

## Head Start on the Heterogeneous Generation

By Ann Gilbert, Program Director, WATERINMOTION Platinum

Although the term “Active Ager” may refer to anyone over the age of 50 years old, most agree that the aquatic classroom is filled with active agers and then some. The aquatic classroom is studied as being the most heterogeneous population in most fitness facilities. The word heterogenous means: diverse in character or content, and having little to do with actual age. The pool could be called “a large heterogenous collection” of special populations.

The approach to coaching this heterogeneous group must be to demonstrate regressions and progressions through the entire program assuring that the student can focus on capability, rather than being classified as a beginner, asked to just modify. Coaching capability breeds a mindset of opportunity and success. Historically, programming for special populations treated students as if they were all very frail. Although, in the heterogeneous group, there may be a few that are diagnosed as frail, many have chosen a healthier lifestyle and are just starting their quest for wellness after 50.

The goal in coaching this mixture of members is to teach with an inclusive style.

➔ The first key to coaching success is to be aware and to remain updated to all student's needs.

Mild Cognitive Impairment: MCI is a common condition in which the student can carry out daily activities but may have a concern with memory or have mild changes in thinking abilities. Patience and understanding will work wonders to help these clients feel successful. And, always encourage socialization.

Arthritis: Remind all your students who have spoken of arthritis of any kind to simply listen to their body. Teach the popular 2-hour rule, coaching that some muscles soreness is the norm post-exercise, but if joint pain develops that lasts for 2 hours or more, then it is time to cut back.

Osteoporosis: ACE has reported that a woman's risk of breaking a hip due to osteoporosis is equal to all risks of cancer combined. Encourage participation in all strength training segments of class. Actively educate on the need for weight bearing exercise. Cue the need for great postural alignment and avoid quick, jarring, twisting moves.

Obesity: Encourage water walking and short burst of HIIT programming. Focus on increasing the minutes of movement per week.

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Diabetes: Follow guidelines above and encourage students with Diabetes to bring in a small snack to class. Watch the student carefully and watch for signs of low blood sugar, although never attempt to diagnose.

Parkinson's: Focus on balance and posture when cueing. Encourage the student to move in a shallow pool. Increase duration and intensity weekly.

Multiple Sclerosis: Keep the student cool. Discourage swim caps and encourage having a cool cloth available. Introduce gait training or "white line" positions in which students would be trained in positions that challenge core stabilization and balance.

Special concern	Water temp	Impact	Move details	Benefits	Intensity
Pregnancy	Cooler water	Grounded or anchored	Little or no stretching	Decreases bloat, decreases stress on bones	RPE lower end 6-7
Parkinson's	Warmer water due to muscle rigidity	Balance and posture patterns	Shallow for more stability	Increases postural alignment and core balance	Increase RPM with gained confidence
Multiple Sclerosis	Cooler water	Combination but being on the ground improve sensory input	Shallow for more stability and weight bearing	Improve walking patterns and ADL, gait challenges	Increase RPE with gained confidence
Fibromyalgia	Warm mid 80's	Lower impact , anchored or grounded in pm	Focus on muscle function and increasing flexibility or ROM	Decrease pain, increases blood flow	Lower intensity so not to overexert
Arthritis	Warmer	Anchored with floatation, manual dexterity, few toys	Stretching around smaller joints	Increases function and ROM	RPE good and bad days, later in day
Obesity	Cooler water	Rebounding, grounded and combinations of all	Water walking as cool down. Increase endurance	Burns calories, allows for a comfortable environment and privacy	Increase along a bell curve from RPE 6-9 and down

0 The second key to coaching success is not to fear having so many heterogenous members together in one group. The aquatic environment is the safest and most effective place for all to train. As a coach, you can be creative with the properties of water and apply modern approaches to training such as HIIT, Tabata, and other high-energy-expenditure formats with very little risk of injury to most listed on the chart above.

The next key to success coaching is to cue with compassion and empathy.

Instead of saying...	Try saying....
Exercise	Movements, skills or even drills
How are you guys	How is each of you feeling today
Let's start	The purpose of the class today is
If you can't do this modify	Work at today's capacity
Don't do this if....	Let's all try this movement
Find your balance	Let's learn to stabilize before we mobilize
Great job, perfect!	It looks as if we all are improving
Now really bring it	Step just a bit out of your comfort zone
Be a beast	Be a champion today!

In conclusion, know that you may be the most sought-after fitness professional on our planet. You coach the most heterogenous population in the fitness facility with coaching and cueing skills that are developed over time and appreciated by so many in the fastest growing population in fitness. Hat's off to you for taking time to get a head start on inclusive coaching methods.

## RESOURCES

### SCW MANIA PRESENTATIONS:

*Special Programming for Special Populations*

*Aquatic Solutions for the Active Aging*

SCW ACTIVE AGING ONLINE CERTIFICATION MANUAL

*Mayo Clinic on Health*

*Ann Gilbert*

*Ann Gilbert*

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