

Swim Back to Health: The Guide to Aquatic Therapy for Recovering Addicts

Overview

There is nothing easy about addiction recovery. When entering recovery, many are plagued by common but understandable fears—such as the fear of relapse and the fear of losing friendships. As [ChooseHelp.com](#) notes, it can be a challenging time, but with the right approach you can be successful.

With a survey from the [Partnership for Drug-Free Kids](#) and the [New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services](#) showing that 10 percent of adults in the U.S. are reportedly recovering from addiction, it's important that there are a variety of treatment methods available to suit the needs of a diverse population. One alternative treatment that has wonderful physical and mental health benefits is aquatic therapy.

To learn more about aquatic therapy and how it can help you or your loved one's addiction recovery, take a look at the tips, articles, and other resources offered in this guide.

Keys to a Successful Addiction Recovery

Before you begin aquatic therapy, it's important that you understand the essentials of addiction recovery. Below are a few tips that will help you get a strong start.

Prioritize recovery. To be successful, recovering must be your number one concern. [NationalGeographic.com](#) notes that the professionals who've helped you along the way can be good shoulders to lean on when you're struggling.

Avoid old habits. [WikiHow.com](#) offers a six-part article on beating drug addiction. Part Four provides advice on how to prevent old habits from creeping back into your life. For example, it suggests that making a plan for each day and sticking to it can be a big help.



Don't be afraid to ask for help. The support of others is a crucial part of any recovery. [HelpGuide.org](#) provides advice on how to build up a network of support by enlisting friends and family, regularly attending meetings, and more.

Exercise. Regular exercise releases endorphins that make us feel better, and as a result, it can be a key component of recovering from addiction. In addition, this [Chicago Tribune article](#) explains a study out of Vanderbilt University found that exercise was successful in reducing cravings in marijuana-dependent users. The article also profiles addicts, including Todd Crandell, founder of [Racing for Recovery](#), who attribute their success in recovery to exercise.

Eat healthy. Of course, you should always load up on fruits, veggies, and other healthy foods, but doing so can be especially beneficial when you're overcoming addiction. [TheFix.com](#) explains that the vitamins and nutrients you'll get from a healthy diet will help your body

recover from the damage associated with drug use, give your immune system a boost, and help you have more energy.

Find purpose. The [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) recommends four dimensions for recovery. One of those dimensions is purpose. The organization advises adding meaning to your day—by volunteering, working, caretaking, or taking part in another fulfilling endeavor—will be a key building block of getting well.



Get in touch with your spiritual side. As [WebMD.com](#) notes, you may find it helpful to reacquaint yourself with religion by either attending services or praying. The article also notes that another great way to enhance your spirituality and increase your peace of mind is through meditation.

Learn to manage triggers. In its [article](#) on triggers, PyschCentral.com teaches that they are those “events, people, and subsequent emotions” that make you want to use. The site provides five tips for managing triggers. For example, make a plan ahead of time for how you’ll handle triggers.

Aquatic Therapy and Its Benefits

Aquatic therapy and its uses for addiction recovery may not be familiar to you. Read on to learn more about the practice and how it can benefit you.

What is aquatic therapy? As [HealthSouth](#) explains, aquatic therapy is widely used to help sufferers of chronic illnesses manage their symptoms and to help people recover after injury. It can also be a beneficial form of therapy for people recovering from addiction.

Aquatic therapy exercises. The [University of Minnesota Department of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation](#) explains how and why aquatic therapy works via a detailed presentation. It also provides several different exercises to help you kick start your own aquatic therapy.



If you think aquatic therapy is right for you, here are a few additional resources with exercise examples:

- MayoClinic
 - o [Water walking with hand webs](#)
 - o [Deep-water walking with hand webs](#)
 - o [Arm exercise using hand webs](#)
 - o [Arm exercise using hand weights](#)
 - o [Resistance exercise using kick boards](#)
 - o [Leg exercise using a noodle](#)
- National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability (NCHPAD)
 - o [Exercise Session Format](#)
 - o [Program I](#)
 - o [Program II](#)
 - o [Program III](#)
 - o [Program Modifications](#)
- Ask Dr. Jo
 - o [Standing Exercises](#)
 - o [Basic Walking Exercises](#)
 - o [Advanced Walking Exercises](#)
 - o [Core Workout](#)
 - o [Cardio Workout](#)
- [University of Washington Orthopedics and Sports Medicine](#)

Benefits of Aquatic Therapy

Boosts mood. Exercising in water can help with your physical and mental conditions. As the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) note, exercise has been shown to have mood-lifting effects in both men and women.

Reduces chronic pain. If chronic pain contributed to your drug use, swimming and other aquatic exercises can be a productive and effective way of alleviating that pain in recovery. [The Telegraph](#) introduces a swim stroke that helps joints, and [The New York Times](#) explains that swimming has been found to reduce back pain.



Helps manage depression. As mentioned above, exercise should be an important part of your recovery. This [article](#) from EverydayHealth.com explains what a beneficial exercise swimming can be in managing depression. It also cites a study that found that “three sessions of vigorous aerobic exercise were approximately as effective at treating depression as daily doses of Zoloft, when the treatment effects were measured after four months.”

Improves sleep. [ChooseHelp.org](#) notes that not getting enough sleep has been connected to “greater relapse rates.” Swimming can be a great tool for making sure you’re able to

get plenty of sleep as you overcome your addiction. [The Huffington Post](#) explains that it has been shown to “improve quality of sleep two-fold” and provides tips on how you can make swimming a regular part of your life.

Swimming and Long-term Recovery

There’s just something special about being in the water. For many, its therapeutic benefits can’t be beat. If you’d like to learn more about how to make being in the water a permanent part of your recovery, take a look at the tips below.

Improve your skills. If a fear of the water or an inability to swim has kept you out of the pool, now’s the time to learn. This [article](#) from TheGuardian.com highlights different issues many adults have with being in the water and provides information about what methods of learning work best for adults.

Join an adult swim team. [U.S. Masters Swimming](#) is one way to become part of a team as an adult swimmer. It’s a great way to add structure to your swim routine and to socialize with other swimmers. If you’re just getting started with your swim routine, USMS offers many great resources. Here are a few:

- [What equipment do I need?](#)
- [What is a typical workout?](#)
- [Lingo you’re likely to hear at practice](#)
- [How do I learn the four strokes?](#)



Become a triathlete. If you are a strong swimmer, training to become a triathlete can be a great challenge and a way to make swimming a regular part of your life. [Active.com](#) provides tips on how to start training.

Sign up for the Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program. For those in recovery who also suffer from arthritis, know that the Arthritis Foundation has developed a special aquatic program for sufferers. It is designed to relieve symptoms. Learn more about the program [here](#). To find the Aquatic Program in your area, contact your Arthritis Foundation [local office](#).

Try ocean swimming. If you’re lucky enough to live near the ocean, consider making it a regular place to take a dip. Of course, ocean swimming requires some extra precaution and a higher level of skill. [Men’s Fitness Magazine](#) provides a comprehensive overview of the sport and the factors you should consider before going for an ocean swim.

Take part in water aerobics. The great thing about water aerobics is that you can adjust your workout to best fit your needs. Some days you may want more of a challenge while on others you may want movements that simply calm your nerves. [SheKnows.com](#) offers water aerobics exercises that you can use to spice up your routine.