

# Naked Aqua: To Noodle, or Not to Noodle, that is the Question!

By Michele The Trainer

## Are you enhancing your aquatic exercise experience with equipment? Are you open to using no equipment in your class (i.e. Naked Aqua)?

For most of us, using equipment is an opportunity. In this article, we will review and comment on types of equipment available to us and some examples on use and behavior. Colorful equipment is fun and often a privilege to have on hand. However, if not available we must explore “Naked Aqua” and the reasons why, or why not, to offer programs with no equipment. Naked Aqua; To Noodle, or Not to Noodle, that is the Question!

Please review Chapter 11 “Emergencies, Injuries and Instructor Wellness” of the Aquatic Fitness Professional Manual and the AEA Standards and Guidelines. Water exercise equipment is never intended to be “proper rescue equipment”.

Chapter 7, “Types of Aquatic Equipment and Muscle Actions”, reviews aquatic equipment types and results based upon the properties of water.

Let’s start with an overview of the types of equipment choices available to us:

With **Noodles/Buoyant Equipment**, the muscle actions are eccentric and concentric.

Noodles are a cost effective, colorful and effective addition to water classes. They also come in a variety of sizes and foam densities. The noodle advantages are many because they straddled and ridden like a bicycle for suspended training or be integrated for partner/buddy exercises and drills. Noodles can be hard to grip, however, for some individuals with arthritis or those with pre-existing wrist/grip issues. Nevertheless, if we are substiting an aquatic fitness class we can generally assume that if nothing else, there will be noodles available for our use.

Buoyant equipment also includes foam dumbbells and sometimes ankle cuffs. When we use all things buoyant, the challenge often

is keeping the equipment submerged, avoiding “popping up” out of the water. Cueing our students to control buoyant equipment will ensure the maximum workout benefit and optimum safety for the joints. Controlled, submerged movement without compromising posture is the key.

**Weighted Equipment** in the water behaves same as weighed equipment on land thanks to gravity; thus we experience both concentric and eccentric muscle actions. Due to safety concerns, weighted equipment is not a standard choice for the water, yet the AEA does recognize the importance of weighted equipment in some instances. It is important for us to understand their benefits and behavior are. The following excerpts from the upcoming 6th Edition of the Aquatic Fitness Professional Manual (printed with permission from the Editor):

*“Muscle action for weighted resistance in the water is very similar to land. Weighted equipment sinks in the water and is influenced by the forces of gravity... The gravity vector, like buoyancy, is vertical but points downward instead of upward. Although the effects of gravity are reduced in the water, as long as the weighted resistance is denser than water and sinks, it will be affected by gravity. Any movement performed upward against the forces of gravity is gravity resisted and usually creates a concentric muscle action. Any movement performed downward is assisted by the forces of gravity and usually creates an eccentric muscle action. When compared, buoyed and weighted muscle actions are the opposite of each other.*

*Weighted and buoyed equipment complement each other well in programming. It is difficult to work the deltoids, abductors, iliopsoas, and erector spinae, for example, with buoyant equipment in the water unless you assume some awkward positions or risk injuring the low back. Most movements for these muscle groups are buoyancy assisted and work primarily as antagonists. Using weighted equipment works these*

*muscles without a problem. On the other hand, it is difficult to work the adductors, latissimus dorsi, abdomen, and gluteus maximus standing in the water with weights. Buoyant equipment works these groups easily. Once again, it is very important to plan your resistance programming in the water if you are going to use equipment. The use of weighted equipment should be carefully supervised and monitored if done at all in deep water.”*



**Drag Equipment** primarily utilizes concentric muscle actions when moving against the water’s resistance. Drag equipment is an excellent choice to work both muscles of the muscle pair in a given exercise. Drag equipment is available for lower body training, often attached around the . It also and ankle. Drag equipment may be easier for participants to control since there is no “popping up”, yet some drag equipment is also more cumbersome which can diminish agile movements. Some newer options include both upper and lower body equipment choices, and being smaller, works effectively with more intricate movement patterns

Gloves are a popular choice for those who have difficulties with gripping. With gloves, participants can benefit from the drag resistance, but never have to put their hand in the gripping position. This is a very comfortable choice for many. Glove progressions are partially determined by the material. Lycra gloves will be easier and provide less drag because the water flows through the fabric, while neoprene

will deliver a harder workout since less water will flow through. Hand positioning will also affect the total workload experienced.

