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Discover Swim Spas

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BY MATT ALDERTON

Physical therapist Malton Schexneider sees many people and many kinds of pain. His patients have back problems, shoulder kinks, stiff knees, bum joints and weak muscles, for starters, not to mention more serious conditions such as arthritis, sciatica, muscle sprains and even herniated discs.



Schexneider often prescribes traditional treatments, including strength training, spinal manipulation and range of motion therapy. Increasingly, however, he's recommending that patients get wet in order to get well. "Getting them into water is very beneficial," Schexneider says. "When you get in water, your gravity becomes less of an issue; it keeps people more flexible and more mobile."

Water offers a low-impact environment in which to relax, rebuild and recuperate. Whether you're seriously injured or just a little bit stressed, it's the ideal place to exercise both body and soul. But you don't need to invest in a full-sized swimming pool in order to enjoy the benefits of hydrotherapy. Swim spas make it easy and affordable to swim your way toward better health.

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Swim Spa Specs

Approximately 14 feet long, 7.5 feet wide and 52 inches deep, the typical swim spa is much larger than a hot tub, but much smaller than either an above ground or in-ground swimming pool, says Andy Tournas, president of ThermoSpas, a Wallingford, Conn.-based hot tub manufacturer. It works by utilizing high-powered jets and state-of-the-art water heaters, he says. The jets create a current against which you can swim, as if you were in a swimming pool, while the heaters warm the water, as if you were in a hot tub.



"It's basically a swimming treadmill," Tournas says. "When you swim against the current, you're essentially creating the benefits of exercise in a small footprint."

Wetness Equals Wellness

Swim spas' potential health benefits are especially appealing, particularly to consumers who are generally unable to exercise, due either to age or injury.

"People are beginning to realize the necessity and the benefits of daily exercise," Tournas says. "And exercise in a warm water environment is a lot more friendly to the body than going into a gym."

Swim spas can work wonders, Schexneider adds. Potential benefits include pain relief, stress reduction, muscle gain, weight loss, improved sleep quality, lower blood pressure and increased immunity, among others. "These are all secondary benefits," he says. "The primary benefit is exercise. It's about getting people moving."

To make exercise even easier, manufacturers are offering a vast selection of underwater exercise equipment, such as resistance bands, which make it possible to target muscle groups that standard swim strokes don't. Some are even selling a new breed of swim spa — the exercise spa — that's more compact and more affordable than the standard model.

Soaking in H2-Oh!

While "swim" is one feature of swim spas, "spa" is another. In fact, many models come with standard hot tub features, including optional accessories such as mood lighting, sound systems and aromatherapy inserts.

"Like a hot tub, you can relax in these things," Schexneider says. "You can heat the water up, you can turn on the jets, and you can even have parties."

Better than a hot tub, though, some swim spas can accommodate as many as 12 people, making it easy to relax and entertain.

"People want the ability to enjoy their family, enjoy their kids and have their friends over," Tournas says. "People who like to entertain are really going to gravitate toward swim spas."

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