



## Benefits of Aquatic Exercises with Lymphedema

Aquatic exercise offers exciting therapeutic opportunities for treatment and long-term management of Lymphedema. The **hydrostatic resistance (water resistance)** with exercise and activity offers the opportunity to tone, strengthen, improve flexibility, and increase endurance. The buoyancy of water offers a gentle environment to promote freedom of movement while reducing joint stress. This is an excellent opportunity to work on improving range of motion and quality of movement.

Activities can be graded to challenge the individual to meet their specific goals and objectives. An appropriate aquatic exercise program may help train the individual for other activities in their daily life.

One of the surprising benefits of **hydrostatic pressure (water pressure)** is the support provided for the lymphedematous limb. In many cases, individuals with Lymphedema find the compression allows for freedom to exercise without their sleeve.

Water also has a high binding affinity for heat, acting as a heat magnet. Anyone who completes aerobic exercise and increases their heart rate will likely perspire. The surrounding pool water efficiently absorbs your body heat created from your exercise and activities. This may reduce the risk of aggravating the Lymphedema. Typically, most public pools will be kept at 29-30 C, well below body temperature. This temperature is appropriate for this conduction of heat to work effectively. Unfortunately, hot tub water temperature has the opposite effect. As the water temperature is higher than core body temperature, it becomes increasingly difficult for your body to regulate heat. This can increase risk of flare-up of Lymphedema.

The water offers an opportunity to exercise both in a solitary or group setting. Client's can develop a personalized Lymphedema, aquatic program, or choose to work in a group setting. Aquatic exercise can be a terrific social activity, and may help to improve quality of life for our patients who value aquatic activity as part of their program. The social component may help to increase compliance.

Water exercises are fun, but not for everyone! ANY exercise program, as part of a long-term Lymphedema care plan, must be enjoyable for you. Anyone who would like to exercise in water should be comfortable with basic swimming skills. An individual with Lymphedema should consider consulting with your Lymphedema therapist prior to implementing an aquatic exercise program. They can help tailor a program that meets your Lymphedema needs, work with your other medical and functional concerns, and set

goals for you to achieve. However, please keep in mind that one should always be cleared by their family physician prior to starting any exercise program.

Do water exercises work? Unfortunately, there is limited published research looking at the benefits the aquatics with Lymphedema. However, there is great opportunity to assess both physical and psychosocial benefits in the coming years.

Aquatic exercise may be an invaluable tool for client's to use to help their long-term management of Lymphedema.

Ref: Shier, Byron. (2005, Summer). Benefits of Aquatic Exercises with Lymphedema. Alberta Lymphedema Learning Association Newsletter, 2 (p.1-2).