



CATHERINE BALL

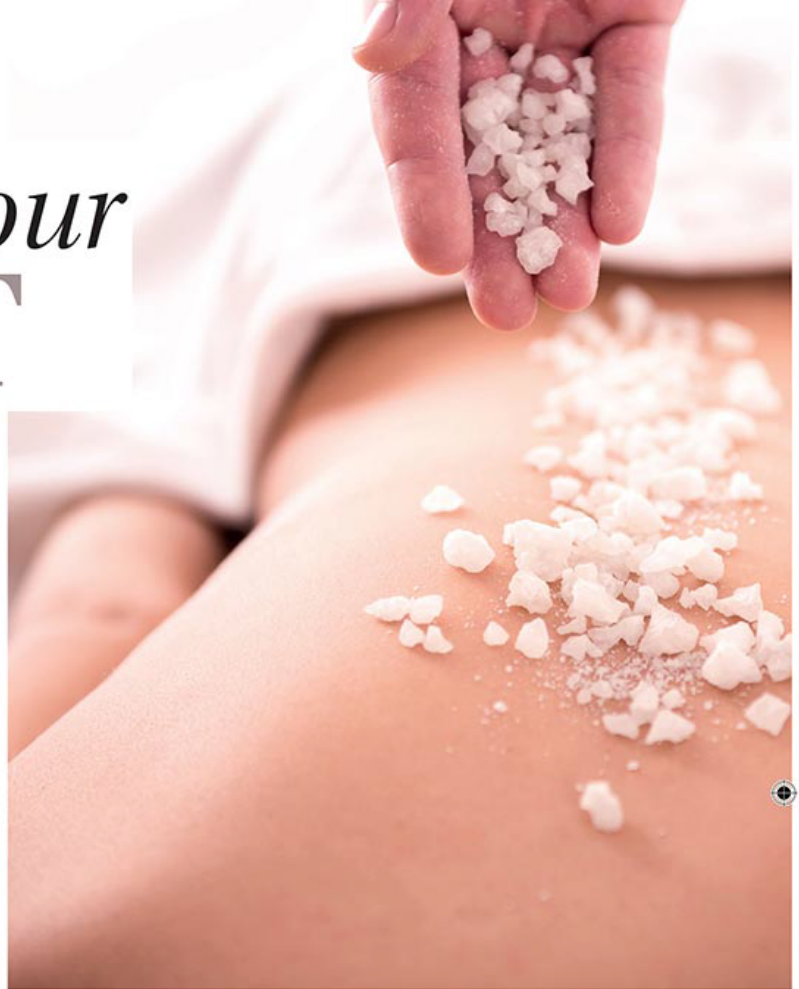
Worth your SALT

Add more salt to your life, in the form of dry and wet therapy, and reap the healing benefits of the ancient mineral caves

When you think about a healthy lifestyle, salt probably isn't the first thing that springs to mind. According to research from the British Heart Foundation, including too much sodium in your diet can increase your risk of heart disease and stroke, but there's also evidence to suggest that breathing in the minerals found in natural salt can reduce your stress levels, clear your airways and even improve the condition of your skin. The benefits of salt therapy – also known as halotherapy – were first recognised back in 1843 when a Polish doctor, Felix Boczkowski, noticed the men working in salt mines were healthy and thriving with very few respiratory problems. He discovered that breathing in the microscopic particles of natural salt could ease respiratory difficulties and boost wellbeing. Since then, the use of salt caves as a complementary therapy has become widespread – especially in eastern Europe, with man-made salt rooms becoming a feature of spas all over the world. But don't worry too much if you don't have a salt room near you, as we're about to show you how you can reap the benefits of halotherapy in your own home.

