

It's Never Too Late to Learn

So through the power of social media and a few strategically placed Instagram posts, suddenly everyone is talking about... SWIM LESSONS!!

Okay, I'll admit it's pretty fun to see yourself all over the internet (oh WHY couldn't it have been in the summer when my tan is at its peak??) but the truth is, I am most thrilled by the fact that people are talking about swimming and safety. And when I say people I mean adults. We focus so intently on our children - as well we should - that we forget about an entire population of people who are non-swimmers and at risk.

I have been teaching swimming for over 30 years and some of the most gratifying exchanges have been with my adult swimmers, who, for whatever reasons, found themselves all grown up and still unable to swim.

Teaching adults is more challenging simply because these brave souls have had a lifetime to build up their fears and apprehensions towards the process and yet they're forging ahead anyway. Some take on the challenge when they become parents (like a certain someone who may or may not be famous and recently posted about it) and want to be more involved in spending time with their own kids in the water. Some may never have had the opportunity to learn before and finally decided to cross it off their 'bucket list'. Still others may have learned incorrectly and ineffectively; they can swim if they absolutely must, but certainly, don't enjoy it and struggle to avoid feeling panicked.

What is true about swimming is that it is one of the greatest, if not THE greatest, forms of exercise a person can incorporate into their life. It's aerobic, anaerobic, strength and endurance building and does not stress bones, joints or limbs. It can be modified for any type of body, most any type of previous injury or illness (such as strokes, arthritis, broken bones or torn ligaments) and any type of fitness level.

If you are a non-swimming adult reading this and even considering forging ahead with learning, I say please, please do it!! You won't regret it! At the end of this article are just a few tips to help you in the beginning stages. Also, it almost goes without saying, that a great instructor is key and should make you feel comfortable first and foremost. If you feel in any way that you can't relax and trust the person who's teaching you this crucial skill, please find someone else. You should immediately and instinctively know you're in good hands.

On top of all the physical benefits of swimming, it is also a meditative and calming space. Once you learn to get 'into the zone', you can get both a workout and a mental reprieve. Lynn Sherr, the author of *Swim: Why We Love the Water*, really says it best:

“At one level, it’s purely sensual: the silky feeling of liquid on skin; the chance to float free, as close to flying as I’ll ever get; the opportunity to reach, if not for the stars, then at least for the starfish. Swimming stretches my body -beyond its earthly limits. But it’s also an inward journey, a time of quiet contemplation. I find myself at peace, able to flex my mind and imagine new -possibilities without the startling interruptions of modern life. The silence is stunning.”

I never imagined that adult swim lessons would ‘go viral’ as the young folks say today but since it has, I would love to take this opportunity to say anyone can do it, everyone can do it, it is economical as a form of exercise, it is a crucial life skill, it is a truly feel-good type of activity and I might add, the least judgmental space a person can exist in. Once we’re in the water, we’re all the same, blowing our bubbles, kicking our feet and trying to get from one side to the other.

A few tips for the adult beginner:

- 1) Learning to breathe is key to success. Your instructor should be teaching you how to breathe out in the water. Holding your breath causes anxiety and feelings of panic and claustrophobia. It also limits your ability to build up endurance and strength.
- 2) Treading water is NOT for beginners and should be introduced at a later stage as a safety skill.
- 3) Adults can learn to swim fairly quickly in many cases but consistent practice is key to overcoming fears and building sustained energy for it. Swimming is HARD, even for people who are athletic. It is quite tiring until you get used to it and most coaches recommend 2-3 times a week to build up endurance.
- 4) Not everyone can float successfully (due to body type and muscle mass) but those who have a harder time can still swim on their back enough to be safe.
- 5) Some people learn freestyle more easily and others learn breaststroke more easily. Either one is fine to start with and both require regulated breathing skills.
- 6) Kickboards are not for beginners to use without assistance from an instructor. You’re better off just practicing a streamline glide with kicks.
- 7) Flippers do make swimmers kick faster, however, it is always preferable to learn to kick naturally before introducing any accessories.