

Aquatic Therapy for Rehabilitation

August 2017

Aquatic therapy, also called water therapy, is the practice of performing therapeutic exercises in a pool. Swimming laps is what first comes to mind when we think of pool exercise, but aquatic therapy uses the pool environment to facilitate a low-impact exercise regimen for a patient. This has proven to be particularly effective for treating back pain, and for rehabilitation from musculoskeletal injuries or spinal surgery. An aquatic therapy regimen should always be tailored to a patient by a professional that understands the patient's condition and abilities. A regimen can include simple exercises performed while standing in a shallow pool, or use high-tech equipment like an underwater treadmill. However easy or intense a patient's water workout is, the therapy is beneficial for the same reasons.

There are several reasons why aquatic therapy has become a favored method for rehabilitation exercise. Pools that are heated increase blood circulation and can help soothe pain. These aren't always available for exercise, but even in cooler temperatures exercising in the water when you have pain decreases the load and pressure of your body weight. The buoyancy of water allows the body to move weightlessly, which means patients are often able to twist and turn more freely. Range-of-motion exercises that would not be possible for a patient to perform in a typical gym environment can result in increased mobility during and after recovery. In addition to buoyancy, the water provides a light resistance which helps a patient rebuild their strength and flexibility in a safe and comfortable environment.

Another reason aquatic therapy is especially recommended for recovery from an injury or surgery is that it allows a patient to exercise with no risk of falling. This also makes the therapy a great option for patients whose balance is an issue. Even when a patient performs exercises they could never attempt on land, aquatic therapy is a safer and less painful experience overall. There are a few instances where exercising in a pool could be detrimental. Any infection, fever, or open wound is a risk factor when entering a pool. A patient should be cleared from these concerns before diving into their treatment plan, but aquatic therapy can still help anyone rehabilitating!