

Instructors: Save Thyself

printed in the CALA Wavelink Newsletter



I might be biased, but I strongly believe that CALA certified aquafitness professionals offer the best in leadership. Participants love being the focus of our attention: they respond with enthusiasm and delight when they are educated about what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how to best achieve results. We as leaders have to meet the highest standard in the industry in order to call ourselves 'CALA Certified. "'

"Yes, yes," you are saying, "so what's your point?"

I am writing this because I want you to be a great aquafitness leader, well into your dotage. I want to see aged, happy, healthy aquafitness leaders motivating participants for years to come. At the present time, I feel that acute injuries, repetitive strain, and burnout are taking their toll. Many leaders express concern over working long, hard hours in a hot, chlorine-filled, and humid environment. These are real issues that need to be addressed.

Our participants enjoy all the benefits the water has to offer while we, the leaders on deck, work in a potentially hazardous environment. The members of our classes have their joints cushioned by buoyancy, their muscle balance ensured by aquatic resistance and their bodies cooled by temperate pool waters. We constantly remind our participants to focus on their own well-being.

Hydration and Blood Pooling

Make your own safety a priority with every class you teach. Drink water while you teach, and be sure you are well-hydrated before you come to class. While we do not have hydrostatic pressure pushing our kidneys into overdrive, we also do not have that gentle force increasing venous return to our core. We tend to work vigorously for a while, then stand, cue and motivate with the upper body. During this time, blood from the leg muscles is not being assisted back to the heart by leg movement and will 'pool' in the legs and feet. Gentle movement of your legs will assist your venous return. When you are 'marking' the movements rather than moving vigorously, be sure to do some leg movement to assist blood flow back to your upper body. Blood is shunted to our skin in a fruitless attempt to assist cooling. This compromises blood flow to our working muscles, our heart, and our brains (which may explain why the best-planned routines sometimes can't be remembered on deck)! Hydration and the gentle movement mentioned above will help maintain blood volume and will assist venous return.

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Impact

Impact on deck **MUST** be cushioned by an Aqua Safety Deck Mat, which can be purchased through CALA. (Take time to read the Aqua Mat handout) Even with this useful tool, our joints receive a great deal of pounding if we repetitively model jumping jacks, skis, or other movements that require both feet to leave the floor. You should mark ('fake') airborne movements whenever possible. You can also use your arms to mimic leg moves. Any vigorous movement demonstrations **MUST** be done on the mat. Pool ladders and solid deck chairs can assist the instructor to do impact-free demonstrations.

Alignment

When demonstrating bobs, jumping jacks, wide hamstring jogormarch, wide tucks or squats, instructors often have the knee joint at an angle that places unhealthy forces on the medial knee ligaments. (A plumb-line dropped from the middle of the patella falls inside the feet, rather than in line with the middle of the foot). Ensure that your alignment is 'joint friendly'. Be sure that the knees are in line with the middle toe when bending or absorbing impact. This may require external rotation of the hip joint and/or narrower foot placement 'jogormarch' we do! Add a number of tucks, cross over jogormarch and sartorius jogormarch and the strain on the hip flexors and low back becomes enormous. Low back pain is a common complaint among instructors. Overuse of hip flexors is the most likely culprit. Do your own water workouts to achieve the same muscle balance benefits as your class and to remember how it feels to move in water.

Balance

Muscle balance happens naturally in the water, where every action is resisted. On land, we work only against gravity. Our hip flexors work **BOTH** directions with every 'jogormarch' we do! Add a number of tucks, cross over jogormarch and sartorius jogormarch and the strain on the hip flexors and low back becomes enormous. Low back pain

Cross Train

Cross train in a variety of activities to build well-rounded fitness and resilience to injury. Stretch your hip flexors and strengthen the **EXTENSORS** of your hips and low back, to balance the overuse of Aquafit leadership. Because deep water hamstring moves (hamstring chair, swivel, and pac-man,) are more difficult to demonstrate, some leaders focus more on the 'hip flexor alternatives'. In doing so, they rob their clients of excellent core stabilization and hamstring/gluteal training opportunities, and further over-emphasize the use of

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their own hip flexors as stabilizers. Kneel on your mat, use the pool railings or mimic your legs with your arms. Your class probably needs emphasis on hip extensors and core stabilizers as much as you do.

Shoes

Instructors who jump in and out of the water, or who teach on decks where their feet get soaked, may not wear the proper footwear for the work they are doing. Remember: you are working on cement. Look for a supportive deck shoe that can tolerate water. CALA distributes the RYKA Aqua Shoe at a very reasonable instructor price. 416-751-9823 or email: cala_aqua@mac.com to order or ask questions about the shoes.

You are teaching many, many classes per week because:

- a) Your class LOVES you and wants you and only You to teach them, several times per week
- b) You need the money
- c) There are not enough CALA-trained and certified leaders for the demand
- d) You are a masochist.

Remember BALANCE and moderation in all things! Encourage other leaders to get trained so you don't have to bear the entire teaching load. If cash flow is a problem, aqua personal training can be far more lucrative than leading group aqua classes, AND it is easier on your body!

You have worked hard to achieve the CALA standard of excellence in aquafitness leadership. It is not fair to you or to your participants if you are out of commission due to accident, repetitive strain, traumatic injury, or psychological burnout. If you fail to take care of yourself, you won't have anything left to give to others.

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Take care of YOUR Mind, Body and Spirit.

Honour Your MIND

Recharge your batteries and stimulate your mind by attending the CALA conferences, workshops or specialty courses, reading research and interacting with other leaders.

Honour Your BODY

Honour your body by practicing leadership safety while teaching on deck. Cross-train your body by getting in the pool for your own workouts, and doing a variety of other healthy, balanced activity. If you happen to teach at outdoor pools, remember that sunscreen does NOT prevent skin cancer. Cover up with a sun hat; stay in the shade; wear sun-filtering, lightweight clothing while you teach.

Honour Your SPIRIT

Avoid teaching too many classes, and take a break for a while if you find yourself feeling burned out. Lift your spirits by doing the special things that bring you joy. This way the time, money, and hard work you have invested in becoming a CALA certified leader will benefit you and others for years to come.