



HOW TO STAY SAFE SWIMMING OUTDOORS

Swimming outdoors is fun and life-enhancing but there are some important things to remember before you take the plunge to ensure you enjoy your swim safely.

This checklist will ensure you are well prepared, if you can't answer these 8 questions, then give it a miss, it's always better to #BeAdventureSmart and come back another day.

Plan your swim

1 Can you find a safe spot to swim?

- Choose your swimming spot carefully, be sure that swimming is permitted at your chosen site and be aware of local dangers. Swimming at an organised venue or with an organised group is a good idea.
- Hidden obstacles, inflows and outflows, poor water quality, sudden changes in depth and even wildlife like swans can all be a danger.
- At the coast, if possible choose a life-guarded beach and swim between the red and yellow flags.
- Check the times of high and low tide and understand how it might affect your swim.
- Check out where you plan to enter and exit the water before you start, and make sure you can spot the exit point from the water. Have a backup plan of where to get out in an emergency.

2 What is the weather like?

- Even a light breeze blowing away from or across the shore can push you off course and make it difficult to return, so check for offshore and cross-shore winds. Wave can make it hard to breathe or get in and out of the water and can cool you down quickly after your swim.
- Heavy rainfall can change river levels, currents and water quality dramatically so, check the flow and levels before swimming in a river.

3 Do you know the route you are taking?

- Plan your route carefully; consider the weather, tides, your ability and the ability of the people you are swimming with.
- Give someone on land an idea of where you are going and when you will be back. If you are driving there, tell them where you are parking your car so that someone can check to see if you have left or may still be in the water.



4 Who are you swimming with?

- Swimming alone is a bad idea, swimming with a friend is more fun and you can look out for each other.

5 Are you up to it?

- Many things can affect your perception and reaction to the water temperature. What was OK last week might be a struggle this week. Sleep, diet, hydration, menstrual cycle and illness may all affect your temperature regulation and/or tolerance.
- You are more likely to get into difficulty if you have drunk alcohol or taken drugs - don't swim under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Cover cuts and abrasions, however minor, with sticking plasters before entering the water. Don't swim if you have deep cuts.

The right gear's a good idea



6 What kit do you need?

- When open water swimming, a bright hat (fluorescent green or orange are most visible) and a tow float will make sure you can be seen by other water users.
- Carry a floating dry bag containing a charged mobile in a waterproof case and pealess whistle so you can attract attention if you get into difficult.
- A wetsuit is a good idea to help you stay warm, and be more buoyant. Goggles help you see where you are going when your eyes are underwater.
- Make sure you have something to wash your hands and face with once you come out of the water.
- On cold days make sure you have a dry towel/ robe and warm layers of easy-to-put-on clothing for after your swim.
- On sunny days apply sunscreen at least 30 minutes before you swim. If wearing a wetsuit there is danger of overheating, so sit in the shallows and cool off before leaving the water. Re-apply sunscreen once you are dry.

Know your limits

7 Do you know how to stay safe when in the water?

- The water will be cold; to avoid cold water shock, enter the water slowly until your shoulders are under the water, and you can control your breathing.
- When swimming in a river, float with your feet facing downstream and your bottom up you can use your feet to kick off any hazards. Keep your bottom up to protect from contact with debris.
- Get out before you get too cold. When your muscles get cold, your stroke may slow, you may lose power, become uncoordinated, or struggle to speak; these are signs that it's time to get out.
- Be a good buddy, keep an eye on your friend and get them out of the water if they show signs of getting cold.
- Wetsuits keep you warm but the water may still be very cold so get in carefully rather than running, jumping or diving.
- Try not to drink the water. Seek medical advice if you feel unwell following a swim.

If things go wrong



8 Do you know what to do in an emergency?

- Remember, Float to Live: cold water shock passes in less than 2 minutes, so relax & tilt your head back with your ears under water and use your hands to help you float until you can control your breathing.
- If you tire or need help during your swim, roll on to your back, hold on to your tow float if you have one and signal for help by blowing your pealess whistle 3 times and placing one hand in the air to signal for assistance.
- If you are caught in a rip current, don't try to swim against it, wade, or if you can't wade swim, along the shore until you can get back to the beach.
- If you see someone else in trouble, do not enter the water. Remember **CALL, TELL, THROW**.
 - **CALL 999** immediately, in inland waters ask for the Fire and Rescue Service, in sea or coastal areas ask for the Coastguard.
 - **TELL** them to float on their back and stay calm.
 - **THROW** them something that floats or a throwline.