



HEALTH

Home / Wellness / Mind

# The Sweet (and Therapeutic) Truth About Salt Caves

Take a relaxing break from your regularly scheduled life – and help your body and mind at the same time.

By **Stacey Colino**, Contributor Sept. 13, 2017

**THE IDEA OF SITTING IN** a salt cave to reap health benefits may sound primitive, but it's becoming an increasingly popular activity in [spa-like settings around the U.S.](#) Designed to simulate the environment of Himalayan salt caves, these cozy grottos feature literally tons of crystal salt rock, a dim glow provided by rock lamps, reclining chairs and soothing instrumental background music. Meanwhile, during a session, a machine outside the room (called a halogenerator) grinds dry salt and pumps micro particles of it into the air, which is kept at low humidity and approximately 70 degrees. The setting is a bit like a meditation or [yoga class](#) – without any mantras or downward-facing dog poses. You simply sit quietly and breathe the refined air, as you relax and clear your mind.

The treatment, known as dry salt therapy (or halotherapy), dates back hundreds of years to Eastern Europe and is purported to confer a variety of health benefits. These include relief from respiratory ailments such as asthma, allergies, bronchitis, [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease](#), colds, cystic fibrosis, ear infections and sinusitis, as well as skin conditions like acne, eczema, psoriasis, rashes and [rosacea](#), according to the Salt Therapy Association.



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facial plastic surgeon in New York City who was a 9/11 first responder. "Saline in the lungs is key to eliminating toxins that we either inhale or otherwise come into contact with, and salt allows the body to excrete impurities through ion exchange." Indeed, Himalayan salt emits negative ions that are absorbed by your body when you inhale them; these ions are important for daily activities such as fluid exchange and balance and conduction of muscles and nerves, Leinhardt explains. Meanwhile, salt also has [antibacterial](#), anti-inflammatory and antifungal properties that can fight germs.



The perks aren't simply theoretical. A study in the May 2017 issue of Pediatric Pulmonology found that [children with mild asthma](#) who went for two halotherapy sessions per week for seven weeks gained greater improvements in their bronchial hyperreactivity (constrictions and spasms that cause asthma symptoms) than a control group did. A small study in a 2014 issue of the Journal of Medicine and Life found that when patients with chronic bronchial conditions underwent halotherapy, it triggered anti-inflammatory mechanisms and stimulation of phagocytosis, a process in which cells called phagocytes engulf bacterial or viral particles to destroy them.

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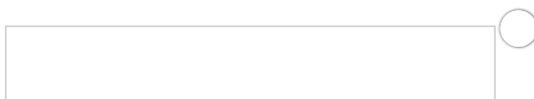
Meanwhile, breathing in salty air "decreases the thickness of the mucous, thereby allowing the body's innate clearing mechanisms to sweep away the secretions, improving drainage and diminishing bronchial sensitivity," explains Dr. Joseph Marino, medical director of Long Island Jewish Valley Stream Hospital in New York. In addition, "the efficacy of halotherapy [may] be related to an immunologic effect by elevating T lymphocytes, which are one of our germ fighters." Theoretically, this could translate into better immune function and greater protection from [colds, flu and other contagious illnesses](#).



In addition to the anti-inflammatory properties, the salts used in halotherapy have calming properties that are helpful for [skin conditions such as psoriasis and eczema](#), and these particular "salts contain magnesium, which offers therapeutic benefits to the skin," says Dr. Joshua Zeichner, director of cosmetic and clinical research in dermatology at the [Mount Sinai Hospital](#) in New York City. "Epsom salt, which is magnesium sulfate, is commonly used as a bath additive for similar reasons." In fact, bathing in water that contains magnesium-rich Dead Sea salt even improves skin barrier function and reduces inflammation in people who have atopic dry skin (an allergic skin condition), according to research in the International Journal of Dermatology.

Still, since salt tends to bring water out of the body's membranes, it's wise to replace fluids after a salt cave session by [drinking water](#), using a saline mist for your nasal passages and lubricating drops for your eyes, Leinhardt advises. Similarly, frequent sessions may cause some dryness of the skin, which is why it's smart to rinse your skin afterward then apply a [moisturizer](#) to maintain a healthy skin barrier, Zeichner says.

