

Healing Chronic Illness at Home: Oxygen, Ozone, Sauna and Detoxification for Lyme Disease, Fibromyalgia, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and MCS

ImmuneSupport.com

11-21-2003

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Jill Neimark is an author and journalist who writes frequently on health and science for national publications. Ms Neimark is also a lyme patient. Byron White, N.D., is a naturopath who suffers from lyme disease and employs a variety of home-based therapies to successfully manage chronic illness.

Three and a half years ago, on a pleasant June afternoon, my life plunged off a cliff into free fall. I walked in a Connecticut garden and twelve days later had a big bull's-eye rash on the back of my knee and a classic case of lyme disease. Even though I went on antibiotics at once, I slid into a nightmare of ill health.

Antibiotics stemmed, but did not kill, the infection. As the spirochete relentlessly invaded my nerve tissue, I felt as if electronic buzzers were being pushed incessantly throughout my body. I suffered from vertigo, terrible thirst, and incredible pain in my neck and back. I was also crushed by a fatigue so profound I figured if it lasted, I'd eventually waste away and die.

Thus began an odyssey that has not yet ended although I am improving steadily and without using antibiotics. In the course of research, I met and befriended a knowledgeable naturopath who suffers from lyme himself, Dr. Byron White. Together we have put together an approach to healing therapies that you can do at home—all of which should be monitored by your doctor, of course. These therapies are intended to restore oxygen to hypoxic cells, kill pathogens, help detox the liver, colon and entire body, and use hyperthermia to improve immune function and metabolism and help the body sweat out toxins. These profound healing therapies employ both age-old naturopathic techniques and state-of-the-art modern tools, and they are ideal for the chemically sensitive who cannot tolerate drugs.

A hand-tailored approach in our own homes allows us to move from illness to health slowly, carefully, and with needed rest and ease. "It is important to fit the treatment to the person and not the person to the treatment," explains Dr. White. Each person's body goes through a natural building and detoxification cycle as it heals.

HEALING AT HOME: THREE ESSENTIAL POINTS

Before you begin a healing journey, it's important to know that:

- 1) No matter how bad it gets, you can get better.
- 2) Patience is key, because each body is different, and you must allow yourself time for trial and error, and for cycles of improvement as well as mistakes and setbacks. Think of yourself on a treasure hunt, picking up clues along the way.
- 3) If possible, seek therapies you can do at home in your own time, and on your own schedule, while listening to your body's responses and discussing them with a trusted medical practitioner who will be your guide in healing.

HYPERBARIC OXYGEN: Restoring The Entire Body

The first therapy that both Dr. White and I use is hyperbaric oxygen. We both own portable hyperbaric oxygen chambers that have made a significant difference in our health. These home chambers are approved by the FDA, are available by prescription from your doctor, and pressurize to low, safe levels—4.5 psi, or about 10 feet below sea level. They are often called “mild” hyperbaric oxygen chambers. With the use of an oxygen concentrator and a medical pass-through, they can increase tissue oxygen levels up to 400%.

Hyperbaric oxygen treatments trigger a marked increase in the ability of white blood cells to destroy bacteria, help new blood vessels grow, saturate tissues with healing oxygen that helps stop damage from toxins and inhibits the growth of anaerobic bacteria. They also improve brain function. One specialist in mild hyperbaric therapy, Gunnar Heuser, M.D., Ph.D., found that using these chambers, circulation and blood flow improved in the brain (using specializing scanning imagery), after only ten sessions. Rhett Bergeron, M.D. offers mild hyperbaric for patients in his two clinics outside Atlanta, Georgia. Most individuals with chronic illness suffer from hypoxia, he notes. “I have found that patients respond extremely favorably to the hyperbaric treatments,” says Dr. Bergeron. “Mild hyperbaric has been shown to be just as effective as treatments at greater pressures and the patients like how it makes them feel.”

The first hyperbaric chamber in medicine was made by a British physician in 1662. However, hyperbaric treatments just recently became available for home use in a portable chamber. I learned about portable chambers through Lance Brubaker, who was diagnosed with lyme in 1990 and now works with Dr. Bergeron. I had benefited from hyperbaric at much higher pressures in clinics, but the cost was prohibitive, and I hated having to relocate to get my treatments, and I never was able to take off enough time to make a long-lasting difference in my health.

