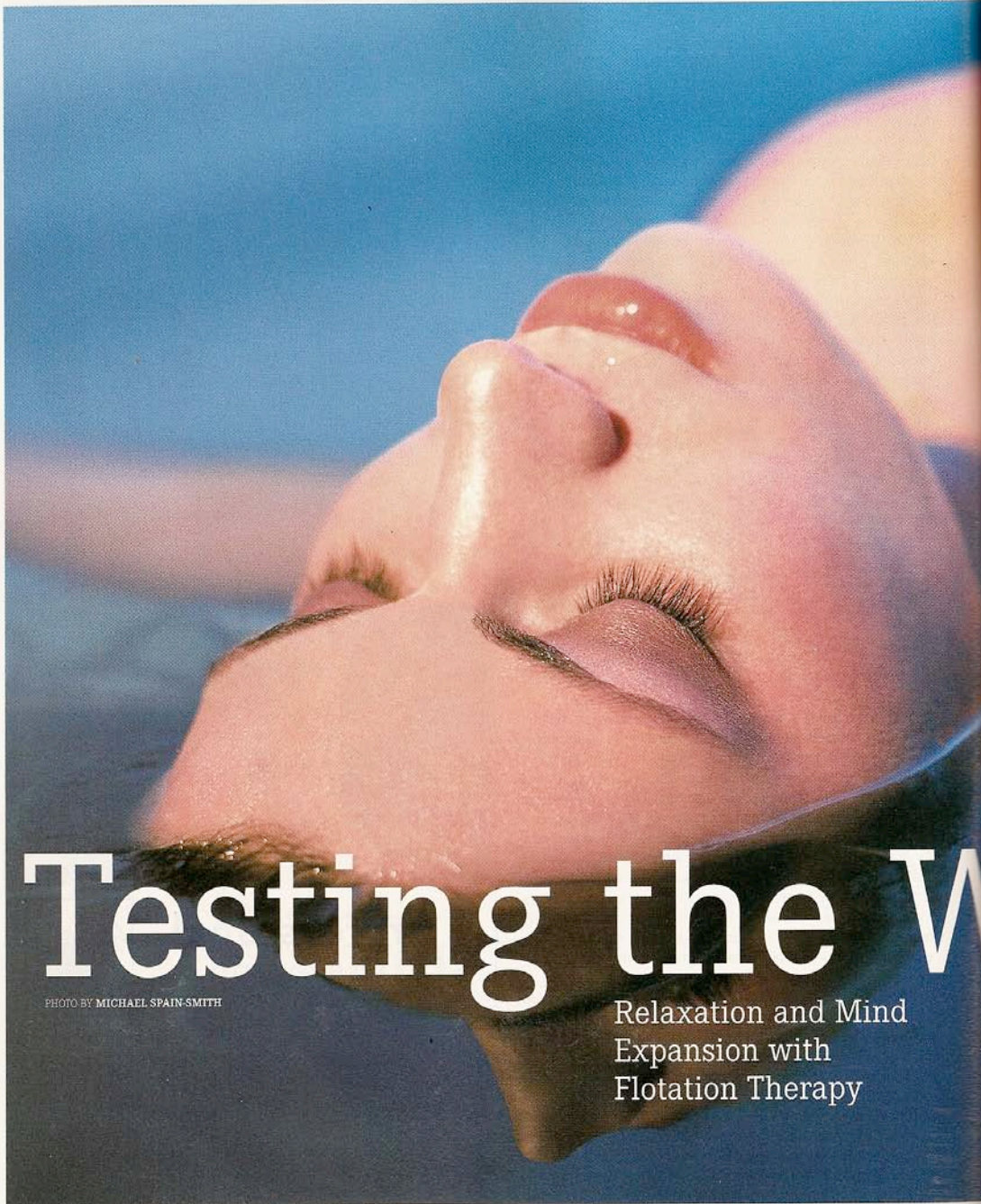


BODY & SOUL



Testing the W

PHOTO BY MICHAEL SPAIN-SMITH

Relaxation and Mind
Expansion with
Flotation Therapy

HAIR & MAKEUP: CHRISTY MCCABE | MODEL: DARCEE LUSICANO, EXPRESSIONS | PHOTO ASSISTANT: RYAN PENNY



aters...

BY MELODY LESSER

Imagine floating naked in a tub of water that is so dense with Epsom salt, it is impossible to sink, or even roll over. The water temperature is set and controlled to stay between 93.5 and 94.5 degrees, which is the same as your skin temperature. Your environment is virtually shut off from the outside world. Neither the cars on the street nor the ringing of a telephone enter your consciousness. As you float effortlessly, you feel your stresses drift away. Your muscles relax; your breathing gets deeper. You are unaware of the passage of time. You might even fall asleep in this isolated environment. When you are roused from this state, you feel relaxed yet invigorated, and the benefits of the floating experience stay with you for days.

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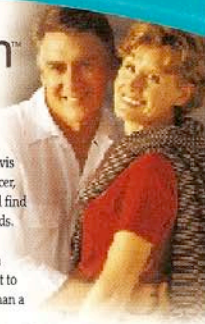
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AGE-OLD THERAPY GOES NEW AGE

Mineral spa flotation therapy is not new. For 2,000 years, men and women have dipped into the waters of the Dead Sea, hoping to find a cure for everything from skin diseases to muscle aches to the effects of stress. But if a trip to the Middle East is not part of your immediate travel plans, a visit to HighTech Flotation Spa in Levittown, PA, might be. Close your eyes, de-stress and tune into subconscious thoughts as you float in a heated, private spa filled with 1,000 pounds of Epsom salts. (You'll recall their therapeutic benefits if you've ever had to soak a sprained ankle.) If you're disturbed by the sound of silence, bring your own music or tune into one of the spa's selections. For those of you who don't like to feel unproductive at any time, even during relaxation, plug in an educational tape. Floating is said to encourage the brain's theta waves, the level of consciousness where input is absorbed.

