

# Fomentations

## Hydrotherapy for influenza, plus!

**What is a fomentation?** The term refers both to the application of a moist heated substance to the body as well as to the heated materials themselves. Fomentation therapy is a relatively simple but very effective means of promoting healing and relieving discomfort. The primary physiological principle involved is that of drawing fresh blood, with its life-giving properties, to the body portion on which the hotpacks are applied.

Fomentations (fomies) can be used to relieve nervousness, restlessness, and muscle cramps. They can help fight illness by increasing the circulation of germ-fighting white blood cells. Fomies can also induce sweating, which increases the elimination of toxins through the skin. They can relieve congestion or pain in the internal organs by drawing blood away from the afflicted part to the body surface. And hotpacks can prepare the body for exercise, physical therapy, or massage.

### The basics

A good pattern for a well-performing fomentation is 4 layers of 50/50 blend wool and cotton material, quilted to the size of 30 by 36 inches.\* Wool provides insulation, which reduces danger of burning the patient, and cotton provides moisture retention, which facilitates the conduction of heat. If not available, something simpler, such as thick cotton towels can be used. Either way, the basic process is to moisten and then heat the fomies until steaming hot, wrap them in a dry wool cover, and then place them on the desired body part, with one or more thick towels placed between the skin and fomentation pack to protect the flesh from discomfort or burns. The application of these hot fomies is generally alternated with brief applications of cold. This alternation of hot and cold (termed revulsive) increases the circulation, producing beneficial effects.

### When to use

- Respiratory infections:
  - sinusitis: revulsive fomies to face.
  - pharyngitis and laryngitis: revul-

sive fomentations to the throat.

- chest congestion from influenza, bronchitis, pneumonia, asthma, and pleurisy. Apply to chest.
- Painful nerves (neuralgias): fomentations as hot as possible, omit cold.
- Arthritis: apply to the involved joints, often followed by specialized massage.
- Myositis/fibrositis: hotpacks to affected areas, especially neck/upper back, followed by suitable massage.
- Difficulty sleeping and nervousness: mild prolonged fomentations to spine, followed by tepid sponge wipe-down and light massage.
- Low back pain: fomentations to affected area, followed by massage.

### When not to use

- Do not administer hotpack therapy to a patient who does not willingly cooperate. This may be the case, at times, with very young or older individuals.
- Treatment should not be given to persons who have a loss of sensation, tendency to bleed or hemorrhage, lack of blood supply, contagious skin disease, or severe swelling from heart or kidney failure, or to patients who are unconscious.
- Do not, without direct supervision of a physician, give fomentations to a person with diabetic neuropathy or suspected acute appendicitis.
- Do not apply hotpacks over any swellings, such as sinuses, joints, and bursas, unless alternating with application of a towel partially wrung from ice water or with an ice bag, left on for a full minute.
- Omit application of cold when treating kidney stones, painful menstruation, a patient who is hypersensitive to cold, or pleurisy (unless pleuritic pain is present).\*\*
- When in doubt as to whether the treatment is in order, check with a physician before administration.

### The environment

The room in which the treatment is given should be appropriately warm, quiet, and well-ventilated but free from drafts. Assemble and arrange all materials and equipment before starting the treatment. Explain the basics of the procedure to the patient. Ask for the blessing and guidance of the Great Physician, who lovingly gave us these natural treatments. When giving the treatment, make your movements efficient, but not hurried. Foster a peaceful, hopeful atmosphere. Be attentive to the patient's comfort and physiological responses to the treatment.

### General revulsive

Fomies, as we have indicated, can be applied for many different conditions. We are now going to focus, however, on an application called a "general revulsive," which is especially helpful for cases of flu and other respiratory infections.

### Materials and equipment needed

- A treatment table or bed, preferably high enough to prevent the therapist from needing to stoop.
- A small table or other suitable surface near the bedside on which to set the items needed during the treatment.
- Two sheets and a light blanket.
- Two or more heavy cotton towels.
- Several washcloths or hand towels.
- Two terry-cloth mitts. These can be made by folding a washcloth in half and sewing up the side and one end.
- A pillow for the patient's headrest.
- Four or five quilted fomie pads, or thick cotton towels.
- Five fomentation covers, preferably of wool material for optimal heat retention, and large enough to fully wrap

\*For professionally-sewn fomentations and other hydrotherapy supplies, contact Quality Hydrotherapy Supplies at [dpshurley@gmail.com](mailto:dpshurley@gmail.com) or (423) 903-5041.

