



Author: Colin Stanwell-Smith  
CEng director Floataway

### What is Floatation therapy?

One or more sessions of floatation, usually for sixty minutes, in a purpose built float tank containing Epsom salt solution at 35.4 degrees Celsius. The solution's relative density is 1.25 making it impossible not to float, usually supine (except for pregnant women see below).

The temperature is correct for maintaining body temperature without muscular action and there is no postural requirement either, so a profound state of relaxation is achieved within 15 to 20 minutes. Endorphins are released encouraging a feeling of well being. Blood flow in capillaries and soft tissue is maximised. Muscles in spasm tend to release. Because there is no contact pressure it is possible to float for many hours without any impulse to turn, even in deep sleep. Floatation has been academically studied extensively since about 1975, particularly in America, and currently in Sweden, (see below).

### The Benefits

Apart from general relaxation, floatation therapy has been shown both anecdotally and in controlled studies to reduce or eliminate acute pain. The pain relief can be permanent after one session. The reduction of chronic pain lasts for several hours and a reduced need for analgesia. Other benefits include lessening of oedema, increased range of movement in skeletal joints and lower perceived levels of stress. It also appears to help in anger management and PMT, reduce feelings of fatigue and insomnia, lower blood pressure and assist in weight control (in conjunction with talking cures/psychotherapy).

*New information about the benefits of magnesium sulphate (Epsom salts) [click here](#)*

Floating in pregnancy

Mid term pregnant women often find considerable relief from pain and stiffness, particularly while floating prone, with elbows on the floor of the tank and chin cupped in hands. In this position the foetus is fully floating and the mother's back and pelvic girdle are released from load.

If this position does not suite, floating the traditional way on your back is the main way expecting Mums enjoy the benefits.

#### Contra-indications

In general mental illness including clinical depression is a contra-indication because the effects of floating are unpredictable in these cases. Obviously patients with open wounds or incontinence are unsuitable candidates. Patients with severe hypertension may experience such drastic reduction in blood pressure as to faint but when this is controlled by a drug regime, there is little risk. Similarly there is little risk for controlled epileptic patients, but it is recommended to have a suitable helper present during the float session. Further information can be found on [www.floataway.com](http://www.floataway.com)

and

[www.floatationfederation.com](http://www.floatationfederation.com)

The following is reproduced from notes by the Swedish Research Council 05.11.2003

Relaxation in a flotation tank brings peace and quiet, increased well-being, and reduced pain.

A new dissertation shows that relaxation in a flotation tank can serve as an alternative form of treatment to reduce stress or relieve persistent pain, and it has no side-effects whatsoever. In times like these, we are surrounded by stress and troubled by burn-out. Stress seems to retain its place as the greatest enemy to good health, well-being, and self-esteem. A major international field of research is now focusing on neurogenesis, that is, the generation of new nerve cells. This is against the background of our losing an estimated several thousand nerve cells per day. It has been known for the last few years that the formation of new nerve cells is constant. The latest findings about neurogenesis indicate that stress blocks the new formation of nerve cells and that relaxation, regular exercise, and an interesting environment increase and optimize the capacity for this. In most studies that have appeared, increased neurogenesis has been related to enhanced creative and intellectual performance.

To lie on your back and float in a tank filled with salt water induces extremely deep and pleasurable relaxation. It is dark and quiet in the tank, which enables maximum relaxation and well-being. To sink into deep relaxation, 45 minutes is a suitable length of time in the tank.

Patients with chronic muscle flexing pains in their neck who have been regularly treated with flotation-tank relaxation for three weeks experience a reduction in pain. After this treatment they also feel much happier and have less anxiety, alongside finding it easier to get to sleep at night. Blood samples taken before and after this period of treatment indicate that the count of stress-related hormones (MHPG) has declined. These studies have been carried out at the Human Performance Laboratory, Department of Psychology, Karlstad University.

People in pain are not the only ones who can benefit from floating in a tank. Anyone looking for an environment that can help reduce stress or lend a moment of pleasant relaxation will find this technique helpful. It has been shown that after treatment in the flotation tank, subjects experience greater creativity: the number of new and original thoughts increases after a session in the tank. It has also been experienced as beneficial to spend some time by oneself in peace and quiet, perhaps to think thoughts or experience feelings that are crowded out of stressful everyday consciousness. Many people experience that they attain a pleasant state between dreaming and waking or a state of daydreaming and fantasy.

Almost everyone who has tried floating in a tank thinks that it is pleasant and agreeable, and they want to do it again. Problems associated with the fear of feeling closed in are extremely slight. For those who might be concerned about this, there is the possibility of leaving a light on or of having the door to the tank remain partly or fully open during the session. The knowledge that you can get up and leave any time probably also helps create a feeling of security.

Taken altogether, this raises hopes that relaxation in a flotation tank can become an alternative form of treatment to reduce stress or alleviate chronic pain, with the help of a method that is safe and entirely without side-effects. If the flotation tank reduces stress, then this must have major consequences for the rejuvenation of nerve cells in those parts of the brain (hippocampus) that are primarily associated with health and intellectual capacity.

Author of dissertation:  
Anette Kjellgren

Title of dissertation:  
The experience of flotation-REST (Restricted environmental stimulation technique): Consciousness, subjective stress and pain

Doctoral dissertation at Göteborg University 2003  
Department of Psychology, Göteborg University, Sweden.

---

#### Other References

Borrie, Roderick A and Peter Duedfeld  
*"REST Therapy in a Weight Reduction Program"*  
Journal of Behavioural Medicine vol3 1980 pp 147-161

Patel, Chandra

*"Reduction of Serum Cholesterol and Blood Pressure in Hypertensive Patients by Behavioural Modification"*

Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners vol 26 (1976)

Suedfeld, P and Borrie, R A

*"Health and Therapeutic Applications of Chamber and Flotation Restricted Environmental Stimulation Therapy (REST)"*

(1999) 14 545-566