

IN OVER YOUR HEAD

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Aquafitness classes often attract participants with varied aquatic backgrounds including non-swimmers and/or weak swimmers. The aquafitness instructor must identify participants who are weak or non-swimmers in order to provide a safe and effective class.

It is important for the instructor to inform the lifeguard(s) on duty of the weak and/or non-swimmers in the class. Whenever possible, these participants should be positioned in the shallowest water, close to the edge of the pool during their aquafitness workout. It is recommended that the instructor have an "assist" device such as a flutter board, aquabelt or noodle close to them in case there is a need to perform a rescue.

Recognition of participants that require assistance is essential. According to the Canadian Lifesaving Manual, produced by the Royal Lifesaving Society of Canada, non-swimmers are easily identified by the following signs:

- a) not calling for help;
- b) not using legs for propulsion;
- c) fear on face;
- d) appearing to be playing in the water due to struggling arm movement;
- e) not being able to control reaction to struggle; and
- f) not being visible because they are submerged.

The second type of participant who may run into trouble in deep water may be the weak or tired swimmer. When in trouble, in water, the reactions of these people include:

- a) approaching vertical body position;
- b) calling for help;
- c) facing a point considered "safe" such as the nearest pool edge or shallow end; and
- d) distress or fear on face.

The aquafitness instructor should be aware of the various rungs of the "ladder approach" rescue. The "ladder approach" begins with the lowest risk and continues to the highest risk.

Before attempting any rescue, the instructor should call to the lifeguard for help and ensure the rest of the class is safe at the side of the pool. The instructor should not leave the class unattended.

The first rung of the "ladder approach" is a "talk rescue". This can be done from the deck. The

instructor will encourage the participant to roll over on to their back and kick to shallower water or to the edge of the pool (this point to be determined by the instructor). The "talk rescue" is effective with weak or tired swimmers since they are aware of how to kick and provide propulsion and how to assume a horizontal position in the water.

The second rung is the "throw rescue". This can be performed from the deck with a flutter board, belt or noodle nearby. The instructor would throw the assist in front of the participant or to the side of the participant and tell them to grab on to the assist and kick their legs to the nearest safe area. Once again, follow-up from the lifeguard is essential.

The third rung of the "ladder approach" is the "reach rescue". The aquafitness instructor can successfully assist the participant by using their arm or reaching further by using an assist, and extending their arm to reach out to the participant; tell the participant to grab on to their hand or the assist; then safely pull the participant to the side of the pool. In this rescue, the instructor should lie down at a 45 degree angle to the pool's edge to avoid being pulled in by the participant.

The "throw" or "reach rescue" or a combination of the two are the most effective for a non-swimmer rescue.

At no time should an aquafitness instructor enter the water to assist a panicky participant. People who are in trouble in water will want to climb on to anything, including their rescuer. This could result in a double drowning.

The lifeguard should be notified immediately for any follow-up (i.e. aspiration of water to prevent secondary drowning). Secondary drowning can occur up to 72 hours after aspiration, therefore, follow-up is essential.

Identifying the comfort level of the aquafitness class participants will help the instructor know how to react when weak or non-swimmers get into trouble in the water. Creating a safe environment by being both aware and prepared will ensure an enjoyable class experience for all.

