

AKWA Awareness

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Aquatic Exercise Myths Set Straight!

By Lori Templeman

This is the third 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 #3: Water Shoes - To wear or not to wear?

- **Are water shoes necessary for aquatic exercise?**

Observing a typical aquatic fitness class today reveals that many participants wear shoes. New participants often ask if shoes are needed for a water workout. The Aquatic Exercise Association highly recommends water shoes for shallow water exercise. Foot protection, traction and resistance are some of the key benefits to be considered. This article discusses when and why water shoes should be worn, along with resources for finding the right pair.

Foot Protection

Water shoes protect your feet from slick surfaces, drains and debris at the bottom of the pool. Injury or discomfort from stubbed toes and foot abrasions can be reduced with proper footwear. Shoes can help reduce the possibility for slips and falls that often occur when moving from the locker room to the pool area, as well as when entering and exiting the water.

The cushioning and support provided by shoes assists with movements rebounding off the bottom of the pool and traveling through the water. This reduces the amount of shock and impact on your joints, especially your knees and hips. People with diabetes, arthritis, musculoskeletal disorders, and foot conditions will especially benefit from this added support. Shoes also assist with body alignment and stability during grounded movements and upper body conditioning.

Traction

Water shoes provide better traction for walking and jogging. Traveling movements and changing directions are easier to maneuver with more connection and grip to the bottom of the pool. Tiled pools can be very slippery for your feet and even plastered pools have their slick spots!

A 2006 study (*Clemens, C.A. and Cisar, C.J*) revealed that participants had faster times and higher heart rates during a 500-yard shallow water run and movement was more efficient with footwear than barefoot. We can now add performance enhancement to our list of benefits!

Not only do shoes make your workout more efficient, but the flotation and resistance added from shoes also contribute to your workout. This is excellent for vertical movements, but shoes do impede forward movement with kicking and swimming.

- **Are water shoes necessary for non-impact deep-water exercise?**

Shoes are optional in deep water. AEA Standards and Guidelines state that for deep water, shoes would not be required and may not be preferred if they hamper full range of motion at the ankle. Your decision and preference depends on your specific purpose for training. Shoes can provide extra resistance and even flotation. Some shoes are designed specifically for these purposes. Fins are built into the sides of shoes to deliberately increase your drag resistance while deep water running. Other shoes/foot wear are made of foam to provide buoyant resistance and additional flotation. These designs are beneficial for athletes looking for increased challenge and performance training. If you are conditioning for better health and activities of daily living, you can go barefoot.

- **Where do I get a good pair of water shoes?**

Some sporting goods stores carry a selection year-round, while large chain stores usually sell them during the summer season. The best way to shop and compare is with an online Internet search. The popularity of aquatic shoes is growing with several brands having distinct styles and features. Shoes range in quality and price from an inexpensive slip-on shoe to a full-fledged athletic shoe.

It is not recommended to wear street shoes in the pool. This causes the transfer of dirt and bacteria into the water. It is best to wear shoes specifically designed for exclusive use in the water. Many water shoes are designed with drainage holes in the bottom, removable inserts, and shoelace toggles or Velcro straps.

Some popular brands of aquatic footwear (slip on, traditional, resistance and buoyancy enhanced options) include the following:

- **Speedo** – www.speedousa.com/
- **Aqua Sphere** - www.aquasphereswim.com/us/
- **AquaJogger** - www.aquajogger.com/
- **Sprint Aquatics** - www.sprintaquatics.com/
- **Ryka** - www.ryka.com/ (Also available through H2O Wear <http://www.h2owear.com/> & HYDRO-FIT www.hydrofit.com/)
- **AQx Sports** - www.aqxsports.com/
- **Water Gear** – www.watergear.com/
- **Avia** - www.avia.com/
- **Land's End** - www.landsend.com/

The decision to wear or not to wear shoes in the pool is a personal one. Once you start wearing shoes to class it might be hard to go without them! Water exercise participants have expressed how their feet feel more comfortable and supported with shoes than remaining barefoot. It's time to take advantage of these added benefits.

Join the trend. Water shoes are here to stay!

Resources:

Frank, Jodi. *Water Shoes: Research Produces the Proof!* AKWA Magazine, August/September 2006.

AEA Standards and Guidelines, 2010

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