HEALTH   TRAINING

Exercise for Scuba Divers

By Gretchen M. Ashton   Dec 9, 2015

Exercise is the great equalizer, so much so that exercise is widely thought to stave off the effects of aging. Exercise helps prevent, reverse and manage illness and disease and contributes to overall wellbeing.

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A fit lifestyle may extend biological health by as much as 20 years. What does this mean for divers? Enthusiasts who exercise regularly can not only improve their dive performance but also add years to their diving careers.

The medicine ball has been utilized for thousands of years as one of the most versatile pieces of fitness equipment, and it offers great options when it comes to exercise for scuba divers. Its very name comes from a time in history when the concepts of health and medicine were so closely related to physical fitness that the words had practically the same meaning.

Although most of us are familiar with what one looks like, a medicine ball is a weighted exercise ball that comes in various materials like leather or rubber. Medicine balls are weighted in varying increments to accommodate improvements in movement and strength by adding resistance. Soft medicine balls are designed more for holding and throwing; hard-surface medicine balls are usually engineered to include bouncing. Some medicine balls are adapted with handles or ropes as hand-holds. The medicine ball is widely used for physical therapy and rehabilitation, as well as to improve athletic performance and general fitness.

Medicine-ball exercises in rehabilitation settings begin with small movements such as rolling the ball in a circular pattern to improve shoulder mobility or lifting the ball to improve core strength. Depending on the goals and fitness level of the diver, the medicine ball can be held as an additional weight for exercises, used for balance or be thrown as shown in the medicine-ball bounce.

Medicine Ball Bounce on a BOSU with Single Leg Option. Photo by Gretchen M. Ashton

Medicine-Ball Bounce

The medicine-ball bounce is a total-body exercise that helps improve strength and coordination for diving activities. Begin with a ball weighted in the 4- to 8-pound range on a steady surface. Beginners may first try this exercise in a seated position. Keep the ball close to the body throughout the exercise. Holding the ball with both hands, take a deep breath and reach overhead, extending the arms and body. Contract the abdominals and exhale while throwing the medicine ball as hard as possible into the floor nearby. As the ball bounces back, catch it and repeat. About 25 bounces is a good starting set. Add multiple sets, longer bouncing sessions and heavier medicine balls to progress the workout and ultimately your fitness. Divers will notice the medicine-ball bounce helps improve arm and shoulder strength, adds stability to the back and leg muscles, works the abs and gets the heart rate up. To advance the exercise, try performing the medicine-ball bounce balancing on one foot on a steady surface, or harder still, on a BOSU ball. This exercise is especially good for diving activities, such as moving under the load of dive gear and changing directions on the surface of the water. With just a small time commitment, divers can reap huge fitness rewards.

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Gretchen brings her passion for diving and fitness together as the founder of ScubaFit® the only fitness for diving certification which is also approved by both diving and fitness agencies. She is an advanced diver, NBFE and ISSA Elite Personal Trainer, Specialist in Fitness Therapy and Nutrition, an AAU World Champion Hall-of-Fame athlete, and a mentor for Water Women, Inc. She shares her message with divers by visiting dive clubs, presenting at scuba shows, as a radio guest, as the publisher of FitDiver® Magazine, and with FitDiver® mobile apps. She widely published with more than 125 articles for diving publications and blogs. For more information or to contact Gretchen, visit www.scubafit.com.

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