



FLOATING AWAY STRESS

Isolation Tanks Induce Deep Rest and Healing

by Gina McGalliard

Sensory isolation in a floatation tank is known for inducing deep relaxation with subsequent improved health. A 2014 study published in the *Australian New Zealand Clinical Trials Registry* investigating the effects of a series of floatation tank treatments for 65 participants, showed it to be an effective measure in decreasing stress, depression, anxiety and pain, while enhancing a sense of optimism and quality of sleep.

The Book of Floating: Exploring the Private Sea, by Michael Hutchison, reports on 20th-century research suggesting the therapy can help allay ailments like chronic pain, migraines and sore muscles. There's also evidence for

enhanced meditation, creativity and spiritual experiences.

Float therapy was invented by Dr. John C. Lilly, a neurophysiology specialist. The individual enters an enclosed tank containing 11 inches of water heated to 93.5 degrees—a normal temperature for human skin—and some 1,000 pounds of dissolved Epsom salt. The effect is like buoyantly floating in the Dead Sea, but in a clean, quiet, private realm. The water is typically filtered three to five times between each session and sanitized using UV light; some also use peroxide and ozone gas to purify the water.

Without any sensory input—no sight, sound or tactile sensations—the

floaters typically enters a profound deeply calm state of theta brain waves that tends to bring the subconscious to the surface. It can take experienced meditators years to learn to consistently achieve this condition, remarks Bryan Gray, of Float North County, a spa in Solana Beach, California.

Ultimate Meditation Venue

Scientific research has shown that floating can release the feel-good neurotransmitters endorphins and dopamine, and lower the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol. Studies performed by the Laureate Institute of Brain Research, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which maintains a float clinic, have found the therapy is an

effective treatment for patients with anxiety disorders.

“It frees your mind of distraction and puts it in a zone,” explains Gray. “It removes the need for fight or flight, so those hormones are reduced. That part of the brain mellows out.”

Marvelous Magnesium

Lying for an hour in water infused with Epsom salt, or magnesium sulfate, the body receives a huge infusion of magnesium, a mineral essential to optimal health. While calcium and vitamin D deficiencies get more attention, it’s even more likely most of us are low on this element due to magnesium-depleting drugs and inadequate farm soils. Many ailments shown by research to be helped by floating have also been linked to magnesium deficiency. The mineral is also essential for heart health, strong bones and central nervous system function, as reported in *The Magnesium Miracle*, by Dr. Carolyn Dean, a physician and naturopath in Kihei, Hawaii.

Wide-Ranging Healings

Chronic pain sufferers often find relief through floating because the lessened gravity allows the body to fully relax. The accompanying serenity releases

the brain’s natural endorphins, which act as natural painkillers, into the bloodstream, reports Hutchison.

The sheer tranquility of floating can alleviate some mental health issues. “We’ve had several people with post-traumatic stress disorder. One man has returned six times and says he’s advanced more in the last three months while floating than he did in the prior five to 10 years,” says Andy Larson, owner of Float Milwaukee.

Athletes also appreciate floating because it shortens injury recovery periods through enhancing blood flow, helping to heal sore muscles. The way it facilitates a calm state ideal for implanting ideas into the subconscious mind enables them to better visualize improved performance.

Discoveries Within

Floaters can fall into what sleep specialists call the hypnagogic state, meaning they are apt to have lucid dreams while awake. Also known as Stage 1 sleep, it is the drowsiest condition we experience while still consciously aware. This is the scientific explanation for reports of visions or “Eureka!” problem-solving moments in the tank, says Hutchison.

This phenomenon can be

especially beneficial for creative artists. “We have a girl that always emerges from the tank with an idea for a new painting,” says Gray. He also regularly hosts a composer that has worked with famous singers, who has experienced innovative musical breakthroughs while floating.

Floating is among the rare healing modalities that can benefit body, mind and spirit in just one hour, with repeat benefits.

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