**[See: [10 Ways to Break a Bad Mood.](#)]**





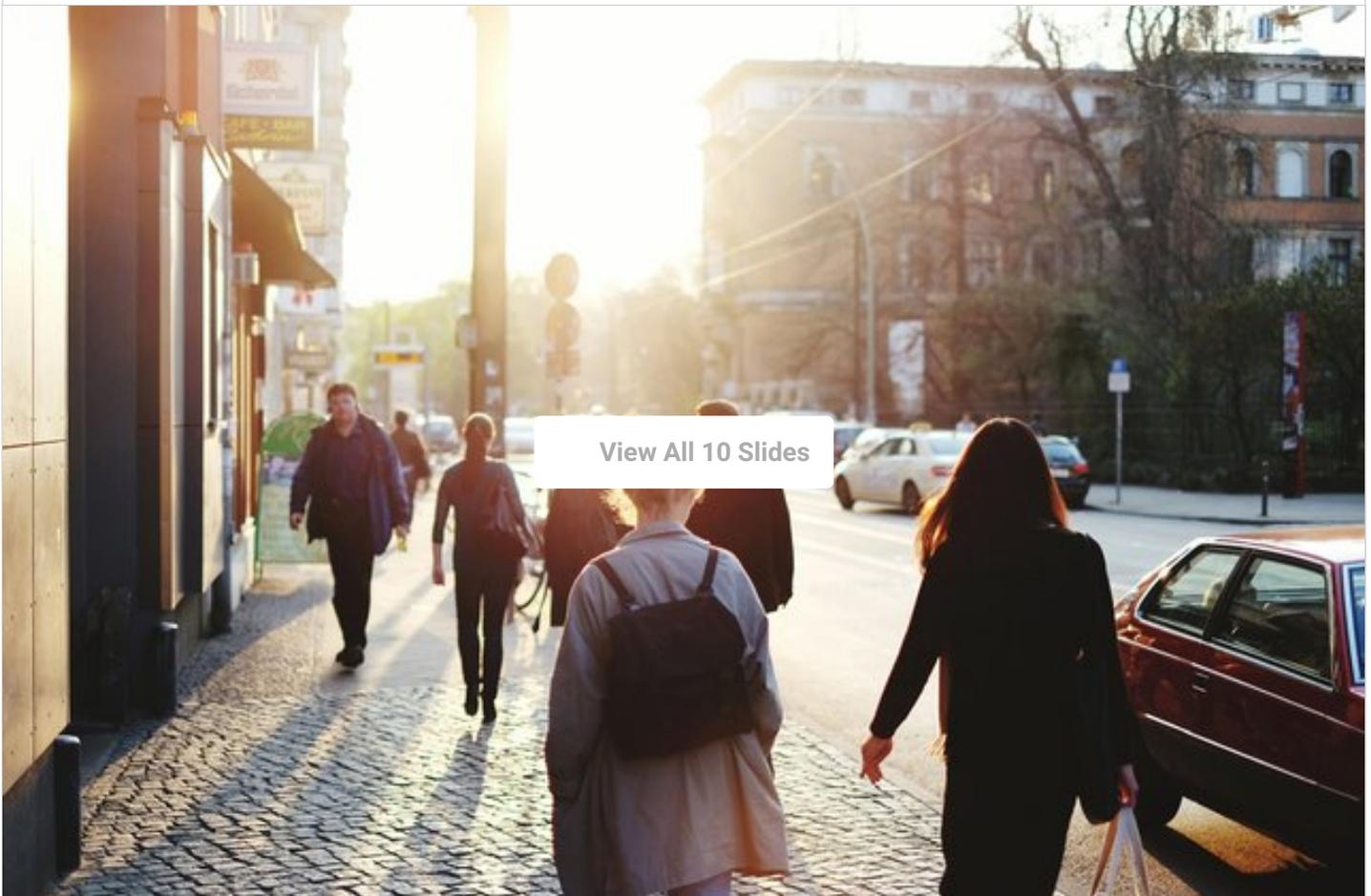
researchers found that while most women who purchased salt cave sessions were seeking relief from problems with their throats, larynxes or sinuses, men were equally seeking [therapeutic and relaxation effects](#). Regardless of their reasons, they generally reported feeling better after the sessions.



This isn't surprising, given that "these settings are tranquil," Leinhardt says. You'll need to turn off, [unplug and disconnect from your regularly scheduled life](#), which means it's inherently time well spent in our 24/7, stressful world. With an investment of approximately \$40 for a 45-minute session, leaving a relaxing salt cave session with a calmer mind and a sounder body is likely to be in your best interest for countless reasons.

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**Stacey Colino, Contributor**

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