

ORIENTING NEWCOMERS TO VERTICAL WATER FITNESS

When a new person comes to a program most Instructors will enquire whether the newcomer is a swimmer or non-swimmer and explain the layout of the pool to show where any depth change may occur. An explanation of how to find the best water depth may be given together with the assurance that everyone should “work at their own pace” and “if it hurts don’t do it” recommendation. The newcomer will also be told that shoes and aquatic mitts should be worn to help with stability and balance. This is all very useful information but none of this teaches the actual skills that are necessary to produce efficient vertical exercise. Water is a powerful force to control, but easy to handle if just a few minutes are taken to go over a short check list of basic skills that can guarantee success.



One of the first things a newcomer will notice upon entry into the water is that buoyancy will lift their feet off the pool floor and the motion created by the other members of the class may even knock them over. Therefore, the primary reason aquatic mitts were introduced (back in 1982) was to enlarge the area of the hand to act as a stabilizing force by assisting with balance and thereby create more surface area to better balance the arms to the legs (or levers). Therefore.....

The #1 Skill we need to review prior to starting a water exercise program is sculling. Learning how to move the hand to support the body’s balance and posture is key to exercise efficacy.



The basic sculling motion is pressing the hand flat into the water and performing a “lazy eight” move (like dusting a table top). Sculling involves adding some pressure to the hands and placing the hands in a position to assist travel, balance and posture. The best position for the hands is slightly forward and to the side of the body just below hip height when stationary. (Most people wave the hands too fast and too high and this does not help the body to balance with water exercise). Sculling properly allows the shoulders to remain down in a stress free range which supports the body because the water can be felt underneath the hands. This holds the body in an upright position with the feet on the pool floor which additionally trains good posture and balance. Throughout a program a body check balance may be utilized to check balance which is another important skill to introduce to newcomers. In fact, try all the basic moves and surprise the body with a one foot body check balance and hands

sculling to aid with the stationary position. Balance checks can be introduced more dynamically by moving to create inertia - a water current- then stopping to use sculling for balance before the current subsides..

The #2 Skill we need to review is How to Assist and Resist Travel movements through the water and also how to change lever length to make the exercise easier or harder dependent on surface area and level length.

Sculling or arm movements may be used to assist travel (to make it easier) or to push against the travel (resist travel) to “work” more intensely. This is Sir Isaac Newton’s law of incorporating the principal of action-reaction. To assist travel backwards use a “fan scull” or push the arms the opposite way the body is travelling. To resist travel and make the intensity greater - use the same sculling movement but walk forwards or push into the direction of travel. Have the students feel the difference in the assistance versus the resistance arm movements. Always cue the arms to help the person assist their

travel and balance. Start with smaller or shorter arms and leg movements then increase the lever or stride length to intensify the movement. Realizing that short little marches are not as intense as long strides – is important when choosing their intensity.

Educate the person to learn how to move more intense or less intense based on their arm work and their use of assisting or resisting any movements. To assist travel forward: push the water away from the center of the body and press back (to squeeze the shoulders) with an upright breaststroke arm movement (use arms like the hinges on a door or cue to open the door with the arms pushing the arms through the water. Be sure the hand and thumbs are facing upwards or outwards so that the shoulders are in a good body position.



To resist the travel, use the same hand/arm movement and walk backwards in the direction of travel. Now feel a greater resistance.

Experiment with sideways movement (side steps) using the same arm mechanics and notice the lead arms pushes the water (resists) while the rear arm assists the travel sideways! This is certainly a unique movement as compared to how a body needs to assist land travel!

The #3 Skill we need to review is a Fall and Recovery to Vertical Body Position.

Should a new participant slip or fall in the pool it is essential that he/she is able to get their feet back on the pool floor and recover to vertical immediately and be comfortable to do so. This may take several sessions of practice and coaching and the client must feel comfortable with the instructor (that they are going to help them if they get into distress).

The motion required for this is to pull back to the center of the body to regain balance and thereby remain in a vertical body position by using their sculling skills and core strength.

Recovery to a vertical body position may be trained with a noodle for a non swimmer or by just using the arms to pull in.

For non swimmers, start the training by using a pool noodle to support the body and prevent the body from going under the water is advised. The exercise choice depends if the person can take their feet off the pool floor without assistance.



WaterART recommends that it is best to start with the “bunny hop” approach and work up to a full lay out fall and the instructor needs to be comfortable with this clientele and IN THE WATER ready to help or get assistance from a lifeguard.

The key to training falls in the water and the core required to transfer this functionality on land is to train in all directions and start smaller range of motion and speed and gradually build up to many different types of exercises to train falls. .

The #4 Skill is to Train Correct Foot and Oppositional Arm-to Leg Movements (i.e. coordination).

Walking is the most used exercise on land and too many people scuff and shuffle their feet as they move along. Good foot work and body mechanics are essential to preventing falls and the water is the easiest place to do this. All of WaterART basic movements train the heel-ball-toe action for forward movement and the toe-ball-heel action for backward movement especially walking, jumping, rocking and skiing. This will also train the participants to anchor onto the pool floor as well as learn a variety of basic moves for variety of coordination. Too many people spend all their time working on the balls of their feet (toes) thus overworking the calf muscles and preventing functional movement and gait. As a result they do not develop sufficient leg or core strength to anchor the body successfully. That is a great reason for adding lots of walking patterns at the beginning of a program, throughout a program as well as at the end of a program. Too many classes ONLY jog in place and too many people work in too deep water depth for shallow water programming. They want to “hide” and consequently they find their body floating throughout a class (which is easier than actually putting any effort into the work out).

Training the opposite arm to leg swing when walking (or any movement) is another way to prevent falling since this provides muscle memory for neuromuscular training which aids in balance and functional movement on land. An instructor should watch their participants and correct their body mechanics when they notice bad mechanics or the same arm and leg working together.



The #5 Skill is to Review all the Basic Movements at a slower pace and consequently lower intensity.

Encourage the newcomer to learn all the basic movements properly. When movements are performed purposefully and correctly in the water they learn how to function on land and improve their body. Walking can be one of the best “strengthening” workouts to prevent injuries. Marching or no bounce jog may be one of the easiest movements because of the short levers and helps people to learn to pick up their legs and move. Rocking helps with back mobility as well as helps to teach how to recover should they slip or lose their balance. Easy kick moves are excellent for stretching the low back, hamstrings and calves (with foot flexed) which is generally very tight areas for most people. Do not lift the legs too high. Be sure that they are also keeping the knees soft. Jumping moves are excellent to prepare for ankle mobility and they can be kept in a neutral or under the water working position so that there is minimal vertical stress or impact on the joints. Skiing movements teach the opposition and helps with hip mobility and stride length. Side Jax movements help with hip strength and lateral movement to strengthen the muscles of the hip abductors and outer thighs.

All the above skills and movements may be easily incorporated into any warm up and preparation of any program. These skills may be delivered in many creative and enjoyable ways. The goal of an exercise program is to teach and train people to learn to utilize their balance, improve their posture, engage their core strength, increase agility, AND of course train their muscle memory – something that is required by even the most seasoned participant. Never boring or a waste of time.



Check out the NEW DVD078 (2 DVDs) –Entry Level Programming for the Non Swimmer. This program illustrates the many ways to get a person moving on their own and comfortable with pool exercise.

