

suburban life

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At **Oxygen Oasis Hyperbaric Wellness Center**, hyperbaric oxygen therapy helps people of all ages contend with the debilitating effects of tick-borne Lyme disease.

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TAKING THE BITE OUT OF LYME



At Oxygen Oasis Hyperbaric Wellness Center, hyperbaric oxygen therapy helps people of all ages contend with the debilitating effects of tick-borne Lyme disease. *by* PHIL GIANFICARO

Jeongsook Park's worry intensified. What was it, she wondered, that had mysteriously caused her 8-year-old son's autism symptoms to escalate? What was the reason for the heightened bursts of rage that moved the boy to physically strike his teachers? What could have triggered the mood swings, hot flashes and night sweats? Why was he constantly ill and aching? What was happening?

Park hoped the wave of sickness would fall away by autumn's end, like so many colored leaves off the trees in the woods near her home in Lawrenceville, N.J.

It didn't.

Park's doctor ordered a blood test. While awaiting results, the physician suggested she investigate hyperbaric oxygen

therapy, HBOT for short, which consists of breathing concentrated oxygen in a pressurized chamber. According to the physician, the therapy has shown to be effective in treating many of the symptoms of autism.

Shortly after beginning those treatments at Oxygen Oasis Hyperbaric Wellness Center in Langhorne, the blood-test results came back: Park's son had Lyme disease.

"Lyme is what was causing him to be raging and sick all the time," Park says. "I had picked a tick off the back of his head in the fall, but I didn't realize Lyme had the effect on my son that it had. As fortune would have it, a proven therapy for symptoms of Lyme is HBOT."

Since taking her son to Oxygen Oasis, he has seen a considerable improvement in his behavior.

"The anxiety, the rage, the anger, the aggressiveness have all decreased," she says. "Now, all his behaviors are getting back to normal. I can't tell you how thankful I am we found Oxygen Oasis."

Finding Relief

HBOT is a medical treatment that enhances the body's natural healing process. In an HBOT session, an individual is immersed in 100 percent oxygen in a total body chamber, where atmospheric pressure is increased and controlled. HBOT is used for a wide variety of treatments, usually as part of an overall medical care plan.

Under normal circumstances, oxygen is transported throughout the body only by red blood cells. With HBOT, oxygen is dissolved into all of the body's fluids and can be carried to areas where circulation is diminished or blocked. In this way, the oxygen can reach all of the damaged tissues and the body can support its own healing process. The increased oxygen—15 to 20 times more than normal at the cellular level—reduces swelling, allows new blood vessels to grow more rapidly into the affected areas, and greatly enhances the ability of white blood cells to kill bacteria.

Lyme disease, which is a bacterial infec-

ABOVE: The Joint Commission-accredited facility offers treatment in both multiplace and monoplace hyperbaric chambers.

tion usually transmitted through the bite of an infected tick, is among the many conditions HBOT can help address.

“In treatment for Lyme, the increased oxygen level helps kill bacteria, as Lyme likes an anaerobic environment,” says Jason Friel, a certified hyperbaric technician who serves as safety and operations director for Oxygen Oasis. “We stress that patients should also be working with a Lyme-literate doctor. The doctor works with the patient to rid them of any co-infections and will typically prescribe antibiotics. Taken in conjunction with HBOT, the antibiotics work more efficiently, decreasing inflammation, pain and other symptoms associated with Lyme.”

HBOT is a simple, noninvasive and painless treatment with few, if any, temporary side effects. The benefits of HBOT treatment for Lyme include increased energy, relief from pain, restored cognitive function, and the normalization of organs and glands to force out toxins and other impurities. Also, the immune system receives a massive boost.

“We began Lyme treatment sessions at Oxygen Oasis in mid-March,” Park says. “When the treatment is done, we’ll have completed 80 sessions, at 90 minutes a session. My son is young, so I lay with him in the chamber. The treatment is gradual, each day’s progress depends on that of the day before, hence the necessity for multiple sessions. The most important thing for my son is that it is improving his health.”

Proper Diagnosis is Essential

Few can relate to Park’s assessment of the benefits of HBOT like Victoria Bliss-Calkins, president and CEO of Oxygen Oasis. Her son, a long-time sufferer of the debilitating effects of Lyme disease, benefited from HBOT.

“He was not properly diagnosed until we found a Lyme-proficient doctor also trained in HBOT,” says Bliss-Calkins. “Oxygen under pressure becomes a drug. It helped him.”

Proper diagnosis is essential. When actor-singer Kris Kristofferson began to experience memory loss several years ago, doctors originally diagnosed him with Alzheimer’s disease. In fact, he was suffering from Lyme, and may have been dealing with its incapacitating symptoms for as many as 30 years. In an article published in *The Daily Mail*, Kristofferson’s wife stated that her husband “suddenly came back” after six dives in a hyperbaric chamber.

Oxygen Oasis has been serving patients since 2014. Bliss-Calkins and her husband, Tom, experienced the benefits of HBOT after he underwent radiation treatment for stage-4 squamous cell carcinoma of the tonsil. The therapy helped him regain flexibility in the neck and reduced the frequency of muscle spasms he endured after surgery.



Oxygen Oasis’ caring and accommodating staff is trained to help patients receive treatment for everything from autism and Parkinson’s disease to sports injuries and post-traumatic stress.

“We are here to help people, to give them information and treatment,” Bliss-Calkins says. “Many of the patients we treat are looking to come off of their medications, which oftentimes masks the symptoms and can cause serious side effects. Following HBOT, our patients feel better, sleep better, and take fewer medications—if any at all. Seeing our patients’ progress in their healing is like Christmas every day.”

Oxygen Oasis is a freestanding facility. All services are provided in a relaxed, private setting by certified, hyperbaric technicians under the supervision of experienced physicians who participate in each patient’s plan of care, from simple daily interactions to doctor-to-doctor conferences.

Among the spectrum of conditions that are treated with HBOT are cerebral palsy, stroke, traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injury, near-drowning, fibromyalgia, migraines, sports injuries, pre- and post-surgery as well as non-healing wounds and delayed radiation injury. These are not all the conditions that can be treated with HBOT; the Oxygen Oasis website, O2Oasis.com, features a complete list.

Not ‘Just a Patient’

Oxygen Oasis has helped a spectrum of people, from Park’s son to those more famous, such as former Philadelphia Flyers star Brian Propp in his recovery from stroke, and former Philadelphia Eagles player Brian Baldinger after knee surgery.

The use of HBOT to treat Lyme disease is on the rise because the disease itself is also on the rise. The number of people getting diseases transmitted by mosquito,



Since Jeongsook Park began taking her son to Oxygen Oasis to treat him for symptoms of Lyme disease, she has seen a considerable improvement in his behavior.

tick and flea bites has more than tripled in the United States in recent years, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently reported. An estimated 300,000 people are infected with Lyme each year. Tick-borne diseases are rising steadily across the country, particularly in Southeastern Pennsylvania and throughout New Jersey.

When Lyme disease strikes, Oxygen Oasis helps people strike back.

“Going to Oxygen Oasis is helping my son get his life back,” Park says. “The personnel—Jason, Victoria, all of them—make us feel comfortable being there. Some places you go, you feel like just a patient. But these people truly care about my son getting better. If I ask a question, they listen. They pay attention. Without their help, I don’t know where my son would be.” ■

➔ **OXYGEN OASIS HYPERBARIC WELLNESS CENTER**
848 Town Center Drive
Langhorne, Pa.
(215) 352-3720
O2Oasis.com