

Take The Plunge

Looking for a cooler way to stay fit this summer? Dive into a season of swimming with these expert tips...

By Yi-Hwa Hanna



Why Go With The Flow?

“Swimming is wonderful both as a form of relaxation and as a workout,” says Kieran Ballard-Tremeer, a swimming teacher at an international school in Dubai. Not only does it work the shoulders, back, abdominals, legs, hips and glutes, it also works the cardiovascular system and helps in strength development, Kieran explains, adding: “Because water affords much more resistance than air, it really helps to build strength and cardiovascular fitness. Swimming is low-impact, so

it’s also less stressful on the body than other sports such as running.” Another bonus? Aside from being easy on the joints, swimming can also be done at any age and ability level, according to Lesley Murray, Swim Director for Speedo SwimSquads. “The support of the water means that it is particularly great for rehabilitation work and ante natal exercise—it’s non-impact and a great aerobic and anaerobic workout,” she says. Studies have also shown that

swimming or even floating is so cathartic that it can actually help with symptoms of depression and stress—in fact, research has found that simply being near a body of water can help ease the mind.

If you’re looking to improve, Lesley suggests joining a technique class this summer to get an update on your current level before moving forward. “SwimSquads are happy to analyse your strokes and give you tips on how to improve your technique. It is important that technique is as correct

as possible, to minimise the risk of any injury and also to ensure that all the effort you are putting in is correctly applied for the best effect,” she says, explaining that it’s also wise to keep your goals in mind: “Regular swimming, mixed with other exercise and a balanced diet, will help with weight loss if needed, while doing the correct balance of sessions with appropriate speed and power work, on a strong aerobic base, will help with your swim speed and power in the water.”

According to Seth, the ideal temperature for a swimming pool is 26 to 28 degrees centigrade. This will help you avoid overheating and swim in optimum conditions, he says.

Listening to music can help alleviate boredom and keep you motivated during long sessions, Kieran says, suggesting investing in a waterproof iPod and earphones.

Did you know? "For races, safety, efficiency and speed are important factors, so the quickest stroke, Freestyle, is commonly used. Breaststroke is often taught as a survival stroke as you can keep your head out of the water initially which helps with breathing. In Scandinavia, this is still the primary stroke taught at schools. Butterfly and backstroke are largely used for short course racing as they expend much energy and restrict visuals respectively," Kieran says.



JUST BREATHE

"Breathing is the core to swimming—incorrect breathing will cause you to fatigue quicker," says Seth J-T Chappels, CEO of Osborne Sports with extensive experience in designing large multi-sports facilities (including pools!). "There is a far higher level of moisture present in the air when you're at a swimming pool in comparison to the dry air that you'll experience at a gym. The moisture in the air makes it easier to breathe. Swimming can help to increase your lung volume and force you to learn better breathing techniques that can aid you with other fitness routines or sports," he says. Read on for his top breathing tips...

- Exhale into the water fully before rotating up to take the next breath. You also want to breathe as early as possible so you can get the most air.
- Keep your ear in the water, angle your head towards the back of your feet so the water forms a well for you to breathe in. This will enable you to concentrate on breathing with your mouth parallel to the water rather than above it.
- Keep your head stationary when you're not breathing. Try looking at a fixed point along the bottom on the pool, only rolling your head slightly to breathe every third stroke. When you swim, you create a bow wave with your head and body, similar to the way a boat does, and experienced swimmers breathe through the wave, barely turning their heads at all to inhale.
- Practice body rotation—done properly, you will only need to tilt your head slightly to be able to breathe
- If you suck in water instead of air, try bilateral breathing i.e. breathing every three or five strokes
- Practice improving your balance in the water with the one-arm drill, in which you swim using just one arm at a time and breathe on the opposite side of the stroking arm. This also helps with body position.

TOP TIPS

New to swimming? Here are Kieran's must-dos:

- Be comfortable with your breathing technique for your chosen stroke: Without security in your breathing, progress can be slow, so this is essential.
- Check your body alignment to make sure legs are not sinking too low in the water, thus increasing drag resistance.
- Attend regular swimming sessions three times a week under the expert guidance of a coach or a club of your own (with periodic professional stroke review) once you have established a good technique.
- Always swim where a lifeguard is on duty and inform them if you are not a strong swimmer.

