

SAINT FRANCIS SPORTS MEDICINE

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- ⊕ Water aerobic exercise: Lose weight with Aqua Aerobics
- ⊕ The 3 Stretches You Need to Do Every Day

Aqua Aerobics Makes Exercise and Weight Loss Comfortable and Fun

Many forms of exercise simply don't appeal to a significant percentage of the population as being "fun." Working up a sweat in the heat and humidity of summer, bundling up against the chill of winter, or just struggling through physical issues all conspire to keep many people away from the exercise they know they need.

Aqua aerobics fits that need perfectly.

"Aqua, or water, aerobic exercise benefits the body and the mind," says Carrie Johnson, PT, CLT, senior physical therapist at Saint Francis Healthcare System. "The buoyancy of water is much easier on your joints, and many participants appreciate the enhanced fat-burning properties that come with exercising in the water."

One of the primary reasons people take up aqua exercise is it places less stress on the body. That's especially attractive for people dealing with joint pain or weight issues, which is why Saint Francis Healthcare System makes aqua aerobics one of its featured exercise offerings.

Fitness Plus Offers Two Classes

The lap pool and rec pool in Fitness Plus, located in the Health and Wellness Center on the Saint Francis Medical Center campus, offer ideal settings for aqua aerobics classes. Low-intensity classes take place in the rec pool, while high-intensity deep water classes are held in the lap pool.

The ability to swim is not required, as participants wear aqua belts for safety and extra buoyancy. Swimwear is the only special equipment needed.

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The group setting of aqua classes adds a social component that is missing from other forms of exercise. It is easier to visit with other participants in a pool than it is while trudging along on a treadmill with earbuds in your ears. As a bonus, aqua aerobics can burn fat up to 1.5 times faster than land-based exercise.

“People are much more likely to stick with an exercise program if they’re having fun than if it’s working,” Johnson says. “The positive feedback of enhanced weight loss combined with the endorphins your body releases during exercise make aqua aerobics a highly effective alternative.”

Aqua Aerobics is Real Exercise

Aqua aerobics features a variety of simple movements such as jumping, walking, moving your arms and knee bends. The instructor guides participants through the hour-long program with an emphasis on proper form.

Preworkout stretching is just as important for aqua aerobics as it is for land-based exercise programs. Participants benefit by warming up their muscles and preparing the body to perform at a higher level, even if that level is comfortably within effort tolerances.

For more information about aqua aerobics, please call the Sports Medicine team at Saint Francis Healthcare System at 573-331-5153.

The 3 Stretches You Need to Do Every Day

With all the different ways to stretch your muscles and only so much time in the day, it’s difficult to know where to start. The problem is most people ignore stretching altogether.

“The sedentary lifestyle many people live today makes it more important than ever to carve out a few minutes and take care of your body,” says Rob Bunker, ATC, CEAS, senior athletic trainer at Saint Francis Healthcare System. “Stretching is as beneficial as eating a proper diet and drinking enough water, particularly if you’re not getting the exercise you need.”

One of the primary issues with living in the modern world is the amount of time people spend hunched over a computer, bent forward while checking their phones and slumped in their chairs watching TV. Here are three exercises designed to combat the effects of these positions.

The Lunge Stretch

This exercise helps offset the effects of sitting at a desk for prolonged periods. This position shortens and weakens the core muscles in front of your spine, called the psoas muscles, required to lift your legs.

How to do it: Put one leg in front of your torso and stretch the other out behind you in a lunge position. Put both hands on your hips and slowly pull your hips forward while keeping them square. You should feel a pull in the front part of your back leg, along with the muscles in your lower abdomen.

Breathe deeply while holding for 30 seconds, then put the other leg forward in this position and repeat.

The Hump Stretch

Notice your upper body position right now. Chances are your shoulders are slouched, your core muscles are not engaged and your back is in a hunch position looking at your computer. Many of us are in this position too long during the day. This stretch is designed to counteract the shortening effect of muscles in front of your neck and chest.

How to do it: Clasp your hands behind your lower back and slowly raise your arms until they won’t go any higher. You will feel the muscles in your chest stretch. Breathe easily for a few seconds, gently tilt your head back and release. Do this at least three times.

The Spinal Tap Stretch

There’s a reason you feel your best in the morning. Assuming you’ve had sufficient rest (that’s a whole other issue), your body and mind spend the night recovering from the previous day. The tissue between the disks in your spine regain their proper spacing, and you walk a little taller than you will later in the day.

How to do it: Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent. Fold your upper body down toward your legs, and then slowly straighten your legs. Let your arms drop toward the floor. Slowly swing your arms and head back and forth for 30-60 seconds, and then slowly roll up your spine, vertebrae by vertebrae.

This stretch also will engage your core and lower back muscles as you gradually stand upright again. Repeat this stretch at least one more time.

For more information about stretching, please call the Sports Medicine team at Saint Francis Medical Center at 573-331-5153.