Aqua therapy, also known as “aquatic physical therapy” and “hydrotherapy,” is an evidence-based practice aimed at helping patients with a wide variety of conditions. As with other forms of physical therapy, aqua therapy involves the oversight of a licensed practitioner and the adherence to an individualized plan of care. Many patients do other types of therapy in conjunction with aquatic therapy, but the unique properties of water and the ways in which it influences movement provide certain benefits that traditional physical therapy may not (1).

What does aqua therapy look like?

Aqua therapy typically takes place in a swimming pool. Exact regulations regarding the operation and maintenance of these pools, presence of lifeguards, etc. may vary according to state and local laws.
In some cases, aqua therapy is given in a group setting to patients with a range of different conditions.
What Is Aqua Therapy?

disabilities/conditions. In others, it may be more individualized (1).

How does aqua therapy work?

Patients who may have more difficulty exercising on land benefit from the buoyancy of water, which can make movement easier for those with limited flexibility, range of motion, and strength. Hydrostatic pressure can also provide numerous benefits: it helps improve circulation, decreases pain, increases range of motion, and can have calming effects. Moreover, water provides has a high viscosity, which can make certain types of movement more challenging and help to increase muscle tone and cardiovascular fitness. Brainline explains that, “The higher viscosity of water makes muscles work harder when compared to the same exercises on land. Viscosity can be described as the way the water molecules stick together when you try to move through them. It is harder to move through the water than it is to move on land because the water molecules are sticking to each other and to you.”

Doing therapy in an aquatic environment can also greatly benefit those with neurological conditions. Being in the water minimizes involuntary spasticity and tremors. It can also help with muscle reeducation: movements in the water tend to be slower, which gives the patient more time to process the ways their body is working (2).

What are the benefits of aqua therapy?

Aqua therapy can help to maintain or improve the following, among other benefits (1):

- Coordination
- Balance
- Posture
- Flexibility
- Strength
- Endurance
- Heart and lung function
What Is Aqua Therapy?

- Relaxation

What kinds of conditions can aqua therapy help with?

Aqua therapy can benefit those with a wide range of neuromuscular, musculoskeletal, cardiovascular, pulmonary, and integumentary (skin) conditions, among others (1).

How can aqua therapy help children with HIE and associated disabilities?

Aqua therapy can help to minimize negative symptoms and improve function in children with hypoxic-ischemic encephalopathy (HIE) and associated conditions. In particular, children with cerebral palsy (CP) (a disorder characterized by motor function impairments and, in many cases, secondary postural problems) may benefit from this therapeutic modality (2).

Aqua therapy may be especially helpful for children and adolescents with CP who are non-ambulatory and struggle with land-based physical activities. However, much of the research published thus far focuses on those with fairly minor impairments; therefore, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the effects of aqua therapy on those who are more severely affected by CP (3).

Does aqua therapy only help with physical disabilities?

No. Recent research on people with cerebral palsy found that aqua therapy can also improve emotional wellbeing, which suggests that this type of therapy may also be an effective intervention for mental health concerns (4).

About the HIE Help Center and ABC Law Centers

The HIE Help Center is run by ABC Law Centers, a medical malpractice firm exclusively handling cases involving HIE and other birth injuries. Our lawyers have over 100 years of combined experience with this type of law, and have been advocating for children with HIE and related disabilities since the firm’s inception in 1997. We are passionate about helping families obtain the compensation necessary to cover their
extensive medical bills, loss of wages (if one or both parents have to miss work in order to care for their child), assistive technology, and other necessities.

If you suspect your child’s HIE may have been caused by medical negligence, please contact us today to learn more about pursuing a case. We provide free legal consultations, during which we will inform you of your legal options and answer any questions you have. Moreover, you would pay nothing throughout the entire legal process unless we obtain a favorable settlement.

You are also welcome to reach out to us with inquiries that are not related to malpractice. We cannot provide individualized medical advice, but we’re happy to track down informational resources for you.

Sources


