



# Why Swimming is Great Exercise for All Fitness Levels

Swimming is one of the most popular recreational activities in the world. But swimming is far more than just a sport. While swimming is a potentially lifesaving skill and a great physical fitness activity, it also can be a tremendous source of fun, a rehabilitation tool, a confidence builder for kids, a lifetime hobby or an ultra-competitive sport.

“There are a wide variety of health and fitness benefits of swimming or physical activity in water,” says physical therapist Basil Strasburg, PT, of Cleveland Clinic Rehabilitation and Sports Therapy.

Swimming also is one of the few physical activities that kids can enjoy without feeling as though they are working out in a structured setting, such as a weight-lifting session at the gym or a dance aerobics class. Playing water games with friends, racing, retrieving rings and other games put kids through a workout that few other forms of exercise can rival.

## Total core training

One aspect of swimming that makes it a great form of exercise is that when you swim, you are using practically your entire body.

As swimmers propel themselves through the water, the arms pull and the legs kick against the resistance of the water. Meanwhile, the hip, back and abdominal muscles stabilize the head, trunk and spine, providing a total body work out.

Because water is denser than air, every kick and arm stroke is a resistance exercise, which is the best way to build muscle tone and strength.

And, as an aerobic exercise, swimming strengthens the heart and lungs while promoting better blood flow throughout the body, Mr. Strasburg says.

And the good news is you don't have to swim laps to reap the benefits of swimming. “Swimming is a total-body sport,” Mr. Strasburg says.

## Low-impact training

Unlike running and jumping activities, swimming is minimally stressful on the body's joints. There's no ground impact, so your joints are protected from stress and strain, Mr. Strasburg says.

In addition, your body becomes lighter when submerged in water. A body in water up to the chest bears just 25 percent to 35 percent of its weight. When immersed to the neck, the body bears 10 percent of its own weight. The water handles the other 90 percent.

The lack of wear and tear on the body is what makes swimming an excellent form of exercise for young children as well as older adults. Swimming also provides a great form of rehabilitation for injured athletes.

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