

Hot Stone Massage

User Manual



Incorporating the use of hot and cold stones into a massage therapy practice.

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This manual provides an overview of hot stone massage, its history, function, notes on the preferred types of stones and notes on how to perform a hot stone massage.

This manual is for the person who has studied massage and is a competent therapist and not for anyone inexperienced.

What is Hot Stone Massage?

Hot Stone Massage dates back to shamanist traditions over 3000 years ago in ancient India and China, and more recently to the North American Indians living in the southwest states. The traditions and healing rituals in which the stones were used included laying the stones in patterns on the body, carrying or wearing stones for health and protection, using stones in the diagnosis and treatment of disease or during ceremonies such as sweat lodges or in medicine wheels.



Some native healers used heated stones to ease the discomforts experienced during menstruation, or applied cold stones to impede blood flow after giving birth. The Roman Empire was noted for their creation of the Roman baths. Many of these rituals still exist today in the form of hydrotherapy practices and the use of saunas, hot immersion baths, and marble stone / cold pools. More recently, it is thriving today in many healing centers and spas throughout North America, Europe, and is catching on fast in other parts of the world.

Hot stone massage combines the benefits of hydrotherapy and thermalism, (or thermotherapy - the use of heat applications) with the strokes of massage using stones to create a deep, relaxing and healing treatment. The heat of the stones warms the skin, which allows for the absorption of moisturizing and therapeutic oils, while simultaneously preparing the musculature of the body so the therapist can work into the deeper muscle layers. Benefits of thermotherapy include: increased local circulation, improved blood flow to surrounding tissues, and greater ability to transport toxins and waste products from the area. An ancillary benefit is that the stones provide a wonderful tool that creates a sense of depth in the massage without the extra wear and tear on the therapist's hands.

What is Basalt, and why is it so good for Hot Stone Massage?

Basalt is the most common type of igneous rock used in hot stone massage and is extrusive, which means that it forms when molten lava cools following a volcanic eruption. When the lava cools above ground, or under water, the process occurs rapidly and the crystals that form are small and not visible to the human eye. Below ground, the cooling process occurs more slowly, and the crystals that form are larger. Because of this, igneous rocks are given names based upon two things: composition (what they are made of) and texture (how big the crystals are). Basalt, itself, is considered a mafic silicate rock. Among other characteristics, mafic minerals and rocks are generally dark in colour and high in specific gravity. This is in large part due to the amount of iron, magnesium, and several other relatively heavy elements that mix with the silica and oxygen during the formation process. It is also the presence of these elements that gives basalt stones their ability to acquire, hold, and emanate a consistent and soothing heat for long periods of time.

The surface of the earth is made of igneous rock, with most of the ocean floor being basalt, and most of the continents being composed of granite. When basalt is freshly



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formed (which is a relative term), it is black or grayish black (even more gray depending on the quantity of nickel present), but will often weather to a reddish or greenish crust. While there have been great marketing efforts put forth to make people believe that black basalt stones are best used in hot stone massage, the truth of the matter is that all colors of basalt stones can be used for hot as well as cold stone massage, just as long as it is basalt.

Sedimentary rocks (such as river stones), on the other hand look prettier (pink, white, yellow, brown), but are not ideal because they heat at such different rates depending on their composition, and they tend to crack over time. It takes harvesters a long time to find the necessary stones to make a sedimentary, or river stone set, but the truth of the matter is that function over form needs to be the rule when using your stones to treat people. Black basalt might not be as interesting to look at as these colored stones, but they are most certainly composed in the way that is needed to perform hot stone massage.

Hydrotherapy and The Use of Heat

Webster's New World Dictionary, Simon and Schuster, defines hydrotherapy as 'the external application of water in the treatment of disease, especially in physical therapy, by the use of baths, compresses, etc.'

In other words, it is the application of water at specific temperatures to promote healing. Hydrotherapy treatments are most effective when the water temperatures are either above or below that of the body's normal operating temperature. Along those lines, the greater the temperature difference from the body, the greater the physiological effect.

