

Should physiotherapists recommend swimming to patients with low back pain (LBP) and is further research warranted?

Purpose: It is common practice to suggest to patients with low back pain (LBP) to try swimming as a form of exercise but what evidence is this recommendation based upon and is there a need for further research? This scoping review was carried out to prepare and support a research proposal which will investigate whether swimming is beneficial for patients with LBP and whether swimming could target some of the comorbidities associated with LBP.

Methods: A search was carried out on the following databases; PubMed, SPORTdiscus, CINAHL, MEDLINE and AMED using the following keywords and combinations; swim*, back pain, aquatic, rehabilitation, hydrotherapy. The search was expanded by reviewing the reference list of the included studies, searching the grey literature and reviewing a recent Swim England report. This scoping review included basic science research, correlational studies, RCTs, systematic reviews and research relevant to the delivery of swimming.



Swimming is 'the exercise for those who thought they couldn't exercise anymore..' (Heminsley, 2017)

Conclusions: There is sufficient evidence presented in this scoping review to support undertaking a study investigating whether swimming is beneficial for patients with persistent LBP.

Implications: Aquatic therapy is currently offered on the NHS and some patients can access aquatic exercise and swimming through exercise referral schemes. Due to significant gaps in the literature there is only low level evidence that funding should be directed to swimming and swimming lessons for patients with LBP.

Acknowledgements and ethical approval

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