



# The Case for **Hydrotherapy**

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## What is Hydrotherapy?

**Hydrotherapy, also known as aquatic physiotherapy, represents a vital component of care for people with a range of debilitating health conditions.**

***A National Manifesto for Hydrotherapy***

*<https://atacp.csp.org.uk/system/files/documents/2021-09/Hydrotherapy%20Manifesto%20September%202021-1.pdf>*

Hydrotherapy is a rehabilitation protocol that involves immersion in water, heated to around 33-35 degrees, to allow the physical properties of water (such as the density, hydrostatic pressure, buoyancy, viscosity, and turbulence) to facilitate change in motor function, muscle tone, pain, cardiovascular status, respiratory function or functional activity.

It is an important therapy for individuals with functional limitations. In such cases hydrotherapy enables them to access a wider range of motion than is possible on land, with a reduction in uncontrolled muscle tone which is often experienced when combatting gravity.

In addition, users of hydrotherapy pools normally experience a reduction in tension in muscles and joints which allows for increased passive range (when compared to land-based stretching), and as a result they improve the quality and health of joints – preventing long term complications such as joint contractures.

The purpose of this case study was to determine the impact of a 16-month water exercise program on the mobility and quality of life for a 27-year-old woman, Andrea, diagnosed with severe mental and physical disabilities...

Results indicated improvements in multiple areas to the extent that Andrea could now extend her spine enough to lie on her back. ADL mobility improvements included stair climb, sit to stand, walking speed and walking distance without aide. Andrea's quality of socialization and emotional well-being improved, as well.

*A Case Study: Mobility and Health Impact of an Aquatic Fitness Program for a Woman With Intellectual and Physical Disabilities*

Lourdes Torres Escobar, Mary E. Sanders, Daryl Lawson, and Charo Belenguer Benitez; *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education* (2013)



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Most users are not able to access cardiovascular exercise through active movement (due to their limited mobility). Hydrotherapy submersion supports cardiovascular conditioning (as the heart pumps more blood per beat when an individual is submerged in water) and therefore long-term health, reducing hospital admissions and need for additional long-term care.

**The warm water helps reduce spasticity and softens rigid tissues, as well as assisting in calming the client if agitated by motion. Water provides the individual with RS intense stimulation and enables free and easy movement, without the fear of falling and without the use of assistive devices.**

*Hydrotherapy for a young child with Rett syndrome. Review of the literature and a case study.*

M. Lotan, C. Barmatz; *International Journal on Disability and Human Development* (2009)



# The Challenges of Using Public Hydrotherapy Spaces, Such as a Pool at an SEN School

**Considerable variation exists in the availability of aquatic physiotherapy services across the country, meaning that for many people there is no viable means of easily accessing this form of care. Hydrotherapy pools that do exist have come under increasing pressure in recent years, with a number of services having closed, or been put at risk of closure.**

*A National Manifesto for Hydrotherapy*

<https://atacp.csp.org.uk/system/files/documents/2021-09/Hydrotherapy%20Manifesto%20September%202021-1.pdf>



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First, the pool needs to be available. This normally means using it outside school hours, which limits access, especially for school aged users. The school needs to be prepared and able to provide the access, which might be a challenge for them if they have to arrange for keyholders to be available, especially at weekends or during school holidays.

Because of these factors, SEN school provision is often sporadic.

Added to these issues is the need to travel to where commercially available pools can be booked. Availability of session slots, distance and travel time all reduce flexibility, so users are not able to access hydrotherapy when they need pain relief, need to lessen spasms, or for any other urgent reason.

Finally, limited session durations mean that users who need longer exercise to get the full benefit are denied that access.

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There is another consideration. A frequent barrier to physical therapies by users is that if the intervention is not perceived as enjoyable or "fun" there is less engagement. This is one of the reasons why hydrotherapy is so successful as a therapeutic solution.





## Challenges with Other Solutions

It's not enough to simply find a pool that is warm enough. Facilities need to have the specialist hoist equipment required to enable entry to the pool, and the pool needs to be large enough to accommodate the required number of carers. Other features, such as massage jets, are also important.



## What Conditions Can a Hydrotherapy Pool Help With?

**The results of this integrative review showed that hydrotherapy when administered with conventional methods of rehabilitation of children with spastic diplegia cerebral palsy, has positive effects on all areas of the International Classification of Functioning.**

*The Effect of Hydrotherapy on Health of Cerebral Palsy Patients: An Integrative Review*

*Masoud Khalaji, Minoo Kalantari, Zahra Shafiee, Mohammad Ali Hosseini; Iranian Rehabilitation Journal (2017)*

**As a therapy, it can help with many conditions:**

- Pain relief, such as back pain, joint pain or muscle pain
- Reduction of muscle tone
- Reduction of swelling
- Improvement to poor circulation and general improvement to cardio-vascular fitness
- Improved flexibility and range of movement, including post-operation therapy for hips, knees and other joints
- Symptom relief for arthritis, including rheumatoid arthritis and ankylosing spondylitis
- Lowered stress, anxiety and high blood pressure

**The medical community have a saying – motion is lotion!** In other words, the more you can move around, the better your physical and mental condition will be. And moving around in water is one of the safest ways to get that exercise.





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