If you're already a confident swimmer and are just looking to up your game, Kieran suggests the following:

- Look at your arm entry position (so it's not crossing over) and pull (keep your elbows high and pull to 90 degrees as soon as possible).
- Look at your stroke timing, including turnover speed, to find your most efficient pace and help improve efficiency. Speed-tempo trainers (available at TriPod on Umm Suqueim Street) can help with this.
- Regular swimming and goal-setting, as well as surrounding yourself with like-minded people supporting your goals will help substantially.

TEST YOURSELF

We'll admit it: Swimming hundreds of laps on end can get boring. Which is why creating a swim routine—much like you would for an on-land workout—can help not only keep things exciting, it can also challenge you and help improve your technique and fitness levels. “Routines need to be set to the level of the swimmer but should all have a warm-up, some technique work, some interval training and a cool-down. You can add more to each element, and also start timing your swims or your rests to ensure that you are slowly getting better,” Lesley says. Still need a little direction? Try Lesley’s sample routine to get you started:

- Warm-Up with a choice steady swim for 10 minutes. Rest as needed.
- Swim four laps of 100m on your first-choice stroke, working on streamlining from the wall, keeping a steady pace. Rest to recovery between swims, but time your rest.
- Swim four laps of 50m kick only using a board, in a second-choice stroke. Rest 20 seconds.
- Swim four laps of 100m with your first-choice stroke, trying to increase your speed on the last length. Rest time should be as it was on the first set.
- Cool-down with 100m of a relaxed stroke, either a kick or an easy swim, followed by two laps of 50m of sculling.



MASTERING THE TUMBLETURN

WANT TO A FIGURE OUT HOW TO DO A TUMBLETURN (THAT'S THE COOL-LOOKING FLIP YOU SEE SWIMMERS DO AT THE END OF A LAP, AS THEY TURN AROUND TO SWIM BACK TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE POOL)? IT'S ALL ABOUT THE RIGHT TECHNIQUE: "PEOPLE THINK A TUMBLE TURN IS ALL ABOUT PULLING DOWN WITH THE HAND. IT IS ACTUALLY ABOUT TUCKING THE CHIN TO THE CHEST FAST. THIS LIFTS THE HIPS AND GIVES A FAST ROTATION," LESLEY SAYS. "TRY LOTS OF SOMERSAULTS IN THE WATER AWAY FROM THE WALL BEFORE ATTEMPTING AGAINST THE WALL," SHE ADVISES.

Gear Up

As with any sport, having the right gear can help. A pool buoy, kickboard, hand paddles and training fins are all wise investments for pool swimming, although at the basic level, all you really need is a great costume, goggles and a cap.

“Unless you’re competing, there are no specifics for swimming attire. Whatever is comfortable (or in fashion!) is fine for the pool,” Seth says, though he points out that for open-water

swimming, dependent on sea temperatures, a swimming wetsuit could be worn. “This also helps protect against jellyfish stings—and you may need an anti-chafing solution for your neck,” he says. When it comes to goggles and a hat, Seth says that this is down to personal choice, although he explains that: “Wider lens goggles are better for open water, [whereas] smaller lens goggles are good for pool swimming.”

Choosing the right fit of suit is important as well, to help streamline your swim, Lesley says: “A swimming costume should fit correctly. Too many swimmers wear a baggy suit that then distracts them from working on stroke and causes drag in the water—or they use a suit that is too tight for racing. Correct fit is essential, especially when using the top

end LZR Racer Fastskin Suits; make sure that you measure correctly before purchasing. A cap is important if you have longer hair both for safety and to reduce drag in the water. Goggles should fit and not need fiddling with during the session. Speedo do a range of goggles to ensure the fit over the nose and in the eye socket is correct for different face shapes, and they are all anti fog. A top tip for racing is put your goggles on first and your cap over the top, it will reduce drag and prevent the goggle straps flapping.”

If your goggles do have a tendency to fog up, try an anti-fog solution. Can't find one? “Washing-up liquid helps—but wash the soap out afterwards!—along with saliva rubbed into the goggles before you swim,” Seth says.



