

Spinal Stenosis and Deep-Water Training

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This email thread discussed Spinal Stenosis and the key email came from Dr. Bruce Becker.

MayoClinic.com defines Spinal Stenosis as: ... a narrowing of one or more areas in your spine — most often in your upper or lower back. This narrowing can put pressure on your spinal cord or on the nerves that branch out from the compressed areas.

Spinal Stenosis can cause cramping, pain or numbness in your legs, back, neck, shoulders or arms; a loss of sensation in your extremities; and sometimes problems with bladder or bowel function. Spinal Stenosis is most commonly caused by osteoarthritis-related bone damage.

Mild symptoms of Spinal Stenosis are often helped by pain relievers, physical therapy or a supportive brace. In more serious cases of Spinal Stenosis, doctors may recommend surgery.

The email from Dr. Becker reads like this:

One of my favorite patients, an ex-NFL All-Pro with severe Spinal Stenosis who I worked with after his diagnosis (and who was assured by his neurosurgeon that he would be in a wheelchair before year-end), made superb progress in our deep-water warm pool. He returned to his ranch in eastern Oregon, dug a hole with his backhoe, cut the end off a plastic septic tank, plumbed it with a filter, chlorinator and heater and sunk it into the ground. He is still ranching I believe---and NOT in a wheelchair. He sent me Xmas cards for many years, still using his tank (mini-pool). Necessity is the mother of invention.

Bruce E. Becker, MD
Research Professor and Director, National Aquatics and Sports Medicine Institute
Washington State University

Rob's Comments:

I guess football players use more than just their brawn.

This article and the email response present a couple of ideas. First, deep water aqua therapy can work for clients with Spinal Stenosis, one of the results of the magical property of buoyancy and its ability to reduce loading on joints. Buoyancy, also, supports the contents of the abdomen taking some pressure off of the spine. As well, the property of turbulence requires clients to activate postural muscles thus strengthening the supporting structure of the spine and this helps to reduce pain during exercise since turbulence "gates" or blocks pain messages, allowing the client to achieve a longer exercise session.

The second idea generated by this article is that one does not have to spend a fortune on a back yard pool if what we want or need is a place to do vertical water training – using the Charlene Kopansky Method. The idea of cutting the top off a plastic septic tank (unused of course) is a good one although you need to sink it in the ground. I estimate that this system would cost around \$2,000 to install, if you dig the hole yourself.

Another idea that was published on NPR in the U.S. suggested lining a used dumpster with thick plastic sheeting, adding a chlorinator and surrounding it with a deck. Or, you could just get a ladder. The advantage here is that you don't need to sink it in the ground as the dumpster is strong enough to withstand water pressure. This system could be big enough for two to four people at a time.

Recycling at its best.