

Chocolate to spa for, a sweet treat for a sumptuous holiday

It's still a while before Valentine's Day, but I admit I'm already craving chocolate, a guilty pleasure I don't feel so guilty about. In my book, chocolate is a year-round indulgence and you certainly don't need to await the arrival of a box of chocolates on your doorstep in February. Take matters into your own hands—what better time to relish chocolate than during the height of holiday season?

Rosie Marcantoni, owner and president of **Spa Saluté Med Spa** (512-241-8477), agrees. Her spa regularly offers chocolate treatments for the chocoholic in all of us. Although she says the treatments are most popular among teenagers and men, I schedule an appointment for a chocolate layered facial and chocolate mousse body wrap.

Marcantoni, a licensed esthetician, enjoys personally handling these treatments. Her engaging personality easily persuades clients to entrust themselves to her capable hands. I soon discover she is a modern day Renaissance woman. A former paralegal, engineering technician and model for Calvin Klein, Marcantoni has now adapted her multi-faceted talents to another industry, creating a truly unique place in Austin's spa scene.

Her talents are evident. See it in her tilework artistry, with its milk-and-coffee-colored designs throughout the spa. Feel it in her skincare expertise, with treatments tailored to each client's needs. First, Marcantoni examines my skin with a

Wood's lamp, an ultraviolet light that identifies dehydration, acne and sun damage. When the lamp illuminates my face, I take careful note of what it reveals: purple areas indicate dehydration, brown spots indicate sun damage, and white or light blue skin indicates healthy areas. This evaluation, done in a dark room, allows Marcantoni to put her expertise to work treating my skin according to its needs.

The first thing she does after examining my face is rub pure Vitamin K liquid below my eyes to eliminate puffiness and darkness. "Dark circles under the eyes are often the result of allergies or not enough sleep," she says. I've been getting enough sleep, but acknowledge that I suffer from allergy symptoms.

Marcantoni also points out that purple areas indicate dehydration, and not dryness. Dryness refers to dryness in the top outer layer of skin, the epidermal layer, whereas dehydration refers to the lack of water in the underlying dermal layer, she says.

Marcantoni purifies my face with chocolate milk cleanser. She decides not to apply Vitamin C because she thinks it might prove too irritating. Instead, she chooses the Marine Collagen Contour, a rubber masque made by DPC of Italy, and then applies a plaster masque on top of it. It's gooey and hot when applied, but silky and solid when removed. My facial also includes a chocolate shea

butter cream massage to the shoulders, arms and hands. I feel so content, I want to hum.

I begin my chocolate mousse body wrap sitting upright and inhaling deeply, taking in the most decadent scent of all: pure chocolate. Marcantoni then dry brushes my body to loosen and exfoliate my skin.

When asked about chocolate's properties, she says, "Caffeine in chocolate is great for treating cellulite. It stimulates and helps fat cells break down."

"This masque has cocoa from the Amazon, which is derived from raw cacao," she says. "Cacao is the actual bean that cocoa comes from and it's among the most concentrated vegetable sources of energy." According to Marcantoni, the masque also contains magnesium, zinc and theobromine, which is similar to caffeine and also stimulates fat burning.

Chocolate is good for me! I relish my body wrap even more with this upbeat news. Marcantoni encourages me to choose from one of five flavors for the body scrub. Chocolate cake flavor it is. I eat up my shea butter sugar chocolate cake scrub, followed by a body wash with chocolate berry cleanser, more hot steamed towels to remove the scrub and wash, a chocolate body masque and chocolate oil massage. The body wash is an extra step Marcantoni adds and which most spas neglect.

The body masque is my favorite part. Marcantoni uses extra shea butter oil to thicken the mixture, to better simulate the consistency of melt-

ed chocolate, before she wraps me up in a plastic thermal sheet.

Afterwards, she uses hot steamed towels to remove the masque, Marcantoni tops off the treatment with a chocolate cake shea butter body massage.

On my way out the door, Marcantoni surprises me with a parting gift—edible chocolate. It's the perfect touch.

You can find other cocoa-centric treatments at **Aziz Salon, Day Spa & and Skin Wellness Center** (512-476-4131). Treat your feet to the Chocolate Mint Pedicure or try the Chocolate Mint Body Scrub, a special service customers may book one week in advance. Or, take a soak in a chocolate bath at **Nature Spa** (512-801-3893).

You can't go wrong complementing chocolate with coffee, well-known for its caffeinated kick. **Daya Day Spa and Salon** (512-374-1010) near the University of Texas offers the Bali Kopi Scrub, a treatment that exfoliates and hydrates with the help of Indonesian coffee grounds, while **Lake Austin Spa Resort's LakeHouse Spa** (512-372-7380) offers a Coffee Scrub and Massage treatment. **G**

Joanne vows to return to Spa Saluté, where she'll try a different chocolate flavor—perhaps the chocolate berry. Or maybe the chocolate mint. Oh wait, how about caramel vanilla or chocolate coconut? You may reach her at Jliu@goodlifemag.com.