FIND A POOL

Looking for a place to swim? Here are four to try...

1

Hamdan Sports Complex

Ideal for serious athletes looking for great lengths to swim, this enormous pool runs across a 50 metre span and is an ideal place for exercise and swimming enthusiasts to practice their crawl. Popular for competitions, events and among the fitness set, it's open to the public for swimming at very affordable rates starting at just Dhs25 a day or Dhs220 a month. Check hamdancs.com/swimming for public swimming times.

2

Fit Republik

More than just a gym-lover's haven, their Olympic-sized pool boasts eight 50-metre lanes surrounded by floor-to-ceiling windows and an impressive grandstand. Bonus: If you're not looking for a regular gym membership and are only interested in the pool, you can opt for an Aquatics-only package (that involves swim lessons and more), with a three-month membership starting from Dhs1,300. Visit fitrepublik.com for details.

3

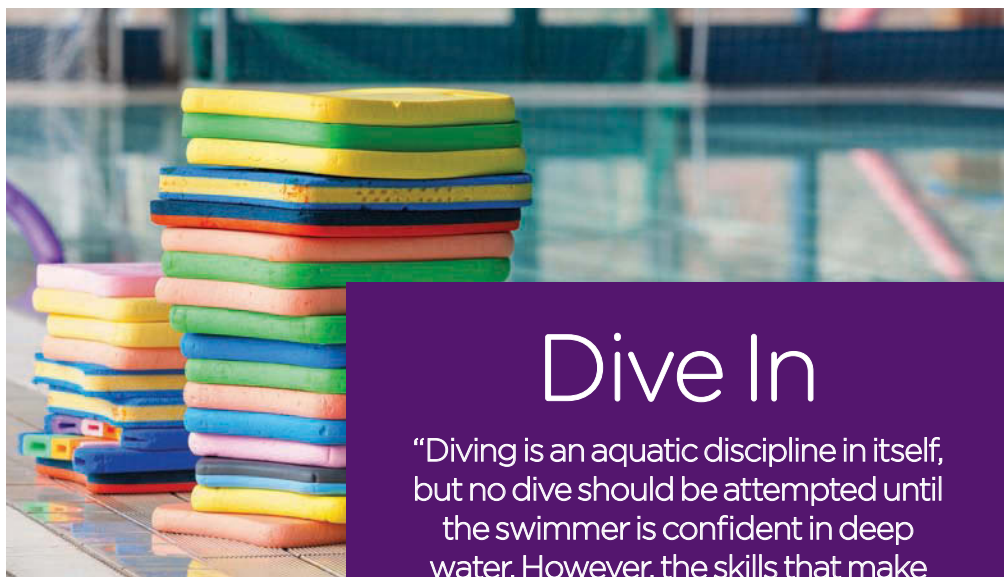
Speedo Swim Squads

Offering swim lessons for all ages throughout the year at various locations (typically, schools) around Dubai on a per-class or 10-session basis, Speedo SwimSquads also offers summer camps at Collegiate American School, Nord Anglia International School and Hamdan Sports Complex. Coaches can support any age of learner, from as young as 3 months and up to adult training. Visit SpeedoSwimSquads.com for details.

4

Dubai Masters Swimming Club

This collection of adults of varying swim abilities meets to train or for fun, with coaches and a supportive environment. DMSC is associated with Aqua Sports Academies, which offers lessons for all levels, from children to adults, not to mention training for competitive swimming, making it a one-stop shop for the entire family. They also offer events, giving you easy motivation to constantly challenge yourself. Visit dmsc.ae for details.



