




YOUR BODY

RECOVER SWIMMIN



Here's a workout you can dive into:
A beginning swim plan that helps
you gain strength, muscle and a
healthier cardiovascular system.

by Michael Berg

GLY

Photo: Shutterstock

Every four years, the sport of swimming enters the national consciousness as elite Olympic swimmers square off in the pool and millions of viewers worldwide learn the difference between an Australian crawl, backstroke and butterfly.

Most, however, don't take that knowledge any further than as a casual viewer of the Games, which is a shame; swimming as an activity is truly one of the best health-bolstering exercises in existence.

Better yet, for those who are rebuilding their physical strength and stamina after a bout with addiction, it can be a lifesaver, whether you hail from the era of Mark Spitz, Michael Phelps or somewhere in between.

If you've been seeking a fun way to start moving and regain well-being, get ready to dive into our simple workout plan. It involves nothing but water, a bathing suit, goggles (if you're so inclined) and your willingness to engage in a refreshing and reinvigorating activity that helps cleanse the body and soul.



Water Works

Although regular swimming is beneficial for anyone, it can be especially helpful for a body on the mend. “Drugs and alcohol take a tremendous toll on the body; exercise can begin to heal some of those physical wounds,” says Dixie L. Thompson, head of the department of Kinesiology at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville and a Fellow of the American College of Sports Medicine. “Aerobic exercise, like swimming, is also great way to manage stress.”

Swimming can also be a superb way to ease into a workout regime. “Swimming is a non-weight-bearing exercise, and as such is gentle on the hips and knees,” Thompson says.

If you’re a natural waterbug, embracing a full-fledged swim plan two to five times per week in your post-recovery phase may be the perfect way to ensure you stick with exercise, especially if you’re not too keen on the traditional weights-and-cardio fare at the health club. “Generally, people who enjoy being in the water and who have easy access to a pool can make swimming an important component of their overall fitness program,” says Thompson.

Science stands firmly behind swimming’s potent physical benefits. According to one study published in the *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education* in 2008, regular swimmers may halve their

risk of death compared with inactive adults. And for those with chronic pain issues, swimming can offer tremendous benefits—water-based exercise can improve joints and decrease the pain associated with osteoarthritis, according to a study published in 2007 in the *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*. In addition, an older but still relevant study out of Brooklyn College in 1992 showed that water-based exercise measurably improves participants’ mental health.

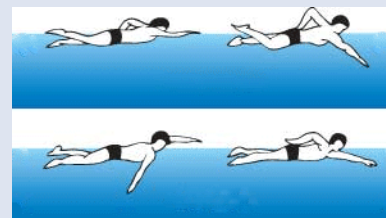
Make a Splash

Our three-week program is built for those who already know how to swim but are trying to build up their strength and muscle tone after years of neglect. Designed by Dallas-based health, wellness and lifestyle coach Kim Truman, it incorporates a number of different swimming tactics, yet is easy enough so one can gradually acclimate to regular physical activity.

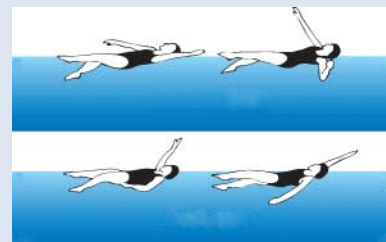
“Beginners should not be intimidated,” Truman says. “Someone new to swimming workouts actually has the advantage over someone more experienced because you’re more able to focus on your stroke. Most experienced swimmers instead focus on speed or distance and may not be using their time or energy efficiently because their form slips. So have fun and embrace your beginner swim status.”

DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

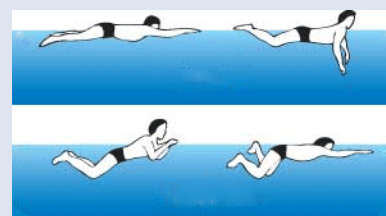
Here is a primer on four of the most common swimming strokes.



Australian Crawl/Front Crawl (also referred to as “freestyle”): The fastest (and most common) stroke, you make a “crawling” motion with your arms, putting one arm out ahead of your body at a time and powerfully propelling yourself forward while you kick your feet.



Backstroke: Lying on your back, you bring one arm up and back down into the water, then the other in a windmill fashion, rocking your body to and fro as you kick with your feet.



Breaststroke: Facedown in the water, you extend your arms forward in front of you, then open them wide in a fan out to each side, cupping your hands, as you frog kick with your legs (i.e., snap them together). This is a complicated stroke, and not recommended for beginners.

Butterfly: This is another complicated stroke that you may want to learn after you master the basics. Lying facedown, you bring both arms simultaneously up out of the water and powerfully down and back to drive your body forward, all while doing a dolphin kick with your feet (legs moving together like a fish).

As for the workout itself, Truman says it is built to help you practice form and improve your body's strength and cardiovascular fitness. "Just remember to relax and enjoy the pool!" she adds. (To see the full training plan, check out "The *Renew* Swim Workout" chart below.)

Before every session, a slow and steady warm-up is recommended. "For a person

who is quite deconditioned, walking in shallow water and performing arm movements in chest-deep water will be effective," Thompson says. "For those who are more trained, slow swimming and using a kickboard can be useful."

If you try our swim plan, we admit, you may not break any records along the way. No matter how agile you may become in

the water, a gold medal is most likely not in your future. But after a few months of crawling, backstroking and butterflying wall-to-wall in your local pool, you'll possibly have won something much more meaningful—a golden opportunity for a second chance at life, sober and healthy. ■

Michael Berg is a regular contributor to Renew.



Week 1 Workout	Warm-up:	Workout:	Cool down:
Do 2 to 3 times with at least a day of rest in between each bout.	4 laps freestyle (at an easy, steady pace) Rest 1 minute at the end of the lane	4 laps (2 laps kick* style, 2 freestyle) Rest 30 seconds 4 laps freestyle (faster pace) Rest 1 minute 6 laps (2 laps kick style, 2 freestyle, 2 kick style) Rest 30 seconds	2 laps freestyle (slow and easy pace)
Week 2 Workout	Warm-up:	Workout:	Cool down:
Do 2 to 3 times, again with at least a day of rest between sessions.	4 laps freestyle (easy, steady pace) Rest 1 minute	6 laps freestyle (faster pace) Rest 30 seconds 8 laps freestyle* Rest 30 seconds	4 laps freestyle (easy, steady pace)
Week 3 Workout	Warm-up:	Workout:	Cool down:
Do 2 to 3 times; you can consider stretching to a fourth if you're progressing well and feel energetic and comfortable with the training.	4 laps freestyle (easy, steady pace) Rest 1 minute	6 laps (2 laps kick style, 2 freestyle, 2 kick style) Rest 30 seconds 4 laps using a pull buoy† (if your pool has one available) Rest 30 seconds	4 laps freestyle (slow and easy pace)

* A "kick style" is focusing on your legs to propel you forward. You put your arms out in front of you with one hand atop the other and kick, either using a fluttering kick or a longer, slower kick (or a mix of both). You can also hold a kickboard flotation device if you prefer.

*Count the number of strokes you use each 50 meters. On each subsequent lap, try to eliminate one stroke every 50 meters by elongating your strokes.

† A pull buoy is a device you place between your thighs or ankles that provides more resistance against the water. If not available, just swim the laps normally and double the number of laps completed to eight.