

Why Should My Child Be a Swimmer?

Swimming is an outstanding activity for young people.

1. Swimming promotes fitness and teaches a child to strive for physical achievement. Many super-stars in other sports started out as swimmers and gained strength and coordination that helped them to excel.
2. Swimming is an exciting individual and team sport.
3. Swimming is a technical and specialized activity involving extensive skill development.
4. Swimming is a healthy "lifetime" activity. Participants may be 1 or 101 years old.
5. Swimming is relatively injury free in comparison to other youth sports.
6. Swimming teaches the life lessons of sport and sportsmanship which include learning to deal with winning and losing, as well as working with officials, teammates and coaches.
7. Swimming motivates participants to strive for self improvement and teaches goal orientation.
8. Swimming cultivates a positive mental attitude and high self-esteem.
9. Swimming can prevent drowning.

Did you know?

Drowning is a leading killer of American children.

In ethnic communities, drowning rates are nearly three times the national average.

More than 30% of kids are at risk for obesity-related illnesses. Swimming is a cure.

Key Questions

While winning is nice, while setting a record, getting a best time, or making a qualifying time feels good, we hope that our young athletes learn more than "it is great to swim fast". No where in human history or theology do we learn that the ability to swim fast holds a very high priority in the grand scheme of the universe. From a practical standpoint, over-emphasis on speed, times and achievements will eventually end in frustration. No matter how fast a young athlete swims, there will probably be another swimmer in the next town, state, or country, swimming faster, if not now, then next month. So as coaches and parents, ask yourselves:

- .. Did the child learn to swim with more skill this past season so he or she is both stronger and safer in the water?
- .. Did the child learn to exhibit initiative, wanting to come to the pool and do the practice without having to be constantly pushed or prodded by parents and coaches?
- .. Did the child learn something about unselfishness, sacrificing his or her personal wants for the good of others or the team?
- .. Did the child benefit from the competitive experience, learning how to handle winning and losing in our competitive society?
- .. Did the child learn more patience in overcoming obstacles, setbacks and problems?
- .. Did the child learn empathy?

In a few years, the medals and ribbons will be laid aside and best times will be a hazy memory. The friendships that will develop and the life skills learned will carry on for a lifetime.

Top 10 Hardest Things to do in Swimming

10. That First Big Event – Whether it's the 400 IM, the 200 fly or the mile, there's always that event that has swimmers shaking in their boots when they do it for the first time. Once they pull it off, though, they realize it was easier than they thought.

9. Diving in for Morning Workout – That first brisk plunge is all you need to wake yourself up at 6 a.m.... if only you can throw yourself in.

8. Keeping Your Goggles on while Diving In – At any given meet, you'll see countless age groupers swimming the 50 free with goggles around their necks. Heck, even some senior swimmers have problems with this one.

7. The Flip Turn – Think about the first time you tried a flip turn. You were probably either too close to the wall, or too far, and it took weeks of practice to do it right every time. Even today, you probably still miss walls and get water up your nose from time to time.

6. The Breaststroke – Who hasn't been disqualified in the breaststroke? This stroke has about a million little rules to remember and requires a great deal of timing and coordination – no wonder all the top breaststrokers are such specialists.

5. Pacing – Whether it's the 200 or the 1,000 free, pacing is the key to the race. Unfortunately it sometimes takes people their entire careers to finally get it exactly where they want it.

4. Making the U.S. Olympic Team – Of about 250,000 athletes registered with USA Swimming each year, only a maximum of 52 (26 men and 26 women) are chosen every four years.

3. Winning an Olympic Gold Medal – Of the millions of swimmers in the world, you have to be the best swimmer in your event on that given day. But hey, somebody has to win it.

2. Breaking a World Record – How tough is this one? Only three American men (Lenny Krayzelburg, Aaron Peirsol and Michael Phelps) and two American women (Janet Evans and Natalie Coughlin) currently hold individual long course world records.

1. Make a National Cut in Every Event – Only a handful of American swimmers in the history of the sport have been able to do this.

Questions New Swim Parents Should Ask

Your child has told you that he or she wants to join a swim team. How exciting! Now you are wondering what this means for you and your family. Here are some basic topics you need to be familiar with and some questions you should ask before your child dives in.

