

CONTINUOUS NEUTRAL BATH

A. Definition:

The immersion of the patient's body in a continuously flowing bathtub full of water at a "neutral" temperature. (i.e. one which neither decreases nor increases body heat: 92-97° F.)

B. Purpose:

To secure mental and physical relaxation; to quiet the patient and induce sleep.

To satisfy patient's unconscious needs: warmth, security, regressive impulses.

To promote skin healing in certain conditions.

To increase elimination of urine by the kidneys.

C. Effect:

Replacement of stimulating environmental factors with a neutral, unvarying situation. Reclining position relieves visceral pressures; buoyancy of water relieves pressure on skin of back; insensible perspiration is checked; amount of urine excreted increases; activity of the skin as a respiratory organ is suspended. Heart action is strengthened, cerebral congestion relieved. The heat producing mechanism is at rest. Internal body temperature remains normal.

Quiet room with subdued light and exclusion of non-needed persons further reduces stimulation. Cutaneous nerves are soothed as well as nerves of organs with which the skin is in reflex relation. Sleep often ensues. (Wright, R., Hydrotherapy in Psychiatric Hospitals, p. 236.)

D. Therapeutic Application:

Insomnia; hypochondriacal complaints; depressed states; tension states; agitated states; excited states; delirious states; renal insufficiency; certain skin conditions (decubitus, burns).

E. Contraindications:

Presence of skin eruptions due to prolonged immersion (temporary contraindication); any skin disorder aggravated by moisture; catamenia--only if patient seems disturbed about bath at this time.

F. Indications for Immediate Termination of Treatment:

Chilling (cyanosis of lips; undue pallor; shivering or goose flesh); heat prostration (faintness; nausea; shallow or gasping respirations; weak, rapid pulse); mechanical failure of control apparatus (inability of maintaining water temperature required).

G. Complications:

Bath rash--discontinue until rash disappears. Report to doctor so cause may be determined.

Bath pruritis--usually subsides when skin dried and dusted with talcum powder.

Abrasions--the softened epithelium is easily abraded. If superficial, apply lanolin before and during treatment. Report to doctor and discontinue treatments if abrasions fail to heal.

Corrugations--apply lanolin to palms and soles during treatment.

H. General Instructions:

1. The patient is never left alone in bathroom while there is water in tub, or control handle attached.

H. General Instructions (Continued):

2. Temperature: Water temperature 92-94° when room temperature is above 78° F.
Water temperature 94-96° when room temperature is below 78° F.

Do not attempt treatment if room temperature is below 68° F. If wider variations of temperature are temporarily required for the patient's comfort, a doctor's order stating change (to not less than 90° F. nor more than 100° F.) and duration (15 - 20 minutes) must be obtained.

3. Duration: 2 - 8 hours. Patient should be removed for 1 - 2 hours between treatments to allow skin to function normally. Apply lanolin to pressure areas, palms, and soles before and during treatment of more than 2 hours.
4. Position: Most patients prefer recumbent position with tub cover fitted around neck. If patient prefers to sit up, remove hammock and place patient on rubber ring. Fit tub cover up as far as possible to reduce water cooling from evaporation.

I. Equipment:

1. Tub with provision for maintaining requisite water temperature.
2. Keys to control cabinet.
3. Handle to control valve.
4. Recorder chart for control cabinet.
5. Two bed sheets.
6. Bath blanket--to drape patient.
7. Bath towel.
8. Bath mat (use towel if necessary).
9. Two face cloths--for compresses.
10. One face towel--to protect tub cover.
11. Pillow case for inflated pillow.
12. Ice bag cover.
13. Canvas hammock to fit tub.
14. Canvas tub cover.
15. Shower cap.
16. Bath thermometer.
17. Inflated air pillow.
18. Filled ice bag.
19. Chair for nurse.
20. Small tray with:
 - Enamel pitcher of cool water
 - Paper drinking cups
 - Paper drinking straws (1/2 length)
 - Bowl of ice cubes
 - Bath record book
 - Pencil
21. Jar of lanolin.
22. Clean tongue depressor.
23. Soap in soap dish.

