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Simple SWIMMING GUIDE

By: Joene Palmer

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About the Author

Joene Palmer was an active amateur swimmer for years.

She met her husband at a swimming meeting.

Joene firmly believes that the exercise helped keep her fit for her demanding job and raising her family.

“Swimming was not the first sport which I was involved in but it is one that I have always kept doing through the years, including two interstate moves and one move overseas for eighteen months.”

“I hope that my book will help people that have never got around to learning how to swim or are coming back to it as a relatively safe exercise later in life.”

“I have explained how average people like me can benefit from swimming and given some basic steps to help with learning the important techniques with minimum effort.”

“I hope that my book will help many people get more enjoyment and better results from the effort and time which they put into their swimming.”

“I want it to help them as so many of the swimmers I have swam and socialized with through the years have helped me.”

Introduction

Good technique is the basis of enjoyable and safe swimming.

If you have just started to swim or have not swam for some time, read and practice the methods I have written in this book.

None of the time you put into making the basic procedures second nature is ever wasted.

But, learning the basics thoroughly is not only important for your enjoyment and progress with your swimming; it could save you from injury or worse at some time in the future.

Before You Start

Whether you are currently fairly fit or someone that has not done any sort of exercise consistently for an extended period, please consult your doctor before starting to swim or do any other form of exercise on a regular basis.

How Swimming Benefits You

Swimming is recognized as a low cost, highly enjoyable activity which can benefit almost anyone.

It is a low-risk form of exercise which has advantages for people with limited mobility or other physical problems.

Many people that are trying to lose weight are advised to exercise by walking or even running. But, their weight, the risk of damage to their bones and other potential physical damage often rules out those options.

Many of these people find that they are able to exercise more in a pool where the water can support some of their weight.

My understanding of the current thinking about swimming and losing weight is that swimming is not definitely a way to lose weight. But, swimming makes it easier for people with weight problems to exercise more regularly and to a higher level than they might be able to otherwise. This can help them to lose weight.

But, if someone just swims rather than including some periods of more intense activity in their sessions, there is not likely to be a noticeable improvement in the amount or rate of weight loss which they achieve.

I have read that the humid atmosphere around pools as well as the swimming itself can be beneficial to some people with certain types of asthma.

Like all medical information, it won't apply equally to everyone and you should always consult your doctor or specialist before undertaking any form of exercise.

Another important reason that everyone should learn to swim is that this skill could help to save your life or help you to save someone else in a dangerous situation in water.

It is particularly good for people that have not been using any form of regular exercise or who are unable to tackle more strenuous forms of exercise because of their current state of health.

You can; of course, progress to more strenuous forms of swimming but this book is focused mainly on helping readers that are starting to use swimming for exercise rather than for serious competition.

However, I recommend that you join a local swim club or look for a branch of the international Masters Clubs in your area.

The Masters Clubs welcome all swimmers over the age of twenty, whether they swim for fun or exercise, and they also organize competitive swimming for people with all levels of swimming ability.



Water can be very helpful to people that are recovering from some form of physical injury because it can help to support the body during their activities in the water. That includes athletes as well as people like me.

The pressure on the heart during mild exercise in water is likely to be less than when similar levels of exercise are done on dry land.

For all its benefits, I don't suggest that swimming should be your only form of regular exercise. Swimming should be just one type of exercise which you do.

Use other types of exercise as well to ensure that all parts of your body get some benefit.

There are a few sports which involve swimming and they can be used to add variety to your exercise program.

Getting Started

Like any other activity, the way that we think about what we are doing has a great effect on how well we perform.

I recommend that you always have someone with you when you swim. That is particularly important when you are inexperienced.

If you have some concerns about lying in the water, try to think about it as lying on a couch. The water will support most of your weight.

Try to relax your body because this will be a great help to achieving the proper position in the water and you will actually float better. If you are tense, you are likely to settle lower in the water and have less control over your own movements. This, of course, will make you more worried and take most of the enjoyment from the experience.

There are many devices which people can use for support and confidence building when they are starting to learn to swim. I think that these only have limited usefulness for most adults. After they start to gain the confidence and have some understanding of the fundamental techniques of swimming, they should only use devices such as pull buoys and kickboards when they want to increase the amount of exercise they give to certain areas rather as a general swimming aid.

I believe that extended use of flotation devices can hold back adults because many become focused on using the device for support and have some difficulty making the transition to using proper techniques without the device.

