10 Amazing Benefits of Swimming You Never Knew

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Swimming has been called the perfect exercise. After all, you can get all of the benefits of an aerobic workout without any damaging impact on joints, and it can be done by both the very old and the very young.

It is utilized by athletes to stay strong and keep fit when recovering from injury, and there is no fancy equipment needed—just you and the deep blue.

Swimming has many more benefits that those obvious advantages seen on the surface; its improvements to overall health go much deeper. So, let's take a big breath, and dive into the 10 benefits of swimming:

1. Swimming improves muscle definition and strength.

Swimmers gain muscle strength throughout the entire body. Where runners see muscle build in their legs, swimmers utilize more muscle groups to move through the water. While the legs kick, the arms pull. As the back reaches and rotates, the stomach tightens to power the legs and stabilize the core, making swimming one of the best aerobic exercises to give you a total body workout. Just look at Michel Phelps' fit physique if you need inspiration!

2. Swimming builds up bone mass.

For years, researchers scoffed at the idea that swimming affected bone mass. After all, only weight-bearing exercises were able to achieve this benefit, right? Not according to [research](#) published in the Journal of Applied Physiology. Because there are ethical reasons to avoid in-depth bone examination on

humans, the study put rats into three groups: running, swimming, and a control group with no exercise stimulation. While running still showed the highest increase in BMD (Bone Mineral Density),[1] the swimming group also showed benefits over the control group in both BMD and femoral bone weight. While more studies are needed, these new findings show that previous research dismissing swimming's bone benefits may need to be revisited.

3. Swimming helps you stay flexible.

Swimming requires you to reach, stretch, twist, and pull your way through the water. Your ankles become fins and are stretched with each kick as you push off against the liquid pressure. This doesn't mean you shouldn't still stretch on your own, but repetitive stretching found in your various strokes also helps with flexibility.

4. Swimming reduces inflammation.

While swimming's cardiovascular benefits of strengthening the heart muscle are common knowledge, research also indicates aerobic activities,[2] such as swimming, reduce inflammation that leads to atherosclerosis[3] build-up in the heart.

Reducing system-wide inflammation leads to lessened disease progression in many other areas as well, so expect to hear of more benefits as the research progresses.

5. Swimming holds its own for calories burned.

Everyone knows that swimming is a great way to burn calories, but most don't realize it can be just as efficient as jumping on the treadmill. Depending on the

stroke you choose and your intensity, swimming can burn equal or greater calories than running.

Additionally, you don't have to worry about sweat in your eyes. For example: for 10 minutes of swimming you burn 60 calories with the breast stroke, 80 calories with the backstroke, 100 calories with freestyle, and an impressive 150 with the butterfly stroke.

For perspective, running a 10-minute mile burns around 100 calories. Therefore, a strong 30-min butterfly speed session can burn 150 more calories than running a 5K in the same time frame.

6. Swimming can improve exercise-induced asthma.

Nothing is as frustrating as trying to exercise and being unable to get your breath. Unlike working out in dry gym air or braving seasonal pollen counts, however, swimming allows you to breath moist air while you train. Not only does swimming help alleviate asthma symptoms, studies have shown that it can actually improve the overall condition of the lungs.

In a recent study, a group of children that completed a six-week swimming program saw improvements in symptom severity, snoring, mouth-breathing, and hospitalization and ER visits. These benefits were still noted a year after the swimming program ended. People who don't have asthma benefit too as swimming increases overall lung-volume and teaches good breathing techniques.[4]

7. Swimming lowers stress and depression.

Love that natural endorphin kick? While many talk about a runner's high, swimming can bring about all those feel-good emotions too.

In addition to the happy hormones, you also can feel a relaxation response similar to yoga. As I mentioned previously, swimming stretches your body

constantly. Combine this with the deep rhythmic breathing, and you can experience a relaxation rush that's very unique to the sport.

Swimming is also calming and meditative, as the sound of your breathing and the water rushing by helps you focus inward and drown out all other distractions. This lowers stress and depression naturally.

Research also shows that swimming can reverse damage to the brain from stress through a process called hippocampal neurogenesis.[5] So, if you feel like you're drowning emotionally, jumping in an actual body of water may be exactly what you need to find your feel-good feet again.

8. Salt-water swimming can be a beauty treatment for skin.

When I switch from pool swimming to open water workouts in the ocean, I noticed a vast improvement in my skin over time.

Swimming regularly in salt water helps the skin retain moisture and detoxify to promote new cell growth.[6] You will be surprised how smooth and healthy your skin feels after an invigorating ocean swim.

9. Swimming can make you smarter.

Of course all exercise is great for the mind, but can swimming actually make you smarter?

Research from Australia focused on kids who took swimming lessons compared to a control group of non-swimmers. The results showed that kids who regularly participated in swimming were able to master language development, fine motor skills, confidence, and physical development sooner than the control group.

Swimming may also help with math skills, as swimmers regularly calculate the meters swum in sets or interval drills to put their adding and subtraction skills to work.

10. Swimming may just lengthen your life.

While all exercise can produce greater health and longevity, studies point to swimming as one of the best choices for doing so. Researchers at the University of South Carolina looked at 40,547 men, aged 20 to 90, for over 32 years. The results showed that those who swam had a 50 percent lower death rate than runners, walkers, or men who didn't exercise.[7]

Feeling motivated to grab those goggles now? The water's great! Jump on in:

What You Need to Know About Swimming for Exercise

Reference

[1]	^	Wikipedia: Bone Density
[2]	^	Science Daily: Why Aerobic Exercise Is Good For The Heart
[3]	^	Wikipedia: Atherosclerosis
[4]	^	Wiley – Blackwell: Swimming Aids Asthma Symptoms In Children, Study Finds
[5]	^	PsychCentral: How Swimming Reduces Depression
[6]	^	3FC: 3 Beauty Benefits of Swimming in Salt Water
[7]	^	Prevention: Dive into Longevity