Flotation therapy, or Flotation REST (Restricted Environmental Stimulation Therapy/Technique) was developed in the 1950s by Dr. John C. Lilly. He believed that up to 85 percent of central nervous system activity was spent dealing with light, sound and holding the body up against the force of gravity. By restricting or eliminating these stimuli, the body and brain are free to relax. "We're subject to the effects of gravity all day long," says Andy Vendetti, president of HighTech Flotation. "Add to that light, sound and temperature, the sensory nutrients that your body is exposed to, and it's no wonder that you're tired at the end of the day. Even lying in bed, you're being pulled into the mattress by gravity. The blood pools down to the lowest point, so your brain, which is always on, tells you to roll over. That's one of the reasons you're always moving around in your sleep. When you lay flat on your back in a water solution that's five times denser than your body, and therefore supports you and makes it impossible to sink, your body no longer has to fight gravity."

Flotation therapy has been said to lower blood pressure and speed up the healing process of muscles and joints. Other benefits include improved sleep, concentration and heightened creativity. You've heard of the right brain/left brain theory, whereby the left hemisphere of the brain excels at details and processing information and the right hemisphere is the seat of intuition and creativity. By eliminating external stimuli and effectively turning off the left hemisphere of the brain, the right hemisphere is free to wander, according to Vendetti.

Floating releases endorphins and the benefits of a float can last for up to four days, says Vendetti. And although no particular expertise is required, learning to get maximum benefits from floating is gained through repetition. "Floating is a tool you can use to give yourself a tune up. Every time you float, you learn how to use that tool a little better."

Just 25 miles outside of Center City, Hi-Tech Flotation offers float sessions by appointment, which can be scheduled throughout the week up until 8 p.m. They recommend that you float regularly—about three times per week initially. A typical float session lasts about an hour and costs \$40. The choice to float with or without clothing is up to you. The spa is equipped with a private dressing area, private shower, and, according to Vendetti, "It has its own filtration system and the solution is totally sanitary. No bacteria or virus can live in salt." If you would prefer to float at home, Vendetti, along with his partner, Dave Seefelt, who designs float spas, can customize one for you. If you're handy, they offer a do-it-yourself kit that starts at \$2,700. **For more information, call 215-547-6116 or 888-saltspa.**

WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE

Some consider it hedonistic; others consider it a necessity. But having scented oils rubbed into your skin prior to soaking in a heated tub is not a modern treat. The ancient Romans built public baths, complete with libraries and surrounded by beautiful gardens, where they'd spend long afternoons luxuriating with friends while attendants massaged, perfumed and generally pampered them as they soaked. Louis Christian Wayne-Robert Salon and Spa in Cherry Hill presents a couple of new twists on an age-old ritual. Lisa Landers, the spa manager, explains their Soft Pack Cocoon Body Treatment. "It was invented in Europe by a doctor who used it as a therapeutic tool. It relaxes everything to the point where pain actually disappears."

After a total body moisturizing treatment—choose from a menu that includes, among others, The Body Ageless, which uses evening primrose cream that purports to prevent premature aging of the skin, and The Body Slimmer, which has minerals from the Dead Sea that, according to the spa's literature, "purge toxins from the body and increase your metabolism." You are wrapped in scented and moisturizer-infused fleece sheets and submerged into 50 gallons of heated water. "You don't get wet during this process," says Landers. "Instead, a hollow, plastic blanket that is attached to the bed fills up with water." So, in essence, all but your head is wrapped in a water-filled cocoon. "You have the sensation of weightlessness as your body is submerged." The lights are dimmed; candles are lit. "The heat relaxes the body and penetrates the products on your skin." Clothing is optional, as is a shower afterwards, but says Landers, "We recommend that you don't shower. We like the moisture to stay on the skin

for a few hours, and we highly suggest a massage afterwards. It is so effective you can still see evidence of the moisture up to four weeks later." The fee for this treatment, which takes about 45 minutes, is \$75.

The Vichy Shower Room—named after the city in France that is the site of renowned mineral springs—is the location of choice if you are seeking an invigorating experience. "Water makes people feel alive, and that's what this experience does," says Landers. Clients can choose from three different body scrubs and three different wraps. "You get very wet in this room. The technician does all the work, using various body sprays to invigorate the skin, from head to toe, front and back." Those who are confident can experience this in the buff. For those who may be more modest, wearing a bathing suit is fine. At some point, you are left alone, as you lay on your stomach, while warm sprays of water play along the length of your body. "That's the time you use for relaxation. Afterwards, the technician comes back in, dries you off and does a complete moisturizing treatment." After this experience, says the spa's literature, "You'll never want to shower standing up again."

"The perfect half-day," according to Landers, "is to go from the invigoration of the Vichy Shower Room to the Soft Pack Cocoon Body Treatment for relaxation. Then, dedicate an hour for a massage."

The spa, which has been open since last spring, was designed to make the client feel like they are in a state of meditation and relaxation. "I was the first one in," says Landers, of the Soft Pack Cocoon. "When you come out, your entire mind, body and soul are in a state of total relaxation." To schedule a session or to arrange for a gift certificate, call the spa at 856-751-2233. ■



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