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Try This 30 Minute Swim Workout That Burns Big Calories

Looking for a way to burn calories, but hot yoga in the summertime just doesn't sound appealing? One word: swimming.

Swimming looks relaxing, but looks can be deceiving. Many athletes in great shape from other sports are shocked to find out how exhausting only a few lengths of the pool can be.

Swimming uses your whole body, and your brain coordinates the alternating movements of your arms and legs and reminds you that you need to breathe. This adds a layer of complexity not found in sports in which oxygen is a given.

Don't be intimidated: Getting a good workout in the pool is simple and completely doable, even for beginners. With short-rest sprinting, you can build endurance, lose weight and give your body the best all-over workout it's ever had in as little as 30 or 45 minutes, three times per week. Here's a quick breakdown:



Anatomy of a Basic Workout

Warmup (5–10 minutes)

Slow, relaxed swimming for 5–10 minutes, broken into smaller chunks. Stretch out, and pay attention to your technique and your breathing. Do some 50s or 100s, or just swim a few lengths, rest and repeat. Build your speed slightly toward the end of your warmup.

Pro Tip: Breathe in through your mouth, then exhale steadily through your nose whenever your face is in the water; never hold your breath. The most common mistake swimmers make is forgetting to exhale when their faces are in the water.

Kicking (5–10 minutes)

A vigorous kick set will increase your heart rate and keep the warmup progressing toward some fast swimming. Many pools have kickboards, or you can just extend your arms and kick on your back. You can also kick face-down, using a single arm stroke when you need to breathe. Keep your kick light and with a small amplitude, as though your feet were inside a bucket. The kick starts at the hips and ends with a flick of the toes. If you don't have good ankle flexibility, training with medium- or long-bladed fins can help.

Short-Rest Sprint Set (10–15 minutes)

Here's your cardio and calorie-burning meat and potatoes. Swim fast, rest for a short period, then swim fast again. To build a high-intensity interval set that works for you:

- Swim 1 or 2 lengths of the pool, fast and hard
- Rest for 10 seconds
- Repeat

Once you know how much time it takes you to swim hard and then rest for 10 seconds, you'll know how to configure your set. For example: If it takes you about 1 minute and 20 seconds to swim two lengths, and then you rest for 10 seconds, your repeat interval will be 1:30. Do this 10 times, and it will take you 15 minutes to complete the set. On paper, that looks like: 10 x 50s / 1:30.

Want More? Bonus Set (up to 15 minutes)

To continue the high-intensity swimming, just alter and/or repeat the sprint set here. If you want to try something different, do a set of 200s or some technique drills, or maybe practice the other three strokes (butterfly, backstroke or breaststroke) to exercise different muscles and improve your feel for the water.

Cooldown (10–15 minutes)

Do a few lengths at about 60% effort, then wind it down gradually, with the last length in elementary backstroke. Float, relax and enjoy the feeling of being in the water. As with the warmup, break your cooldown into manageable chunks: 4 x 50s or 8 x 25s, repeat. Don't skip this step! The more sprinting you do, the more of a cooldown you need for your muscles to recover and be ready for your next workout.