



Hydrotherapy

What is hydrotherapy?

In around 2000 BC, the ancient Egyptians first recognised that bathing in warm water possessed therapeutic benefits. By about 500 BC, the ancient Greeks began to understand the properties and benefits of Hydrotherapy. In particular, Hippocrates, the Greek physician, recommended Hydrotherapy to assist the relieving of medical conditions such as jaundice and rheumatism.

Throughout the ages, the development of Hydrotherapy continued, the Romans further enhanced the practice by massaging oils into the skin prior to bathing. The Romans were also renowned for the fine architecture and sophisticated masonry of their public baths, which can still be seen in the English town of Bath today.

The term Hydrotherapy is derived from two Greek words, 'Hydro' meaning water and 'Therapeia' meaning therapy. Today, Hydrotherapy is most commonly understood to mean the treatment of illness through the use of water. The concept of Hydrotherapy is to rid the body of toxins that may be inflicting joint pain and inflammation.



Water healing is one of the oldest, safest and cheapest methods of treatment. It is used to relieve symptom of:

- Arthritis
- Anxiety
- Back pain
- Cellulite
- Muscle weakness
- Premenstrual syndrome
- Stress
- Troubled sleep

Hydrotherapy works by the water motion stimulating the touch receptors on the skin, relieving tight muscles and releasing chemicals that we produce in our body called endorphins. This also boosts blood circulation and promotes general well being.

Relaxing in a Spa or Hot Tub, the user experiences a sensation of weightlessness due to the buoyancy effects of the water supporting the body weight and it also lifts your spirit. The hot water relieves fatigue and prevents stiffness. The pressure of the water from the water jets literally massages the body.

Nearly one person in every 20 has some form of disability. The treatment of a disease or disability using water is complementary to physiotherapy or kinesiotherapy. Pool water can also be used by a wider group, as a preventative method by reducing stress, tension, fatigue and toning the spinal muscles to reduce the risk of injury. It can also be used for people with asthmatic conditions by expanding and exercising the lungs.

While spa mineral water therapy is widely accepted in Europe and the Far East, hydrotherapy is more usually practised as a facet of physiotherapy or rehabilitation in the UK.





The specialised hydrotherapy pool is now an essential aid to recovery for people suffering with arthritis, ME and MS. A hydrotherapy pool can also be used for exercise for physically disabled people, or those with learning difficulties; it also used for rehabilitation for convalescent or paraplegic people.

Pools for medical treatment all require rapid water treatment services, highly effective circulation and an above average water temperature, from 30 to 37oC.

These pools are usually specifically designed for therapy use and should take into account the particular purposes and the range of users. The pool should be accessible for wheelchair users by various methods, such as ramps hoists or lifts.

When planning the design of a hydrotherapy pool facility, careful thought must be given to the approach, access, and mobility within the building to the pool itself. The changing and toilet areas should be designed for the particular users. There should not be any unnecessary changes of level, restrictions to toilets, cramped changing accommodation or awkward pre-cleanse facilities.



Swimming pool surface areas and depths need to be suitable for the users, in some cases with their carers, and the purpose intended.

Deck level pools for hydrotherapy usage have a number of advantages for disabled bathers and the physiotherapy staff, as they are working at one level, in connection with the water and the pool surround. In situ, shallow steps, with dual hand-railing, are helpful to bathers, who have some mobility, in order to enter and exit the pool with the minimum of assistance.

It must be remembered that a hydrotherapy pool complex is in fact a hospital. Therefore, cleanliness and the cleaning regime of the complex must be given a great deal of thought, both from a cleaning and hygiene viewpoint, but also the materials used for the finishes of not only the hydrotherapy pool, but also the walls, floor and ceiling. At the design stage, it would be wise to consider including a water pressure wash down system to avoid the need for trailing hoses, as the people using the complex will usually have a lower resistance to infection than the general population, who might use other pool complexes.

Acknowledgements to John Dawes

(ISPE Handbook - Design & Planning of Swimming Pools)

