

Study: Early swimming promotes early development

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Swimming is one of the most important skills that children can learn. Swimming provides for basic safety in and around water, and it also opens the door to dozens of other water-based activities ranging from canoeing and kayaking to kite sailing.

But the benefits go even further. Research suggests that learning to swim in early childhood leads to better physical, cognitive, and linguistic development.

In 2012, Griffith University in Australia reported on a three-year study that surveyed almost 7,000 parents with children under five years in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. The aim was to examine whether participation in early swimming lessons impacted subsequent milestones in child development.

The results showed a clear connection. Even after allowing for differences in gender and socio-economic status, it was clear that children who participated in early-years swimming developed a wide range of physical skills and met a number of developmental milestones earlier than their peers.

They also scored significantly better in mathematics-related tasks and visual-motor skills such as cutting paper, coloring, and drawing lines and shapes. Their literacy and oral expression were better as well.

Why would early swimming make such a difference? The researchers concluded that most of the developmental differences could probably be explained by the method and structure of swimming lessons.

In the preschool years, young swimmers are basically practicing how to learn in a school-like instructional environment. They are required to watch and listen to their swimming instructor, and they need to interpret language

in the process. In many instances, they are also asked to count one-to-three and one-to-ten while linking physical movements to their counting.

Not surprisingly, researchers found that the overall quality of different swim programs appeared to have a significant effect on subsequent learning and development.

Given the positive effect on the transition to school, as well as general water safety, the study concludes by recommending that children should be encouraged to participate in early swimming lessons.

Active for Life recommends that parents read what makes a **quality swimming program** before registering their children in swimming lessons.