We all know the therapeutic effect of a hot bath, a soak in thermal pools and in sports medicine heat packs are a frequently used first aid tool.



The effects of heat on the body are generally an increase in physiologic function which include:

General Effects:

These effects are achieved by full body packs, whirlpools, steam rooms, etc.
Increase in respiratory rate Increase in circulation
Increase in heart rate Increase in metabolism
Increase in number of erythrocytes and leukocytes (enhanced immune system)
Increase in the release of toxins
Decrease in blood pressure, stress, fatigue, and tension
Diaphoresis (sweating) Sedative effects

Local Effects:

These effects are achieved by heating compresses and packs, hydrocollators, hot stones, etc. Local heat should only be used on chronic injuries 48-72 hours after the initial injury to:
Decrease in pain perception (analgesia)
Decrease in muscle spasm
Decrease in muscle stiffness Increase in local inflammation response (vasodilation)

What is the 'perfect' stone set?

While there is no such thing as the 'perfect' stone set, most general sets contain at least 50 stones. There are other, specialty sets, which may be different based on the type of massage that is being given. Examples of this are a facial, manicure / pedicure or reflexology set, which will have fewer stones than a full body set.

Also, for the therapist who needs to be portable, they will bring a scaled down set to minimize the weight that they have to carry, and usually a smaller heater, such as a 6 Quart unit. Ideally, each set will be chosen by the practitioner once they get a feel for what sizes and shapes they prefer working with. When choosing stones - dark, smooth rounded stones are ideal, with specific shapes and sizes for different body parts (i.e. extra large placement stones for the belly or sacral area, or flat, rounded stones for work in the scapular region).



Size - some practitioners find they like to work with larger stones, as they distribute more heat to the client and have a greater overall effect. Others find the larger stones too cumbersome to use, and prefer working with smaller, more manageable stones. Either method works well, however smaller stones will need to be rotated more often as they lose heat more quickly than the larger ones.

Shave - again, practitioner preference prevails as some people prefer flatter stones, and others, more rounded stones. The stone shape can add to its functionality by conforming to the body part - ie: triangle shaped placement stone for the solar plexus and sacrum. We find flatter stones lose heat more quickly, so the preference is to use fuller or thicker ones if possible.

Spinal, or Back Layout Stones are flat, and can be quite thick as they will sink into the massage table, however the thickness should be consistent so the client is comfortable.

Hand placement, or Palm Stones are quite round and allow the fingers to rest comfortably around the stone.

Toe Stones, or toe stones are very thin to fit properly, while **Facial Stones** and **Chakra Stones** are flat so they don't roll off the body.

Belly and Sacrum Stones tend to be large, flat, and somewhat rounded. Usually, they are also heavy since they cover such a significant amount of area. These stones are what we call 'placement' stones, in that they are put in place and left there for significant amounts of time. It is due to this that these stones are never placed directly on the skin. Place a sheet or towel between the stone and the clients skin, inquire as to your client's comfort level, and keep a watchful eye for any irritation to the skin in that area.

Effieurance Stones are up to you and what you find you are most comfortable working with. Find stones that are comfortable in your hand, and also have smooth working surfaces for your client's comfort. These stones are placed directly on the client's skin, and should always be kept moving.

Neck Stones or **pillow stones** are rounded stones that sit in the arch under the neck when

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the client is on his / her back. Acupressure, or Trigger Point Stones have a distinct rounded point on them for specific deep work, and contour stones tend to be larger than trigger point stones and have more of a rounded edge to them for work in areas such as the scapula or neck.

Preparation

There are several items needed to perform a Hot Stone Massage. They include:

Sheets for draping. While any sheet is acceptable, we find that flannel sheets are preferable because they are:

- Thicker.
- More comfortable to lie on.
- Warmer.
- More absorbent should water drip on them.

A Hot Stone Heater such as the 'Spa Pro' heaters.

A plastic or wood spoon, tongs or a slotted or perforated scoop or spoon to retrieve the stones, but avoid a metal spoon as it may become too hot to handle and scratch the stones.

A net or mesh bag is handy for keeping the smaller toe / finger stones together in the heater so as to allow for ready and quick retrieval.

