

# Get your baby swimming

By Healthline, 2019

When your baby isn't old enough to walk, it may seem silly to take them to the pool. But there can be so many benefits to splashing around and gliding through the water.

Being in the water engages your baby's body in a completely unique way, creating billions of new neurons as your baby kicks, glides, and smacks at the water.

Due to their delicate immune systems, doctors typically recommend that parents keep their babies from chlorinated pools or lakes until they're about 6 months old.

But you don't want to wait too long to introduce your baby to the pool. Children who don't get their feet wet until later tend to be more fearful and negative about swimming. Younger children are also usually less resistant to floating on their backs, a skill that even some babies can learn!

Here's the lowdown on the potential benefits of infant swim time...

# 1. Swimming may improve cognitive functioning

Bilateral cross-patterning movements, which use both sides of the body to carry out an action, help your baby's brain grow.

Cross-patterning movements build neurons throughout the brain, but especially in the corpus callosum. This facilitates communication, feedback, and modulation from one side of the brain to another. Down the road, this may improve:

- reading skills
- language development
- academic learning
- spatial awareness

When swimming, your baby moves their arms while kicking their legs. And they're doing these actions in water, which means their brain is registering the tactile sensation of water plus its resistance. Swimming is also a unique social experience, which furthers its brain-boosting power.

A four-year study of more than 7,000 children by the [Griffith University in Australia](#) suggested children who

swim have advances in physical and mental development when compared to their peers who don't swim.

Specifically, the 3- to 5-year-olds who swam were 11 months ahead of the normal population in verbal skills, six months ahead in math skills, and two months ahead in literacy skills. They were also 17 months ahead in story recall and 20 months ahead in understanding directions.

However, the study's findings were only an association and not firm evidence. The study was also sponsored by the swim school industry and relied on parental reports. More research is needed to explore and confirm this potential benefit.

## **2. Swim time may reduce the risk of drowning**

Swim time may reduce the risk of drowning in children over 4 years old. Swimming may reduce the risk in children ages 1 to 4, but the evidence isn't strong enough to say for sure.

It's important to note that swim time doesn't reduce the risk of drowning in children under 1.

According to the [American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\)](#), drowning is a leading cause of death among children and toddlers. Most of these drownings in children under 4 years old occur in home swimming pools. If you have a pool, early swim lessons may be helpful.

Even the youngest babies can be taught swimming skills, like floating on their backs. But for infants under 1 year old, this doesn't keep them safer from drowning.

Even if your child has had swim lessons, they should still be supervised at all times while in the water.

### **3. Swimming may improve confidence**

Most infant classes include elements like water play, songs, and skin-to-skin contact with parents or caregivers. Children interact with one another and the instructor and begin to learn to function in groups. These elements, plus

the fun of learning a new skill, may boost your baby's self-esteem.

A [2010 study](#) suggested 4-year-old children who had taken swim lessons at some time from the age of 2 months to 4 years were better adapted to new situations, had more self-confidence, and were more independent than non-swimmers.

An [older study](#) reinforced these findings, illustrating that a program that included early, year-round swimming lessons for preschool-age participants was associated with:

- greater self-control
- a stronger desire to succeed
- better self-esteem
- more comfort in social situations than non-swimmers

## **4. Increases quality time between caregivers and babies**

Even if you have more than one child, swim time that involves a parent in the water promotes one-on-one bonding. During a lesson, it's just you and your little one focused on each other, so it's a wonderful way to spend quality time alone together, point out experts who offer swim lessons.

## **5. Builds muscle**

Swim time helps promote important muscle development and control in babies at a young age. Little ones will need to develop the muscles needed to hold their heads up, move their arms and legs, and work their core in coordination with the rest of their body.

Swimming.org [points out](#) that not only does swim time for babies improve their muscle strength and ability on the outside, but the exercise provides internal benefits as well by getting those joints moving.

Swimming is also great for cardiovascular health and will help strengthen your little one's heart, lungs, brain, and blood vessels.

## **6. Improves coordination and balance**

Along with building muscle, time in the pool can help your baby improve their coordination and balance. It's not easy learning to move those little arms and legs together. Even small coordinated movements represent big leaps in your baby's development.

## **7. Improves sleeping patterns**

As we mentioned before, pool time takes a lot of energy for babies. They're in a new environment, using their bodies in completely new ways, and they're working extra hard to stay warm.

All of that extra activity uses up a lot of energy, so you may notice that your little one is sleepier after a swim lesson. You may have to schedule in time for a nap after time in the pool or move up bedtimes on the days that swim time is in your routine.

## **8. Improves appetite**

There's nothing like a day in the pool or at the beach to make you leave hungry, and babies are no different. All of that physical exertion in the water, as well as the energy it takes their little bodies to stay warm, burns a lot of calories. You'll probably notice an increase in your baby's appetite after regular swimming time.

### **Safety tips**

Newborns and infants should never be left alone around any body of water, like bathtubs or pools. It's important to keep in mind that a child can drown in even just 1 inch of water.

For children under 4 years of age, it's best to do "touch supervision." That means that an adult should be close enough to touch them at all times.

Here are some other tips to keep in mind when your child is around water:

- Be aware of even small bodies of water, like bathtubs, ponds, fountains, and even watering cans.



- Always make sure your child is being supervised by an adult while swimming.
- Enforce safety rules around the pool, like no running or pushing others underwater.
- Use a life jacket while in a boat. Don't allow inflatable toys or mattresses to be used instead of a life jacket.
- Completely remove the cover of your pool before swimming (if your pool has a cover).
- Don't drink alcohol, and eliminate distractions (talking on your phone, working on a computer, etc.) if you're supervising children swimming.

## Signs of drowning

The AAP gives [clear guidelines](#) on the possible warning signs of potential drowning. Signs that may indicate a person is in danger of drowning include:

- head is low in the water, and mouth is at water level
- head is tilted back and mouth is open
- eyes are glassy and empty, or closed
- hyperventilating or gasping
- trying to swim or trying to roll over

# The takeaway

As long as you're taking all the necessary precautions and giving your baby your undivided attention, swim time can be perfectly safe.

Another benefit to infant swimming is that it's a wonderful parent-child bonding experience. In our hectic, fast-paced world, slowing down to simply enjoy an experience together is rare.

Swim time with our babies brings us into the present moment while teaching them important life skills. So grab your swim bag and wade in!