

Taking the Plunge

How and why you should add swimming to your routine.

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The triathlon – thought of by many as an ultimate test of physical and mental endurance. A swim, bike, run event that is popular among many athletes as a goal to achieve, a test to challenge their body's limits. It is glorified in its Ironman form - the intense 2.4 mile swim, 112 mile bike, and 26.2 mile run - but opportunities to compete in triathlon events exist all over the world and on smaller scales than the full Ironman.

Recently, I have added a triathlon to my to do list. I plan to start small with a sprint triathlon and hope to build up to a Half Ironman (1.2 mile swim, 56 mile bike, 13.1 mile run) within a couple of years. But, to be honest, I have strong doubts about whether or not I can accomplish this because of the swimming part.

I have never used swimming as a form of exercise – only for recreational enjoyment, and of course survival, when necessary. Swimming is a great way to stay healthy and workout your body and I know I have been missing out on it's benefits.

To name a few:

- It is the only aerobic exercise that is a full body workout without the harsh impact on your bones. No one ever gets shin splints or stress fractures from swimming laps. If you are experiencing bone or joint pain, getting into a pool for your workout will be much more welcoming than stepping on to a treadmill.
- Swimming not only burns calories and strengthens your heart, it can also double as strength training. As your arms and legs are working on moving forward they are met with resistance by the water, and resistance exercise is a great way to tone and strengthen muscle.
- If you are an asthma sufferer or have difficulty exercising in certain climate or weather conditions, a pool significantly reduces or eliminates those challenges. Swimming provides a stable, moist air environment to breathe in which can help reduce exercise-induced asthma symptoms. Even if you don't suffer from any breathing difficulties, swimming will still give you the opportunity to increase your lung capacity.



Swimming is something I have little experience with, but because of the benefits involved with incorporating swimming into my

exercise regime and my goal to begin competing in triathlon events, I really have no choice but to find myself a pool and get in. If you too want to add swimming to your resume, here are some things to help you get started:

- First, if you truly do not know how to swim, seek out an instructor for lessons. Hiring an instructor (or asking a friend nicely) isn't a bad idea even if you do know how to swim because they can better train you on proper form and breathing.
- Get your accessories ready. Goggles and a swim cap will be necessary. You may want to consider ear plugs or a nose clip. A kick board will prove as a very good training aid, but most public facilities, such as gyms, will have them available. And don't forget a towel!
- Practice your breathing. Poor breathing technique will significantly affect the efficiency of your stroke, so spend as much time as possible, perfecting your breathing technique.
- Know which lane to claim. If you are training at a public place like a gym or a YMCA, lanes are usually designated based on your ability level (beginner, immediate, advanced). Be honest with your assessment of your skill level and pick the appropriate lane.
- If you are not working with a coach or instructor, look up videos of the different strokes (freestyle, breaststroke, backstroke, and butterfly) and pay attention to the proper form and technique.
- As with any workout, after a swim you need to recover. Start the recovery process by cooling down in the pool by reducing your speed and distance gradually, not suddenly. Take some time after exiting the pool to stretch your muscles. Don't wait to stretch after you've dried off because your muscles will have gone cold. Replenish within an hour after your swim with a carbohydrate and protein snack (aim for a 3-to-1 or 4-to-1 ratio). And, even though it is difficult to notice, you do sweat while swimming, so keep yourself hydrated.

There are many reasons to incorporate swimming into your exercise regime. Whether you have a goal to compete in a triathlon, are looking for something different to do, or want to challenge your whole body while giving your bones and joints a break – it's time to just jump in and get wet!

Kimberly is the Head Women's Volleyball Coach at Chestnut Hill College, located in Philadelphia PA. She also coaches high school athletes who compete on travel volleyball teams. She has worked with numerous athletes of various ages and levels to help them achieve their maximum potential. When not helping and teaching others as a coach, she enjoys challenging herself in the gym and looks forward to a Java Jolt smoothie after a good work out!

