

The Health Benefits of Swimming



*You dive into the pool for a game of Marco Polo or to cool down from the hot summer heat. You love the calming feeling of **being submerged** in water and the fun factor of **frolicking** in the pool like you were 10 years old again. But do you ever just swim for exercise and for the array of the health benefits of swimming? Don't be a fish out of water when it comes to knowing just how wonderful swimming is for your mind, body and soul...*

Have you ever watched the Olympics and found yourself **in awe of** the professional swimmers' physiques? Their long, lean and toned muscular bodies seem to **glide through** the water effortlessly. Swimmers are in fantastic shape and those who swim regularly know that they not only look great on the outside but feel just as great on the inside. The health benefits of swimming are almost unmatched by most any other sport.

Why is Swimming So Good?

Swimming works your whole body, improving **cardiovascular conditioning**, muscle strength, endurance, posture, and flexibility all at the same time. Your cardiovascular system in particular benefits because swimming improves your body's use of oxygen without overworking your heart.

As you become fitter and are able to swim longer, your resting heart rate and **respiratory rate** will be reduced, making blood flow to the heart and lungs more efficient. If you're looking to lose weight, swimming is just the ticket. On average, a swimmer can burn as many calories in an hour as a runner who runs six miles in one hour. Simply put, some call swimming the perfect form of exercise.

Additional Health Benefits of Swimming

- *Whole body conditioning:* Swimming **tones** your upper and lower body because you're using almost all of your major muscle groups. The best strokes for all-over body toning are the freestyle, breaststroke and backstroke.
- *Low risk of injury:* There is a low risk for swimming injuries because there's no stress on your bones, joints or connective tissues **due to buoyancy** and the fact that you weigh 1/10th less in water. If you're looking for a safe daily workout routine, swimming is ideal because you can rigorously work out with a reduced chance of swimming injuries. Many athletes supplement their training with swimming.
- *Low-impact exercise:* So many people **can reap the benefits** of swimming. **Pregnant women benefit** from swimming because it helps strengthen the shoulder and abdominal muscles, which can be strained when carrying a baby. The elderly, women who have had a mastectomy and those recovering from an injury often turn to swimming or water aerobic exercises because it's low impact, helps relax stiff muscles and isn't weight-bearing. Swimming also increases circulation.
- *Improve blood pressure:* Studies have shown that a workout routine that includes swimming can help reduce and possibly prevent high blood pressure, which lowers your risk for heart disease and stroke.
- *Stress reduction:* You don't have to be a water **sign in the zodiac** to feel the meditative and healing properties of water. Swimming is extremely relaxing because it allows more oxygen to flow to your muscles and forces you **to regulate your breathing**. It's also a great way to relieve stress. **Our bodies are made up of about 60% water** so it's no wonder why some feel such a draw to the water.

Take the Plunge

Do you want to take up swimming but don't know how to get your feet wet? First, if you have any existing injury or asthma, consult your doctor to determine if you should swim and at what pace.

Start slowly, especially if the pool feels like foreign land. Experts recommend that beginner swimmers start with 12-20 minutes of swimming, and once your strokes become more efficient, your ability to swim longer will also. For exercise purposes, the best stroke to use in the pool is freestyle, where your arms are moving in a windmill motion while your body is pivoting and you're breathing on the side of the arm that's

out of the water.

To keep your swimming routine fresh, mix up the freestyle stroke with other strokes, such as the backstroke or butterfly. Not only will using a variety of strokes save you from boredom, but you'll be working different muscles for a more effective workout every time.

If **laps aren't your thing**, there are plenty of other good swimming exercises. Try walking or running in water, which many people find easier to do than on land. Tread water – **it can be exhausting** but will help tone your legs and arms.

You can also try **water aerobic** exercises or gather your friends and attempt some synchronized swimming. Revert back to your childhood with a game of Shark or some relay races. Don't just take advantage of only the water either – **use the walls of the pool** to kick without a kickboard or to do leg lifts. The water is an ideal playground for all forms of swimming as exercise – just be creative!