

BY NANCY CHAMBERLAYNE, MED

Come on in, the water's fine!

For years, after my 1987 diagnosis of MS, I dreamed of jogging. The stark reality of minimal leg strength, poor leg coordination, and unstable balance made jogging a distant memory. I was resigned to going for short strolls with my cane—and later, a walker.

But in 1998 I discovered deep water jogging. Like most people with MS, I experience increased mobility in cool water (80–84 degrees F). The body is composed mostly of water and is buoyant, which means less energy is expended in the pool, allowing you to move freely. Jogging, aerobics, stretching, and lap swimming are all possible.

I was thrilled when my physical

therapist confirmed that deep water jogging was the right therapy for me. I wear a flotation belt around my waist enabling me to jog in the deep end of the pool. This belt keeps me afloat so I can concentrate on the movement of my body.

During the first few laps of deep

water jogging my left leg hangs limp. Eventually, the left knee bends like the right knee and I feel like I am really jogging.

“If you are interested in aqua-exercising, check with your National MS Society Chapter, community pool, and YM-YWCA for aquatic programs designed for people with disabilities,” said Miranda Mirsec, director



Nancy Chamberlayne
with her flotation belt.

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of Health and Wellness for the Southern California Chapter of the National MS Society. A clinical exercise specialist, recreation therapist, or physical therapist can assess your physical status and, in consultation with an aquatic instructor, design a program to meet your individual needs or direct you to a specific aquatic-exercise program.

“It is vital to set realistic and attainable goals when aqua-exercising,” my therapist emphasizes. If the exercise feels uncomfortable, stop and speak to an expert. It is also important to let your primary care physician know that you are considering an aqua-exercise program.

Stretching in the water, holding onto the side of the pool allows for stability and safety. Mirsec stresses that we should stretch slowly, conservatively, and rhythmically to avoid possible muscle spasms. The resistance of the water can be used as a tool for stretching.

Deep water jogging has increased my physical stamina, enabling me to stand erect longer and walk further with the use of my walker. I have more energy and sleep solidly. The stress in my life is reduced. I encourage you to make your own splash.

Resources

See www.nationalmssociety.org/youcan_WaterExercise.asp for more on how water works for people with MS.

Aquatic Exercise Association, P.O. Box 1609, Nokomis, FL 34274; 888-AEA-WAVE; www.aeawave.com. Offers referrals to certified instructors.

Aquatic Therapy & Rehab Institute, Inc., 13297 Temple Blvd. West Palm Beach, FL 33412; 866-462-2874; www.atri.org. Offers referrals to certified instructors.

Kiefer Sports Group, 1700 Kiefer Drive, Zion, IL 60099; 800-323-4071; www.kiefer.com. Equipment and apparel for aquatic therapists, water fitness instructors, and aquatic exercise enthusiasts.

Sprint Rothhammer, P.O. Box 3840, San Luis Obispo, CA 93403; 800-235-2156; www.sprintaquatics.com. Sprint offers aquatic equipment to people around the world.

Swimmers Guide; www.swimmersguide.com.

United States Water Fitness Association, Inc., P.O. Box 243279, Boynton Beach, FL 33424; 561-732-9908; www.uswfa.com. Certifications, general public and professional education, publications and videos.

YMCA, 101 North Wacker Drive, Chicago, IL 60606; 800-872-9622; www.ymca.net. Resource and facility directory for community programming nationwide.

YWCA, 1015 18th Street, NW, Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20036; 202-476-0801; www.ywca.org. Resource and facility directory for community programming nationwide. ■

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