

Daniel Fulham O'Neill, M.D., Ed.D, F.A.A.O.S.

Board Certified Orthopaedic Surgeon & Sports Psychologist

12 Yeaton Road, Suite C4 Box #12 Plymouth, NH 03264
Tel: 603 536 2270 Fax: 603 536 2277

TESTING THE WATERS

The Ultimate Soft Workout

Despite the fact that land is where we spend the majority of our lives, our existence began in an aquatic environment and the physical and mental benefits of that environment remain very real. We northern knee surgeons are jealous of our brethren in the south where pools and aquatic classes for rehab are more widely available. Water exercise is not an imperative, but it certainly feels good.

When a person attempts most weight room exercises, the muscle is not actually working through a full range of motion. I call water exercises "*isophysiological*" since they present your muscles with uniform resistance through the entire arc of motion. In water you can strengthen muscles with minimal risk of tearing or injury. Strengthening through the full range of motion also ensures that flexibility is not sacrificed for strength improvement. The relaxation effect of water, combined with the decrease in gravity, allows opposing muscle groups to relax and thereby gain flexibility.

To enhance your water training program, get some type of flotation device such as a vest, foam noodle, belt, or barbells, as they will allow you to perform certain exercises more efficiently. This equipment, available at many sporting goods stores, will be a worthwhile investment since after rehabilitating your knee, you (or the kids) can continue to use it for years to come. Soft workouts such as water sessions are a terrific way to burn calories and keep fit without constantly beating up your joints.

The following are five basic water exercises followed by workout charts according to your recovery level. Try doing the exercises for a set number of minutes rather than number of repetitions. This is a good way to avoid rushing any motion. Concentrate on practicing each motion deliberately and let yourself be a kid!

Water Exercise 1: Deep-Water Walking & Jogging Forward/Backward

Purpose: Ideally, doctors would have everyone walking and jogging in the water before attempting these activities on land. This way you practice these basic movement patterns in a safe, forgiving environment. Not always practical, but certainly ideal.

Starting Position: Standing vertical in deep water with a flotation device.

Action: Start with some easy "walking" both forward *and backward*. The deep water eliminates gravity, and your knee loves it. Once you feel you are water-walking smoothly in the deep end, shift into an area with neck-deep water. Proceed to the shallower areas as you get stronger. Pretend you are in finishing school, with a tall, upright position. Glide! In addition to countering the effects of gravity, water provides resistance for muscle strengthening. Once you're walking well in the pool, head back to the deep end and start jogging. Before you know it, you'll be running up a mountain!

Note: Do not forget to do everything forward and backwards, starting with slow, deliberate motions. The variations of the walking/running theme are endless, so feel free to make up games for yourself, such as interval "sprints" (speed changes).



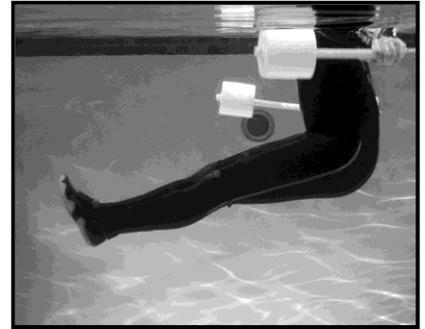
Water Exercise 2: Leg lifts

Purpose: This is a great core-strengthening exercise and again, there are endless variations.

Starting position: Using your flotation device, stand upright in deep water.

Action: Maintaining an upright posture, raise your legs as high as possible to the "L" position. Feel the strength in your back and abdomen.

Note: The water is a great place to work on core exercises since the buoyancy is constantly pushing you to the surface and challenging your position.



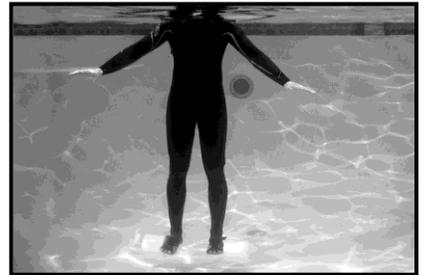
Water Exercise 3: Flutter Board or Barbell Squats

Purpose: Balance and motion

Starting position: Stand with two feet on a heavy flutter board or barbell in deep water.

Action: Allow the board to rise while flexing your knees slowly. Then, press the board toward the pool bottom.

Note: Change speeds to increase the challenge.



Water Exercise 4: Skiing

Purpose: A fun, dynamic exercise to work on lateral motion, speed and quickness.

Starting Position: Using your flotation device, stand upright in deep water.

Action: Bring both knees up toward the chest and push them down at a 45-degree angle to the right; then bring the knees back to the chest and push them down 45 degrees to the left. Think moguls!

Note: Arthroscopy patients can move to chest-deep water, pushing off the pool floor, as soon as they feel good. ACL and TKR patients should probably wait until 6 weeks post-op.



Water Exercise 5: Ladder Squats

Purpose: To improve knee range of motion

Starting position: Stand on the bottom rung of the pool ladder or stairs and hold the hand bar without using a flotation device.

Action: Squat down into the water to stretch and work on ROM at the knee.

Note: The water takes the weight off so you can safely and comfortably squat lower than on land.



SAMPLE WATER WORKOUT

LEVEL A:

PURPOSE	Flexibility, balance, and feeling better in general	
AQUATIC	Activity Deep-Water Walk Leg lifts Barbell squats Deep-Water Walk Ladder Squats	Time 5-10 min 1 min 2 min 5 min 2 min Total = 15-20 minutes
COMMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used to promote greater range of motion after the wounds are closed and dry. • These could be done 2 times a day if you have easy access to a pool. • Go slow and steady – <i>deliberate practice!</i> • Excellent session for working out stiffness in the morning or at the end of the day. 	

LEVEL B:

PURPOSE	Light strength, endurance, and speed	
AQUATIC	Activity Forward Jogging Leg lifts Backward Jogging Skiing Barbell squats Forward Jogging Ladder Squats	Time 5 min 1 min 5 min 2 min 1 min 5 min 1 min Total = 20 minutes
COMMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin changing the speed of your movements in the water (e.g. 1 min. slow, 1 min. fast, 1 min. slow, etc.). • You can move from one exercise to the next without rest to get a bigger aerobic workout. • Always finish with a stretching session. 	

LEVEL C:

PURPOSE	Strength, endurance, and fun training	
AQUATIC	Activity Forward Jogging Forward Running Backward Jogging Backward Running Swim 2-4 pool lengths Forward Jogging Forward Running Forward Jogging	Time 5 min 5 min 5 min 2 min 3 min 5 min 5 min Total = 30 minutes upright plus swim
COMMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Backward running is really tough. Do it for 2 minutes at a slightly higher speed than a jog. • Use a crawl, side, or backstroke on your swim. Feel the leg motion at your <u>hips</u>, not your knees! • Running is not sprinting. You cannot “sprint” for 5 minute intervals, but you could throw in some 15 second sprints along the way. 	