\*\*Applying topical cold over painful spots in the lungs can help reduce the pain. Hotpacks can be applied to the surrounding areas of the chest where no pain is present. *Cont. on page 36.*



the fomie. Thick cotton towels can be used if wool covers are unavailable.

- A metal container with a lid, deep enough to allow for a rack on which to keep rolled-up fomies out of the boiling water, eg., a canning kettle. Or, if using the oven to heat fomies, heavy-duty aluminum foil.
- Well-insulated oven mitts
- A large basin or small tub for a footbath. The bottom of the receptacle should be large enough so that the patient's feet can rest flat on the bottom with the knees bent at a 90-degree angle and deep enough so that the water can reach several inches above the ankles.
- Newspaper or plastic to place under the foot tub to protect the bedding from getting wet.
- Hot water for the footbath.
- A plastic pitcher for ice water.
- A basin of cold water with crushed ice.
- Drinking water and a bendable straw.

### How to do the general revulsive

1. Heat water in the container in which the fomies will be steamed. Thoroughly moisten the dry fomies with warm or hot water (but not to dripping). Roll up like a tube and place vertically, preferably, on a rack in the heating container. Cover with lid and steam for a minimum of 10 minutes after the water has started to boil. Lay fomentation covers or towels open and flat in a stack on a surface near the heating fomies. Once the fomies are sufficiently heated, remove one from kettle. Use an oven mitt or towel to protect your hand and arm from being burned. Assemble hotpack quickly to preserve its heat: unroll it across the center of an open cover and then fold the wrap over the steaming fomie. Fold the hotpack in half lengthwise and roll quickly in a tube. This will help retain its heat and facilitate carrying it to the bedside. If you cannot heat the fomies on the stovetop, you can also use an oven or a microwave. For the oven method, roll fomies up after moistening, then wrap each *separately* with *heavy duty* aluminum foil. Heat at 450° to 500° F. for a minimum of 25 minutes. To microwave, wet the fomie, wring out excess water, roll up, and place in a pricked plastic bag. (Because it will

not be kept warm in the microwave once the oven stops, it is best to heat the fomie *just before* using.) Heat *one at a time*, on high, until steaming hot. Remove and wrap in a cover. While this pack is on patient's chest, heat the next fomie in the microwave.

Another method of heating, for towels only (*not* quilted fomies), is to dip the towels into a big pot of boiling water. This procedure needs to be done very carefully, so as not to burn oneself. Fold the towel lengthwise, grasp both ends, and twist tightly. Dip towel into hot water, leaving the two ends and your hands out. Lift thoroughly soaked towel out and stretch between both hands to remove excess water. Lay one end of the wet towel on an open towel or wool cover. Untwist the end still being held and lay it down as well on the flat cover. Quickly assemble.

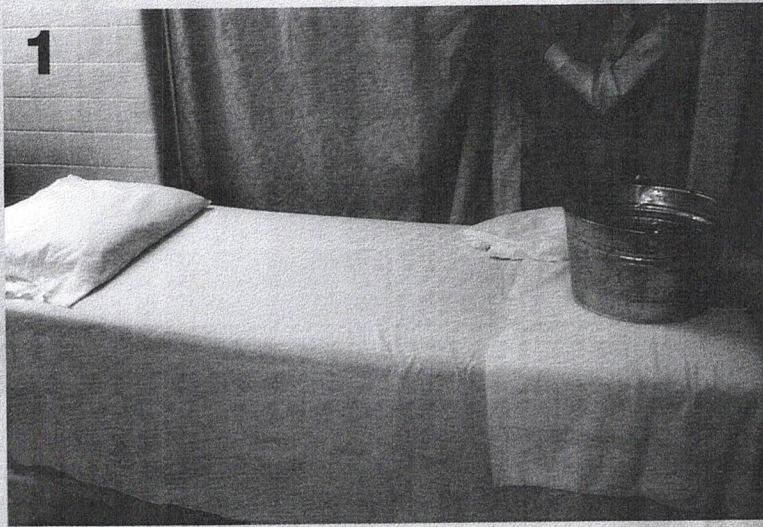
2. Drape empty treatment bed with a plastic covering, two sheets, and a light blanket (in that order). Fold down one sheet and the blanket.
3. Assemble the basin of ice-water, drinking water with straw, pitcher with ice water, and place by the bed.
4. Place a piece of plastic across foot of bed. Lay a towel on top of the plastic. Then set the tub for the footbath on the towel. Add water to the tub, 105° F. or more depending on patient's preference, but no warmer than 102° for diabetics. A hot water bottle can also be used to heat the feet during the treatment, but it will not be as effective as the footbath.
5. Assemble one hotpack and lay vertically on bed, where patient's back will lie. Cover with a thick towel.
6. Have patient, clothed in shorts or underpants, lie down with his back on the hotpack. This hotpack will be left in place until the treatment is over.
7. Help patient put his feet in the foottub. Adjust water temperature as needed to his tolerance and comfort. Cover him and the foottub with the upper sheet and blanket.
8. Uncover patient's upper body and place a dry towel(s) over his chest, then replace covers. Bring a hotpack, uncover bedding again and lay hot fomie over the chest, on top of the dry towel(s). Cover hotpack with another dry towel to retain its heat. Pull bedcovers back up over over

