

# Colonic Hydrotherapy; how was it for me?

Well, I can't say it was painful. I didn't feel a thing when Roger Groos, teacher at The National College of Colon Hydrotherapy [www.ncch.co.uk](http://www.ncch.co.uk), and member of The Association of Registered Colonic Hydrotherapists (ARCH), commenced the treatment by opening the three way tap and allowing filtered, warm water at 38C to flow into my rectum from a tank, positioned no more than 70 cm above the couch. Roger had put some herbs in the water, liquorice and fennel to relax the colon. I lay on my back while he gently massaged my abdomen while water continued to flow into the bowel. Then he turned off the inflow, massaged the abdomen some more, turned me on my side, and switched the tap to outflow. I felt a burning sensation just inside the rectum and a strong urge to push. I relaxed and breathed deeply, then watched aghast as the contents of my colon raced down the transparent tube like rats in a burrow. I suppressed a twinge of embarrassment. There was no hiding place. For about 2 days after my colonic, I was aware of a bubbling sensation in my gut and my bowels were perhaps a little looser than usual, but my usual pattern was quickly restored.

My bowels and I usually get on pretty well, so my experience cannot be taken as a fair test of colonic hydrotherapy. All I can say is that the procedure was conducted with care and professionalism. I needed to seek a more expert opinion from somebody who had IBS. So I contacted Peter. This is what he told me.

'I am 39 and have suffered with bloating for years. My doctor diagnosed IBS and has advised dietary treatment. Over the years, I have restricted so many different foods, but nothing is made any difference and it's difficult to know what to eat and the symptoms made me feel heavy, hard, lacking energy and depressed. Then as a last resort a friend of mine suggested I try colonic irrigation. To be fair, I was sceptical, but in the event I was so glad I did. The procedure was very professionally conducted. Linda Booth, my therapist, spent a lot of time understanding me and my illness, and she made sure that I understood the procedure. This feeling lasted, and the second colonic a week later was as good as the first. People have commented that I look so much better and I certainly feel more confident'.

Colonic irrigation has got a bad name among some doctors and nurses, but it is not entirely clear why. Roger estimated that members of ARCH carry out in excess of 200,000 colonic hydrotherapy treatments every year, many on people who have bowel dysfunction associated with IBS. Colonic hydrotherapy is a relatively benign treatment for bloating and constipation associated with IBS. Pain is less common than with the administration of laxatives and purgatives and more serious consequences are vanishingly rare. There has only been one report of colonic perforation ever reported by ARCH members and that occurred in somebody with undisclosed diverticulitis'.

We hear a lot about beneficial bacteria these days, but does flushing these out with water, cause harm? Again, Roger was reassuring. 'The bacteria are not completely flushed out. There is often some faecal material left as well as the biofilm of bacteria clinging to the mucus layer adjacent to the colonic lining. Within 36 hours, a healthy population of bacteria will be re-established, Roger said. So as long as colonics are not carried out too frequently, the bacterial populations will not suffer; certainly not as much as following medical treatment with broad spectrum antibiotics'.

Hydrotherapy, the water cure, comes from a tradition of naturopathy, which includes the use of herbs to regulate bodily functions and get rid of toxins. The herbs include fennel, chamomile, liquorice, raspberry leaf, dandelion root and peppermint. They are derived from folk remedies and while the efficacy of all of these is not scientifically proven, they are not dangerous, their usage is tightly regulated and their pharmacological action is less potent and therefore less prone to side effects than many medical drugs.

The issue of toxins is perhaps more vexed. Much colonic hydrotherapy is conducted, not to treat constipation of IBS, but as a life style choice as part of a detox regime. While it is true that toxic substances may be produced as a result of bacterial degradation of food residues in the colon, these are largely detoxified by the liver and excreted by the kidneys. The body is very effective at looking after itself.

The fear that colonic hydrotherapists are conducting invasive procedures without a medical or nursing training may concern some nurses and doctors, but the reality is that many colonic hydrotherapists are nurses and the training and practice conducted by ARCH are independently regulated by The Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council, [www.cnhc.org](http://www.cnhc.org). So is it time for reappraisal or at least proper research to test the efficacy of colonic hydrotherapy compared with other options. Could it be seen as a useful and comfortable treatment for more resistant symptoms of IBS and not relegated to the dubious backwaters of detox retreats?

Have you had colonic hydrotherapy? What was your experience? Do let us know by writing to [nick@theibsnetwork.org](mailto:nick@theibsnetwork.org). We would be very interested.