According to Lance, at his sickest, “I literally couldn’t walk 200 feet without passing out. I had countless disassociated symptoms, some life-threatening.” In 1994, he shut down his business and built his own home hyperbaric chamber. “I did hyperbaric three times a week for two months, and two times a week after that for two years. I also added in a low temperature sauna protocol, and did a lot of cleansing and detox.” Today, Lance is fully recovered. Last summer, at Lance’s invitation, I visited Dr. Bergeron’s clinic, tried just two sessions in the portable chamber and was delighted to feel improvement in energy and muscle strength, as well as lessening of the buzzing static that seems to accompany lyme, and that author Amy Tan (who suffers from late stage lyme) has called, “Dolby digital syndrome.”

(I also got a look at Lance’s old chamber, which sits like a proud relic in his garage, a testament to his ingenuity and pure guts, as the thing is built out of butane tank and submarine hatch and has no windows. Today he has a state-of-the-art portable chamber in one of his extra bedrooms and still uses it if he feels a cold coming on or wants a tune-up.)

Before my home chamber I was suffering excruciating headaches that I call “lymegraines”—they were clobbering me once or twice a week. Since getting my chamber last July, the headaches have vanished. My energy, digestion and sleep are improved. But perhaps the greatest benefit is how I feel in the chamber: as if all my neurons, which had been unhitched and cut and were just dangling and doing the jitterbug, have been reconnected and are working properly. I even drift off to sleep at times. So, oddly, it has become my favorite place—a kind of womb of feel-good safety. I use my chamber about twice a week.

My response to the chamber is typical, according to Dr. Ignacio Fojgel, M.D., Founder & Head of the Complementary & Integrative Medicine Department at Maimonides University in Argentina, and Chief of the Hyperbaric Medicine Unit there. “The action of pressure on the autonomic nervous system has never been given its due attention. Many people sleep during the session or become relaxed and peaceful.

Parasympathetic up-regulation occurs, and a relatively high parasympathetic tone is needed for most healing processes to happen." In fact, in chronic illness, the sympathetic nervous system is often dominant and can trigger nervousness, agitation, hyperactivity, sleep difficulties, and dysregulation of hormones and neurotransmitters. Hyperbaric treatment helps restore balance.

Barbara Kris, a 60 year old from North Carolina, suffers from post-polio syndrome and lupus, and nearly died a year ago from necrotizing fasciitis, pneumonia and heart failure. Daily home treatments with hyperbaric oxygen, along with alternative therapies like chelation and glutathione, have brought her back to a normal life. "People tell me it's miraculous. A year ago the weakness in my legs was so bad I couldn't get up from a chair, and my doctor tells me without the hyperbaric treatments I would probably have lost my hand. I am thoroughly grateful and I would not be without my chamber."

With a home chamber you can calibrate your treatment to your schedule and need. You can also do treatments over a period of months and years, rather than a brief stay at a clinic. "When I first began hyperbaric," says Dr. White, "I started with very low pressure and no additional oxygen. I was severely deconditioned from illness and twenty minutes was all my body wanted. As my body began to function at a higher level, it began to push out excess carbon monoxide. One of the things your body will do when it gets more oxygen, and thus more energy, is to begin to detox." Over a period of months he built up to higher pressures and added in more oxygen, and watched neuropathic pain slowly vanish, while fatigue, balance and memory problems improved.

There are other methods that may increase oxygen levels although the honest truth is, they are not nearly as powerful as they do not push oxygen into the tissues. Still, we know of one lyme patient who breathes in oxygen through a cannula while increasing his circulation by sitting in a hot bath. For those who are well enough, light exercise on a treadmill or stationery bicycle while breathing in oxygen is also helpful. Finally, one bedridden patient took an oxygen supplement called DiOxychlor along with a supplement called nattokinase, which helps clear fibrin from the blood and allow nutrients to access cells more readily. She noticed improvement after combining the two supplements (today, with many alternative therapy interventions she is 90% improved).

