Make a Splash

Here is a low-impact, fun-filled workout perfect for aging Baby Boomers or anyone who loves the water and doesn't want all the stress on the joints from running or weight training. BY PETER SMOLENS



A WATER AEROBICS class can be a perfect alternative to an intense workout in the gym. By performing exercises in the water, they become low impact and perfect for people who are getting older or recovering from joint injury.

For example, when in the water, stretching allows you to achieve greater range of motion with minor resistance. The water's natural resistance surrounds your joints as you perform the exercises, making it safe for people of all ages.

According to the United States Water Fitness Association, even if you have never worked out in the water before, performing water aerobics can provide you with fitness and health benefits. Here's why:

Buoyancy: This water property allows people to do exercises that are difficult on land. Ninety percent of your body is buoyant when in the water up to your neck, so you are not hitting the floor as hard as you would on land. No pounding or jarring!

Resistance: There is continual resistance to every move you make. The water offers 12 to 14 percent more resistance than when you exercise on land. Resistance does not allow for sudden body movements.

Cooling Effects: Water disperses heat more efficiently, so there is less chance of overheating. The water continuously cools the body. Exercise in the water is cooler and more comfortable than it is on land.

You should check with your doctor before performing any physical exercise and water aerobics is exercise. It is best to join a water aerobics class led by a certified instructor. Selecting

the right class is important. According USWFA President and CEO John Spannuth, there are five types of classes in water aerobics:

1. Adapted Aquatics – designed to help individuals with temporary or permanent disabilities and/or challenges.
2. Water Fitness – designed to develop and maintain general and/or specific components of physical fitness.
3. Aquatic Fitness Personal Training – This is usually limited to one-on-one private instruction with a personal trainer.
4. Aquatic Therapy – includes aquatic rehab.
5. Aquatic Physical Therapy – only a certified physical therapist can conduct these sessions.

By finding the right class, you will get the most out of your water aerobic exercise. Depending on your physical condition, the instructor can provide you with options during the workout. At the end of class you will have gotten all the exercise you'll want. In addition, don't be surprised if you get addicted to the fun of participating in water aerobics class.

Water Aerobics On Your Own

There are always situations where it is impossible to join a class. As long as there is chest deep water and enough space to spread your arms, you can perform a water aerobics routine that will give you benefits.

When certified water aerobics trainer Patricia Opong-Brown teaches her class, she begins with a warm-up period. Swimming laps is one of the best things you can do to get your the blood pumping. An alternative is walking or jogging in the water. If space is limited or the pool is crowded, perform these movements in place. Opong-Brown advised to go at your own pace. You want to get the exercise, but don't over exert yourself.

Once you've warmed up and are comfortable in the water, the main part of the routine is a series of stretching exercises. Different exercises are used to concentrate on different parts of the body. Opong-Brown suggests the main section of your water exercise routine cover the following areas:

Water Walking: Moving forward, backward, and sideward, using regular, short, quick, or long steps, in waist-deep or chest-deep water

Jumping Jacks: Stand in the water and move the legs and arms. An alternative is holding your arms together and moving them side to side.

Boxer's Punch: Stand with your feet hip-width apart, one foot slightly forward. Put your arms into a boxer's pose. Punch out with each hand moving your feet back and forth to twist your body.

Push Down: Stand straight with your open hands palms-down on the surface of the water and push down until your hands are beside your hips. Turn your hands and bring them back to the starting position. Move your feet back and forth in sync with your arms. Another option is to keep your elbows locked at your sides (pretend they're glued to your ribcage), exhale.

In addition, to vary the workout, Opong-Brown suggests a number of exercises that you can do using the pool wall for support. They include the following:

Wall Pushups: Face the edge of the pool a couple of feet from the wall. Hold on with both hands and slowly pull your body to the wall. Then push yourself back up straight.

Leg Pushes: Face the edge of the pool. Hold on with both hands and bring one leg out to your side, keeping your back straight. Exhale while you bring it up as high as you comfortably can without turning at the ankle. Bring it back down and repeat, doing a full set for each leg.

Pull-ups: Grasp the side of the pool and lower your body as far as your arms will allow. Keeping your knees bent, exhale and pull yourself up as high as you can (the range of motion for this will vary greatly from one person to another).

The last 10 minutes of the workout should be the cool down. Opong-Brown suggests a series of stretches. She also stresses the importance of keeping your body hydrated. It is possible to become dehydrated in the pool, so make sure you drink water before and after your workout.

Although a water aerobic workout burns a lot of calories, once you try water aerobics and it becomes a part of your exercise program, you might find that working out in the pool feels like you're playing in the water while getting the exercise you need. **MS&F**

