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Open Water Swimming Advice

www.nationalwatersafety.org.uk/openwaterswimming

Introduction



Variously termed ‘wild’ and open water swimming, this activity is not new but is enjoying something of a revival in the UK.

Open water can be used to describe rivers, lakes, natural pools and the sea. Any recreational use of water should be encouraged but equally it is important to enjoy the activity safely.

There’s a big difference between swimming in a pool and swimming outdoors.

One in 5.5 million participants drown each year in managed pools whereas one in 200,000 drown at inland water sites such as rivers, lakes and natural pools. This is about the same risk a pedestrian has of being killed by a vehicle¹.

There is an even higher risk of drowning when swimming in the sea.

Every year, on average, some 40 people drown whilst swimming, jumping in and playing in open water. Avoid being one of them. Follow our advice to swim safely.

¹ <http://www.rospa.com/leisuresafety/Info/Watersafety/inland-waters-risk-assessment.pdf>

“ I have been swimming in rivers, outdoor pools, the sea, etc for about 58 years and this is pretty sound advice.

It has always seemed to me to be a perfectly natural thing to do, especially in hot weather. I have swum in some pretty cold waters, the Neath Valley in February, high in the Alps and the High Tatras in Slovakia and in the Zagros of Iranian Kurdistan. ”

DJ Gull (72 years young)

Our top tips for safe open water swimming:



1. Know where you are swimming and check out the conditions before going in

- Go with friends who know how to help.
- Check out local knowledge and advice (speak to clubs).
- Look out for safety signs. Follow the advice.
- Before entering the water, make sure there is a safe entry and exit point.
- Swim parallel to the shore and not into deep water.
- Stay in your comfort zone.
- Avoid weirs, locks and other structures.
- Don't enter the water if it is polluted (e.g. looks dirty, is a strange colour or smells).

2. Make sure you are properly equipped

- Wear a wetsuit. It will help keep you warm and provide some buoyancy.
- Use buoyancy aids if you are not a strong swimmer.
- Footwear will help stop you slipping and protect your feet when getting in and out of the water.
- Goggles allow you to see underwater obstructions.
- A high visibility swim cap shows where you are – especially valuable if there are boats passing by.
- Cover cuts or grazes with waterproof plasters before going in.

3. Beware of the cold

- Don't go in if you are feeling very cold before you start.
- Be ready for the shock when you go in.
- Get used to the cold before swimming in deeper water.
- Limit time in cold water. Stop if you are shivering or after 20 minutes.
- Be ready for cramp. Stay shallow to stand up or use a buoyancy aid.
- Make sure you can get warm after swimming.
- If you want to drink alcohol, do it afterward not before.

**MAKE SURE SOMEONE KNOWS WHERE YOU HAVE GONE AND WHY AND THAT YOU HAVE THE MEANS TO CALL FOR HELP, ESPECIALLY IN REMOTE LOCATIONS.
TAKE NOTE OF LOCAL SAFETY ADVICE AND RESPECT THE COUNTRYSIDE, LANDOWNERS AND OTHER USERS.**



A safer swim is...



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Further information

This information has been jointly developed by members of the NWSF inland water safety and watersports group. Further information on the risks associated with open water swimming can be found at www.nationalwatersafety.org.uk/openwaterswimming

- Wearing...
 - ... a well fitting wetsuit to give buoyancy and protect against the worst of Cold Water Shock
 - ... highly visible swim cap to stay warm and be seen by others
- Slowly entering to get used to the conditions, and again, to avoid Cold Water Shock
- Swimming sober
- Avoiding...
 - ... fast flowing or deeper water...
 - ... structures such as weirs, bridges, and locks that can have hidden dangers
- Going together... In case help is needed