OZONE: Killing Pathogens and Oxygenating Cells

Although at times I feel evangelistic about my chamber, I know it is not a silver-bullet. In fact, there is no silver bullet in chronic illness, because it is a multisystemic breakdown. Usually a person with CFIDS, fibromyalgia, lyme, lupus, or any such chronic disorder has a number of chronic infections and toxic overload.

Another oxygen therapy that both Dr. White and I use is ozone, or O₃. Ozone is known to be bactericidal, fungicidal, protozoacidal and virucidal. In short, it is a strong germicide. It also oxidizes toxins, certain metals, and pesticides—breaking them down so the body can excrete them (with help from naturopathic techniques which we will explain shortly). Ozone works as a free-radical. Our own neutrophils, which kill pathogens, actually manufacture ozone, according to recent research by the Scripps Institute. "Neutrophils are very small cells, but they are very nasty microbicidal agents," says Bernard Babior, professor at The Scripps Research Institute (TSRI) and an expert in neutrophils, which he has been studying for over 30 years. "An active neutrophil kills a bacterium in only a few seconds, using at least a dozen and a half mechanisms." Apparently the neutrophils feed singlet oxygen (O₁) to antibodies, which convert it to O₃ and use it to poke holes in pathogens and kill them.

"I tested positive for h. pylori four years ago and was suffering from gastritis and severe abdominal pain," recalls Dr. White. "I drank four glasses of ozonated water daily for a month and my symptoms cleared up. When I was re-tested I was negative." Dr. White also utilizes ozonal, ozone pumped through olive oil, in order to treat sinus and bronchial infection. This is considered safe to breathe.

A great pioneer in ozone therapy is chiropractor Saul Pressman, of Vancouver. He grew up on a farm and unwittingly poisoned himself with pesticides several times. "I developed fibromyalgia so bad that by age 33 I had to go on all fours to go up and down stairs," he recalls. Adopting a naturopathic approach, he learned he had celiac disease and eliminated all gluten products, which improved his health. He also began to use ozone. Today he is completely healthy. "Now I am 50 and run up stairs two at a time."

In Saul's world, ozone is forever—rather than diamonds, for the story his wife told me is half fairy-tale and half healing odyssey. Years ago, Sherri-Lee Pressman had chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia so extreme she was on disability. "I couldn't lift my arms for the pain. I'd take a shower and be so exhausted I had to lie down and rest for an hour." Determined to get well, she worked with a naturopath and over time recovered about 75%, returned to work, and met Saul Pressman. Three weeks later, for Christmas, he gave her an ozone generator. "I was really blown away," she recalls. "I knew what it meant to him." Another three weeks passed and he asked her to marry him; he also suggested she take time off and really heal herself with ozone. "I used it every day. It was intense, and it often made me feel like I had the flu, but I kept at it. I wanted to completely heal so I could get pregnant." Slowly but surely she recovered total health, her chronic yeast infections vanished, robust good energy returned, and today they have a healthy daughter.

Ozone can be taken into the body through insufflation (gas that is infused for a few minutes either into the ear, the rectum, or the vagina), by ozonating water and drinking it, by ozonating olive oil and applying it topically, by using a funnel to ozonate a specific part of the body, or by using an ozone steam sauna, which is perhaps the most powerful method. These saunas utilize a fiberglass steam cabinet where you sit comfortably inside the cabinet up to your neck, with your head in the open air.

Carlos LeClair, a 73-year-old living in Florida, is convinced that ozone saunas eliminated his lyme disease symptoms when 24 months of antibiotics did not. Like many who use ozone saunas, he developed a rash. It is thought that the rash is part of a detox reaction, since continued use of ozone results in fading of the rash, according to Pressman. LeClair agrees. "I am absolutely convinced that the itchiness and rash I experienced, mainly on my chest, was due to an interaction of the ozone with toxins in my body. The rash was gone after eight months of ozone saunas. When I had completed twelve months, twice a week, I decided to do a 30-minute sauna every day for ten days, just to make sure that I had finished off the lyme bug. By the sixth consecutive day of ozone saunas I woke up to find a 3-inch diameter bull's-eye rash over my left kidney."

