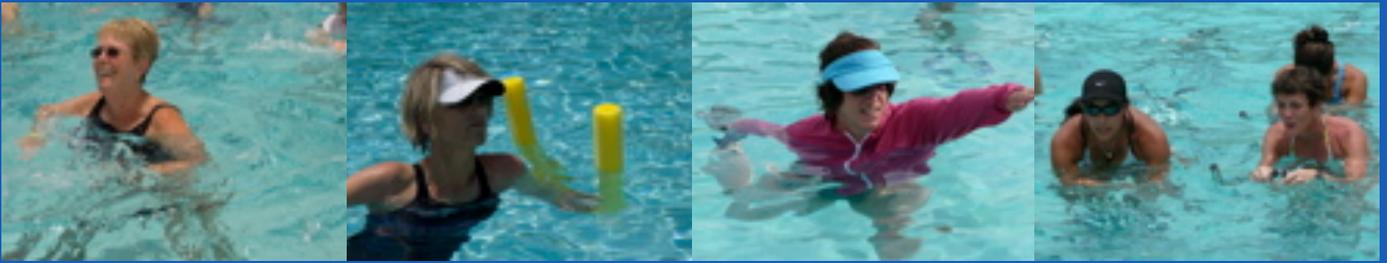


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Aquatic Exercise Myths Set Straight!

By Lori Templeman

This is the first in a series of commonly asked questions regarding vertical aquatic exercise. These articles are designed to help clarify misinformation common to the aquatic fitness industry.

Topic #1: Can I get a good cardiovascular workout and lose weight through water exercise?

This has been a hot debate for years. Aquatic Fitness Professionals are frequently questioned about the effectiveness of water exercise for cardio training. Stereotypes have not helped the cause. TV shows, photographs and even greeting cards depict water exercise as frivolous. Pools are also associated with recreation and leisure, while land-based programs in the gym are marketed as sweat-filled and challenging.

The intensity potential of aquatic workouts is often questioned. However, a participant's ability to elevate the heart rate and burn calories depends on several factors. Body weight, age, level of exertion, environmental concerns (e.g. water and air temperature and pool depth) and apparel are just a few factors that must be considered. It is important to recognize that aquatic heart rates tend to be lower than comparable training on land due a number of reasons. Water will cool the body more effectively than air of the same temperature while hydrostatic pressure and reduced gravity both affect blood flow, body weight and exercise response. This does not necessarily mean that the workout is less intense!

The Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE) has become a popular method for self-monitoring intensity level during exercise. How fatigued you feel during an exercise will establish where you are on the intensity scale. Your environment affects your perceived exertion, just as it does heart rate. Water and air temperature affect our exercise experience.

The pool can be considered a nurturing and supportive environment for those with limited mobility and the aquatic environment can provide more programming opportunities for a wider population. Water's buoyancy provides options for increased agility and better range of motion at any fitness level. Participants can execute powerful moves, such as rebounding kicks or plyometric-type training, at an intensity they could never accomplish on land. Yet, while pushing your intensity to the max, the stress on your joints is reduced due the buoyancy. That means less injury potential and quicker post-exercise recovery. This is why many athletes, including runners, cross train in the pool.

On the other hand, 360 degrees of resistance surrounds your body when submerged in the water. While the water can be a supportive environment, it is much more dense than air. Every time you move, your muscles are "loaded" against that resistance. Applying force and power against that resistance allows the participant to increase caloric consumption and oxygen intake during water exercise. This is especially apparent in deep water classes, where participants are fully suspended while wearing a flotation belt. Once you experience deep water, it quickly becomes apparent that exertion levels are influenced by the fact that one lacks the momentum found when pushing off the pool bottom. The muscles work harder to maintained controlled movement against the resistance with correct vertical alignment.

To get the most from a water workout, you need to learn how to utilize and enhance the water's resistance. You can increase intensity by accelerating with more force – such as “rebounding” off the pool bottom or traveling further. The amount of energy your arms and legs utilize to press against the water greatly affects the intensity of a movement. You can choose to adjust the speed and size of your movements and add equipment to enhance surface area. The depth of the water you are in also affects results because this determines the ratio of gravity to buoyancy. Mid-rib cage to mid-chest is often recommended for a high intensity shallow water workout.

A water workout is capable of providing the challenge and intensity needed to increase your cardio endurance and burn calories to improve body composition. Ultimately, the intensity of aquatic exercise is what you want to make it. Your results will be reflective of the effort you put into your movement. The water can provide a nurturing, supportive environment or you can push yourself by “working the water” and come away with a workout that is challenging and effective. The harder you work within your personal capabilities, the better the workout and the more calories you burn.

Get in and work the water...and the water can work for you!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lori Templeman is the sole proprietor of Fitness Temple. She is currently teaching aqua, yoga and personal training in Sacramento, CA and holds certifications through AEA and AFAA, with specialized training from the Arthritis Foundation, YogaFit and The Pilates Coach. Lori is currently training to become an AEA Aquatic Training Specialist and she can be reached at akwalori@hotmail.com and www.loritempleman.com.