



Open Water Swimming Guide For Beginners

The warmer weather is here, and swimming pools remain closed. One alternative is open-water swimming. But bear in mind that it can be more dangerous than in a purpose-built swimming pool; water can be colder, much deeper, and there might be currents to contend with. But swimming in a group and using floats can make things safer. If you fancy a go, try these tips:

Open water swimming is swimming in open outdoor bodies of water, including lakes, rivers, reservoirs, oceans and bays.

It's a quite different to swimming in a pool, there are no lanes, no tiled walls, and no chlorine, there are less physical boundaries and perhaps more importantly, the outdoor environment is so incredibly different and varied.

The water feels freer and alive with nature, the depths are deeper, the colours wilder and the views can be breathtaking. The water can be as flat as glass or a lumpy as Lake District fells.

Dip your toe into another world because what lies beneath can also be fascinating.

Keep Calm when Swimming in Open Water

There are no walls to push off every 25 or 50 metres, which can take some getting used to, the water will generally be colder and the waves could be choppy, but stay calm and relax all this is quite normal, go steady until you find yourself a regular rhythm.

Due to the change in water temperature you may find yourself swimming a bit slower than in the pool, try to relax and keep a steady rhythm. Kicking your legs too fast can waste precious energy and oxygen which can give you the feeling of 'running out of air' and 'tightening of the chest', so relax, keep it steady, 'flutter' your legs and, if wearing one, let the wetsuit do the work

Dealing with the Deep of Open Water

Most people find that they need to get use to the natural environment, expect different colours of water from peaty brown to soupy green, the water may change temperature as you move through different patches, there could be weeds, mud or shingle under your feet and you may or may not be able to see the bottom.

Remember to focus on one fixed point to swim towards, such as a tree on the bank or a buoy, this can reduce feelings of disorientation and panic. Focusing on your breath or repeating calm words may help with feelings of panic.

Many people find turning onto your back disorientating, so try to avoid this if it makes you dizzy.

Relax, breath slowly and if you are worried about the natives, remember you are the biggest predator!

As there are no walls to push off from, you will be swimming continuously; don't swim too far on the first outing, gauge how far you can swim without getting too tired, swim along a bank or shore. Always swim with someone else even if they are spotting you from the shore and swim within your own limitations.

Using a swimmers tow float can add confidence as it increases your visibility and you can use it to rest on if needed.

Open Water Swimming Technique Tips

The principles of good swimming technique are essentially the same indoors or outdoors, but some adaptation of technique will keep you going in a straight-line and help make your performance more efficient, especially useful in open water swimming events.

The general aim is to travel further with the least amount of effort, as reducing effort saves energy and oxygen, there are a number of things you can do to help this:

Open Water Swimming Tip 1: Frequent Sighting

If you swim in a straight line it takes you less energy and time to get to the same place.

Pick a fixed object to 'sight' on in the direction you want to swim, better still if there are two objects one in-front of the other that line up in your direction, then as long as you keep the two objects in alignment you are swimming in a straight line.

After completing a breath, as you start the the next stroke with your arm out stretched, simply lift your head up and forwards, just high enough to see, put your head back down and then continue with your next stroke. Adjust your course if necessary.

Try to 'sight' every 6 or 7 strokes.

If you tend to pull to one side more than the other, use some training techniques to develop a strong pull in both arms.

A good swimming wetsuit can also help keep you tracking straight, as the bouncy in your legs reduces the effect your leg kick may have on your direction.

Open Water Swimming Tip 2: Leg Kicking

Kick your legs in a regular steady rhythm, not too crazy fast, as you'll waste precious energy. The aim is to kick 'or 'flutter' to keep your legs high in the water and reduce drag.

Open Water Swimming Tip 3: Reach and Glide

Get as much travel out of each stroke as you can, reach forward to pull and take advantage of the glide before you start each new stroke.

Open Water Swimming Tip 4: Breathing

Practice breathing on both sides, so if the waves and wind are choppy on the left say, you can breath on the right.

Exhale under water so as you turn your head you are ready to breathe in. Turn your head clear of the water before you start to inhale.

Above all relax and keep swimming towards your point, and you'll soon find the rhythm that you'll settle into.

Written by Elizabeth Larkin, Updated 10/26/20

<https://www.swimthelakes.co.uk/beginners-guide-to-open-water-swimming/>