Swim with friends

You might have a friend that is also interested in swimming. Having your swimming sessions together can have great benefits for both of you. You can encourage and support each other in the early stages of your program or when you reach a certain level and cannot seem to progress beyond it.

In the early stages, you can help each other by taking turns to watch the other person and helping them to correct any part of their technique which may be holding them back.

Get a few lessons

Although it is an extra expense, you should consider taking a few lessons when you start your swimming program. This will help you to avoid developing bad posture or

movements which could prevent you from achieving the best results from your swimming and continue to hamper your efforts for years.

Making changes to your self-taught style can take much longer and cost more than a couple of lessons would have earlier.

You could get individual coaching but, if that is unavailable or too expensive, there are coaches and organizations which hold group sessions in most areas from time to time.

Supervision by a professional instructor will help you to get started with the right techniques and avoid the need to adjust your self-taught style radically to the correct procedure.

You could ask a friend who is an experienced swimmer to give you some tips but not everyone is good at passing on knowledge. The coach has the advantage of having helped many people like you through those early steps. They give you knowledge and patience which often makes it easier to absorb the information.

There are some benefits to swimming with other people, especially when you have just started to learn or have not swum regularly for a long time.

Etiquette

Rules will vary between different pools.

If you are not sure about the rules for using lanes occupied by other swimmers at a particular pool, check with the attendant before getting into the lane.

The examples I give here are fairly common but always check at each venue you start to swim at.

Sharing a Lane: When you share a lane, try to choose one where the other swimmers are doing a speed you are comfortable with.

Don't swim in the same lane as people that you know usually swim faster than you.

Don't worry about someone improving their rate faster than you. That will just destroy your concentration and cause you to slow even more or make mistakes.

Wait until a swimmer has completed a swim or exercise before asking if you may share the lane with them.

Don't try to chat with other swimmers in the water. Wait until you meet on dry land. You are all there to enjoy your swimming and talking is distracting, especially if they are trying to improve their technique.

Two swimmers sharing a lane will split it down the middle. You must keep to your own side. If you don't have that level of control yet, stick to swimming in a lane by yourself for now.

When more than two swimmers share a lane, they must swim a circular pattern.

Equipment: If you use any equipment provided at the pool, be sure to return it to where it is normally stored when you no longer need it.

Some people will leave it at the pool edge and say that they do that so it is handy when someone else wants to use it. But, that's just an excuse for not taking it back where it should be left. It can also be a hazard and cause an injury to another pool user.

Joining a Swimming Club

Everyone that swims will get some benefit from joining a swimming club in their area. Don't wait until you are able to swim well. You will find that everyone in a club has been through the same learning process and you will be encouraged, not embarrassed.

The club's other members will share their knowledge and experience of swimming and often be willing to advise you on the most appropriate equipment and where the best prices are offered.

You may also be able to save money on equipment and services which the club may arrange a discount for its members.

Your local swimming club is a good place to find someone of similar ability to yourself who is willing and enthusiastic about helping each other to improve your techniques and offer each other support when it is needed. This can be especially valuable if your family is not interested in swimming or if you do not know many people in the area.

Most clubs have an active social program which you can be part of. Some clubs organize trips to swim meets in other areas and have contact details of other swimming clubs which will welcome you and often provide their facilities at low cost when you visit their area.

The Masters Clubs

Adult swimmers who are aged from twenty years upward, who are not only focused on competitive swimming, will find the network of Masters Swimming Clubs in their country a great way to improve their technique in a supportive and friendly atmosphere.

The bottom line is that good swimmers have learned good techniques. Unless you learn the techniques, you won't get the best experience and enjoyment that you could with your swimming.

You will be graded on your current swimming ability so that you swim with people at the same level.

You will also be able to compete against members of your club and others of similar ability in well-organized meets from time to time if that is what you want to do.

United States Masters Swimming <http://www.usms.org/>



“USMS is the governing body for adult swimming in the US.

We welcome all adult swimmers.”

Gearing Up

You will probably have a swimming costume in your cupboard but it may need replacing or updating because you like a new style or to get the advantages that are claimed for the newer fabrics in some costumes.

In this section, I will give some suggestions about traditional and some fairly new items which you might find useful and fun.

Costume

There are a wide variety of costumes available to suit all tastes.

Your first consideration should be the type of swimming which you will be doing.

