

Salt Therapy

There has been a boom in recent years in the availability of 'salt therapy' (halotherapy/speleopathy), an alternative therapy method which claims to benefit respiratory health.

What is it?

'Salt Therapy' refers to a range of techniques where salt particles are inhaled with the aim of improving symptoms of lung disease. This might be through relaxing in salt-caves, or artificial salt rooms, which are coated in salt and which have salt particles pumped into the air for visitors to inhale. Other methods use salt pipes, inhalers or other devices. Salt Therapy is said to benefit a range of conditions, from cystic fibrosis to asthma, eczema and even bronchiectasis and COPD.

What's the Evidence?

There is some historical and anecdotal (word-of-mouth) evidence to support the idea of salt caves being of benefit to people's respiratory health.¹ However, there is no scientific evidence that salt therapy will have this impact. In addition, those who promote salt therapy do not always agree on the type or amount of salt to be used, the method, or the benefits. Their claims are not based on any reliable scientific research or current medical guidelines.²

Caution!

Chairman of Lung Foundation Australia, Professor Christine Jenkins has said, "there are concerns about the possibility of the warm, moist environment in these salt rooms providing opportunity for the growth of various other bacteria of concern. In addition, salt can irritate the airways."³

Lung Foundation Australia is not alone in warning caution about salt therapy. Asthma Australia has also refused to recommend the therapy, explaining that it can trigger a tightening of the airways. Respiratory specialists sometimes use inhalation of concentrated saline (salt) solutions as part of a lung function test, to trigger asthma attacks in patients suspected of having asthma. Without this professional supervision, exposure to salt-enriched air could be potentially dangerous for those with a respiratory condition.⁴

Alternative Therapies

Professor Christine Jenkins has advised that the idea of inhaling salty water (hypertonic saline) is, however, a valid therapy suitable for some. There is good evidence that it can reduce exacerbations for patients with cystic fibrosis⁵, and on this basis some experts believe that it might be a useful therapy and will prescribe it for some patients with non-CF bronchiectasis.⁶

Lung Foundation Australia recommends people with a lung condition exercise great caution in the use of salt therapies. We advise you to discuss salt therapy with your General Practitioner or Respiratory Specialist.

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¹ Asthma Australia 2012, *Salt Therapy* http://www.asthmaaustralia.org.au/onAIR/Salt_Rooms.aspx?terms=salt%20therapy Accessed 19/03/2014

² Asthma Australia 2012. *Asthma and Salt Therapy – treatment or consequence?* http://www.asthmaaustralia.org.au/QLD/Asthma_and_Salt_Therapy.aspx?terms=salt%20therapy, Accessed 19/03/2014

³ Lung Foundation Australia 2012, *LungNet News*, November 2012, Q&A www.lungfoundation.com.au Accessed 19/03/14

⁴ Asthma Australia, *ibid*.

⁵ Elkins M. et al. January 19, 2006, *A Controlled Trial of Long-Term Inhaled Hypertonic Saline in Patients with Cystic Fibrosis* *N Engl J Medicine* <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa043900> or DOI: 10.1056/NEJMoa043900.

⁶ Lung Foundation Australia, *ibid*.