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We Dug Deeper into the Claims on the New ‘Goop’ Show — Here’s What We Found

Written by Amy Jamieson on January 26, 2020 — [Fact checked](#) by Dana K. Cassell

Experts tell Healthline what they think of magic mushrooms, cold water therapy, and other topics discussed on Gwyneth Paltrow’s new show on Netflix.



The six-part series called “The Goop Lab” features actress Gwyneth Paltrow and explores topics ranging from cold water therapy to fast-mimicking diets. Photo courtesy of Netflix.

The vagina-scented candles were only a tease.

“[The Goop Lab](#),” which premiered on Netflix this past weekend, is a show where viewers learn the ins and outs of vulvas and much more thanks to

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Paltrow stands within a pink vulva in ads for the series, a nod to the events of episode three of the six-part series.

In that episode, one woman studies her vulva on camera with a mirror. There are also detailed instructions from a sex educator on how to achieve good orgasms.

The vulvas, though, are only one part of Paltrow's new show.

There is also serious exploration of other outlier topics, such as psychedelic drugs used in the context of treatment and energy-erupting chiropractic sessions in addition to cold water therapy that fights illness.

“It can be very dangerous when you take things like healthcare and lifestyle management and dress it up as being legitimate when it's meant for entertainment,” says Dr. Gary L. LeRoy, FAAFP, a family physician in Dayton, Ohio, and president of the American Academy of Family Physicians.

He recommends a discussion with a physician about methods of treatment seen on television or the internet.

“There's just so much noise out there that people have to be careful of what they're hearing,” he told Healthline. “We're talking about people's lives and their health. People can die from delaying legitimate evidence-based healthcare while they're playing around in the goop and slime out there.”

Indeed, before you consider partaking in magic mushrooms or jumping into frigid water, listen to what experts in specific fields told Healthline about some methods seen on “The Goop Lab.”

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Jamaica and magic mushrooms



Staff members of the Goop website participate in some therapies highlighted on “The Goop Lab.” Photo courtesy of Netflix

Every episode begins the same way.

There’s a disclaimer that “The Goop Lab” is designed to entertain and inform and that you should always consult with a doctor when it comes to your own health or before you start any of these treatments.

In episode one, a handful of Goop staffers, some who want to work through their painful pasts, embark on a trip to Jamaica to take psilocybin, known as magic mushrooms, under the professional supervision of a facilitator.

One participant describes the emotionally exhausting session “like 5 years of therapy in about 5 hours.”

Since they’re illegal in the United States, psychedelics like psilocybin aren’t administered in traditional therapeutic settings

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However, they've been explored in the research capacity with encouraging results, one expert told Healthline.

"We've conducted most of the research in the United States on this," said [Matthew W. Johnson](#), PhD, associate professor at Johns Hopkins University in Maryland, an expert on psychedelics, other drugs, and addiction. "The data are very promising."

Johnson, who hasn't seen "The Goop Lab," reports high success rates with psilocybin in treating tobacco addiction, anxiety, and depression.

"We saw large, very dramatic reductions that were immediate in both anxiety and depression [for cancer patients]," Johnson said. "Those are the most advanced therapeutic findings in the field."

However, there are potential dangers, he says, sometimes occurring in "underground guiding" that happens in the United States.

"People with psychotic disorders or a predisposition for psychotic disorders, like schizophrenia, could be harmed," he said. "In an unstructured setting, it can even exacerbate depression, anxiety."

People can have "a bad trip" and engage in dangerous behavior that can lead to death. There are also cases of people who've died because of a cardiac response to psilocybin.

"People die," Johnson said. "I have a file folder full of cases where people have essentially done something while they're intoxicated — like fallen from a height or wandered into a stranger's house and get shot by police. Wander into traffic. These are highly intoxicating drugs at high doses and people can have panic reactions, so those are the major risks."

Traveling to Jamaica for the purpose of taking magic mushrooms isn't advised.

"I would tell them not to do it," Johnson said.

He also notes federal law forbids travel overseas for the purpose of

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Then, there's the people overseeing the programs.

"I can't say anything about the credentialing," he added. "You really need professional expertise to screen for these sessions and to run them. To mitigate those risks."

