

# Hydrotherapy

Meadow Farm hydrotherapy opened to offer swimming facilities as an aid in the recovery and rehabilitation of injured animals, primarily dogs. Since then the centre has expanded to give an all round service of care which includes McTimoney Therapy, physiotherapy, nutritional and weight management advice, Pet Behaviour counselling and a bathing and grooming service.

The centre was opened by Rachel Watkins in September 2000. Rachel trained at Warwick Agricultural College studying Equine Sports Therapy and Performance Horse Development and spent time swimming horses and practising the use of ultra sound, massage, laser therapy and Magnetic pulse therapy. After seven years working in various fields within small animal veterinary practice, she was drawn towards Canine Hydrotherapy.

The idea started when my mother had a Cavalier puppy, Beatie, born with the umbilical cord wrapped around her front leg. Her leg was underdeveloped, having very little muscle and was shorter than the other front limb. She underwent an operation to help lengthen and straighten the leg, a wedge osteotomy, and later started swimming at a local canine pool to help build up the muscle and strengthen the leg. I spent some time with the pool operator, Charlie Clarricoates and he very patiently taught me about the technicalities of swimming dogs, and of pool construction.

By the time we had decided to open our own pool, I knew exactly what I wanted. We ended up building our own concrete tiled pool, as the pre-manufactured pools didn't provide what we felt we needed. With the help of an experienced swimming pool company we designed and built our pool from scratch.

Our pool is 12ft x 5ft x 4ft6" deep, there is a built-in ramp at one end for dogs to walk in and out. We have four anti-swim jets instead of the

normal two in most jet pools. This gives us more control and variety and enables us to tailor-make individual fitness programmes for every dog.

The pool is heated all year round and fully filtered. We do not use chlorine as a daily water sanitizer, a controversial topic I know; instead we use a biological additive to kill bacteria and algae. This means we clean and empty the pool more frequently than other pools would, more work for us but the water remains clear and fresh and with no irritation to sensitive skin, eyes and ears. We do shock treat as necessary with chlorine or non-chlorine shock, but always ensure that levels have returned to that of tap water before any dogs swim again.

Beatie, my mother's dog did amazingly well!! Her confidence grew as she became stronger and learnt she could compete with her

house-mates, this is something we see with many of the dogs we swim, their behaviour patterns change. With puppies, behaviour that owners thought was their dog's normal quiet character becomes a bright, bubbly, naughty puppy. Dogs that owners think are just "growing old" and slowing up gain strength and energy. This mental response is due of course to the physical effects of swimming in water. Water has many properties that make it unique as an aid for rehabilitation.

## Thermal properties

It is crucial that the water in a hydrotherapy pool is kept at the correct temperature, 30 degrees centigrade is considered to be best. This prevents the body from cooling on immersion and also prevents over heating during exercise. This thermal effect can warm superficial joints during exercise, important for both soft tissue injuries and arthritic joints.





## Buoyancy

The main advantage of swimming is the buoyancy of the water, the upward thrust of water against the body reduces the effect of gravity. This provides non-weight bearing exercise, allowing the limbs to move without carrying the weight of the body and a full exercise programme can continue where the animal would otherwise have to be rested.

## Hydrostatic Pressure

Whilst buoyant in the water, the body is also affected by an upward pressure known as hydrostatic pressure, at a given depth an equal pressure is exerted on all surfaces. This together with the cohesive properties of water helps to massage the affected area as the animal pulls itself through the water. This is very beneficial for treating oedema in the limbs. As hydrostatic pressure increases with depth, the distal extremities are exposed to a greater pressure than the proximal extremities, thus distal to proximal flow of oedematous fluid occurs.

Hydrostatic pressure can cause animals with respiratory problems

to find breathing more difficult and hydrotherapy is not always suitable for these patients. This is one of the reasons that we insist that all dogs have a full veterinary health check every six months whilst swimming and all dogs that come to us must be on a veterinary referral.

There are many conditions that benefit from hydrotherapy, from those requiring muscle build up and increased joint stability to those benefiting from increased flexibility and movement. The list is endless,

- Hip and elbow dysplasia
- Osteoarthritis
- Osteochondritis dissecans OCD
- Cruciate ligament tears and ruptures
- Patella luxation
- Chronic Degenerative Rhabdomyelopathy CDRM
- Limb atrophy
- Fractures
- Soft tissue injuries
- Weight management

Since opening in 2000 we have had an increasing and varying caseload. We now have working with us a

McTimoney therapist. This treatment is invaluable in maintaining balance in the muscular skeletal system and works well in conjunction with hydrotherapy. We also have available to clients the referral services of a Veterinary Physiotherapist and a Pet Behaviour Counsellor. We also have on site a fully equipped grooming room and consulting facilities.



In 2004 we launched our website as an information site for both clients and veterinary surgeries. Our registration and veterinary referral forms can be found here to download direct. [www.meadow-farm.com](http://www.meadow-farm.com)