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Short Communication

Aquatic Resistance Activities Improve Functional Endurance in Chronic Musculoskeletal Conditions

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DESCRIPTION

Chronic musculoskeletal conditions affect a large portion of the adult population worldwide and often lead to persistent discomfort, reduced mobility, and decreased tolerance for daily physical activity. Individuals experiencing long-term joint or muscle-related limitations frequently report difficulty performing tasks such as walking for extended periods, climbing stairs, bending, or carrying objects. Over time, these limitations may reduce independence and contribute to a more sedentary lifestyle, which can further worsen physical deconditioning. Rehabilitation strategies are therefore designed to improve functional endurance while minimizing stress on affected structures [1]. Aquatic resistance activities have gained attention as a supportive intervention due to the unique properties of water that allow safe, controlled movement with reduced joint loading.

Water-based exercise environments provide buoyancy, which reduces the effective body weight experienced by joints during movement. This reduction in load allows individuals with pain or stiffness to perform movements that may be difficult on land. At the same time, water provides natural resistance in all directions, requiring muscles to work continuously throughout movement. This combination of reduced joint stress and consistent resistance creates an ideal environment for improving endurance in individuals with chronic musculoskeletal limitations [2]. Functional endurance refers to the ability to perform physical activities over sustained periods without excessive fatigue. In individuals with musculoskeletal conditions, endurance is often reduced due to pain avoidance behaviors, reduced activity levels, and muscle deconditioning. Aquatic resistance activities address these factors by allowing gradual reintroduction of movement in a supportive environment. Common exercises include walking through water, controlled arm movements, leg kicking patterns, and gentle full-body motions that engage multiple muscle groups simultaneously [3].

One of the key benefits of aquatic exercise is the reduction of impact forces. On land, activities such as walking or stepping place repetitive stress on joints, particularly the knees, hips, and spine. In water, buoyancy significantly reduces these forces, enabling individuals to move more freely without aggravating discomfort. This allows for longer exercise durations and increased participation, which contributes to gradual improvements in endurance. Water viscosity also plays an important role in resistance training. Unlike fixed external weights, water resistance increases with movement speed, encouraging controlled and deliberate motion [4]. This property helps individuals regulate their effort level naturally. Slow movements provide gentle resistance, while faster movements increase intensity. This adaptability allows participants to self-adjust exercise difficulty based on comfort and fatigue levels.

Chronic musculoskeletal conditions often involve muscle weakness due to prolonged inactivity. Aquatic activities encourage activation of both large and stabilizing muscle groups in a coordinated manner. For example, walking through water engages the lower limbs, core muscles, and postural stabilizers simultaneously. This integrated activation supports improved functional movement patterns that translate into daily life activities [5]. Pain reduction is another important factor influencing participation in physical activity. Many individuals with chronic conditions experience discomfort during weight-bearing exercises on land. Water immersion can have a soothing effect, reducing perceived pain levels and allowing individuals to move with greater ease. This reduction in pain during movement may increase willingness to participate in longer and more frequent exercise sessions.

Joint mobility is often restricted in chronic musculoskeletal conditions due to stiffness and reduced movement tolerance [6]. Gentle aquatic exercises promote gradual joint movement without excessive strain. Repeated motion in a low-impact environment can help maintain or improve range of motion in affected joints. This improvement in mobility contributes to easier performance of daily tasks such as dressing, bathing, and household activities. Balance and stability are also enhanced through aquatic training. Water provides continuous multidirectional resistance, requiring the body to make constant postural adjustments [7]. These adjustments help improve neuromuscular coordination and balance control. Individuals

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who struggle with stability on land often find water environments more forgiving, allowing them to practice movement with reduced fear of falling [8].

Respiratory demand during aquatic exercise may also differ from land-based activity. Water pressure on the chest can encourage deeper and more controlled breathing patterns. This may enhance relaxation and support improved oxygen utilization during exercise. Coordinated breathing during movement further contributes to endurance development. Social interaction is often present in group aquatic sessions conducted in rehabilitation centers or community pools. Participating alongside others with similar conditions can create a supportive environment that encourages consistency. Social engagement may also improve motivation and reduce feelings of isolation commonly associated with chronic health conditions [9].

Exercise progression in aquatic programs is typically gradual. Initial sessions may focus on simple walking or gentle limb movements, while later stages may include more complex coordinated activities. This structured progression ensures that individuals adapt safely without experiencing excessive fatigue or discomfort. Regular monitoring by rehabilitation professionals helps maintain appropriate intensity levels [10].

CONCLUSION

Aquatic resistance activities provide a valuable rehabilitation option for individuals with chronic musculoskeletal conditions by combining low-impact movement with effective muscular engagement. Through consistent participation, individuals may experience improved functional endurance, reduced discomfort, and enhanced confidence in performing daily activities. When integrated into comprehensive rehabilitation programs, aquatic exercise serves as a supportive approach to long-term functional improvement and physical well-being.

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