

## **POOL BENEFITS**

**By**

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## **POOL THERAPY FOR A HEALTHY LIFE**

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## INTRODUCTION

The wonderful world of water. Maybe its because I was taught to swim when only two, or maybe because I have spent so many days surfing the Pacific, or maybe because we are made consisting of about 70% water . . . whatever the reason, I have found water to be one of the simplest and most accessible healing agents. It provides us with exercise and relaxation. It soothes the nerves and refreshes the soul.

About ten years ago, my family moved to Mariposa, in the Sierras, from Oceanside. It didn't take too many hot summer days before I had the maps out looking for lakes, rivers, distances to the beach (oh, yeah), and for the local swimming pools. Four years into it, and many exciting water days later, we were sweltering down Blackstone Avenue in Fresno when we saw what seemed to be a mirage of crystal blue water. Off to our right were several above-ground swimming pools set up in a big parking lot. Next came the U-turn back to the water. Admittedly, we had been thinking of getting a pool every year since we have lived in Mariposa, but this particular day I jumped in hook, line, and sinker, and put a down payment on a 26-foot by 13-foot by 4-foot deep splash pool. We wanted a pool long enough to do laps in, deep enough to do water exercises in, and moveable so that its location could be changed if necessary. Besides that, we found the cost of \$5,000 to be affordable, versus the estimates of around \$30,000 for a standard in-ground pool. All right!! With a pool, we no longer would have to go looking for water. It would be right out the back door.

Over the next week, we leveled a space for the pool, brought in a layer of sand and a ground cloth for under the pool, assembled the pool (which was, to my delight, easily done by the four of us), and filled it with water. We were good to go!

Being a chiropractor for 30 years now, I recognized the value of water therapy. Because of various musculoskeletal conditions, such as degenerative arthritis, osteoporosis, fibromyalgia, or rehabilitation from sprain/strain type injuries or prolonged illness, exercise in water can be extremely beneficial because the weight-bearing stress from gravity is dramatically reduced. I had been interested in formulating a protocol of water activities that could benefit my patients, as well as my family members.

Which brings us to the present, and this booklet, which is the compilation of many months of exploring various ways to use a pool to improve one's health. And you know what? It is so much fun! Let me share with you some ideas that will, hopefully, be an asset to your health, as well as provide much enjoyment!

## **BODY, MIND, AND SPIRIT**

It has been my personal experience that spending time in the pool is healthy to all of me. My body gets refreshed, exercised, and invigorated all at the same time. This positive effect connects to my mind, will, and emotions (my soul). I know this because I start smiling. My creative thinking kicks in. I get motivated, encouraged, inspired. I find new strength, new determination, renewed energy. I reflect upon the happenings and relationships in my life, and find new strength and resolve to make things right in these areas of my life. Wow, all of this just by doing a few laps, getting a "jet massage," and floating around looking up at the sky? Powerful medicine! And there is more. As this clear, cool water is working its curative values to my body and soul, I find a peace deep inside . . . in my spirit. My thoughts turn to my Lord, and the fellowship is awesome. Sometimes a song of praise, sometimes prayers. Sometimes just floating around in the peace and quiet, listening, being in His presence.

I don't want to get carried away here, but all this really does happen! Can you relate? Do you want to give it a try? As this booklet now turns to practical application, consider for your own situation the benefits of pool therapy.

## **CHOOSING A TYPE AND SIZE OF POOL**

Choosing a pool is definitely a personal preference. The big choice is whether to have an in-ground pool or an above-ground pool. My suggestion to you is to take your time and look at all your options. Prices can vary tremendously. I decided on the above-ground pool primarily because it was affordable. I also liked the option of relocating it if desired, or even storing it. However, I love the aesthetics of an in-ground pool. Well planned and designed into the landscaping, it can really make your backyard your own private resort.

One consideration to keep in mind is the dimensions of your pool. If you desire to do lap swimming, it is best that your pool be at least 25 feet long and 4 feet deep. The width can vary, but it is nice to have at least 12 feet wide. That way, you will have room to have pool games, company, and just more room to be creative in your pool therapy.

With an above-ground pool, a good level pad will be important, made a few feet larger all the way around than the pool's dimensions. Putting sand or some other softening material under the pool will make the use of your pool enjoyable. And remember to gopher-proof your pool setup. There are specially made under-pool materials available.

