



“Vibration Therapy”: Could it be the Cure for PPS?

A Bruno Byte

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Question: My right leg is paralyzed and my left leg is weak, so I use crutches. I have carpal tunnel syndrome and my stomach and intestines move slowly. I want to buy this standing platform that vibrates your feet, turns on your nerves and make muscles contract and get stronger. Do you think this could help my problems?

Dr. Bruno’s Response: Polio survivors have their nerve -- nerve problems, that is -- from the damaged [vagus nerve](#) that makes the stomach and intestines move, to the remaining, poliovirus-damaged, overworked motor nerves running the muscles in the arms, hands and legs. We’ve talked about these often disabling post-polio problems for years. Could something as simple as vibration cure them?

“Vibration therapy” is provided by machines that range in price from \$200 to \$5,000. The devices have a platform, a support with handles that comes up from the platform so you can hold on and plates to stand on that alternately move your left and right legs up and down five to 50 times a second. The claim is that vibration therapy machines cause muscles in the legs and arms to rapidly contract and relax as the body very slightly shifts left and right. These slight contractions are claimed by the machines’ makers to cause “a significant increase in muscle strength.” One VTM manufacturer’s website states, “This internationally respected motorized exercise system produces quick results...burns fat and works the muscles -- including the upper body, when the handles on the unit are grasped -- with little to no stress on the joints and fibrous tissue.”

How do vibration machines treat leg muscle weakness, even paralysis? One VTM website says, “A few patients were asked to use a vibration plate for two 30-40 second periods. The results were very encouraging, as all patients showed increased balance and mobility. So, if standing for 80 seconds “increases balance and mobility,” why not try it? Well, the operative phrases are “a few patients” and “very encouraging.” You need to test more than a few patients to know if any device works. And, we’re not told what “very encouraging...increased balance and mobility” means.

But, wait. There’s more!

The same VTM website describes not just “very encouraging” but “amazing” results testing people with spinal cord injuries: “A research conducted in the U.S. on a few patients who could barely stand and needed to use braces on their legs. Vibration training helped these individuals to start standing on their own. Two of the patients achieved amazing results and were able to walk almost independently, with help of walking aids. Vibration training could be their savior.”

Claiming “amazing results” when, again, only a few patients were tested, and telling paraplegics that “vibration training could be their savior?” Time to cut to the very small print at the bottom of the webpage: “Information on this website is not intended to diagnose, treat or cure any disease.”

If the VTM is “not intended to treat or cure any disease,” what should we make of vibration training’s

“amazing results,” producing “increased balance and mobility” and being the “savior” of those with muscle weakness and paralysis?

How about *nothing*? What would be "very encouraging" is if companies were prohibited from claiming "amazing results" when they have published not one research paper documenting such claims, and especially when there is research showing that vibration training could actually trigger symptoms. Several studies have found that nerve entrapment is common in polio survivors. A just-published study found that 62% of polio survivors had carpal tunnel syndrome and 41% had nerve entrapment at the elbow, with those using a cane, crutches or a wheelchair at greatest risk. You know another risk factor for carpal tunnel syndrome? That would be vibration at about 30 times a second with the most harmful vibrations being at less than 16 times a second, *exactly* the frequencies the VTM produces as “the handles on the unit are grasped?” So, the VTM may actually be harmful for polio survivors and cause CTS. What’s more, research has shown that vibration decreases movement of stomach muscles and intestines, exactly what a polio survivor having a slow gut does not need.

Without published research documenting the effects and the side effects of the VTM, and with vibration known to cause CTS and slowing of the gut, polio survivors should save their \$5,000 and buy a big, high-definition TV, or better yet, a power wheelchair.

The Encyclopedia of Polio and Post-Polio Sequelae

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