AIR BATHING

The airbath is one of the fundamental therapies of traditional naturopathy. Unfortunately, like so many of those truly natural therapies popularized during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the airbath has fallen into obscurity.

To the 21st century individual, whose understanding of health and disease is largely shaped by allopathic medical dogma and pharmaceutical industry indoctrination, the idea that regularly exposing the entire skin surface to the air around it has therapeutic value, seems quaint and improbable.
However, the power to cure disease resides only within the patient's body, and that innate power cannot fully prevail until the fundamental elements of life and health, in necessary measure, have been set in place, namely: proper diet; pure water; fresh air; sunlight; adequate exercise, warmth, rest and sleep emotional harmony; proper posture.

Accordingly, if a substance is not fundamental to the health of the body, it's also not fundamental to the treatment of disease. From this view comes the most important therapeutic principle of traditional naturopathy: Disease treatment must be based upon the use of the fundamental elements of life in accordance with the needs and abilities of the individual.

James C. Jackson, M.D., a noted 19th century physician and natural health teacher observed:
"Air is considered by us as a sine qua non (essential element or condition) to restoration. It is so refreshing, so recuperative, so calculated to restore the body to healthful conditions, and so easily obtained, as to leave those who forbear to use it for the benefit of the sick without justification".

THE HEALING POWER OF AIR

An airbath involves the exposure of the undressed body to the swirling currents of moving air. Though deceptively simple, it's actually an extraordinarily effective restorer of vitality and balanced nerve activity. Benjamin Franklin was notably fond of taking airbaths, especially during his workday, claiming it enabled him to think more clearly. In The Practice of Nature-Cure, a great early 20th century naturopath Henry Lindlahr, MD writes:

> ***" Who would think of keeping plants or animals covered up, away from the air and light? We know they would wither and waste away before long...civilized human beings have for ages hidden their bodies most carefully from sun and air, which are so necessary to their well-being...the human skin has become so enervated that often it has lost the power to perform freely and efficiently...undoubtedly, this has much to do with the prevalence of various types of ill health."***

His son, Victor Lindlahr, MD, also a noted nature-oriented physician, remarks in The Natural Way to Health:

> **"The action of the skin can be stimulated by three simple procedures: sunbaths, water applications and airbaths. *And, strangely enough the most imposing results are obtained by the simplest of all - the airbath."***

RESPIRATION

Air is to humans what water is to fish. It's not enough to breathe-in air through the nostrils while wholly neglecting the skin's breathing function. Like the lungs, the skin takes-in oxygen and throws-off carbon dioxide. Hiding the body under synthetic and/or heavy, tight-fitting clothing seals-off the skin from the life-stimulating influence of air.

BLOOD CIRCULATION

Since the skin is the primary organ involved in the regulation of blood-flow through the capillaries, some scientists feel it does as much work toward the proper circulation of blood as does the heart. The skin capillaries have approximately 800-times the combined cross-section area of the aorta, the largest artery in the body.

EXCRETION

Healthy skin removes a significant amount of metabolic waste and toxins each day. Sometimes referred to as the " third kidney," it is actually the body's largest elimination organ.
Sweating is one of the primary mechanisms by which the skin excretes toxins. You do not need to sweat freely in order to remove toxins through the skin. Approximately one quart (one liter) of insensible perspiration, the type of sweating that you are not conscious of, evaporates from the skin surface each day.

While the chief role of sweating is thermo-regulation (regulation of body temperature), sweat also contains waste byproducts of the body's metabolism of nitrogen including ammonia and urea.

Ninety-nine percent of perspiration is water. The remaining one percent consists primarily of waste products. This is one of the reasons that sauna therapy, especially using a far infra-red sauna, can provide important therapeutic benefit. Some physicians recommend at-home sauna therapy to support the detoxifying action of kidney dialysis.

Perspiration also moves out lactic acid, the accumulation of which gives rise to muscle stiffness and soreness and exacerbates fatigue. Sweat may also contain toxic metals such as lead, and mercury which the body absorbs when exposed to pollution or mercury amalgams (tooth fillings).

In times of kidney failure, the skin will begin to eliminate a urine-like excretion. The skin may develop a yellowish brown discoloration and the urea found in sweat may crystallize on the skin forming what is referred to as uremic frost.

