The lighting...soft, intimate.

The music...tranquil, soothing.

Your body...comfortably nude, securely draped in a warm cotton sheet

Rejuvenate with

stone therapy

BY NINA GART

Getting Stoned

Escorted to a plush, cushioned table, you begin your journey by reclining on a series of flat hot and cool stones, covered by a thick towel, that trace your spine. Your skin welcomes their therapeutic energy like ripples in a pool of water. Within minutes, your body and mind begin to trust and respond to the sensations. Your breathing slows as oils are applied to your skin. The therapist, with hot stones in hands, rhythmically glide across your meridian lines. The waves of heat surprise your senses, quickly converting to bliss.

Starting at the foot, the stones move up your leg, along the side the torso and up the arm, right to your fingertips, all in a delicate, non-stop ritual. Next, your chest and shoulders receive the same mindful practice. Large stones are cradled in your palms and coin-sized stones are lightly wedged between your toes. You completely lose track where the therapist's hands end and the velvety-soft stones begin.

Heated Chakra stones align and balance chief energy centres, sending their healing properties deep to your core. As the first half of the treatment concludes, your body feels there is more to come.

As you gently turn to rest upon your stomach, a large, flat hot stone is carefully placed on the cotton blanket, just above the tail bone supported by the sacrum. The sequence of synchronized movements follow the peaks and curves of your body, being careful not to cross your spine or come into contact with bones and joints. Cool stones are placed on key areas to alleviate stress. More heated stones caress and massage every inch of your body with warmth and sedation.

Your senses detect the ritual clicking of stones, followed by the meditative deep breathing of the therapist, who guides you through the treatment to a world beyond. It's as if Mother Nature is healing you with her own tender hands.

Earthly Delights

The Stone Therapy experience; for many consumers the contemporary form of this ancient healing art remains to be discovered, but for thousands of North Americans, it's quickly becoming a treatment of choice in health spas all across the continental Americas and Europe.

"The Stone Therapy process is a type of tai chi dance, infusing vascular gymnastics with the thermotherapeutic application of heated and chilled stones, as well as breathing and meditation, all in kinetic motion," states Nina Gart, teacher and director of Stone Therapy School, headquartered in Vancouver, British Columbia. "The journey often takes people by surprise; so much so, they're speechless."

Considered ancient tools for treating dozens of ailments in societies like China, Japan, Russia, North and South America, and Eastern Europe, stones have recently found their way in to spas, much to the delight and curiosity of clients. Stone Therapy has gained in popu-

larity since 1998, due to its efficiency and healing power as well as increased marketing and media coverage. It's deemed a must-have on spa menus, and the treatment draws rave reviews while delivering a variety of holistic benefits. That translates into a fledgling service with staying power.

Natural Healers

In today's rapidly accelerated society, life begs for relief from stress, pain and fatigue. Stone Therapy is touted as the essential marriage of body and energy work, not only repairing underlying problems but also relinquishing anxiety and tension. Other alternative therapies involving stones fall into the same line of energy work, including Raindrop, Reiki, Reflexology and Thai massage.

There are two types of stones used in hot and cold therapy. Basalt stones, created with multi-crystalline structures and composed of igneous rock formed by volcanic activity, are the givers of energy. They hold and transfer heat from their core to the muscle tissue, nerves and inner organs. Chilled marble stones, composed of mono-crystalline structures, found at the bottom of ancient oceans, cleanse, remove stress and promote recirculation and healing. Contemporary methods incorporate anywhere from 20 to over 50 stones, but are often limited only to the heated variety. Gart's customized version of Stone Therapy uses a base of 46 heated basalt stones and a minimum of six cold marble stones. On average, sessions last for 60 to 75 minutes. Depending on the needs of the client, a treatment can easily be extended over two hours using advanced energy work and elaborate techniques, as well as a plethora of additional stone and crystal layouts.

The basalt stones are heated to temperatures of between 125°F and 135°F and kept in a large, water-filled roaster oven. Marble stones are cold, but never frozen, and packed in an ice-lined cooler. Some stones are used for passive applications, others are put to work in active applications, such as massage strokes. There is even a "Governor" in each basalt set: the Sacrum stone, which sits just above the tail bone. The "Guide," otherwise known as the Third Eye, is a tiny stone that rests gently between and just above the eyes.

Each stone is chosen for the purpose of healing specific areas of the body, based on shape, density, porousness, color, size and weight. If it is too small, it won't distribute enough energy; too large, it can easily harm if used improperly; too rough, it can cause irritation. Each practitioner must be properly trained through education and experience to know which stones are appropriate for individual treatment. As a health and safety measure, all stones are lightly wiped of oil, cleaned and sanitized after each session..

Physiologically, the science of Stone Therapy has been proven highly beneficial. Heated stones are reputed to leisurely initiate the Parasympathetic Nervous System, which slows down the heart rate, relaxes inner organs, increases blood flow, and boosts immune and lymphatic systems. At the same time, the cool marble stones are hard at work, lining the spine, caressing the neck and tucked under the shoulders. They are swift to attend to problem areas, infusing healing energy in fresh, cleansing strokes.

"Clients are taken on a journey with stones. They discover dimensions and sensations within their physical bodies that they did not know existed."

