



I AM LEGEND

To better describe each treatment, we've picked from the following symbols. "Bodily fluid" isn't as bad as it sounds.

-  PAINFUL
-  SWEATY
-  INVIGORATING
-  EMASCULATING
-  EMBARRASSING
-  BODILY FLUID
-  EXPENSIVE
-  STICKY
-  NUDE
-  RELAXING
-  SWELLING

Boston Adventures in

Extreme Beauty

Spa and Fitness Services That Leave You Feeling Weird All Over

BY THE IMPROPER'S EDITORIAL STAFF PHOTOGRAPHS BY TRACY POWELL

When our reporter returns to the office, he looks like he lost a fight with an outside cigarette lighter. Bruises form crop circles under his shirt. That's what happens when you visit the spa. At least that's what happens when you have cupping, which uses heat or suction to create a partial vacuum with the skin. The procedure stimulates the flow of blood, lymph and energy. It also leaves back hickies that last a week.

Anything in the name of health and beauty these days. The wellness industry keeps raising the stakes with innovative offerings, and Boston has embraced the trend. Why nap, really, when you can have floatation therapy?

To test the waters, we picked seven of the city's stranger services—the more extreme, the better. Treatments included platza, candling and power body detox, which mixes mud with electricity. We also threw in a fitness gauntlet for the exercise nuts.

It wasn't pretty. Aside from the bruises, there was pain and embarrassment. One of us has already repressed the memory of a "wet oak" massage. We did feel healthier on the whole, however. Read our first-hand accounts and then try a treatment. Because if you're just getting facials, you're not living. Talk to us once you've had Swiss lymphatic drainage.

Models: Todd and Katrina/Maggie Inc.; makeup: Mariolga Pantazopoulos/Team the Agency



BUBBLE BOY These cups create a vacuum with the skin—and leave some serious bruises.

Our Cup of Tea

When my editor first asked me to get “cupping” for this story, my initial reaction was, “Wait, I thought Nick was the one having something weird done to his balls.” But thankfully, that’s not what cupping is about, or so I’d learn during a visit to Mary Kinneavy’s office.

Mary is a licensed acupuncturist at Pathways to Wellness—a nonprofit in the South End—who’s practiced in Boston for more than 20 years. And while acupuncture is her forte, she also dabbles in other forms of holistic help. Cupping is one of these forms. It’s an ancient Chinese deep-tissue massage, in which a partial vacuum is created by cups placed on the skin and suction. The process stimulates the flow of blood, lymph and energy to the affected spot. “It can reach a

larger area than many treatments,” she tells me, “and it’s great for tight muscles and circulation problems.” Sounds good. Let’s give it a try.

I start out lying face-down and shirtless on Mary’s table. Four medium-sized cups are suctioned to my back, and a smaller fifth one is attached to my neck. It sort of feels like four largemouth bass (and one normal-mouth bass) are simultaneously giving me hickeys. So in other words, it feels pretty awesome. Mary supplies a more technical description. “The suction brings all the toxins in your body to the surface, and then they can be dealt with.”

After about five minutes, the cups are removed and stage two begins—with eight words I haven’t heard in a long time: “I’m going to slather Vaseline all over

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you.” Once I’m sufficiently lubed, Mary attaches another cup, but this time she’s able to glide it without losing the grip. The cup holds its suction tightly as it moves around the surface of my back and neck; I’d equate it to a good massage.

The appointment’s over and aside from a few impressive yet painless bruises, I’m no worse for the wear. But am I any better? That’s hard to say. I don’t think cupping’s about the quick fix, but

more of a procedure that can teach your body how to improve over the long haul. I’ll definitely do it again.

Rich Levine

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Pathways to Wellness
1601 Washington St., Boston
617-859-3036
pathwaysboston.org
Cupping: \$40, 30 minutes
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