



## FEATURE

Hydrotherapy is very useful if animals are lame or sore. It can be used for chronic conditions such as arthritis, lameness, post-operative recovery, hip, joint and soft tissue problems, cruciate ligament damage, spinal injuries, muscle weakness, sciatica and rehabilitation after injury and sickness. It aids in weight loss and general fitness. It can assist in reducing pain and inflammation. Animals with arthritis have very swollen and painful joints. Walking and exercise becomes very uncomfortable for them and they may also find it difficult to get back up after lying down for long periods of time. Most animals gain weight, as they are much less active, putting even more pressure on their joints. This is where hydrotherapy helps with this problem.

### Swimming in warm water

Swimming your dog in an indoor, heated, dog pool facility is an excellent way for dogs to recover from surgery, to strengthen and condition, to improve general fitness, muscle tone and stamina, to lose weight and to learn how to swim.

Swimming dogs in dams, rivers or oceans have disadvantages if they have a condition. While the dog can swim freely the water is cold and the following points need to be considered:

- Cold temperatures constrict blood vessels close to the skin restricting blood flow and oxygen to the muscles and essential organs and causes the blood to move away from the peripheral limbs risking pain and muscle strain. This can be very painful and makes the muscles less efficient.
- Even in summer months the water can be very cold.
- Cold water can lead to increased stiffness in arthritic dogs.
- Lack of control with swimming can allow for an accident to happen or drowning.
- It can put the dog at risk of gastroenteritis, skin, eye and ear problems.

Swimming in warm water allows the muscles to work more efficiently and helps to aid blood circulation without risk of cramping. It also helps reduce some of the swelling in joints. The increased limited weight bearing exercise makes joint movement easier; helps regain fitness and can help them to lose weight they may have gained. Water temperature should be between 26-30 degrees C.

# What is Hydrotherapy?

Muscle wastage begins within 3 days of any immobilisation so, to prevent further weakness or injury it is important to rebuild, through safe exercise, any muscles that have deteriorated.

### A good start is important

Dogs can start to swim from as early as 4-6 months of age. For puppies and dogs learning how to swim, it is important that their first experience with water is not going to be a stressful one. The aim is to make them confident and to give them an enjoyable time.

### Building & conditioning muscle / weight control

Hydrotherapy is a great conditioning tool for working, show or sporting dogs. It builds their muscles, conditions them, and expends their energy while they are having fun. For dogs that are not getting enough exercise, this burns more energy than any other form of a work out. Senior dogs benefit from the increased mobility and they are able to delay the effects of debilitating arthritis and other joint diseases. A regular regime of swimming also works their cardiovascular systems and provides weight control.

For weight management, swimming your dog is an ideal form of exercise. The excess weight on the dog is really taxing on their joints, heart and lungs. By going in a pool, the strain is relieved from the joints while they are getting a really good cross section workout. That is something that cannot be achieved on land. Their weight will continue to place additional wear on their bodies. For really obese dogs, walking distances is nearly impossible and the pool is one of the best things for them to get back in shape.

Having a Spinal injury can cause impairment of motor function, and Hydrotherapy can provide support and allows the dog to exercise its muscles while nerve regeneration is taking place.

The terms “hydrotherapy” and “swimming” when used properly can mean two different things. Swimming for a dog means being completely buoyant in the water, this is not the same as hydrotherapy.

Hydrotherapy is a more controlled type of aquatic exercise and is often used for dogs to build muscles in weak areas without allowing the dog to “overdo it.”



***“Did you know that a five minute swim is equivalent to a 5km walk!”?***

## *Benefits of Hydrotherapy*

- Speedy recovery after surgery
- Overweight dogs can gain fitness and lose weight
- Arthritic and senior dogs
- Condition Training
- Swim Lessons & Fun!
- Allows exercise for pets with disabilities
- Great bonding activity with your canine
- Pre and Post operative conditioning after orthopaedic surgery
- Improves quality of life
- Reduces inflammation of injured joints, fractures and soft tissue injuries
- Increased circulation, endurance, flexibility, range of motion, and balance
- Decreased swelling in joints
- Increased co-ordination
- Muscle development
- Cardiovascular improvement and conditioning
- Increased confidence
- Increased energy level in ageing dogs
- Excellent for mental stimulation and general convalescence
- Makes joints more supple
- Improves stamina and strengthens muscles
- Can aid in pain relief of DJD (Degenerative Joint Disease)
- Builds general fitness helping with injury prevention
- Exercises all muscles allowing to rebuild or maintain cardiovascular fitness.

Dogs that need improvement with proprioception, core strength, flexion, extension, muscle building, gait improvement and cardiovascular strengthening will certainly benefit from hydrotherapy.





## Conditions helped by Hydrotherapy

The following conditions have also been helped by Hydrotherapy:

- Knee surgeries
- Anterior cruciate ligament surgery
- TPLO surgery
- Full hip replacement
- Femoral Head and Neck Excision
- Amputation of a limb
- Hip and Elbow dysplasia in young and old dogs
- Luxating Patella
- Fractures
- Degenerative joint disease
- Weakened spine
- Osteoarthritis
- Neurological disorders
- Early signs of cognitive dysfunction
- Osteochondritis Dissecans (OCD)
- Soft Tissue Injuries

Post surgery hydrotherapy normally starts around 4-6 weeks after their operation. Your veterinarian will guide you as to when would be the most appropriate time to start hydrotherapy for your dog. A Vet referral form should be filled out by your Vet and given to your Hydro therapist before treatment commences. This will assist the Hydro therapist in your dog's rehabilitation process. Swimming can reduce the dog's recovery time by half.

*“Swimming is a wonderful activity for dogs young and old.”*

Water can be very calming for dogs and can reduce levels of stress in addition to assisting with improving many bodily functions.

Dogs can swim just for fun too!! They do not have to have a medical condition to swim. It is a wonderful

mental stimuli, burns off energy, it is a great cross training especially for those people that can't exercise their dogs daily, due to work and busy lifestyles. Dogs can have a lot of fun chasing a ball in the water or retrieving a frisbee!

*Sharon Osmond (pictured below with Cody) is the founder of K9 Swim in Londonderry, NSW and is a Qualified Veterinary Nurse, Holds a Diploma in Animal Naturopathy and Certifications in Myofunctional Therapy and Hydrotherapy. She started K9 Swim because her 12-year-old Weimaraner, Curzon, was diagnosed with hip dysplasia and osteoarthritis. She knew the best thing for Curzon was to swim her in warm water. She knew that there were plenty of other dogs out there that needed this kind of therapy so hence K9 Swim was born.*



*K9 Swim at Londonderry, NSW is a unique Hydrotherapy Centre designed for your dogs to swim safely in an indoor heated pool. The pool water is heated to a comfortable 28 degrees C. all year round. Swimming is performed in a controlled environment and a hydrotherapist is in the pool with your dog if required.*

[www.k9swim.com.au](http://www.k9swim.com.au)

