Is Salt Therapy an Effective Alternative Treatment for COPD?

by RUSSELL WINWOOD

Salt Therapy for COPD

As COPD patients, we are always looking for ways to make breathing easier and improve our quality of life. In this article, I'm going to talk about salt therapy for COPD and my personal experience using this treatment.

What Is Salt Therapy?

Salt therapy's origin comes from the Odessa Science Research Institute in Ukraine. In 1980 they developed the first halotherapy device. The machine replicated the grinding and crushing of salt and dispersed the particles into the air to simulate the conditions of an underground salt mine. This was called modern salt therapy or halotherapy. The two types of salt therapy are dry (salt rooms) and wet (mixing salt and water)

Today's dry salt rooms consist of a controlled environment where pharmaceutical grade salt is circulated within the salt room. Pharmaceutical grade salt is said to be a natural anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial. Wet salt therapy is usually delivered through gargling salt water, drinking saltwater, bathing in saltwater, using saltwater for nasal irrigation, or floatation tanks filled with saltwater.

Salt therapy is said to have benefits to patients with respiratory disease, including COPD. The claim is when inhaled deep into the lungs, and the salt particles help stimulate the cilia, which in turn expels mucus and other foreign particles from the lungs. This process is said to help respiratory patients breathe easier.

A single salt therapy session usually takes between 35 to 45 minutes. You sit on a comfortable chair in either a group setting or private room. Some people read or watch TV while others take the time to catch up on sleep. The majority of people attending these sessions say they are very comfortable and relaxing.

Is Salt Therapy Safe?

Salt therapy is safe for most people, but like any therapy, there are exceptions. People who have a contagious disease, fever, open wounds, cancer, severe hypertension, mental disorders, and active tuberculosis should avoid salt therapy. If you are a pregnant woman or unsure whether you should try salt therapy, you should consult your doctor first.

While I'm all for exploring new ways to fight COPD, it's important to do your research. The last thing you need is to make your disease worse.

The Pros and Cons of Salt Therapy

Reduce breathlessness, airway clearance, anti-inflammatory, beneficial for some skin complaints are common sales pitches. On most of the Halotherapy websites, you can find testimonials supporting these claims.

There seem to be a few negatives when accessing halotherapy, and this could be due to the limited amount of high-quality studies. While salt therapy is said to help clear airways, it can irritate airways of asthmatics.

What Science Has to Say About Salt Therapy

If you delve into the scientific literature, you will not find studies which support changing clinical guidelines to include salt therapy. You will find some studies concluding benefits from salt therapy and some which conclude no benefit. What is clear is the need for more high-quality studies to determine whether salt therapy has a useful future.

Salt therapy has plenty of anecdotal evidence from people who have felt these sessions have helped relieve their COPD symptoms. While there is no science to support its use, there is also no science which indicates salt therapy is harmful.

Some people report a difference after only one session, but some clinics recommend two to four times a week for the first five to eight weeks. Salt therapy can become an expensive relaxation session if you see no benefits, with some packages starting at $500.

My Experience with Salt Therapy for COPD

My wife Leanne and I explored salt therapy in the early stages of my diagnosis, like many patients, we were desperate and would give anything a try.

We attended many sessions over three months at our local salt room. While I didn't witness any changes in my breathing or lung function, I did find the sessions very relaxing. Leanne noticed positive changes in her skin.

Conclusion

Salt therapy has to be a personal decision but one made in consultation with your doctor. If you can afford it, have your health care team's permission, then why not give it a go. Science doesn't always keep up with therapies and what is not clinically recommended now, might be in years to come.

With such large numbers of COPD patients across the world, we will always see alternative therapies popping up. All patients have the right to explore these options to see if they find a benefit. Whether its based-on science or a placebo effect, feeling better from therapy is subjective and a very positive result.

In saying this be warned – do your homework, ask lots of questions, because there are unscrupulous people out there waiting to take your money. Finally, don't be afraid to lose your money. If you pay upfront and you have adverse effects from salt therapy, it's far better to walk away.