Reduce noise and play soothing, pleasing music.

Learn to be more assertive. Sometimes the key to manag-

ing your stress is learning how to say no or delegating aspects of your to-do list to someone else. Set realistic goals for yourself that are specific and achievable.

Pursue something creative. Whether it is playing music, keeping a journal, gardening, painting or sketching, dancing, sewing or any other creative pursuit, these activities can enrich your life and reduce your stress.

Find time to be alone, even if it is for only a few minutes. Schedule regular time for yourself to do things that you enjoy.

If you need an immediate stress band-aid, try closing your eyes for a few minutes. Count backwards. Watch a short nature video.

Online Resources

There are so many elements to good health that it can be challenging to keep up with all of them or to stay educated on what is myth and what is supported by valid research.

Pew Research reports that 42 percent of the people who go online at a library do so for health-related searches. In addition, 59 percent of U.S. adults look online for health information or even to figure out what medical condition they have. While they often get good information, other searches result in inaccurate or dangerous information.

Do you need to sort through the noise of information that bombards you in advertisements, media and the internet? Here are some places you can start.

GOVERNMENTAL RESOURCES

Such places as the National Institutes of Health and the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion provide help in both offering advice and sorting through the research and studies on health topics.

Healthy People 2030 is an initiative of the latter organization that ‘promotes, strengthens and evaluates the nation’s efforts to improve the health and well-being of all people.’



© ADOBE STOCK

As part of that program, they provide a database of evidence-based resources sorted by topic. They are available at health.gov/healthypeople/tools-action/browse-evidence-based-resources.

The National Institute of Health produces several wellness toolkits in the areas of your environment/surroundings, your feelings, your body, your relationship and your disease defense. They are available at www.nih.gov/health-information/your-healthiest-self-wellness-toolkits.

USA.gov provides a collection of resources for information on specific conditions, healthy eating and living, general health and health insurance. It is also possible to order a copy of your medical history that insurance companies have access to. This is available at www.usa.gov/health-resources.

The Health Resources and

Service Administration has additional health resources including poison control, women’s healthy living guides, Stop Bullying and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) programs. www.hrsa.gov/get-health-care/resources

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

Universities, especially those with medical schools, are the source of research into health topics and constant studies to help expand our knowledge. Many universities also publish resources for their students so that they can successfully navigate college life in a healthy manner. Most of these resources are useful no matter what your age or educational status.

For example, Boston University’s Student Health Services publishes a collection of resources on such topics as wellbeing, sexual health and relationships, sexual miscon-

duct prevention and response, sleep, stress and mental health and substance use and recovery. While many of the resources are local, others are applicable for anyone.

Purdue University publishes a blog that includes a list of health and wellness blogs to follow. www.purdueglobal.edu/blog/student-life/valuable-health-wellness-blogs/

Consult the website of a medical school or university near you.

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Several non-profits are committed to public health and make information on a variety of health conditions available to the public.

The Global Goals has several health goals including reducing infant and maternal mortality, fighting communicable diseases, promoting mental health, treating substance

abuse, reducing roadside injuries and deaths, providing universal health care, reducing illnesses from hazardous chemicals and pollution and promoting access to reproductive care.

The Medical Library Association provides a three-part guide that is formed from the collective wisdom of medical libraries. The first part provides tips on filtering health-related web pages and how to use quality electronic finding tools. The second is a set of guidelines to evaluate the content of health-related websites. The final section provides additional resources. The guide is available at www.mlanet.org/page/find-good-health-information.

The American Heart Association offers several healthy living resources including digital recipe books, email newsletters, regular challenges and blogs.

Swap Out Foods

Changing your entire diet can feel like an overwhelming task. After all, you've spent an entire lifetime developing the eating habits you have right now.

Changing the way you shop, the recipes you use and even your taste buds is hard to do overnight.

It's why many health organizations and nutritionists recommend making simple food swaps—swapping out one food at a time for a healthier option until you have developed new habits. These swaps can be done for a number of reasons—to lose weight, to improve one's heart health or cholesterol or to help control diabetes. Or maybe you just want to start moving toward a long-term, sustainable, healthy diet.

Select one or two of these and once you've formed a habit, try another.

BEVERAGES

What you drink is as important as what you eat. The UK's National Health Service reports that 25 percent of the sugar kids get each day comes from sugary drinks.

Swap out fruit juice for fresh fruit. Juice is high in calories and sugar—almost as much as cola. It also lacks the fiber that fresh fruit has.



© ADOBE STOCK

Other drinks to swap out are colas, powdered sugar drinks, milkshakes and whole milks. Swap in water, sugar-free drinks, lower-fat milks or infused water. It's even better to drink coffee or tea than cola. Both are rich in antioxidants that are good for your heart. However, swap out cream for skim milk. Swap iced coffee for a small fruit frappe.

BREAKFAST

Swap sugared cereals for oatmeal, wheat biscuit cereal or whole grain cereal, no-sugar-added muesli, or yogurt. Instead of adding brown sugar, add ginger and cinnamon.

