



Aqua Exercise Instructor Guidelines

AUSactive aims to activate the nation by empowering excellence, innovation, standards and leadership across all modalities. These national guidelines outline best practice for all aspects of aqua exercise planning, programming and delivery.

Aqua Exercise Instructors (AEIs) are a valued part of the health and fitness industry who, as Registered Exercise Professionals (REPs), will use these best practice standards to safeguard the health and interests of people using aquatic based exercise services.

Furthermore, these guidelines are a valuable resource providing a scope of service designed to assist local government agencies, public and private venue managers and facility program managers in the design and delivery of community recreation in the growing area of aqua exercise.

AEIs, pool owners and operators, employers and program coordinators are all impacted by local regulatory frameworks and guidelines as detailed in AUSactive's:

- **Scope of Practice**
- **Code of Ethical Conduct**
- **National Code for Practice for the Health and Fitness Industry**
- **Health & Fitness Industry Policy and Procedures**

These documents have been prepared utilising information that is current at the time of publication.

STANDARD 1. QUALIFICATION, EDUCATION and COMPETENCY

Role of the Aqua Exercise Instructor

AUSactive Registered Aqua Exercise Instructors (AEI) are qualified to instruct water-based exercise, which are considered non-clinical in structure for participants with low and moderate health risks.

AEIs also have the competency to conduct emergency action, both in and out of the water. An AEI should continually update all related skills and knowledge in reference to planning, instructing and emergency action.

Vocational Education and Training

AEI foundation training is incorporated within the Australian Government's Vocational Education and Training (VET) system. This competency-based system provides minimum requirements for a wide range of workplace training which may only be delivered by Registered Training Organisations. AEIs are required to hold **nationally recognised skill set competencies or qualifications** from this the Sport, Fitness and Recreation training package.

Training Package Modification

AEI foundation training may, from time-to-time, be modified to align with current industry skill requirements. Each industry sector has responsibility to ensure these modifications are incorporated into the workplace.

- AUSactive, in collaboration with industry, will inform industry sectors of the changes to training packages. Where possible, AUSactive will guide registered businesses and exercise professionals to pathways for navigating new standard requirements relating to proficiency and compliance in a timely manner.
- Employers are responsible for ensuring staff are, at minimum, appropriately qualified, inducted and competent in delivering aqua exercise classes. AEIs already employed and meeting their professional registration requirements are not required to re-enrol and complete the foundation VET AEI training, i.e. the AEI Skill Set.
- Aqua Exercise Instructors are responsible for maintaining AUSactive professional registration and standards relating to the role and function of an AEI.

Ongoing Competency Assessment and Professional Development

AEI's and employers all have specific responsibilities in ongoing competency, workplace training, professional development and assessment to comply with workplace policies and procedures, particularly in relation to supervision, safety, aquatic emergency action, duty of care and legislative requirements.

AEIs are responsible for maintaining current competency in the knowledge and skills required to perform the role. Once registered with foundation requirements, AEIs also have a responsibility to:

- actively partake, accumulate and record evidence of continuing education in aqua exercise;
- renew workplace training and industry requirements including, but not limited to:
 - o CPR and First Aid;
 - o Working with Children check, or jurisdictional equivalent;
 - o current competency of their skill in performing basic water rescues;
 - o other workplace qualifications applicable and relevant to the role and function of an AEI.

Information on continuing education is available at:
<https://ausactive.org.au/members/learning-development/>

Emergency Action

The owner, employer, coordinator and AEI must be aware of hazards associated with the workplace environment. An annual competency assessment of an AEI's skill to perform basic water rescues is required.

The workplace training and assessment needs to be undertaken in an environment and conditions the same or very similar to where the AEI delivers classes / sessions. This includes but not limited to factors such as

- additional supervision / non supervision conditions
- additional staff such as team leaders and coordinators
- depth, width and temperature of pool
- access to rescue equipment
- entry and exit points

Competency Assessment

It is the employer's responsibility to ensure:

- AEIs under their employment meet the ongoing requirements set out in the relevant professional registration scheme;
- ongoing education and competency compliance is undertaken;
- workplace based trainers have relevant experience, knowledge and skill; and
- workplace assessors hold current and appropriate certifications.

