

Open Water Swimming

Advice and Guidance for Tri-Athletes



A Free E-book from



Open-water Swimming- Points

- Safety first – Use your common sense, and never swim alone. Simple guidelines will get you started safely. Successful swimming is about understanding water conditions, knowing your own personal abilities. Tell someone where and when you are going swimming, expected time home. Wear bright coloured bathing cap – get yourself seen.
- Swim with Supervision: Always swim in groups – ‘buddy up’ with someone of your own ability. Ask more experience swimming to come along. Stick together while swimming.
- Ask someone who owns a kayak or some form of boat to come along just in case you get tired.
- Always speak t lifeguards [if available] and tell them what you are doing – and ask them to keep an eye on you.
- Understand the water currents: Even the most experienced open-water swimmers can have trouble swimming against a strong current. Consider the direction and strength of currents before getting wet. Swim against a current to start so that you can gain an advantage of the current’s push on the return. Currents are affected by many factors, including wind, gravity and the changing tidal times.
- Always check any current’s while swimming as they can change direction and strength quickly.
- Always be observant – check landmarks, the direction in which anchored boats point can also indicate current direction.
- Rip currents- How to Identify a Rip Current:
 - A channel of churning or choppy water.
 - An area of different colour water
 - A line of foam, seaweed, or debris moving steadily seaward
 - A break in the pattern of incoming waves
 - They also occur without presenting these signs – check with locals or lifeguards.
 - If in a rip tide- always keep calm – swim calmly towards the shoreline- don’t fight the current, float or tread water.
 - If in difficulty face shoreline wave arms and yell for ‘HELP’ .
 - Check local tides – Understand daily high and low tides and measurements. A change in the tide can mean a change in the direction of a current.



Dress the part

- Brightly coloured bathing cap
- Dependable goggles
- Wet Suit
- Earplugs
- Watch
- Chafe cream such as Vaseline/ glide
- Towel & Warm clothing for after
- Fluids



Relax

- Novice swimmers should enter the water slowly. Allow your body to acclimatize to the water temperature. Start by swimming close to the shoreline at a comfortable pace, concentrate on exhalations and breathing comfortably. Focus on goals setting for each swim – to reach a particular buoy, swim for x amount of minutes – improve technique.
- Wetsuits give you added buoyancy which will give you confidence. A wetsuit can feel restricting when you first use one – this will get easier with practice- loosen the neck as this will help you to breathe easier and relax.
- Wear fins while training –
- Practice diving into the waves – practice riding the waves into the shoreline



Breathing and stroke patterns

- Breathing and stroke patterns are different in open-water than the pool – Breathe often and early. Know your breathing pattern – breathing every 3rd stroke in freestyle may not provide you with enough air exchanges to maintain a steady effort over a long distance. Breathing both sides to keep up with competition, to maintain good symmetry and balance in the strokes. Practice in the pool – as you never know what situations will present you on race day- swells, wind and choppy water are inevitable so practice breathing both sides.
- Keep relaxed in your stroke work all the core muscles, maintain a relaxed rhythmic flow through the water,
- Keep your kick light and rhythmic, picking up the pace only to pass another swimmer or for a strong finish.



‘Get in, Get around, and Get Out’

Skills for Entering, Exiting and Navigating through the water before heading to the beach or lakes.

- Check the entries and exits, look at the terrain – are there rocks, pebbles gravel, sludge? Does the ground drop off gradually or quickly?
- Swimming a straight course in open water is a challenge – practice sighting and get your navigation skills correct on race day-
- Try ‘peek-breathe pattern’ As you set your arm up for the catch at the front of the stroke, lift your head forward and up enough to clear the water with your goggles – crocodile –style and take a look at your target.



The Shortest Distance Between Start & Finish Check List

How many buoys or markers are on the course and what colour are they

How many meters between each buoy

Is there a turnaround buoy and, if so, is it larger and a different colour

Is the course out and back

Is it anti clockwise or clockwise swim

Entry & Exit is it in the same place

Terrain – sandy/ shale / pebbles/

How many heats – ages

Mass start

Check for landmarks



Train smart
Rosemarie Jones
RTJ Sports

For training plans or more information about triathlon training visit:

www.rtjsports.com/coaching/trainingplans