1. Financial Obligations. Swimming costs money because teams usually have paid professional coaches and most teams pay rent for their pool time. These costs must be passed on to the swim team members in the form of membership fees and team fees. Questions you should ask are:

- What is the total cost per year for my child? [Approximate amounts are entry level \\$1300.00, Travel Senior Level \\$2000.00](#)
- How are the payments broken down? (Monthly? Quarterly? By season?) [Dues 10 months, Fundraising quarterly, Others as they arise](#)
- What is the average cost per year for competitions for a swimmer of my child's age and ability? [\\$200 - \\$1000](#)
- How are entry fees for swim meets collected? Is there an escrow account or are meet entry fees collected every time my child is entered in a meet? [Each Family enters the meets online per Coaches instruction](#)
- What equipment and outfitting will my child need and how much does it cost? [Cap, Goggles, Swim Suit, Swim Fins & bag](#)
- Where do I get the equipment such as suits, caps and goggles that my child needs? [Nor Cal Swim Shop](#)

2. Swim Practice. Swim practices are usually scheduled with the swimmers broken into groups according to age and ability. Questions you should ask are:

- How many days a week will my child have swim practice? Which days? [2 times a week to 10 times a week, verified with Coach.](#)
- What time is practice and how long is the session? [Afternoon and early evening for all, plus mornings for the Senior group.](#)
- What is the attendance policy? Can my child arrive late or leave early if necessary? [We try for flexibility, but this would be dependent on Coaches discretion.](#)
- Is there flexibility to tailor my child's practice schedule to our family schedule? [The days of the week yes, practice time no.](#)
- Who will be coaching my child? What is this coach's background and experience? [All of our Coaches are trained & certified see web site for each Coaches level attained so far.](#)
- How many other swimmers will be in my child's group and what is their age range? [Groups are by skill and fitness 20-30 on any given day.](#)
- What are the provisions for safety and supervision? [Trained Coaches on Deck at all times.](#)

- Do I drop my child off or can I stay and watch practice? [Generally this is your choice but you must stay off the pool deck and stay in the bleachers.](#)

3. Swim Meets. Swimming competitions are called meets. Meets are organized so that children are competing against other children of similar ages and abilities. Questions you should ask are:

- How often will my child compete in meets? [1 a month to every 2-3 weeks](#)
- Where are the meets held? [Locally with in driving distance at various clubs, senior level swimmers do travel.](#)
- Do I chose the meets my child competes in? [No, the Coaches will let you know which meets the team will be at; those are the ones you would attend.](#)
- Who does the meet entries? [You enter your swimmer.](#)
- Who is responsible for providing transportation to meets? [Local meets are the parent's responsibility.](#)
- What do parents do at the meets? [TIME for 1-2 as required by Meet Director, assist child as needed, cheer for the team and your swimmer. They may not have swum fastest but maybe they achieved a skill goal that was more important.](#)

4. Volunteering and Parental Responsibilities. Most teams depend heavily on parent volunteers to perform a variety of tasks. Questions you should ask are:

- How do I help my child's team if I know very little about swimming? [Most volunteer jobs require little skill or experience.](#)
- Who can I ask when I have questions? [Your Coach or Membership.](#)
- What is expected or required of parents? [To let Coaches - Coach and Parents - Parent.](#)
- Will my child and I be expected or required to participate in fundraising? [Yes, \\$300-\\$400 per year.](#)

Sticking With Swimming....What Can a Parent Do?

The Unfortunate Path that Many Swimmers Follow:

The swimmer's career often starts with 8/under success and high parental enthusiasm. The child is encouraged by parents and others to excel and a big deal is made out of every accomplishment. As the child changes age groups and moves into the 9/10 group, even the most successful child may struggle because he or she has a harder time finding success against 10 year olds. What successes are achieved may not be as noticeable. Unfortunately, as many as one-third of the young swimmers and their families do not make it past this point.

By the time swimmers are 10 or 11 years old they (or their parents) may realize that twice a week practices or summer only swimming is not enough to compete with others who are practicing more frequently. Physical ability and natural coordination can still help athlete to stay competitive and have success but it is getting harder to stay on top. More big changes and rude awakenings are lurking in the future.

The first Big Change: From 10/under to 11 & 12

- Events become longer going from 25's and 50's to 50's and 100's and even some 200's and distance freestyle events.
- Competition changes from sprint competition to race/pace/competition.
- In some programs, one half of the athletes and their families do not make this change. They never give the coaches or the program a chance to help the athlete adapt to the changing nature of swimming competition.