The employer should carry out workplace training and assessment that gathers evidence that can support the judgement/decision that an AEI is sufficiently competent to perform their role related to the working environment a venue procedure. This judgement is undertaken for an employee's knowledge, skill and competency in the areas of:

- CPR and First Aid
- emergency action
- workplace-based policies and procedures
- working with children check or equivalent
- health and fitness assessment to inform facility management should the ability to perform any skills become compromised*.

*This may not preclude AEIs from undertaking classes if:

- a thorough risk assessment has been undertaken mitigating risk
- AEI and facility are in agreement of the process
- both parties have signed a formal agreement.

STANDARD 2. RISK MANAGEMENT

Aqua exercise classes attract a wide range of participants from different backgrounds, ages, fitness, functionality and ability. The owner, employer, programmer (or coordinator) and AEI must be guided by local regulatory frameworks and guidelines ensuring, safe, culturally appropriate, non-discriminate and inclusive program activities that form the basis for aqua fitness sessions.

AUSactive provides risk management documentation in the areas of:

- **Scope of Practice**
- **Code of Ethical Conduct**
- **National Code for Practice for the Health and Fitness Industry**
- **Health & Fitness Industry Policy and Procedures**

Workplace Health and Safety practice focuses on creating a safe workplace that protects the health, safety and welfare of the AEI and participants from exposure to hazards and risks resulting from activities in the aqua class and activity environment. The aquatic setting in which aqua classes are conducted presents inherent risks. The Royal Life Saving Society Australia Guidelines for Safe Pool Operations (GSPOs)¹ details standards and best practice for all aspects of aquatic recreational environments, including, but not limited to, design, operations, programming and staffing.

To eliminate risk and legal liability, the owner, employer, coordinator and AEI are required to be competent to accurately program, plan and deliver aqua fitness classes in a safe and effective manner that includes, but is not limited to:

- i. Duty of Care
- ii. Emergency Management
- iii. Supervision and Ratios
- iv. Safe Work Practices
- v. Participant Screening

i. Duty of Care

The National Code for Practice for the Health and Fitness Industry recommends that a business that programs, plans and conducts aquatic programs and, in this case, aqua classes, has and owes a 'Duty of Care' to employees and participants. They should abide by and adhere to the GSPOs in regard to Technical Pool Operations, First Aid, Facility Design, Supervision, Low Patronage Pools, Programming and employ appropriately qualified AEIs within industry standards to provide these services.

An AEI owes a 'Duty of Care' to themselves and their participants regardless of who attends or is included in the class. A REPs duty is to ensure all participants are safe and attain the outcomes of the specified class.

What does this mean for an AEI?

Delivering a class professionally that removes, or minimises as far as practicable, the potential for harm or injury to both the participant and themselves.

ii. Emergency Management

The National Code for Practice for the Health and Fitness Industry recommends businesses that program, plan and conduct aqua classes have a documented emergency management plan that adheres to the GSPOs and includes:

- a risk management and assessment plan for the facility, programs, services and equipment
- emergency procedure/s
- a supervision plan.

A facility emergency management plan should make reference to, as a minimum requirement, the AEI's knowledge, skills and possible role(s) when attending to:

- the person requiring assistance
- first response and first aid requirements
- other class participants
- alerting appropriate personnel in a supervised and unsupervised setting
- accessing first aid and emergency equipment
- recording and following processes and procedures.

iii. Supervision and Ratios

Aqua exercise classes may be presented in a variety of environments such as indoor/outdoor, and in deep/shallow water. Supervision must be appropriate for the environment and may require additional qualifications and competencies for effective risk management. A supervision plan needs to be based on an appreciation of the inherent risk associated with an aquatic environment and the availability of internal and external supervision resources to the aquatic facility. The owner or operator of an aquatic facility should conduct an aquatic risk assessment in accordance with the GSPO to determine what is required for supervision at that particular aquatic facility.

The aim, objectives and structure of the supervision plan should be clear and realistic, it should cover all environments and operating conditions at that facility, and focus on prevention of incidents as well as response. When conducting a risk assessment for supervision at an aquatic facility, an owner or operator should consider all relevant matters including, but not limited to:

- patron/client profiles and characteristics
- availability of a defibrillator, spinal board and oxygen equipment
- conducting aqua classes in a clearly designated, roped off and signed area with appropriate entry and exit points
- class location in relation to other high-risk areas and activities
- competency of supervisors.

