



HOT STONE THERAPY

The use of hot stones is an ancient therapeutic method that works on the body and the soul.

Words / Judy Chapman

Hot stone therapy is now a revered treatment in spas around the world and works deeply on many levels to help you return to your “self”. If you suffer from muscular aches, tight shoulders, pain in the lower and upper back, poor circulation or computer tension, then treatments made from hot stones may just be what you need. The beauty of hot stone therapy is that each culture has its own variety, so no two treatments are the same.

HOT STONES: AN ANCIENT METHOD

Heat therapy has long been used for healing around the world. Infrared saunas and thermal massage beds are my current favourites. More traditional treatments that use heat for healing include moxibustion, cupping, bathing in thermal springs and the application of a steaming poultice. Even a soak in a warm bath or a simple hot water bottle can be incredibly soothing for muscular pain.

While the true origins of hot stone therapy are unknown, research reveals that stones have long been used as a curative by many cultures including the Native Americans, Tibetans, Koreans and Hawaiians. In Korea, for example, healers wrapped basalt stones in cotton sheets and placed them on various parts of the body to reduce stress and release any blockages.

In ancient China, heated rocks and hot sand were wrapped in tree bark and applied to the body as hot compresses to relieve aches and pains. It is believed that the Mongolians first introduced the healing stone massage into Tibet and would mix ingredients such as barley with river stones for their massages.

Over in Hawaii, lava stones have long been used during their *lomi lomi* massages. And, according to therapists in Bali, ancient rocks are considered sacred and are collected from the seashore and placed outside under each full moon to soak up the lunar energy that, when applied during treatments, will deepen the guest’s healing experience.

UNCOVERING THE TREATMENT

In most treatments, aromatic oils help the smooth heated stones to glide along the muscles of your back and to massage the lower back and shoulders to bring you down to earth. Warm stones are also placed into the palms of your hands to bring you back to centre. Hot stone therapy not only feels incredibly grounding and warming, it’s also an excellent treatment to help alleviate emotional imbalances including stress, tension, anxiety and insomnia.

During a hot stone treatment, the therapist will steam rocks until they are quite warm and place them on different parts of your body. The weight and

warmth of the stones feels incredibly comforting, particularly when the stones are placed in the palms of your hands and on the soles of your feet. The sensation of warmed stones smoothed across one’s body is incredibly nurturing too. The warmth from the stones seems to move effortlessly across the body, melting away muscular pain, dissolving tension in the mind and encouraging blood flow and circulation.

Hot gems and jewels are another emerging trend in spas and are also inspired by ancient practices used in both Tibetan and Ayurvedic medicine. In Tibet, for example, jewels and stones were part of certain rituals; astrologers often selected a precious stone or metal to help rebalance and strengthen one’s energy levels. In China, jade is considered to hold the essence of life force and according to Ayurveda, the best ways to absorb the energies from gems and metals is to wear them close to your skin at all times.

At the end of the day, of course, healing is not only about the ingredients — the stones, technology and instruments — but also the therapist’s and your own intention. After all, healing is a two-way street and to make the most of your spa experience, being open to receiving is also part of the journey. Releasing, letting go, trusting, believing, surrendering — these are ultimately what will return you to self and help you on your path.

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