The bull's-eye rash is unique among rashes and diagnostic of lyme disease all by itself. In naturopathic parlance, this bull's-eye would be called 'retracing'—an illness peels back symptomatically over time from the most recent to the oldest symptoms. Carlos LeClair considers himself well today: he has had no symptoms of lyme disease in the last two years.

Ken Gullan, Director of the Institute for Research Integration (IRI) in San Diego, CA, has used ozone saunas for 18 months to eliminate asbestos poisoning from three years when he worked for a mining business in Africa. When he began the saunas, he had mild prostatitis, athlete's foot, fatigue, and above all, over 450 fatty tumors called lipomas all over his body. "I used to joke that I looked like a bunch of grapes in a pair of pantyhose." The lipomas were probably the body's attempt to safely surround asbestos fibers with fatty tumors. "Initially I got a really bad rash. It seemed like I couldn't detox any other way than out through the skin." Today, his prostatitis is gone, his athlete's foot has disappeared, and he has about 160 lipomas left. "I've got an incredible amount of energy now, I believe that is the biggest overall benefit."

I myself am at the beginning of my ozone therapy experiment. I have tried the sauna four times and found myself in an energized and peaceful state afterwards. I am about to embark on a more regular protocol, hoping that by combining it with my hyperbaric oxygen chamber, I will provide my

body with a truly powerful two-pronged healing therapy that allows my cells to breathe (oxygen) and helps them kill pathogens (ozone).

HYPERTHERMIA: How Saunas Can Heal

A third very powerful modality that can be carried out at home is sauna therapy. Human exposure to toxins has dramatically increased in the last century, and their residues can be reduced through sauna therapy. In addition, sauna increases circulation and improves lymph flow. By allowing the body to eliminate toxins through the skin, sauna therapy helps the liver, kidneys, and bowel. As you sit in the sauna, your body temperature goes up, mimicking the natural fever response—which boosts the immune system.

Sauna therapy can be done at home. Dr. White has a top of the line Healthmate Far Infrared Sauna, while I have a very inexpensive near infrared bulb sauna designed by naturopath Larry Wilson. Others use far infrared heat lamps. Although there is much debate about the benefits of different types of saunas, and the depth that various forms of infrared penetrate into the body, we feel that most forms of sauna, used carefully, are helpful. Infrared saunas are easier to tolerate because they tend to heat the body and not the air, allowing people to tolerate much longer sauna time and achieve the same results. As mentioned previously, Lance Brubaker melded hyperbaric and sauna therapy to heal himself. "Spirochetes don't like pressure, oxygen, or heat, so I offered them all three," he recalls. Tissue oxygen levels remain elevated for hours after a hyperbaric chamber session, and the infrared sauna heat increases circulation and stimulates the immune system. The two can be synergistic.

The length of time spent in the sauna varies with each individual. Most chronically ill individuals should start with about 10 minutes, and see how that impacts them over the next 24-48 hours. I overdid my sauna therapy in the beginning, staying in for 45 minutes and experienced an increase in muscle pain as a result. After Dr. Wilson performed hair mineral analysis on me he advised me to reduce my sauna to 20 minutes every other day.

"It is important to temper treatments like hyperbaric oxygen, ozone and sauna with your body's ability to handle the treatment," notes Dr. White.

Rosemary Trudeau, an Australian woman who has been ill with some form of CFIDS or possibly Lyme for 24 years, reports the bulb sauna has normalized her blood pressure for the first time in decades. "The first time I used the sauna," she recalls, "I only coped with 5 minutes and then had to crawl into bed. Since then I have built up the time to twenty minutes, a ten minute rest, and another twenty minutes. My blood pressure had been 80/60 for twenty years. After ten weeks my blood pressure is up to 110/70. I am not so dizzy, am using my walking frame less and managing to stay vertical for hours every day. I also had a blood test and the nurse used an adult needle and managed to get a whole vial of blood. This is one of the best things I've done for my health in years. I am feeling a lot more optimistic about getting well. My stamina is much better and I'm managing to do all sorts of things I haven't felt like doing for years. I am recommending it to many other chronic Lyme's and CFS patients, who are being told there is nothing they can do about their neurally-mediated hypotension. The bulb sauna is working wonders for me."