Class Ratios

Defining the scope of ratios for an aqua class within a specific venue should include consideration of:

- The pool's dimensions, including the potential for hazards that may impede instructor supervision of class participants;
- The capacity to create a safe distance between participants, pool walls and lap lanes;
- The gradient and surface of the pool floor to ensure participants can undertake classes in an appropriate depth;

- Class type and anticipated exercise intensity in both placement and description of classes. Higher intensity classes create greater turbulence and may present a risk to those with limited functional movement or lack of knowledge or skill with movement in the water. This will impact a person's balance, stability and control;
- Instructor and class participant experience; and
- Deep water drift, which occurs as the movement of the water 'pulls' participants toward deeper water. This presents a safety hazard and should be considered when planning classes and participants to instructor ratios. The pool floor, especially near lane line markings, may also present a slip hazard.

Ratio Recommendation	Supervised (with pool lifeguards on pool deck)	Unsupervised
Instructor in the water	Up to 10 participants	
Instructor on the pool deck	Up to 40 participants	Up to 30 participants

iv. Safe Work Practices

Each Australian state and territory have Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) legislation, codes of practice and industry standards administered and enforced by local authorities.

The employer is required to ensure the AEI has a working understanding of their role and responsibility in relation to:

- WHS Regulations
- age, disability, racial and ethnic discrimination
- privacy legislation
- music copyright legislation
- workplace operational policies and procedures.

v. Participant Screening

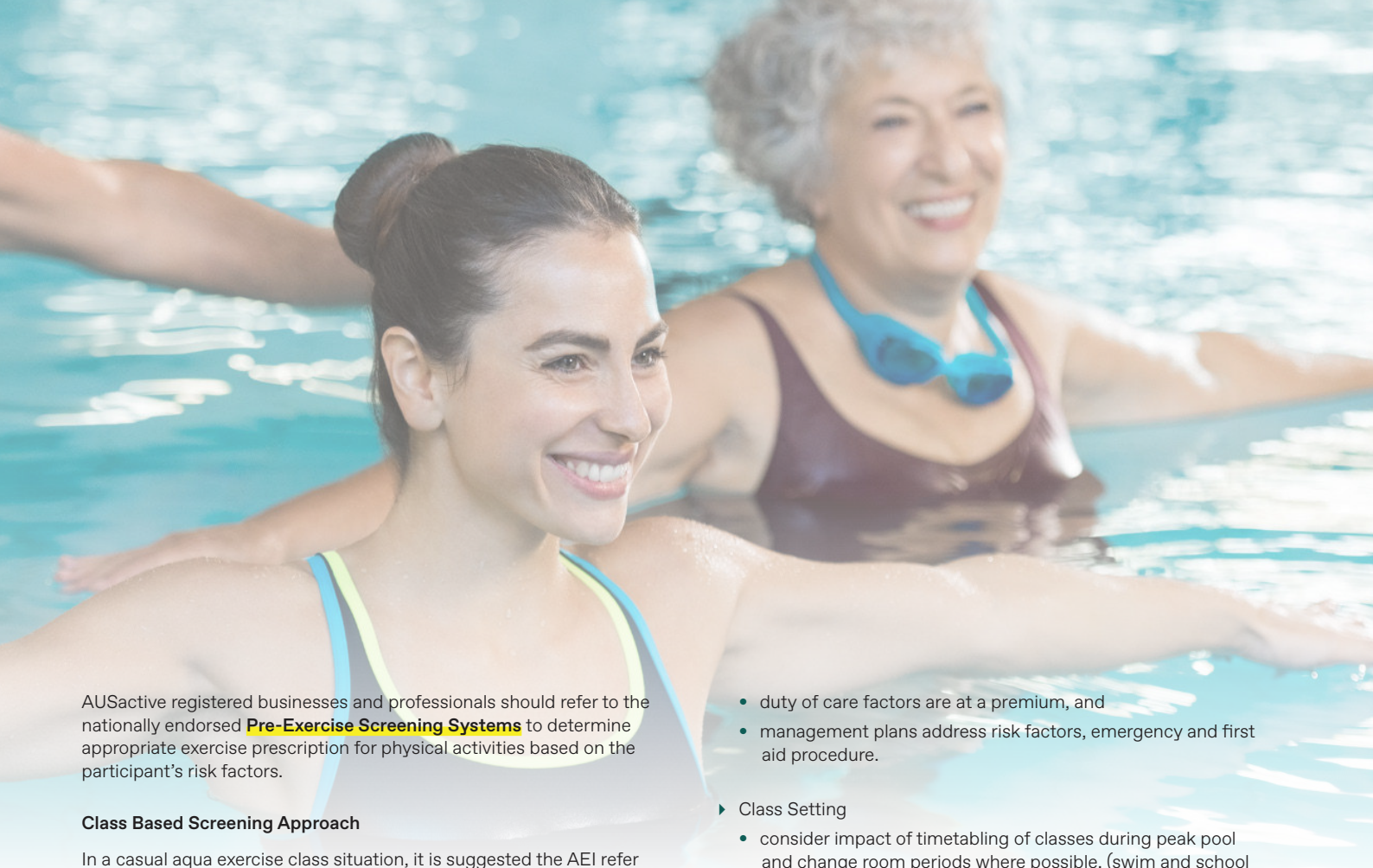
Pre-exercise screening is a vital safety function highlighting employer and employee responsibility and the importance of pre-exercise screening to ensure all individuals are supported during exercise.

