



ACSM Information On...

STARTING A SWIM TRAINING PROGRAM TO IMPROVE FITNESS

Swim training is an excellent way to improve fitness and health.

A Complete Physical Activity Program

A well-rounded physical activity program includes aerobic exercise and strength training exercise, but not necessarily in the same session. This blend helps maintain or improve cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness and overall health and function. Regular physical activity will provide more health benefits than sporadic, high intensity workouts, so choose exercises you are likely to enjoy and that you can incorporate into your schedule.

ACSM's physical activity recommendations for healthy adults, updated in 2011, recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (working hard enough to break a sweat, but still able to carry on a conversation) five days per week, or 20 minutes of more vigorous activity three days per week. Combinations of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity can be performed to meet this recommendation.

Examples of typical aerobic exercises are:

- Walking
- Running
- Stair climbing
- Cycling
- Rowing
- Cross country skiing
- Swimming

In addition, strength training should be performed a minimum of two days each week, with 8-12 repetitions of 8-10 different exercises that target all major muscle groups. This type of training can be accomplished using body weight, resistance bands, free weights, medicine balls or weight machines.

Swimming is a low impact activity that can improve cardiovascular fitness, has been shown to increase muscular strength and endurance, helps to maintain muscle mass, burns significant calories (caloric expenditure varies greatly based on skill level), is a form of rehabilitation and can be performed at all ages. Before starting a program make sure you do not have a contraindicated medical condition that would prove dangerous in the water environment.

Environment

For beginner swimmers it is important to master the appropriate skills, be familiar with water safety and be knowledgeable of the swimming environment. Indoor swimming is usually performed in pools of various lengths. Swimming flumes or swimming treadmills are also indoor options. Check to see what options are available in your community. For indoor pools, it is vital that the appropriate temperature and water environment be maintained. There are a number of water related illnesses or conditions that can occur even in properly maintained pools. It is important to follow the facility safety rules and to understand proper etiquette. There may be times when more than one swimmer may have to share a lane. Check with the lifeguard or pool personnel for assistance.

Never swim alone

Wherever you swim, there should be appropriately trained personnel to handle any emergency situations. It is not recommended that beginners swim in open water. Open water swims can be dangerous. Rip currents, tide changes, surf, water temperature, marine animals, water cleanliness and boats are just a few of the conditions that can make open water swimming hazardous.

Technique

There are many different swimming strokes and techniques that can be used. Each stroke has unique characteristics and requires different form and skills. Practicing proper stroke technique will improve swimming efficiency. If you are a non-swimmer or have limited experience, swimming lessons can be very helpful. Lap swimming or endurance swimming is quite different than playing in the water. Taking lessons from a qualified teacher or coach can provide the basic skills necessary to start swim training or a conditioning program. Proper mechanics are very important in order to swim effectively and improve performance. U.S. Masters Swimming (www.usms.org) is an excellent resource. Masters swimming is for individuals 18 years or older and consists of more than 1,500 swimming clubs. The clubs offer a variety of



programs including beginning swimming, training and conditioning, to competitive events. The options available at the different clubs vary.

Training

It is recommended that the training session start with a warm-up, followed by the training session, and conclude with a cool down. During the training session the swimmer can work on technique, perform a variety of drills, and work on fitness. The cool-down is an important component of the training session. For the cool-down, avoid going from a hard training session to a hot environment such as a hot tub. This could put individuals who are pregnant or have specific medical conditions at potential risk for dangerous consequences.

Use progression and slowly increase frequency, intensity and duration of training over time. It is very common for swimmers to train using work rest intervals. An example would be swim a minute or a few laps then rest and repeat. The work rest intervals can be varied. There are endless numbers of available training programs. Find a program that is suited for your personal goals and your level of fitness and training (www.usms.org). During the training session the swimmer can work on specific skills (*i.e.* kick, stroke, breathing, body position). The intensity of the workout can be monitored by watching the clock or by monitoring heart rate. When using a heart rate monitor, it is important to know that heart rate in the water may be lower than on land. Swimming places the body in a prone position which allows the heart to work more efficiently. Heart rates for conditioned swimmers tend to be lower during swimming compared to other forms of aerobic activity, however heart rates can vary based on skill and technique. In addition to heart rate monitors, there are devices available that assist the swimmer by monitoring swim time, number of laps, distance, and swim efficiency.

Equipment

When starting a swimming program there are two major pieces of equipment that are essential, swimsuit and goggles. Select an appropriate swimsuit that is comfortable and is designed specifically for swimming. Manufacturers have developed a number of fabrics that dry quickly and resist fading. There are also swimsuits that are made for competitive purposes and wetsuits can be used in cooler environments. Goggles are very important to protect your eyes. They also make swimming much more enjoyable. There are a number of fairly inexpensive models that have prescription lenses. It is important that the goggles fit snugly and do not leak. Swim caps can provide a variety of benefits depending on the swimmer and their needs. There are also a number of training aids the swimmer may consider purchasing. Fins may be useful for the swimmer who has a weak kick. Runners often have poor ankle flexibility and fins can add propulsion to the training session. Make sure the fins fit properly. A pull-buoy is a flotation device that is placed between the legs to help the swimmer train without the lower body sinking. A kickboard is another flotation device that can be used for a number of drills. Kickboards are routinely used to help keep the upper body floating while working on the kick. In addition there are earplugs, nose clips, and other items that may be appropriate based on the individual swimmer.

In conclusion, swim training is an excellent way to improve health and fitness. Swim safely and enjoy the benefits.



Staying Active Pays Off!

Those who are physically active tend to live longer, healthier lives. Research shows that moderate physical activity—such as 30 minutes a day of brisk walking—significantly contributes to longevity. Even a person with risk factors like high blood pressure, diabetes or even a smoking habit can gain real benefits from incorporating regular physical activity into their daily life.

As many dieters have found, exercise can help you stay on a diet and lose weight. What's more – regular exercise can help lower blood pressure, control blood sugar, improve cholesterol levels and build stronger, denser bones.

The First Step

Before you begin an exercise program, take a fitness test, or substantially increase your level of activity, make sure to answer the following questions. This physical activity readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q) will help determine if you're ready to begin an exercise routine or program.

- Has your doctor ever said that you have a heart condition or that you should participate in physical activity only as recommended by a doctor?
- Do you feel pain in your chest during physical activity?
- In the past month, have you had chest pain when you were not doing physical activity?
- Do you lose your balance from dizziness? Do you ever lose consciousness?
- Do you have a bone or joint problem that could be made worse by a change in your physical activity?
- Is your doctor currently prescribing drugs for your blood pressure or a heart condition?
- Do you know of any reason you should not participate in physical activity?

If you answered yes to one or more questions, if you are over 40 years of age and have recently been inactive, or if you are concerned about your health, consult a physician before taking a fitness test or substantially increasing your physical activity. If you answered no to each question, then it's likely that you can safely begin exercising.

Prior to Exercise

Prior to beginning any exercise program, including the activities depicted in this brochure, individuals should seek medical evaluation and clearance to engage in activity. Not all exercise programs are suitable for everyone, and some programs may result in injury. Activities should be carried out at a pace that is comfortable for the user. Users should discontinue participation in any exercise activity that causes pain or discomfort. In such event, medical consultation should be immediately obtained.



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