

# The Halliwick Method: Applications for Individuals with Orthopedic Conditions

Susan J. Grosse  
Aquatic Consulting & Education Resource Services  
sjgrosse@execpc.com  
<http://my.execpc.com/~sjgrosse>

Orthopedic conditions present a variety of challenges to the practitioner. Absence of limbs, joint impairment, abnormal muscle tone, and atypical reflex patterns can impede motor activity and limit daily function ability. Additionally, orthopedic conditions also can impair balance, alter body image and resulting perceptual-motor functioning, impede development of physical fitness, and inhibit independent mobility. Because of its use of specific movement enhancing progressions to assist an individual in developing motor control, the Halliwick method is an ideal therapeutic intervention for individuals with orthopedic conditions.

No matter what the age of the individual – adult or child – the Halliwick Method can be a valuable addition to an orthopedic treatment plan. Halliwick activities rely on the natural buoyancy of the body while facilitating development of motor control. Individuals learn how to position and control their bodies through a variety of rotations, always moving from the unstable to the balanced state. Breath control is emphasized throughout, reducing tension. Control of position in turbulence builds core strength while reinforcing individual confidence.

Halliwick activities begin with water orientation. A one to one client therapist ratio assists in familiarization. Hands on positioning aids in reducing abnormal reflex patterns. Individuals learn that even the smallest movement can alter body orientation. As Halliwick activities are sustained over time endurance and cardiorespiratory fitness improves.

Why does Halliwick methodology have the potential to be so successful? Halliwick methods are based on sound hydrodynamic principles. The Halliwick Method originated in England, where, in 1949 James McMillan, an engineer by profession, developed techniques for helping individuals with disabilities become independent swimmers. Based on the adaptation of scientific and hydrodynamic principles to the behavior of the human body in water, the Halliwick Method emphasizes the goal of individual independence. No buoyant aids are used during Halliwick activities. An individual learns natural, self-initiated motor control.

The Halliwick Method includes specific guidelines for handling and positioning to facilitate performance, suggestions for developing good breathing and breath control, and a complete progression of skills and activities. This progression includes water entry, adjustment, breath control, locomotion, submersion, vertical rotation, lateral rotation, combinations, and water exit. Group activities, logical extensions of one on one progressions, are emphasized, with groups made up of student/instructor pairs. All components are based on McMillan's original ten-point program.

Why is Halliwick so little known in the United States? The Halliwick method originated in Great Britain as an instructional swim method. In the United States, swim instruction has its roots in group lessons – one instructor with six or more individuals. National instructional swim programs are designed for group lesson purposes. Integrating Halliwick was not a feasible alternative. However, the very same hydrodynamic principles governing movement during Halliwick activities are the same hydrodynamic principles governing any aquatic movement, including any and all purposeful swimming.

Over time, the Halliwick method has taken two complimentary directions – one instructional, following its foundational beginnings, and one therapeutic, expanding on MacMillan's original *Ten*

*Point Programme.*

**Halliwick Method Ten Point Program** (original) “It may be appreciated at this state, that this philosophy could well apply to exercise technique. Within the limitation of these few words much has to be covered, but even greater areas omitted. The following definitions of the ten points can only serve as a guide, they do not cover the full significance of the programme.”<sup>1</sup>

1. **Mental Adjustment:** The appreciation of the differences in the elements, land/water. The comparison of posture and movement on land and in water. The realization that there are now two effective forces in action, gravity and upthrust.
2. **Disengagement:** The encouragement to use any newly developed ability without mental or physical assistance.
3. **Vertical Rotation Control:** To control balance and movement around any transverse axis (sitting to lying).
4. **Lateral Rotation Control:** A similar control but around a longitudinal axis (rolling from prone to supine).
5. **Combined Rotation Control:** That is control around a diagonal axis. Usually an essential for the more asymmetric body to control changes in shape and/or posture.
6. **Mental Inversion:** A psychological step in trying to stay under the water against the effect of upthrust. It is also an adequate check on the points previously taught.
7. **Balance is Stillness:** To demonstrate the ability to maintain a posture in water against disturbing forces.
8. **Turbulent Gliding:** An expression that covers the activity of the body being moved in the supine position through the water. The body is not touched neither is it allowed to make any propulsive movement. Turbulence is used in this case.
9. **Simple Progression:** The body is now required to make a simple movement creating progression through the water.
10. **Basic Movement:** This is the application of a defined larger patterned movement of progression. It is based on hydrodynamical principles and can be used by some 70% of the handicapped population.

<sup>1</sup>McMillan, James M.B.E. (1978). The role of water in rehabilitation. *Pysioterapeuten*. Volumn 45, March.

Today, Halliwick methodology is increasingly better known in the therapeutic field through the efforts of Johan Lambeck of the Netherlands. (Grosse, 2004).

Limitations in range of motion, muscle weakness, balance impairment, abnormal body shape, absence of limbs, limited motor control, and other resulting manifestations of an orthopedic condition will not keep an individual from participating in Halliwick activities. Individuals with orthopedic conditions are in an ideal position to benefit from Halliwick engagement.

Several activity packed hours of Halliwick methodology related to orthopedic conditions are included in the schedule for the ATRI specialty workshop in March, 2009 in Boston, MA. For more information on this workshop, go to [www.atri.org](http://www.atri.org). Unable to attend the workshop? Looking for more information on the Halliwick method? The publication *The Halliwick Method:*

*Water Freedom for Individuals with Disabilities*, containing over 75 photos (including underwater shots of handling and positioning) is available for \$15 +3 S & H from Aquatic Consulting & Education Resource Services, 7252 W. Wabash Avenue, Milwaukee, 53223.

## Halliwick Method Resources

- Association of Swimming Therapy (1992). *Swimming for People with Disabilities*. London, UK: A.C. Black.
- Bull, E. et. al. (1984). *In the Pool: Swimming Instruction for the Disabled*. Hauger Skolevei 1, N. 1351 RUD, Norway: Norway Swimming Federation.
- Grosse, S. & Lambeck, J. (2004). The Halliwick method: A comparison of applications to swim instruction and aquatic therapy, *ICHPER•SD Journal*. 40(4), 31-36. Fall.
- Grosse, S. J. (2004). The Halliwick Method: Water Exercise for Children with Disabilities. *AKWA*. 18(2), 31-33 August/September.
- Grosse, S.J. (2001). *The Halliwick Method: Water Freedom for Individuals with Disabilities*. Milwaukee, WI: Aquatic Consulting and Education Resource Services (7252 W. Wabash Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53223).
- Grosse, S. (2005). Halliwick techniques: enhancing aquatics for individuals with disabilities. *American Journal of Recreation Therapy*. 4(2), 7-12, Spring.
- Grosse, S.J. (2002). *Grosse Adapted Aquatics Database*. Milwaukee, WI: Aquatic Consulting & Education Resource Services.
- McMillan, J. (1978). The Role of water in rehabilitation. *Fysioterapeuten*. Volume 43, March.
- McMillan, J. (1978). The Role of water in rehabilitation (Different content from above.) *Fysioterapeuten*, Volume 45, February.
- Martin, J. (1981). The Halliwick method. *Physiotherapy*, 67(10), October.
- Reid, J. (1975). Activities in water based on the Halliwick method. *Child Care Health Development*.1(4), 217-233.