

Four reasons swimming should be your next workout

January 23 2023, by Heather Massey



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

When most of us think of exercising, images of long runs on the treadmill or picking up heavy weights often come to mind. But although these are both great ways of keeping fit, they aren't for everyone.

So if you're someone who's looking to keep fit but can't stand the gym, it

might be time for you to try something a little different: [swimming](#). Not only is this exercise a fun change from your normal routine, it also comes with a slew of benefits that rival even the most intense gym workouts.

1. It's good for cardiorespiratory fitness

Swimming just a few times a week can be a great way of boosting many aspects of your cardiovascular fitness—which may help to [lower your risk of cardiovascular disease](#) and death from any cause.

For example, one study found that swimming 40-50 minutes three times a week for three months was shown to [increase aerobic fitness](#). These improvements to aerobic fitness can also be seen in [young children](#) and [older adults](#) who swim regularly, too.

Swimming is also shown to improve cardiovascular health even in people diagnosed with conditions such as [cardiovascular disease](#) and [stiff arteries](#).

2. It builds certain types of strength

Since [water](#) is more dense and viscous than air, [it adds resistance to our movements](#). This would explain why swimming can help to improve many different aspects of strength.

Research shows regular swimmers have [greater respiratory muscle strength](#) compared to groups undertaking a [cycling or running programme](#). Respiratory muscle strength is the pressure your breathing muscles can generate when you breathe in or out. As such, swimming may be recommended for those with [chronic respiratory disease](#) where respiratory muscle strength needs to be improved or maintained. And,

the longer you keep up with swimming, the [more of these strength improvements](#) you're likely to see.

Aquatic exercise (such as water aerobics) and swimming are great for rehabilitation and can also help [improve hip muscle strength](#) in [older adults](#), which may lower their risk of falls. These activities can also [improve grip strength](#) in people with osteoarthritis. Low grip strength is a predictor of increased risk of [functional limitations](#) and of reduced quality of life as we age. Therefore it is important to gain or maintain [strength](#) and function now to reduce the impact in later life.

3. It's less impactful on the joints

Compared to land-based activities (such as running or cycling), swimming [reduces weight-bearing stress](#). This means there's less compression on joints than there would be exercising on land. This makes swimming a great way to be physically active for people who may otherwise find exercising difficult.

For example, swimming can be great for people recovering from an injury or illness, with research showing swimming was able to moderately reduce pain and improve physical function in adults who suffered from [musculoskeletal conditions](#) (such as arthritis or joint problems). Swimming can also be beneficial for older adults, with one study showing the physical benefits of swimming could [reduce risk of falls](#).

Swimming can also be great for women who are pregnant, especially those who suffer from [pelvic girdle pain](#). People who are overweight may also benefit from swimming. Not only is this form of exercise easier on the joints, it may also be just as good as walking for [reducing body fat](#).

4. It improves mental well-being

There's strong evidence that being physically active in general can prevent [symptoms of depression](#), and lower the risk of [developing low mood and anxiety](#). Exercise may also improve quality of life for [people with depression](#).

Swimming itself is associated with a range of [benefits for well-being](#)—including improved life satisfaction and feeling healthier. It can also [reduce stress levels](#). These signs of positive well-being may in turn translate to lower odds of [poor mental health](#).

Outside the pool

If you're already someone who swims regularly, you might be looking for ways to change your routine a bit or try something new. Many people are keen to try outdoor swimming due to its reported benefits to [well-being](#), [mood](#) and [mental health](#).

But outdoor swimming can come with many additional risks, so there are a few things you need to bear in mind if you're planning to give it a try. These include being aware of the way [cold water can affect your body](#), alongside the location you're swimming and the hazards associated with swimming in [rivers](#), [quarries](#) and the [sea](#).

There's also an ideal time of the year to try outdoor swimming. Even in [early summer](#), when the weather tends to be warmer in the UK, outdoor water temperatures are still very cold. In fact, swimming fatalities are common in late-spring and early summer as people take to the water to cool off. So if you do want to try outdoor swimming, it's best to wait until late July to early September when water temperatures are at their peak.

Fortunately, there are also many things you can do on your own to [reduce the risks](#) posed by cold shock—the body's initial response to jumping in [cold water](#)—such as by training the body ahead of time.

Alongside its many physical and mental health benefits, swimming can also be a fantastic way for people to socialize and get involved in their community. There are many ways to [get started with swimming](#), so look out for opportunities in your neighborhood.

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