A set of basalt stones- at least 30-50 stones of varying sizes is recommended for a full-body massage. Smaller sets can be used for focused body parts, such as the feet, hands, or face

Massage oil as a general lubricant and essential oils.

Essential oils can be used in a number of different ways, as a natural antiseptic that can be used on the stones, or added to the water in the heater to act as an anti-fungal and a diffuser for the treatment room. Make sure that the essential oil you choose to add is geared towards the effect you are looking to achieve in your massage. Chances are you are looking for a soothing experience for your client, and your oil should reflect that. Also make sure that your client is not allergic or sensitive to that particular oil.

Towels: 2 or 3 large bath towels for the client that should be large enough to cover the entire back depending on the treatment. 1 hand towel for the therapist. 2 hand towels for the sides of the client, or to wrap the toe / finger / foot stones once placed (optional).

Set Up:

A white towel at the bottom of the pan will help you to see and find the stones you need.

Massage oil - We recommend using any unscented, plain, or aromatherapy based oil. But note creams or lotions will leave a white film on the stones.

To prepare the heating unit / roasting pan for use during a hot stone massage, you should:

At the start of the day, add fresh water to the heater. Enough water will be needed to submerge the stones. By having enough water in the pan, this will guarantee that the stones will be heated evenly and thoroughly. A rule of thumb is to fill the heater until the water is 1-2 inches from the top. Tea tree oil as an antiseptic or any other essential oil can be added to the water to have the heater act as a room diffuser.



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Heater:

If the device that you are using to heat your stones has a temperature gauge with numbers on the dial, please note that the temperature settings refer to the heating coil, and not the water itself. A thermometer should be referred to frequently to guarantee that the water temperature is between 50 and 57 degrees C (125 and 135 degrees F), but more so based on the client's sensitivity and comfort level.

While performing the hot stone massage, the lid is off of the heater and the water inside is subject to temperature fluctuations due to environmental influences such as air conditioning, etc. Throughout the day, check the water level for evaporation. If the water level decreases, the water temperature will increase. Add water as needed to maintain the original level and continually refer to the thermometer for temperature maintenance. If the water temperature goes beyond the desired level, cold water may be added to bring the temperature down.

It is worth noting that in the USA, insurance cases involving massage therapists and burns from hot stone treatments are on the rise, so please use extra caution.

Practice and Using the Stones:

It is important to first get used to the feel of the stones in your hands, as they come in different sizes. In general, the larger stones are better for placement on the body, and the smaller stones are best to massage with.

While there is no exact science to this type of treatment, stone size will generally depend on the body part that is being massaged. Small stones for the face, medium stones for the shoulders and arms, large stones for the legs and back. Stones that are placed on the body are recommended to be flat so that they stay in place.

Smaller stones that are being used actively will cool quickly, typically within a few minutes. Therapists will need to exchange cool stones for newer hot stones frequently. By placing the used and cool stones to one side of the heater, and keeping unused and warmer stones on the other, therapists will be able to make quick and efficient exchanges as needed. The larger stones will retain their heat for a longer period of time, some upwards of 20+ minutes.

Hot stones should always be used with oil, even on the face to assist with proper glide, and to avoid trauma to the skin.

When massaging a small area, such as the face, make small movements with the stones in this position.

When new ones have been retrieved from the heater, roll the stones in your hands as you approach the client. This will help the get a good 'feel' for what temperature the stones are when coming out of the heater, and also serve to cool the stones if necessary.

Stones may also be left out of the water for a few moments or a cup or two of cold water may be added to the heater pan if the stones are too hot. Having a small bottle of water ready nearby is ideal. If the stones are coming out of the heater and are very hot, check the thermometer, the temperature settings, the water level, and make adjustments as needed.

To perform effleurage, hold small to medium stones in the palm of your hand, not with your fingertips. With each down-stroke, you want to flip the stone in your hand. This serves two purposes, as it will keep a hot stone from burning you, and it also aids in maintaining an even heat distribution to the client. In other words, when performing your massage strokes, you want to glide up, flip the stone, and glide down. By imagining the stones are part of the

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hand, therapists achieve greater depth and ease while performing the massage.

