

Bobath therapy

The Bobath concept is an evolving approach to the management and treatment of children and adults with mobility difficulties caused by neurological conditions such as cerebral palsy and strokes.

This therapeutic approach was originated by Berta and Karl Bobath over 50 years ago based upon their clinical experience using models of movement and neuroscience available at that time.

It has since developed in accordance with research, evaluation, client response and infant development.

Health professionals using the Bobath approach will include physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and doctors.

The Bobath approach to treatment

The Bobath treatment aims to improve posture and movement to enable more realistic functioning in daily life. Through specialised ways of handling, stiffness can be reduced, muscle control against gravity increased and fluctuating muscle activity stabilised. Depending on the severity of the condition, the patient may be better able to learn how to sit up, use his/her hands, to stand up, to stand, and to walk. Ideally the treatment will be an integral part of the daily routine for that patient. For example, the way the patient is picked up, carried, put down, or positioned when sitting, will enable parents/carers to enhance the patient's ability and function.

The aims of the treatment are goal-orientated and influenced by several factors such as the age of the patient, severity of their condition and their motivation. Treatment is planned for each patient via assessment. Some of the areas that will be assessed are:-

- the patterns of movement the patient presents with;
- age-appropriate movements that the patient may not be achieving or may find difficult;
- the patient's present capabilities;
- examination of the patient's posture in different situations and positions.

Once the patient has been assessed, a prioritised 'problem-solving' list will be formulated, and then appropriate techniques used to address these areas.

Positioning is very important in Bobath treatment. Correct positioning helps improve movements. Experience of different positions is necessary to improve overall body control and reduce the risk of unnecessary poor posture.

Handling a patient using key points on the body allows the therapist to manipulate the patient to correct their movements. Help may be given with movements like chewing, handling objects, moving about, sitting or lying down. Using correct positioning and handling of 'key points' on the patient's body, is considered very important, as this lets the patient experience, as far possible, normal movement patterns.

How families and carers are involved

Like any other therapy, Bobath requires effort and practice in order to achieve benefits so input from families and carers is essential as they spend most time handling the patient. The therapist will work with the family and/or carers to teach them how to handle and position the patient properly at home, so encouraging and facilitating correct movement.

In fact, anyone involved with the patient can participate in the therapy. Good communication by everyone involved with the patient is essential; this helps to ensure the patient is having appropriate goals identified, and to ensure that progress is considered satisfactory.

Many patients do not like therapy so incorporating the movements into day-to-day life and leisure activities enhances outcomes and is more acceptable and practical to the whole family.

Further information

For further information on Bobath therapy, reading material, training courses and assessment, please contact:-

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