



**I didn't feel anything until I came out because it was so freezing cold.**

— Madam Celine

## Woman claims she suffered second-degree burns after spa session

# Cryo treatment left her crying out in pain

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**Hoping to ease the pain in her aching hips and joints, she went for a whole body cryotherapy session at an upmarket local spa last month.**

The treatment involves entering a machine known as a cryosauna that releases vaporised nitrogen to lower the skin surface temperature close to freezing point.

Everything seemed to be going smoothly until she noticed that her left upper arm looked like it had shrunk after the treatment.

Madam Celine (not her real name) claimed that pain shot through her body and she screamed in agony.

The French national, a Singapore permanent resident, is in her 40s and works in the creative industry. She told The New Paper last week that she suffered second-degree burns on her upper left arm, left breast and right elbow.

According to the spa's website, cryotherapy is a technique that uses extremely cold liquid nitrogen, as low as minus 180 deg C in medical and clinical treatments.



The treatments involve machines that make use of vaporised nitrogen to rapidly lower the skin's top layer to 0 deg C.

The website claims that whole body cryotherapy can treat muscle pain and inflammation, and improve the immune system.

As she was suffering from aching hips and joints, the single mother of three children aged between 15 and 25 years old, decided to give cryotherapy a shot. She said: "I was really interested to see if something like this was going to help me."

As she was afraid of the freezing temperature, she decided to get cryotherapy done on her face first on May 31.

The 10-minute session cost \$200.

Madam Celine said: "There was this machine and the therapist just passed this gas on my face and it felt cold. After that, my face went back to normal temperature and it was fine."

She returned to the spa on June 7 and paid \$400 for two cryotherapy sessions.

After getting her face treated that day, she returned on July 5 for the body treatment.

She said a therapist took her to a room. After stripping down to her underwear, she was given footwear and a pair of gloves to put on before stepping into the machine.

It was very cold. The therapist told her to move around for two minutes.

"I didn't feel anything until I came out because it was so freezing cold," said Madam Celine.

Then she realised her left upper arm had "shrunk".

"When I saw that, I freaked out. The therapist

**SCARRED:** Madam Celine's (above) bruised left arm (inset) will have permanent scars according to her plastic surgeon.

PHOTOS: KIAT TAN, COURTESY OF MADAM CELINE

## OTHER CRYOTHERAPY CASES

An American woman was diagnosed with third-degree burns after a cryotherapy session at a centre in Texas, US in 2011. News portal Dallas Observer reported that the woman had a frozen arm after the treatment.

As the arm thawed, it became swollen. Blisters appeared and she sued the centre in November last year.

Former Olympic champion sprinter Justin Gatlin had frostbite after going into a cryogenic chamber with sweaty socks in August 2011.

According to the BBC, Gatlin said: "I was only in there for two minutes, but for some reason the socks froze to my ankles. It felt like my feet were on fire... and it hurt to walk."

Two sportsmen suffered burns on their feet after undergoing cryotherapy treatment.

According to Irish online news portal Independent.ie, in May 2012, hurlers John O'Leary and Christopher Ryan were understood not to have worn any footwear in the cryotherapy chamber.



started massaging it."

The pain hit her only after her body warmed up, she said.

It was so intense that she feared she would lose her arm.

"After that I felt sick, like I wanted to throw up. I was feeling faint."

The staff later told her they had to close the spa as other customers were frightened by her screams.

Madam Celine said she was told that a doctor had been called to treat her.

She said she either fainted or fell asleep after throwing up. When she opened her eyes, the doctor had arrived.

"The doctor looked at my arm and told me it should be okay. He gave me maybe some Panadol. He said, 'It's a bit red. Just rest'."

"Of course, I wanted to hear that. I didn't want to hear anything bad."

Madam Celine said the doctor advised her to go home and rest.

### HOURS HAD PASSED

That was when she noticed that almost four hours had passed since the treatment.

Despite her condition, she managed to drive home to Upper Bukit Timah. Her children were shocked when they saw her, Madam Celine said.

She was in a lot of pain that night and remained in bed the next day, a Sunday, because she felt ill.

Blisters started appearing on the affected areas and she saw her family doctor on Monday.

He told her she had second-degree burns and wrapped the affected areas with gauze.

She was put on painkillers and given two weeks' medical leave.

Madam Celine said she had to walk around with her bandaged left arm pointing upwards for about a month, making it impossible for her to go work.

"I had to because my arm was swollen. I couldn't put my arm down. I couldn't meet my clients and my kids had to help me around the house."

She consulted a plastic surgeon and was told the scars could be permanent.

She got her personal assistant to contact the spa's parent company about the incident.



**COLD TREATMENT:** For her full body cryotherapy treatment, Madam Celine entered a machine, similar to the one pictured above. After she got burned, she had to move around with her left arm pointing upwards for almost a month as it was swollen (left).

PHOTO: INTERNET

## Nitrogen vapour can be dangerous

**Nitrogen vapour can be dangerous if not handled with care, said Assistant Professor Guillaume Thibault from Nanyang Technological University (NTU).**

Responding to queries from The New Paper, the professor from NTU's School of Biological Sciences and Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine added: "Nitrogen vapour can be extremely dangerous to the skin and eyes if someone does not wear the appropriate personal protective equipment."

"It can burn the skin by killing skin cells. Besides burning, nitrogen vapour can also lead to asphyxia by depleting the level of oxygen in the surrounding if there is no appropriate ventilation."

The Consumers Association of Singapore (Case) has not received any complaints involving cryotherapy treatment, or against the spa in the past three years.

### COMPENSATION

Its executive director, Mr Seah Seng Choon, said Madam Celine can go back to the company and ask for compensation for her injuries resulting from its cryotherapy treatment.

If the company refuses to make amends or if she is not satisfied with their offer, she can seek Case's help or lodge a claim at the Small Claims Tribunals.

He said consumers should take note that their health must come first when seeking such treatments.

"They should always determine whether the treatment is medically proven to be effective to deal with the problem."

"If they have any existing health conditions or have any doubts about the treatment, they should consult a doctor first," said Mr Seah.

President of the Spa and Wellness Association of Singapore Susan Teng said she believes that no authority is monitoring the use of these cryotherapy machines.

The association is now planning a registry for therapists.

She said: "(Now) there's no way anyone or (any) authority can verify how many therapists we have... or how many are trained therapists."

"Consumers should learn to ask for trained therapists to ensure that their wellness and health is taken care of properly."