

# Toward Functional Independence – A Physiotherapist's Top Five Picks

By Gwen Rose, B.Sc., PT Reg. (ON)

**H**ealth care professionals use various forms of technology to assist clients in their rehabilitation and optimize their health in rehab facilities, clinics, and retirement and long-term care homes. With our aging population, there is an increasing emphasis on clients accessing affordable technologies to reach their health and fitness goals and self-manage their chronic diseases and disabilities so they can remain functionally independent and age successfully.

## Gym in a Chair

One of the most beneficial yet simple technologies I have come across is the Resistance Chair Exercise System – the affordable, portable, compact gym in a chair. It enables even those in remote areas or with limited space to exercise safely and effectively. With its patented pulleys and variable-strength resistance bands attached to a sturdy fold-up chair, it allows users a full-body, low-impact workout from a safe, seated position, and it addresses all four components of functional fitness: flexibility, muscle strengthening, cardio and balance.



## Infrared Technologies

Two pain-relieving technologies developed in Canada incorporate far infrared and near infrared wavelengths. Thermotex far Infrared Heating Pads come in a variety of shapes and configurations and can be used over casts and bandages or directly on the painful area. Deep tissue radiant heat raises temperature 6 cm beneath the surface, increasing blood flow to deliver nutrients and oxygen while eliminating waste and easing inflammation.

The new Genesis Pain Relief Light stimulates healing at the cell level by concentrating broad-spectrum near infrared light through an innovative patent-pending, water-based filter. Studies show that not only does it decrease inflammation and alleviate pain but it actually accelerates wound healing and leads to improved recovery from ischemic injury. Both these Health Canada-approved medical devices are portable and easy to use in clients' homes as well as in other settings, and their prices are much lower than laser technologies.

## Ergonomic Chair

More than 80% of us have back pain at some time in our lives. The latest ergonomic chair, the height-adjustable Zenzu Ball Chair, improves posture, reduces back discomfort from prolonged sitting and allows users to actively sit, working core muscles while at their desks.

## Active-Passive Exercise

The MOTOMed Movement Arms and Legs Therapy System is used extensively in rehab and long-term care facilities as well as in private homes. The MOTOMed is a sophisticated, well-constructed active-passive exercise device for people with neurological deficits. It is widely used for conditions such as multiple sclerosis, stroke, Parkinson's, spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries and dementia, and for the frail elderly. Extremely effective in improving circulation, maintaining or improving range of motion and facilitating motor recovery, it also strengthens muscles and potentially provides a cardio workout. It is even credited in improving bowel and bladder function. The MOTOMed transitions automatically between passive, active-assist and active modes based on the ability and needs of the user. Many exercise features such as speed, distance and resistance can easily be adjusted. Of great benefit is the symmetry training and other biofeedback information, as well as the automatic spasm detection and release feature.

## Leg Lifter

The Multifit LegLifter, a unique assistive device from New Zealand, mounts on the side of the bed and enables clients to electronically bring their legs up onto the bed with the touch of a button. It is used as a short-term solution or for ongoing independence in bed transfers for those people who can walk to their bed or transfer from a wheelchair but are unable to bring their legs up. It also prevents potential injury to caregivers who previously had to assist with this movement. ▀

Physiotherapist Gwen Rose is the founder and president of Wheels of Fitness Inc. This Toronto-based company discovers and distributes innovative products, and develops programs and services to enhance fitness, health, well-being, independence and quality of life for older adults and those with chronic diseases or disabilities.



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