Aquatic Therapy Helps Heal the Body and the Mind

“Water is life’s matter and matrix, mother and medium. There is no life without water.”
Albert Szent-Györgyi

It has long been said that water is the basis of all life. Your muscles are 75 percent water; your blood 82 percent water; your lungs 90 percent water; your brain 76 percent water; and your bones 25 percent water. We should all drink as much water as we can. But did you know that submerging your body in water for exercise and aquatic therapy is a giant step in helping your body heal faster with less pain? Aquatic therapy uses your body’s buoyancy to decrease your weight, strengthen your muscles, slow changes in bone density, ease the pain of degenerative conditions such as arthritis and osteoporosis. Aquatic therapy also helps with postsurgery weakness and ligament instability, eases cartilage breakdown and even helps combat obesity. Studies also show that water therapy increases blood flow to your resting muscles by up to 225 percent, which improves your oxygen levels, strengthens your cardiovascular system and helps with lung capacity.

R.H. Myers Apartments resident and professional artist Betty Forchheimer knows firsthand the benefits of being in the warm-water pool. She works out with staff of the Peter B. Lewis Aquatic & Therapy Center, delving into her Ai Chi (aquatic Tai Chi) two times per week. A serene calm comes over Betty as she stands in the waist-high warm water and sways to the beautiful relaxing music played by Joy Nowels, the exercise specialist and group exercise instructor who leads Betty’s Ai Chi class. “It’s very relaxing,” says Betty. “I love coming here. Joy is a good teacher; she’s always so pleasant and happy.”

Betty is no stranger to exercise. She was a health maintenance client at the Peter B. Lewis & Aquatic Center and a member of the Wednesday Walker’s Club at Acacia with other Center clients and community members prior to moving to the R.H. Myers Apartments more than a year-and-a-half ago.

“Betty works really hard. I love her enthusiasm for staying strong, fit and capable. Ai Chi is great for improving balance and strengthening one’s core, and it is very relaxing,” Joy explains. “I look at the faces of those in Ai Chi and I see their mindfulness and focus. They have a peacefulness that comes over them.”

Joy is a strong advocate of aquatic therapy for a good reason. She was so touched by its healing power after being in a devastating car crash in 2007 that left her wheelchair-bound for more than three months that she decided to go back to school to get into the health and wellness field. She had gone through two major surgeries to fix all the damage from the crash. The experience also gave her intimate insight into the aches and pains of ailments of the body, and of aging in general.

“For three-and-a-half months, I couldn’t walk. I did physical therapy twice a week and an aquatic arthritis class three times a week. I know what it’s like to not be able to move or walk, when everything hurts to try. I had a crushed pelvis, a collapsed lung, my head was banged up, and overall I had more than a dozen pins in my body. I had to dig my way back to good health. I have a strong sense of where people are,” Joy shared. “I want to help others because I understand their battles.”

If you or someone you know is facing similar struggles, please share this article. If you would like more information on Ai Chi, health maintenance or any rehabilitation therapy services offered at the Peter B. Lewis Aquatic & Therapy Center, or would like a class schedule, visit lewisaquaticcenter.org or call 216-595-7345.