



THERAPY WORKS NW

Physical, Occupational & Speech Therapy

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"It may appear to have a recreational flavor, but hippotherapy holds immense promise of therapeutic benefit for a variety of conditions when used in concert with other therapies,"

A Washington-based child neurologist.

What is hippotherapy?

Hippotherapy is a therapeutic treatment strategy that uses the multidimensional movement of the horse, which resembles the human walking pattern, to achieve functional outcomes. As the horse walks, it strengthens the patient's core muscles, training the patient's ligaments, bones, and joints to do what the therapist wants them to do. Physically and emotionally disabled children have been known to demonstrate improvements in balance, strength, flexibility and coordination as well as communications and socialization.

Conditions that often respond to hippotherapy include: cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, developmental delay, autism spectrum disorder, traumatic brain injury, muscular dystrophy and others.

What is the difference between hippotherapy and therapeutic riding? Therapeutic riding is supervised recreational riding for people with disabilities. The goal of therapeutic riding is for the rider, who uses a saddle, to learn to ride independently and to enjoy the physical and social benefits of horseback riding.

Hippotherapy is a treatment strategy performed by a physical, occupational, or speech therapist. With the assistance of a trained horse handler and a trained therapeutic assistant, the therapist modulates input to the patient by adjusting movement of the horse, the rider's position, and therapeutic activities. Patients often ride without the use of a saddle and learn to make the postural adjustments necessary to sit upright while simultaneously moving through space in three dimensions. Additionally, a variety of therapeutic goals can be reached when the patient rides in different positions (for example, supine or backwards) and performs exercises or games. Patients who respond well to hippotherapy may, over time, graduate to therapeutic riding.

Is hippotherapy better than other forms of physical, occupational, or speech therapy?

In many cases it can be. The movement of the horse's gait is the therapy tool. In a clinical setting, a therapist can use a ball or a swing to help patients with balance and motor skills and can stimulate the patient's body up to a point. In a hippotherapy session, a patient can be stimulated multi-dimensionally by the tilting, rotating and moving through space of the horse's gait for as long as the 15 to 20 minute therapeutic session. This is almost impossible to replicate in a clinical setting. It is the variability of the horse's movement—plus the rhythm, the multiple dimensions, and the ability of the therapist to modify these qualities—that make it superior in certain applications

More important, the excitement of working with the horse can make the child a more willing participant. Disabled children, accustomed to months or years of medical and therapeutic experiences that they may have grown to dislike, often don't associate these negative experiences with hippotherapy.

Is hippotherapy safe for a child? According to the American Hippotherapy Association



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(AHA), hippotherapy has an outstanding safety record. Therapeutic horses are small in order to accommodate children, who make up the majority of their patients. Horses that are gentle and easy-going are selected and specifically trained in their role as therapy animals. Each session is controlled by the therapist, who is assisted by a therapeutic aide while the horse is led by a specifically trained handler.

Are there studies that prove its efficacy? The AHA lists research reports and case studies on its website. Go to www.americanhippotherapyassociation.com and click on the Research tab. The American Physical Therapy Association and the American Occupational Therapy Association have each written position papers endorsing the value of hippotherapy in professional practice.

Is hippotherapy covered by health insurance? Some insurers do cover hippotherapy when it is provided as part of a prescribed physical or occupational therapy program and by one of their contracted therapists. Others do not. In the state of Oregon, many insurers, including the state Medicaid program, do not cover hippotherapy.

What is Therapy Works Northwest? TherapyWorks NW is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation. It is the only hippotherapy practice in the Portland metropolitan area that is operated by a licensed physical therapist. Therapy Works Northwest mission is to provide therapy, including hippotherapy, to children with disabilities regardless of their ability to pay.

Where can I find a hippotherapist?

The term hippotherapist is a misnomer. Hippotherapy is one of many treatment strategies a physical, occupational, or speech therapist may choose. Through its Standards committee, the AHA sponsors therapist registration which acknowledges that a therapist has met specific education and practice requirements in hippotherapy.

Go to www.americanhippotherapyassociation.org, click on the Hippotherapy informational link, and Then click on Find a Therapist.