

# wild about water running

DERIVED FROM ELITE ATHLETES' TRAINING REQUIREMENTS, YET SUITABLE AND SAFE FOR ALL, CLIENTS ARE GOING WILD FOR WATER RUNNING

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Aquafitness in general in the UK usually comes way down the list in terms of recognition and being valued for what it can achieve. It tends to sit uncomfortably between "swimming" and land aerobics and still has the reputation for being only suitable for the "unfit". Usually the oldest (or smallest!) music system is used on poolside because "it will do for aqua". Numbers are usually too high in the peak-time classes, leaving little room for participants to move but obviously bringing in a good income for the centre concerned. Ring any bells?

Water running is something totally unique and is something that eventually could shift the balance of attitudes towards aquafitness to a much more positive one.

Deep water is utilised efficiently and ideally water running is conducted with a flotation belt and with the participant tethered to a lane rope with an appropriate spacing. Although this is ideal, it can include chest-depth running and can indeed be performed without the use of tethers and lane ropes.

*"It can be exhilarating to be suspended in deep-water running with great technique yet remaining relaxed and in control – pure joy for the mind, body and spirit – essential for human well-being"*

## so what about the runners and athletes?

- The fact is that 66% of runners will experience a running-related injury over the next 12 months. Running on land in excess of 56km per week increases the chance of injury by more than 55%.
- Running is an instinctive action and necessary for most sports, so being “off the road” is a major training and performance issue.
- Fitness can be improved and maintained without the risk of repetitive impact by water running.

Correction of running technique can also be assisted, making the “mind/muscle” connection and allowing actions to flow and become relaxed.

- If one thinks about watching the slow motion of elite athletes on replay winning their events, it is interesting to see how fluid they are. This is frequently noted by those commentating on the event. The comparison then between action in the water and action on land is not so different!
- Runners restricted to a deep-water running regime for up to eight weeks can maintain or even improve their aerobic fitness.
- Posture can often be improved by suspension in deep water and a focus on “power posture” helps the participant to improve performance and lessen injury risks.
- We as trainers should be bold and prepared to engage the mind of the participant by facilitating visualisation and allowing their minds to take their own journey during the class.
- This engagement of the mind is crucial to success for any participant – we really have to get a grip and understand that participants do not “leave their brain in the car park”.

Even those totally resistant to new ideas and change will find it is difficult to ignore the likes of Dame Kelly Holmes and Paula Radcliffe (*The Independent*, 2008) using water running/aquajogging as part of their training programmes – such athletes do not have the time to waste on an activity that does not deliver results!

Everyone from athletes to post-rehabilitation clients can achieve the results they desire in this class. The pain relief experienced for those with even serious joint issues is phenomenal, offering increased mobility and enjoyment for those trapped in chronic lower back pain, for example.

The reduction of swelling is due to the effect of hydrostatic pressure aiding the healing process. Even the British Army is dabbling with the concept for rehabilitating their soldiers following injury and it was surprised at what a challenge deep-water running presented.

The mind/muscle focus enables the participant to relax and develop a new level of awareness of how they can control their own workout within a group fitness format.

It can be exhilarating to be suspended in deep-water running with great technique yet remaining relaxed and in control – pure joy for the mind, body and spirit – essential for human well-being.

As fitness professionals we need to have the knowledge and skills to pass on the credibility level with runners as well as the unfit participant – allowing for inclusion.

There is something quite magical about having a very mixed ability group where everyone accepts and supports each other and everyone gets the “buzz”. We need to fully appreciate how to manipulate the water most effectively without equipment, otherwise we ourselves cannot progress as instructors, and we must learn to throw away the “props” of noodles, mitts etc. and go back to basics and go on a voyage of exploration and discovery.

Elite athletes do indeed use specialised equipment to intensify their workout but still need to understand how to manipulate the water and exhibit correct technique in order to maximise potential.

The training programme can be adapted to suit the participant by scheduling:

- Running economy
- Lactate threshold
- Maximum oxygen consumption ( $VO_2$ max)
- There is also no reason to exclude such training methods as fartlek from the workout, adding intensity and variety for all. **fp**

### resources

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Ward L, Participant research, 2008.



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