

HEALTH

Using a Hula Hoop to Improve Dive Fitness

By Gretchen M. Ashton Jun 16, 2016

Often used to help divers dial in their buoyancy in the pool, hula hoops can improve a diver's fitness when used on land as well.

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Pursuing further [buoyancy training](#) after completing their Open Water course is one of the best decisions a diver can make when it comes to continuing education and improving overall diving performance and comfort underwater. To practice buoyancy, dive instructors arrange hula hoops with weights and lines on the sea floor or the bottom of a pool. The test is to *slowly* pass through the vertical hoop in full dive gear without touching it. Once a diver establishes neutral buoyancy, nuances in breathing and focused control of the body allow the diver to pass through the hoop without dragging it along. It's not easy but practice makes perfect, and many divers will notice an improvement on their very next dive. But it may be time to bring the hula hoop out of the water and onto dry land.

Using a hula hoop to improve dive fitness

Using hula hoops for exercise has become fashionable, and doing so can help improve both a diver's performance and comfort underwater. Hula hooping offers good aerobic exercise, which strengthens and maintains the heart and lungs. It also utilizes the core muscles of the torso, and improves flexibility and coordination. Maintaining the heart, lungs and cardiorespiratory system is most important for divers because of the unique physiological stresses of the underwater environment and scuba. Hooping for 20 minutes a few times each week is a good start to an aerobic-exercise program. Much of human movement is in a forward and straight direction, more than side-to-side. As a result, divers develop muscle imbalances, creating areas of tightness and weakness in the body. This happens particularly around the torso, low back and hips — muscles essential to streamlined diving.

Hooping helps activate balance, strength and flexibility in every direction. It also incorporates the mind-muscle connection, peripheral vision, and other sensory activities of the body that transfer well to diving. Of particular importance are the abdominal muscles, which protect the lower back, stabilize the body during movement of the limbs, and help with breathing. The aerobic pathway of hooping can help reduce abdominal fat and trim the waistline.

Get Started

To begin, place the hoop on the ground and step inside it. Lift the hoop with both hands and place it along one side of the waist; give it a spin and begin to move the hips in a circular motion. Try to keep the hoop moving horizontally, with one edge touching the body as it spins around the torso at different speeds. At first, just counting successive spins will be motivating. But as soon as possible, transition to hooping for a set number of minutes without dropping the hoop. It's easy to practice hooping in spite of busy schedules. It's appropriate for all ages and fitness levels, and you can hoop almost anywhere — even while watching television.

Hula hoops come in different sizes. For added fun, small divers and children might find it possible to jump through the hoop while spinning it vertically with the hands, like a jump rope. Hula hoops range in price from a few dollars for lightweight plastic to \$80 for weighted and padded hoops; hoops designed specifically for fitness break down into sections for easy transport in a gym bag or luggage. So when you consider a hula hoop's possible uses for a diver, consider taking it out of the pool and hooping on dry land.



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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, NBF 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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