

A Novel, Highly Effective Approach to the Treatment of CP Patients

MEET Thomas, a nine-year-old patient with Stage 5 cerebral palsy. According to Thomas' mother, he lacks the ability to balance and has further difficulty from excessive muscle tone in his legs, and he cannot stand or walk independently – both require manual manipulation for safety and coordination.

For parents of children with cerebral palsy, the simplest task can be a struggle. Depending on the severity of the symptoms, anything from tying a shoe to unassisted walking is almost beyond the realm of possibility, even with years of traditional physical therapy. One alternate method of therapy that has been changing lives in Europe, the U.K., and the U.S. is finally available in Canada: Intensive Suit Therapy.

Thomas recently completed a three-week course of Intensive Suit Therapy. His therapist set three goals for the treatment: that Thomas be able to control his head when seated, be able to sit for 15 seconds with supervision, and that he could demonstrate controlled crawling. His mother, while hopeful, showed concern that Thomas can be difficult to engage and motivate. Both were pleasantly surprised that Thomas not only managed to pay a lot of attention and have fun during the therapy, he met two of his three goals – with the third to be integrated into his next three-week session.

Originally developed as part of Russia's space program to counteract the harmful effects of weightlessness on the body, the suit technology was shared with the rehabilitation industry where it became a viable treatment option for cerebral palsy, post-stroke condition, traumatic brain injury, autism spectrum disorder, and other neurological disorders.

This innovative therapy provides an external skeletal support for patients with neuromuscular disorders. The suit aligns the patient's body as close to normal as possible, re-establishing correct postural alignment and weight bearing, which is crucial

in normalizing muscle tone, sensory, and vestibular functions.

Suit therapy focuses on repetition of movement – involving progressive resistance exercises and developmental skills to train and retrain the brain, allowing movement to become both normalized and automatic. It can accelerate progress in sensory processing and motor skills through strength, flexibility, endurance, balance, coordination, vestibular, and enhanced functional skill training. Children with cerebral palsy who undergo intensive therapy acquire skills like rolling, crawling, sitting, standing, and walking, which they may not be able to achieve in years with traditional therapy.

The therapy is normally administered as a three-hour a day course, five days a week for a period of three to four weeks. As a result of such an intense course, parents are extremely likely to observe feasible positive changes, and in many cases, significant improvements of motor functions and general performance.

Sessions typically include:

- initial warm-up employing massage and moderate warm-up exercise,
- intensive exercising with the therapeutic suit on, positioned on a bed utilizing immobilizers and weight loads,
- advanced exercising wearing the suit and utilizing suspension techniques in the so called spider cage, conducting assisted walk (suspended and non-suspended), push-ups, stand-ups, parallel bars, tricycle riding, and other modalities.

Therapy should only be done under the care of a licensed and trained therapist. In Canada, this therapy is available at the Toronto-based Revivo Neurology Treatment Centre. The founders went through two years of intensive training abroad, in-



Thomas, nine-year-old Intensive Suit Therapy patient: a true smile comes with hard work.

cluding methodology, pathology and hands-on training, and all Revivo staff receive training either at clinics in Europe and the US, or onsite at Revivo.

While new to Canada, suit therapy has hundreds of thousands of success stories in Europe, the U.K., and the U.S.

One Revivo patient, a four-year-old with stage two CP, was unable to walk unassisted by a walker. After her first intensive session (three weeks of daily therapy, plus homework done by loving, caring, and involved parents), she is now able to walk on her own.

Another stage two patient who also required a walker was also unable to roll over or sit up by herself. After the first week of treatment she is able to sit up, and after two weeks she can roll from side to side, as well as roll continuously by pushing from one wall to the other.

For suit therapy patients particularly children with little to no ability to move, like Thomas and the other case studies, every step is a 100 per cent improvement in their quality of life. For their parents and caregivers, this therapy offers a new hope that traditional therapy just cannot match.

For more information about Intensive Suit Therapy or to book your appointment for an assessment please visit www.revivo.ca or call 416 628 4232