Take your time on choosing your pool. Talk to others in your area on what they decided on, and how it is working out. Visit several dealers and compare. Check pools out on the Internet. Also, the time of year you purchase may save you money. Usually at the end of summer or in the fall you will find some special deals. Have fun! This purchase will be conducive to better health!

## **BE CREATIVE WITH YOUR POOL**

I consider our pool to be therapeutic hydrotherapy. I have been working out various protocols that are comprehensive in their therapeutic value, as well as a lot of fun. Let me give you an example.

If it is a hot summer day, I will often precede the pool workout with a few minutes either stretching or sunbathing. The warmth of the sun is relaxing to the nervous system, and it helps

to loosen tight muscles. It also makes the idea of cooling off very appealing. Having your favorite large, thick beach towel adds to this enjoyment, as well as to the trying off later.

Today is very hot, so the seventy-degree water seems quite nippy. I decide to gradually adapt to the coolness by walking laps inside the pool and, with each lap, submerge a few inches further, always stopping at the intake jet for a mini-spinal massage. After a half dozen walkabouts, it is time to start swimming.

The first couple laps are a gentle breaststroke with the full body submerged except the head. By then, the body is cooled down and adapted. It's time for dunking the head under the water! This can be one of the highlight moments in pool therapy. It is very soothing and relaxing. It must be all the nerve sensation in the head that just automatically lowers the tension levels. I usually stay under a few seconds and do a few underwater breaststrokes to enjoy this quiet underwater world. Coming up for air is the beginning of a swimming session, consisting of a medley of different strokes.

I often start with a couple laps of the backstroke, extending the sensation of having my head in the water. And the arm movement really stretches the upper back and shoulder muscles, while the leg up and down kicking dissipates tension in the lower body. This is followed by a couple laps of the "crawl," which is the common swimming stroke done in the facedown position, with legs alternately kicking up and down while the arms are alternately stroking the water from an over-the-shoulder movement. This really works the entire back, abdomen, and shoulders. Now is a good time to relax.

Finishing up these laps at the intake jet, I pause for a couple minutes of hydro-massage. I let it work up and down the spine by moving my body up and down. Then I turn around and carefully have the jet massage the chest and abdomen, consciously releasing tension and envisioning the individual organs being toned by the water pressure. Then I fully submerge and let the water jet massage my head. Then the same with the feet. By now, relaxation is nearly complete. I continue with several laps of the sidestroke, reversing the side down every couple laps. This provides an excellent stretch of your rib cage, as well as the hips, thighs, and legs. At this point, the muscles are relaxed and stretched. It is a good time for getting the heart moving and the muscles working a little more. Ten laps of alternating strokes at a steady clip worked in here will provide excellent cardiovascular exercise in a joint-friendly environment.

A cooling off period just floating around the pool is a fitting finish to this exercise protocol. One last float over to the intake jet for a final jet massage is the frosting on the cake. After getting out of the pool, a moderately brisk drying off rub with your warm, thick towel will leave you invigorated and relaxed at the same time. Are you smiling now?

This serves as an example of how you can become creative with pool therapy. Have fun working out some protocols of your own. The enjoyment is there, as well as the benefits!

### **ADVANTAGES OF WATER EXERCISE**

The major advantage of exercising in the water is that the buoyancy of your body in the water takes the weight-bearing stress off the joints. This makes it possible, as well as enjoyable, for one to do exercise even though they might have joint pain from arthritis, injury, or other causes. Water exercise is also excellent in a rehabilitative program for body strengthening, and even specific muscle injury recovery. The water helps to support movement, and makes it easier to control body movements as well as the amount of resistance desired. Those who have found

exercise too painful or difficult because of chronic back pain, leg pain, or osteoporosis can also benefit from water therapy.

Water also has a positive effect on the nervous system and circulation. Just being in the water has a calming and mood-elevating effect. Water therapy exercise classes are very popular in both physical therapy centers for rehabilitation, as well as in public and back yard pools for exercise. Participating in a water exercise class can be a lot of fun, and very beneficial to your health.

Have you ever noticed how “buff” serious or professional swimmers can become? Pool therapy provides the environment in which athletes can swim and tone up their muscular and cardiovascular systems.

Pool therapy is good for the body and can be enjoyed by most anyone.

