A Functional Method of Weight Maintenance
by Laurel Dierking, MEd, NFPT

Step aerobics provides an exciting, rhythmic exercise experience that has been proven to aid in weight maintenance, muscle growth, as well as improvements in heart and overall health.

WHAT IS STEP AEROBICS?
Step aerobics involves simple and rhythmic step movements performed continuously for an extended period of time on an adjustable stair step. Moving to a sequence of dance-like combinations, step aerobics can enhance functional fitness, and improve muscular and cardiovascular endurance. This type of exercise allows for the optional use of hand-held weights to further increase the level of intensity (greater effort).

Energized by an upbeat music playlist, the class is led by an encouraging aerobics instructor who enthusiastically guides the rhythmic flow and speed of the class. Participants

DISCLAIMER: To develop an exercise program that best suits your needs, please consult with your physician. It is important to talk with your doctor before beginning any exercise program.

This fun and functional form of exercise brings numerous health benefits to individuals struggling with weight-loss and its accompanying problems. These benefits are particularly important for those individuals who have a body mass index (BMI) greater than or equal to 25. A person’s BMI represents an estimated ratio of body weight to height. Individuals with a BMI between 25 and 29.9 are classified as “overweight,” while a BMI greater than or equal to 30 is indicative of obesity. Oftentimes, the discomforts associated with exercise lead to continued sedentary lifestyles, which only further exacerbates poor health outcomes. A practical and invigorating approach that you may not have associated with combating these outcomes is step aerobics.
are motivated to keep a steady pace that stimulates improvements in coordination and balance. Consistency and duration of aerobic exercise enables optimal fat loss.

Step aerobics not only provides a unique and engaging workout, but also allows for an increase of lean muscle mass, which yields innumerable benefits such as allowing your body to burn fat better (improved metabolism) and improved sustainable energy. Physical limitations partnered with low cardiovascular endurance require a distinct and safe approach to exercise through low intensity aerobic work.

**AEROBIC EXERCISE**

Keep in mind that aerobic work relates to any exercise that improves or is intended to improve the efficiency of the body’s cardiovascular system in absorbing and transporting oxygen. Aerobic exercise specifically involves the use of oxygen to convert fat into energy for the working muscles. The involvement of multiple muscles groups during aerobic exercise specifically involves the use of oxygen to convert fat into energy for the working muscles.
exercise, coupled with continuous low intensity aerobic work will maximize fat conversion and lead to greater overall fat loss.

If you have a BMI greater than or equal to 25, you must be aware of potential contraindications to exercise in order to progress toward holistic, injury-free, long term weight-loss management. These contraindications may include jumping or bouncing, jogging, high impact movements, and heavy lifting. Performing these types of movements can lead to injury and should be avoided initially until adequate strength and joint support is developed.

Step aerobics allows for the manipulation of intensity (greater amount of work) either by adding additional steps or with the use of handheld weights. In order to avoid high impact strain on your joints from the step, you will want to keep your step level relatively low to begin and gradually progress as your body weight decreases and the muscles around your joints are strengthened.

**DURATION AND INTENSITY**

It is a common myth that in order for your workout to be sufficient, you need to be working at 100 percent of your maximum effort. Fortunately, for those with little exercise experience and extreme limitations, this daunting fable is not even close to being true! Depending on your weight-loss goals and current physical state, the most important aspect of plunging into a new exercise routine is duration, not intensity. As previously mentioned, aerobic exercise is necessary to burn fat. It is imperative that you start slowly and progress gradually when beginning a new training routine, whether it is your first experience with exercise or you were once a fit athlete.
It is important for all individuals to build your aerobic capacity so that you could sustain 15 to 60 minutes of low intensity aerobic exercise at least three times per week. As your body becomes capable of completing a particular amount of aerobic work, you should gradually increase your work load and/or duration. Depending on your fitness goals, as your ability to work for a longer period of time improves, your intensity level of work can also increase. This is where step aerobics offers a great modality to do just that. Simply add another level to your step or add handheld weights to increase intensity! Low intensity aerobic exercises such as walking, biking, or swimming, partnered with a well-balanced diet are other great ways to maximize fat loss. Including step aerobics into your exercise routine provides you with the most critical aspects of attaining healthy weight-loss.

**CONCLUSION**

Although you may think of just leotards and leg warmers when aerobics are mentioned, step aerobics is a preferred method of exercise for anyone looking to maximize their weight-loss or improve overall fitness. Step aerobics as a method of exercise for individuals affected by obesity is proven effective in reducing total body weight and fat mass, improving muscle tone, decreasing strain on joints, improving cardiovascular health, and even boosting self-esteem, all through low intensity aerobic exercise.

Step aerobics classes are taught in most gyms, many private health institutions, as well as in local community health centers, such as the YMCA. After four to six weeks of consistent exercise, you will want to increase not only the intensity, but the type of training in order to continue progressing with your weight-loss and improving your heart health. In addition to weight-loss, step aerobics will also bring comfort and ease into your physical body while nurturing a positive self-image. This, coupled with a well-balanced nutritious diet, will lead you down the road to long term weight-loss and management, and the achievement of your goals.

**About the Author:**

Working within the health field for three years, Laurel Dierking MEd, NFPT, is passionate about cultivating body, mind and spirit awareness through holistic health practices. As a Health and Fitness Professional and yoga instructor at JFKFITNESS, Laurel strives to guide individuals on a path to self-awareness, long-term functional fitness, and weight-loss management.

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**Why Join the OAC?** Because it’s the ONLY National non-profit organization whose sole focus is helping individuals affected by obesity. The OAC needs every individual who is concerned about the cause of obesity to join our Coalition. With your voice, we can make a difference in education and advocacy for the millions of individuals affected by obesity.

**OAC Membership Categories (select one)**

- Individual Membership: $20/year
- Institutional Membership: $500/year
- Chairman’s Council Membership: $1000+/year

Are you joining for the first time, or are you renewing your OAC Membership?
- I am joining for the first time (never been an OAC member).
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**OAC Membership Add-ons (optional, but only accessible by OAC members)**

**Add-on 1: Educational Resources**
To order bulk copies of OAC resources, members can purchase educational packages (not required for Institutional and Chairman’s Council Members).

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  - $50
- Deluxe Package
  - 51-100 pieces/quarter
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Make a tax-deductible donation to the OAC. Your donation helps the OAC’s educational and advocacy efforts.
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**BUILDING A COALITION OF THOSE AFFECTED**

The OAC is the ONLY non-profit organization whose sole focus is helping those affected by obesity. The OAC is a great place to turn if you are looking for a way to get involved and give back to the cause of obesity.

**Why YOU Should Become an OAC Member**
Quite simply, because the voice of those affected needs to be built! The OAC not only provides valuable public education on obesity, but we also conduct a variety of advocacy efforts. With advocacy, our voice must be strong. And, member is what gives the OAC its strong voice.

**MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS**

- Official welcome letter and membership card
- Annual subscription to the OAC’s publication, Your Weight Matters℠ Magazine
- Subscriptions to the OAC Members Make a Difference and Obesity Action Alert monthly e-newsletters
- “Bias Buster” Alerts, altering specifically to issues of weight bias
- Immediate Advocacy Alerts on urgent advocacy issues and access to the OAC’s expert advocacy team
- Ability to lend your voice to the cause