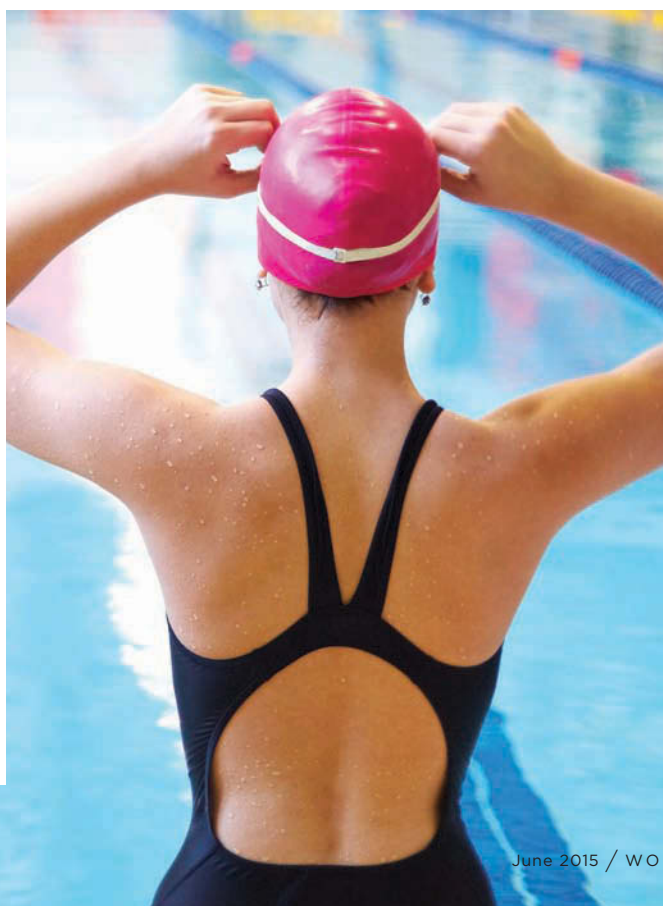
Dive In

“Diving is an aquatic discipline in itself, but no dive should be attempted until the swimmer is confident in deep water. However, the skills that make up a successful dive—streamlining, rotation, jumping, submersion—can all be attempted in easier skills by less able swimmers, ready to put into a dive later on. The scary bit about diving is being able to put yourself off balance before pushing from the side. The most common mistake is to lift the head, which ends in a ‘belly flop,’ which can be painful,” Lesley says.

Race Ready

Signed up for your first triathlon or swimming competition? Great, now it's time to turn to the experts. “Once you start competing, you really need to get some advice on planning your workouts. They should all help your overall improvement not work against each other, so a swim group or coach, tri group or coach is quite important. You need a balance of workouts to bring you to race fitness. Adding in regular swim training sessions into your training regimes will help you get that extra bit of fitness to benefit all other sports,” Lesley says.

“Being aware of the type of water start is important too, as is having practised swimming in similar conditions prior to the race. Lake swimming and river races have different conditions to sea swimming for example,” Kieran says, adding: “Weather and wind play important roles too. Race starts with many people starting at the same time can be an alarming experience. Congested water space and legs and arms bumping into you can increase your worry and lead to anxiety or more dangerous panic in the water.” In open water, sighting and knowing where you're heading is important, she says: “Usually large buoys are used to guide you. Making sure you swim in a straight path will help you not swim a longer distance than the course.”



Pool vs. Ocean?

Swimming in the great blue sea can be quite different from a pool, and if you're only used to swimming in one over the other, it can take a bit of getting used to. Don't let that put you off trying both, though! “To start with, pool swimming is the way to go. The conditions are usually constant in a pool, depth is standard and of course adverse weather doesn't prevent you getting your workout done. It is more convenient too as you don't need to arrange someone to kayak with you or rely on a lifeguard being present as you would do in open water,” says Kieran. “In open water, always know where you will be swimming, have support in the form of other swimmers, someone on land who can see you and preferably a kayaker or boat if doing a long swim. Check currents with a local expert and ensure you won't be swimming in a water sports zone,” she adds. Seth agrees that the pool should be your first port of call: “Basic swimming skills should be learnt in the pool, and adapted for open water. Strokes in open water tend to be more wide to enable navigation (sight of where you're going) and also the tide. Muscle use is the same in open and pool swimming. The benefit of open water is that it's more challenging and varied,” he says. “Salt water is denser than fresh water so supports the body more. This means it is easier to swim in,” Lesley says. “Many people prefer sea swimming as you do not have to continually turn against the wall. Others prefer swimming in a pool where you do not have the dangers of tide and sea creatures. Wherever you swim, it is recommended that you do not swim alone,” she adds.