

## YOU ASKED US



### WHAT DO YOU DO WITH DUMB BELLS?

Hi Julie:

I have been teaching water fitness for nearly one year now, and it seems like I can never make everyone happy. I teach six classes a week at different facilities- they know I have my certification-but sometimes they disagree with my teaching- so I want to ask you to make certain this is correct.

My ladies wear aquatic jogging belts in the deep end, and I explain that we utilize dumbbells for extra resistance - now they're arms are at their sides and raise them up and down with elbows back while jogging in place, getting a terrific workout on their arms (deltoids) and quads and hamstrings. One lady was very sarcastic and disagreed with my teaching them this way, so she went ahead and took off her jogging belt, she says she was getting a better workout her way.

Also I tried saying politely that she's using extra strength to keep her head above the water, also she was not targeting the correct muscles. It's quite embarrassing in front of the rest of my class.

Thanks for your help on this, sincerely,  
Denise – Ontario

Dear Denise:

It is very difficult to deal with a participant who does not understand or appreciate that you are doing your best and have to deal with a total class. Therefore you have to err on the side of safety all the time. That is why most group classes have to be generic rather than specific to each individual. You teach the skills, give the participants permission to work at their own pace and at their own comfort level. If they don't wish to conform to your instructions you can only advise them what you think is best – make sure everyone in the class can hear your advice. Then if they still want to go ahead and “do their own thing” you have done your part. If they suffer an injury from their own actions you cannot be held responsible.

**I think the answer here is that you and the lady are both right AND wrong.** Here is my reasoning - maybe this will help you explain your point of view to the lady and see hers.

We are teaching aquatic fitness whereby we incorporate all components of fitness into each workout – cardio, muscle conditioning, strength, endurance, flexibility, agility, co-ordination, balance, and, the best exercise of all, posture and core training. The reason we want participants to wear a belt in deep water is to allow a separation between work and rest. If you don't use some buoyant support to keep your head above water you have to use the legs constantly to either tread water or swim to stay afloat - this does not allow the participant to target any of the abovementioned fitness components effectively.

**We need good muscle balance for an efficient workout** - we will never get good cardio without strong muscles to move the body through the water that is why we have to concentrate on strength before cardio. Major muscles come in pairs to move the joint to which they are attached - and most muscle groups have one side of the pair stronger than the other. The great thing about exercising in deep water is that it makes it easy to pinpoint the weaker side of a muscle pair when you work with either legs or arms only. As a general rule of thumb it is much easier to bicycle forward than backward if you use legs only - whereas it is easier to use the arms to power forward to travel backwards if you take the legs out of the exercise. The belt enables us to work our arms and legs independently to target specific muscle groups for strengthening as well as allowing us to use unique body positions to increase or decrease the degree of difficulty for all moves. This will help you explain why you want each participant to use a belt.

**Now - getting to the dumb bells.** The dumb bell is basically an advanced piece of equipment. They can be used successfully for upper body muscle conditioning, great abdominal work and cardio when used correctly. Unfortunately too many programs use them because they are “there” rather than because they are needed and, as a result, they are used badly – such as pushing forward and back, and side to side on top of the water,



**Dumb bells – a no-no exercise**

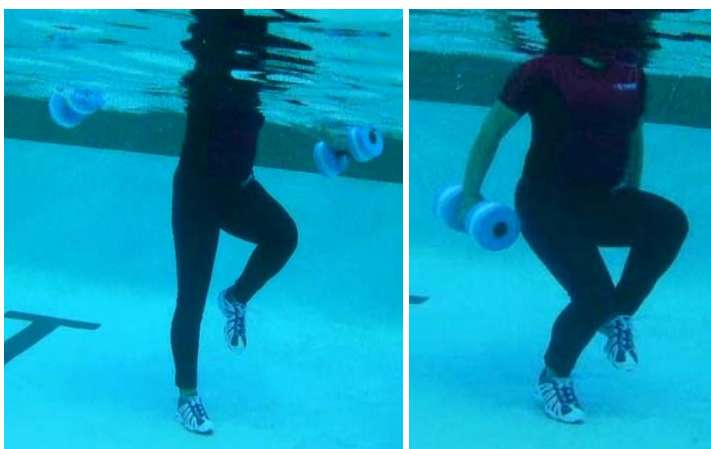
or when laying on the back on top of the water and imitating land crunches or working with them under the arm pits. These exercises allow the buoyancy to lift the shoulders and can cause shoulder pain at best and impingement at worst.

**When you bring out the dumb bells you are introducing another piece of buoyant equipment into the program.**

The "extra resistance" you are talking about is buoyant resistance i.e. resistance works against buoyancy on a downward move only. If you are using them in the hands your participants have to learn to control the upward movement and you must cue to keep the shoulders in good alignment. How you use them depends on whether you are training for specific muscle work or cardiovascular conditioning.

**Now I am going to get picky.** - What is not clear in your e-mail is: which component of fitness you are using the dumb bells for? When you say: "extra resistance" it sounds like you are targeting strengthening – for the upper body?? But your description sounds more like cardio. You need to separate the two components – see beginning comments.

The suggested position of the arms for the exercise in question – elbows back and raising them up and down describes a land move for the Medial Deltoids. However this movement would not be working them in the water because of buoyancy. To target the Medial Deltoids in deep water you have to abduct the arm laterally while powering down through the water. – This is best done in a side-lying body position and extremely difficult to control successfully using two types of buoyant equipment – i.e. belt and dumb bells. Also, bear in mind that the Medial Deltoids are the strong side of the muscle pair – you would be better targeting the antagonist muscle, the Latissimus Dorsi, which is an important stabilizer for the upper back.



**Target the Latissimus Dorsi. Start with the hands below the shoulders and pull down**

**Jogging legs:** If you are working Quads and Hamstrings you are using them as a paired unit and they will both be doing the same amount of work i.e. working hard but not really strengthening. But using a jog while targeting upper body work is a good move since jogging will keep the participants warm while they slow down to do the upper body muscle conditioning correctly.

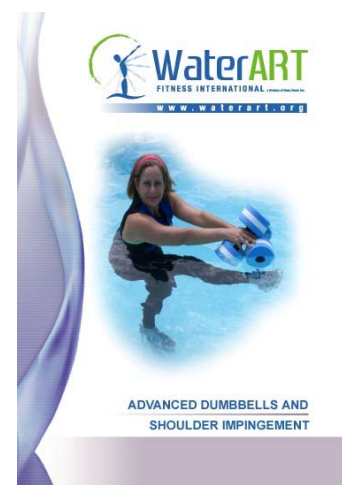
Now, let's go back to the lady who took off the belt. There is no reason why a dumb bell cannot be used for buoyant support just the same as the belt. The downside is that when hand held most people are not strong enough to keep dumb bells under control for total support during a program. It is safer if the participant keeps wearing a belt so he/she can concentrate on controlling the dumb bell (and shoulders) for the suggested exercise rather than fighting to stay afloat AND perform a specific exercise.



**A suspended ski with dumb bells**

If your lady does not want to wear her belt when using the dumb bells and she IS strong enough to work without it I would say let her go ahead. She will actually have to work harder for those specific exercises to maintain control and correct body alignment. But please point out why she should wear a belt for the rest of the program when you are not using the dumb bells to allow her to have arms free and for all the above mentioned reasons to get the most out of her workout.

**Drusilla Leitch,  
Master Trainer & Certification Director**



**For more information on the correct use of Dumb Bells see our new DVD060 - Advanced Dumbbells and Shoulder Impingement, Can be found under H<sub>2</sub>O Education**

