

Countdown to Competition —Are you Ready?



By: Ellen G. Waller, MS, NASM-CPT, NASM-PES Target Training, Founder & Coach

Why pool time can help Irish Dance training

Ellen Waller, Founder of Target Training, is back at Irish Dancing Magazine sharing a fun idea as to how you can use pool time to get in an Irish Dancing workout. Check it out!

The warm summer months lead to many days spent at the pool. And for Irish Dancers, we typically jump in and play around with practising our steps in the pool. Who's with me? If you already do this, keep it up! Practising your steps, specific dance moves and strength and mobility training in the pool can be exceptionally beneficial to your dancing.

Training in the water provides great low-impact options which can reduce your risk of overuse injuries and help dancers recover from injuries. With most Irish Dance injuries, you have impact restrictions (meaning you can't jump). But instead of taking off completely for weeks or months which can cause a significant loss in your cardiovascular fitness and strength, participate in 'active rest' by training in the pool. Make sure you check with your doctor or health care professional first before performing any injury recovery training.

Aside from a low-impact training advantage, there are several other physical benefits to training in water.

- **Increased Strength:** The resistance (viscosity) from the water makes it more challenging to move through the water. This resistance helps develop your muscle strength which helps improve your dance technique.



Ellen G. Waller, MS, NASM-CPT, NASM-PES, is a long-time competitive and professional Irish Dancer and instructor who has dedicated her life to Irish Dance. Her talent as a dancer has led her to perform for thousands across the globe and her passion as an Irish Dance instructor has influenced innumerable young dancers. Determined to break the barriers young dancers and athletes inevitably

encounter, she earned an undergraduate degree in Dance Education and a master's degree in Exercise Science.

Coupling her in-depth experience as an Irish Dancer/instructor with her expansive knowledge of kinesiology, Ellen created the innovative TARGET TRAINING programme; a series of courses and advanced training methods that condition specific muscles Irish Dancers of all ages need in order to excel. Through the TARGET TRAINING programme, dancers can optimise performance, improve technique, reduce their risk of injuries, overcome physical and mental challenges, and perform at an elite level. Learn more at at www.targettrainingdance.com

- **Increased Speed:** The resistance in the water also makes it very challenging to move quickly. When we perform movements in the water, like kicking your legs up as fast as you can, it'll help develop the muscles needed to increase your speed for sharper dancing.
- **Improved Balance:** This is especially important for anyone returning from an injury or who struggles with balance. Balancing on one foot in the water will provide support to build up your balance. Begin in chest height water balancing on one leg and as that becomes easier, move to shallower water until you've worked your way out of water.
- **Improved Irish Dance Skills:** Working on new Irish Dance skills, especially jumps, can be challenging. But if we practise them in the water, we have more time to properly execute the movements and

train our body how to complete the skill. Take a movement like 'scissors' where you jump off two feet, wrap your legs around each other, then bring them back to the starting position. This will be much easier to execute in the water where you have time to wrap your legs around. The resistance from the water will also help develop the strength needed for the move. It's a win-win!

Next time you are at the pool, practise all your Irish Dance steps with perfect execution a few times each. Pay special attention to your posture, extension, toe height, turnout and crossing.

In addition to your regular dance steps, I highly recommend that Irish Dancers use their pool time to do additional training for Irish Dancing such as these five exercises designed to help improve your strength. Complete eight repetitions of each exercise for three sets.



LAT ADDUCTIONS

- Stand tall in waist/chest-high water engaging your abdominals.
- Keeping your shoulders down, bring your arms to the surface of the water keeping them straight.
- Exhale and as quickly as you can, bring your arms down to your side.
- Hold arms by your side for three counts, engaging the back of your armpits, then raise them back to the surface.



TRICEP EXTENSIONS

- Stand tall in waist/chest-high water.
- Pull your elbows slightly behind your body and bend them at a 90-degree angle.
- Leaving your elbows where they are, quickly straighten your arm engaging your tricep (top, back of arm) for three counts at the end of the movement.



SINGLE LEG KNEE TO EXTENSION

- Stand with perfect Irish Dance posture in waist-deep water on one foot.
- Lift your free knee up and hold for five counts.
- Keeping your knee where it is, engage your quad to extend your leg straight. Hold for five counts.
- Keeping your leg straight, quickly lower it down.

STRAIGHT LEG KICKBACKS

- Stand with perfect Irish Dance posture in waist-deep water on one foot.
- Turn your lifted leg out and quickly lift it a couple of inches behind you, then return to the starting position to pulse your leg back.



MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

Another well-documented benefit of pool time is the benefit to your mental health. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Swimming can improve mood in both men and women.” Pool time can have a positive impact on people of all ages.

After your Irish Dancing exercise take a few minutes to relax your muscles and joints by floating. Think of this as your cool-down time but in this case, you are resting your mind and your muscles. Because your body is buoyant, this gives you a chance to decompress not only your muscles but your mind. And, you will likely enjoy the isolation and peace that comes at this time where you can meditate and zone-out the stresses in your world. Try it, you’ll like it!

For more training tips, head to Target Training’s website www.targettrainingdance.com 



CORE SWIVELS

- Place your arms on the outside of the pool and bend your knees to a 90-degree angle.
- Exhale and quickly swivel legs to one side, then inhale and return back to the centre. Repeat on the opposite side.
- For a more challenging modification, straighten both legs.

