



Compress and Immersion Contrast Hydrotherapy

Indications

Contrast hydrotherapy involves alternating hot and cold applications for the purpose of increasing local circulation and reducing inflammation. It is commonly used for subacute or chronic traumatic injury (more than 48 hours post-injury), impaired venous circulation and edema. Contrast hydrotherapy is typically applied as wet compresses or partial immersions of affected body parts. The heat dilates and cold constricts local blood vessels, creating a “pumping” vascular action which helps clear out inflammation and accelerate recovery.

Contraindications

Do not use in acute asthma (over lungs) or if you are aggravated by cold (cold urticaria, Raynaud’s syndrome or phenomenon, etc). Use with caution in areas of decreased sensation (anesthesia, paralysis, neuropathy, etc) to avoid tissue damage, burns, etc.

Procedure for Contrast Hydrotherapy Compress

1. Prepare one basin with hot water and place a bath towel into it. You may need to have extra hot water to add to basin during treatment. Prepare a second basin with cold water, add at least one tray of ice cubes to it, and place a hand towel into the cold water.
2. Take the bath towel from hot basin, wring it out, fold it once or twice, and place the hot towel on the affected area for 3-6 minutes. After that time, wring out the cold towel, remove the hot towel from the affected area and place the cold towel, folded once, over affected area for 1-2 minutes. You have completed one cycle of hot/cold application.
3. Prepare the hot towel again, remove the cold towel and place the hot towel on the affected part to begin the second cycle of hot/cold application.
4. Repeat the hot/cold cycle a total of 3-5 times, always finishing a cycle with the cold application



Procedure for Contrast Hydrotherapy Immersion

1. Prepare two basins, large enough to submerge the affected body part. For example, a bucket w/central divider or 2x 5 gallon buckets to submerge a limb.
 2. Hot bath should be between 100° -110° F and cold bath should be 55° - 65° F.
 3. Immerse affected limb in the hot bath for 3-6 minutes, then switch to cold bath for 30 seconds to 1 minute, repeating this hot-cold cycle 3-5 times. This should be done at least once daily. More times = better results.
- Works even better if you can add 1/2 to 1 cup of epsom salt to your hot bath. This acts as a muscle relaxant.
 - Add some Peat to the hot water or do separate Peat soaks every other day to improve healing. You can buy these at http://www.torfspa.com/body_wrap.html

Resources

1. Hayes, K.W. *Manual for Physical Agents*. 4th ed. 1993. Norwalk, CT. Appleton & Lange. Pp. ix, 169.
2. Mallon, M. B. *Thermophysiology* (Haralson, 3rd ed. 2001. Philadelphia, PA: Hanley & Belfus.