

HEALTH

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E-CIGARETTES: The Crown Seven Hydro Imperial brand.

THE HEALTHY SKEPTIC

E-cigs: Smoking without smoking

The FDA hasn't approved electronic cigarettes as a quit-smoking aid. But the devices have found fans

CHRIS WOOLETON

Even in these days of strict indoor clean air laws, you can still legally puff away in movie theaters, restaurants or even on a plane. You just have to use a cigarette that runs on a battery, not tobacco.

Electronic cigarettes — battery-powered devices that deliver a fine spray of nicotine without any flame or smoke — have been sold in this country for about three years now. Some people use them as a way to quit smoking real cigarettes. Unlike gum or patches, the devices mimic the sensation of smoking while providing the nicotine rush. Other people use them to get their cigarette fix in places where smoking is not allowed.

The Food and Drug Administration hasn't approved electronic cigarettes as an aid to quit smoking or for anything else. The agency has tried to stop the products from entering the country, but its authority over e-cigarettes is still being hashed out in courts. Meanwhile, the gadgets have developed a devoted fan base. On message boards and blogs, e-cigarette users have loudly and clearly proclaimed their allegiance to the devices.

E-cigarettes — sold without age restrictions online, in some bars and clubs, and at the occasional mall kiosk — come with replaceable cartridges containing various levels of nicotine. The regular cartridges for NPRO cigarettes from NJOY, for example, contain 16 milligrams of nicotine, but you can also get a light version with 12 mg, an ultralight version with 6 mg, and even a nicotine-free version. The company says that, for a typical smoker, each cartridge would last about as long as a pack or pack-and-a-half of cigarettes. For comparison, a smoker would get about 20 mg of nicotine from a single pack of regular cigarettes. Each cartridge also contains water and propylene glycol, a chemical that helps disperse the nicotine. (Propylene glycol is also a key component of fog made by fog machines, should you be curious.)

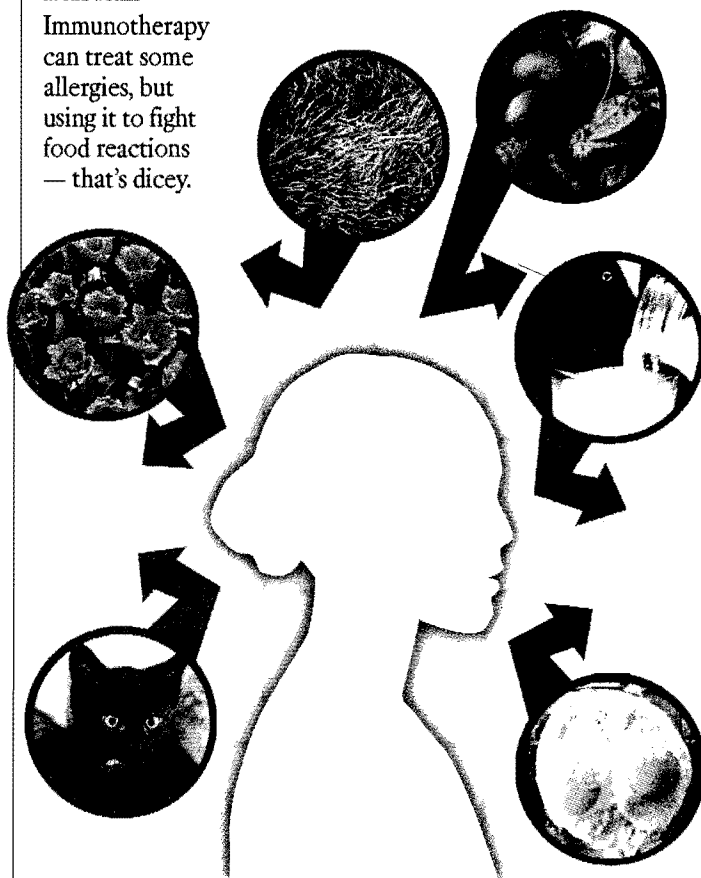
The cartridges come with a variety of flavors. Users of the No. 7 cig- [See Cigarettes, E4]



GARY FELDMAN/Los Angeles Times

IN THE WORKS

Immunotherapy can treat some allergies, but using it to fight food reactions — that's dicey.



