

water BABES

Exercising in water is great fun and well worth the trauma of putting on a costume, says Martin Feaver



Exercising in water is a fantastic way to get fitter and if you thought that meant only swimming then be prepared to be surprised: aqua aerobics, aqua walking, aqua jogging and even aqua gyms are just some of the activities you may find at your local pool. Water provides an ideal playground; it has numerous physical, social and mental benefits.

The physical benefits include: increased cardiovascular fitness, improved muscular flexibility, endurance and strength, better posture and, as the whole body is used continually when in water, balanced muscular tone and definition. Uniquely the buoyancy of water results in less impact on joints, offers a reduced risk of injury and is an excellent way to rehabilitate to full fitness after an injury or joint replacement.

Those who are overweight, suffer arthritis or have lower back and joint problems find moving in warm water often enables them to do exercise that is too demanding on land. They are able to exercise for longer and it can even mean periods of freedom from pain.

The social benefits, these are clear; since many of us don't own our own swimming pool, it means a trip to the local pool or, in summer, the beach. Such trips mean the opportunity to exercise with family and friends. Indeed the social side of water-based exercise is a major factor in its success; people of all ages and abilities can enjoy being in the water together and when you choose an activity you can do with friends and family you are more likely to stick at it. You'll be exercising without realising it, just remember that standing in the pool chatting doesn't count as exercise!

The mental benefits are enormous, the steady rhythm of moving through water is calming and your mind can wander, unwind and drift as you swim or water walk. Being in water also feels refreshing and its buoyancy is liberating so that you leave the pool

with a sense of wellbeing, feeling less stressed and ready to face the world.

It is important to remember that water workouts are just like other exercise sessions so make sure you do a thorough warm-up and cool down. Don't feel embarrassed at the thought of wearing a costume or anxious at the thought of the walk from the changing rooms, go along to one of the many adult only sessions, you will be surprised at how quickly you'll feel comfortable and make friends. If you have yet to venture to your local pool then please read the list below as there are some important considerations.

Considerations when exercising in water

- Slowly enter the water using a ladder or steps rather than diving or jumping in
- Make sure the temperature of the water is comfortable for you – water that is too cold or too hot can 'shock' your body
- If you suffer from angina or exercise induced arrhythmias, check with your medical team before you swim
- If you didn't swim before your cardiac event, or struggle when swimming, consider other water activities such as aqua jogging or walking or aerobics
- Always perform a warm up before entering the water and complete a cool down in the water at the end of your session
- Reduce the intensity of your exercise slightly – when you exercise in water your body works harder than on land without you being aware of it
- Take a plastic water bottle and stop for drink breaks to avoid dehydration during water activities – it may not seem like you're losing fluids when exercising in water but you do
- Check with your GP that it is safe for you to start water based activities if they are new to you or you are renewing an interest in them

Water activities, what's what

Aqua fit (also known as Aquarobics)

Aerobics and exercise sessions in the pool

Suitable for most people of all ages and abilities

Class members work at a variety of levels by increasing effort and using resistance equipment designed for use in the water

Aqua jogging/walking

Basically jogging or walking in water

Includes many of the benefits of jogging on dry land while reducing the impact that can affect joints

Can use buoyancy belts to help keep you upright

Intensity of the exercise can be increased with varying the depth of water you jog or walk in

Fitness swimming

The traditional view of exercising in the pool

Uses basic swimming techniques and equipment

Using different strokes and training equipment adds variety and interest

PICTURE:PHOTOLIBRARY.COM

Before her two heart attacks and bypass operation in 2001, Mary Jennison did very little exercise. Her experience was enough to make her realise she needed to change her lifestyle. Her osteoarthritis means that walking is difficult and painful so Mary turned to swimming to get in shape.

"After my bypass a lot of well-meaning people said to me that I should take it easy, but my heart surgeon said that he hadn't given me a new heart for me to sit and do nothing with it!

As far as I'm concerned I've been given a second chance and I'm going to make the most of it. I had always liked swimming, so I started going twice a week – I love it! It gives me a feeling of being in another world. I don't do breast stroke as it strains the neck and hips, but I do a range of other strokes and also do exercises in the water.

"I'm slimmer, fitter and have more energy than I've ever had before and, aside from the physical benefits, it has helped me to learn to relax because

I have always been a bit of a worrier.

"It's such a pleasure to enjoy doing exercise and swimming is such fun. I sometimes have secret races with other swimmers just to see if I can go faster than them although I am careful not to overdo it.

"I've also started eating healthily and given up smoking, I've even encouraged my family to think about their lifestyles too. My outlook on life is much more positive and I enjoy every moment of it – I'm sure

swimming plays a big part in that. I think of my heart as a reconditioned engine that I have to keep tuned and swimming enables me to do that, even if other parts of this 'car' aren't working quite so well.

"On land I'm a bit of an ageing duck but in the water, just maybe, I'm more like a swan!"

