



6 ways to thrive THIS WINTER

Are the shorter days starting to dampen your spirit? Treat yourself to one of these six therapies, which will help to melt away troubles and warm your body from head to toe

Dark days, cold temperatures, low moods – winter can be a glum time of year. And for many of us, it means spending more time indoors and less time feeling inspired to look after our health and wellbeing. However, with colds and flu rife at this time of year, it's

more important than ever to take care of your body – and there's a horde of therapies out there that can help you to do just that. Each of these treatments take around 60 minutes, depending on location, method and cost, and will leave you feeling instantly more zen.

Hot stone massage

Hot stone massage involves smooth, heated stones made from basalt or jade being applied to the body to help warm the muscles and provide a deep, relaxing massage. "As well as using the stones as a massage tool, your therapist may also place stones on or under your body for a short period of time – including between your toes and in your hands – to aid relaxation and restore balance," explains Maria Mason, salon owner and vice president of the FHT (fht.org.uk). "A skin-nourishing oil is either massaged into your body before the stones are used or applied directly to the stones before they come into contact with your body. Depending on the type of hot stone massage, cold stones may also be used to boost circulation and reduce inflammation."

Lava Shell massage

An original Lava Shell massage uses carefully selected, recycled tiger clam shells from the Philippines. "Unlike the stones used in a hot stone massage, which need to be warmed up in a special heater, these pretty shells are self-heating and stay warm throughout the duration of the massage," Maria explains. "The shells are activated by the therapist before the massage treatment, by placing a sachet of food-grade minerals inside the shell and then adding a saline solution, which react together to produce heat. Having already applied oil to the skin, the shells glide smoothly over the body and can be used to address a variety of concerns, from easing aching muscles and joints, to soothing digestive complaints."

Shirodhara

Shirodhara is a therapy unique to Ayurveda, the traditional medicine system of India. It involves warm, herb-infused oil being gently and steadily poured over the forehead across the third eye, which is considered to be the seat of intuition and spirituality. "I often travel overseas to experience and learn new therapies in their country of origin," says Maria. "This includes shirodhara, which I found to be a deeply relaxing treatment. It is particularly effective at soothing the nervous system, helping to ease stress, anxiety and nervousness, while simultaneously providing clarity and strength of mind."

Candle massage

Fear not! The candles used for this type of treatment are not like the ones we burn at home, but are specially formulated for massage, containing a range of nourishing ingredients that work in harmony with the skin. "The candle is lit just prior to treatment and, once melted, it is gently poured onto the body and massaged into the skin," Maria explains. "The candles we use at my salon contain pure, natural ingredients, including beeswax, soya, coconut oil and essential oils. As well as soothing and hydrating the skin, the oils produce a wonderful aroma, which remains on the skin long after treatment and adds to the whole therapeutic experience."

Warm bamboo massage

Thought to originate from Asia, this massage uses heated bamboo sticks of varying lengths and diameters to massage the whole body. "The sticks are used lengthways, in a roller-like fashion, to warm, stretch and knead the muscles," Maria explains. "The ends of the bamboo can also be used to work knots or different pressure points. It's a great treatment for tackling tight muscles and sore spots, which makes it particularly popular with clients who enjoy cycling, running and other sports, or simply prefer a firmer massage."

Thai herbal compress massage

Practised in Thailand for hundreds of years, this ancient form of massage uses a herbal compress to treat the whole body. "Each compress contains up to 14 special herbs and spices, which all have different therapeutic actions," says Maria. "Lemongrass, turmeric, kaffir lime and tamarind are often used as base herbs, with the entire blend wrapped tightly into a muslin ball, which is then steamed to release its medicinal properties. The therapist systematically presses the compress over the body, incorporating lovely long stretches and other massage techniques to help soothe muscles, reduce swelling, boost circulation and induce a feeling of deep relaxation."

DIY WAYS TO STAY WARM THIS WINTER

KEEP ON MOVING

Stuck outside on a cold day? Whether you're waiting for a train or cheering someone on at football, try to keep moving. Walk up and down the platform or football pitch to boost your circulation and stay warm.

COVER UP

Our heads, hands and feet are more likely to feel the cold than larger and more central parts of the body, so invest in a good hat, gloves and socks to minimise heat loss.

TEA WITH A KICK

A hot cuppa is always great for warming the hands and body. Pick a herbal tea that contains a favourite spice, such as chilli or ginger, for an added kick.

A SOOTHING SOAK

We all know that having a warm bath with our favourite natural products is deeply relaxing, but if you have a soak just before bedtime, it will reduce your core body temperature and help you to go to sleep.

DIP YOUR TOES

Not keen on baths? Soak your feet in a bowl of warm water while you enjoy reading *Natural Health*. Add milk or honey to soften your skin or Epsom salts to tackle foot odour and athlete's foot.

WARMING WHEAT BAG

Feeling creative? Search online for some simple instructions on how to make a warming lavender wheat or rice bag, or you can even buy a kit in the shape of your favourite animal.

The Federation of Holistic Therapists (FHT) is the UK and Ireland's largest professional association for complementary, holistic beauty and sports therapists. Founded in 1962, the FHT has been promoting the highest standards in therapy education and practice for more than 50 years. Find a professional therapist near you at fht.org.uk/findatherapist