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Author(s): Kramien, Liz; Chaikin, Milt
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The era of hyperbaric oxygen has finally arrived. A high-tech treatment that administers 100 percent oxygen at controlled pressures, forcing healing oxygen deep into tissues, has long been medically approved to treat conditions like bone infection, tissue necrosis caused by serious burns, or carbon monoxide poisoning. But until recently, most hyperbaric chambers were located in hospitals. Now centers are springing up around the country, and here on the East Coast there are treatment facilities available in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Long Island and Maryland. Remarkable responses have been seen in stroke victims, children with cerebral palsy, chronic Lyme disease sufferers, individuals with multiple sclerosis, Crohn's disease, diabetic complications and many other difficult-to-treat conditions. It is even being used by the rich and famous to help heal plastic surgery scars more quickly.

HBO therapy increases the amount of oxygen in the blood by up to 2,000 percent, depending on the treatment depth. This, in turn, dramatically increases the amount of oxygen at the cellular level and forces oxygen into tissues. This is extremely important when tissues have been damaged--by trauma or infection--since damaged, inflamed tissue already has less blood circulation and less oxygen. In addition, most infective organisms can't survive at those high oxygen levels.

Dr. M. Wm. Sloan, whose clinic has two monoplace chambers in Long Island, says he is using HBO for stroke victims. After emergency care in hospital, HBO treatments and recovery can be enhanced by hyperbaric therapy. Sloan recommends 60 or more treatments.

"This is a treatment that's so safe, and simple and natural for the body, that it should be used in a wide variety of cases," says Dr. Christopher Calapai, whose offices contain what is known as a "monoplace" chamber (where one person undergoes treatment at a time). A television is set up on top of the chamber so that patients can entertain themselves while undergoing treatment. "I believe every hospital should have a chamber to treat heart attack and stroke. Calapai continues "Both conditions decrease tissue oxygen, allowing cell death. Research has shown HBO works well to in strokes, brain injury, difficult infections like lyme or clostridium, diabetic ulcers, even M.S."

In the case of Lyme disease, William Fife, Ph.D., a Hyperbaric Medicine specialist at Texas A & M University (now retired), gave HBO treatment to 91 individuals with chronic late Lyme disease, who had failed even on IV antibiotics. Eighty-four percent improved or had complete remission of their symptoms.

One patient in California had 150 HBO treatments to treat his chronic Lyme, and his story has been widely circulated on the Internet. He writes, "I am told that I hold the record for the most near-consecutive HBO treatments in North America. I completed my 150th 'dive' on January 29, 1999 at a hyperbaric facility in northern California. I saw six physicians before a Lyme diagnosis was made. I went untreated for 10 months. I regularly experienced relapses, which became more severe with each occurrence. It has been five months since I finished HBO therapy. I am happy to report that I have been working full time for more than two months. Although I still experience a few basic symptoms and have occasional bad days, each month is better than the last. This month I am living life at about 90 percent of my capacity. It not only feels wonderful to be well again, but I am thankful to have my life back."

HBO therapy is a medical procedure and like any other medical procedure there can be risks. However, when HBO therapy is administered by trained health care individuals, these risks are minimal. A chest x-ray is required, and it is important to dear your ears as pressure is being increased, much as you might in an airplane. The hyperbaric health care professional works with the patient or parent and teaches them various techniques on how to equalize pressure in the ears, such as swallowing. High blood pressure is a contraindication for this therapy. In addition, it's

important to eat a big meal beforehand and even suck on a piece of candy during treatment, as the oxygen causes the body to metabolize glucose more quickly. Otherwise, there's little to notice during the procedure--people often read, listen to music, or watch television.

Dr. Christopher Calapai comments: "I've seen stroke patients with claw hands who couldn't even hold a glass of water, use their hands now." Mary, a patient of Calapai's, had many tiny strokes and then one large one. "My formerly quick attentive active mind had gotten cloudy, and that was very distressing to me. I had over 20 treatments, and pretty rapidly I began to improve. All my friends noticed it and said, "Oh gee, what have you been doing? You seem like yourself again!" I was very happy to tell them about this marvelous treatment."

According to Burton Goldberg, quoted in the Alternative Medicine Guide to Heart Disease: "If you can get more oxygen to the brain within the first 24 hours of having a stroke, you can often stop most of the damage and salvage a great deal of brain tissue, eliminating 70 to 80 percent of the damage." At the Ytusus Center for Integrative Medicine in Brooklyn, HBO is being used for patients with chronic neurological disorders. Dr. Pavel Ytusus, M.D., presents evidence in the form of case studies of 16 patients with neurological disorders ranging from traumatic brain injuries to stroke and multiple sclerosis. All 16 patients had from 30 to 220 hour-long treatments. Their speech, motor and reading ability and memory improved. In fact, only 25 percent had no response.

In Maryland, at Chesapeake Hyperbarics, patients enter a multi-chamber. In this chamber, which is a bit like a small submarine, as many as six patients sit and breathe oxygen through an aviation type head mask. Multiplace chambers are more congenial as you can laugh and talk with others, but both monoplace and multiplace are equally effective. The advantage to monoplace is that the treatment can be specifically geared to your own needs: the pressure gradient as well as the time of the treatment. The disadvantage may be claustrophobia.

Clinical successes with HBO abound. Dr. DJ Perrins of London cleared up a 45-year chronic ear discharge in a patient, using HBO. Chronic severe vertigo has also responded. But perhaps the most amazing case I've heard of is that of Susan Rodriguez, who now runs a hyperbaric facility in California. Her story: "In 1991, I was diagnosed with Lupus, Cerebral, Vasculitis, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Including auto immune markers in the spinal fluid that indicated a demyelination process of acute Peripheral Neuropathy, all of which were documented by S.P.E.C.T. Brain scans, blood test, skin biopsy, spinal taps, along with lower and upper EMGs.

To shorten this story, I was treated using Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy, or HBOT for 28 treatments, I was sent back to the doctor who ordered additional S.P.E.C.T. Brain Scans, spinal taps, skin biopsy, EMGs and blood test. All of which returned to normal. My doctors have since written many letters fully endorsing hyperbaric oxygen therapy treatment!"

Tune in next issue for the follow up: The author of this article describes her own experience using hyperbaric oxygen and antibiotics to treat an early case of Lyme disease.

By Liz Kramien and Milt Chaikin

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