DETOXIFICATION: Last But Not Least

Building the body up and detoxifying at the same time are crucial to successfully improving a person's health. "It is common to find people with chronic illness that have compromised ability to detoxify," explains Dr. White. "Generally, the chronically ill body is in an acid state. It can be useful to eat and juice foods that are alkaline to help decrease acidity. These include any green vegetables, especially the leafy ones; as well as figs, lima beans, apricots, spinach and lemons."

The colon, liver and kidneys are the most common routes of detoxification, but your lungs, lymph and skin can also rid the body of waste. "Most people I have worked with have very sluggish or stagnant lymph systems," says Dr. White. To detox at home, drink clean water, along with electrolytes on a daily basis. Try to drink half your body weight in ounces, so if you weigh 100 pounds, try to drink 50 ounces over the course of the day. An electrolyte formula Dr. White recommends is E-Lyte. "Your whole body depends on water and minerals to function. I also recommend dry brush massage to encourage lymph flow."

Colon cleansing, via enemas, home colemas, or professional colonics, can also be useful. Dr. White recommends a 48-ounce plastic enema bucket for those new to colon cleansing, rather than an enema bag (the latter are usually made out of rubber, a petroleum product). Liver flushes (using various formulas) can also decrease toxic load on the body by helping clear the liver and gallbladder of stones and sludge. Carlos LeClair recalls being advised to do liver flushes with ozone, and in retrospect, "I wish I had followed the advice derived from others' experiences and thoroughly flushed out my liver before beginning the saunas. I believe that if I had done this, the rash might not have lasted so long."

Herbal support can also be useful. Two herbs that are receiving a lot of attention in the Lyme and CFIDS community lately are artemisinin and samento. The former is a derivative of artemisia that is said to be useful in a tickborne infection called babesia. It also has a history in Chinese medicine of being antispiretochetal. In addition, it is antifungal. The latter, samento, is a form of cat's claw that seems to be immune modulating and antibacterial.

It is wise to enlist the aid of a health care practitioner who is familiar with these procedures and herbs to help design a program of detoxification that is gentle but thorough. "As you heal and work on yourself it will be natural to have days that are worse and better," explains Dr. White. "It is also common to have emotional responses triggered by the healing and detoxification cycles. It is natural to release what I call emotional toxins as well as physical toxins through this process. That gives us an opportunity to grow and heal in new ways."

As emotional, and even spiritual issues, come to the surface, it is important to keep a positive attitude. One of the best books on healing through the power of the mind is available free on the web via download. Called Your Empowering Spirit (Y.E.S.), by Gary Sinclair, it is an inspiring book about healing from the inside out. Sinclair claims to have healed himself of severe multiple sclerosis.

REFERENCES

- Mild Portable Hyperbaric Chambers, Lance Brubaker, (770) 560-2676. Home chambers come in three sizes, and leasing plans are available.
- Ozone Sauna: Dr. Saul Pressman, DCh, Plasmfire International, www.plasmfire.com or call (604) 532-9596. Dr. Pressman is widely considered to have the most reliable, high quality ozone products available.
- Yahoo Groups: mild hyperbaric and Lyme disease: <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/lyme-mildhyperbaric/>; ozonetherapy: <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/ozonetherapy/>
- Infrared Bulb Sauna: Dr. Larry Wilson, email: Larry@drlwilson.com or call (928) 445-7690. Dr. Wilson also sells a book, Manual of Sauna Therapy, that is very useful, at www.drlwilson.com.
- Far Infrared Lamps: http://www.ycyhealth.com/tdp_index.shtml
- Enema Bucket: <http://shop.store.yahoo.com/homecareessentials/ppi2562.html>
- Colema Board: <http://store.awwwsome.com/enema.html>
- Gary Sinclair's Your Empowering Spirit: <http://www.cyberphysiology.com/> or call (760) 451-3099