patient, including the hotpack. Be on the alert for any developing "hot spots"—bony or tender areas—under the hotpack. Protect these delicate spots from discomfort or burn by placing a dry small towel or washcloth between hotpack and patient. Note: towels tend not to hold the heat as long as do quilted fomies, so you may need to replace the hotpack sooner if using heated towels.

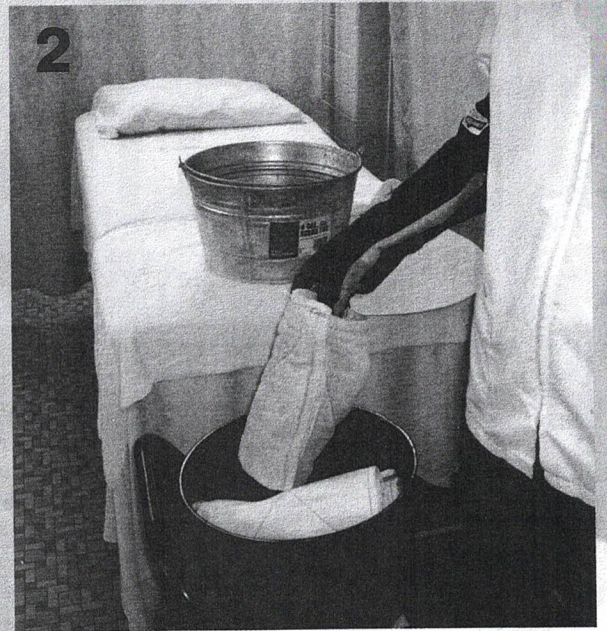
9. Because the patient may sweat during the treatment, be sure to offer him water to drink often. Using a flexible straw will allow him to drink without sitting up.
10. Wring a washcloth or small hand towel from the ice water and place on patient's forehead for his comfort and to prevent overheating. Reapply as needed during the treatment.
11. Check the temperature of the footbath and add more hot water as needed. Continue to do this periodically until the footbath is concluded. Be careful not to burn patient's feet when pouring in the hot water. Stir the added water in with your hand.
12. While first hotpack is lying on the patient's chest, prepare a fresh hot one and bring it to the bedside. Remove the spent one, set aside, and quickly blot the chest area with a hand towel wrung partly dry from ice water. Pat the skin dry, cover chest again with a dry towel, and apply the next fomie. Be sure the towel(s) used to protect the chest is dry. *A moist one conveys heat more readily and could burn the patient.*  
Note: If using more than one towel to protect the chest, all but one can be removed as the hotpacks cool, to economize the heating effect.
13. After three hotpacks have been given, apply cold water to the patient's feet as follows: uncover bedding over footbath. Lift patient's feet up out of the bath with one of your hands and hold them, toes up, above the tub. Using a pitcher of ice water, quickly douse them with cold. Set feet down on the towel placed beneath the tub and dry them briskly. Remove foottub from the bed.
14. Conclude the treatment by administering cold mitten friction: wring the mitts from the ice water and quickly slip them onto your hands. Remove the covers from one leg. Starting at

