

The Benefits of Swimming for Runners



Especially as winter approaches, the thought of having to go running in the dark and cold may not be very appealing to you. If only there was another way to maintain fitness to a similar level without having to deal with the weather?

Luckily swimming and pool running may be an ideal solution, not just for over the course of winter, but for those who may just want to mix up their training a little.

This short article will briefly explain the benefits of swimming and pool running, as training for your running, and hopefully give you some useful tips along the way!

Why Swimming?

Swimming as a discipline may be more familiar to triathletes, but could potentially be the key to maintaining fitness whilst recovering from a running-related injury. Although you may prefer keeping your feet on dry land, the different movement patterns used in swimming will give you the opportunity to use some of those neglected muscle groups! Swimming will not only give your legs a break from all the high impact of running but will serve as an ideal form of active recovery, as well as increasing endurance and oxygen capacity.

Swimming Tips

A great thing about swimming is that it allows you to isolate certain areas of your body to work on. For example, if you'd much rather work on your upper body and give your legs a rest, then a pull buoy or an ankle strap can be used. These devices will allow your upper body to do all the work. Alternatively certain drills or techniques can be used depending on what you need to work on.

Where do I begin?

Firstly, if you're looking to do an aerobic session, you quite simply swim steady lengths for a certain amount of time. It is difficult to give a generic starting point, as everyone starts at a different level of swimming ability. The key is to start off doing as much as is comfortable for you, and increase your time in the water gradually. The increase in distance covered will follow, as you will get stronger in the water over time, I promise!

As for an anaerobic workout, this involves you going for a certain distance per repetition, as you would on the track. For example, you could do 8 x 50meter sprints with 30 seconds rest in between. From there you'll be able to increase the number of intervals as you get stronger.

Why Pool Running?

For those who perhaps aren't keen on swimming itself, pool running (or aqua jogging) provides a great cardio workout without the impact, giving your joints a break from the hard pavement. As water is thicker than air you encounter a lot more resistance, causing your heart rate to increase substantially, strengthening your muscles and joints. The buoyancy of the water allows recovery and injury prevention. This method of training would be ideal for someone who suffers with injuries due to the high impact of road running, as it provides mileage within training whilst giving the legs a bit of a break.

Where do I begin?

Well, to start you'll need a running belt to keep you afloat. Although you are able to use the shallow depths of the pool, you'll find it more beneficial running at the deep end, as shallow depths will cause some impact on joints and lower the resistance placed on the muscles.

For those thinking of how far to jog in the pool then it is best to estimate through time rather than distance. For example if you normally have a 10km run planned, estimate how long it would take you to finish this workout and jog in the water for that estimated time. The same would apply for an interval session. Mimicking these running sessions in the pool will allow for both the aerobic and anaerobic systems to work and improve in the same way running does.

The difficulty and level of effort from the session will depend on your cadence rather than speed, meaning the faster you move your arms and legs in the water, the harder the session will be.

A great thing about pool running is that it gives you an opportunity to focus on your running form in slow motion. Take advantage of this as it can help strengthen the muscles that contribute to good form, and it will also train your body internally to run more efficiently.

Things to Remember

1. **Mix it up** - long swimming sessions can be repetitive at times, so mix up the sessions a little by changing strokes or adding pool running in between sets during an interval swim session.
2. **Rest** - it's easy to get a little over excited with your training so make sure to take the same amount of rest between sessions as you would with running.
3. **Injury** - it's important to remember your injury situation when pool running, as injuries like a hip flexor strain may not handle it well. If the running hurts, STOP!
4. **Technique** - take this opportunity to focus on your technique, whether that would be your chosen stroke or running.
5. **Record every session** - make a note of distance covered per session so you can view your progress.
6. **Enjoy!**