

HYDROTHERAPY for arthritis and related conditions



Hydrotherapy is the use of water in the treatment of many different conditions including arthritis-related conditions. It differs markedly from swimming as it involves specially designed exercises that are performed in a warm-water pool, with a temperature of around 33 – 36C.

Hydrotherapy is not aquarobics, which by contrast is a lot more strenuous. Hydrotherapy is generally more focused on slow, controlled movements initiated by the therapist to resolve specific joint or muscle problems, while you relax in the water and allow the therapist to direct your body movements.

It's also not Spa therapy, which is based on the theory that the mineral content of spa water has special health-giving properties. In Europe, hydrotherapy may take place in spa water, but the benefits of hydrotherapy do not depend on them taking place in spa water.

Hydrotherapy is beneficial regardless of how many of your joints are affected.

It helps to improve recovery after joint replacement surgery as well as for back pain, auto-immune arthritis diseases and osteoarthritis. Individual therapy sessions are helpful in the beginning, but normally you would be in a small class of others, with exercises nonetheless tailored to each individual.

In South Africa, hydrotherapy is usually offered by either biokineticists or physiotherapists. This article and the accompanying photographic demonstrations of different movements are by biokineticist Chanelle le Sueur, who holds an additional qualification in hydrotherapy.

The exercise science of biokinetics lives by the saying, *Life through Movement*, and our main focus is to strengthen the body as a whole so that our clients can complete the activities of daily living with ease (standing up, dressing, putting on socks, cooking, playing sports and so forth). We use scientifically based exercises focused on the needs of individual patients and their particular conditions.

Part of our treatment includes hydrotherapy, which is most beneficial to take part in as a first phase therapy treatment no matter what operation you've had or condition you have.

Water therapy has been used for thousands of years, especially in China, Japan and ancient Rome and Greece, where communal hot baths were centres of social activity. By the 19th century, Britain and the USA had at last begun to catch up and a similar culture grew up around natural hot springs such as Bath in the UK, the town that features prominently in Jane Austin's books. By mid-century, cold water cures were as common as warm water pools, and the two were also used in conjunction with each other, in order to increase and decrease the flow of blood to various organs. Today, the word Hydrotherapy applies particularly to warm water therapy.



Bad Ragaz was derived from hydrotherapy developed in Switzerland and is performed in the water together with the therapist, who moves the client, who is lying horizontally supported by rings or floats, in a series of movements and relaxation patterns. The patterns may be performed passively for flexibility and relaxation, or actively (Active Bad Ragaz) with assistance or resistance by the therapist.

Halliwick is a form of adapted aquatics which can be modified into active aquatic therapy. The client is usually held while the therapist systematically and progressively destabilizes her to teach balance and postural controls. The client learns to react to and eventually predict the demands of an unstable environment.



Watsu is a form of passive therapy modelled after the principles of Zen Shiatsu massage. The client is cradled in the arms of the therapist who stabilizes or moves one segment of the body, resulting in the stretching of another segment due to the drag effect. The client remains completely passive while the therapist combines the unique qualities of the water with rhythmic flow patterns.

continued on page 19 /...

Muirne van Wyk throws away her crutches

She tells us about her life, her osteoarthritis and her experience with hydrotherapy:



I was born in London and grew up on a farm in Middlesex, later in Buckinghamshire, so during my school holidays we would work on the farm. After a secretarial course in Oxford I went into the film industry as a secretary, progressing to production and location manager working on movies with the best – Stanley Baker, Michael Caine, Margot Fonteyn and Nureyev, Gregory Peck and others.

I came to South Africa for five different movies, met my husband on set where he was a gaffer and have lived here ever since. We run a business in Somerset West installing solar and alternative power systems to hotels, institutions and game lodges, and our two sons are both running their own businesses too – we're a hard-working family!

In fact I still work in our business and am currently looking for new premises. With my husband's declining health I find I am busier than ever. I am also deeply involved with the U3A Explorer group which is extremely active and I enjoy organising our trips to many exciting destinations in South Africa.

Next year I will be eighty years old and have been suffering from osteoarthritis for probably the last 50 years of my life. It's possible that it started so early because I was involved in a bad car crash in my mid-teens, as there is very little osteoarthritis in my family. My mother was a ballet dancer who remained fit and active all her life and died at 95, and my father, who was the musical director for some one thousand movies, died at 65 from a throat complication caused by smoking.

