



Why You Should Take Your Workout to the Water This Summer

Experts Reveal the Mind and Body Benefits of Working Out Waterside



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After the year everyone just had, we could all use a vacation. While you may have spent many weekends last year convening alone with nature (instead of with your loved ones) hiking or trail running, consider the warmer weather – and COVID-19 vaccines – your excuse to head to blue spaces this summer.

While you might not need any convincing to book that ticket to the coast or plan that road trip to the nearest watering hole, there are a surprising number of benefits – for the body and mind – to being in or near the water that you may never have thought about. And what’s really cool is that anyone can reap these benefits – even if you’re

landlocked, says Wallace J. Nichols (aka Dr. J), marine biologist and author of **Blue Mind**, which explores his research into the connection between water and happiness. That's because science has shown that the same physical and mental adaptations are present even when someone simply looks at water — whether that's taking in the view from the beach or just looking at a photograph, says Nichols.

Here we break down just what those benefits are and the workouts you can tackle to reap them while also squeezing in your daily sweat.

1. Reduces Stress and Improves Mood

It's not just a placebo effect — or your out-of-office message: Being near water really does help you feel more at ease. “The best way to understand blue mind [the state of mind when around water] is to think about red mind, says Nichols. “[Red mind] is always being over connected and always on and working — that's our new normal and comes with anxiety and stress and frayed edges, and if we stay in that mind state, we will burn out. Blue mind is the remedy.”

Research backs this up, with **one 2017 study** showing an improvement in mood when exposed to “blue environments” such as water — even more so than when exposed to “green spaces” such as forests. Another **systematic review** of multiple studies “suggested a positive association between greater exposure to outdoor blue spaces and both benefits to mental health and well-being.”

2. Improves Creativity, Compassion, and Collaboration

Being around water helps reduce the noise that keeps you up at night. Doing so allows for greater opportunity to be imaginative and empathetic — traits that can be stunted when you're in the thick of a tough work day... or week. Think of it as more bandwidth, says Nichols. When your cognitive and psychological resources are used toward a perceived threat [i.e. anxious thoughts and stress over deadlines and growing to-do lists], other things are ignored because there's simply not enough time or energy to dedicate to them.

3. Helps You Remain Present

In that same vein, decluttering your brain allows for a kind of mindfulness that feels out of reach in the chaos of everyday life. “Being in the present is something that happens naturally in the water,” says Iokepa “Kepa” Nae’ole, manager of Hale Huakai (ocean activities) at **Kā’anapali Beach Hotel** on the Hawaiian island of Maui. “While sitting on the bench at the gym between sets, it’s easy for your mind to wander to places that have nothing to do with the here and now. In the water, and especially in the ocean, you’re constantly paying attention to your surroundings.”

4. Reduces Your Risk of Injury

One hour paddling in a kayak or outrigger canoe can equate to as many as 5,000 strokes, but if your trainer asked you to perform 5,000 burpees, or 5,000 squats in an hour, you’d think they were crazy, right? “The fluid motion required to propel a board or boat is much easier on the body than land-based resistance movements,” explains Nae’ole.

What’s more, with gravity out of the way, you not only eliminate the pressure on your joints but thanks to the buoyancy of water, you’re able to move with a greater range of motion and may be able to perform exercises you’d never be able to do on dry land. “Swimming especially helps to neutralize the gravitational stress you’re exposed to every day, allowing you to feel more of the exertion of every muscle used and less of the muscles needed to keep you upright and stable,” adds Nae’ole.

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The Best Ways to Take Your Workout to the Water

Now that you know why you should find your way to the water, here’s how to get the most out of it. Soak up the warm weather, and try some of these water sports and

activities for your next outdoor workout. You just might discover your new favorite way to spend a weekend.



SUP has exploded in popularity over the last several years, and it can be done on any body of water – calm, flat water for more leisure activities and beginners, and faster-moving water and waves for advanced athletes and those looking to SUP surf, says NaeË»ole. (For the record, SUP surfing boards will be a little different in width and shape.)

Either way, your core is sure to get an intense workout while on a SUP. Maintaining balance and coordination – not to mention the increased effort if you’re going against the wind! – is the main fitness event for this water sport, but your entire body is working from the toes up making SUP a full-body burner. “It enhances the balance, core training, and proprioceptive ability,” adds Manuel Velazquez, health and fitness specialist at [Rancho La Puerta](#) in Baja California, Mexico. “It also enhances focus, concentration, and in a way, it promotes a meditative state when still or moving. This results in a better overall emotional state of being.”



It’s clear with one glance that surfing requires major coordination, balance, and strength, making this one of the best water-based core workouts you can find. Thanks

to all the paddling involved to get out into the open water, surfing is also a great cardiovascular workout as well as targets your shoulder and back muscles.

When you're ready to catch a wave, your core and legs come into play to boost yourself up onto the board and remain engaged the entire time to help keep you upright.



Laps in the pool are great, but you might also consider trying open-water swimming to level up your cardio and strength training thanks to the natural resistance of water, not to mention a current. In fact, it's Nae'ole's go-to workout of choice. "My number one daily workout is a non-stop, 30-60-minute ocean swim using a snorkel, mask, and bodyboarding fins," he says. The barrier to entry is minimal — low cost, gear, and prep work — albeit you'll need access to open water and you should be a competent swimmer. "Most importantly, it allows me to get my workout in while at the same time enjoying the presence of wildlife," adds Nae'ole.



Take that same SUP and drop down to your stomach to try prone paddleboarding, but it can be done on any surfboard large enough to float a person, explains Nae'ole. "A typical longboard (9 feet or longer) can give a person a great workout for the arms and shoulders," he adds. "Paddling prone forces the paddler to arch the back while lifting the chest slightly away from the board, which is great for posture." Plus, there's no paddle

required, and this water workout can be done on any body of water warm enough to swim in, he says.