

By Kelly Marshall BSc (Hons), Dip PT, NASM, SFS, IFS, CES kelly_gk@hotmail.com



SWIM FOR YOUR LIFE

Swimming is classically deemed to be an effective tool for building endurance, muscle strength, general cardiovascular fitness, promoting mental relaxation and is often associated with an older age group.

However, it is often overlooked for its potentially integral role as part of a total body approach for long-term health and optimum performance in daily living.

Ways to incorporate swimming into your exercise regime include:

As 'active recovery' to promote enhanced muscle recovery post hard training sessions/events.

It can be used post-gym workouts or on 'rest' days from other training.

If you are a regular runner then swimming can form a complimentary activity for incorporating 'non-impact' days where you reduce joint stress, still targeting your heart rate.

Working around injuries

if you have been doing land-based exercise but now an injury affects your ability to continue with weight through an ankle or knee then look to the pool as a potential method of rehab. You can isolate upper or lower body movements, do pool running/walking or just do gentle laps (as long as your swimming techniques are pain-free and don't reproduce symptoms).

As a cross-training component

Swimming can be included before or after a gym-based workout to serve as a sub-section of your whole workout, as it offers alternative physiological demands and different muscle movement patterns.

According to the American Heart Association, just 30-60 minutes of physical activity (i.e. swimming) 3-4 days per week can help reduce your risk for heart disease, stroke, and diabetes by lowering your blood pressure and cholesterol.

As a warm up component

Done prior to another workout (playing tennis, exercise class, gym workout or a run) you can gradually increase the effort & intensity to increase the heart rate and easily prepare the body.

To provide a renewed motivation

If you don't swim regularly then consider phasing it in for a period of time, as advanced and experienced exercisers can suffer training plateaus and demotivation as much as (if not more often than) the novice exerciser.

As part of a new hobby

Swimming is the starting component that forms the multi-discipline sport of triathlon. There are over 350 affiliated clubs across the UK and they cater for all levels of ability and experience, so if you enjoy swimming you could consider getting involved in a greater challenge and combining the skills and fitness of cycling and running.

What Swimming is not as effective for:

Weight loss – swimming is quoted to burn around 3 calories a mile per pound of bodyweight and as part of a structured exercise plan plus healthy nutritional approach, can be effective in calorie burning.

However, in isolation it is not the outright best solution for weight loss and research even suggests that it may have limitations relating to the cooling effect of the water and the markedly reduced calorie burning expenditure once leaving the water (Luebbers, 2009).

Advanced muscle toning

In isolation swimming provides a general body toning effect but does not promote specific muscle definition development and it's worth remembering that Olympic swimmers spend significant amounts of time doing land-based strength training as well as time spent training in the water!

