

Patient Information

Physiotherapy

Wax therapy

Wax therapy involves applying melted paraffin wax and mineral oil to the body. This improves mobility by heating connective tissues.

Wax therapy method is effective due to the low specific heat of the combination. This allows patients to tolerate the heat better than from water of the same temperature.

Wax therapy is mainly used on your hands in a hospital setting.

Wax therapy is used for:

- Reducing pain and stiffness associated with osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis
- Fibromyalgia
- Eczema (a dry skin disorder)
- Joint stiffness and muscle soreness after fractures, some minor surgical conditions, ligament sprains and strains

Benefits of wax therapy

Paraffin wax acts as a form of heat therapy. It can help improve circulation, relax muscles and reduce stiffness in the joints. Wax therapy can also help soften the skin and it may help reduce swelling.



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Side effects

Paraffin wax is tested in a lab to make sure it's safe and hygienic to use on the body.

Paraffin wax has a low melting point. This means it can be applied to the skin at a temperature low enough not to cause burns or blisters.

If you have very sensitive skin, paraffin wax may cause heat rash. Heat rash results in small red bumps on the skin that can be itchy and uncomfortable.

If you have a chemical sensitivity, you may develop minor swelling or breakouts from the wax treatment. That's because paraffin comes from petroleum products.

Wax therapy – is it safe?

Yes, in general wax therapy is safe.

Do not attempt to use wax if you have:

- an open wound
- skin infection/rashes
- a defective skin sensation (they cannot correctly judge hot and cold temperature differences on the skin)
- ischemic conditions (a very poor blood supply to an area)
- a skin allergy
- diabetes - there is likelihood of reduced sensation, and heating may affect your blood sugar levels

Risks of wax therapy

- Burns. Use a thermostatically controlled unit which regulates the temperature of the wax to reduce the risk of this.

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If you're doing a paraffin wax treatment at home, take care not to heat the wax too much, as it may catch fire. It should be no more than 125°F (51.7°C) when you start your treatment.

- Aggravation of inflammation.

Your physiotherapist will have asked you questions to confirm if you are a safe candidate for Wax therapy. If you are unsure and remain concerned about your suitability or risk to yourself, please seek your GP's or practice nurse's advice.

How to apply wax therapy

A paraffin wax treatment involves submerging the affected body part, (usually the hand) into a large container of warm wax for a moment or two. This creates a waxy glove.

1. Dip your hand into the wax up to 10 times. This is done to build up an adequate layer of warm wax.

Each time, lift your hand out of the wax fully. Allow the wax to set for 2 to 3 seconds before putting your hand back into the wax - it should lose its shine.

2. Cover your hand with a plastic bag. Wrap a towel around the plastic bag to insulate it.
3. The wax can remain on your hand until the heat has gone. This will probably be about 15 to 20 minutes.
4. Remove the towel and plastic bag. Peel the wax towards your fingers. It should slide off in almost one piece.
5. Discard the wax if another person is using the unit

If the unit is being used by only one person, this peeled wax can be placed in the bath to melt again. Please only follow manufacturer's instructions for your own safety.

The wax will need replacing after several uses. It will gather some dead skin cells and sweat, making it unsafe to continue using.

Where to buy a wax bath to use at home

Baths can be purchased from beauty sites such as:

- Amazon www.amazon.co.uk
- HoMedics www.homedics.co.uk
- Argos www.argos.co.uk
- eBay www.ebay.co.uk

For your own safety, follow each individual manufacturer's instructions on using their specific pieces of equipment.

Baths can vary in price and size. Small units suitable for immersing one hand at a time cost about £55 upwards (as of August 2023).

Units advertised for less than £55 may not have adequate thermostatic control or may not be robust enough for regular use.

Wax refill blocks/pellets cost about £15 to £20.

Accessories such as covering mitts, used to put over the wax application to keep the warmth in for longer can be purchased for about £10 and £20. But these aren't essential.

For more information contact:

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