Worry stones (palm stones, thumb stones) are smooth, polished gemstones, usually in the shape of an oval with a thumb-sized indentation, used for relaxation or anxiety relief. They are used by holding the stone between the index finger and thumb and gently moving one's thumb back and forth across the stone.

From the perspective of cognitive behavior therapy, the use of worry stones is one of many folk practices that can function as psychologically healthy self-soothing exercises. Such techniques are imparted at an early stage of treatment, displacing any familiar but destructive coping methods (nail-biting, scratching, lip-biting, etc.) that the patient may have developed. This helps ready the patient to safely confront anxiety or trauma.[1] Worry stones are simple and intuitive enough to be useful in therapeutic contexts where complexity and unfamiliarity are paramount concerns, such as when offering short-term treatment to refugees[1] or children[2] with post-traumatic stress disorder. After a patient has mastered a more sophisticated relaxation script for anxiety management, the worry stone itself can serve as a physical 'relaxation script reminder'; the patient may notice an impulse to use the object, and thereby become aware of their own anxiety.[2]

As a folk practice implement, worry stones have many origins. Variations on the concept originate in ancient Greece,[2] Tibet, Ireland,[2][3] and multiple Native American tribes.[2]

Worry stones enjoyed relatively large popularity in the 1970s.[citation needed] They are also believed to have originated in Tibet, for the same usage. (see Lobsang Rampa's books for further information). Also Wiccans and other Neo-Pagans use worry stones and they are sold in various pagan shops.

Crystal healing is a pseudoscientific[1] alternative medicine technique that employs stones and crystals. Adherents of the technique claim that these have healing powers, although there is no scientific basis for this claim.

One method is where the practitioner places crystals on different parts of the body, often corresponding to so-called "chakras"; or else the practitioner places crystals around the body in an attempt to construct an "energy grid", which is purported to surround the client with healing energy.[2] Despite this, scientific investigations have not validated claims that chakras or energy grids actually exist, nor is there any evidence that crystal healing has any greater effect upon the body than any other placebo.

Practices

This section does not cite any references (sources). Please help improve this section by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed. (July 2014)

Practitioners select the stones by colour or their supposed metaphysical qualities and place them on parts of the body. Stones are placed at the feet or held in the hands. Practitioners sometimes use crystal wands, which are placed near the receiver's body. Colour selection and placement of stones are done according to concepts of grounding, chakras or energy grids.

There is no scientific basis for the concepts of "chakras", being "blocked" or "energy grids" requiring "grounding" being anything other than terms ascribed by the adherents to misleadingly lend credibility to their practices. Energy as a scientific term is a very well-defined concept that is readily measurable and bears little resemblance to the esoteric concept of energy used by proponents of crystal healing.

Cultural uses

Different cultures have developed traditions of crystal healing over time, including the Hopi Native Americans of Arizona[3] and Hawaiian islanders, some of whom continued to use it as of 1997.[4] The Chinese have traditionally attributed healing powers to microcrystalline jade.[5]

Criticism

There is no peer reviewed scientific evidence that crystal healing has any effect. It is considered a pseudoscience. Pleasant feelings or seeming successes of crystal healing can be attributed to the placebo effect.

In 1999, researchers French and Williams conducted a study to investigate the power of crystals compared with a placebo. Eighty volunteers were asked to meditate with either a quartz crystal, or a placebo stone which was indistinguishable from quartz. Many of the participants reported feeling typical 'crystal effects' however this was irrespective of whether the crystals were real or placebo. The study was repeated in 2001 by French, O'Donnell and Williams in order to add a double-blind component to the study design. Similar results were produced.[6]

Crystal healing effects could also be attributed to cognitive bias (which occurs when the believers want the practice to be true and see only things that back up that desire).[7]

Crystal healing techniques are also practiced on animals, although some veterinary organizations, such as the British Veterinary Association, have warned that these methods are not scientifically proven and state that people should seek the advice of a vet before using alternative techniques.[8]

As with other non-scientific methods the practice of "crystal healing" can be actively dangerous or possibly even fatal if it causes people with illnesses that are treatable by scientifically-based medicine to avoid or delay seeking effective treatment.

Efficacy

A 2009 Cochrane summary concluded that there is insufficient evidence to determine whether salt therapy in treating asthma is effective and that more research is needed; particularly randomized controlled trials.[2]

Salt mines and caves

Namakdan Cave (means: "Salt Shaker Cave") is the longest salt cave in the world.

These natural deposits of mineral halite are derived from evaporated ancient lakes and seas. The unrefined rock salt, primarily sodium chloride, also includes varying concentrations of other mineral salts such as calcium and magnesium, manganese and sulfates which have additional therapeutic properties,[citation needed] depending on the source.

The special characteristics of the micro-climate of a salt mine include stable air temperature, humidity and lack of airborne pollutants such as pollens, and are unique to each mine. At depth the air pressure is also significantly higher than above ground which has been found to benefit sufferers of respiratory diseases in studies conducted at the Dead Sea, which is below sea level.[citation needed]

There are records of improvements in the breathing of miners in Roman and medieval times. Feliks Boczkowski – a physician at the Polish salt mine at Wieliczka – wrote in 1843 that the miners there did not suffer from lung diseases and his successor set up a spa based upon these observations.[3] Modern use of this therapy started in Germany when Karl Hermann Spannagel[4] noticed improvement in the health of his patients after they hid in the Kluterthöhle karst cave to escape heavy bombing. It is now practised in places such as Bystrianska in Slovakia,[5] Wieliczka in Poland,[6] Solotvyno in Ukraine[7] and many other East European countries.[8]

Halogenerators

see also Halogenerator

Halogenerators are used to simulate the salted atmosphere of salt mines. These highly developed machines crush rock salt into dry micrometre-sized particles, ionize the particles, and release them into the air. Salt particles of sizes 0.1–2.5 micrometres are able to escape the natural defences of the upper airways and travel deep into the lung to the level of the alveoli. Typically used in a small room with floors and walls lined with rocksalt, known as artificial salt room.

Salt lamps are another method of salt therapy.[citation needed] A large crystal of natural salt is hollowed out and heated with a tealight or lightbulb. The crystals give off a glow in various colours of pink, orange, red or purple according to the minerals present.

Home salt therapy

Special home saline therapy devices were developed with the scope of making salt therapy easily available at home, replicating the seashore or speleotherapy aerosol. Hand-held devices and ultrasonic salinizers use rock salt to create the microscopic breathable particles of salt. The hand-held salt inhaler uses dry rock salt and can deliver the salt aerosol by breathing through the mouth and exhaling through the nose, offering 1–2 hours of daily exposure. The ultrasonic salinizer uses saline solution,[9] made with natural rock salt, to create the salt aerosol. These salt particles are released into the indoor air and freely breathed during the night, offering 7–8 hours daily exposure, especially for chronic respiratory diseases.[10]