

On a sunny morning a group of women and children are jogging and doing vigorous exercises. No, not in the neighbourhood park but in a swimming pool. The kids are simply having fun in the water; but the women are here for different reasons. Some want to keep fit, others are undergoing treatment for arthritis.

This water regimen is a smart combination of land aerobics with an advantage of zero impact exercises in water and is said to be immensely beneficial in treating arthritis, spondylitis, Parkinson's disease, slip disc and also a great way to shed those extra kilos.

Aqua aerobic exercises are ultra low-impact cardiovascular, toning, flexibility and strengthening workouts in a swimming pool. A great way not just to get fit, but also to relieve pain in joints, knees and back.

Delhi-based Kiran Sawhney, one of the very few aqua aerobic instructors, has learnt this technique from the Speedo Fitness Institute in Toronto. "People who find it difficult to do exercises on land can do the same movements in water without much effort. The regimen can work wonders for them," she says.

Aqua aerobic exercises are more than just swimming and also different from the workouts in a gym. They are not only the best means to condition the body and mind but also an effective way to treat various ailments and injuries, she explains.

In aqua aerobics the buoyancy of water makes a person feel lighter and helps easy movements. The resistance is provid-



Workout in water

Aqua aerobic exercises are low-impact workouts in a swimming pool. They are a great way, not just to get fit, but also to relieve pain in your back, joints and knees, learns AVINASH KALLA

ed by water that actually strengthens the muscles resulting in stress reduction, minimum muscle strain and cardiovascular improvement.

Sawhney explains, "When you are chest deep in water you become 75 per cent buoyant and if you weigh 60 kilos the load on the joints will be 15 kilos. Neck deep you become 90 per cent buoyant and there will be still lesser load on the joints making it easier for people with arthritis and joint problems to exercise regularly.

The exercise regimen is fun and is also the fastest way to reduce flab. An hour of aerobics burns 400 to 750 calories, which is far higher than if one exercised on land. Moreover the joints do not feel the impact of the body weight in water. The pressure of the water helps to keep the blood circulating in the legs and prevents formation of varicose veins.

"Arthritis and other spinal injuries can all be treated with specific aqua workouts. Depending on the severity of the

problem, it can take from six months to a couple of years to treat arthritis," says Sawhney.

There are exercises for different age groups and different ailments. It is also possible to focus on the desired muscle groups and this makes the exercise regimen equally popular with men and women. Though there is no risk of injury these have to be done under the guidance of a trained instructor.

In aqua aerobics you can get a good workload on all muscle groups without suffering monotony. There are various equipments that can be used like buoyancy belts which are tied around the waist, weights which are like dumb bells but are made up of thermacol and are used in resistance training to develop body muscles.

This technique is new to India

and unlike in the west it has not become very popular simply because of a lack of facilities. There are no institutes offering certified training and there are not many heated pools in the country. This limits the scope of aqua aerobics only to summers and considerably reduces its effectiveness.

"Those who are undergo this regimen in summer crave for it through the winter. Simply because it is both healing and invigorating," says Sawhney.

Interestingly you do not necessarily have to be a swimmer to practise aqua aerobics. Shallow aqua aerobic exercises are for those who do not know swimming. Participants do stomach crunches, leg stretches and a variety of special exercises in that standing posture.

Aqua aerobics are great stress busters, they not only heal the body but also keep spirits soaring and leave you feeling toned and relaxed. The water pressure against the body acts like a massage, releasing muscular tension and helps in brisk blood circulation to the heart. This is excellent for the respiratory system.

Water provides natural balance to the body. Lax muscles are strengthened and those that are tight on land are stretched by buoyancy. Which is why aqua aerobic exercises are recommended for pre and post-natal periods.

Says Sawhney, "When done under the guidance of a trained instructor [which is a must] these exercises are a great way to condition the body stimulate the mind and rejuvenate the spirit."

In short, a cool offer no one can refuse!