Breathe easy

Julie Dunn, the owner of Salt Space (a salt therapy centre in Hove), says many of her customers suffer from conditions like asthma, eczema, sinusitis, hay fever and COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease). "Salt therapy provides relief for a variety of respiratory and skin conditions; it boosts the immune system and can increase lung capacity," she says. "It's completely



natural and organic. We were lucky enough to be involved in a trial run by the local community respiratory service for people suffering from COPD and the improvement in scores was 'highly statistically significant'. I've also experienced the benefits of salt therapy. I used to suffer from chronic hay fever from March to September but, since being at Salt Space, my symptoms have virtually disappeared."

Salt of the earth

While you'll never be able to completely replicate the conditions of a natural cave in your home, using a salt pipe or inhaler can help. Fill it with a natural salt – either Himalayan or Halite crystals as they have a high mineral content – and then slowly breathe in the air through your mouth before exhaling through your nose. Healer Antonia Harman, the founder of divineempowerment.co.uk, regularly recommends salt inhalers to her clients with lung

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"Himalayan salt has a pale pink colour because it contains trace amounts of iron oxide as well as calcium, potassium and magnesium."

Up in the air

Although dedicated salt rooms are a fairly new phenomenon in the UK, people have long known the benefits of spending time at seaside resorts. The Victorians firmly believed that escaping the city to relax on the coast and take in the sea air was good for their health. "Salt therapy is one of the most ancient forms of therapy and has a long history in the United Kingdom where people would come to bathe in the salt waters around the coast," adds Pamela. Another key piece of equipment for practising halotherapy at home is a salt air purifier, although these are typically a bigger investment than an inhaler or lamp. These air purifiers attempt to recreate the kind of microclimate you would find in a natural salt cave or a man-made salt room, which uses a commercial halogenerator. Although there are a number of devices on the market, one of the most commonly available home salt therapy machines is made by Salin Plus. This uses a fan to draw in the air from the room, before releasing tiny salt crystals measuring less than five microns (one-thousandth of a millimetre) back into the room. The company claims these microparticles help widen your airways and reduce the number of bacteria in your respiratory system.

Feeling salty

"Ever gargled with salt water for a sore throat?" asks Leyla Mehmet, a naturopath from The Really Healthy Company. "It's effective because it kills bacteria. Inhaling salt does the same thing – but for the lungs. It is antibacterial and anti-viral, so it's really good for asthma and allergies and safe for children as well." Although halotherapy refers only to dry salt therapy, wet salt therapy also has significant health benefits, especially for those with skin conditions such as eczema. Leyla suggests amplifying the effect of using a salt lamp or pipe at home by regularly adding natural salts to your bath. "Salt baths are outstanding for the skin, as the salt in water sterilises any bacteria. Ideally, you should use dead sea salt for bathing as this is good for any healing of the skin, such as vaginal injuries after giving birth, itching and chicken pox," she says. "I recommend these baths to every single person I see with eczema – this, plus sleep, is an absolute must in the natural handling of eczema." You can also add any natural sea salt, as well as Himalayan and Epsom salts, which are also high in magnesium, to your bath to help relax your muscles. So, next time you hear someone giving salt a bad name, pipe up.

disorders. "Salt therapy offers the benefits of sea air when you are miles away from the nearest coastline," she says. "The negatively charged ions in natural salt help your body to relax, and the benefits are endless, varying from improved sleep to weight loss and elevated moods." If you want to practise salt therapy at home, choose a relaxing space that's free from distractions, where you can sit calmly and practise deep breathing techniques. A Himalayan salt lamp can serve the dual purpose of adding tranquil lighting to your room and improving the air quality. "A salt lamp is an easy way to fill your home with negatively charged ions and they put out an attractive pinky glow," says Antonia. "They fill your home with mineral goodness which may elevate your mood, raise your energy levels and sharpen your concentration." Medical herbalist Pamela Spence also swears by the use of salt lamps for relaxation: "This would be the closest to sitting in a salt cave that we could recreate in our homes," she says.

NH Circle



"SALT IS WELL KNOWN FOR BEING GREAT FOR THE SKIN. WHEN MY ECZEMA FLARES UP, I DISSOLVE A CUP OF SALT IN A BATH OF WARM WATER – IT'S ALSO VERY RELAXING."

