

Caring for your Spine

Water Therapy and The Spine

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WATER THERAPY AND THE SPINE

What is Water Therapy?

Water therapy refers to exercising in the water. Water therapy is not just swimming, but refers to any form of exercise in the water. Water has been used as a medium for healing and therapy for centuries. In the past, mineral pools were places elite citizens would go to get pampered and treated for their ailments. The pools today are used for different types of water therapy. The terms water therapy and hydrotherapy both refer to recreation and the implementation of therapeutic exercise in a fluid environment. Water provides buoyancy, thereby rendering the body lighter in the water. This provides an opportunity for individuals to perform movements that may otherwise be difficult or impossible to perform on land secondary to pain.

Where Can Water Therapy Be Performed?

Water therapy can be performed in a heated pool at the local gym, a YMCA or in the privacy of one's own pool or bathtub. Water therapy may also be provided in a medical facility such as an outpatient rehabilitation center or within a hospital setting.

What are the General Benefits of Water Therapy?

Water is a unique environment where effects of gravity are minimized and buoyancy allows for greater capacity to exercise for those in pain. The water around the body including the extremities provides resistance to movement in all directions, unlike exercise machines that provide resistance in limited planes of movement. Water can be used to resist movements at different intensities, all of which is under an individual's control. Movements in the water can be performed at any pace an individual can tolerate.

The water environment allows for non-weight bearing and partial weight-bearing exercise. Exercises that are performed in the upright position promote postural awareness and help develop postural control. Water therapy usually involves the use of the entire body, not just the injured part, thereby providing a more comprehensive approach. Water therapy is also a great way to condition and train for general health or a particular sporting activity.

What are the Benefits of Warm Water Therapy?

Exercising in warm water offers several benefits that include relaxation of sore muscles, increased blood flow and greater enjoyment of the exercise session.

What Types of Exercise can be Performed in the Water?

All spine and extremity muscle groups that can be exercised on land can be exercised in the water. Water therapy can be used to perform balance training, strength training and range of motion exercises. Gait training and postural rehabilitation can also be performed in the water.

Who Provides Water Therapy?

The term water therapy is not controlled or regulated by a governing body like physical therapy and massage therapy. Subsequently, anyone can claim to offer “water therapy.” Prior to beginning a supervised water therapy it is recommended that you do a little homework and learn more about the program and the individual(s) teaching the program you will be in.

Look for individuals who have formal training and preferably certification in exercise science and/or personal training /supervision. Water therapy may be considered part of a physical therapy program if supervised by a licensed practitioner. Physical therapy that includes water-based exercise is reimbursed by most insurance providers. A trained and experienced professional will help guide individuals in the performance of the right exercises and supervise exercise progression.

What Types of Water Therapy are There?

The term water exercise is very general for it can be used to describe any exercise that is performed with or without supervision. The term water therapy is often used to describe exercises for a specific region of the body with definite goals in mind. A water therapy program is often implemented by a certified aquatic exercise specialist or other knowledgeable healthcare professional. A water therapy program may be used to get a person to a point whereby they can successfully participate in a land-based therapy program. The term aquatics rehabilitation is specifically used to describe a prescribed exercise program for a medical condition. The term aquatic aerobics is often used to describe an exercise program for general conditioning. There are aerobic programs with spinning cycles specifically designed for partially submerged use. There are many floatation belts, vests and buoyancy devices available for water exercise.