Participant Disclosure

Participants are encouraged to advise the business operator and AEI to optimise their participation outcomes and mitigate adverse event/s. The AEI must provide participants with relevant information about the class to encourage them to advise of information that may impact or influence their level of safe participation. AEI must adhere to privacy legislation laws relevant to participants' disclosure of health information.

Pre-screening

The owner or operator of an aquatic facility should encourage all aqua participants to notify staff and the AEI if it's their first time attending an aqua class. This may identify those individuals with a known medical or other condition that may impact or present an impediment to their participation. Once aware of the information, the AEI utilises their knowledge and skill to assess the level of risk of an adverse event occurring.



AUSactive registered businesses and professionals should refer to the nationally endorsed **Pre-Exercise Screening Systems** to determine appropriate exercise prescription for physical activities based on the participant's risk factors.

Class Based Screening Approach

In a casual aqua exercise class situation, it is suggested the AEI refer to initial training elements of aquatic screening and stays connected with industry updates and professional development. The AEI gives an introductory welcome to participants that includes, but is not limited to:

- overview of class type and content
- a request to advise the AEI of any personal health or functional issues that may impact participation before or during the class particularly the Stage One questions listed in the Pre-Exercise Screening Systems
- encouraging participants to seek medical advice for existing or new health concerns
- advising participants to undertake activities appropriate to their physical and current well-being level
- ensuring they maintain hydration throughout the class.

STANDARD 3. PLAN, PROGRAM AND DELIVER

This section guides owners, managers/programmers and AEIs to appreciate that each pool is unique in building specifications and accessories. Aqua classes differ from most land-based group exercise classes as they are often integrated within public spaces and may require consideration and care to service excellence and maximise program outcomes.

Planning and programming aqua classes should consider all environmental factors, including, but not limited to:

- ▶ Supervised venues have the advantage of additional staff resources that may be able to assist with:
 - set up and pack up
 - participant supervision for accessibility to the class, i.e., operation of hoist or wheelchair assistance
 - lead, assist and/or guide in an emergency.
- ▶ Unsupervised settings pose additional requirements such as that:
 - workplace health and safety are appropriately managed

- duty of care factors are at a premium, and
- management plans address risk factors, emergency and first aid procedure.

▶ Class Setting

- consider impact of timetabling of classes during peak pool and change room periods where possible. (swim and school lessons, lap swimming and recreational users)
- signed and roped off in the pool area for participants
- signed and roped off pool deck area for AEI.

▶ Windows/Doors

- A pool concourse can be very draughty and cold, especially at the water surface level. To enhance participant comfort, class placement, wherever possible, should be away from open windows and continually opening doors in the cooler weather.
- Pool environments can be hot and humid, making it unsafe for the AEI to exercise on the pool deck. The employer's duty is to ensure that the instructing area is well ventilated.

▶ Entry/Exit Egress

Aqua attracts a wide range of participants, some of whom may not have the physical capacity to enter or exit the pool without using stairs or designated entry/exit points. The placement of classes should consider these factors prior to programming an aqua program.

