



Pamper party

**SELF-INDULGENCE OR
SELF-HELP? GET THE
REAL STORY ON
WHETHER SPAS DO A
BODY GOOD**

SCENTED CANDLES. CHECK. Fuzzy bathrobe. Check. Serene atmosphere. Yes, indeed. Let the relaxation and beautifying begin! Oh, and swipe that credit card while you're at it. Sound like your last trip to the spa? While it's a guaranteed feel-good way to spend your downtime, *More* wanted to know whether visiting a spa offers anything apart from freshly polished fingers and toes. In other words, can a case be made that going to the spa is actually healthy?

Wendy Smeltzer thinks so. "There are so many treatments in spas that can be of benefit," says the medical director of Santé Spa in Calgary and former chair of the Leading Spas of Canada's standards and practices committee. "They may not be a cure for disease or reduce your need for prescriptions — they're not meant to do that — but they can certainly help improve well-being."

Okay, stress reduction is good for you, right? While it's not exactly groundbreaking news that immersing yourself in a relaxing environment can have positive effects on the way you feel, there is some compelling evidence to back up your monthly (or yearly) day to yourself. How do we know?

Taking a trip?



GOOD FOR YOU - YOU'VE EARNED IT! You've worked hard, balancing work, personal lives, and taking care of everyone at the same time. Millions of Canadians travel south every year seeking sunshine and break up the long winter months.

TRAVEL CHECKLIST

- ✓ Leave a copy of your itinerary (flights and hotel) on your fridge at home so family and friends know where you are in case of an emergency.
- ✓ Set automatic timers on lights. Program them to go on and off at various times during the day and evening.
- ✓ Lower the thermostat to conserve energy and save money on your heating bill.

MOST IMPORTANTLY

During your vacation, you can get sick by consuming contaminated food or water, and it can really ruin a holiday. Travellers' Diarrhea is the most common health problem encountered when travelling from a country with highly developed hygiene and sanitation infrastructure to a less developed one. You can reduce your risk of becoming ill and prevent travellers' diarrhea, with Dukoral®, a drinkable oral vaccine that prevents travellers' diarrhea caused by enterotoxigenic *E. coli*. Dukoral is available at the pharmacy, ask your healthcare professional if Dukoral is right for you.

DUKORAL® is intended to help prevent travellers' diarrhea caused by enterotoxigenic *E. coli* in adults and children 2 years of age and older. It does not treat travellers' diarrhea once it develops. Not everyone who gets vaccinated will be fully protected, therefore, precautions to avoid contaminated food or water should be taken. Allergic reactions and side effects may occur. Visit DukoralCanada.com for complete information.

Prevent travellers' diarrhea with

DUKORAL®

2 weeks before you leave for 3 months protection

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Spa visits can lower absenteeism and hospitalization. "They are a legitimate, culturally acceptable way of taking time to de-stress."

■ STRESS IS BAD, BAD, BAD ////

"Visiting a spa is a legitimate, culturally acceptable way of taking time to de-stress," points out Smeltzer. "It's estimated that more than 60 per cent of visits to family doctors have some stress component. By achieving a state of relaxation, you can help reduce stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenalin in your system."

■ SCIENCE SAYS SO ////

According to German data studied by American researchers, spa visits can lower workplace absenteeism and hospitalization. While the study's authors admit there are few papers and control group studies on health benefits, spa therapies such as balneotherapy (the treatment of disease by bathing) and hydrotherapy (using the temperature and pressure of water for therapeutic purposes) can detoxify the blood, improve immunity and aid circulation and digestion. The authors also cite previous research in which patients with chronic lower back pain exhibited fewer symptoms after a combination of spa and drug therapies than did a control group who used only drugs. Similar results were shown when individuals with knee or hip pain used the combination therapy.

Furthermore, according to one small-scale Italian study, mud bath therapy with mineral water was shown to improve psoriasis to the same degree as drug therapy.

■ IF IT'S CALLED A "MEDICAL" SPA, IT MUST BE HEALTHY, RIGHT? ////

"The benefit of a medical spa is that you have access to a full menu," says Cory Goldberg, the plastic surgeon at the Windermere House Sanctuary Day Spa in Ontario's Muskoka region. "For example, there's a focus on massage

therapy and reflexology, which release endorphins and mediate certain pain pathways in our brain. This can induce overall relaxation, along with helping to cure chronic pain and reduce anxiety levels."

What else? Medical spas can also offer access to a nutritionist, for example, or a naturopath, who can provide general health advice and recovery tips after a medical treatment.

While frequenting a registered massage therapist at a spa doesn't replace your annual checkup with your doctor, she can help create a wellness plan to put you on the right track, says Amanda Baskwill, chair of the board of the Registered Massage Therapists' Association of Ontario. "It's difficult to claim overall benefits of massage because it depends on the spa and what it allows its therapists to do," she points out. "But if you're paying attention to your body and receiving treatment, you can prevent chronic strain from everyday living. Plus, massage can have a rehabilitative component.

"Massage is often covered by third-party insurance," adds Baskwill, "and, more and more in Canada, it's being seen as an allied health practice."

■ STILL, BUYER BEWARE... ////

Of course, there is the risk that you could cause yourself more harm than good if you're not in the hands of a qualified (and certified) professional. There are certainly cases of treatments gone wrong. Everything from colonics to tanning services is now offered at spas and while public health authorities regulate basic hygiene, many facilities are not frequently monitored.

When you call to book an appointment, ask if the spa is associated with an organization upholding standards and practices, such as the Leading



Body+MIND

Spas of Canada (LSC), a 150-member-strong association and the only national spa body in the country.

“Unfortunately, it’s a buyer beware situation for a majority of spas in Canada,” says Lori Robertson, the executive director of the LSC. The LSC has developed criteria for health and safety at spas as well as an internationally recognized quality assurance program, which is optional for members. However, joining the association is voluntary.

If you’re going to a medical spa for services that border on the invasive (including the use of paramedical devices such as lasers), make sure the facility has at least one medical doctor on staff and only qualified professionals administering the procedures. For services such as massage therapy, each province has its own registered mas-

sage therapy organization, so check that your spa is certified by that body.

Don’t be afraid to ask what type of training your esthetician has had before booking an appointment — and find out whether it’s from a legitimate school. “There is no national body with requirements for estheticians,” points out Robertson, “so there is potential for people to be trained at who knows where by who knows whom.”

If you have a medical condition, speak to a doctor before undergoing a spa treatment — particularly if you’re pregnant, have diabetes or suffer from heart disease. Other concerns? People with thyroid conditions should be careful with seaweed wraps and algae treatments, and those with heart conditions should avoid immersion in hot water for long periods of time. Diabetics need to be especially cau-

tious about pedicures due to the risk of complications and infections.

“It’s very important that the spa ask for a health history,” says Smeltzer. “If you are at a spa founded on good, solid practices, it will have a list of health conditions that could be compromised by certain treatments.”

ONCE YOU’VE checked that your spa is safe and clean, and you’re convinced your day of relaxation will be beneficial, consider the words of Michael Gardam, director of infection prevention and control at the University Health Network in Toronto: “There are many things science isn’t going to measure, such as how going to a spa will affect your mood and health — these results aren’t well studied or easily quantified. But so many people swear by spas — that has to count for something.” **M**

THIS IS NOT A GOOD TIME

for
travellers' diarrhea

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