

Open water swimming health and safety guidelines

You and any other participants taking part or coming along on your dip **must** read this – it's crucial to ensure the safety of yourself & others

You should avoid taking part or seek medical advice if you have the follow conditions:

- **Pregnancy**

Many experienced winter swimmers will carry on throughout pregnancy, but it's a different demand on the body that if you're new to swimming.

- **Asthma or other respiratory conditions**

Cold shock can make dippers hyperventilate at they get in.

- **Heart conditions**

Cold water causes your heart rate and blood pressure to sharply increase as the blood vessels constrict in response to sudden cooling. This can be dangerous for those at risk of heart failure and stroke.

- **Poorly-controlled hypertension (high blood pressure)**

Hypothermia

Source: <https://www.active.com/articles/swimmers-avoid-hypothermia-by-knowing-the-signs>

You must familiarise yourself with the signs of hypothermia and know what to do if someone you or someone you're with becomes hypothermic.

Signs:

- Mild hypothermia – uncontrollable shivering and numbness, loss of simple coordination
- Moderate hypothermia – confusion and strange inebriated-like behavior, slurred speech.
- Severe hypothermia – blue-gray skin, slow or halted breathing, loss of consciousness

If you begin to feel the effects of mild hypothermia count to 10 and then back to 1 over and over again. If you lose your train of thought or lose count exit the water and get help because you are slowly losing your mental capacity.

The onset occurs slowly so you have plenty of time to rationalize and prevent it from worsening.

Once you exit, dry off and warm yourself in towels, sweats and a hat.

A severely hypothermic person will need medical attention ring 999. Keep them conscious and make sure they're dried and warmed.

Afterdrop - this can happen when your body temperature drastically drops when coming out of the water, so be aware of how you are feeling and how others act even after you are on land.

The key to preventing this is to warm up **slowly** and gradually. If you rush it by having a warm shower or bath you'll likely faint as your temperature plummets along with your blood pressure.

DO NOT try exercise to warm your body up if you or someone else becomes hypothermic, the more you exert yourself the more energy and heat you burn – so sit down and wrap up.

Tides

If you would like further information on tides, you can build your knowledge here:

<https://www.outdoorswimmingsociety.com/understanding-tidal-rivers-and-estuaries/>

Quick notes

- DO NOT swim at night time
- ALWAYS use the buddy system and be visible
- ALWAYS plan your escape route, especially if swimming amongst rocks
- DO NOT go alone
- Get in **slowly** starting from the feet
- Bring warm drink, sugary snacks (rich in calories), wooly hats, towel, warm blanket, dry and cosy clothes
- Get dry ASAP, wrap up warm and have a warm (not hot) drink and a sugary snack
- Be aware of others and recognize your own symptoms of hypothermia, act accordingly and ring 999 if severe symptoms become evident.
- You can wear a wetsuit if you wish and if you have access to one this is recommended to acclimatise to the cold temperature
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DO'S & DON'TS

Source: [outdoorswimmingsociety.com/festive-swims-dos-donts/](https://www.outdoorswimmingsociety.com/festive-swims-dos-donts/)

- **Do** ensure you are warm before the swim. Remove your warm clothing at the last minute (and especially your shoes – you lose lots of heat into the ground).
- **Do** go in feet first (not head first – you will involuntarily gasp when your body hits the water, and you don't want to be under it when this happens).

- **Do** take special care to have your breathing under control before immersing your shoulders or swimming. The gasp reflex is involuntary and occurs as you enter the water. This gasp is followed one to three minutes' hyperventilation, or very fast breathing, and a significant rise in heart rate. Both the gasp reflex and hyperventilation can result in you aspirating water (breathing it into your lungs). This can lead to panic and drowning. Some people like to stand waist deep, put their hands under the water, splash a little water on their cheeks, and wait for breathing to normalise. Others like to focus on the exhale, puffing air out, as they regularise their breathing.
- **Do** take care when entering the sea, especially during the first few minutes of gasping and shock. Aspirating water (breathing it in, which can lead to panic and drowning) is a real risk if you get splashed or knocked over by a wave.
- **Do** have low expectations of how long you'll be in for or how far you'll go – many winter swimmers count strokes (10, for example) and swim just 25 metres or less.
- **Do** dry off and put on layers to keep you warm quickly. You may feel deceptively warm at this point, it's 10 minutes after exit that you're at your coldest, so you want to be wrapped up and warming up by then.
- **Do** take more clothes for afterwards than before – a hat, gloves, warm socks/boots and windproof layer if it's exposed are all likely to be appreciated.
- **Do** have a warm drink and some cake (this is one time when a sugar boost is a good thing!).
- **Do** warm up slowly, do some gentle walking if you feel okay. Increase the level of activity gradually if you wish, but stop if you feel unwell and sit down.
- **Do** consider doing a few acclimatising dips in the days and weeks prior to the dip. Acclimatisation reduces the physiological effects of the first seconds to minutes of entering cold water, and undertaken quietly and safely in your local lido or with other winter swimmers mean you'll know what you're in for in quieter conditions.



- **Don't** take part if you have a fever.
- **Don't** take part if you have a chest infection.
- **Don't** jump or dive into deep water unless you know what you're doing and are acclimatised to that level of cold.
- **Don't** take part if you've been drinking alcohol, have a hangover, or have taken recreational drugs. These will affect your judgement (about the length of time you can stay in the water for example), and also your body's ability to withstand the cold.
- **Don't** stay in too long – as soon as you feel comfortably warm in the water it's time to leave!
- **Don't** have a hot shower or enter a hot room till you are comfortable, and certainly not while shivering. It's okay to sit in a warmish room. Hot baths and showers bring blood back to the freezing surface of your skin quickly, chilling your core. Better to warm up slowly from the inside out.