Avoid croissants and cereal bars. Instead have trail mix or fresh fruit.

Use avocado instead of margarine. Swap full-fat yogurt for fat-free yogurt.

LUNCH

Switch from white bread to 100% whole-grain bread. Swap cheese fillings for reduced-fat cheeses.

Swap out potato chips for nuts, plain popcorn or rice cakes. Swap fries for a baked sweet potato. Instead of sour cream, use non-fat Greek yogurt.

Swap iceberg lettuce for leafy greens like kale, spinach or romaine.

DINNER

Swap out such flavorings as salt, ketchup, soy sauce and gravy for healthier alternatives

such as herbs, spices and seasonings. Some good options include oregano, curry, paprika and lemon or lime juice.

Make one dinner a week meatless. Swap red meat for fish such as salmon or tuna. When you do eat meat, grill or bake it rather than fry it. Select leaner cuts of meat—steak rather than sausages.

Add more fruits and vegetables.

Swap pizza crust for cauliflower crust. Instead of eating pasta, use cauliflower pasta, zucchini pasta or spaghetti squash.

Choose whole grain rather than refined grains.

Make tacos using cauliflower or corn tortillas.

Instead of covering your

food with cheesy or creamy sauces, select tomato or vegetable-based sauces. Pesto is a good alternative.

Instead of eating canned vegetables or canned fruit in syrup, use frozen vegetables and fruits.

While it isn't a food, swap out a larger plate for a smaller one. It will naturally move you to smaller serving portions.

SNACKS

Replace milk chocolate with dark chocolate. Try having frozen bananas or frozen grapes instead of ice cream.

When making snacks, use cinnamon rather than sugar. Instead of pudding or donuts, switch out for hummus and chopped vegetables.

Take Medicine Correctly

One major threat to your health is not taking any prescribed medicines correctly.

If you don't, you're not alone. The Centers for Disease Control has identified it as a major problem. They estimate that people not taking their medications as directed causes 30 to 50 percent of chronic disease treatment failures and 125,000 deaths per year.

PRESCRIPTION STATISTICS

How bad is it? The CDC says that 20 to 30 percent of new prescriptions are never filled at the pharmacy. Half the time, medication is not taken as prescribed. Most people who are prescribed medicine for chronic diseases end up taking less than prescribed after six months or stop the medication all together. Only half of patients who take medications for high blood pressure continue taking their medication during long-term treatment.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration says that not taking your medicine at the right time, in the right dose, in the right way and at the correct frequency can cause a disease to get worse and lead to hospitalization or even death.

There are many reasons people don't take medicine correctly from not being able to afford the medication to experiencing unpleasant side effects to forgetfulness to mixing up different medicine regi-



© ADOBE STOCK

mens to feeling like their medications aren't working.

TIPS TO STAY ON TRACK

The FDA has some recommendations for how to adhere to your medication regimen:

Take your medication at the same time every day.

Connect your medication to another routine such as brushing your teeth or getting ready for bed.

Create a medicine calendar and write down every time you take medication and what dose you took.

Use a pill container with separate compartments for times of days and days of the week. Refill your pill container at the same time every week.

Purchase timer caps for your pill bottles that will activate an alarm when your next dose is due.

Bring extra doses of medication when you are traveling in case you are delayed. When flying, keep all medication in your carry-on bag so they don't get lost and the temperature in the cargo hold doesn't damage them.

OTHER WARNINGS

Falling off track isn't the only thing that can threaten your health. The pharmaceutical company Pfizer warns that it is important to talk to your doctor about why you need each drug, how to take it, how to store it and whether it can interact with anything such as alcohol.

They also warn against taking medication for any symptom other than what it was prescribed for, taking someone else's medication or giving

your medication to someone else or taking more or less of a medication than what your health care professional directed.

Talk to your pharmacist about whether your pharmacy offers a medication synchronization service that lets you refill all your prescriptions at the same time to get a more accurate supply and stay on track better.

Taking your medicine the right way all the time can help you stay healthier and have better health outcomes.

Seasonal Affective Disorder

Despite its acronym, Seasonal Affective Disorder involves more than just feeling sad during the winter months.

In fact, it isn't limited to winter—some people experience it in the spring and early summer.

In the “Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)”, the condition is listed as “major depressive disorder with seasonal pattern.” In other words, it is a real form of depression that has major effects on those who suffer from it.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, about five percent of adults in the United States experience SAD, usually starting between the ages of 18 and 30. A larger percentage experience a more milder form that can be considered “winter blues.” The more severe form typically lasts about 40 percent of the year and can interfere with daily life functioning. It is more common in women and in people with bipolar disorder. It is also more common the further you get from the equator.

SYMPTOMS

The symptoms for SAD vary slightly depending on whether a person experiences the winter or summer variety. In the winter, symptoms include feeling depressed every day, anxiety, weight gain, extreme



© ADOBE STOCK

fatigue, trouble concentrating, heavy limbs, oversleeping, thoughts of death or suicide, feeling irritated or agitated, social withdrawal (hibernation) and feeling hopeless or worthless.