### **DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS**

One of the great things about a pool is that it can be used in so many different ways. This versatility is what makes it such a great asset for exercise, relaxation, and fun. For some, the pool is a place to get serious and swim lap after lap of varying strokes. For another, it may be a place to float around contemplating life. Others enjoy it as a playground in which to play Marco Polo, volleyball, basketball, water polo, or maybe a game of tag with friends. For others, it provides an environment to do water aerobics, stretches, and other rehabilitative activities. There are days when a raft and your favorite beverage make for an ultimate relaxation experience. The nighttime swims, the pool parties, the sharing of conversation while cooling off in the water...and don't forget the jet massage...offer a seemingly limitless amount of opportunities.

### **WATER TEMPERATURES**

The effects of water temperature on the human body are profound. Cooler water (let's say from 60 – 75 degrees) is invigorating and acts as a wake-up call to the body. A sudden plunge into cool water will take your breath away, but will alert your mind and senses. It's amazing how the body, in just a few minutes, adjusts to the coolness, and its refreshing qualities can be enjoyed. Usually, in the back of your mind, there is the thought that this water therapy session is not going to go on indefinitely, and warming up is a frequent pop-up thought. On the other hand, warm water (let's say from 76 – 90 degrees) is much more relaxing. As the water is closer to your own body temperature, there is much less physiological reaction, and the body and mind quickly recognize the tension-relieving effects.

As a general rhythm, pool water is warm in the summer, cool in the spring and fall, and cold in the winter. Of course, where you live will be a major factor, too. Also, temperatures can be regulated with a pool water heater. Thus far, we have not used a heater. In the spring, summer, and fall, we use a summer pool cover, which allows the summer heat to heat the pool while keeping the bugs and leaves out when the pool is not in use. In the winter, we use a winter cover, which protects the pool from the natural elements and produces enough heat to keep the water from freezing. Without having a pool heater, pool therapy does not exist at our home during the winter.

In the summer when pool temperature is quite warm, one fun thing to do is to bring cold water over to the pool via a garden hose. The invigoration experienced by getting sprayed with cold

water can really feel good. If you're swimming with a friend, you can take turns spraying each other, or whatever games you can invent. The cold water poured over the head when the rest of the body is immersed in the warm pool is soothing and can even relieve tension headaches.

For general pool therapy activities, a good temperature range is from about 75 – 85 degrees. In this range, exercise can be the focus, as the temperature level is comfortable, and not needing your body's attention. Have fun discovering various ways of using water temperatures for fun and therapeutic value, alike!

## **FLOATING**

One of the most relaxing activities you can do in the pool is floating. Floating is easier for some than for others but, even if you have the tendency to sink, with a little arm and leg motion, you can stay afloat and experience the benefits of this relaxing activity. When floating, the backside of the body is completely submerged, including the ears. Having the ears under the water really adds to the relaxing effect. The sounds of the outside world are silenced, and you become attuned to your own breathing and the quieting underwater sounds. It is like your body wants to take a deep breath and settle into this new peaceful environment. The tension in the muscles releases and the mind starts to quiet down. This is an excellent way to unwind.

For those of you that are unable to float or prefer not to be submerged in the water, there is always the option of floating on a raft or some other flotation device. This can be a wonderful way to go, especially if the water temperature is really cool. Some of the modern rafts are contoured to support your back and head, and even have beverage holders. This type of luxurious floating can be especially therapeutic.

The movement of the water, the gentle sounds of wind and water, and the calming effect of being in the water all combine to make floating an enjoyable and valuable pool activity.

## **FULL BODY SUBMERGING**

Try going all the way under the water. The head is loaded with millions of sensory nerve endings and, when it takes the plunge along with the rest of the body, the "treatment" is complete. The entire nervous system is calmed and invigorated at the same time. Just holding your breath and submerging for several seconds puts you into the underwater world with its unique quietness. It has the effect of magnifying your awareness of your own body. Try getting in touch with where your tension is, and then release it.

Another fun activity is swimming underwater. It's good exercise, and it feels great. Usually a breaststroke with a frog kick is an effective way of propelling the body underwater. You might challenge yourself to see if you can make a full lap underwater. This also can help increase your lung capacity.

Your imagination is the limit on other underwater activities. Doing handstands, flips, or even imaginary underwater tea parties are things in my own pool memory data bank. Using a mask and snorkel also can be a whole lot of fun. Diving for coins is something that is always popular. So, while you are having all this fun, just remember how much good you are doing the body at the same time!