The second Big Change: From age 12 to 13&14/Senior swimming.

- Events change again. Now it is all 100's & 200's along with 400/500 and 1000/1650.
- The athlete must develop a work ethic and intensify the training aspect of swimming.
- Physical changes affect both male and female athletes. Athletes get bigger and stronger, but many, especially the girls, may struggle to cope with their "new bodies."
- This can one of the most rewarding phases of an athlete's career, yet many will give up.

The third Big Change: A focus on college swimming

- Swimmers who remain in the sport start to look at the possibility of swimming in college.
- Questions arise concerning the choice of colleges, the level of swimming, the possibilities of scholarships and the willingness to compete and train for another four years.

Let's put these changes into "real" numbers:

Suppose a team has 12 Novice swimmers.

- Only 8 will remain in swimming past the first Big Change
- Only 4 will remain in swimming past the second Big Change.
- Only 2 will remain in swimming past the third Big Change.

The Role of the Parent in Navigating the Big Changes:

Sometimes, unfortunately, it is the parents who are responsible for their child leaving the sport. For example:

- Parents who are former athletes, especially former swimmers, may have unreasonably high expectations.
- Parents believe that they are in charge of the athlete's happiness and that only "winning" can bring happiness.
- Parents believe that early success equates with long term success. The 8/under star will, of course, become an Olympian.
- Parents may not understand the need for technical and skill development before "swimming fast."

Parents must examine their own motives. Form a philosophy that emphasizes the process, not the outcome. Be the guides on the "fun path" not the "victory path." When parents use these words, their emphasis is misplaced:

We - Beat - Win - Fast - Lost - Try - Only - My

What Can Parents Do to Reverse the Trend?

Parents must develop progress and grow the just as athletes do. Experience is the key and communication is the mode. Swimmers already have coaches, friends and teammates. They need a parent to fill the parental role. "Coaches coach children, parents raise children. "

Here are some of the benefits your child will garner if he or she sticks with swimming:

Life Lessons: Only one swimmer can win the race. Does this mean everyone else is a loser? Of course not! Swimmers need to constantly be reminded that a top-notch effort on their part will result in personal satisfaction and a contribution to their team. Most USA Swimming clubs design a program of competitive training and competition for our younger swimmers based on long term development. Therefore, we may not stress early competitive success with a great deal of fanfare.

Remember that swimmers under the age of 12 are very inconsistent which can be frustrating to a parent or to the swimmers themselves. Fun and patience are the keys here.

Leadership: In many cases, our team's leaders and successful senior swimmers were not outstanding age group swimmers. Those who "stick with it" often develop into outstanding leaders, having learned patience, dedication and commitment. Steady progress and understanding the meaning of various accomplishments will make a motivated, well adjusted senior swimmer.

USA Swimming clubs go to great lengths to provide opportunities for all swimmers equally, although sometimes it may seem that more emphasis and time is spent on senior swimming. An 8/under will swim no more than 45 minutes two or three times a week, while a Senior swimmer may be in the water 18 hours per week! Both swimmers are having their needs met as part of a long term progression. Understanding the long term benefits and the long term progression will help parents navigate the waters of a swimmer's career. If you associate "time" with "attention", the longer a swimmer stays with swimming the more attention he or she will receive.

Tips to Become a Successful Student-Athlete

Here are some tips on how to become a successful student-athlete:

- 1. Organize and prioritize.** "Focus on one task at a time, so it doesn't seem like you are trying to do too much," said Ed Spencer, former head coach at Dynamo Swim Club. "Make swimming a priority in your life, and make sure everyone knows that."
- 2. Stay healthy.** "Rest and nutrition are key to success in the classroom and pool," Mecklenburg Aquatic Club coach Dave Gibson said. "Don't get behind on schoolwork because it will just add stress."
- 3. Discipline.** "Discipline leads to better swimming and better study habits, because kids just learn how to get it all done," said Alex Braunfeld, head coach at Dynamo's Alpharetta facility. "Parents, coaches and teachers can all teach discipline."
- 4. Time management.** "Effective use of the day is key to providing time for studying, training and resting," Dynamo head coach Mark Temple said. "Student-athletes choose to manage themselves by scheduling their time between school and swimming."
- 5. Plan ahead with schoolwork.** "Don't fall behind on schoolwork, and talk to your teachers. Keep them informed of your schedule and conflicts," Scholastic All-American Kate Ziegler said. "When I talk to my teachers ahead of time, they are more willing to work with me."
- 6. Leave yourself time to relax.** "I try to not overload myself with work," Scholastic All-American Kevin Nead said. "I always challenge myself in academics, but make sure I buffer myself with time to do things besides swimming and studying."