Also, dead skin cells are a form of bodily waste and their removal helps facilitate the growth of new epidermal cells. The skin should shed 30,000 to 40,000 dead skin cells every minute, all of which have to be immediately replaced by fresh skin cells.

When avenues to circulating air are closed-off, the skin is forced to reabsorb poisons that it's attempting to excrete. The habit of overdressing and underexposing the skin to revitalizing currents of air weakens the skin, reducing its tone and efficiency as an organ of excretion, respiration and circulation.

SKIN QUALITY REFLECTS ONE'S LEVEL OF HEALTH

In earlier times, physicians considered the condition of the skin to be a crucial measure of the patient's vitality: the less vital the skin, the poorer the prognosis. Healthy skin is warm and supple. Unhealthy skin tends to be cold, overly dry or oily, sallow or dingy, all of which are signs of defective nutrition and chronic congestion of the internal organs, resulting in a deficiency of blood and an accumulation of waste in the skin.

AIR AND VITAL FORCE (CHI)

Fresh air contains the essence of life -vital force or chi. Vital force or chi is the fundamental energy that sustains life and is present in the vibratory, biological processes of every cell. All physiological activities are evidence of the presence of vital force. Vital force differentiates life from death. Living organisms extract much of their daily quotient of vital force from the air.

Importantly, blood and vital force sustain each others viability. Vital force has movement and so activates the movement of all physiological processes including blood circulation. On the other hand, the blood nourishes vital force and thus serves as its basis within the body.

The airbath, by its stimulation of vital force and skin capillary circulation not only supports circulation of the blood but also purifies it, thus invigorating the entire system. Clearly, the airbath is of the most basic health-giving gifts provided by Nature.

OBJECTIVE OF THE AIRBATH

Airbaths allow cooling air currents to stimulate contraction and dilation of your skin's capillaries. When the skin is cooled, pores and surface capillaries initially contract, after which, warming blood rushes to the surface and causes dilation of pores and capillaries.

This phenomenon of generating a warming of the skin in response to a slight chill is referred to as a

warming reaction. Such skin-gymnastics exercise skin pores, blood vessels and glands while encouraging improved skin circulation, oxidation and elimination. Importantly, this warming reaction must take place in order for the airbath to be of benefit.

HOW TO TAKE AN AIRBATH

NOTE: The two major factors to always be aware of in this regard are air temperature and the person's level of vitality. Always use common sense. Less is often more in the case of weak, ill, elderly or very young individuals.

The best time for your airbath is during fresh morning hours or just before bedtime to refresh the skin before a good night's sleep. If at all possible, the airbath should be taken outdoors; it's most invigorating on breezy days.

If this is impractical, it may be taken by a private, open window. Compared to the air outdoors, indoor air is relatively stagnant, but a well-ventilated room, especially one with cross-ventilation, will serve the purpose.

The airbath may last from one minute to one hour, according to the ability of the skin to react and rewarm itself as well as season of the year. Sensitive individuals might begin with airbaths of only one minute–or even less if feeling chilly.

The experience at all times must feel pleasant; the skin must not be allowed to become chilly beyond the body's ability to restore its warmth. An airbath that produces chill without reactive warming is weakening rather than strengthening. The less-than-hearty person's circulation will benefit from a vigorous towel-rubbing of the skin (cotton towel) following an airbath.

During cooler months, airbaths will naturally be of shorter duration, although it's not unusual to find that at this time of year one might feel less cold following a proper airbath than when dressed. This is due to the fact that the skin's circulation will more readily react to the stimulus of cool, fresh air than to the stagnant air trapped between clothing and skin.

On a cool day, exercising can make the airbath more effective and pleasurable. Also, after a vigorous rub-down with a coarse cotton towel, a hearty individual may wish to follow with a brief (10- to 20-seconds) cool shower or quick, cool water-rub for an even more invigorating effect.

On warmer days, occasional cool showers or bath-sprays during the extended airbath heighten its tonic effects. I named a wonderfully invigorating experience the Rain Bath. On a warm, rainy day in a private area, one might airbathe while walking about in the rain. when you do this, breathe deeply in through the nose and out through the mouth and occasionally hand-rub the skin.

Continue your Rain Bath for several minutes until the skin feels slightly chilly. Follow with a vigorous towel-rub and quickly dress. Also, a warm, breeze can add a refreshing dimension to your airbath. Exercise generates the sought-after warming reaction. Deep-breathing exercises encourage stronger circulation, so they are especially effective during the airbath.