*Continued on page 22.*

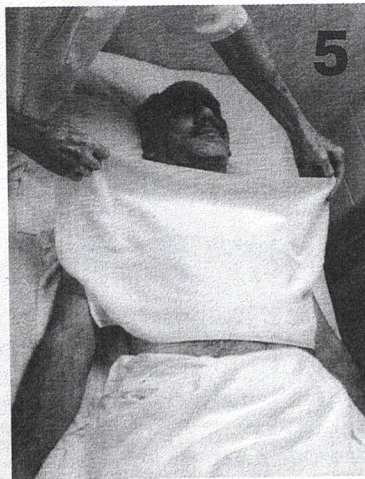




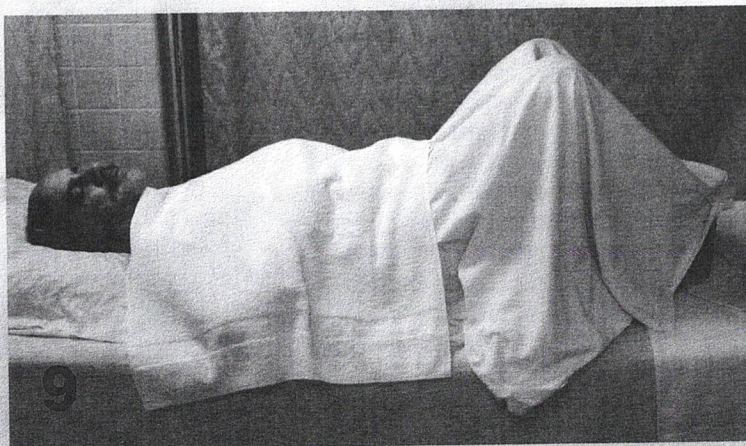
**1**  
The basic set-up: a bed or treatment table draped with a plastic covering to shield it from moisture, then covered with a bedsheet. At foot of the bed, place a tub with warm water, with a towel underneath. Have another sheet and blanket at hand with which to cover the patient.



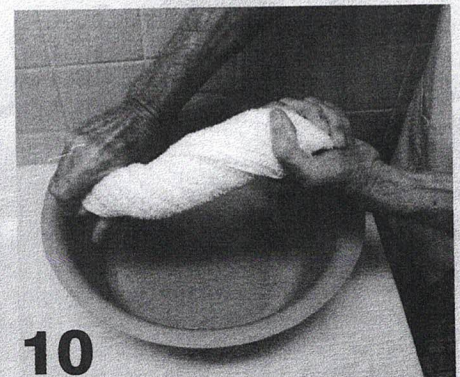
**2**  
When removing a hot fomentation from the heating container, be sure to carefully protect your hand and arm from being burned by using oven mitts or some other protective covering.



**5**  
**6**  
Lay a towel(s) across the patient's chest, place the first of the three hotpacks on it, cover with another towel to retain heat, and then lay bedcovers over patient, hotpack, and towels.

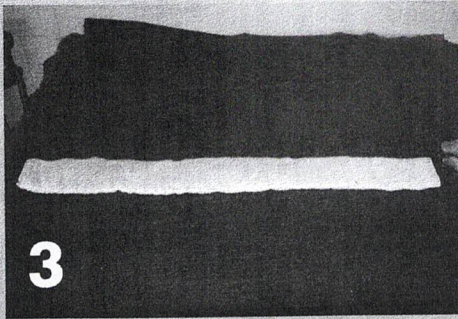


**9**  
Leave each fomentation on for about three to four minutes, until it begins to lose its warmth.



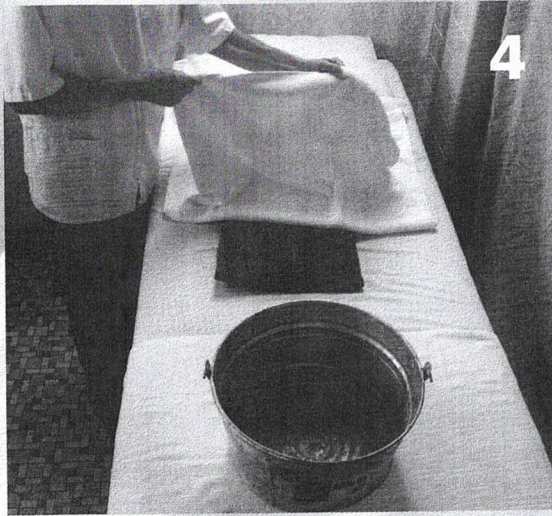
**10**  
Wring out a handtowel from ice water. After removing the fomentation and setting aside, lay the cold towel across the patient's chest and rub vigorously but gently to close down the dilated blood vessels. This will send the blood on its way and enhance the circulation.





