

# SWIMMING



## **Swimming and aquatic sports can be a fun way to get exercise.**

It's low impact which puts less stress on your joints. It provides a good cardio workout incorporating the whole body, using all major muscle groups. During Florida summers, with the high heat and humidity, dehydration and heat illness are serious concerns.

Swimming keeps the body cool which prevents excessive sweating, and decreases these risks. For most of us, swimming is about leisure, but there is a growing interest from all ages in water sports teams (water polo, water volleyball, etc.), practicing and competing in triathlons, and swimming competitively. Since the repetitive nature of swimming can cause overuse injuries, with shoulder-related injuries being the most frequently reported. Non-contact and repetitive injuries (classified as overuse injuries) can also result from maximum effort throws, swims and kicks. These injuries usually resolve with rest or cross-training, but occasionally require therapy or injections. Surgery is rarely required for overuse injuries.

A person who swims regularly should be aware of the following key ideas to lower their risk of injury:

### **Water Warm Up**

Start a workout with a slow swim about 10-15% of your total distance. Focus on stroke mechanics and accentuate the "reach" of the stroke. Stop and stretch after your warm up prior to proceeding with the rest of your workout.

### **Proper Warm Up**

Before you get in the pool, prepare your shoulders for training. Warm them up with a few stretch-cord exercises or some dry-land stretches. It's important to increase your core temperature, heart rate, and circulation before hopping into the pool. This will help with the range of motion in your joints.

### **Posture**

Paying attention to your posture is not only important in the workplace, but also in the water. Carrying over poor posture habits from daily work life to the pool or open water can wreak havoc on your shoulders. Rounded shoulders can create shoulder impingement. Think of keeping 'chest forward and shoulders back' to introduce a healthier and injury free position to your swimming mechanics.

### **Use Resistance Training in Exercise Routines**

Start by warming up your shoulders with some simple band exercises. Bands are great because you can do several repeats of an exercise without overusing your shoulders. You can slowly build the strength in your shoulders without added strain.

### **Try the Backstroke or Breaststroke Occasionally**

Stretch out your shoulders with some easy backstrokes. If you're swimming a lot of freestyle, there's a good chance you're limiting your strengthening to certain shoulder muscle groups. Think about it: You're doing the same motion over and over again. You're not giving your other muscles a workout!

Backstroke and breaststroke use different muscles, and will give those that you use in freestyle a rest.

### **Body Rotation**

Good symmetrical rotation is essential for injury-free swimming. Your shoulders, chest and hips need to move as one unit.

### **Bilateral Breathing**

Bilateral breathing, or inhaling and exhaling to both left and right sides, provides a healthy balance to freestyle swimming by creating a more symmetrical stroke. Breathing to the same



**HOT TIP: SEE A DOCTOR**  
Before altering your workout regimen, consult a doctor. Not everyone should be doing the same workout — an exercise that can help one swimmer can seriously injure another swimmer. Find out what your specific needs are.

side all the time can build up the muscles more on one side, eventually creating a side-dominant stroke. Over time, this can result in muscle asymmetry and potentially increase the risk of overuse injuries.

### **Use Paddles with Caution**

Paddles add a tremendous amount of strain on your shoulder muscles. They are equivalent to adding more weight to your workout. While they help strengthen your muscles to improve sprint speed, they increase stress on the arm muscles, increasing the risk of a pull or strain. If your shoulders begin to hurt, take the paddles off. You can still perform pulling sets with just a pull buoy. If you're trying to avoid injury — but don't want to say goodbye to paddles — consider using a smaller pair. The bigger the paddle, the more resistance you'll have in the water. Resistance adds strain to your shoulders.

***This article was contributed by Florida Orthopaedic Institute's Dr. Adam Morse.***

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