

Title:

Aquatic Physiotherapy for Secondary Leg Lymphoedema: A safe way to exercise?

Abstract:

Question: Can women with secondary lymphoedema of the leg perform one hour of aquatic physiotherapy twice weekly for four weeks without increasing the volume of the leg or experience of lymphoedema symptoms? Does aquatic physiotherapy result in a reduction of the volume of lymphoedema and experience of symptoms?

Design: Randomised controlled pilot trial with assessor blinding.

Participants: 17 women diagnosed with secondary lower limb lymphoedema.

Intervention: The experimental group participated in a 1hour aquatic physiotherapy session, twice weekly for four weeks, while maintaining their usual lymphoedema self-management intervention. The control group maintained their usual lymphoedema self-management only.

Outcome measures: Participants were assessed and measured on six occasions over the 12 week study period using the modified Miller Clinical Grading system, Lymphoedema Symptom Specific Questionnaire, limb measurements (Perometer and circumferential measures) and Bioimpedance Analysis (SFB7).

Results: There were no significant differences in quantitative outcome measures between groups, though some significant change occurred over time. Experience of ache, decreased fitness and frustration with their condition of the treatment group demonstrated a trend towards improvement during the intervention period; as did clinical presence of lymphoedema according to the modified Miller Clinical Grading system.

Conclusion: This pilot study gives preliminary evidence to suggest women with secondary leg lymphoedema can participate in aquatic physiotherapy without increasing the volume of their leg or experience of lymphoedema symptoms. Recommendations for future research and use of outcome measures in this population are made.