Johnson said it's important not to view psychedelics as the end all, be all.

"This isn't the only thing out there, especially talking to people with depression or PTSD or addiction," Johnson said. "I'd encourage them to stay in treatment and not to view [psychedelics] as the only hope for them. That's kind of setting up people for a real let down because it may not work for them."

But for some, psychedelics can be life-changing.

"I've dedicated 15 years to it for a reason," Johnson said. "Sometimes the effects are absolutely dramatic. Some people say it's like years of therapy packed into a day. Sometimes it seems like that. That's hard to quantify scientifically, but they are large effects. Sometimes you get dramatic reductions in depression and addictive behavior. So, yeah, it's indeed a really exciting area."

Cold therapy: 'The Iceman' cometh

Much like a new character in *Frozen II*, a man dubbed "The Iceman" enters the picture with his own wellness plan.

It involves deep breathing and cold water therapy, which entails taking a dip in frigid water.

Wim Hof says his methods unlock a multitude of benefits including a stronger immune system, reduced stress, improved sports performance, and more.

The Goop team engages in "snowga," which is like yoga but barefoot in the snow with deep breathing. They jump into water that's 44°F (6.7°C) to

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Healthline spoke with a medical historian who said regimens like this can be tough to adhere to.

“The reasons that these fads cycle every few years to something new is that the improvement is temporary and it’s often hard to stick to a regimen like that,” said [Alicia Puglionesi](#), PhD, a medical historian and an adjunct professor at Johns Hopkins.

She finds this method especially interesting, however fleeting it may or may not be.

“Bathing and the temperature adjustment to the body were actually a very central pillar of medicine until the 20th century,” she explained. “So there’s a whole history — going back to Ancient Greek medicine and the ideas of Hippocrates — [of] ideas about the importance of bathing and certain kinds of water at certain temperatures, in certain places. The water in certain places was understood to have special qualities. It’s very poetic that a certain kind of water is believed to heal certain kinds of illness.”

She adds that even the belief that you’re receiving appropriate medical care has a positive effect.

“As a historian, I don’t want to dismiss anything as placebo because people may experience its effects as real,” she said. “But at the same time in the 20th century, we’ve developed very powerful biologic agents that can change the chemistry of the body and actually kill germs, and returning to much less effective therapies of the past would be counterproductive in managing serious illness.”

[Matthijs Kox](#), PhD, an assistant professor at Radboud University in the Netherlands, helped oversee a [2014 research project](#) in which Hof and 12 others trained in his method were able to combat the reaction to a cell wall component of *E. coli* bacteria through breathing and cold water therapy.

Despite that success, Kox is hesitant to recommend the therapy as a method of wellness.

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“We actually found that this method is able to influence your immune response, but that does not say that it’s good for everyone,” he noted.

Kox added he will continue to study Hof.

“I think a lot more research has to be done to see whether this actually has health benefits,” he said.

Longevity in the lab

Episode four focuses on a new method of determining a person’s “biological age,” which is defined as the age at which our bodies actually function.

It’s the work of [Morgan Levine](#), PhD, an assistant professor in the Department of Pathology at Yale University.

She calculates biological age by using nine blood test biomarkers, such as inflammation, metabolism, and cardiovascular health.

These factors combine, Levine says, to form a biologic profile that could be younger or older than your actual chronological age.

To see if what they eat can lower their biological ages, Paltrow and two Goop staff members embark on three different diets. The hardest is Paltrow’s fast.

She tries a product sold by longevity expert [Valter Longo](#), PhD, the director at the Longevity Institute at the University of Southern California.

Longo has created a 5-day fast-mimicking regimen with [ProLon](#), a meal kit that includes packets of macro- and micronutrients in a handy box.

“It’s supposed to produce the same beneficial effects in your body as fasting all the way without the same uncomfortable side effects of going without food for five days,” said [Debbie Petitpain](#), MS, RDN, LDN, a spokeswoman for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

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“Really what the scientists are trying to figure out is, what is the optimal length you should go without eating to get some benefit,” she explained. “Should you go 12 hours without eating? Should you go 5 days without eating? And the research just doesn’t have any answers for us yet.”

Petitpain said it’s more important to figure out your goal during a fast. Your medical team and a registered dietitian can help with that.

