

Whole body cryotherapy in cryo-chamber for treating rheumatoid arthritis

Whole body cryotherapy now occupies a firm position in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. The success of treatment has now been confirmed by a whole range of clinical studies.

As already mentioned, the disease processes with these autoimmune disorders primarily play out in the joints (inflammation of the synovial membrane of the articular capsule, destruction of cartilage and bone structures). Nevertheless, although new principles of action (TNF- α -blockade) have recently been included in therapeutic programs, a complex procedure is still required for treatment. This also results from the understanding of rheumatoid arthritis as a systemic disorder that damages the entire organism. Medication-based, if necessary surgical treatment, mobilization therapies, physical therapy (warm or cold applications) and also psychological treatment must be combined with and adapted to the patients' own personal coping strategies. For this purpose an extensive and excellent source of information is available in the form of literature provided by self-help organizations.

Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronically progressing illness which is not yet possible to cure despite all the advances that have been made in its therapy. As such the goal of treatment is to achieve a decrease in disease intensity in order to halt or delay its progression.

Whole body cryotherapy can be understood in this context as an adjuvant physical therapy that if applied resolutely can assist in achieving the therapeutic goal. It is not in principle a substitute for other proven therapies even if, as experience and studies have shown, a reduction in drug consumption can also often be achieved upon its application.

Whole body cryotherapy should be given twice per day on a hospitalized basis, or three times with highly active processes, over a period of two to three weeks optimally, where success of treatment should be assessed every two to three days by the doctor. As Dr. Bianka Benkenstein was able to verify in one study, a relief of symptoms, measured by the reduction in pain and restriction of movement, could be achieved with on average 10 to 15 cold exposures, even with a high initial activity of inflammatory disease. The disease manifestation was shortened and the inflammatory activity receded.

Under no circumstances during a cryotherapy should mobilization-therapeutic activities be refrained from. Movement improves the distribution of synovial fluid and in so doing the nutrient supply of the joint cartilage. On the other hand muscle atrophy due to inactivity is also reversed that might otherwise lead to secondary damage, for example at the skeleton.

As acute-clinical, rehabilitative and cure-therapeutic observations also suggest, one can say that under a whole body cryotherapy there is

- an improvement in general well being,
- pain reduction or elimination as well as a reduction of other inflammatory signs such as swelling and warming,
- improvement in general mobility and joint function in up to 60% of the treated cases and
- reduction in medicine intake (glucocorticoids and non-steroidal anti-rheumatics) in 35 to 40% of the patients.

The effects can still be shown three to six months after completion of therapy.