



Stroud Region Open Space & Recreation

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One in a series of educational essays on engaging the benefits of local greenways, parks and recreation systems.

Fit, Fun and Feeling Good: The Benefits of Aquatic Exercise

by Beth Dwyer, M.Ed

“Swimming makes me feel good mentally, physically and emotionally,” declares Teri Baustien, a Stroudsburg resident who has included swimming as part of her overall exercise plan for more than eight consecutive years. “I can’t explain the physiology involved—I just know how I feel!” East Stroudsburg resident Bill Reese adds, “I like the idea of swimming for it allows me to use all the muscles of my body and enhances the wellness of my body and mind.” Fellow resident Gino Sten agrees: “Swimming improves focus, endurance and mindful thought.”

Swimming is only one form of aquatic (water) exercise offering bountiful benefits—and is not just a summer activity. In fact, given access to a pool, swimmers often stay with their exercise routine all year round compared to other forms of exercise. According to Jeff Walters, a Stroudsburg School District principal and a former professional tennis player, “Swimming helps me start the day in a proper manner. This exercise works most every area of the heart, body and mind. I have exercised most of my life and swimming ranks in the top with all forms of lifetime sports.”

Walters’ thoughts are reinforced by many books and research articles regarding the physiological benefits of swimming and other aquatic exercising that improve bodily functions. Aquatic workouts aid cardiorespiratory health by increasing the heart rate to appropriate levels and improving the stroke

volume of the heart (how much blood is pumped with each beat), thus strengthening the heart. Swimming and other forms of aquatic exercise also improve muscular strength and endurance and the range of motion in the joints. According to ESU professor Dr. Gregory B. Dwyer, "The pattern of muscle action and joint usage in the water can be less stressful to the body. The buoyancy of the water is much more supportive to the joints compared with other forms of pounding exercise such as jogging."

The physical properties of water, including weight, density, hydrostatic pressure, buoyancy and specific gravity, combine to create an exciting workout medium. Water workouts are unlike any aerobic exercise on land: The water exerts uniform pressure from all sides and its buoyancy creates a feeling of weightlessness. For this reason, aquatic exercise is often recommended for individuals suffering from arthritis or those recovering from injuries and surgeries related to joints. This was the case for local Health and PE teacher Gerry Kancel, a competitive athlete all his life. He turned first to walking and now to swimming after partially tearing the left ACL in his knee. He asserts, "I can swim and swim and not get sore."

Aquatic exercise is proven to have psychological benefits as well, such as improved sense of control, self image and feelings of self worth. Many young people who learn to swim demonstrate increased self-confidence not only in swimming abilities but in other related activities such as learning in school and developing leadership abilities.

Social opportunities abound within the confines of aquatic exercise as well. Participating in learn-to-swim programs often affords children the opportunity to meet and make new friends. Adults enjoying Aquasize classes often socialize during the workout. With their heads kept above the water, they have the opportunity to talk to each other, listen to music and move to the beat of the song. And open swim times at local indoor pools afford families big and small a wonderful opportunity to recreate, have fun and spend time playing in the water together.

Whether you have the skills to swim horizontally or the need to have your feet on the bottom of the pool, think about including aquatic activity into your daily life. Local public access to indoor pools in the wintertime includes those offered by the Pocono Family YMCA, East Stroudsburg University, and the Stroud Region Open Space and Recreation Commission.

Beth Dwyer is a former Physical Education teacher and the Recreation Director of the Stroud Region Open Space and Recreation Commission. She has taught swimming classes for all ages for many years.

The Stroud Region Open Space and Recreation Commission provides essential public services of regional economic stimulation, environmental stewardship, and social stability through healthful recreational and cultural programming and responsible stewardship of parks and open space.

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