

Overview

You may have heard that experts recommend adults get [150 minutes of moderate activity](#) or 75 minutes of vigorous activity each week. Swimming is an excellent way to work your entire body and cardiovascular system. An hour of swimming burns almost as many calories as running, without all the impact on your bones and joints.

Swimming is the [fourth most](#) popular activity in the United States. But why, exactly? There are a host of benefits you may gain from swimming laps regularly. Read on to learn about the benefits of swimming and how to incorporate swimming into your routine.

Benefits

1. Works your whole body

One of the biggest benefits of swimming is that it truly works your entire body, head to toe. Swimming:

- Increases your heart rate without stressing your body
- tones muscles
- builds strength
- builds endurance

There are various strokes you can use to add variety to your swimming workout, including:

- breaststroke
- backstroke
- sidestroke
- butterfly
- freestyle

Each focuses on different muscle groups, and the water provides a gentle resistance. No matter what stroke you swim, you're using most of your muscle groups to move your body through the water.

2. Works your insides, too

While your muscles are getting a good workout, your cardiovascular system is, too. Swimming makes your heart and lungs strong. Swimming is so good for you that researchers share it may even reduce your risk of death. Compared with inactive people, swimmers have about [half the risk of death](#). Some other studies have shown that swimming may help [lower blood pressure](#) and [control blood sugar](#).

3. Is appropriate for people with injuries, arthritis, and other conditions

Swimming can be a safe exercise option for people with:

- [arthritis](#)
- Injury
- disability
- other issues that make high-impact exercises difficult

Swimming may even help reduce some of your pain or improve your recovery from an injury. One [study](#) showed that people with osteoarthritis reported significant reductions in joint pain and stiffness, and experienced [less physical limitation](#) after engaging in activities like swimming and cycling.

Even more interesting, there was little to no difference in the benefits between the two groups. So, swimming seems to have many of the same benefits as frequently prescribed land exercises. [If you want non-swimming water activities, try these water excises for people with arthritis.](#)

4. Good option for people with asthma

The humid environment of indoor pools makes swimming a [great activity](#) for people with [asthma](#). Not only that, but breathing exercises associated with the sport, like holding your breath, [may help](#) you expand your lung capacity and gain control over your breathing.

Some [studies](#) suggest that swimming may increase your risk for asthma because of the chemicals used to treat pools. Talk to your doctor about the potential risks of swimming if you have asthma, and, if possible, look for a pool that uses salt water instead of chlorine.

5. Beneficial for people with MS, too

People with [multiple sclerosis \(MS\)](#) may also find swimming beneficial. Water makes the limbs buoyant, helping to support them during exercise. Water also provides a gentle resistance.

In [one study](#), a 20-week swimming program resulted in significant reduction of pain for people with MS. These people also showed improvements with symptoms like fatigue, depression, and disability. [Learn more about water therapy for MS.](#)

6. Torch calories

Swimming is an efficient way to [burn calories](#). A 160-pound person burns approximately [423 calories](#) an hour while swimming laps at a low or moderate pace. That same person may burn up to 715 calories an hour swimming at a more vigorous pace. A 200-pound person doing the same activities would burn between 528 and 892 calories an hour. A 240-pound person might burn between 632 and 1,068.

To compare these numbers to other popular low-impact activities, that same 160-pound person would only burn around 314 calories walking at 3.5 miles per hour for 60 minutes. Yoga might burn just 183 calories per hour. And the elliptical trainer might burn just 365 calories in that hour.

7. Improves your sleep

Swimming may have the power to help you sleep better at night. In [a study](#) on older adults with [insomnia](#), participants reported both a boost in quality of life and sleep after engaging in regular aerobic exercise.

Nearly [50 percent](#) of older persons experience some level of insomnia, so this is excellent news. The study focused on all types of aerobic exercise, including the elliptical, Stairmaster, bicycle, pool, and exercise videos.

Swimming is accessible to a wide range of people who deal with physical issues that make other exercises, like running, less appealing. That can make swimming a good choice for older adults looking to improve their sleep.

8. Boosts your mood

[Researchers](#) evaluated a small group of people with dementia, and saw an improvement in mood after participating in a 12-week aquatic program. Swimming and aquatic workouts aren't just psychologically beneficial for people with dementia. Exercise has been [shown to boost mood](#) in other people, as well.

9. Helps manage stress

Researchers [surveyed](#) a group of swimmers immediately before and after swimming at a YMCA in New Taipei City, Taiwan. Of the 101 people surveyed, 44 reported being mildly depressed and feeling stress related to fast-paced life. After swimming, the number of people who still reported feeling stressed decreased to just eight.

While more research needs to be done in this area, the researchers conclude that swimming is a potentially powerful way to relieve stress quickly.

10. Safe during pregnancy

Pregnant women and their babies can also reap some wonderful rewards from swimming. In [one study](#) in animals, a mother rat's swimming was shown to alter the brain development in her offspring. It may even protect babies against a type of neurological issue called hypoxia-ischemia, but more research is needed. Aside from potential benefits to the child, swimming is an activity that can be performed in all three trimesters.

[Another study](#) shows no adverse effects of swimming in chlorinated pools while pregnant. In fact, pregnant women who swam during their early to mid-pregnancy had a lower risk of preterm labor and congenital defects.

Keep in mind that while swimming is generally considered safe during pregnancy, some women may have activity restrictions due to complications in pregnancy. Talk to your doctor before starting any new exercise programs during pregnancy, and if you have complications, ask about activities that are safe.

11. Great for kids, too

Kids need a minimum of [60 minutes](#) of aerobic exercise each day. It doesn't need to feel like a chore either. Swimming is a fun activity and doesn't necessarily feel like formal working out.

Your child can do either structured swimming lessons or be part of a swim team. Unstructured swim time is another solid option to get kids moving.

12. Affordable

Swimming may also be an affordable exercise option compared to some others, like cycling. Many pools offer reasonable rates to join. Some public schools and other centers offer swim hours for free, or for a sliding scale according to your income.

If you're still concerned about the costs of joining a pool, check with your employer or your health insurance. Some offer reimbursements for joining a fitness program.

Risks

Swimming is safe for most people. As with any workout, there are certain risks associated with swimming. If you're injured or have certain medical conditions, be sure to check with your doctor before swimming laps. In general, it's a good idea to check in with your doctor whenever you start a new exercise program.

People with skin conditions like [psoriasis](#), for example, [may get](#) more irritated in the chlorinated pool water. Your doctor is your best resource for guidelines unique to your health.

