

fitness | aerobic grandma by Molly Schechter

Modifying Movements for 'Mom'

Many times in a class or the gym, someone will ask, "Can I do that exercise?" A better question might be, "How can I do that exercise?" With few exceptions, most people can do most moves. But many of us of a certain age need to modify for our individual limitations.



MOLLY SCHECHTER

Few fitness professionals understand this better than Lawrence Biscontini, who teaches continuing education courses to personal trainers and group fitness instructors. He says, "Not all movements are made for all people. But there are no 'bad' ones, just movements prescribed badly and inappropriately for some."

Biscontini teaches his students to prescribe for special populations by saying, "Here's how to regress this for mom."

He recommends adaptations for "any weight bearing, balance or strength movement involving standing on one leg or two, or being on all fours or in plank position." Standing work, especially standing on one leg and hiking the hip, is especially important for older adults. It helps prevent falls by improving balance and strengthening the *quadratus lumborum*, a large core muscle that side bends the torso and stabilizes the hip and lower back.

Particularly in a gym or a fitness class, there can be self-induced pressure to do what everybody else is doing. The best instructors will spot someone who is struggling and volunteer an alternative. But in the end it is up to the student to say, "Give me a modification."

For "mom," he regresses the difficulty by putting her next to a chair or having her work facing out from a corner so she has a wall on both sides to assist her and make her feel more comfortable. Most of Biscontini's modifications similarly reek of common sense: extra padding for working on the floor, for example, and curled fingers for weight bearing on the hands.

When Biscontini talks about making modifications for mom, he is literally talking about his own mother, Barbara Biscontini Savage, 80, of Hershey, Pa. According to Lawrence, "Mom was the first



Courtesy photo

Barbara Biscontini Savage and Lawrence Biscontini

Miss Pepsi Cola back in the last century when she was a teen. She has survived smoking three packs a year from her teens to her fifties, years of inappropriate eating through lack of education and health problems, including high blood pressure, back issues, vertigo, and arthritis. And she represents someone I've changed from sedentary to non-sedentary. She's no athlete, but now she goes to Silver Sneakers and takes t'ai chi at church."

Biscontini has an enviably optimistic world view; "I don't refer to anyone as a senior," he says, "but chronologically enriched." He has won just about every form of recognition in the fitness world including 2012 Power Music Group Fitness Lead Consultant and 2011 ACE Senior Group Fitness Consultant. In addition to training trainers, he runs fitness retreats in Puerto Rico and Mykonos. Learn more at www.FindLawrence.com. Better yet, friend him on Facebook.

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