

# Salt Air in the City

## Salt Rooms Soothe Allergies and Skin Conditions

by Avery Mack

For a list of U.S. salt  
rooms, see [Tinyurl.com/  
SaltSpaLocations](http://Tinyurl.com/SaltSpaLocations)



**A**ccording to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, as many as 50 million Americans are affected by seasonal or year-round nasal allergies. Additionally, 56 million suffer from eczema, psoriasis or rosacea. Prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs may help, but aren't a cure. Salt therapy can be a gentler, all-natural solution for easing associated symptoms.

While eating too much salt is bad for the body, breathing it is a healthy activity. The Greek word for salt is *halos*,

and halotherapy provides a welcome alternative to conventional pills, sprays and injections.

In the mid-1800s, after salt mine workers in Poland were found to have a low rate of respiratory illness, the Wieliczka Salt Mine Health Spa was established on the site of a mine to treat clinic patients for asthma and allergies. That pioneering facility is still in operation.

"In the beginning, I think salt therapy was seen as a time-consuming novelty. Now, holistically minded people are more supportive," says

Clay Juracsik, owner of the St. Louis Salt Room, in Maplewood, Missouri. The room's walls are covered in salt, with blocks of backlit Himalayan pink salt at floor level. Clients wear disposable booties to walk through inches-deep, loose, mineral-rich Dead Sea salt to reclining chairs. The lights dim, soft music plays and salt, rich in negative ions, infuses the air for a 45-minute session.

"We have a second, smaller room where the walls and floor are not salted, so a child and parent can

move around or play without disturbing others. Our youngest client was 2 weeks old," says Juracsik.

With the help of specially designed machines and software, microscopic salt particles one to five microns in size are circulated through the air to be deeply inhaled. As a natural anti-inflammatory agent, salt helps reduce swelling of throat tissues and nasal passages, making breathing easier for individuals suffering from such respiratory ailments as allergies, asthma, bronchitis and sinusitis.

"True halotherapy is based on using 99 percent pure sodium chloride in the halogenerator," says Leo Tonkin, co-founder of the Salt Therapy Association, in Boca Raton, Florida. "Dead Sea, Himalayan or other salts can be used as décor."

"My husband, Gary, had three sinus surgeries before he discovered a salt room during a trip to London and had a eureka moment," relates Ellen Patrick, owner of four Breathe Easy salt rooms in New York City and nearby Westchester County.

"A client's 4-year-old son tells Mom when he needs a treatment to 'make his nose work better,'" reports Lisa Cobb, owner of Luxury on Lovers, in Dallas, Texas. "He uses a salt bed similar in style to a tanning bed and large enough for his mother to be with him for a 20-minute treatment. Pilots and flight attendants like salt rooms to counteract the recirculated air on planes. Athletes use them to increase lung capacity. A treatment works like a visit to the ocean."

A recent pilot study conducted at The Salt Room, in Orlando, Florida, and published in the *International Journal of Respiratory and Pulmonary Medicine*, concluded, "Halotherapy is associated with improvement in symptoms of sinus disease in cystic fibrosis and should be explored as an adjunct treatment."

Salt's anti-inflammatory, antifungal and antibacterial properties may also reduce skin swelling and itchiness, and even acne, without drying the skin. Increased lung capacity aids blood circulation, which also helps improve skin health. Salt room operators note that frequent treatments are needed during early stages of therapy or during

acute outbreaks of conditions, but can be reduced to a maintenance level over time.

Juracsik remarks, "The best success I've seen is with respiratory ailments like bronchitis and pneumonia. We don't need a new, fancy pill for every illness. Salt is historically proven to be a natural and effective way to improve respiratory health."

Options go beyond basic treatments. "Meditating in the salt room allows double relaxation," comments Patrick. "Salty yoga is one of my favorite therapies because clients can exercise and breathe easier at the

same time. Another option comprises a sound bath, during which crystal bowl music creates a vibration similar to piano notes to quiet and focus the mind during a salt session."

Salt treatments can be experienced regularly, seasonally or as needed. For those free of respiratory issues, a salt room visit provides a refreshing way to relax, sit, chill and breathe. Patrick views it as a form of stress management to increase well-being.

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