

Swimming

Swimming is one of the best forms of exercise for improving all-round fitness. Swimming is a cardiovascular exercise, involving all the major muscle groups. It is a demanding aerobic exercise (using oxygen as a source of energy), strengthening the heart, lungs and circulatory system.

Swimming is kinder to your body than land-based exercise. Moving through water in a position of least resistance gives buoyancy and support to your body, avoiding those knocks that can cause sport injuries. In water you weigh about a tenth of your normal weight. It is an ideal choice of exercise for those people who might have problems with weight-bearing landbased activities, as the range of motion for the less fit person is much wider. Swimming has also been known to be particularly effective and therapeutic for those who suffer from pain, especially arthritic pain.

Unfortunately you need to do a bit more than splashing around the pool or going down the waterfalls and slides.

The four key swimming strokes are: backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly and front crawl (freestyle). Each stroke requires a different technique based on the leg kick, arm cycle, timing and breathing.

If you are an unfit beginner, there is no need to break your neck about your breathing technique, just get started. Take it easy. Here are a few tips for when you start a swimming programme.

Start by swimming a length, followed by a rest for between 30 seconds and a minute, then repeat. The ideal would be to reach the point where you swim for 30 minutes three times a week.

You could also use a float and kick your legs. You will still get a good cardio workout.

Swim one length "hard" and one length "easy", this should burn a few extra calories.

Change your strokes with different lengths. You could do some water walking between length swimming.

For those who are not swimmers, try aqua aerobics. Water is 1000 times more dense than air and provides up to 12 times the resistance you can get from doing the same thing on land.

Remember the more movement you create in the water, the harder your body works. You really don't need a lot to go swimming. Get yourself a cozzie and a pair of goggles. Find a local pool you like and force yourself to make time for some quality time for your body. Your local swimming pool/leisure center will be in the phone book so give them a call and get going.