

Elist Discussion on Prosepective Client with MS

10-1-12 From Teresa:

I have a prospective client with MS (Multiple Sclerosis) who has very little use of her lower extremities. She uses a motorized scooter and is very dependent on her upper body for most of her ADL (Activities of Daily Living).

Her legs are unable to stabilize her body in chest deep water. She would prefer to use dumbbells to support herself in the water but I would like to explore alternatives to holding her upright. Our pool's water depth would not allow a buoyancy belt.

Given these limitations, how do I help her strengthen her upper body? I want to work on her shoulder and torso mobility but Ai Chi seems to cause her to hold tension in her shoulders and upper back.

And finally, how do I help her strengthen her lower body when she is unable to stand independent of using the wall and her arms for support? She stands stooped and her shoulders are forward.

Thanks for all your help.

From Megan:

Use a noodle. It can be placed under the armpits for stability and for core work. Place it under one foot for strength etc. Dumbbells under armpits place stress on the shoulders and neck area.

From General:

There is a product called "Aqua Bar", which can be found in the Philadelphia area. An "Aqua Bar" is a noodle that has a rigid PVC pipe threaded through the center. It will allow greater stability when one is placed under each arm like parallel bars. I use these with TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury), MS and CP (Cerebral Palsy) patients with great success. A coach or trainer can hold onto the ends to assist without constraining a client's movement. Good luck.

From Corrine:

How about sitting on a noodle? Does she have the trunk control for this? She may be able to work her legs and arms (to an extent) in this position. Resistance cuffs or buoyancy cuffs might be used to help strengthen her legs

Supine supported with flotation might be a good way to strengthen arms and legs. This is a great position for strengthening the posterior muscles, which may help her to have a more upright posture. Swimming activities such as kicking and paddling can also be done in this position.

Because MS is a degenerative neurological disease, you may not be able to strengthen anything. Your sessions may just be helping her maintain what strength and mobility she

has. You may want to focus more on muscle endurance instead of strength. Definitely, you do not want to overload the muscles. Also be aware that in general, warmer water temperatures do not work well with MS patients. Energy conservation is important, so doing too much in the pool may have an adverse impact on her life and the rest of her day. Don't wear her out in the pool so she cannot do her normal ADLs.

From Kristi:

Hi, I've work with clients with MS. Depending on the stage of your client's disease, there are a couple of things you can do. I think Corinne mentioned the supine position with the use of either a vest or noodle or both. Using a Bad Ragaz method here will help strengthen the trunk and stretch out those muscles. You can also move her legs out and in (think Thigh Master [A piece of exercise equipment made popular by Suzanne Summers – It strengthens leg adductors]) to loosen the hip area which seems to be a very tight zone, especially if she is in a chair most of the time.

If you want to strengthen her arms - here is the beauty of water – there is no need for barbells, weights, etc. especially in the beginning. Just getting her range of motion to increase and the resistance of the water against her movement will be a great start.

The next issue is how do you keep her stabilized with her feet on the ground? There are water weights (not buoys) but actual weights made to be used in the water. Put them around her ankles to weigh her down. She most definitely will not have the strength to move her legs once these are on, but if you are presently working with the arms this may help keep her from floating up from the legs and dipping her face into the water.

Another way to anchor your client is with a medicine ball. They have a gel-like substance in them and weigh about three pounds. When placed in water they drop to the bottom but stabilize after awhile and kind of float in the middle of the water. Anyway, these are great to put between the legs right above the knee to keep lower part of her body grounded a bit while working on leg muscle strength [adduction] at the same time.

Finally, someone had mentioned sitting on a noodle (as if it were a bike). Some people get intimidated by this, thinking they will fall off, but as long as you are standing close and there is a wall near-by there is always something to grab onto. Noodle bicycling will really help core strength. Have your client pull her belly-button (naval) back towards the spine, let her butt sink down and her legs can just hang-out while you work with arm movements: breaststroke, reverse breaststroke, arm circles. You can start one side at a time until she is comfortable and her core is stronger. I Hope this helps :)

From Teresa:

Kristi-

Where would one find the medicine balls you describe for water?

From Kristi:

I will find out when I go into work today. We have a basket full of them. I love to use them for my regular aquatic classes and they are great for exercise out of the water as well. When I teach on deck and demonstrate using them I get a good workout.

From Kristi:

They are called Heavymed by Gymnic. Here is the link:

http://www.gymnicballs.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=CTGY&Store_Code=G&Category_Code=201

From Barb:

Hi Teresa – Your lady with MS is fortunate to have you seeking options for her movement activity. Have you considered a Wonderboard? [from June Konno or Kiefer]. She could lean her upper body over it and even though her feet may barely touch the pool bottom she can kick with progressive vigor as her strength and core control improves. You can begin by standing in front of her holding the board to stabilize it until she perfects the balance. There was an active Elist discussion about this equipment so you can scroll back for details.

You may also want to give the TriFitWalker from AquaJogger a try. Again, beginning with you holding the front bar as she is suspended. Then as she gains leg control you can let go.

More than any piece of equipment, your patience and encouragement is the key to maximizing her success in the water. As another person indicated, her mobility may never be what she or you would like because MS is progressive. But she can be much better and that is good news. Recall in the National MS Society professional development manual, MS aqua is not an avenue to mainstream aqua activities. It is a unique work for those living with MS to help them be all they can be with the body, mind and spirit. They have to work with [what they can do] today.

From Teresa:

Excellent, excellent suggestions. As always, thank you Barb!