Hydrotherapy Guidelines

One of the principals of naturopathic medicine is that proper circulation to internal organs and tissues is a necessity for pain relief, optimal metabolic function, repair of damaged or infected tissue and for general well being. There are many ways to improve circulation and hydrotherapy, the use of alternating hot and cold water, is one of the oldest.

Most people have used hydrotherapy occasionally as in ice packs for a sprained ankle, the hot compress for sinus pain, or the hot bath for a case of the flu with aches and chills. There are dozens of specific hydrotherapy techniques valued by naturopathic physicians, yet unknown to most people.

The benefits of hydrotherapy include an improvement in sleep, digestion, bowel function, an increase in energy levels and a reduction in chronic pain. We have found that other naturopathic therapies such as herbal medicines, special diets or homeopathy often work better due to concurrent hydrotherapy treatments.

The effects of hydrotherapy are many and varied and depend upon the condition being treated. Some therapies are contraindicated with certain conditions or with certain populations such as infants and the elderly. These are covered in the Hydrotherapy Treatments chapter.

	Cold	Hot
General Effects	**Primary**: excellent after initial depressant.	**Primary**: excellent if intense.
	Short applications: excellent tonic reaction.	**Short**: depressant by atonic reaction.
	Prolonged applications: depressant by the influence upon metabolic function.	**Prolonged**: mixed, excitatory and depressant.
Special Effects	**Heart**: fast then slows.	**Heart**: slows, then increases.
	Vessels: contraction the dilation.	**Vessels**: dilation primarily, then contraction if intense.
	Nerves: benumbs.	**Nerves**: excites.
	Muscles: reduces volume.	**Muscles**: increases volume.
	Respiration: slows and deepens.	**Respiration**: quickens.
	Stomach: increases HCL and motion.	**Stomach**: decreases HCL and motion.

Blood: increases both RBC's (30% to 50%) and WBC's (15% to 150%), increases phagocytosis unless prolonged chilling.	**Blood**: increases RBC & WBC counts as well as phagocytosis.
Kidneys: congests & stimulates.	**Kidneys**: reduces activity.
Metabolism: increases CO2 in blood By increasing production of CO2; Decreases urea and improves oxidation.	**Metabolism**: decreases CO2 in the blood by increasing respiration; increases urea and General protein wastes.