

Hydro Power

Train Hard and Stretch Deeply in the Water

BY ANGELA AMBROSE

Running 40 miles a week started to take a toll on Karen Roof's body. She suffered from chronic joint soreness and nagging foot pain from plantar fasciitis. If she wanted to continue running marathons, she had to make a change. "I felt like I couldn't run on land six days a week anymore like I used to. It took me longer to recover," says Roof.

As a personal trainer and aqua yoga instructor, she knew that working out in a pool provided a low impact environment where she could exercise at high intensity without pounding her joints, so she decided to incorporate weekly deep water jogging and aqua yoga into her training schedule. A few months later, her plantar fasciitis disappeared and she achieved her fastest race time in more than a decade.

"By running in the pool, I'm giving my body a chance to recover a little more. Water is 12 times more resistant than air, so I'm working hard to move, but with little or no impact," says the 41-year-old. Her favorite part of her aqua workout is doing yoga stretches after her long runs: "I just love the feeling of being in the water, and the buoyancy when stretching is just heavenly." Today Roof is injury-free and training for a 56-mile ultramarathon.

CROSS-TRAINING IN THE POOL REDUCES INJURIES

People of all ages, abilities and fitness levels can benefit from exercising in the pool. Water creates the ideal environment for aerobics, strength training and stretching with less risk of injury.

"The top athletes know when they're hurt they can go and cross-train in the pool, and they can stay in great shape even though they can't do

their normal techniques on land," says Lynda Huey, president of Complete PT Pool & Land Physical Therapy and author of five books on aquatic therapy. "They can get a powerful cardiovascular workout doing deep water interval training and then go to the shallow end and do things that are specific to their

sport to keep their technique fine-tuned, but without as much weight on the joints."

For the last 30 years, Huey has trained athletes in the pool to give them a competitive edge, including Olympic track and field champions Carl Lewis, Gail Devers and Florence Griffith Joyner. When pro basketball player Wilt Chamberlain had elbow, knee and hip surgery, Huey helped him rehabilitate in the pool, allowing him to get back on the court sooner.

Water training offers some unique benefits not found on land. Because water surrounds your entire body, opposing muscles are worked with every move. The natural instability of water also



forces you to engage your core muscles more and to train more efficiently.

"Water is the only environment where you can safely and effectively perform true strength training simultaneously with aerobic exercise. You can do twice as much volume of work in the water than you can on land," says Craig Stuart, owner and master instructor of HYDRO-FIT,® Inc., which specializes in aqua exercise equipment and instruction. For more advanced exercises, Stuart suggests adding webbed gloves, noodles, buoyant barbells or ankle cuffs to help increase the resistance of the water and build more strength and cardiovascular endurance.

"In most sports, some kind of trauma or repetitive stress from gravitational compression takes most athletes out," says Stuart. "The whole idea is to get in the water to perform at a superior level and not get injured."

AQUA YOGA CREATES FLOWING, MEDITATIVE PRACTICE

After a challenging water workout nothing feels more soothing and supportive than yoga in the pool. "Because we have hydrostatic pressure that hugs the whole body and we have buoyancy, it seems easier to sustain the integrity of length in a pose," says Camella Nair, creator of Aqua Kriya Yoga and author of a book by the same name.

The water can be a less intimidating place to practice yoga, especially balancing poses, hip openers and deep backbends. One legged balancing poses such as tree or dancer's pose are easier to maintain, and the buoyancy of the water helps you move deeper into the pose with more focused effort. You can also attempt poses in the water that you might be afraid to try on land. On your yoga mat, you might take a hard tumble falling out of handstand or crane pose, but if you fall out of these poses in the pool, the water gently cradles your body and slows you down, cushioning your landing.

Aqua yoga is also more accessible to those with physical limitations, including the elderly, obese and inflexible. "When they're in the water, they're fully supported. They don't feel like they're going to fall over and hurt themselves," says Nair. "The buoyancy allows more of a lift, and so what I'm tending to find is people's pelvic floors are getting a lot more toned, and they start to automatically stand up a little bit taller in the water."

Following an intense water workout with aqua yoga stretching creates the perfect yin yang ex-

Shallow vs. Deep Water

Cardio intervals, jogging, strength training and sports simulations can be performed in deep or shallow water; however, aqua yoga is best performed in chest high water. Before you dive into a water workout, consider the differences between shallow and deep water training:

Shallow Water Exercise

Water depth: Chest/armpit level

Impact on joints: 25 to 35% of your weight

Required equipment:

Optional water shoes to cushion feet.

- Use webbed gloves and buoyant barbells for increased resistance and intensity and noodles for stretching and balancing.
- Use the pool wall for stretching, added resistance and more exercise options.

Deep Water Exercise

Water depth: Deep enough to maintain your vertical length without being able to push off the floor.

Impact on joints: 0%

Required equipment:

buoyancy belt or ankle cuffs.

- Use webbed gloves or buoyant barbells for increased resistance and intensity.



perience. The flowing, meditative properties of water help create a mind-body connection and wash away stress and tension. For the ultimate savasana experience, Nair suggests ending your yoga practice by floating on your back supported by aqua noodles.