



HOW TO SWIM SAFELY: THE BASICS

Taken from The Outdoor Swimming Society

- Swim sober. Alcohol and drugs impair your judgement, your swimming ability and your ability to regulate body temperature.
- Check there's a suitable exit point before you get into any water.
- Cold water has an effect on the body and can incapacitate the swimmer, weakening arms and legs. Increase your exposure to open water gradually, and swim along the banks (rather than across) lakes, for instance, so that you can exit the water when you feel cold.
- Jumping into water at less than 15°C can cause cold water shock. One of the most common symptoms of this is an uncontrollable gasp. This can mean water enters your lungs and you could drown. Following the gasp reflex, you might start to breathe very quickly or hyperventilate. This response isn't under conscious control and lasts for one-to-two minutes. Get in slowly and ensure your breathing is under control before you start to swim.
- Cold: You can't become truly hypothermic for at least 30 minutes and probably much longer in summer, however the cold water can cool your muscle tissue, which will affect your swimming and your coordination, so you might find it difficult to get out.
- Do your own risk assessment before getting in. Consider your experience and ability.
- Be aware of and honest about your own swimming fitness and ability outdoors.
- We advise you not to swim if you have had a drink, taken drugs, are pregnant or have a heart condition.
- Swimming in open water is not the same as swimming in a pool, so stay within your limits.
- Be careful of sudden changes of depth. Check the depth and what's in the water before you get in. Don't dive or jump in unless you know it's deep enough and there are no obstructions.
- Be alert to weather and its effect on your swim.
- It's best not to fall in, but if you do, try to float calmly on your back for a 1-2 minute period, rather than swimming immediately.
- Don't try to rescue someone in trouble. Drowning people will drag you under. Raise the alarm at once. Dial 999 or 112 and ask for the relevant agency, give the control room operator the what 3 words address of where you are.

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RECOGNISE THE SIGNS OF DROWNING

We all know the movie and TV version of drowning: shouting, waving, maybe screaming for help. This is not what happens in reality. People who are drowning:

- Are usually silent: they are trying to gulp air and can't shout.
- Their mouth will bob above and below the surface of the water, and will be open as they try to gulp air.
- Their head is often tilted back as they try to keep their mouth above water.
- Their arms might be extended straight out sideways, and appear to be flapping as they try to push themselves up using the water surface.
- They might appear to be doggy paddling or treading water, as though climbing an invisible ladder.

This drowning phase lasts for 20-60 SECONDS so act quickly.

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