Those who have summer SAD may have some of the above symptoms, but additional symptoms tend to be insomnia, poor appetite and weight loss, episodes of violent behavior and restlessness or agitation.

Typically a person is not diagnosed, according to the U.S. National Institute of Health, unless they have experienced SAD symptoms for at least two years.

CAUSES

There is not a definitive, sci-

entific answer on what causes SAD. It has been linked to a biochemical imbalance related to fewer daylight hours and less sunlight. Seasonal change can disrupt a person's circadian rhythm.

The NIH cites research that found people with SAD have reduced activity of serotonin, which regulates mood. Other findings suggest that an over-production of melatonin is a factor. Another issue that can make things worse is a deficit in vitamin D.

People with SAD tend to have negative thoughts about the season in which they suffer, but it is not known whether that is a cause or an effect.

TREATMENTS

There are four main treat-

ments for SAD: light therapy, psychotherapy, antidepressant medication and vitamin D.

Light therapy is the most used treatment.

It involves the affected person sitting in front of a bright light box daily for 30 to 45 minutes every morning from fall to spring. The boxes are designed to filter out UV light, which is why they are safer than tanning beds which are not recommended.

Cognitive behavioral therapy, a form of talk therapy, has been adapted to help those with SAD. It usually involves two weekly group sessions for six weeks. It has a two-prong focus. The first is helping people to replace negative thoughts about the season with more positive ones and the

second helps patients schedule pleasant, engaging seasonal activities—either indoors or outdoors.

Medications used to treat SAD include antidepressants that regulate serotonin activity and are taken when the symptoms occur.

Another medicine that has been approved for winter SAD sufferers is bupropion, an extended-release drug that prevents recurrence of episodes when taken daily from fall until spring.

While studies are mixed, some people have found taking Vitamin D helps to treat SAD symptoms.

The Cleveland Clinic also warns people who have SAD to not isolate themselves nor to use alcohol and drugs.

Live An Enriched Life

Dementia is scary but it isn't a guaranteed part of aging and many of the activities that help stave off dementia can be fun, enjoyable and part of a healthy lifestyle.

The three main ways to keep your brain in great shape, according to England's NiDirect service, is a healthy diet, aerobic exercise and mental stimulation.

HEALTHY DIET

Some foods are better for the brain than others. Foods high in saturated fat are thought to speed mental decline while other foods help the brain.

The Mayo Clinic recommends a Mediterranean diet as studies have shown people who eat it are less likely to develop Alzheimer's. This diet includes plant-based foods, whole grains, fish and healthy fats such as olive oil. It recommends low amounts of red meat and salt. Omega fatty acids help your cells function correctly, may decrease the risk of heart disease, increase mental focus and slow mental decline.

Henry Ford Health suggests eating a diet filled with fruits, vegetables and whole grains and avoiding saturated fat and sugar. Eating a mix of nourishing foods, they say, can help build new brain cells and fight



© ADOBE STOCK

off mental decline. They suggest keeping a bag of trail mix handy and feeding your brain consistent fuel—every three to five hours—to keep in functioning well.

AEROBIC EXERCISE

Regular exercise is an important part in staying mentally sharp and avoiding dementia. Exercise increases the flow of blood to your brain. Exercise for 30 to 60 minutes at least two to three times a week. When possible, exercise daily.

Henry Ford Health cites preliminary research saying that physical activity is even more beneficial if you combine it with a mental challenge. Exercise such as dancing, martial arts or yoga may offer

more benefits than just jogging or swimming.

MENTAL STIMULATION

Give your mind a daily workout as well. There are many ways to do this and the best ones are those that you enjoy. This might involve doing a crossword puzzle, reading more, playing cards or computer games, gardening or going to the theater.

Henry Ford Health recommends picking a new activity such as learning a new language or a new instrument. Mayo Health Clinic warns against watching too much television or taking brain-training programs that overly focus on memorization.

Rather, they suggest picking

different activities to “cross-train” your brain.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

While those three are the main ways to stay mentally sharp, there are lots of other things that studies have shown will help.

Getting enough sleep is important because it helps your brain clear out proteins and consolidates memories. Mayo recommends getting seven to eight hours of consecutive sleep because it gives you more time to store your memories effectively.

Stay socially active. Harvard Medical School said that establishing and maintaining connections improves your mental skills and memories.

Friendships and family connections can provide support during stressful times which reduces the damage stress can do to the brain. Getting involved in community or religious organizations can also help you stay mentally alert.

Henry Ford Health recommends developing friendships with people of different ages, races and ethnic backgrounds as a way of building better brain connections and having a richer life. Talking, resolving conflicts and debating current affairs all help to flex mental muscles.

Harvard Medical School also recommends not smoking and limiting alcohol intake. Mayo also advises keeping your blood vessels healthy.