**Rubberized Equipment**, such as bands and tubing, represents another colorful, and fun addition to group fitness. As with all equipment choices, there are some safety concerns with bands. group with wrist/grip concerns may not be able to control the band effectively, especially your arthritic participants those with arthritis. You may want to try programming in small segments of band exercises, and if a participant is not comfortable using the bands, you can offer them a different exercise so options during these short segments.

**Flotation Equipment** such as belts and vests are an amazing addition to fitness as you can get an abundant amount of cardio and your feet never touch the floor!! Most of today's flotation belts are comfortable and are available in different thicknesses and widths to accommodate a wide variety of body types.

**Please review Chapter 16 "Deep Water Exercise" and the Deep Water Equipment Options of the AEA Aquatic Fitness Professional for additional information.**

## Naked Aqua - Should we choose to use no equipment?

Using no equipment is a trend right now in land fitness. Aqua, however, is seeing some amazing new equipment available. There are many benefits to using equipment, especially equipment that comes in staged levels (easy, moderate, hard) such as some dumbbells, some noodles, and some drag equipment, because this allows for progression over time. Gone are the days of the same class using the same noodle that provides the same flotation with the participants wondering why they are not seeing any significant change in their body composition. On land we would not lift the same three-pound weight for ten years, so this is the same in water. It is a very exciting time to have equipment available that offers us the opportunity for progression and regression.

Equipment also offers color and variety to our programming...it's just plain fun, which can be considered functional fitness like the new trends in laughter yoga. If it's fun, we will see better adherence and increase participants because now we can attract more fun for folks of all ages!

No equipment, "Naked Aqua", is more of a challenge for several reasons. Just like our students have their favorite spot in any exercise class, they may also have their favorite equipment. Since our training and cueing is so spectacular, participants may be unconsciously competent and automatically retrieve their favorite piece of equipment and, like a security blanket, bring it into the water with them. If they already have the equipment in hand, requesting that they use no equipment may not be met with a warm response. Very clear announcements prior to entering the pool are in order. Explain why it's good to change from the regular format; this . Yes, I know that I have been heard saying, "Where I come from aquatic fitness with no equipment is called swimming!"

Caught unprepared and naked! I subbed the other day and planned a ton of noodle programming focusing on that particular pool depth and temperature.... and in spite of my preparations when I arrived there was not a noodle in sight. Nothing/Nada/Zip/Zilch! Wow! There was a ton of noodlæ the last time I taught at that facility. A beautiful heated pool in a fitness facility with no noodles! Therefore, it's never bad to have an hour's worth of "naked" programming up your sleeve.

Naked programming can include a plethora of movements such as shallow water knee lifts, running, walking, cross country skiing, jumping jacks, knee lifts, and several arm movements including breath stroke arms, push pull arms, plunging arms, doggie paddle arms, etc. Faster tempos are an option too because there is no extra drag from equipment (syncopate away!)

Please let me know your Naked Aqua successes or if a diva in your class has challenged you to a noodle dual when trying to coax it from their gloved fingers. Remember that safety, functionality and fun are the goals, so enjoy!! Send me some of your colorful equipment class photos!!



### Author

*Michele the Trainer loves warm clean water from the puddle to the pool to the Pacific. She is an ACE Personal Trainer, Group Exercise Instructor, and PADI Divermaster, and of course an AEA certified aquatic instructor. Having transformed her own body from size 40 to size 4 (the good old genuine tried and true diet and exercise way), Michele is obsessed with fitness, health and wellness. With her oceanic connection and background, warm water fitness quickly became a passion! For more on Michele visit [www.michelethetrainer.com](http://www.michelethetrainer.com) or email her at [michele@michelethetrainer.com](mailto:michele@michelethetrainer.com)*