Photographs by contributors from features: LISA LUISI/SHOOTING STAR; LISA SHIMIZU/LOS ANGELES TIMES; LOS ANGELES TIMES; NICK LOUGHRAN/LOS ANGELES TIMES; LOS ANGELES TIMES; AMY C. CHAPMAN/LOS ANGELES TIMES; JAY L. CLEGG/SHOOTING STAR

ALLERGIC ... FOR NOW?

By AMBER DANCE >>> Caroline Cooper will pack her bags and head off for college this fall secure in the knowledge that she'll be able to safely eat anything the cafeteria dishes up.

Her mother, Heather Cooper, meanwhile, will not have to worry that Caroline, 17, will go into anaphylactic shock while alone in the dorm.

This is notable because from the time she was 11 months old until this past spring, Caroline Cooper was severely allergic to milk — a bit of cheese or yogurt could have killed her. But early last year, the teenager began a type of immunotherapy, eating minute but gradually increasing amounts of milk protein. In March she tasted her first bite of ice cream, the same day she was accepted in the honors business program at the University of Texas at Austin.

Traditional immunotherapy, via allergy shots, is a century-old technique most commonly used to treat inhaled allergens — such as cat dander and pollen — and it's also standard [See Allergies, E4]

SALT ROOM SANCTUARIES

Halotherapy for skin and respiratory issues catches on. Whether it works is another matter.

JESSIE SCHREWE

Heidi Kling is reading in an all-white room. She's shoeless, but socks protect her feet from the 6 inches of salt that coats the floor. The only objects in the window-

less room are four chaise longues and hand-molded plaster ickies that hang from the ceiling. If there were a 'Yes! In the room, you would swear you were on the Mat-terhorn at Disneyland.

Normally, at 1 o'clock on a Tuesday afternoon, Kling would be at work or running errands, but today her allergies, which cause her ears to ring, have brought her to this monochrome sanctuary.

Basking in salt rooms, also known as halotherapy, is an aller- [See Salt, E5]



AMY CUNNINGHAM/LOS ANGELES TIMES

ALTERNATIVE SPACE: Lynette Browning, with husband Griff at her side, sits in for a 45-minute session to treat her severe asthma at one of Salt Chalet's therapeutic rooms.

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Halotherapy for skin and respiratory issues catches on. Whether it works is another matter.

JESSIE SCHIEWE

Heidi Kling is reading in an all-white room. She's shoeless, but socks protect her feet from the 4 inches of salt that caked the floor. The only objects in the window-

less room are four chaise longues and hand-molded plaster leeches that hang from the ceiling. If there were a Yeti in the room, you would swear you were on the Matterhorn at Disneyland.

Normally, at 1 o'clock on a Tuesday afternoon, Kling would be at work or running errands, but today her allergies, which cause her ears to ring, have brought her to this monochrome sanctuary.

Basking in salt rooms, also known as halotherapy, is an alternative therapy. [See Salt, E5]



ANNE CORNACE/LOS ANGELES TIMES

ALTERNATIVE SPACE: Lynnette Browning, with husband Griff at her side, sits in for a 45-minute session to treat her severe asthma at one of Salt Chale's therapeutic rooms.

LATIMES.COM/HEALTH

Los Angeles Times

Making room for salt treatment

[Salt, from E1] native therapy for people with chronic respiratory and skin problems that is modeled after the salt caves and spas that originated in Eastern Europe more than 200 years ago. In the last decade, the trend has caught on, and facilities have opened up in Israel, Canada, New York, New Jersey, Chicago, Florida and, most recently, Encino, home of the Salt Chale, the first salt room treatment center on the West Coast.

But though salt rooms may be garnering fans, health experts are leery of the medicinal benefits that these rooms are purported to provide. Stories about miraculous recoveries and unprecedented health improvements are all over the Web, said Dr. Dean Schraufnagel, professor of medicine at the University of Illinois at Chicago. That doesn't guarantee they're true. "There haven't been any clinical studies that research this particular therapy method," he says.

Tucked away in a shady corner on the second floor of Etno Commons, an outdoor shopping center most notable for carneys in the movie "The 40-Year-Old Virgin," the Salt Chale is hardly noticeable in the shadow of a Big Boy, Baskin-Robbins and a Bally Total Fitness center.

For \$55 a pop, clients relax in rooms with salt-caked walls and floors. A small hole in the wall hides the pipe that carries the salt into the room—a generator spewing out 1/2 cup of Dead Sea salt for every 45-minute session. As customers sit, relax and breathe, they are presumably inhaling and coming into contact with this supposedly therapeutic salt.

