



OPEN WATER

Swimming Safety Guidelines

REMEMBER OUR OPEN WATER SAFETY CODE

PREPARE

Check the location, tide and weather conditions before you go, wear a brightly coloured cap and use an inflatable safety tow float.

WATCH OUT

Swim with a buddy or in a group and tell someone when and where you are going and your expected return time.

BE AWARE

Assess the water conditions. Swim outside areas with high craft activity such as boat ramps, ski lanes or harbour channels. Avoid potential hazards such as moored craft or submerged objects.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Challenge yourself, be aware of your limits. Test yourself in a pool or other safe environment before venturing into the open water. Learn how to safely rescue someone and how to signal for help.

BEFORE YOU SWIM

As a lot of open water swimming takes place where there are no lifeguards present, make sure you always have a plan before you swim.

Swimming with a buddy or in a group is safer and makes you more noticeable to other water users, there is safety in numbers.

We also recommend you tell someone when and where you are going and what time to expect you back.

Plan your swim before you leave and consider the currents and tides of your chosen location.

Plan your entry and exit points, if possible try to avoid boat ramps and steer clear of areas with high craft activity.

KNOW THE WATER

No stretches of water are the same, so it is vital that you assess the water before you get in. We advise that you check before you go using websites such as Safeswim and MetService to help you understand the conditions of the water, the tides and the weather forecast before you swim.

Your buoyancy will change depending on what sort of water you are swimming in. Due to the salt content in sea water, you are more buoyant in the sea than fresh water such as a river or a lake.

If swimming at the beach, you should aim to swim during slack tide, the hour before a high or low tide as there is less water moving and weaker currents. You should stay within 200m of the beach and avoid swimming in or crossing shipping lanes.

If swimming in rivers, be aware of the current. Even if a river appears calm, it can contain fast-moving undercurrents. When river swimming, choose a spot where it is easy to get in and out with further places downstream to exit the water if needed. Check the current, you can do this by throwing a piece of wood/stick into the water first.

If swimming in a lake, be aware of the lake environment. Lakes can contain sudden drop-offs, strong currents, and submerged debris. Ensure the water looks clean and learn how to recognise blue-green algae. Stick to designated swimming lanes or if in an unpatrolled location, try and swim parallel to the shore rather than straight out into the middle, swimming into the wind at the beginning and back with the waves behind you, is best.



STAY WARM

The average temperature of open water varies between 14°C in Kaka Point to 23°C in KatiKati throughout summertime, but don't be put off by the cold! You can use a specially designed swimming wetsuit that will keep you warm, help with buoyancy, and allow you to use your natural stroke unhindered. These differ from surfing wetsuits as they give more flexibility in areas such as the shoulders.

Whenever open water swimming, we recommend you enter the water slowly and let your body acclimatise. Getting into cooler water too quickly can result in reduced blood flow to your limbs and an automatic increase in your breathing rate. Jumping in might seem like fun but you risk cold water shock and hitting objects under the surface by not getting in gradually.

BE VISIBLE

Being visible in the open water is extremely important. A brightly coloured hat and inflatable Safety Tow Float are essential as they give a clear signal to other water users that you are in the water. It also allows people out on the water to see where you are, should you get into any trouble.

The Safety Tow has the added advantage of taking your weight if you need to rest during your swim, or provide flotation to someone else. Some models have a waterproof compartment (such as the Swim Secure Tow Donut) so that you can take your valuables with you while you swim.

SWIM TECHNIQUE

It's best to start with short swims and increase the length of your swims over time as you become more experienced and tolerant of the conditions.

When in the water ensure you sight your swim using a landmark as a guide to keep you going in the right direction. It's best to lift your head every 8-10 strokes to ensure you are still on course.

There is no right or wrong method to swimming, you can swim using whatever stroke you are comfortable with. However, if freestyle is your preferred method, it's good to practise bilateral breathing if this is possible for you. This will help if you are swimming with a persistent chop from one direction as you will be able to breath on the opposite side, away from the chop.

You should end your swim if you start to get cold or you feel yourself tiring, both are signs that your core temperature could be dropping.



AFTER YOUR SWIM

As soon as you exit the water let someone know that you have done so.

Make sure you have some warm clothes waiting for you on shore, you will get colder once you exit the water as blood returns to your cooler extremities. A hot drink at the end of a swim is a great idea but avoid alcohol as this will cause you to lose heat.

To maintain biosecurity, it's important that your kit is washed carefully in-between visiting different open water environments. This ensures invasive species are not transferred from one body of water to another. If possible, hose your kit outside in the garden, rather than washing it in the bath/shower this is so the dirty water goes into the soil, rather than straight into the water system.

There are local open water swimming groups all over the country. Some swim year-round at their local waterway, while others only swim in summer months and spend winter at indoor aquatic facilities. Local knowledge is so important while trying to find a good, safe spot to swim and you may find some fellow swimmers to tag along with too.

