

Hot Stone Therapy



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I can say without a doubt that one of the more challenging tasks in life is to come home after Hot Stone Therapy and write a reflection paper about the experience. This particular body modality is incredibly relaxing—for me much more so than Swedish or Shiatsu massage—and even more relaxing than soaking in my hot tub (and I didn't think anything could beat that). The elevated stress at work from the past two weeks had accumulated in my neck and shoulder blades, forming itself into large knots, and I was desperate to find a not-too-expensive modality that would melt them away. Now I am quite thankful that my need to find a new body modality for this assignment led me to the hot stones. Little did I know just how glorious is the healing experience that involves the combination of human touch and the absolutely shocking physical sensation of smooth basalt stones heated to 130° being placed on the back along each side of the spine. What a way to claim total embodiment! (And I would love to believe that!)

The hot stone session began as a normal massage. I removed my clothing and positioned myself face down on a massage table covered

with a large towel. Using an oil lubricant, the practitioner massaged my upper back and neck with long, deep strokes, which I later learned was called Hong-Kong style, a deep tissue massage often associated with hot stone therapy. She then retrieved a bowl of hot stones and selected one to use as the massage tool rather than her hands. Evidently I wasn't quite prepared for the temperature of the stone because I jumped when she applied it, which made her nervous to continue. I encouraged her to proceed, and once accustomed to the heat, I found the sensations of the hot stone against the trigger points of my back to be powerful in releasing the knots—and with very little pressure. When the stone had lost most of its heat, she selected a new one and continued with the massage. She did not, however, use them on my neck, the palms of my hands, or my feet, as I had hoped (perhaps I should have paid for the 90-minute version).

After the massage she placed the remaining hot stones on both sides of my spine at various intervals. Surprisingly, the final stone placed, which was on the sacral area, caused a massive involuntary spasm all the way down my right leg and

into my foot, disrupting all the other stones. She tried again to position the final stone, and again we received the same response, so she massaged the area briefly and then applied the stone. (I am curious about the tension in this area and wonder if I can perform a single hot stone therapy on myself in this area more frequently.) The practitioner covered the stones with a towel to hold in the heat, and the stones stayed in place for most of the remainder of the massage of my legs and feet.

After she picked up the stones (a couple of them had managed to slide off my body completely) and had me turn over, I was excited to think that the hot stone massage would continue. She performed a traditional massage of my facial tissues, arms, and legs, but did not use the stones. In my own imagination, the stones would have felt lovely on my forehead and temples. Later when I arrived back home, a search of the Internet uncovered an abundance of information and 'how-to' videos, and several of these did show the use of stones on the face and front side of the body—part of the 90-minute session, I'm sure.

Most of the Internet articles on Hot Stone Therapy indicate that this method of detoxification and relaxation has been used in many cultures for centuries. It is suggested that the heat from the stones releases the tension in the muscles almost immediately, allowing the massage from the practitioner to penetrate more deeply with less pressure. According to the e-How website, "The use of

hot stone therapy can help people with various physical problems, including muscular aches, poor circulation, arthritis, Fibromyalgia, MS, back pain, stress, anxiety, tension insomnia and depression." The key benefits of utilizing this therapy include "improved sense of well-being; a release of endorphins, the body's natural pain-killers; improved arthritic conditions; a release

of stored stress and tension; improved circulation; and a decrease in aches and pain in the joints."

I can't speak to most of these conditions or benefits; however, this one lovely experience with nature's own river rock relaxed me beyond anything I have yet experienced—a great benefit

for only \$49 plus tip. That night I was somewhat concerned about the red marks on my back where the stones were placed, but these are fading. Some Internet videos suggest using a towel beneath the stones to prevent burns to the skin, and I suspect it might be a good idea, although it will reduce both the contact sensation and the amount of heat distributed to the tissue beneath.

This experience has intrigued me enough to research the purchase of a hot stone kit, a stone warmer, and DVD instructions. Perhaps I will gift this to my daughter who has been looking for a career path.

References

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