On “The Goop Lab,” Paltrow is tested after her fast and the result is a lower biological age.

“Does the biological age that Gwyneth was able to lower truly translate to a longer life for her?” Petitpain asked. “We don’t know. Does it truly translate to a healthier life for her? We don’t know. And while being able to get individual data on yourself is very interesting, we don’t yet necessarily know exactly what those markers mean.”

The three women also try facial treatments, including facial acupuncture with 100 needles, a thread lift where threads are inserted into different areas of the face to lift it, and a [vampire facial](#) that consists of applying platelet-rich plasma (PRP) from the blood to the face.

[Marina Yuabova](#), FNP, DNP, a family nurse practitioner and doctor of naturopathic medicine and assistant professor at City University of New York, told Healthline that as with any procedure where needles are used, there are risks. So choose your practitioner wisely should you want to follow suit.

“Hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV are the three primary infections that can be transmitted from unclean needles, all of which can be passed on to sexual partners,” Yuabova said. “In order to reduce the risk of all listed above, the consumer should make sure that they choose well-trained medical professionals. Needles and threads used in the procedure [should be] opened in front of the patient and sterile package remains intact.”

Thread lift, which seems like the most invasive facial procedure of the

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granuloma formation, nerve damage, and displacement of facial tissue, Yuabova added.

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Energy at work

Episode five contains the “exorcism” sound bite that you may have heard in previews for the show.

This episode showcases chiropractor and body worker [John Amaral](#), DC, who has previously not allowed his method of somatic energy practice to be filmed.

This energy work presents itself as part orgasm and part exorcism mixed with a tinge of Pilates. Amaral tells Paltrow that he’s been hesitant to share his method because it can look “strange.”

The method involves Amaral moving his hands in the air, snapping his fingers, making sounds with his hands and touching points on the body.

This, he says, is his way of interacting with the energy layers around people.

Dr. [James S. Gordon](#), a psychiatrist and author of the new book “[The Transformation: Discovering Wholeness and Healing After Trauma](#)” and executive director of The Center for Mind-Body Medicine, hasn’t seen Amaral in action, but using the materials available on Amaral’s website on

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“He’s using laying on of hands, he’s using breath, he’s using meditation, and he’s using movement. All of those have potential therapeutic benefits,” Gordon told Healthline. “For example, energy healing, a laying on of hands, has been studied mostly through [reiki](#) and through therapeutic touch, and in both those modalities have been shown in experimental conditions to decrease levels of stress, improve mood, and decrease pain.”

Gordon notes that one-on-one attention is also at play here.

“If you go see a physician, you have 10 or 15 minutes with them and that’s it,” he said. “And then you’re given a prescription for a medication. People don’t feel understood, they don’t feel heard. So that’s part of the appeal of these therapies. Not the only thing. The therapies themselves are likely to have some benefits as well, but it’s the time spent.”

A representative of the [American Chiropractic Association \(ACA\)](#) wasn’t familiar with Amaral’s particular methods, but he offered general guidance to people seeking treatment from a chiropractor, including whether there are certain people who might not be good candidates for such care.

“There are certain health conditions that would make some traditional chiropractic techniques inadvisable for some patients. However, most chiropractors have training and experience in a wide variety of treatment methods, including low-force methods that are appropriate for a wide variety of health conditions,” said [William J. Lauretti, DC](#), a professor at New York Chiropractic College and a spokesperson for the ACA.

Lauretti said a chiropractor will carefully evaluate your health, screen for any “red flags” that may suggest a serious underlying condition and recommend treatment that is most appropriate for you.

“This might include traditional chiropractic techniques, lower-force soft tissue techniques or instrument-assisted techniques, exercises, lifestyle advice, or referral to another medical specialist when appropriate,” he told Healthline.

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Overall, experts told Healthline that these techniques highlighted on the Goop show do have some therapeutic benefits, but they all should be practiced with caution and under the supervision of a medical professional.

Magic mushrooms, for example, have shown some potential benefits in research for people with depression and anxiety. However, the compounds can be dangerous if not used properly.

Fast-mimicking diets have also shown some benefits, but experts say you should evaluate your goals and speak to a medical professional about the best way to approach such eating plans.



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