▶ Pool Deck/Concourse

The concourse and pool deck surface may be prone to being slippery, harsh on soft feet or present a great deal of travel distance to and from change rooms. Quality decisions on where to 'house' the class may help prevent these factors from presenting a problem for participants and mitigate risks.

▶ Lighting and light reflecting on the water's surface

Factors such as glare, reflection on the water's surface, turbidity, and obstructions in the line of sight can limit supervision and exercise modification effectiveness.

The AEI must ensure:

- constant visual contact with all participants; and
- participants can always hear and see the instructor.



► Noise

Sound travels easily across water, and with music as an integral element of aqua classes, a noise management strategy is recommended to help avoid conflict between other users and personnel in the pool at the time of the class. Consideration should include:

- Access to a microphone for instruction
- Induction and education on using the specific sound system and microphone in relation to effectiveness, sound levels, maintenance, hygiene and the venue's acoustics.
- The number of participants and class type will also influence sound level.
- Where the aqua sound system is placed - often in smaller pools the sound is louder and clearer if system is placed on the opposite or side of a pool and partially facing a wall. Both the facility programmer and AEI should explore best possible options to provide the best aqua customer experience.
- Sound systems should be cordless; however if unavailable, an earth leakage or DC low voltage leads should be used.

► Gradient

- Classes should be placed in an area where participants can exercise on an even surface
- Attention to the turbulence created during the class should be a high priority if participants exercise on an acute gradient. The instability and increased turbulence may result in accidental submersion.
- Classes placed in areas with acute gradients may result in the number of participants that can participate, and ratios may be compromised.
- The AEI must inform participants if and where the gradient is situated and offer options for participants who are not comfortable travelling to a different pool depth.

► Water Temperature

Pool operators must know the regulations, codes and guidelines for the state or territory they operate within. Managers and AEIs should work collaboratively to program classes. Ideal water temperature will be influenced by the:

- type of class and the required exercise intensity;
- ability of participants to regulate their temperature during the class;
- participants and their health conditions;
- personal comfort.

For example:

- » Low-intensity classes will require warmer water temperatures for optimal physiological outcomes, comfort and safety. Lower intensity classes are most often used for people who may have health conditions that limit their ability to exercise at higher intensities due to weakness, pain or cardiorespiratory conditions.
- » A lower pool temperature is recommended for a class involving higher-intensity cardiorespiratory exercise.
- » Participants should always be allowed to self-pace the intensity of exercise, rehydrate, take breaks or stop exercising if they feel uncomfortable. Personal comfort, as well as regulating body temperature, should still be considered for individuals.
- » For those people that may have a health condition that is sensitive to heat in terms of temperature regulation, fatigue or other negative consequences, the temperature, the length of time immersed and the intensity of exercise can all be considered in finding the appropriate factors for safe and effective aquatic exercise.



Broad guidance on water temperature for safety and comfort:

- Vigorous exercise classes, for a group of health/fit participants general recommendation range is from 24°C – 28°C.
- If the water temperature is lower than 26.5°C, the warm-up phase of the class should be increased before moving on to the cardiovascular phase.
- Classes should not be conducted in water less than 17°C¹
- Moderate exercise: general recommendations range from 28°C – 33°C
- Lower intensity exercise: thermoneutral temperatures range from 33°C – 35°C.

AEIs should be aware, ready and able to adapt or cease the workout in the event of variant ambient air temperature and unexpected drop or increase of the water's temperature.

► **Water Quality**

Nationwide Health Department regulations advise on factors and parameters relating to water treatment, quality and testing. An AEI should be aware of the water temperature and quality conditions before class commencement.

AEIs working in unsupervised environments are expected to have the knowledge and competence to measure the water temperature and test the water quality to ensure a safe and appropriate environment for the class to be conducted.

► **Outdoor Setting** – all the above environmental conditions apply in addition to:

- weather factors, including where the sun will be located at the time of the class
- agility to re-situate class when abrupt changes in water temperature, wind chill and potential sunburn risk arise.

► **Aquatic Equipment**

- The AEI should be familiar with how the body will react while using equipment in different depths and while moving at varying speeds. Carefully consider which equipment will best suit the needs of your participants and exercise outcome.
- Participant and AEI equipment should be out on the pool deck and easily accessible before the class start time.
- Always check that the equipment is in good working order before commencing a class, as this will eliminate disruption in the class flow.
- Equipment should be utilised and stored according to manufactures guidelines and the facility's policies and procedures. Consider the method in which equipment is conveniently accessible, transported, distributed and collected in a safe manner.

