

Search  for

- How Weight Watchers Works
- Food & Recipes
- Fitness & Health
- Success Stories
- Community
- Marketplace

**Explore our site**

- [Our approach](#)
- [What you'll eat](#)
- [Meetings](#)
- [Online](#)
- [Science of weight loss](#)
- [Success Stories](#)

**Ready to start?**

**Find a meeting**  
 [▶](#)

**Weight Watchers Online**  
[Sign up today](#) [▶](#)

**Free E-mail Newsletter**

Our free e-mail newsletter highlights recipes, Success Stories, helpful tips and more!  
[Sign up for free now](#)

# Ready, Set... Swim

Article By: Kyle Stack

[Print](#) [Email](#)



## Get into great shape in the water

If you're seeking a sport that can get you into exceptional physical shape with minimal stress on your joints, perhaps it's time to take your workout to the water.

A true full-body workout, swimming consists of four main strokes: freestyle, backstroke, breast stroke and butterfly. Don't worry—you don't have to learn all four at once, but becoming familiar with one or two is advised before jumping into the pool, lake or ocean. Here are

five simple steps to take to get your swimmer's body.

### Step One: Get medical clearance

This is a must-do every time you're introduced to a physically challenging activity. The Web site caloriesperhour.com states that a 170-pound man who swims using the freestyle stroke at a moderate level of exertion can burn 135 calories in just 15 minutes. It's always a good move to get cleared by the doc, to ensure you're healthy enough to participate.

### Step Two: Buy swim gear

Swim trunks are the basic necessity and can be found at virtually any sporting-goods store and many other clothing retailers. (Braver souls can opt for Speedos.) Eye goggles are required at certain indoor pools and best serve to eliminate eye irritation from chlorinated pools.

Rowdy Gaines, a three-time Olympic swimming gold medalist, notes that many of the elite swimmers he trains wear swim fins on their feet. Others use pool buoys, which are flotation devices that you put between your upper legs near the groin. According to Gaines, "fins give you a natural feel of riding high in the water" and helps keep the legs at a constant level which helps maintain sufficient kicking through a stroke. Buoys are a similar aid to the kicking motion.

"The biggest problem beginning swimmers have is they're bottom-heavy," Gaines says. "Their legs are dragging. Buoys lift the back-end and help streamline the body."

### Step Three: Eat and drink healthy

It's all about the carbs before you swim.

"People need to make sure they're keeping up with their carbohydrate intake so they're not fatiguing too early," says sports dietitian Rikki Keen, MS, RD, CSSD, CSCS.

Her recommended carbs to eat / drink 1 to 2 hours before swim time include Greek yogurt, half a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, half a bagel with a small amount of cream cheese, a sports drink or even fruit juice mixed with whey protein, which is also a great post-swim choice, despite its sugar content. Keen notes sugar is not a deterrent if it's consumed within 30 minutes of exercise.

"That's the time that the body is going to put that sugar back into the muscle as fuel," Keen says.

Keen warns that the typically colder water in pools, lakes and oceans will keep a person's core temperature low, which translates into a higher rate of hunger after exercise. (Warmer core body temperatures suppress appetite.)

### Step Four: Learn the strokes

Stick to the backstroke and freestyle at first, since they are the least technical and physically demanding strokes. Roughly 70 to 80 percent of the power in each stroke is derived from the upper body, whereas the butterfly and breast stroke require more lower-body power and much more timing and technical

### Swim Stats

#### Carbohydrate intake

Find your weight in kilograms—your body weight in pounds divided by 2.2.—and make sure to consume 1-2 grams of carbohydrates per kilogram of body weight. Keen believes that will leave you satisfied before and after a dip in the

- Recent Articles**
- [Ready, Set ... Tennis](#)
  - [Tone Up with Fitness Boot Camp](#)
  - [Personal Trainer: Best Exercises for Weight Loss](#)
- [View all](#)

**Weight Watchers Magazine**

Try a risk-free issue

**Subscribe now!**

**FREE** recipes, workouts and more. Get our weekly email newsletter and special offers.

[Get It Now](#)

expertise.

Gaines implores keeping the elbows above the hands during freestyle for a cleaner "catch," a term for when the hand enters the water. That will ensure a smoother, more efficient swim since it will produce fewer strokes.

Keep your head still and straighten your arms during the backstroke, while ensuring your hand leaves the water thumb-first and re-enters the water pinky-first. That gives you a cleaner 'catch' and enables you reach deep into the water and "throw" the water at your feet as your arms rotate.

Despite each stroke's reliance on upper-body strength, don't forget to kick in order to help your tiring back, shoulder and arm muscles. Keep your feet close together and make sure your toes are pointed toward the end of the pool, not toward the pool bottom. That will ensure your body remains balanced and your legs stay at a level at which you can keep your kicking power.

"Another problem for beginning swimmers is their ankle flexibility is not good," Gaines explains of a joint that's necessary for kicking power. He says this is because the muscles used in swimming might not be used in many other sports. That's why fins or buoys can help initially; just don't become dependent on them.

#### Step Five: Manage your breathing

Breathing doesn't have to be a chore when you're in the water. It all starts with the top of your body.

"The breathing revolves around your head position," Gaines says. "Your head needs to be in line with your spine. Your body turns you into your breath, not your head."

Don't lift your head when performing a freestyle stroke. Instead, let the natural motion of the stroke permit you to take breaths. Pick a side of your body from which to draw a breath and take that breath as you pull your arm out of the water. Your body will turn slightly with each stroke and that will enable you to maintain a consistent breathing pattern.

Whatever you do, keep your body aligned, Gaines says. "The body position I look for is like a pole in the water. You want to be as straight as possible, no arch in the back and the head shouldn't be too high."

Adopt these techniques and you'll be able to exercise regularly without your body's joints enduring the normal wear-and-tear caused by other sports.

pool.

#### Sweat rate

Keen notes that because people are obviously wet when swimming, they forget that they actually do still sweat. In order to figure out your sweat rate, weigh yourself before a swim, wearing only what you'll wear in the pool. Then weigh yourself after the swim, wearing the same thing and having dried off. Take that difference in ounces, and add the number of ounces of liquid you drank after you began the swim. That becomes your sweat rate.

For example, if you weighed 150 pounds before an hour-long swim and weighed 148 pounds afterward, you lost two pounds, or 32 ounces. If you drank a 16 ounce sports drink, you would add that to the 32 ounces of weight loss to get your sweat rate—48 ounces per hour.

[Staff Site](#) | [About Us](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Press Room](#) | [Careers](#)  
[Site Map](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Help](#) | [Affiliate Program](#) | [Troubleshooting](#)  
[Terms & Conditions](#) | [Privacy](#) | For subscribers only: [Subscription Agreement](#)

© 2010 Weight Watchers International, Inc. © 2010 WeightWatchers.com, Inc. All rights reserved.  
 WEIGHT WATCHERS and **POINTS** are the registered trademarks of Weight Watchers International, Inc. and are used under license by WeightWatchers.com, Inc.