You can pay hundreds of dollars for a costume from a major supplier that is designed for getting the most speed through the water. The price of these suits cannot usually be justified for the casual or club swimmer.

Some people will want to buy a brand which has given them good service in the past or has been recommended by people they trust.

But, most of us will consider anything within our price range that appears to have the following qualities:

Appearance and fit: Trunks are usually board shorts, briefs or traditional swimming trunks. There are many variations within each type and manufacturers will introduce new styles regularly to encourage us to add extra costumes to our supply.

The brief styles are most popular with younger swimmers and anyone that is interested in any sort of competitive swimming.

Women need to remember that suits will tend to stretch out when they are wet.

They also need to check that straps won't cut into or irritate their skin. You can apply Vaseline to reduce the irritation of tight straps but it's obviously better to check the fit of the suit thoroughly before you buy it and spend a little extra if necessary to get a durable and comfortable suit.

You can't usually return a suit to the store after you've taken it home. So, take your time and check a few suits out thoroughly when you are in the store. Try to imitate your usual swimming actions while you are trying on a suit.

Manufacturers use a variety of materials for their various costumes. You will have to balance such factors as cost, time required for drying (nylon or polyester and some other synthetics are probably best), color fastness, fit, appearance and durability.

The synthetic materials are usually less likely to sag when they absorb water.

Although some costumes have sealable pockets for carrying valuables, don't put much in them to avoid drag when you are swimming and strain on the costume.

Board shorts were developed as the popularity of surfing grew. They are durable and most have one or more pockets. They are very practical for all types of swimming and related activities, including beach sports.

The traditional swimming trunks are still very popular. Some types absorb and hold water more than others.

For people that take their swimming very seriously, modern materials such as lycra may be worth the investment.

Some manufacturers are now offering suits which are chlorine resistant. Chlorine in pools is one of the major factors which reduce the durability of a swim suit.

Caring for Your Suit

To get the best value from your suit, look after it.

When you rinse your suit out after each session, squeeze the water out of the suit. If you wring it to save time, you will damage the fibers which make up the suit and have to buy your next suit much sooner. This is the real reason for complaints about the durability of some suits in my opinion.

Another means of reducing the wear you get from your suit is to put it in a clothes dryer – the heat will damage your suit.

Lay your suit flat on a towel to let it finish drying off rather than putting it on your clothes line.

You can use a special cleaning product designed for cleaning swim suits after, say, every five sessions. But, you can also get good results by applying a non-abrasive soap by hand.

Suits wear out in months rather than years. Don't keep wearing a suit because it's your favorite. Replace it when it is less comfortable or starting to deteriorate.

Caps

Some people don't like wearing a cap while others won't swim without one.

I don't think they can be rated as essential for everybody but they are some times when it is a good idea to wear a cap:

1. A cap will prevent long or thick hair causing any drag when you are swimming.
2. A cap is good protection against the effects of chlorine and other materials which are sometimes present in pools and other swimming areas.
3. A cap will stop your hair getting in your eyes when you swim.

Latex caps grip the head better and are popular with people that race. But, they are a bit harder to put on and can develop tears more easily than other types of caps.

Silicon caps are easier to put on and get off. They are more expensive but last much longer than latex caps given reasonable care.

Dry the cap inside and out after each use. Put some talcum powder inside the cap when you have dried it.

Fins

Fins, or “flippers”, give you a larger surface to push through the water. They will give any swimmer a boost in their speed without requiring the extra effort which some other aids, like paddles, do.

Most fins are either small and flexible which is most suitable for less experienced or younger swimmers, or larger, firmer fins which are for swimmers that have the strength in their legs to use them well.

If you haven't worn fins before or not for some time, start with the smaller, more flexible type until you build the strength into your calf muscles from the larger fins.

Don't wear fins that are too tight because that can be bad for your feet.

Fins with enclosed heels can be more comfortable than those which have a strap around the heel. The latter need to be carefully fitted or the strap might irritate your heels.

If good fit is a problem for you, get fins that are slightly larger and wear socks inside them to prevent the strap moving around and rubbing on your heel.

Be careful if you are out of shape and using fins. Over-exertion can put pressure on your ankles and your Achilles tendons.

When you are confident about swimming with your flippers, you could add a bit more zest by doing some “just for fun” swims during your session where you wear fins and a kickboard or paddles. Don't be tempted to overdo this but it is a fun thing to do occasionally when you have some experience.

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