

THE GOOD BATH

Master the art of a good soak for total mind-body bliss, says *Fiona Embleton*

BUILDING SLOW ROUTINES AROUND restorative salts, doing lymphatic-drainage massage and inhaling steamy aromatic air to melt away stress – the ritual of bathing is back. 'In periods of rapid technological change there's a natural desire to return to simpler, more physical experiences,' says Sharmadean Reid, founder of 39BC, a bathing brand that draws on ancient cleansing traditions. 'There's something deeply grounding about washing your body: water, warmth, touch, scent.'

The wellbeing benefits of slipping into warm water up to your neck don't stop there. 'A bath is the equivalent of a hug as your nervous system releases oxytocin, the hormone that correlates with love, trust and joy,' says neuroscientist Dr Tara Swart. It's also thought to stimulate your immune system; it can help to reduce the risk of heart disease, dial down the stress hormone cortisol and lower your body temperature to prepare you for sleep.

For bathing obsessives, it's about swapping post-work cocktails for cold plunges at modern bathhouses. At-home products have had a glow-up, too. Where fizzing bath bombs were all the rage in the early noughties, today's bathroom shelf features the type of hyper-stylised body care that Instagram eats up. As for how to take the perfect bath, crib from the experts...

SET THE MOOD

As consultant dermatologist Dr Alexis Granite says, the ritual can be as important as the bath itself. 'Regular routines have been found to shift the body out of stress mode.' So, turn your bathroom into a soothing escape by dimming the lights and going phone free. 'A simple, uncluttered space with a few luxuries such as candles, crystals and aromatherapy oils will allow you to gain maximum impact from your bath,' adds Swart.

PERFECT THE TEMPERATURE

The temperature of your bath should have a Goldilocks rightness about it: warm enough to relax knotted muscles but not so hot that you sap moisture from your skin. According to Granite, the sweet spot is 37–39°C (roughly your body temperature). 'Very hot water can strip skin of its natural surface oils and exacerbate dryness, tightness and irritation,' she says. For the final 30 seconds of your routine, unleash your inner Wim Hof with a blast of cold water under the shower to release happy hormones like dopamine and increase blood flow.

PHOTO: ALAMY



1. **39BC** Fig Milk Bath & Shower Oil, £39
2. **Bamford** B Silent Bath Salts, £39
3. **M&S** Apothecary Restore 3 Wick Candle, £20
4. **Diptyque** Natural Soft Sponge, £33
5. **La Bonne Brosse** No1 The Body Brush for Sensitive Skin in Aubergine, £98
6. **Diptyque** Rich Soothing Balm, £76
7. **Guerlain** L'Heure Bleue Scented Soap, £33
8. **Susanne Kaufmann** Bath For The Senses, £60

GUIDE

STIMULATE YOUR LYMPH

Dry brush before you get into the bath to shift stagnant fluid and de-puff weary limbs. 'Gently pump and stretch the skin around your collarbone, also known as the "main drain", with your fingertips,' says Sophie Yerby, a lymphatic drainage and nervous system specialist. 'Using a dry brush and a light touch, sweep along the arms towards the armpits, across the chest, over the abdomen and up the legs towards the groin.' Remember: hard bristles don't always mean better exfoliation. 'They can leave sensitive skin itchy or overstimulated,' says Yerby. 'I prefer a soft brush – this is meant to be a calming ritual, not something you have to grit your teeth through.'

ENGAGE YOUR SENSES

Fragrance fires off neurons, conjuring up feelings of joy and comfort. So when certain scents are combined with ingredients in a bath oil that wash away impurities, it's the perfect kind of beauty alchemy. 'Rose oil is renowned for renewing optimism,' says Swart. 'But lavender is nature's strongest neuromodulator, proven to calm when you're feeling anxious and boost when you're feeling low in energy.' Decompress with Susanne Kaufmann Bath For The Senses, laced with lavender, patchouli and ylang ylang. There's just one caveat: anchor your candles and body care around one hero scent to avoid overpowering your senses.

SUPERCHARGE YOUR SOAK

'Epsom salts, which contain magnesium sulfate, are a nice addition after exercise as they soothe sore muscles,' says Granite. When it comes to bath oils, consider your skin type. Reid recommends nourishing dry skin with lipid-rich plant oils such as sunflower and avocado – ingredients that also form the backbone of her 39BC Fig Milk Bath & Shower Oil. 'If you have very sensitive or eczema-prone skin, avoid heavily scented bath salts, which can cause irritation,' advises Granite.

MAX OUT ON THE STEAM

Steam softens pores and loosens impurities, ultimately making the skin more receptive to any products. Reid recommends slathering on a hydrating face mask while in the tub to turbo-charge its effects. 'Humidity helps reduce water loss and keeps the skin's surface hydrated while the mask gets to work, so you emerge looking plump and dewy,' she says. Dr Barbara Sturm's Super Anti-Aging Face Mask Rich restores luminosity with its cream-to-oil formula.

INVEST IN POST-BATH CARE

Last, but by no means least, moisturise your body when you emerge from the bath. 'Gently pat rather than rub with a towel and apply your body care while the skin is still damp to help trap water,' advises Granite. 'Start with a hydrating serum and follow with a richer cream or body butter to seal everything in.' Joonbyrd Daydreamer Firming Body Serum tends to lacklustre winter skin with peptides and humectants. And Diptyque's Rich Soothing Balm, leaves limbs indecently silky. It's just what you deserve at this time of year.