

The Healing Power of Water

by Dr Reinhard Bergel



Sebastian Kneipp

Who developed water treatment as a means of curing illness, was a German priest who lived from 1827-1897.



As a young man, the doctors pronounced him terminally ill with a lung disease. But he wouldn't accept their prognosis. Sebastian Kneipp wanted to live, and when he found, by chance, a booklet in the Munich library call Cold Water Treatments by Sigmund Hahn, he decided to try it.

The treatments worked. His health stabilized. He got well, well enough that he in turn cured other people. Poor and rich alike flocked to receive the water cure and advice of the not too friendly, but warmhearted healer-priest who never asked for any payment.

When Father Kneipp first started giving his treatments at the monastery in Woerishofen (near Munich), the town was no more than a sleepy village. Over the years it grew into a world famous spa city.

Father Kneipp expanded on the original work of Sigmund Hahn. To it he added his vast knowledge of herbs and natural foods. An entire system, of water treatments, baths, steam baths and wrappings, was developed. To pass on his knowledge he wrote several books, My Water Cure, That's How They Shall Live and My Testament and Codicil are the most well known of these. The man who was supposed to die at an early age lived to a very fruitful 70.

Today, over 100 years after his death, Father Kneipp's water cure is still respected and used by the medical profession in Germany. In fact, the German medicare program will even pay for your stay at a Kneipp Spa if it is prescribed by a doctor. The government's philosophy is that three or four weeks of treatment acts as prevention and reduces health costs in the long run.

The International Kneipp Association, a non-profit organization with its head office in Munich, has developed a network of treatment sanitariums throughout Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg, France and Southwest Africa. Most of these clinics are privately owned by medical doctors who have taken special training in the Kneipp cure.

When Father Kneipp first started, he used a water can (this is now the symbol of the Kneipp Association). Later, after he had more thoroughly developed his treatments, he replaced the can with a hose, a little bigger in diameter than a regular garden hose.

Your patients can try the water treatments at home. When using the hose, the water pressure should be such that when the hose end is held up the distance between the nozzle and the top of the arch of the water is about the width of a hand. Such a pressure will allow a steady, even flow of water around a leg, arm or hip. That the water coats the body evenly, without splashing over the skin, is an important aspect of Kneipp therapy.

If you want to use your shower, take off the shower head to create an even flow, or hold a wash cloth over the outlet.

Alternate Footbath

This is one of the most widely prescribed treatments for tired legs, circulation problems, headaches or insomnia. Place two large pails, or medium sized garbage cans, side by side. Fill one with warm water (approximately 39-40°C) and the other with cold water. Put your feet into the warm water for five minutes first (the water level should go about three quarters of the way up your legs.) Then change into the cold water. Count 10 seconds and change back to the warm water for another five minutes. Then cold for 10 seconds once more.

Dry your feet, put on socks and take a brisk walk for 10 minutes or go to bed right away. Under no circumstances sit down and let your legs get cold again.

Alternate Armbath

Use two sinks side by side, and follow the same procedure as for the footbath.

In Germany, this treatment is often used, under a doctor's supervision, to stabilize blood pressure, relieve headaches, angina pectoris and nervous conditions.



Knee Rinse

This easy and health stabilizing treatment promote circulation. Father Kneipp always reminded his patients that "circulation is life and health."

Start with the hose on the right little toe, move up along the outside of the leg to about 10 cm (4 in.) above the knee. Move the hose or shower handle back and forth to evenly coat the leg with water.

Move the hose down the inner side of the leg. Do the back of the leg in the same fashion.

If you have warm legs you can use cold water. If your legs and feet are cold, then start with warm water and alternate, The cold water rinse applied between warm water and alternate. The cold water rinse applied between warm water rinses acts as a "shock treatment." Through the transmitting organ of the skin, the nerves respond to this treatment by increasing the blood flow in that area.

Hip Rinse

Again, start on the right foot, little toe side, move up to slightly above the hip bone. Cover the whole leg with a water coating. Avoid splashing. Hold this for approximately 10 seconds, then move the water down the inner side of the leg. (Up the outside, down the inside).

As with all treatments, start with the right side first. The little right toe is the farthest spot from your heart – and that's where we start. This is to avoid any sudden shock to the heart.

The hip rinse is very often prescribed for women in menopause, to increase vitality and for general improvement of health and circulation.

Arm Rinse

This works well for relieving headaches. Start on the right arm, little finger side, move the water along the arm to the shoulder. At the shoulder, let the water coat the entire arm and then move the water down the inner side. Do the left arm in the same fashion.



Again, depending on your initial body temperature, use cold water only or alternate between warm and cold.

Full Body Rinse

If your shower head is fixed to the wall you can still use it for a full body rinse. Hold a wash cloth over the shower head. Let the water cover your feet first, then move slowly into the shower until the water coats you from your shoulders down. No splashes though. And again, right side first, then left.

Finish by rinsing the soles of your feet. Warm first, cool after. I usually finish my shower with a cool or even cold rinse.

Water Stepping

To combat hot summer weather or the change of life flushes, and just for overall invigoration, water stepping is the most effective of the Kneipp treatments.

Many German health resort towns have built basins fed by ice cold natural springs in the forest just for this therapy. The wanderer or hiker can take off their shoes and socks and easily refresh him/herself in these wading pools. It is heart-warming to see not only the very old but the very young doing this.

Similar water basins at intervals along our highways (in Canada and the US) would be wonderful health stops. Long car trips are not good for the circulation and the treatment of water stepping is very invigorating.

But since we don't have such facilities, your bath tub is a good place to practice this. Fill the tub up to calf level with cold water. (This treatment is never done with warm water.) Walk back and forth in the tub, always lifting one leg out of the water. Walk like a stork, one leg high up out of the water.

The alternation between air and water is what makes this treatment effective. Ten to 15 seconds might be all you need. By no means stay in the water longer than comfortable. Or you can even try walking barefoot in the snow (high stepping all the time). It's very stimulating.

Afterwards dry your legs, put warm socks on and take a walk.

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