

Hot Tub May Mimic Exercise

From David Mendosa's newsletter (www.mendosa.com)

One study was found in a search of MEDLINE. It was led and reported by Philip L. Hooper, M.D., of the McKee Medical Center in Loveland, Colorado, and was a small study, but its results were extremely promising. Their thesis was that exercise is effective for people with type 2 diabetes. They wondered if sitting in a hot tub with water up to their shoulders would simulate the benefits of exercise for their patients.

Eight patients participated. They used the hot tub for half an hour a day, six days a week, for three weeks. Water temperature ranged from 100° F to 105.8° F. Diet, exercise routines, and medication were stable for eight weeks before and during the test period, although one participant had to reduce his insulin dose by 18 percent to prevent hypoglycemic reactions.

After three weeks the mean weight of the patients had decreased 3.7 pounds. Mean fasting plasma glucose level decreased from 182 mg/dl to 159 mg/dl. Their mean A1c levels dropped from 11.3 to 10.3. As the study progressed, the participants reported improved sleep and an increased general sense of well-being.

How could hot tub therapy work so well? Dr. Hooper theorizes that the benefits could result from increased blood flow to skeletal muscles.

Neil H. Cox, F.R.C.P., of the Cumberland Infirmary, Carlisle, U.K., and Richard K. Bernstein, M.D., director of the New York Diabetes Center in Mamaroneck, New York, subsequently voiced concerns. The reply by Dr. Hooper suggests at least three caveats for hot tub therapy.

Dr. Cox noted that water infected with pseudomonas bacteria could cause an inflammation of the hair follicles. I remembered that widespread infection of natural hot springs in Southern California led me to stop bathing there long before I moved north. The key, as Dr. Hooper points out, is to monitor the pH of the water, water filtration, and the balance of chemical disinfectants.

Dr. Bernstein expressed his concern about exposure to hot water by people with diabetes who have decreased blood supply in their feet and legs. In addition, people who have diabetic neuropathy may be burned without feeling it.

Dr. Hooper responded that he and his colleagues agree that hot tub therapy is not recommended for people with decreased blood supply in their feet and legs. People with diabetic neuropathy should rely on thermometer readings rather than their subjective sense of heat.

“Interestingly,” Dr. Hooper added, “three patients in our study commented that their feet felt better after three weeks of hot-tub exposure, with improved sensation and a decrease in the formation of calluses.”

If you choose to use hot-tub therapy, make sure the facility is clean, and that you have adequate circulation in your feet and legs. Be especially careful if you have neuropathy. Otherwise, it seems that hot tubs have a lot to offer, especially for those of us who can't—or won't—exercise.

Below is a cheaper and more convenient alternative to the traditional hot tub. They come in several sizes, including a personal size, don't require any special plumbing or wiring and can even be set-up in a bedroom or other part of the home. When empty one person can handle the largest tub. I have owned two, one that was set up in a space in my garage and one that is currently set up in my basement. I found both easy to maintain, cheap to operate and dependable.

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