



# BalanceHealth<sup>SM</sup> Newsletter

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## Swimming

With warm weather right around the corner, it's time to take our fitness routines outside! Swimming is a great summer workout option; it burns calories, works numerous muscle groups, and cools you down on hot days.

Adding swimming to your summer exercise repertoire is easiest if you have your own swimming pool, but certainly not necessary. Many gyms, community organizations like the Y, and even schools or colleges offer memberships that allow use of their pool. You can also bring your workout to the great outdoors and swim in any local lakes, rivers, or the ocean. When swimming in natural bodies of water be sure to bring a friend in case of an emergency. Swimming outdoors does add difficulty as there is added resistance from currents and waves.

### Health Benefits

Swimming is a non impact **aerobic** activity. This means you get all of the benefits of a cardio workout without putting any stress or pressure on your joints. Although swimming provides a great workout for all fitness levels, it is an especially good choice for people with arthritis, the elderly, and people with certain injuries

that preclude them from running and jumping.

Swimming is also a great exercise option for **toning muscle**. Unlike other aerobic activities, swimming provides greater resistance since your body travels through water instead of air, causing your muscles to work harder. Swimming also provides a full body workout. Every muscle is engaged while swimming – your arms and legs are constantly moving, while your core, upper back and shoulders are engaged the entire time.

Swimming also improves **flexibility** as it requires your body to move through a broad range of motions with each stroke. The act of swimming actually requires you to stretch with each motion in order to maintain proper form.

### Types of Strokes

The key to an effective swimming workout is varying your strokes. By varying the types of strokes used, you will maximize the number of muscle groups that are worked and you will have the most fun – variety is the spice of life! There are 4 main types of

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strokes that are utilized by both competitive and recreational swimmers:

### *Front Crawl - Freestyle*

The crawl is the most basic type of swimming stroke and is used most often in recreational swimming. This stroke is also used in freestyle swimming competitions as it is the fastest of all strokes. When the majority of people think about swimming it is this stroke that comes to mind.

Now for the mechanics – Alternating arms go over and down through the water to push back the water and propel your body forward. Legs kick up and down (flutter kicks) with the opposite arm stroke. Your head is turned to the side to take a breath as your arm on that side is raised.

### *Backstroke*

The backstroke requires the same basic movements as the front crawl, only reversed. One of the advantages of the backstroke for recreational swimmers is that it is easier to breathe as the swimmer's face never enters the water. Interestingly, out of all four competitive swim strokes, only the backstroke begins with swimmers in the water.

To perform the backstroke, the swimmer's back faces the bottom of the pool. The swimmer uses an alternating stroke that provides the majority of the power and an up and down flutter kick provides additional propulsion and balance.

### *Breaststroke*

The breaststroke is the slowest and least efficient of the four competitive swimming strokes. The arms and legs move simultaneously. The momentum is provided primarily by the legs and feet, while the arms contribute less than with any other stroke.

To perform the breaststroke, lie face-down in the water. Bring your hands and feet in, with your knees together. Extend your arms over your head and glide for a second. Bring your hands out and around and back into your chest. As your hands thrust out and around your head, rise up to take a breath. Use a frog kick to propel yourself through the water.

### *Butterfly Stroke*

The butterfly is the newest swim stroke and was derived from the breast stroke. The butterfly is the second fastest competitive swim stroke. This stroke requires a great deal of upper body strength and is therefore rarely used by recreational swimmers.

To perform the butterfly, start face down in the water. Bring your arms out, over and around. Your arms should go into the water as your head comes up to take a breath. Use a dolphin kick to help propel you through the water. Start with your legs together, toes pointed. Working from the hips, your legs come up, with your knees slightly bent, and go back down to propel you through the water.

Swimming is a fun, effective, low impact exercise that can be performed by just about anyone, so go ahead and try adding it to your fitness routine this summer!

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