► **Professional Practice**

- instructors should adequately maintain good hydration levels
- monitor the amount of high-impact moves that are demonstrated
- wear appropriate footwear
- demonstrate on a non-slip mat and/or aqua frame for safe and effective delivery
- use a microphone
- maintain professional development
- collaborate with peers in the aqua exercise industry.



SPECIFIC POPULATIONS

Physical activity is beneficial, providing it is done with good judgment, caution and consistency. These principles apply to everyone, including those with a medical condition or disability. Exercising in water is a popular choice for participants who may have an injury, medical illness or disability. Therefore, it is encouraged that venue management and AEs regularly review practices and culture at all levels, in particular to health and safety.

General Guidelines

- Where a condition can infect other people in a group, preventative measures should be put in place to prevent any infection. As a general rule, the participant should be advised to stay out of the water until the infection has cleared up. Check venue policy and advise accordingly, especially if the participant presents with infection.
- An allocated space poolside for relevant medications and mobility aids should be available (bronchodilators, spacers, walking sticks).
- Do not enter the pool if an open wound is present.
- Suggest footwear for participants who have thinning skin on their feet.
- Certain activities for people on multiple medications may have a contraindication, such as dizziness, resulting in disorientation and/or accidental submersion.

The aquatic environment provides a comfortable exercise environment where social and physical gains can be achieved. Regardless of the participant attending, the class should be designed to maintain and upgrade body strength, flexibility, conditioning and general fitness and promote well-being. This next section serves as a guide to ensure that safety and professional standards are maintained and that the aquatic environment is used as an effective exercise medium for everybody. This information is a summary to assist in addressing common conditions of the population that engage in aqua exercise. It is recommended to contact disability bodies and allied health organisations associated with aquatic exercise for more information and professional development.

Pregnancy

Water-based aquatic exercise and treatment offer several advantages for pregnant women, including decreased loading on soft tissue and joints, reduced lower limb oedema and improved cardiovascular fitness.

Due to the risk of temperature-related issues to the foetus in the first trimester, the following is recommended water temperature for women throughout their pregnancy:

- For moderate intensity exercise 28°C – 32°C.
- For gentle or therapeutic exercises no greater than 35°C², ideally with a shorter immersion period.

Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Conditions

It has been well documented that exercising in the water has beneficial effects on pain, quality of life, balance and physical function in adults with musculoskeletal conditions^{3,4}. Additionally, for those with inflammatory arthritis, aquatic exercise also has positive effects on disease activity⁵. Aquatic exercise offers a less loaded environment to exercise due to buoyancy which creates an enabling environment for people with weakness or pain⁴. Pain from exercises such as squats has been found to be less painful in water than on land for people with knee osteoarthritis⁶. Two to three 30-60 minute sessions a week of exercise for at least six weeks are recommended³. Programs for people with musculoskeletal conditions typically include warm-up, strength, stretching, range of motion, aerobic, balance and cool-down exercises⁴. For some people who are exercising at lower intensities, a warm water pool may be more comfortable⁷. With chronic disease, there will be pain with exercise. Arthritis Australia provides the general guide of two hours after exercise as usual and recommends slowing down or doing less next time if it's for longer than this or seeking advice from a health professional if there is ongoing pain after exercise⁸.

Multiple Sclerosis

Heat sensitivity for 90% of Australians living with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is a major issue⁹, resulting in fatigue often limiting a person to complete physical exercises⁹. Therefore, exercising in cooler water temperatures should be a consideration for participants with MS. There is broad evidence of the beneficial effect of cooler water aqua classes in heat-sensitive patients¹⁰. Water temperature of 21°C - 27°C has been found to reduce heat fatigue and improve impairment in lower extremities⁹.

Parkinson's Disease

Aquatic exercise has been shown to improve motor impairments, quality of life and reduce the fear of falling in people with Parkinson's Disease¹¹. The heat of the water helps soothe and relax the muscles, lessening tremors, reducing rigidity and pain, and giving a feeling of freedom unavailable on land¹². People with Parkinson's can stand tall in water with increased back extension, improving their posture.

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