

Cold water swimming improves menopause symptoms, finds research

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Menopausal women who regularly swim in cold water report significant improvements to their physical and mental symptoms, finds a new study led by UCL researchers.

The research, published in *Post Reproductive Health*, surveyed 1,114 women, 785 of whom were experiencing menopause, to examine the effects of cold water swimming on their health and well-being.

The findings showed that [menopausal women](#) experienced a significant improvement in anxiety (as reported by 46.9% of the women), [mood swings](#) (34.5%), low mood (31.1%) and hot flashes (30.3%) as a result of cold water swimming.

In addition, a majority of women (63.3%) swam specifically to relieve their symptoms.

Some of the women quoted in the study said that they found the cold water to be "an immediate stress/anxiety reliever" and described the activity as "healing."

One 57-year-old woman stated, "Cold water is phenomenal. It has saved my life. In the water, I can do anything. All symptoms (physical and mental) disappear and I feel like me at my best."

Senior author Professor Joyce Harper (UCL EGA Institute for Women's Health), said, "Cold water has previously been found to improve mood and reduce stress in outdoor swimmers, and ice baths have long been used to aid athletes' muscle repair and recovery. Our study supports these claims; meanwhile the anecdotal evidence also highlights how the activity can be used by women to alleviate [physical symptoms](#), such as hot flushes, aches and pains.

"More research still needs to be done into the frequency, duration, temperature and exposure needed to elicit a reduction in symptoms. However, we hope our findings may provide an alternative solution for women struggling with the menopause and encourage more women to take part in sports."

Most of the women involved in the study were likely to swim in both summer and winter and wear swimsuits, rather than wet suits.

Alongside aiding [menopausal symptoms](#), the women said their main motivations for cold water swimming were being outside, improving [mental health](#) and exercising.

Professor Harper said, "The majority of women swim to relieve symptoms such as anxiety, mood swings and hot flushes. They felt that their symptoms were helped by the physical and mental effects of the cold water, which was more pronounced when it was colder. How often they swam, how long for and what they wore were also important. Those that swam for longer had more pronounced effects. The great thing about cold water swimming is it gets people exercising in nature, and often with friends, which can build a great community."

The researchers also wanted to investigate whether cold water swimming improved women's menstrual symptoms.

Of the 711 women who had experienced menstrual symptoms, nearly half said that cold water swimming improved their anxiety (46.7%), and over a third said that it helped their mood swings (37.7%) and irritability (37.6%).

Yet despite the benefits of cold water swimming, the researchers were also keen to highlight that the sport comes with certain risks.

Professor Harper explained, "Caution must be taken when cold water swimming, as participants could put themselves at risk of hypothermia, cold water shock, cardiac rhythm disturbances or even drowning. Depending on where they are swimming, water quality standards may also vary. Raw sewage pollution is an increasingly common concern in UK rivers and seas. And, sadly, this can increase the likelihood of

gastroenteritis and other infections."

The study may contain some bias due to the survey only being taken by women who already engage in cold water swimming. And, as the survey was conducted online, it is likely that women were more likely to complete the survey if they noticed an association between menopause symptoms and [cold water](#) swimming.

More information: Megan Pound, How do women feel cold water swimming effects their menstrual and perimenopausal symptoms?, *Post Reproductive Health* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/20533691241227100](https://doi.org/10.1177/20533691241227100)

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