The Salt Chale consists of three salt rooms—two for adults and one for children. Brightly colored shovels, buckets and toy trucks litter the salt-strewn floor of the children's room, while adults have the option to watch television, listen to music, read a book, talk to other clients in the rooms or dim the blue-hued lights and sleep.

"Everybody does their own thing when they're in the room," says proprietor Dikla Kadosh, who opened the facility nine months ago with her husband, David Mashiah.

Patty Adams, an accountant from San Diego, commutes to the Chale once a week for two back-to-back sessions, booking the private adult room so she can recline without embarrassment in a bikini while listening to her iPod. She has a skin condition, psoriasis guttata, that causes red, raised lesions on much of her body during flare-ups, and she's not comfortable revealing her skin in public.

"I like to go in with as much skin exposed so that every part of me can get a bit of the salt." She says she has seen great improvements in her condition since she started coming to the salt room (her only other medication is antibiotics).

"My skin has finally cleared up, and I'm not embarrassed to show my arms," she says, pointing to a faded pink sore.

Adams says she learned about salt rooms from an article published earlier this year in the Jewish Journal's Tribe magazine. That coverage, as well as publicity that it has received from ECAL Channel 23 local news, LA Talk Radio and the daytime television series "Doctors," has helped widen Salt Chale's customer base, occasionally attracting clients from as far away as Washington state.

But, Schraufnagel says, though it's true that inhaling salt solutions can help treat common dust and seasonal



ANNE CORNACE/LOS ANGELES TIMES

THERAPY: David Mashiah and Dikla Kadosh run Salt Chale, a salt room treatment center in Encino.

allergies and reduce congestion in patients with cystic fibrosis by clearing up mucus, "this does not mean that salt rooms can do the same thing."

Saline solutions administered to the body in a more direct way than salt rooms do, Schraufnagel notes. The solution is squirted into the nostrils, quickly and efficiently transporting salt of a specific particle size to the lungs and chest cavity.

What's more, the particle size of the salt in the solution is probably more predictable and uniform, as well as smaller, than those emitted from a salt room generator. Though the size of the particles in the air of the salt rooms is unknown, they're probably too large to be easily inhaled, Schraufnagel says—as evidenced by the fact that some customers say the particles are large enough to be seen as they shoot out of the machine.

"To get into your lungs, the particles need to be very small," he says. "Between 1 to 5 microns in diameter... A salt room wouldn't be as effective as the mist from an inhaler for people with asthma or a saline solution for people with sinus or allergy problems."

Dr. Mark Lebwohl, chairman of the dermatology department at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, agrees that the benefits of salt room therapy are as yet unproved, but adds that he understands how halotherapy has become popular.

Many salt rooms, including the Salt Chale, use salt imported from the Dead Sea. Because of the sea's unique properties—it is the lowest point on Earth and has the highest concentration of minerals in a body of water—many people swear that its components (salt, mud and water) can treat a

variety of ailments, Lebwohl says, especially skin conditions.

That type is probably undeserved, he says. In truth, it may mostly be the sunlight that makes the Dead Sea experience therapeutic. The spot is more than a quarter mile below sea level, and as sunlight travels through this extra depth of air, many of the sun's damaging short-wavelength UV rays are filtered out.

In a 1998 study of 21 people with psoriasis at a Dead Sea spa, Israeli researchers found that after four weeks, the condition improved in 28% of those people who bathed in Dead Sea water, but of those who only sunbathed there, 73% saw results. Improvement was seen in 83% of those who both sunbathed at the spa and went in the water.

Dr. Neil Kuo, an assistant professor of medicine at the College of Medicine at the University of South Carolina, says that if salt rooms are as effective as people claim they are, then one would expect to see similar health improvements from other salt-related activities.

"Why would it be different from... swimming in the ocean and swallowing salt water?" he said.

Regardless of doubts and the lack of studies, the salt room trend appears to be slowly on the upswing. "In the last few years, six salt room centers have been built in the U.S., most within the last few months," Dikla says. She expects to see at least one additional salt room on the West Coast by the end of this year.

And if nothing else—well, the sessions are relaxing.

When her 45-minute session is up, Heidi Kling clicks off her iPod and takes a deep, cat-like stretch as she wakes up her body. "I'm not normally able to take naps in the day, but when I come here... I can't help myself. I don't know if these sessions are doing anything to help my allergies just yet, but I'm going to keep coming here in the hopes that they do."

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