THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE SOAK
SELLING THE HYDROTHERAPY PRESCRIPTION FOR HEALTH

Understanding and communicating the health benefits of hot tubs can provide dealers with a competitive edge in these challenging economic times. Instead of focusing sales presentations on hot tub features, salespeople can explain how product differences provide the wellness so many customers want. Each time a dealer sells the health benefits of immersing in a hot tub to a consumer, they are responding to a legitimate need.

Today, when everyone is being extra careful about where they spend their money, customers are more willing to open their wallet if they truly believe a product will help them and their family. This is why spa and hot tub dealers need to share the science behind the soak with prospects and customers.

SOAKING AWAY STRESS
Recent science supports the notion that soaking in a hot tub relieves everyday stress. According to Washington State University’s Dr. Bruce Becker, who reported his latest research at the World Aquatic Health Conference (WAHC) in October 2008, “We found the autonomic nervous system alters during warm water immersion, producing changes that are parallel to those seen during relaxation and accompanying a reduction in anxiety.”

Becker also suggests warm water immersion, along with relaxation, may have a positive effect on working memory and performance of cognitive tasks, such as problem solving.

GETTING YOUR ZZZ’S
After a hard workout or workday, getting restful sleep can sometimes be a challenge. Sleep researchers believe many cases of insomnia can be traced to the hectic, stressful lifestyles of otherwise healthy people. Studies suggest immersion in warm water (such as a hot tub, which has a constant temperature) before bedtime can ease the transition into a deeper, more restful sleep. This may be due to a temperature shift, as the body’s core internal thermostat drops after leaving the water, signalling to the body it is time to rest.

One study by E.J. Sung and Y. Tochihara in 2000 (referenced in Hot Water & Healthy Living) looked at the positive benefits of soaking in warm water in the evening, during winter, to fall asleep more easily. The sleep improvement may be related to hot water’s relaxing properties—the buoyancy of water reduces body weight by approximately 90 per cent, relieving pressure on joints and muscles and creating the sensation...
of weightlessness. The hot, swirling water leaves soakers feeling mentally and emotionally relaxed.

**KEEP THINGS PUMPING**
Soaking in warm water also increases circulation, which improves blood supply to muscles. As such, more nutrients are available to help cells and tissues regenerate, which speeds up the healing process. Immersion effects on healing are aided by the buoyancy of water, which reduces the amount of weight exerted on joints by gravity. Exercising or moving in the water also helps promote healing, as does the hot tub’s jet action, which provides a gentle massage for any affected areas.

According to *Spas, Pools, and Arthritis*, a publication from The Arthritis Foundation, regular sessions in a hot tub help keep joints moving, restoring and preserving strength and flexibility, and protecting joints from further damage.

**TAKE HEART**
Research led by Dr. Thomas G. Allison of the Mayo Clinic indicates hot tubs and spas may not present as much of a risk to heart patients as previously thought. According to the study, soaking in a hot tub increases the heart rate while lowering blood pressure, instead of raising it as other forms of exercise do.

Additional research in this field was reported at the 2008 WAHC from Drs. Becker and Hildenbrand of the National Aquatics and Sports Medicine Institute of Washington State University. Their two-year research studied the effects of immersion temperatures on younger and older adults.

“Warm water immersion, at 38 C (102 F) for 25 minutes, from bathing to hot tub use, protects the heart from rhythm disturbances and improves the efficiency of the heart muscle,” Becker reports. “Our research has shown the positive effect of warm water upon the regulatory mechanisms that control heart rate, blood pressure and circulation in both young and older subjects.”

**TELL THE STORY**
It is clear soaking in a hot tub can provide several health benefits to potential customers. The penetrating action of hydrotherapy jets, coupled with warm water, can provide a relaxing massage to all muscle groups and joints, while also contributing to a restful night’s sleep and a reinvigorated spirit. Hydrotherapy can also facilitate natural pain relief from arthritis, stiff joints and poor circulation. For many people, even simply sitting in a hot tub for 20 minutes can improve heart health in the same way as riding a bicycle. “There may well be magic in the water,” Dr. Becker concludes.

Ultimately, customers need to hear about this brand of ‘magic’—and that is where you, the hydrotherapy specialist, come in. It is time to share the secret—hot tubs can make people feel and live better. So, the next time you have a prospect on the phone or in the store, invite them to learn a little more about the science of the soak.

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**RESOURCES**
- Hot Water & Healthy Living, J.B. Smith, www.hotwaterbook.org
- National Sleep Foundation
- Arthritis Foundation
- Comprehensive Aquatic Therapy, Drs. Bruce Becker & Andrew Cole
- National Aquatics and Sports Medicine Institute (NASMI), Washington State University

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