Every petrissage technique can be performed holding the stones the same way - in the palm of your hand, not with your fingertips. These include:

Kneading, Pickups, Fanning, Fulling & Ringing

For friction and deep stripping techniques, hold the stone between the fingers, not in the palm of the hand.

Use good firm pressure (deeper rather than lighter) and movement during the massage, but avoid letting the stones sit in any one place for extended periods of time to avoid burning the client. The skin can also be burned if light pressure is used. Let the stones do the work, maintaining good form and body mechanics, and the heat will soften and relax the muscles without your having to be invasive. This will also help maintain the therapists comfort level as far as their hands and joints are concerned. You also want to check with the client as far as their pressure tolerance is concerned, and always remember that each client is different.

The rhythm that is developed will also determine the effect the massage has on the client. Fast strokes tend to stimulate, while longer and slower strokes are more sedating and soothing. With a slow rhythm, the heat of the stones also has a greater chance to penetrate the superficial tissues and get into the muscle.

Many clients will not notice the stones themselves, but will feel strong hands, and a deep, penetrating, relaxing heat. This is the result therapists should look for. Check in with your clients to ascertain their comfort level.

When massaging the leg, be careful to avoid excessive pressure to the shins, avoid contact with the knee, or any other bony prominences.

When massaging the feet, using a spreading technique feels especially good with hot stones.

Performing a Hot Stone Massage

The following is the basic structure for a 60 or 90-minute hot stone massage routine

Precautions: Check heat of rocks on inside of your arm first. The small of the back is very sensitive to heat - always check in with the client. Placement stones need to be warm, not hot, as they are staying in one place and can feel quite hot. Always inquire with the client as to their comfort level and always place a sheet between the stones and the skin. If they are too hot, you can dip them in cool water briefly and also double check the heater temperature. Remember, slower strokes are more calming.

Starting Position:

How do you normally massage?

Generally begin the same wayō **Make sure the stones are dry of water** - stones that are wet will burn even through a towel.

But you can layer dry hot tones on the towel, not on the bare skin and begin the massage on the area not covered with stones. You can actually layer the whole



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body if you have enough stones.. And cover the layered area with another towel to retain the heat.

By the time you have completed the layering, you can then remove the stones from an area and use those stones to massage with until they cool.

Method:

Start out by applying a layer of oil directly to the body part being worked, then gradually incorporate the warmed stones into the effleurage strokes - moving quickly at first because the stones are hot, and then using slower strokes as the stones lose heat.

Make sure to turn the stones in your hands as you massage in order to distribute the heat evenly. Do three sets of sweeps with the stones, then hands on petrissage work, then a final sweep again with the stones.

Work the whole back of the body, then remove any placement stones before asking the client to turn over and sit up while you place the spinal layout stones along either side of the spine and cover with a towel.

Here you place two lines of stone on the table, so as the client lays back, their spine is between the stones. You can also add stone to the body front, place hand stones, the neck stone and chakra stones.

Start again at the feet with the toe cosies, and work your way up the legs, arms, shoulders, neck, and lastly the face.

Turning a Client Over:

When bringing the client from the supine to the prone position, he/she is raised to the seated position, and the towel, stones and bolster are removed from the massage table before asking the client to flip over. Once turned over, the bolster is replaced under the client's ankles, a towel is placed on the patients back, and fresh hot stones are applied along the sides of the spine. To avoid stone movement, the towel is folded over the stones to keep them in place. Check with the client regarding stone temperature and comfort as this is a new section of the body, and the sensitivity level may be different.

Redness of the skin, or hyperemia, may be evident. This is normal and common even in general massage therapy or when an object has been pressing against the skin.

A stone may be placed on the sole of the foot once the client has been repositioned as stated above. To help keep the stone in place, a towel can be wrapped around the foot, which will also help maintain the temperature of the stone for a longer duration.

