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Alternating Hot and Cold Showers

Start your morning with a contrast shower and take advantage of one of the oldest systems of medicine— hydrotherapy— also known as “water cure.” There is only one rule— always end on cold—even during the winter. Counterintuitively, ending on cold helps you feel warm afterwards as capillaries dilate and blood rushes back to your skin once you dry off. You’ll have to try it to believe it. The benefits span almost every health system— cardiovascular, immune, nervous, and detox, to name a few. Skip the coffee and try a contrast shower to energize your morning!

How does it work?

- Hot showers help clean your skin by opening pores, allowing materials trapped there like dead skin cells to be removed
- Cold showers boost circulation. The cold temperature causes blood vessels on the surface of your skin to constrict and encourage blood to surround your organs.
- Cold showers stimulate weight loss by encouraging consumption of brown fat, the “good” fat, which generates heat and burns calories to keep our bodies warm.
- Cold showers boost mood.¹ Researchers hypothesize that this occurs because the increased impact to cold receptors on the skin sends an overwhelming amount of electrical impulses to peripheral nerves and to the brain, serving as a “re-set” button on the nervous system.²
- Cold water can help prevent hair loss as it is good for the roots. Contrast showers may benefit hair growth by boosting circulation to the hair roots on the scalp.
- Combing hot and cold showers by alternate has the ability to combine all of these effects and more.

How do I do it?

1. First, get completely wet with a temperature you are comfortable with.
2. Then, slowly increase the temperature till you get to a temperature you can barely stand.
3. From the top of your head to your toes, briefly expose all body parts to this. Be in the hot water for at least one minute.
4. Next turn down the water temperature to cold, to where you can barely stand the cold. Expose all body parts to this temperature for at least 20 seconds.
5. Then switch, back to hot and alternate with cold.
6. Remember to always end on cold to experience the benefits.
7. You can modify the amount of time used for the cycles but maintain a ratio of 3:1 for hot to cold. Never use more than 1 minute of cold.

8. Start with moderate temperatures and gradually build to greater extremes. Many find their resistance to the temperature extremes builds over time using this therapy

Any precautions?

- Be sure not to burn yourself with the hot or cold temperature. Increase and decrease the water temperature slowly to prevent this.
- Do not try this if you have epilepsy, any condition prone to seizures, pregnancy, extreme frailty, advanced kidney disease, alcohol or drug consumption, or cardiovascular problems.
- Do not do contrast showers after eating a large meal. Wait at least 30 minutes.
- Ask your doctor before starting any treatment, including lifestyle recommendations.

References

1. Nikolai A.Shevchuk. Adapted cold shower as a potential treatment for depression. *Medical Hypotheses*. Volume 70, Issue 5, 2008, Pages 995-1001. Available online 13 November 2007.
2. A Mooventhan and L Nivethitha. Scientific Evidence-Based Effects of Hydrotherapy on Various Systems of the Body. *N Am J Med Sci*. 2014 May; 6(5): 199–209. doi: 10.4103/1947-2714.132935. PMID: 24926444. Available online: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4049052/>