

Flotation Therapy

History

- The idea of the flotation tank, originally referred to as the “sensory isolation tank”, was pioneered by American neurophysiologist and psychoanalyst Dr. John C. Lilly in 1954.
- His research with regard to the float tank concentrated on human responses to sensory deprivation.
- The results of his research on this topic were surprising. He discovered that, instead of the person’s mind moving into a sleep state, the brain instead increases its activity, allowing for improved problem solving abilities and increased clarity of mind.

Description

- The density of the water is such that it provides the floater with the ability to float with complete buoyancy. 1000 pounds of Epsom salt is added to 10 inches of water, which makes it impossible for the patient to sink.
- The water inside the float tank is maintained at a constant temperature which is very close to the temperature of human skin. This assures that the floater is protected from the unpleasant sensation of overly hot and cold temperature.
- An alternative name that has been given to flotation therapy is R.E.S.T. therapy. R.E.S.T. is an acronym for Restricted Environment Stimulation Technique. Just as the name implies, the idea behind R.E.S.T. is based on the premise that, in today’s fast-paced world, we are constantly subjected to external stimuli and stress, so much so that we experience sensory overload. Flotation therapy is a therapeutic modality whereby almost all external stimuli are screened out. This greatly reduces the central nervous system’s workload, and allows the floater to focus his or her energies inward to promote healing.

Floating For Stress/Pain Management

- Flotation therapy can be a very effective tool for stress management, as outside stimuli are almost eliminated and central nervous activity slows considerably.
- With nothing to react to, the floater’s levels of the stress hormones epinephrine and adrenaline are decreased, while the levels of **endorphins** increase. These “feel good” substances are produced in the body by the pituitary gland and the hypothalamus, and work as natural pain relievers.
- With the promotion of relaxation also comes the promotion of the parasympathetic response (Paradise, 2009). The parasympathetic response allows the body to naturally balance itself out chemically and metabolically, allowing healing to take place.
- A recent study measuring the effects of flotation R.E.S.T. on chronic pain yielded some promising results. 37 patients suffering from chronic pain participated in the study, with 17 patients in the control group and 20 in the experimental group. The results of the study showed that those who had been suffering the most severe pain saw their pain levels drop appreciably after nine sessions in the float tank over a period of three weeks. The study also saw the patients’ levels of optimism rise and levels of depression and anxiety decrease (Kjellgren A., 2001).

- Also, flotation therapy is important in terms of being a small component in a larger, more comprehensive pain management program (Fine, Barrie). Relief from pain is noticed immediately during and immediately following floating and this can allow for a more positive outlook from the patient about the success of a more comprehensive pain-management program. Studies show that flotation therapy, along with other techniques, such as counseling and relaxation activities, worked more effectively than just one of these therapies alone (Fine, Barrie). At A Better Way Hypnotherapy, we utilize flotation therapy as an important single component to a larger biobehavioral-based treatment program

Floating for Increased Motivation/Elimination of Addictive Behaviors

- The use of flotation therapy for the elimination of addictive behaviors has been well-documented. It seems to be particularly effective when used as a complement to other therapies, including hypnotherapy (David).
- Studies with follow-ups from 18 months to 5 years show an average abstinence from smoking rate of about 50 % when flotation therapy is combined with other treatments (David). This is a much higher average than other single-treatment modalities. For example, the nicotine patch alone has been found to be only 5 % effective, while the use of antidepressants have been 40 to 50 % effective, but without long-term follow-up studies (David).
- The way flotation therapy seems to help with regard to addictive behaviors and motivation again centers around its role in facilitating the release of endorphins. These natural pain relieving substances seem to help with the unpleasant withdrawal symptoms associated with addiction (<http://floatforhealth.net/motivation.htm>). In this way, flotation therapy offers the important benefit of helping eliminate cravings, thus decreasing the chance of a relapse episode (David).
- The relaxing nature of the therapy also influences the floater to have a more positive outlook on the rest of the treatment program and to be more open to suggestions made by the practitioner (<http://floatforhealth.net/motivation.htm>).

Effects of Flotation Therapy on the Mind

- When a person lies in a flotation tank, the brain gradually begins to relax, and brain waves shift from higher frequency Beta, to Alpha, and eventually Theta.
- As the brain waves shift into the Theta stage, endorphins are released which help to alleviate pain and fatigue and provide the floater with an overall sense of wellbeing (Paradise, 2009).
- Usually, the Theta stage is reached only before falling asleep for a brief period, but flotation therapy allows the person to enter the theta stage for a longer period, usually for a few minutes during the last half-hour portion of an hour long float session (<http://floatforhealth.net/creativity.htm>). During the Theta stage, the person experiences clear mental imagery (<http://floatforhealth.net/creativity.htm>). The Theta stage allows access to the right brain, which is associated with increased alertness, creativity, mental clarity, problem solving ability, and learning (<http://www.floatationtankassociation.net/>).

Additional Benefits

- The Epsom salts used in the float tank reduce swelling and draw toxins from the body (Paradise, 2009).
- Reduces heart rate and blood pressure while increasing overall circulation in the body (Paradise,2009).
- Flotation Therapy has been used to enhance scientific creativity, artistic performance, and sports performance.

Sources:

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<http://floatforhealth.net/motivation.htm>

<http://floatforhealth.net/creativity.htm>

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