



Institute for Complementary Practices

Fact Sheets

Teachers College Columbia University

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Edited: Laura McPherson

MEDEK Therapy

MEDEK is a form of physiotherapy that was developed in Venezuela by Chilean physical therapist Ramon Cuevos during the early 1970s and introduced to North America by physical therapist Ester Fink. This form of physiotherapy focuses on improving the gross motor skills of young children with physical disabilities and movement disorders. The therapy focuses on training movements leading to sitting, standing, and walking. Muscles are trained to do these movements rather than being exercised in isolation. It operates on the assumption that movement affects the development of the brain. Practitioners of MEDEK and clients and their parents who have participated in this therapy claim better than expected improvement in motor skills. Cuevas and Fink have trained over 190 physical therapists in this technique. Currently, there are two centers in Toronto where MEDEK therapy is available. These centers also train therapists to provide this therapy.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

What is MEDEK Therapy?

MEDEK stands for Metodo Dinamico de Estimulacion Kinesica or Dynamic Method for Kinetic Stimulation. It is a form of physiotherapy that involves training movements that lead to sitting, standing, and walking. A child undergoing a MEDEK treatment is physically manipulated by the therapist to stretch out tight muscles and train the muscles in groups. These manipulations eventually lead to the child gaining control over their trunk, which is necessary to perform basic gross motor activities such as sitting, standing, and walking. Each exercise the patient does has a specific name and a specific, functional purpose. Exercises are repeated until the reaction of the brain becomes automatic and the body reacts normally to situations where it is required to keep its balance. MEDEK therapy begins on a table; then, if the child is able to stand with ankle support, moves to the floor. Floor exercises involve seven pieces of MEDEK equipment which can be configured in various ways to challenge the child's sense of balance.

What is MEDEK used to treat?

The developers of MEDEK therapy recommend its use for young children with developmental motor delays, hypotonia, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, and chromosomal deficiencies (according to the Canadian MEDEK Centre's website). The effectiveness of the therapy depends on the level of dysfunction, the amount of time spent in MEDEK therapy, and the age of intervention. MEDEK practitioners recommend beginning MEDEK treatments very early in the child's life because lack of motor development as a young child snowballs as the child gets older.

Has MEDEK therapy been effective in treating cerebral palsy?

MEDEK treatments can help young children with cerebral palsy gain control over their movements. It is especially helpful for children who have poor control over their trunk and are floppy as infants. Early MEDEK treatment is helpful because muscles weaken from lack of use as children with cerebral palsy get older, making intervention more difficult as time goes on. However, MEDEK does not work for all children with cerebral palsy.

How long do MEDEK treatments take and how much do they cost?

Participants in MEDEK therapy do exercises both with a therapist and at home. The home program consists of about eight exercises performed twice daily. When beginning MEDEK treatment, participants undergo eight weeks of therapy, after which they are evaluated to see if the therapy is effective for them. Treatments may last for five months to five years. The cost of these treatments was not specified.

Is MEDEK covered by health insurance?

The website for Helping Hands Therapy Place (see Helpful Links below) claims that there are health insurance plans which cover treatment, but does not specify which ones.

Are there any unwanted side effects?

MEDEK therapy does not have any known negative side effects except for fatigue due to the vigorous exercise.

How can MEDEK therapy fit in with the IEP services a child receives?

Ideally, MEDEK therapy is initiated during the first six months of the child's life and used while the child is still young, so school aged children would not usually receive MEDEK therapy. It is, however, a form of physical therapy and as such could be considered as a service for a child to receive as part of an early intervention program.

Information adapted from:

The Canadian MEDEK Centre. *About MEDEK*. Retrieved January 29, 2002 from <http://www.medek.ca>.

Spivak, Diane (2000). *Physiotherapy Treatment gets Disabled Kids Walking*. Retrieved January 29, 2002 from <http://www.healthcentral.com>.

Helpful links on MEDEK Therapy

● <http://www.medek.ca>

This is the web page of the Canadian MEDEK Centre, the international center for MEDEK care and education. It contains information about MEDEK therapy. The Centre also provides this therapy to children with movement disorders and developmental delays. Last updated August 2001. 121 Sultana Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M6A 1T6. Tel: (416) 785-7498.

● http://www.jeena.org/alter_ther.html#Medek

This page contains information on MEDEK and a variety of other complementary practices.

● <http://www.medek-athelpinghands.com/>

This is the webpage of the Helping Hands Therapy Place, a center in Toronto which offers MEDEK therapy. The center is directed by Dr. Sonja Obrankovic-Sarcevic.

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