

# AQUATIC EXERCISE



Multiple Sclerosis Society  
of SA & NT

An aquatic exercise program can have many benefits for people with MS. The warmth of the pool can help to relax tight muscles and the water buoyancy can make exercise much easier for people who have muscle weakness.

Many people feel more confident exercising in water than on land because the water helps to maintain balance.

Physiotherapists can provide an aquatic exercise program that is tailored to meet specific needs and physical abilities.

You can choose from a variety of aquatic exercise programs, the Society's Keep Active Program, or open swim sessions at a pool.

## Potential benefits of an aquatic exercise program

- Improve muscle strength
- Improve flexibility
- Improve gait and mobility
- Improve fitness and energy levels
- Reduce fatigue
- Improve balance
- Relieve pain

- Improve mood, ease depression and increase self-esteem.
- Reduce swelling in the limbs
- Relaxation and reduce stress
- Increased sense of wellbeing
- Socialisation and fun

## Guidelines for participating in an aquatic exercise program

1. Always get medical clearance from your doctor to ensure that it is safe for you to exercise in a pool. Some people have health conditions that could be aggravated by the heat of the water or the pressure of the water on the body. It is important to inform your physiotherapist or instructor about all medical and physical conditions you have – even things that you don't think are important.
2. Choose a pool that is heated to a comfortable temperature, usually between 32 to 35 degrees Celsius. If you are heat sensitive you may prefer a cooler pool. Some indoor pool

- areas are stuffy and humid due to poor ventilation so consider both water and room temperatures.
3. Limit your time in the water to 30-40 minutes in order to avoid becoming overheated. Your core body temperature can become slightly elevated when in warm water and this can cause new signs and symptoms to appear or old symptoms to worsen temporarily. This is related to the slowing of nerve conduction with increased temperature. Temporary changes should resolve within 24 hours. Always advise your physiotherapist or instructor if these symptom changes persist.
  4. Ensure that you drink before and after exercising in the pool to avoid becoming dehydrated. The pressure of the water causes your body to eliminate water faster than normal so it is important to replace fluids during or immediately after exercise and to avoid long sessions in the pool.
  5. Choose an exercise class or program that suits your current ability. You may need to get advice from your physiotherapist.
  6. As a general safety precaution you should always have at least one other person with you at the pool who is a good swimmer. Depending on your level of ability you may need assistance from another person when in the water.
  7. During an exacerbation or period of illness you should avoid activities that increase your body temperature. Consider taking a break from your exercise program or talk to your instructor about how you can modify the program until you recover. You may need to be reassessed at the end of your exacerbation so that your program can be modified to suit your current ability and fitness level.
  8. If you use a catheter you may be able to participate in aquatic exercise by using a spigot to block the catheter temporarily. Please contact the Society's physiotherapists for information about catheter management for aquatic exercise.

## Further Information

If you have any questions or require further information about aquatic exercise please contact your GP or health professional at the MS Society. Additionally if you would like to discuss personalised exercise program please contact a health professional at the MS Society.

**MS Society of SA and NT – [INFO10 CS MS Keep Active Program](#)**

## References

Modified from MS Australia ACT/NSW/VIC - Aquatic Exercise Guidelines for People with MS.

### **National MS Society (USA)**

You can exercise in water <http://nationalmssociety.org/living-with-multiple-sclerosis/you-can/exercise-in-water/index.aspx>

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MS House, 110 Reservoir Road, MODBURY SA 5092

Phone: (08) 8396 0044

Fax: (08) 8396 0184

Toll Free: 1800 812 311

Email [ms@ms.asn.au](mailto:ms@ms.asn.au)

Website [www.ms.asn.au](http://www.ms.asn.au)