

HOT TUB FITNESS

By Rick McAvoy, PT, DPT, CSCS

AS A PHYSICAL THERAPIST, MOST OF MY cases involve aquatic therapy — and my clients really get relief from the warm-water exercise of a hot tub. Most people know hot tubs primarily for their ability to help with relaxation and stress management, but they don't realize that you *can* perform aquatic exercises in a hot tub. By adjusting some of my physical therapy exercises, I was able to give my clients some modified regimens that we normally would do in a therapeutic pool, but altered slightly for anyone to perform in a hot tub.

Exercises in a hot tub have several benefits over their land counterparts. The warm water helps you relax and promotes tissue stretching; because skin temperature is 92 degrees, stick

with a neutral water temperature of 92 – 94 degrees F, which usually feels comfortable without causing overheating. Warm water also helps “unload” the body of weight resistance. Submerged up to your chest, you'll only weigh about 30 percent of your body weight; up to your neck, you'll only weigh about 10 percent. In addition, hot tub jets can help with exercises by providing more turbulence, so you'll get more resistance to movement and help strengthen muscles.

A few guidelines for exercising in hot tubs: First and foremost, remember that hot tub exercises are still exercises — so always check with your doctor before starting a program. Make sure you stay hydrated while exercising,

Shoulder Stretch



Reach behind back with one arm. Gently grasp side of head, tilting head away so that a stretch is felt in upper shoulder area. Hold for approximately 15 – 30 seconds, and repeat with other arm. Do 3 sets.

Benefit: This exercise increases flexibility of the upper shoulder musculature. These muscles tend to tighten throughout the day, which can contribute to poor posture, increase stress in the neck area, and contribute to headaches.

Hint: Make sure that you maintain proper posture and do not let your shoulder rise. Stretch should be gentle and not too forceful.

Hamstring Stretch



In a sitting position, reach down along one leg until a comfortable stretch is felt in back of the thigh. Keep knee straight; hold position. Release and repeat with alternate leg. Hold for 15 – 30 seconds, doing 3 – 5 repetitions each leg.

Benefit: This exercise improves hamstring flexibility. Most people tend to have hamstring tightness, which can contribute to irregular forces on the lower back, creating risk for injury.

Hint: Make sure your spine remains straight during the exercise. Just lean your chin forward and feel a stretch in the back of the leg.

Ball Chopping

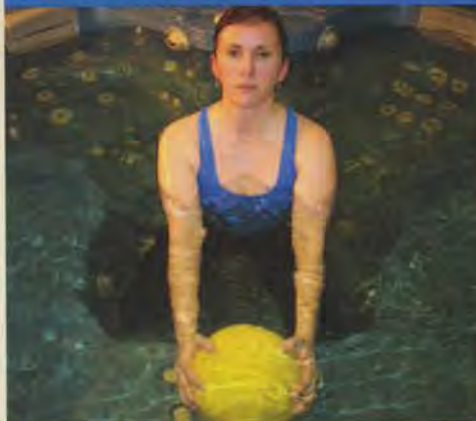


Sitting or squatting, hold ball in both hands toward one shoulder; bring ball into water towards opposite knee, twisting torso. Return to start position. Repeat 10 – 15 times on each side, doing 3 sets.

Benefit: This is a total body exercise that emphasizes the core muscles, the mid-section muscles that are the foundation for all movement. With a strong core, your arm and leg muscles will work more efficiently and reduce your chance of injury.

Hint: Tense your abdominals as if you are putting on a tight pair of pants while you perform this exercise. This will reduce improper forces on your lower back.

Trunk Rotation with Ball



Kneel in spa, holding on to ball. Contract the abdominal muscles while rotating trunk to one side. Repeat to other side, doing 3 sets of 10 – 15 reps on each side.

Benefit: Most injuries in the body occur when we perform twisting motions. By emphasizing rotary motions during exercise, they will improve function and reduce risk of injury.

Hint: Make sure you emphasize your abdominal muscles during this exercise. Tense your abdominals like you are putting on a tight pair of pants while you perform this exercise. This will reduce improper forces on your lower back.

Bicycling



Sitting on a spa bench, bend knees upward and move legs toward you, mimicking a bicycling motion. Start by going 3 – 5 minutes, and work your way toward doing it for 20 minutes.

Benefit: This exercise will help with overall cardiovascular improvement and strengthen leg muscles.

Hint: Make sure your abdominals are tense during this exercise. You can also make this exercise more challenging by performing it as an interval. This means bicycling for 3 minutes at a steady pace, then increasing the pace for 1 minute, and returning to steady pace. Be sure to stay hydrated.

and keep the water at that neutral temperature.

These exercises are a great introduction to hot tub exercise. They improve flexibility of the spine and extremity muscles, promote strengthening and stabilization of the joints, and contribute to overall fitness. More exercises can be found in my book, *Aqua-Gym: A Spa Owner's Guide to Aquatic Exercise*. Start your

journey toward fitness right at home, and maximize the use of that hot tub! 🌊

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Before beginning this or any other new exercise program, always check with your physician. If given the go-ahead, start with short workouts to familiarize yourself with the training, then gradually add time until you can walk at a moderate intensity — with an elevated breathing rate — for at least 30 minutes, not including your warm-up or cool-down stretches. When water-walking or engaging in other pool exercise regimens, consider wearing aqua shoes, which add cushioning and provide traction, giving you a better workout.