

Balneotherapy may be beneficial for osteoarthritis

Clinical question	Is balneotherapy effective for osteoarthritis (OA)?
Bottom line	Balneotherapy (spa therapy, mineral baths) may improve pain and quality of life in patients with OA. Compared to no treatment, spending time in both a sulphur bath and a Dead Sea bath (high concentration salt bath) may improve pain at the end of treatment but may not lead to any difference in pain at one and 3 months follow-up. The bathing may have an effect on pain while therapy is ongoing, not after it has concluded.
Caveat	These “positive” findings should be viewed with caution as the scientific evidence is weak due to poor methodological quality and the absence of an adequate statistical analysis and data presentation. Only 7 trials were involved, and the numbers of patients in the intervention groups varied from 10 to 97.
Context	OA is one of the main causes of long term disability. There is no cure for OA at present, so treatment often focuses on the management of symptoms such as pain, stiffness and immobility. Treatment options include drugs, physiotherapy and balneotherapy. Balneotherapy is an ancient and popular therapy. It involves spending time in an indoor pool filled with mineral water at a temperature of between 31°C and 34°C.
Cochrane Systematic Review	Verhagen AP et al. Balneotherapy for osteoarthritis. Cochrane Database of Syst Rev. 2007, Issue 4. Article No. CD006864. DOI:10.1002/14651858. CD006864. Note: This review contains 7 trials involving 498 participants.
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