Research:

Hydrotherapy Beneficial to Individuals with Osteoarthritis

Hydrotherapy classes appeared to provide relief of joint pain and improve physical performance measures in individuals with osteoarthritis, in a recent study.

In the study, titled “Physical Activity for Osteoarthritis Management: A Randomized Controlled Clinical Trial Evaluating Hydrotherapy or Tai Chi Classes,” participation in hydrotherapy and Tai Chi classes was evaluated in individuals with chronic symptomatic osteoarthritis of the hips or knees. Exercise programs for patients with osteoarthritis of the hips or knees are intended to strengthen bones and improve pain, physical function and general health status.

Hydrotherapy is frequently recommended for osteoarthritis patients because the weight-relieving properties of water allow for easier joint movement. Tai Chi, which has gained popularity in recent years, is also an option because of its slow, continuous movements.

The goal of the study was to determine if these two exercise programs provided improvements in joint pain and physical function.

One hundred fifty-two individuals participated in the randomized, controlled clinical trial study. Participants were between the ages of 59 and 85, were diagnosed with osteoarthritis of the hip or knee, and experienced current and chronic hip or knee pain. The study was conducted with a blinded outcomes assessment.

Participants were randomized to one of three groups: hydrotherapy classes, Tai Chi classes or a 12-week waiting-list control group prior to randomization to hydrotherapy or Tai Chi classes. Participants were required to attend classes for one hour, twice a week for 12 weeks.

Assessments were conducted pre-treatment, post-treatment at 12 weeks and at 24 weeks for follow-up. Pain and physical function, general health status, psychological well-being and physical performance were among the outcomes measured.

Significant improvements were evident in pain and function for the hydrotherapy group and Tai Chi group; however, only the hydrotherapy class participants experienced significant improvements in physical performance.

The study’s authors say future studies should evaluate “the temporary incorporation of patella taping to potentially allow pain-free Tai Chi practice,” since four Tai Chi participants withdrew from the study because they either disliked the class or it increased their knee pain.

Source: The George Institute for International Health, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia.
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