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# DOES HYDROTHERPAY HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE WELLBEING OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER?

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**Aim:** To investigate the effectiveness of a four-week hydrotherapy program aimed at improving social, psychological, and emotional wellbeing of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

**Design:** Within-subjects, randomised crossover trial where children with Autism Spectrum Disorder participated in a 4-week intervention period and acted as their own controls over a corresponding 4-week control period

**Methods:** Eight children (males: n = 6; females: n = 2, mean age =  $8.72 \pm 1.99$  years) with Autism Spectrum Disorder were randomised into two groups (Group 1, n=4; Group 2, n=4). Each child participated in a 45-minute hydrotherapy session (intervention), once per week over 4 weeks. The Child Behaviour Checklist was completed by parents at weeks 0,4 and 8 to measure changes in wellbeing across the intervention and control periods. Mean change scores for intervention periods were compared to change scores for control periods using paired samples t-tests.

**Results:** Significant differences in mean change scores for: Total Problems (p=0.03) domain, Internalising Problems domain (p= 0.05), Anxious/Depressed syndrome (p=0.05) and Attention Problems syndrome (p=0.03) were found suggesting an improvement during the intervention period above that of the control period.

**Conclusion:** Hydrotherapy can enhance emotional and psychological wellbeing of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and could be considered as a beneficial therapy option, either alone or in conjunction with other therapy modalities.

## Key Practice Points:

- Hydrotherapy may be appropriate, either independently or as an adjunct therapy, for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder to benefit their emotional and psychological wellbeing
- If used, one-on-one hydrotherapy sessions are recommended.