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TUESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2010

Underwater Treadmill Proves Rehab Benefit

Physical therapist Sandra Stevens first explored the use of underwater treadmills at Middle Tennessee State University with children suffering from cerebral palsy. She hypothesized that the underwater system might also have profound benefits for spinal cord injury patients struggling to relearn how to walk and move. Stevens noted dramatic improvement in endurance in patients who used the treadmills as part of their rehabilitation program. She said, "So they've gone from four or five minutes of walking to 32 or 34 minutes. That's a big improvement," in a DNA India article.



Stevens' research has already helped a handful of spinal cord injury survivors to relearn to walk after suffering from full or partial paralysis. A Newsweek article reported on the cases of three of Stevens' patients: Jim Harris, Bob Moody, and Janette Rodgers; all three of them have relearned how to walk with the help of underwater treadmills.

Harris survived a plane crash, Moody fell and became paralyzed two years ago, and Rodgers broke her neck in a car accident in mid-2009. The Newsweek article reported, "For spinal-cord injuries, walking in water is the ideal place because people with this particular injury have a blunted cardiovascular response to any exercise, Stevens explained. Walking in water produces greater blood flow, which increases cardiovascular activity, she said."

Since the use of underwater treadmills does not require any kind of FDA approval, the rehabilitation method has witnessed a rapid gain in popularity in various and sometimes-strange places around the U.S. A basketball player for Ohio State University was able to recover and return to play after a fall left him with broken bones in his back. Yahoo Sports reported that Evan Turner missed just six games while recovering from his injury. "Turner said he spent 30-40 minutes each day in the pool running on an underwater treadmill. His body responded well enough that he stopped taking painkillers earlier than expected," the article noted.

A basketball training facility in Mississippi is being completed this year with an underwater treadmill for athletes to use while recovering from minor to more serious injuries. A state of the art rehabilitation center in Wyoming has plans to include an underwater treadmill as part of their new expanding facility.

Another article reported that even some high-tech veterinarian facilities provide shallow underwater treadmills for obese dogs to use for moving safely and losing weight. The method holds tremendous promise for spinal cord injury survivors around the world. Because the method is relatively inexpensive, it is likely that more and more training and rehabilitation facilities will provide underwater treadmills as an effective and viable option for their patients.

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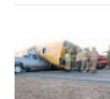
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