Nina Gart

These are regarded as the true healers of Stone Therapy. The marble reaches deep and fast through the body, dissipating all physical, emotional and psychological blocks, extracting one after another. This is the state where regeneration and recovery begin.

Safe and Secure

While clients feel pleasant sensations throughout the therapy, the true results on the physical body are revealed usually within 24 to 48 hours. This is when balance is regained and restored and can last for weeks, as the detoxification process is completed with the consumption of extra water and sufficient rest.

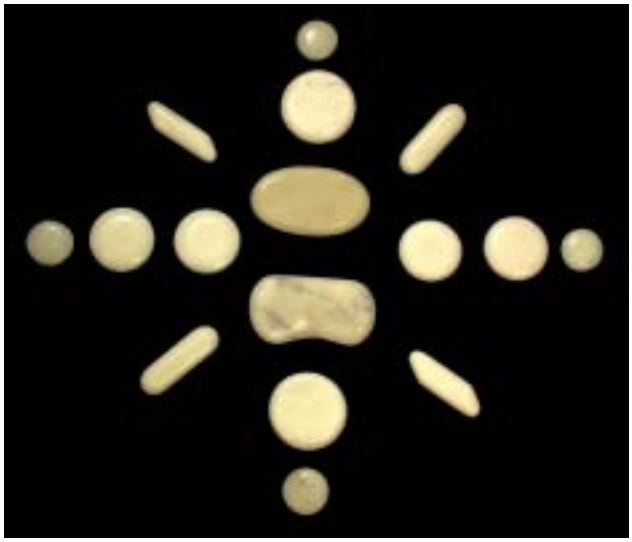
To ensure the highest quality treatment, practitioners are required to be trained by reputable schools where key priorities in safety and client research are followed. They must obtain specific information in order to determine the type of treatment to be performed as well as what precautions should be taken, especially if a client is on medication, has a chronic condition, skin ailment or heart problem. Pregnant or acutely ill clients do not receive a treatment.

As with all spa therapies, repetitiveness is often key to longstanding health. For more positive and longer lasting results, a series of Stone Therapy sessions are recommended.

Gart suggests consumers choose a Stone Therapist wisely, noting that the industry has grown too fast to monitor proper training and practice. Asking questions and checking for credentials from qualified schools will bring you peace of mind and allow you to fully appreciate the natural healing power within the stones as well as yourself.

"Clients are taken on a journey with stones. They discover dimensions and sensations within their physical bodies that they did not know existed. The results of the therapy can be truly profound or just greatly beneficial–to the degree of readiness. It truly is a treatment for our time."

For more information on Stone Therapy School programs, long-distance learning or to purchase stones, contact Nina Gart at 1-866.305.0066 (toll-free), visit www.stonetherapyschool.com or email at nina@stonetherapyschool.com



While many spas are quick to cater to the growing demand for Stone Therapy treatments, many consumers are incorporating hot and cool stones into their own home-based therapies to bring relief to aching muscles and chronic conditions, or boost the body's energy systems. For those who want to venture into experiencing stones at home, the best approach is one of caution.

"Many people think that you can just pick up a stone, heat it in warm water and run it across your body. It's not that simple. Stones hold heat to a greater or lesser degree, so you could run the risk of burning your skin from extreme temperatures," states Nina Gart, who offers sage advice before you begin.

Gart suggests using specially selected and manufactured stones from reputable suppliers. Research the company's history, training levels, qualifications and service standards. When you are comfortable with your purchase, remember the following rules:

1 **Purchase stones that fit the treatment you will perform.** Small stones don't hold enough heat to for prolonged applications, while very large stones can be hard to handle and can cause trauma. Make sure they fit your hand neatly, are smooth and rounded, and feel comfortable in weight.

2 **Purchase stones that satisfy passive and active applications.** Warm stones slowly bring needed blood to chronic areas while resting cold stones on inflamed areas is considered passive and swifly brings relief and speeds the healing process.

3 **Before using your stones at home:** Wash them thoroughly in warm soapy water, rinse thoroughly under running cold water, sanitize by spraying them with 70% alcohol or witchhazel, and lace them lightly with grapeseed oil.

4 **Caution: Never heat the stones above 130°F.** As well, do not freeze your marble stones. Simply place them in a bowl of ice for about 1 hour, then apply over a layer of thin, cotton fabric.

5 **Movements should be slow, long and not too deep.** Allow the stones to follow the path of your body, penetrating the skin, muscles and nerves. Short, brisk, superficial movements will cause burning with either temperature.

6 **Caution: Do not allow the stones to come in contact with protruding bones or the spine.** When crossing joints, neck and other sensitive areas, stay in contact with the stones, but never apply pressure as this can easily cause injury and bruising.

7 **The average localized treatment (hand, arm, neck or leg) should last around 30 minutes.** Apply a light coat of grapeseed oil to the area to be treated, massage with hot stones for approximately 10 minutes and follow up with passive application of cool stones. If the pain persists, wait about two hours and repeat the treatment again.

8 **Once you have completed your home treatment:** Repeat the washing, drying and sanitizing ritual and place the stones in a towel-lined container or on a layer of epsom salt until the next use.

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