Contact:

Please remember that hot stone massage is different than Swedish Massage. In stone massage, maintaining continuous contact with the body is impossible without an assistant to pass stones as the hot stones being used continually need to be swapped with new stones from the heater in order to maintain temperature continuity. You can uncover the next body part that will be receiving treatment prior to gathering the stones for use so as to assure a smooth transition from the heater to the client and this also makes the client aware of the



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next area to be treated.

The initial contact you have with your client sets the tone for the level of comfort they have as you progress through your session. This is particularly true for someone who has never had a hot stone treatment before, and might be concerned about having a 'hot object' placed on their skin. By taking a little extra time at the beginning of the massage to make sure the initial contact is well tolerated by your client, you will be saving yourself quite a bit of time in helping them to relax, enjoy the session, and return for a similar service. The biggest component of this is communication and remember that different areas of the body have different sensitivity levels to the same stimuli or temperature.

The massage begins with the client in the supine position fully draped or sitting up to allow the therapist to visualize the spinal alignment for stone placement. A bolster is placed under the knees for support.

Large, flat stones will be placed in 3-4 rows of 2, which will allow the spine to be centered between the stones themselves.

At this point, it is important to discuss the different aspects of a stone facial massage. Stones can be used either heated or chilled, depending on your preference. To cool the stones, they are placed in a bowl of ice water, and to heat them, you simply place them in a small bag or net in your stone heater. This is done so that the small stones are not lost on the bottom of your heater, thus making it difficult to retrieve them during the massage. Whether you have chosen to use heated or chilled stones, never use anything but cold stones over the eyes.

Take 2 cooled facial stones, place one on each eye, and either a hot or cold stone on the chakra point known as 'the third eye'. One recommendation is to wet a cotton eye cloth, place it on the eyes, and then put the cold stone on top of it. This protects the skin from direct contact with the stone, and ensures a widely distributed cool temperature effect. While leaving the stones on the face, it is time to place your toe (and finger) stones. Toe stones are in a bag in the heater, or a fish net, which are then taken out and placed between each toe, and left in place until the client is ready to turn over. You can wrap a towel around them to keep them in place, and also help them retain their heat for a longer period of time. They do not need very much oil, as they are stationary during the massage. Now remove the 3 stones that are on the face, in preparation of beginning your facial massage.

In facial massage, all strokes should go up and not down, out but not in. If the stones need a little glide, put some oil on the stone, and not directly on the client's skin. Work around the cheekbones, and place direct pressure on the sinus points, especially if the client is experiencing allergy symptoms or sinus headaches.

Take precautions to ensure your stones are not too hot and listen to your client's feedback

Cleaning Up:

At the end of each massage, and at the end of the day, clean the stones with an antibacterial soap and a scrub brush to assure their cleanliness. In an attempt to keep bacteria from building up in the water, some therapists add a tablespoon of bleach to the water at the beginning of the day. Another option would be to add several drops of an essential oil that



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has antibacterial properties, such as lemon, tea tree or cypress oil. If this is an absolute impossibility, then using a few drops of spa cleaner or tea-tree oil in the roaster water will act as a disinfectant, and will allow you to leave cleaning the stones until the end of the day. Dirty stones will feel oily, have more drag to them, and will feel sluggish. Just like washing your hands and arms in cold water after doing a massage will clean any energy off that you may have picked up from the client, washing the stones will clear the energy for them, too. Discard the water from the heating pan, and scrub the pan with an antibacterial soap. **Do not let the stones sit in the water overnight.

If you are into energy work, it is also recommended to re-energize your stones every few months by giving them a day out in nature to pick up the energy from which they came.

All objects vibrate at a certain frequency, and it is the difference in frequencies of objects that causes conduction. Overnight at new moon is best, however just leaving them out on the grass for a day or so will make a big difference in their energy. Other techniques include soaking them in sea water for 24 hours, burying them in the sand, or burning sage near them and 'intending' for the stones to be renewed as you do so.

Medical Disclaimer

Contraindications for giving a Hot Stone Massage

Any condition where the client has a loss of sensation, including Neuropathy, Diabetes, Peripheral Vascular Disorder, High Blood Pressure or is post-surgery, injury, or trauma where nerves have been affected.

