

What is hippotherapy?

- The term hippotherapy refers to how occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech language pathology professionals use evidence-based practice and clinical reasoning in the purposeful manipulation of equine movement as a therapy tool to engage sensory, neuromotor and cognitive systems to promote functional outcomes (American Hippotherapy Association, 2019).
- Hippotherapy utilizes the natural gait and movement of the horse to provide motor and sensory input. It is based on improvement of neurologic functions, and sensory processes, and used for patients with physical, and mental disorders.



Why the horse?

- According to the American Hippotherapy Association a horse walks an average rate of approximately 100 steps per minute. By just spending 5 minutes on a horse that is ambulating the patient will get approximately 500 neuro motor inputs.
- During ambulation the horse provides a rhythmic movement which stimulates anterior, and posterior swinging movements. These movements of the horse encourage the rider to achieve proper balance and posture. The horse as well as those assisting the rider provide a large spectrum of motor and sensory input to the patient

Research shows that hippotherapy....

- Hippotherapy shortens recovery times, and improves balance and muscle control of the patient. The slow, and rhythmic movements of the horse's body have therapeutic values, and ensure development of paraspinal muscles. Multifaceted swinging rhythm of a horse gait effects the bones of patient's pelvic girdle 2x more strongly than that of the patients.
- The horse pelvis, just like the human pelvis demonstrates a 3 axial movement pattern while walking. These variable rhythmic, and repetitive movements provides physical, and sensory feedback to the patient. There are many favorable effects of hippotherapy on coordination, muscle tone, postural balance, stiffness, flexibility, endurance, strength, correction of abnormal movement pattern, and improvement of gait, and balance have been demonstrated in many studies
- Research has been done and shows that hippotherapy is specifically beneficial for children with autism and cerebral palsy however, this does not mean that this is not beneficial for other diagnoses as more research continues to be done.

Hippotherapy as a physical therapy

In physical therapy, multidirectional movements of the horse are utilized in gait training, balance, postural control, strengthening, and increasing range of motion. In many studies, improvements in gross motor skills, and functional activities have been reported in disabled children

Hippotherapy as a occupational therapy

In occupational therapy, movements of the horse are utilized with the intention to improve motor control, coordination, balance, attention, sensory processes, and performance in daily activities. Sensory processes, vestibular, proprioceptive, tactile, visual, and auditory systems are targeted simultaneously

Hippotherapy as a speech and language therapy

Hippotherapy also targets improvements in speech, language, cognitive, and masticatory functions

References

American Hippotherapy Association Website

Koca, T. T. (2016). What is hippotherapy? The indications and effectiveness of hippotherapy. *Northern Clinics of Istanbul*. doi: 10.14744/nci.2016.71601



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