

Tried and Tested

Aquagym

By Sylvia Brown

"I always notice an increase in my mobility after having been on the Aquagym. I can walk faster and more fluidly."

I am lucky to live just across the road from a great little swimming pool, Upperthorpe, in Sheffield. The pool is very disabled-friendly with wheelchair access, a ramp, chairs to wheel you down into the pool, a hoist and a variety of floats.

There's a yellow float which clips around your torso. This is particularly useful for people who have limited strength in their legs. Though my legs move pretty well nowadays in the water (I am a great kicker!) I use this float to help me when I first get in.

The staff at Upperthorpe are very helpful and friendly. The disabled sessions are three times a week and the water is nice and warm. Best of all, the swim



doesn't cost much and your carer goes free!

Added to all this, the swimming pool even has an Aquagym. I could not believe my luck five years ago when I heard that they has just installed one!

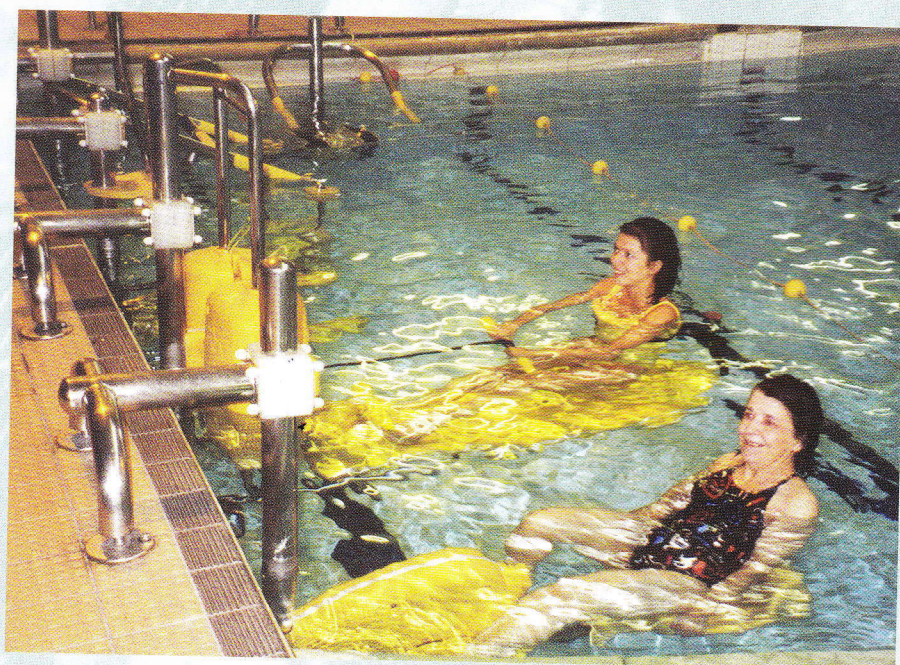
The Aquagym consists of multi-gym equipment, like in a normal gym, but it's all in the water! The beauty of it is that you can work your muscles in the warm water, which also supports you as you do so.

This was just what I needed because gym equipment on dry land would have been too strenuous for me, but with the support of the water you are eased into it much more gently. Talk about perfect, ideal for strengthening my muscles and getting my legs moving. The Aquagym only costs 70p extra.

There are seven pieces of equipment, each of which works different parts of your body. There's an AquaCycle, AquaRower, AquaStepper, AquaClimber, AquaAbs, AquaStrider (legs and lower back) and AquaPulldown (arms, shoulders and upper back). My favourites are the AquaStepper and the AquaClimber, as these really give my leg muscles a good work out.

Using the Aquagym

Before you use the equipment you are given a short induction session to train you in how to





use each machine properly. You are advised to warm up by swimming a few lengths before you start using the Aquagym. I find it best to alternate swimming and exercising on each machine, so as to ensure you pace yourself.

Each machine has a timer on it so that you can set the number of minutes you want to exercise. This is good because you can try to increase the amount of time you spend exercising gradually from week to week.

A few years ago when I could

hardly walk at all, I would be pushed into the pool on a chair. But after using the Aquagym, I could walk out, it was like a miracle!

Since those days I have gradually built up the amount that I can do and nowadays I can generally walk into the pool. Even so I always notice an increase in my mobility after having been on the Aquagym. I can walk faster and more fluidly.

I am convinced that these forms of regular exercise (alongside diet, nutrition and a

positive attitude) play a crucial role in halting the progression of my 'progressive' MS.

Though in the short-term the exercise does take it out of me, and I generally find that I have to rest up afterwards, the long-term benefits are vast. I gain in strength, so I can stand longer, walk further and balance a bit better and the key is to build on this strength.

I would highly recommend using the Aquagym. If you don't live in Sheffield maybe you could persuade your local pool to invest in one?



Postscript by Frank Naseby from Sheffield

Using the Aquagym suits me down to the ground. Swimming has become really important to me now and even though I am extremely tired after each session, once I have had a rest I feel much better both mentally and physically.

It is totally relaxing and you can let your mind wander. I love the rowing machine and in my mind I row to all kinds of places! It's nice to meet up with the other regular swimmers which includes Sylvie and Steve.