



NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S
When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.

Helping Hand™

Health Education for Patients and Families

Hippotherapy

Hippotherapy gets its name from the Greek word “hippos,” meaning horse. Horses are used as a tool in physical, occupational, and speech therapy.

How It Works

- The horse is a base that supports your child.
 - The movement mirrors the walking, rhythm, speed, and tempo pattern of a human.
 - These are experiences they can't get from other therapies (Picture 1).
- Your child will learn to use their senses in a natural setting. You will see their function improve as they respond to therapy.
- Your child's time in therapy may feel reduced through fun and positive sessions.
- Physical Therapy (PT), Occupational Therapy (OT), and Speech Therapy (ST) can all use hippotherapy to help your child increase their:
 - Posture control
 - Spine, hip, and pelvis movement
 - Speech
 - Eye-hand coordination
 - Attention span and focus
 - Understanding speech (auditory processing)
 - Balance
 - Strength
 - Reaching
 - Self confidence
 - Motor coordination and planning
 - Range of motion
 - Walk (gait)
 - Sensory processing
 - Oral motor control



Picture 1 Hippotherapy

Treatment and Benefits

To receive therapy using movement of the horse, your child's doctor will need to request a PT, OT, or ST evaluation. A therapist will assess your child's physical, mental, and psychological ability to decide if the horse is an appropriate treatment tool.

- Children with the following can benefit from PT, OT, and ST using hippotherapy:
 - Down syndrome
 - Cerebral palsy
 - Traumatic brain injury
 - Autism
 - Muscular dystrophy
 - Sensory processing disorder
 - Spina bifida
 - Genetic disorders
 - Developmental delay
 - Weakness from chemotherapy
- The exact goals of therapy depend on your child's needs.
- Hippotherapy is a treatment tool, not a riding lesson.
- The therapist always controls the horse while your child is on it.
 - They walk next to the horse and direct how it moves. This helps keep your child safe.
 - They also watch your child for physical reactions like balance, control, and range of motion. These reactions build physical strength and brain connections.

Safety

Therapists, horses, and staff are specially trained so hippotherapy is safe.

- A therapy session includes a horse leader, a therapist, and 2 side walkers.
- To be a part of the program, your child must wear approved safety equipment. This includes a helmet and gait belt.
- Hippotherapy isn't the right treatment tool for your child if they are allergic to horses or have a history of animal abuse.

Insurance

You will need to check with your insurance to see if they cover the costs of physical, occupational, and speech therapy. Many program expenses, such as barn and horse lease fees, and liability insurance, are paid for by the hospital.

For More Information

- PT, OT, and ST using hippotherapy is offered at locations in Temperance, Michigan and Whitehouse, Ohio.
- Contact Nationwide Children's Hospital Toledo Outpatient Therapy at (419) 251-0070, or fax to (419) 251-0075.