## **JET MASSAGE**

One of the best discoveries I have made with our pool is the therapeutic hydro-massage provided by the return water jet from the filter. It's powerful and can really be effective in removing stress from tight muscles. The motor for our filtration system is one horsepower. This provides excellent filtration for our pool size (26' long by 13' wide by 4' deep), and is the perfect amount of pressure for a vigorous body massage. You can vary the amount of pressure on your body easily by the distance you stand from the valve. One word of caution: Be careful not to get too close to the jet with sensitive body parts. Pain and/or injury could occur.

A good way to begin your jet massage is to back up to it slowly while standing. When you determine the optimal amount of pressure, let the water massage your entire neck and back by moving your body in an up and down motion, either by bending at the knees or by controlling your depth in the water with arm and leg movements. As the circulation in the back increases, you might start itching. This is a definite indicator you have had enough.

Slowly turn to one side and repeat your movements, then to the other side. This way you can massage your lateral rib cage, hips, thighs, and legs. This is also a good time to maneuver into positions to let the jet massage all sides of your thighs and legs. By holding onto the top edge of the pool, first with one hand for one side of your body and, when ready, the other hand for the other side of your body, you can stabilize yourself without being pushed away from the jet by the water pressure.

Next, see if you can handle the pressure on your feet. The feet are loaded with nerve endings, and this can be a very ticklish sensation. The sensitivity soon dissipates, however, and this foot reflexology massage is great for the whole body. You can do the same on your hands. It feels really good and has similar benefits as the feet.

Now, slowly turn towards the water jet, and allow the water to massage the front of your neck and sternum area. If you are a male, you can continue the massage over your entire chest. However, the pressure on a woman's sensitive breast tissue could be painful, so it is contraindicated. From here, abdominal water massage can really dissipate tension you have been holding and not even know about. The water pressure has a toning effect on the internal organs in the abdomen, also. Just proceed with caution and be a distance away from the jet so the pressure is only moderate to light. You may want to hold onto the top edge of the pool with both hands for good positional control.

A good way to finish your treatment is to go underwater with your head and let the water jet massage the top of your head. Do this a couple times and, after the third time, just relax and let the pressure push you away from the jet. As you float away, you will feel great and very relaxed.

## **POOL GAMES WITH OTHERS**

The pool is a great place to have fun with others. Some of my favorite and long-lasting memories are of fun with family and friends playing games in the pool. Here is a chance to socialize and get a good workout at the same time.

One popular pool game is Marco Polo. It is a tag game where the person who is "it," with eyes kept closed, says, "Marco," and the others in the game must answer, "Polo," if they are not underwater at the time. In this manner the one who is "it" seeks out those saying, "Polo," until a tag is made, at which time the one tagged becomes "it." This game is a lot of fun.

Water basketball and water volleyball are great water games. Equipment for playing these two games is readily available in pool supply stores and other sports and variety stores. Water polo and playing catch with a soft football or Frisbee are other fun activities.

Races are also a lot of fun and great exercise. Lap races using different swim strokes, or races in inner tubes or on rafts make for exciting events. Seeing who can float the longest or hold their breath the longest are a couple other ideas. Diving for coins is a lot of fun, and water fights with water guns brings out the kid in all ages.

These are but a few of many possible games to enjoy with others. These are often special times where friendships are made or deepened. It can be very refreshing on a hot summer day, and it is an excellent way to exercise.

### **NIGHT SWIMMING**

Swimming at night is a whole new ballgame. It brings with it its own excitement and adventure. Whether your pool has lights or not, the experience will be unique and enjoyable.

Swimming at night with no lights usually is very calming and peaceful. The sounds and feel of the night are evident as you glide through your liquid medium. Floating and looking up at the night sky is one of my favorite activities. Swimming underwater and feeling the water all around and the movement of the muscles along with the quietness of the night is an unforgettable experience.

Swimming at night with pool lights adds a new element to your night swim. There is an inherent energy that comes with the light. It focuses the pool as the place of activity in the darkness of the night. It is a great environment for swimming with friends and playing various pool games. Whether doing laps, just relaxing, or cutting up with friends, this is a wonderful time to use your pool.

### **CONCLUSION**

Pool therapy is a tremendous benefit to healthy living. It is a tonic to body, mind, and soul. There are just so many things one can do in the water! Floating, swimming, playing, socializing, relaxing . . . one's own creativity is the limit. Also, it provides an effective means of rehabilitative exercise.

I hope you give pool therapy a try. Always be safe and follow the rules. GET WET!

For your health,

Patrick V. McClure, D.C.