J. Preparation of Equipment:

1. Assemble equipment in tub room.
2. Check temperature of tub room. Unlock control cabinet. Start water running.
3. Set temperature control at 104° F. until tub is warm. Then close drain, reduce temperature control to 98° F. (if room temperature below 78° F.) which should maintain a temperature of 96° F. in the tub. This is checked with the bath thermometer. Allow tub to fill below level of hammock, then stop flow until patient is

J. Preparation of Equipment (Continued):
in tub.

4. Attach canvas hammock to tub. Adjustments to fit patient should be made after he is in the tub.
5. Place sheet lengthwise over hammock, with excess at head end, folding sides to edges of tub.
6. Place inflated air pillow in place.
7. Apply tub cover, leaving upper 1/3 unattached. Fold excess back.
8. Place second sheet over tub cover.
9. Place bath mat beside tub.

K. Preparation of Patient:

1. Explain nature of treatment, no matter how disturbed or preoccupied the patient appears.
2. Have patient empty bladder.
3. Have patient undress--drape with bath blanket.

L. Procedure:

1. Take patient's pulse.
2. Apply lanolin if indicated.
3. Assist patient to enter tub, keeping him covered with bath blanket until lower sheet is wrapped around him. Have patient put on shower cap if indicated.
4. Fasten remainder of tub cover.
5. Start water flowing again.
6. Place ice bag under patient's head. Refill ice bag before ice is all melted.
7. Place face towel under chin as a "bib".

Note: An actively suicidal patient may attempt to drown himself. Fit an uninflated rubber ring air cushion around his neck, inflate and line with a face towel. This will prevent him from drawing his head through the hole in the tub cover.

8. After tub is filled and patient is partially supported by the water, it is possible to adjust hammock straps to make him more comfortable.
9. Reduce light in room as much as possible.
10. Nurse then seats herself behind patient, to discourage conversation.
11. Care during treatment:
 - a. Check pulse (temporally) every 1/2 hour.
 - b. Check water temperature with bath thermometer every 15 minutes.
 - c. Check water temperature grossly by placing hand in water every 5 - 10 minutes.
 - d. If patient complains of chilling, increase water temperature to 97° and gradually reduce to indicated temperature as patient feels warm.
 - e. If patient complains of heat, reduce to 94° and increase to indicated temperature. If patient still complains of chilling or overheating, notify doctor who may order reduction to 90° or increase to 100° F. for 15 - 20 minutes.
 - f. Offer fluids as indicated. If patient is dehydrated, urge fluids. If he takes them readily, consult doctor to determine if salt should be given as well.
 - g. At meal time, encourage patient to allow nurse to feed him to prevent chilling of arms and shoulders.
 - h. If patient wishes to void or defecate, remove from tub, dry and wrap warmly. Resume treatment following this.

L. Procedure (Continued):

- i. If patient voids in tub, drain, flush and refill.
- j. If patient defecates in tub, remove patient, allow him to shower, clean tub and hammock, and resume treatment.
12. Record during treatment: time, pulse, fluids, water temperature, reaction--every 15 minutes.
13. Use call bell or go to door if assistance is needed.
14. Duration of treatment depends on purpose of treatment and patient's response. Treatments of less than 2 hours duration are not likely to be effective as sedation.

M. After Care of Patients:

1. If lanolin has been applied, allow patient to take soap bath.
2. Open drain and when water has receded below level of hammock, fold back cover, drape patient with bath blanket, and assist him from the tub. Assist to dry, avoiding stimulating friction.
3. Have patient dress in night clothes, and urge to rest in bed for an hour.

N. After Care of Equipment:

1. Wring out wet linen and place in hamper.
2. Scrub hammock and cover with brush and soap, rinse, and hang up to dry.
3. Scrub tub with soap and brush (not abrasive powder).
4. Wash and dry rubber goods and replace.
5. Wash and dry enamelware and replace.

O. Record in Nurses Notes:

1. Time and duration of treatment.
2. Pulse range during treatment.
3. Range of water temperature.
4. Patient's response to treatment.
5. Total fluids taken.

P. References:

- Wright, Rebecca, Hydrotherapy in Psychiatric Hospitals, Boston, The Tudor Press, 1940, 334 p.
- Bowman, Karl M., "The Treatment of Acute Deliria", Virginia Medical Monthly, Volume 67, p. 724-732, December, 1940.