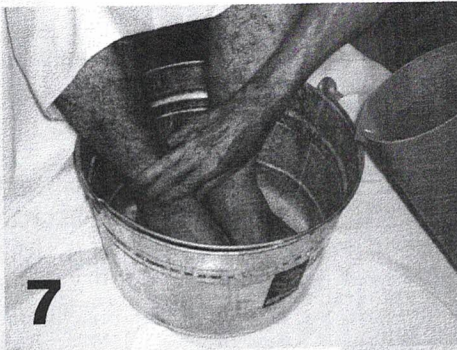
**3**

Lay the steaming fomentation flat on the opened wool cover (or towel) and quickly fold wrap over the fomentation to retain its heat.



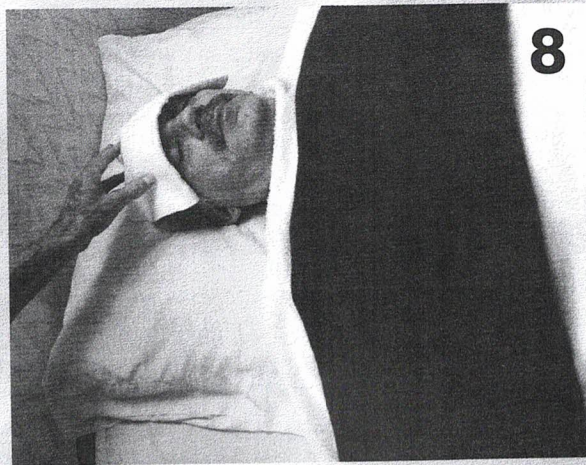
**4**

Lay the wrapped fomentation (hotpack) on the bed, and cover with towels (how many depends on how thick they are and the patient's comfort level). Assist the patient to lie down with his back on the hotpack.



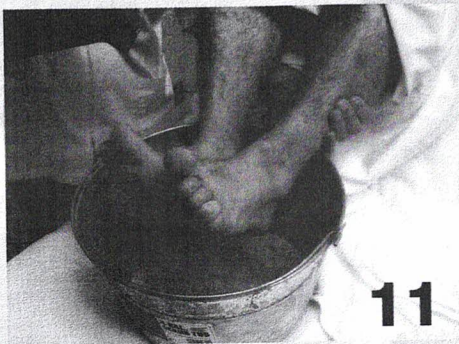
**7**

Add hot water to the foot tub, testing the temperature with your hand and pouring it in such a way that it does not burn the patient's feet. Add more hot water as needed during the treatment to keep the footbath warm. The water level should reach several inches above the patient's ankles.



**8**

During the entire treatment, keep the patient's head cool with a washcloth wrung out of ice water. Because the patient may sweat during the treatment, be sure to offer him water to drink, using a bendable straw so that he can continue to lie down.



**11**

After three cycles of chest fomentations followed by cold rubs, lift the feet out of the foot-bucket. Holding them in a toes-up position, quickly pour a pitcher of ice-cold water over them. Set them down on the dry towel lying under the foot-tub. Dry feet briskly, and then remove the foot bucket from off the treatment table or bed.



**12**

Conclude the treatment with a cold-mitten friction as follows: Begin with the arms and legs, uncovering only one limb at a time. Wring the mitts out from ice water, and quickly place on your hands. Starting at the extremities, rub briskly with a to-and-fro movement up to the shoulder/thigh, and then back again to the fingers/toes. Immediately and gently pat skin dry. Next, apply friction to the chest and abdomen; then have the patient roll on his side while you apply the friction to his back. Dry patient's back. Remove the hot pack that he has been lying on and allow him to lie back down. Give the patient clean, dry bedclothes and socks to put on, if he desires. Cover him with the sheet and blanket(s) and allow him to rest for at least 30 minutes. He should be comfortable, relaxed, and free from chilling or sweating.