Pregnancy, due to the rise in body temperature.

Cardiac Patients.

Anyone taking medications that have side effects to heat.

Anyone on Chemotherapy or radiation treatments.

Anyone with a depressed immune system, including clients with Lupus, Epstein Barr, Mononucleosis, HIV / AIDS, or Cancer.

Geriatric clients; keep the heat around 120 degrees - any higher may be too hot for the elderly.

Clients with Bums, Psoriasis, Skin Cancer, Bums, Dertnatitis, Eczema, Acne, Shingles, Herpes, or any acute skin condition.

Any condition in which massage in general is contraindicated.

Above all, follow the simple rule:

When in doubt - DON'T!

Additional Information Tips for a successful stone massage:

1. Creams and gels stain the stones and leave a film in the water. Use only oil during the massage.
2. Use a liberal amount of oil and apply it with your hands before starting a Hot Stone Massage.
3. Keep a towel handy to wipe excess moisture off the stones.
4. Never place a stone straight from the heater onto the clients skin.
5. Always check the stone temperature with your hands, and flip the stone as you make your way towards the client.
6. Always inform your client when you are about to place the first stone. Do not surprise them with the weight, or heat of the stone.
7. Stationary stones should have a towel between them and the client. The exception to this is the cold stones, which should not be left in place for more than 10- 15 minutes. Remember that the cold will help disguise any potential damage that is occurring, so check

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- your clients comfort level and the area that is being treated.
8. Stones that have been placed can be kept warmer longer if they are covered once positioned.
 9. Have your client remove all of their jewelry. Do not place a hot stone on the belly of a client that has a metal belly ring as it will heat up quickly and burn them.
 10. Start with the stones at one end of the roaster, and as you use a stone, move it to the opposite end. This assures that you are using fresh hot stones, and not the same ones every time you exchange them.
 11. You can keep your oil in the heater to warm it and add to the soothing experience for the client.
 12. Consider new ways to use warmed stones in your massage or aesthetics business. You can easily implement them into:

Mobile Hot Stone Massage: Instead of carrying a roaster around with you, try using moist heat pads to heat your stones. We have successfully used Thermophores to heat the stones when mobile, and they worked like a charm! You can even preheat the stones with the moist heat pads before you leave and throw them in an insulated pack so they stay warm along the way. You can also get an electric plug-in adaptor for your cigarette lighter in your car, and heat the stones up while en-route. Nothing truly replaces a stone warmer however, so if you are on the go, perhaps a 8-20 litre heater would be the best thing.

Hot Stone Chair Massage: Here's an idea that only a few people are capitalizing on. Be on the leading edge in the corporate chair massage industry and offer heated stone chair massage. Clients feel the heat of the stones right through their clothing, as long as you work slowly, using a press and hold movement with the stones vs. light effleurage. Place two warmed stones under their hands on the armrest so they can rest their palms on top of the stones. Since these are placement stones, remember to place a barrier such as a sheet or towel between the stones and the client to avoid burns.

What is Cold or Cryotherapy?

Cold stones, whether used alone or in conjunction with hot stones, has been receiving a lot of attention these days, as its popularity increases in spas and massage therapist's offices around the world, and its medical benefits are increasingly realized. Cold therapy, also known as cryotherapy, works on the principle of heat exchange. This occurs when a cooler object is placed in direct contact with an object of warmer temperature, such as ice or cold stones against skin. The cooler object will absorb the heat of the warmer object in an attempt to achieve balance (where both items are vibrating at the same frequency).

After a trauma or injury, the tissue and blood vessels that deliver oxygen and nutrients to that area are damaged. The cells around the injury increase their metabolism in an effort to consume more oxygen and repair themselves. If and when the oxygen is used up, the cells are at risk of dying. Also, the damaged or constricted blood vessels cannot remove waste. Blood cells and fluid, in an attempt to protect those tissues, seep into the interstitial spaces in the surrounding area, which results in swelling and bruising. When ice, or an object of colder temperature is applied, it lowers the temperature of the damaged tissue through heat exchange and constricts local blood vessels. This slows metabolism and the consumption of oxygen, therefore reducing the rate of cell damage and decreasing fluid build-up or swelling.

