

The word on salt and stones: A perfect remedy for stress

It's been a harrowing week. Well-meaning friends who've noticed my distress have been encouraging me with clichés. *Just relax. Take it easy. Lighten up. Chill.* But the clichés are counterproductive and merely summon internal screams of frustration. I'm at *my wits end*.

In the midst of my tight schedule, I notice that I've scheduled an appointment at **Vanity Salon & Day Spa** (512-482-8573) in South Austin. As I head to the spa, my mood

matches the rush hour traffic, which is intensifying with a crescendo. I'm thinking of deadlines, proposals, projects, chores and errands. Each thought is a land mine threatening to explode at the slightest misstep. I split off from South Lamar and stop just short of the spa's driveway. That's when I notice the spa's look. It's housed in a modest bungalow, painted over in pink and purple shades, in a part of town that's funky and eclectic. My mood swings at the sight of these colors and this oh-so-Austiny look. I dig it, just as I'm sure owner **Laura Gamble** did when she decided to relocate her spa to this Barton Hills nest.

Soon enough, I'm lying under the covers for my Stress Begone Body Wrap. **Sandra Colvin**, a registered massage therapist, tells me that this is my time and my session.

Aaah, what beautiful words. As Colvin vigorously rubs peppermint and lavender salt scrub on my legs, she says, "I'm gonna put salt and oil on your body, and then flip you over and do the front; and then I'll wrap you up like a taco." No work from me works for me. So far so good. Colvin meticulously applies the scrub to my back, arms and chest. I realize that her encouragement to *just relax* carries weight. Hah! *Actions speak louder than words*, I think.

"I'll put an extra blanket on top, and the oils... will have a chance to absorb into your body," she says when she finishes. Colvin adds a space blanket to the pile, and as my body toasts, she massages my feet.

When the scrub has done its work, Colvin wipes the salt mixture from my skin with steamed towels. I take a shower and return to find fresh sheets for my Swedish massage.

Emerging from the spa two hours later, I realize that having someone else do all the work is nice for a change. The most demanding part of my visit was choosing the massage oil—a blend of tangerine and vanilla. The most relaxing? Just about every minute of the salt scrub and massage accompanied by Colvin's calming presence. Colvin has managed to impart an increased awareness of myself through her careful and attentive touch.

With salt still on my mind, I seek out **Kristi**

Ludlam, owner and registered massage therapist of **Zenblend.com** (512-292-4936). Ludlam offers the use of her floatation tank (or sensory deprivation tank) which, from the outside, could pass as a one-man (or one-woman) space shuttle.

"It has ten inches of water and three hundred pounds of Epsom salt in it. Because of the salt, you float like a cork. You get to experience weightlessness," she says.

"You'll feel exactly where you're holding the tension right away. I just tell people to welcome the tension instead of fighting and focusing on it, and it just kind of fades."

But first, my Zen time begins with a hot stone massage. Against a musical backdrop of Japanese flutes, Ludlam rolls the stones along my spine and places them on strategic points of my feet and hands. The stones glide against my skin like warm molasses, and heat slowly seeps into my muscles. After a brief shower to wash away the oils, I enter the floatation tank. I lower the door and slip into darkness.

My senses grasp nothingness. There's nothing to feel, nothing to hear, nothing to see. There is no work to be done. That's when I begin to play. The water, heated slightly above body temperature, cradles me while I try out various positions: hands clasped behind my head, arms extended above my head, elbows bent and palms faced upwards. I lose all sense of time while I revel in this newborn feeling.

When introducing first-time floaters to the tank, Ludlam prefers to stay mum. She knows that each person will encounter a unique experience and she hesitates to influence a floater's reaction. For more reflective clients who desire to prolong the tranquility, Ludlam provides an outdoor tea room and meditation area.

Ludlam says that she typically floats three times a week. I take note of her relaxed features; even her movements seem to flow. According to Ludlam, her regular clients have acquired the ability to remain calm in situations that would normally agitate them.

Of course, relaxation isn't *always* about salt and stones. **Jami Barnes of Jami Barnes Day Spa and Coffeeshouse** (512-894-0002) offers her Customized Stress Reduction Massage. She focuses on natural, holistic products and an inside-out approach. "I'll talk to you about what's going on inside you," she says.

With twenty-three years experience as a facialist, Barnes recommends Le Grand Clinique Deep Pore Facial. "It includes a fifteen-minute neck, upper shoulder and facial massage. I use hot towels on the neck, and cucumbers and chamomile around the eyes. It's relaxing but also therapeutic," she says. ☞

The next time Joanne hears the words, "Just relax," she'll "just do it" and "take a break" with the help of salt and stones. You may reach Joanne at jluu@goodlifemag.com.

