Teaching Aerobics

Class Preparation

Step height should be dependent on participant's height and fitness level and familiarity with Step Aerobics. Even athletes should limit the step height to the lowest possible height until the coordination is achieved on the step. Under no circumstances should the step height be high enough to require a 90 degree or greater flexion of the knee. A maximum of 60 degrees is sufficient for all higher intensity levels.

Always ask if anyone is new to step. Keep a watchful eye on new people to insure their adherence to safety standards. They may not be aware of their limits yet. We all have a tendency to get complacent over time so always instruct participants in the proper technique, regardless if there are new people present or not.

Instructors should be conscious of the fact that the class will try to follow your intensity level. Therefore, if you use more than one-step riser, the class will follow even if they are not ready. Considering all the classes that we generally do in a week, it's not really necessary to use more than one riser. The additional stress on your shins, knees and ankles may manifest itself in time. As instructors we sometimes don't get the chance to follow ACSM guidelines for alternate days of aerobic activity to heal properly. Proper technique, enough sleep and proper diet are of utmost importance.

Before starting class make sure that all towels, weights or other items are stowed under the board or at the wall so as not to provide a hazard during class. Insure that each step participant has a minimum of 25 square feet of space. In other words, a 5-foot by 5-foot area with the step positioned in the middle of this area.

Begin with a progressive, limbering warm-up and stretch period followed by stepping with a tap up then basic step up moves. Progressively add arm and then leg changes. Observe the class's response to cueing. This will give you an idea of the overall class experience level. Adjust the class accordingly.

Face the class providing a mirror image of the moves. During such maneuvers as turn step or over the top (not across the top), it may be less confusing to the class and therefore easier for them to follow if you face front. Remain flexible in your teaching style and use common sense guided by the participant's perspective.

Intensity and Complexity

There is a misconception of what constitutes beginner, intermediate and advanced levels of aerobics. Generally, people equate class level with choreographic complexity. It is physical exercise intensity level alone that determines class level and subsequently heart rate. Complex moves, although fine for dance enthusiasts, can be defeating and demoralizing to most of the people who are trying to learn complex dance moves when they are really there to burn fat.

Intensity can be better served by utilizing large muscle groups quantitatively. Complex dance moves can be icing on the cake after the intensity level has been achieved by the aforementioned method. In many cases this may serve as a great cool-down method since intensity and subsequently heart rate generally drops as the participant slows down to learn new steps. Therefore, beginner, intermediate and advanced level classes can be grouped further into two categories, complex and non-complex denoting the choreographic complexity.

Leg muscles and arm movements will also add to intensity level. Intensity level can be reduced by placing hands on the waist while continuing to step, by reducing the height of the step or by reducing the tempo of the music. Step heights of 4 inches provide intensity levels near those of walking briskly. A step height of 12 inches exhibits near the same energy level as jogging at 5 to 7 mph.