

CALA

Canadian Aquafitness Leaders Alliance Inc.
Handout



Water Walking for Arthritis Patients: Physical Conditioning with Reduced Strain on Your Joints

Walking is an easy, fun way to condition your heart and lungs and strengthen your muscles. Exercising in well-heated water feels great and reduces the strain on your joints. Walking in water is a hybrid exercise suited to all fitness levels including people with arthritis.

If you have arthritis, there are several advantages to going for a walk in the pool. The buoyancy of the water supports your weight, reducing the stress on your weight-bearing joints. Meanwhile, the resistance of the water as you push your way through gives your muscles a workout.

This also gives you an opportunity to slow down and concentrate on moving through the full range of motion.



Water walking in waist- to chest-deep water provides different balance challenges. You can walk forward, backward, or sideways. You can use varying speeds and long or short steps. Since warm water relaxes the muscles and eases joint stiffness for people with arthritis, a warm water pool is best. For any kind of water exercise for arthritis, a water temperature of 83°F to 88°F, is comfortably warm, but not hot.



Water walking is an aerobic activity. This means that it raises your heart rate and breathing and keeps them elevated for an extended period. Like any other aerobic exercise, start each session by warming up and ending with a slow-down. To warm up, do some simple stretches. Repeat these stretches in your slow-down. To give all your muscles an equal workout, walk the same number of laps forward and backward. Also, give each leg a turn at leading.



Here are some more tips on water walking for fun and fitness:





- Use your whole foot. To get a full-leg workout, be sure to step heel to toe when walking forward, or toe to heel when walking backward.
- Walk with a friend. In a pool, you can walk with a partner side by side or facing each other. Of course, joining a class is a great way to find pool friends.
- Move at your own pace within your own range of motion and within your own limitations. Remember, a class is not a competition. Start out slow, and build up the intensity gradually. If you ever start to feel light-headed or nauseated, get out of the water immediately and drink some water. You may be dehydrated.



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- Find a good instructor. A qualified CALA Aquafit Instructor can show you how to make the most of your water walks while keeping them safe.

Here's How:

-  Starting Position: Stand with your abdominal muscles firm, tailbone pointed toward the floor, buttocks tucked somewhat to brace your spine in position, shoulders back, and chest lifted (neutral position).
-  Push relatively straight arms forward and back at your sides as you walk. Turn your hands each time so that the palms press against the water.
-  Use your arms in opposition to your legs: When you step forward with your right leg, bring your left arm forward, and vice versa.
-  Walk as you would on land, placing your heel down first. Keep your back straight and stomach muscles taut. Lifting your knees higher will increase the intensity of the exercise.




Variations 1: Walk forward and backward with short steps, long steps, average steps, or step kicks.

Variations 2: Move in a pattern of a circle or square.

-  When you are ready to increase intensity, stride by taking very large, controlled steps or bound by pushing off with your back foot to bounce up off the pool floor between strides.



Tips:

-  Drink plenty of fluid: without it, you are likely to become dehydrated even though you're surrounded by water and remember your sunscreen!
-  Brisk water walking is more strenuous than it looks and can provide an excellent aerobic workout, burning 300 to 500 calories per hour.
-  Drink plenty of fluid: without it, dehydrated sets in even though water surrounds you. And remember your sunscreen if you are in an outdoor pool or water source