

Make a real splash!

Whether you're looking for a serious challenge, or you just want a different workout to help you get in shape, we've got the swimming plan for you

'Open-water swimming in a triathlon is completely different. You haven't got the end of the pool to touch, so you've got to be confident'



I WANT TO DO MY FIRST OLYMPIC TRIATHLON

If you don't usually spend a lot of time in the water, the 1,500m swim leg of an Olympic distance triathlon can seem daunting. Even if you're used to racking up a lot of miles on foot or the bike, that doesn't mean you'll be swim-fit.

Former Olympic swimmer and founder of Streamline Fitness coaching Kathy Read says it's not about getting in the pool and swimming solidly for an hour. 'You've got to break it down,' she says. 'You need a structured training session and you need it prepared before you go in the pool.'

Kathy recommends getting in the pool three times a week for around an hour. Aim to spend seven minutes warming up, and then do 10 minutes of technique work, doing different drills to improve your stroke. Try the MySwimPro app, which has video technique instruction from top swimmers.

The main chunk of your workout, she says, should be about 1,200-1,500m, but broken down into chunks of 100m or 200m, going at about 75-80 per cent of your maximum pace. 'That would be an aerobic-type speed, and that's a good way to build your fitness,' she

says. Keep an eye on your speed and heart rate throughout the set - ideally when you do the session again a couple of weeks later, you'll see you're getting quicker.

Of course, not many triathlons run the swimming leg in a pool, so it's important to get some open-water practice in too. 'Open-water swimming is completely different,' says Kathy. 'You haven't got the end of the pool to touch, so you've got to be confident.'

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- Most triathlon clubs run group open-water training sessions. The British Triathlon Federation has a list of clubs nationwide on its website: britishtriathlon.org.
- Or you could try a local masters swimming club (visit swimming.org/masters) for pool-based training with a coach.
- If you're going solo, the free app MySwimPro is a great resource for training plans, and it links you with a community of swimmers.



I WANT TO FINALLY LEARN TO SWIM

If you've reached adulthood without learning to swim, you're not alone. According to the Amateur Swimming Association, there are

nine million people in the UK who can't swim. But it's never too late to try. Swimming instructor and founder of SwimTime school Linda Price says setting a goal can be a great way to keep yourself motivated while learning. 'Something like "I want to be confident enough to get in the pool on holiday"', she suggests. But, she warns you should be wary of setting distance-based goals too early, as that can add more pressure, which in turn creates a barrier to learning.

Learning to swim as an adult is daunting. Linda says most of her adult students have some level of fear, even if they don't think they do. But an experienced instructor should be able to put you at ease and help you with water confidence as much as technique. Linda advises lessons twice a week.

'Also, don't worry about what anyone else is doing,' advises Laura Hopkins, a Pilates instructor and founder of Healthy Start Holidays retreats in Barcelona, and who learnt to swim at the age of 24. 'Just stick to your plan and take it

step by step.' Laura says you don't even need to be in the pool to start learning. 'My first session was in my kitchen sink: putting my head in the water and taking it out after seeing some advice to try this on YouTube.'

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- SwimTime offers adult lessons nationwide. Visit swimtime.org.
- Most local authority pools offer adult classes too.
- Also check out The Shaw Method (artofswimming.com) by former Olympian Steven Shaw. It's a method that focuses on, among other things, building your confidence in the water and has proven popular with beginners. He offers one-off workshops in London and the South East.



I WANT TO GET MY FITNESS BACK AFTER AN INJURY

Swimming is great rehabilitation if a musculoskeletal injury has put you out of action. 'It's been used by

physios for years because it deloads your muscles and your spine,' explains Matt Hodges, personal trainer and founder of the MPH Method. 'It doesn't even have to be swimming, it could just be time in the pool. I damaged my back a few years ago and I had to spend a lot of time in the pool, just walking up and down.' If you are rehabilitating a serious injury, you must consult your doctor before you restart any exercise, and Matt says in those cases pool-based exercises should be done to supplement work with a physio.

When you want to start working on your fitness again, but are not quite ready for high-impact stuff like running, swimming is a good alternative. 'But with that you have got to be mindful that your

technique and the stroke you choose should be suitable for the recovery of the injury and that you're not actually going to cause more stress on that particular area,' warns Kathy.

Breaststroke, for example, is a no-no - as it puts a lot of strain on the lower back and pelvis, and is often done incorrectly. Start your time in the pool with some flexibility exercises to get the muscles moving again, and then when you're ready to start swimming, break your training into manageable chunks, such as 50m, building up to 100m as you get fitter. You can always train using just your arms (get a concave float called a pull buoy to put between your legs) or just your legs, if you feel a twinge in your injury.



I WANT TO BURN FAT AND TONE UP

Swimming isn't an obvious choice for weight-loss, but it can burn around 700 calories an hour, boost your metabolism and work every muscle in your body. Matt explains that high-intensity interval work is best for burning fat and this can be done when swimming. 'Do one length sprint, then go easy on the next,' he says.

Jonny Rees, a trainer with Mayfair-based UpFitness agrees, recommending a time-based interval set such as a 30-second sprint followed by 60 seconds of recovery, for 15-20 minutes. 'Try five to 10 minutes' easy swimming to warm up, then some technique drills,

then the intervals, then a few minutes' easy to finish,' he says.

According to Jonny, it's better to do these sessions little and often. 'You could wrap it up in 30 minutes,' he says. 'But ideally do 30 minutes four or five times a week, rather than 90 minutes twice a week.'

He also suggests using swimming as your cardio workout alongside some strength and resistance work in the gym, to help build muscle and lose fat. That is the theory behind the SwimFit programme, launched last year by the Amateur Swimming Association to help non-competitive swimmers get more from their workouts. You can either do workouts on your own or as part of an instructor-led session. The SwimFit Activate+Gym programme mixes high-intensity pool exercises with lane swimming for a total-body workout.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- There are pools offering SwimFit sessions across the country. You can find your nearest with the ASA's poolfinder: visit swimming.org/poolfinder
- If there isn't one nearby, you can sign up to SwimFit for free and download the workouts.

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