



Taking the Plunge

The benefits of swimming are numerous, including the fact that it exerts far less pressure on your joints than most gym based activities, as well as giving you a total body workout.

Most people think that swimming is just for oldies and an easy option for working out, but don't be fooled. An hour's vigorous freestyle swimming can burn up to 700 cal for someone weighing 70kg.

Muscle Groups Worked

Most swimming techniques primarily work the muscles of the arms, upper back and shoulders, as well as a good all over workout with the kicking of the legs, with backstroke and breaststroke also targeting your chest. Not forgetting a great cardio vascular work out too! The water is also an ideal place for rehabilitation training, gently aiding injured muscles back into shape. Muscle bound athletes will benefit tremendously from the odd swimming session as it will aid them with flexibility in the joint.

Stretching

As with regular gym training, stretching the working muscles to prevent unnecessary strain is very important. As the water is so supportive of the body, most people tend to over look the stretching element to the workout. The water is also a great place to stretch after a hard gym workout to help your muscles relax and bring your body temperature back to normal.

Body Positioning

Make yourself streamlined, always looking directly down, and not in front of you. Only the top of your head should break the water, not your forehead or face. Your neck and spine should be in one line. Your kick should have a short cadence, with an emphasis on rhythm, not power, and just your heels should break the surface of the water. Rolling your hips from side to side can increase power and reduce drag. During each swim session, spend a few lengths focusing on both ends of your body

Fitness Programs

Rather than plodding up and down the pool at the same pace and stroke, it's a great idea to incorporate various fitness routines. The following programs are designed for all levels, starting from a beginner up to an experienced swimmer. Try to count your strokes per length (SPL) to maintain the same number. If you find you are increasing from your normal rate with, that is a good indication that you are tired and should rest briefly.

Level 1

This is an introductory level starting at 20 lengths (500m in a 25m pool), taking approx 20 minutes to complete. The program will add structure to your swimming in the form of interval training, which is easy to follow.

If you find this too easy then go to Level 2.

This level is also ideal as a cool down after a gym session to reduce soreness and stiffness or to aid in rehabilitation.



20 lengths (500m)

- 4 lengths easy swim
- 1 min rest
- 4 lengths – alternate 1 length fast with 1 length easy pace
- 1 min rest
- 2 lengths using pull buoy
- 2 lengths kicking with kick board
- 1 min rest
- 4 x 1 length moderate/fast pace using front crawl, backstroke, front crawl, breaststroke
- 4 lengths easy swim

Level 2

If you would normally swim 20-32 lengths then this is the right level for you. The session will take up to approx 45mins depending on your speed and rest.

30 lengths (750m)

- 6 lengths easy swim
- 2 lengths using kick board
- 2 lengths using pull buoy
- 6 lengths easy pace – long strokes alternating style each length
- 1 min rest
- 4 lengths front crawl slightly faster pace
- 1 min rest
- 3 lengths front crawl faster pace
- 1 min rest
- 2 lengths front crawl firm pace
- 1 min rest
- 1 length front crawl maximum effort

- 4 lengths easy pace – alternating strokes

Level 3

This level is aimed at regular adult fitness swimmers who may use water as part of their training for other sports. These sessions will take in the region of 45 min to 1 hour. If you would normally swim 30-50 lengths then give this session a go.

40 lengths (1000m)

- 4 lengths easy swim
- 4 lengths pulling with pull buoy
- 4 lengths swim
- 4 lengths kicking with kick board

- 4 x 2 lengths moderate pace with 30 secs rest between each
- 2 x 4 lengths faster pace with 40 secs rest between each
- 4 lengths fast pace – time your swim

- 4 lengths as 1 length breaststroke, 1 length front crawl – repeat



Level 4

This level is more suited to those who are regular swimmers and understand the concept of interval training. Always look for improvements by increasing the distance covered in each session working your way up to a program consisting of 120 lengths (3000m)

80 lengths (2000m)

- 8 lengths – alternate 4 lengths of using pull buoy, and 4 lengths kick board
- 4 x 4 lengths front crawl with 30 secs rest after each
- 3 x 6 lengths front crawl with 30 secs rest after each (get faster every 2 lengths)
- 2 x 8 lengths front crawl, breathing every 3 strokes with 30 secs rest after each
- 5 x 2 lengths of your choice stroke, concentrating on long glide and good technique with 15 secs rest after each. Wear fins or paddles if you have them.
- 4 lengths using pull buoy
- 4 lengths kicking with kick board
- 4 lengths easy swim choice style

Knowing Your Equipment

Kick Boards

Many people believe that a kick board is just for beginners, but they are wrong. Kicking with a board is a great way to build leg strength and improve kicking technique.

Positioning - Hold the top of the board and rest your arms on it so that your upper body is relaxed. Focus on kicking with your legs, but try not to create lots of splash. Kicking power comes from the motion under the water, not the splash on top! Start with short distances, building up as your legs get stronger. After a few lengths a kicking you will definitely feel the effect!

Boards are available in a variety of sizes and shapes. Generally the bigger the board, the more flotation it will offer and the easier it will be to kick. If you're an experienced swimmer try the streamlines kick board that offers excellent flotation for a board that is relatively small compared to a lot of other boards. If you find kicking really difficult to begin with then try using fins until such a time your legs feel strong enough.

Pull Buoys

Using a pull buoy allows you to rest your legs and still maintain a high body position in the water, so that you can really focus on your upper body technique, toning the muscles of the upper back, shoulders and arms. You should be able to swim further without getting as tired as it offers more buoyancy. Only breaststroke is hard work, even for the most accomplished swimmer, so unless you fancy a really tough workout, stick to front crawl. Positioning - Pull buoys are designed to fit between your thighs with sizes being fairly standard and should be comfortable to use.



Hand Paddles

Hand paddles are a great training aid for good standard fitness/performance swimmers, and they are primarily for use when swimming front crawl or backstroke. They are designed to correct problems with technique and really tone your arms, not necessarily just to make you complete the swimming session faster! Paddles are available in various shapes and sizes, with the smaller ones being easier to use. The larger paddles will require a lot more strength to move forward.

If you experience any shoulder pain when using paddles they may be too big for you, or you should consult a physiotherapist. Check with the lifeguards before using the paddles as not all pools allow them in public sessions.

Fins (Flippers)

Modern training fins are soft and flexible around the foot and only about a third of the length of traditional scuba fins. Using fins should help make your ankles more flexible and help your kicking technique, giving the front of your legs (quadriceps) a great workout. Use them when you are swimming or kicking to introduce a bit of speed and fun into your session. Try to avoid using them for the entire session though, so as to add variety using other techniques and aids.