Top 30 Foods for Swimmers

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| 1. Blueberries | Anthocyanins |
| 2. Blackberries | Anthocyanins |
| 3. Strawberries | Vitamin C |
| 4. Oranges | Vitamin C, Heperidin |
| 5. Mango | Vitamin A, Vitamin C |
| 6. Broccoli | Vitamin A, Vitamin K |
| 7. Carrots | Vitamin A, Vitamin K |
| 8. Tomatoes | Vitamin C, Lycopene |
| 9. Sweet Potatoes | Vitamin A (betacarotene), Vitamin C, Potassium, Iron, Copper, Manganese |
| 10. Avocado | Vitamin K, Folate, Potassium |
| 11. Spinach | Vitamin A, Vitamin K, Folate, Iron, Manganese, Magnesium |
| 12. Mixed Greens | Phytonutrients |
| 13. Potatoes | Vitamin C, Vitamin B6, Copper |
| 14. Bananas | Vitamin C, Vitamin B6, Potassium |
| 15. Almonds | Vitamin E, (gamma-tocopherol) |
| 16. Cranberries | Hippuric acid |
| 17. Oatmeal | Manganese |
| 18. Granola | Manganese |
| 19. Olive Oil | Vitamin E, Oleic acid |
| 20. Black beans | Folate |
| 21. Yogurt | Calcium, Phosphorus |
| 22. Milk | Calcium |
| 23. Orange juice | Vitamin C |
| 24. Eggs | Vitamin K, Choline, Leutin |
| 25. Beef | Iron, Zinc, Vitamin B12 |
| 26. Salmon | Omega-3 fats |
| 27. Shrimp | Selenium, Vitamin D, Vitamin B12 |
| 28. Chicken | Selenium, |
| 29. Whole grain bread | Manganese |
| 30. Whole grain pasta | Vitamin B |

A Total Body Workout (9/8/2008)

BY DEB WHITNEY//Former Physiology Coordinator, USA Swimming

Why are swimmers some of the fittest athletes around? Because swimming is a total body workout. From your head to your toes, here are several reasons why swimming is such a great sport for health and fitness.

Arms – Each arm stroke starts with the catch phase of the stroke, where the forearm and hand form an anchor point in the water. You use your shoulder, upper arm and core muscles to pull your body past this anchor point. Think of how many arm strokes you take during a practice... Now that is a workout.

Lats – See those muscles along the side of your back? Those are your latissimus dorsi or lat muscles. They are very strong and help you in developing and maintaining a powerful arm stroke.

Core – The power in your pull and kick come from your core. A strong core – including abdominal and back muscles – can lead to better technique, faster swimming and a better body position in the water. Your core is also involved in the rotation of your body (side-to-side or up-down). Since the core has such an important role in swimming, these muscles really do get a workout during practice and meets.

Quads – To have a powerful kick, you need strong quads and hip muscles. These muscles – through the whipping action of the legs and with the help a strong core – help propel your body through the water.

Ankles and Calves – All those flip turns and push-offs from the walls increase ankle and calf strength, as well as quad strength. With each turn on the wall, your leg muscles contract, and then you jump off the wall with power and explode into your stroke. Think of how many push-offs you do during a practice. What a workout for your legs!

Aerobic and Anaerobic – Swimming can help you develop the endurance to do a long workout and also develop the speed for sprinting. When you swim at low to moderate intensities, you are building up your aerobic capacity, or the ability to swim for long durations. When you train at moderate to high intensities, you are building up your anaerobic capacity, the ability to blast a 100m sprint in a meet.

Cardiovascular – Your heart, blood vessels and lungs adapt to the many laps you swim in the pool. As your heart, blood vessels and lungs change with training and competitions, your fitness level increases.

Mental Toughness – Swimming works your mind. Getting through those tough workouts and staying focused not only helps your physical fitness, but also helps your mental toughness – not to mention the mental preparation and focus it takes to perform your best at competitions.