



# A STEAMY SCENE

Saunas and steam baths promise purifying results

Written by ELAINE ROGERS

## D

**F**rom Turkish baths to Native American sweat lodges, the benefits of steam rooms have been embraced through the ages. These days, they're a hot and seemingly modern option at destination spas and day spas, appealing to masculine tastes and those of spa newcomers more likely to try quicker, less messy treatments.

As a hypothermic therapy, a steam bath induces an artificial fever, stimulating the immune and circulatory systems and serving as a natural method of detoxification.


When body temperatures reach the 101- to 103-degree range, pulse rates also speed up, rising from 75 beats per minute to as many as 150 and simultaneously increasing blood circulation. Heated blood vessels expand too, helping to stabilize blood pressure. The immune system increases white blood cell production, and higher temperatures typically destroy or weaken pathogens.

The body's natural response to rising temperatures is perspiration, but in a steam bath, the increased humidity blocks evaporation. As the pores open, toxins and other wastes are purged. Because sweat contains many of the same elements

as urine, the skin is sometimes referred to as the third kidney — eliminating as much as 30 percent of bodily wastes via perspiration. Besides removing the accumulation of potentially carcinogenic heavy metals, profuse perspiration helps excrete alcohol, nicotine, sodium and even cholesterol.

Moisture is the primary difference between the two types of steam bathing, wet (steam) and dry (saunas). Since perspiration evaporates in a sauna, some of the residue may remain on the skin, whereas in a steam bath, it is removed along with the sweat. Both forms have their perks, however, and 30 minutes in the sauna produces the equivalent amount of perspiration as a 10-kilometer run and burns as many calories as a 30-minute rowing session.

Steam inhalation is considered an effective treatment for respiratory conditions such as asthma and allergies as well as bronchitis and the common cold. Relieving inflammation and congestion of upper respiratory membranes, it also helps loosen secretions and soothes spasmodic breathing and coughing.

Additional health benefits include muscle relaxation, increased flexibility, tension reduction and improved skin tone. 



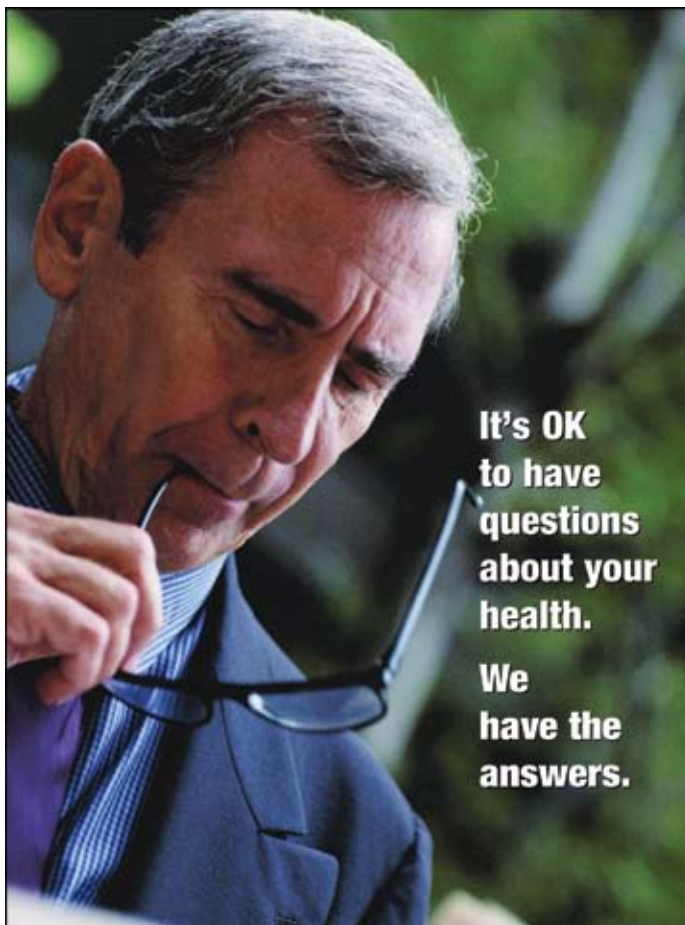
# That's a Wrap

After countless sitcom gags involving that signature green face, most of us are accustomed to the idea of slathering a thick concoction of mud or clay on our faces for dermal rejuvenation. But the same benefits can be extended to your whole body with a body wrap — a relaxing treatment touted by many spas to produce glowing, baby-soft skin.

There are two main types of body wraps out there. For a good detox, mud, algae, seaweed or clay help rid your body of toxins, while shea butter, lotions and creams promise deep moisturizing.

Body wraps, or masks, involve a simple process. First, your body is exfoliated with dry brushing or a scrub and then wrapped in your chosen material and a towel or sheet to keep you warm. After a short period, 20-90 minutes, your body is rinsed clean and left shining. Generally, if you book an esthetician for the job, the product will simply be rubbed on your body, but a massage therapist can employ massage techniques during application.

The real fun of body wraps comes in the wide variety of exotic materials, each promising its own dermal benefits. Soothing aloe vera, moisturizing cactus, cleansing seaweed, age-reversing grapeseed and nourishing rose-petal custard are just a few of the vast offerings. — LINDSAY RANDALL



**It's OK  
to have  
questions  
about your  
health.  
We  
have the  
answers.**

Our educational materials help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Contact us for free booklets available on a variety of topics — *Information You Can Trust*. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721). Or visit our Web site, [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org). For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit [StrokeAssociation.org](http://StrokeAssociation.org).

**Knowledge is power, so Learn and Live!**



**American Stroke  
Association**  
A Division of American  
Heart Association

LN-0680 ©2004 American Heart Association



# GET DIRTY

Indulge in a guilty pleasure with mud and seaweed treatments

Written by ELAINE ROGERS

**B**ack when playing in the mud was something done without a moment's hesitation, the activity was sure to inspire disapproving groans and frustrated sighs from moms and laundry veterans, but today, it's all the rage and not likely to raise an eyebrow at your favorite day spa. Mud and its messy cousin, seaweed, are popular forms of getting down to the nitty-gritty of exfoliation and detoxification treatments.

Despite a similar appearance to the gunk you might have splashed through years ago, spa mud is purer, often clay-based and made from exotic elements like volcanic ash. Used in scrubs, masks, body wraps and even complete body soaks, the new and improved versions are reportedly packed with nutrients and increase circulation, draw impurities from the skin and soothe away body aches.

Marine mud mixes the merits of mud with the mysteries of mineral-rich seaweed. Originating in Europe, where seaweed, algae, sea salts and sand are frequently used in treatments called thalassotherapies, the allure of seaweed in the United States stems from the intrigue of faraway sources such as the Dead Sea. Lore regarding its effectiveness at treating conditions like rheumatism has endured.

With concentrations of minerals ranging from iron, copper and zinc to manganese and boron 100,000 times more dense than seawater itself, seaweed is an ingredient commonly used to improve circulation, enhance metabolism, ease sprains and improve skin tone. Mixed with kelp, algae and heated seawater, various seaweed treatments are also applied for hydration, detox and stimulation of the metabolic system.

Getting muddy may not be on your list of fun things to do anymore, but even for the mess-averse, it may be a simple pleasure worth revisiting. 