Various stones are effective when used as a cold application, with sedimentary and basalt working well, and marble stones having the greatest effect - but also being the most expensive. Smooth in texture, many of these stones can be used without a traditional lubricant,

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depending on their mineral state when frozen or iced.

The use of cold alone on the body is a powerful decongestant, pushing blood, fluid and wastes out of overworked, chronically tense, or inflamed tissues such as the orbits, where it can help reduce dark circles through placement on the eye area. In this circumstance, it is recommended that a moist pad be placed over the eye / orbit area itself to provide an extra layer of protection, and the cold stones be placed upon it. With this safety measure in place, the conduction of the cold via the water across the pad will help to assure a thorough and even distribution of the application as the soft material conforms to the uneven shape of the treatment area.

Cold stones can also be used on the sinus area, or as a pressure placement on post-extraction procedures, where it will help increase microcirculation, metabolism, and elimination thus affecting change on a cellular level, while interrupting the pain-spasm-pain cycle. In cooperation with heated stones, chilled stones create a dramatic movement of fluids within the body, generating a healing, cleansing, and nourishing effect due to the alternate constriction and dilation of the blood vessels. Cold also generates a toning, or strengthening response to several body systems, most notably the immune system.

While cryotherapy can be an effective form of medical treatment in certain circumstances, in massage, cold stones have the advantage over ice, in that stones do not desensitize the skin, as ice can, and should allow soft tissue manipulations and mobilizations to not be taken beyond the client's tolerance via their feedback. With that in mind, careful attention should be given to the client's comfort level and the appearance of the skin. Like heat, cold can cause burns and structural damage that may go unnoticed due to its anesthetic effect.

Some benefits of cold stones:

Dispersal of tissue congestion Alleviation of swelling Decreased muscle spasms Stimulation of the autonomic nervous system Increased tissue metabolism Invigoration / energizing effect.

Some applications of cold stones:

Orbital decongestion - removal of puffiness or discoloration Sinus decongestion - alleviation of sinus pain Post treatment applications i.e. waxing, dermabrasion, electrolysis, etc.

Using both heat and cold in your treatments:

Cold stones alternated with hot stones can provide a therapeutic balance, but is not a treatment for everyone. Alternating between heat and cold will cause the blood vessels to alternate between dilation and constriction. The end result of this will be a dramatic increase in circulation to that area. If a client is prone to being cold day to day, or has mild circulatory problems, it is recommended that the client experience a hot stone massage only.

The combination of hot and cold stones provides therapeutic balance. "Too much heat is depleting, can produce laxity in tissues, and increase inflammation. Americans are just beginning to understand what Europeans have understood for centuries: the effects of 'just enough' cold are energizing, toning and pain reducing," according to Dew. Warm stones soften fascia faster and more deeply than traditional massage therapies while cold stones disperse congestion, alleviate swelling and interrupt muscle spasms. Heated stones increase blood circulation, lymph and digestive fluids and have sedating effects.

Cold stones stimulate the autonomic nervous system, increase metabolism and invigorate.

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General Effects:

These effects are typically achieved through full-body immersion baths.

Decrease in metabolic function Decrease in tactile sensitivity Decrease in systemic circulation
Decrease in body temperature Decrease in respiratory rate

Local Effects:

These effects are typically achieved through cold compresses, ice packs, and cold stone therapy.

Decrease in perception of pain (analgesia) Decrease in local inflammation Vasoconstriction
Increase in muscle tone Increase in muscle stiffness

Contraindications for Cold Therapy

Vasospastic disease, Cardiac Disorders, Rheumatoid Conditions, Paralysis.

Cold hypersensitivity Compromised Circulation Coronary artery disease Any condition in which massage in general is contraindicated. Above all, follow the simple rule:

When in doubt - DON'T!

Please remember to take precautions when using cold stones. Listen to your clients - if the stones are causing pain or unbearable discomfort, cease immediately.