

(Almost) everybody in the pool!

By R.J. Ignelzi, STAFF WRITER

HIGH-BURN, LOW-IMPACT SWIMMING IS AN OPTIMAL FORM OF EXERCISE FOR MOST

Looking for an activity that burns calories, builds strength, is easy on the joints and can be performed by almost anyone of any age or size?

Then take the plunge and swim. "Swimming is a great sport for everyone," says Matt Pentland, aquatics director at the Mission Valley YMCA. "When you can no longer run or play basketball or participate in high-impact activities because of injuries or stress on the joints, swimming is the perfect alternative to keep you in shape."

Not just a rehabilitation activity, swimming is an ideal cross-training tool to combine with land exercises such as walking, running, cycling or racquet sports. Although swimming is a summer activity for much of the country, swimmers in sunny San Diego are lucky to have an outdoor swimming season that's nearly year-round.

Whether your water exercise of choice is swimming laps in the pool, paddling through rough water, or movin' and groovin' in aquacise class, it's time to dive in.

Health/fitness benefits: A good workout for the entire body, swimming offers cardiovascular conditioning, strength and endurance training and helps increase flexibility. A good exercise to help maintain or lose weight, it's low impact with no stress on the joints or bones.

Calories burned: A 155-pound person will burn about 563 calories in an hour of swimming laps, doing the front crawl (freestyle) stroke at light to moderate effort, according to the San Diego-based American Council on Exercise. In an hour, the same-size person burns 704 calories doing the breast stroke and 295 calories treading water at a moderate intensity.

Who is swimming good for? It's a good sport for almost anyone, including the elderly, someone with joint problems, overweight people and pregnant women.

Who is swimming not good for? Swimming is not a good activity someone who doesn't know how to swim and is not interested in learning or is fearful of the water.

How to start: Even if you know how to swim, it's a good idea to take an intermediate adult swimming class, which will improve your overall fitness conditioning and stroke technique, allowing you to move properly and more efficiently through the water.

If you don't know how to swim and are willing to learn, take a beginning adult swimming class offered by most YMCAs and recreation centers. Many adult beginners swim classes offer special assistance to people who are afraid of the water.



Swimmer Becky Jackman not only keeps cool at The Plunge at Mission Beach; she also gets a great cardiovascular and strength workout.

Once you are comfortable or proficient in the water, find a pool that suits your needs and schedule. In addition to private and public pools, YMCAs, recreations centers, health clubs and community parks offer pools with certain times reserved during the day or evening for lap and exercise swimming.

How to progress and add challenge: Join a masters swim team to help you improve. This coached workout can offer a variety of swimming exercise regimens, with or without competitions. Set goals for yourself and every few weeks add laps to your workout. One mile equals 66 pool laps.

Ocean swimming, combined with body surfing, can push the envelope for routine lap swimmers who will have to deal with currents, waves and limited underwater visibility. Open-water swimming should be attempted only by experienced swimmers who are at the intermediate or advanced level.

Tips for proper swimming form: When performing the most popular stroke, the front crawl or freestyle, try to achieve a regular breathing rhythm, taking a breath every stroke or so. Keep the strokes long and gliding. Maintain a steady flutter kick with the feet, keep the hips tucked, bend the knees slightly and keep the fingers together and loosely cupped. Turn the head; don't lift it.

How to eliminate boredom: Swimming back and forth in a pool can get tedious after a while. To keep it interesting and fun, learn and perform all four of the different competitive swimming strokes, including front crawl (freestyle), back stroke, breast stroke and butterfly.

If you're an experienced lap swimmer, occasionally swim in the ocean or bay. If you normally get your workout in the open water, one or two days a week, swim laps in the pool. Join a competitive or masters swim team. Swim with a buddy. Add equipment to your workout, including paddles, fins, a pull buoy or kickboard. Take an aquatics class for the sheer fun of it.

How often should you swim to maintain fitness? The U.S. Centers for Disease Control recommends exercising at least 30 minutes five or more days a week. Because it's kind to the joints, swimming can be your only form of physical activity. But it's better to mix it into a cross-training program with other forms of cardiovascular land exercise (walking, running, cycling, tennis, etc.), strength training and stretching.

Tips to avoid injury: Even though you're in the water, you are still sweating, so be sure to stay properly hydrated and take water (drinking) breaks. Wear goggles to protect your eyes. Wear earplugs to avoid earaches. Take lessons to improve your technique and minimize shoulder and neck problems. Increase your water workout gradually. If you're very fatigued, get out of the water and take a break.

Equipment Necessities: Goggles (\$5-\$14) should be tinted with UV protection if worn outdoors; and swim cap (\$5-\$16).