I have had back and neck surgery, a knee replacement and three hip replacements (one revision). My shoulders, elbows and occasionally ankles, have also been very troublesome. Providing I can keep the pain under control and do my best to keep mobile, I can manage well enough. I find that a glass of milk at night helps with the pain and enables me to sleep. I don't eat a lot of meat, but do eat a lot of fish and vegetables. Occasionally I will take Celebrex, but only for a few days to stop the worst pain. When the pain is generally bad, I take paracetamol, 1 ½ tablets every four to six hours. I have tried all the different brands of glucosamine but found they made no difference. Now I try to avoid medication when I can, and only take regular blood-pressure tablets.

Keeping very busy prevents one from dwelling on problems and gives one more incentive to overcome life's challenges. For a long time I was only able to get around with the aid of crutches and I believe it was this extensive use of them that aggravated the situation with my arms. I had reached a point at which I found it hard to raise my arms to apply deodorant or even to take cups

out of the cupboard at eye level. I found I was really beginning to struggle with everything but at the same time I really did not want to go for more surgery.

I love the outdoors, though mostly now through drives in the countryside. I also love good food and going out to restaurants (funds permitting!) I love being with the family – the boys, their hardworking and creative wives and our four grandchildren. They lead extremely busy lives, as do we, so I treasure the times we are able to get together.

After the last hip revision, I had started treatment with Blaauw and Partners Biokinetics, who, through various excellent treatments, worked wonders and got me back on my feet again. But the big change in my health came about six months ago when biokineticist Chanelle le Sueur from Blaauw and Partners took me for specialized Hydrotherapy.

Chanelle is kind and patient and strict – in that every movement, however small, must be done correctly. After working with her clients for a while, Chanelle becomes very aware of which muscles are working and which are not and she really works at those weak points. The overall effect is amazing! Up until then I had been walking on two crutches all the time, but after a few months I found that I could get around the house unaided. Later I found that I was able to manage if I left my sticks in the car when going to the local shop. I have regained a lot of confidence in my ability to move and I suffer far less pain – and that has really manifested itself now after six months of hydrotherapy.

Since starting my regular hydrotherapy sessions, I can again reach items from high shelves, I can walk distances without sticks, climb stairs more freely, though still with support and care, and with this new-found freedom of movement and far less pain, I am feeling much better and more positive about myself.

I thoroughly recommend the hydrotherapy sessions from Blaauw and Partners Biokinetics. They are fun and challenging, different every time, and they work!

We have two sons, both entrepreneurs. One, who recently sold his own very successful movie equipment business, travels extensively overseas on business and also flies his own plane. The other works throughout Africa, building and installing his own designs of (often silent) generators. In addition to building and designing power stations for some way off the beaten track mines, he has supplied in excess of 35 000 generators throughout Africa, mainly to the cell-tower industry.

continued from page 5 /...

HYDROTHERAPY

for arthritis and related rheumatic conditions



These techniques are extremely beneficial and can be used with any type of arthritis. Hydrotherapy is also beneficial for people suffering from Parkinsons, Fibromyalgia, many neurological disorders, auto-immune and joint illnesses. Some of the benefits are:

- decreased pain;
- improved balance and stability due to the buoyancy and water resistance helping to hold you;
- improved strength and endurance without feeling sore or extremely fatigued after a session;
- decreased swelling in the ankles or other limbs;
- improvement in walking as water's buoyancy helps us to stand upright much more easily and move more quickly than on land;
- improved mood due to the relaxing effect of warm water, increased confidence about exercising and enjoyment of companionship in the group.

WHO SHOULD OPT FOR HYDROTHERAPY?

- if you find exercising on land hurts your joints and muscles too much,
- if you suffer from extremely tight muscles and have muscular spasms,
- if you feel extremely fatigued for some days after one on-land session, or
- if your balance is poor,

Then hydrotherapy is just what you need. In the water we can exercise freely without worrying about any other concerns, as water is one of the safest and least pressured environments there is to exercise in.

Most medical aids will cover biokinetic rehabilitation, usually up to a set limit.

Your body is your most valuable asset so don't hesitate to invest in it to keep it strong, healthy and mobile. Don't let your condition own you, but rather take control and give hydrotherapy or biokinetics a try.

For more information please contact one of our qualified biokineticists at Blaauw and Partners Biokinetics on 021 852 7148, or visit our website www.blaauw@partners.co.za