Optimal Health University™

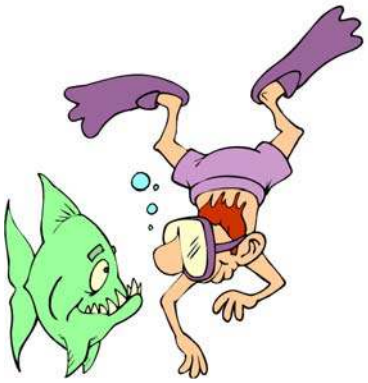
Presented by Dr. Alan Cranton, DC, ND

This Summer, Swim Your Way to Better Health

Dr. Cranton recommends swimming, for both adults and children, as an excellent way to tone the body because it develops the muscles of the upper body and the cardio-respiratory system (Eur J Appl Physiol Occup Physiol 1995;71:295-300) without the wear and tear that can stem from other types of aerobic exercise.

And swimming doesn't just improve your fitness level. When used in conjunction with other therapies, experts find that it prevents obesity, depression, heart disease and even asthma.

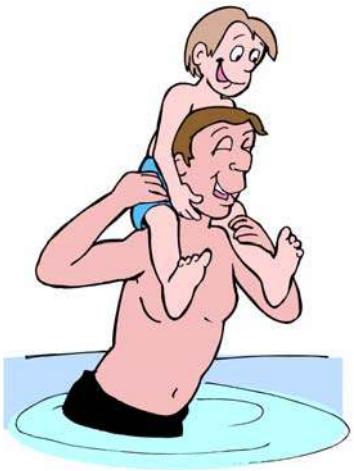
So, this summer, Dr. Cranton encourages patients to jump into the pool or lake with the entire family. But don't just splash around. Start doing laps or water aerobics.



The Benefits of Non-Impact Exercise

For those who typically engage in impact sports, such as running, dance aerobics or tennis, non-impact swimming can give bones and joints needed respite. Plus, incorporating swimming into your fitness routine a few times per week provides exceptional cross-training, which may rocket athletic performance to the next level.

Because water supports body weight, athletes can achieve the aerobic exercise benefits of running without the gravitational stress associated with the sport. This is especially beneficial after suffering an injury.



In one study, runners who experienced low-back and hip pain substituted swimming along with chiropractic care. The result? A significant reduction in pain (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2005;28:e1-7).

Non-Impact Exercise and Osteoarthritis

The non-impact aspect of swimming can be especially beneficial to those suffering from osteoarthritis (OA).

Dr. Cranton often cares for patients with OA and explains that regular exercise is key to alleviating OA-related pain and disability. Unfortunately, exercise may often cause discomfort for individuals with OA.

However, for OA sufferers, swimming water that does not fall below 80 degrees Fahrenheit allows movement devoid of the pain and restriction that regular land-based exercise routines require. A recent study in the *American Journal of Medicine* concurs that those with osteoarthritis find that "therapeutic exercise is beneficial for many patients and includes an initial warm-up with range of motion, muscle strengthening, and aerobic activity [such as swimming]." (*Am J Med* 1996;100:10S-15S.)

Alleviate Asthma

Researchers conclude that "swimming as a training modality has definite benefits for the patient with asthma. These include an increase in aerobic fitness and a decrease in asthma morbidity." (*Sports Med* 1992;14:397-405.)

Studies reveal that swimming may also be an effective drug-free intervention for youngsters with asthma. Swimming appears less likely to trigger asthma (what scientists call less "asthmogenic") than activities such as running and biking.

Dr. Alan Cranton, DC, ND, Cranton Wellness Centre (807) 343-7932
701 Memorial Avenue, Unit 3, Thunder Bay, ON P7B 3Z7 www.crantonwellness.com

Researchers have found that "the low asthmogenicity of swimming compared with landbased activities" may be one reason why it is such an excellent alternative exercise for asthma sufferers, young and old, but there is also evidence that "the high humidity of inspired air at water level … reduces respiratory heat loss," further warding off asthma symptoms (*J Am Acad Nurse Pract* 2003;15:247-52).

Asthma sufferers should be aware that "airway irritation because of chlorine and its derivatives" may occur (*Sports Med* 1992;14:397-405). However, the benefits of swimming far outweigh any potential shortcomings.

Deep Six Depression

A plethora of scientific research reveals that exercise staves off emotional depression. Specifically, daily aerobic activity, such as swimming, has been shown to be as effective as commonly used antidepressant medications — without the hazardous side effects associated with these drugs.

However, research indicates that nonaerobic lap swimming may be equally as effective as aerobic lap swimming in significantly reducing depression. Curiously, one analysis showed that, "the nonaerobic condition was superior to the aerobic condition for enhancing self-concept." (*Percept Mot Skills* 1992;74:79-89.)

So don't be overly concerned if you aren't getting your heart rate up every time you swim — the benefits psychologically are consistent, whether you swim aerobically or not.

Researchers have even found that swimming can alleviate postpartum depression, especially when mothers swim in groups where they may also engage in social interaction.

One investigation involved a survey of mothers and a pilot program that included swimming. "The response from the pilot group was positive and suggested that the participants were benefiting mentally and physically from the exercise and the social aspects of the group." (*J Fam Health Care* 2003;13:44-8.)

Have a Heart

Swimming is a phenomenal way to improve heart health, circulation and blood lipid profiles. However, the key to maximizing the cardiovascular advantages of swimming may be to get your head wet! One study revealed that swimming that incorporates full-body immersion offers superior heart-friendly benefits (*Heart* 2006).

Studies have proven that regular swimming reduces high blood pressure (hypertension), although sedentary older women with hypertension should adopt a swimming routine more slowly than active older women (*Hypertens* 2006;24:307-14).

If you have high cholesterol, what better way to lower it than exercising in a cool pool? A study in Japan shows that anaerobic exercise increases a "good" form of cholesterol (HDL-C) associated with optimal heart function (*J Sports Med Phys Fitness* 1993;33:200-2).

Interestingly, pool size may influence the heart-healthy benefits of swimming. According to one report, the minimum length for optimal exercise is 25 meters, in order to have the strongest "effect on blood lactate concentration and heart rate." The longer the pool, the more strenuous the exercise and "maximal stress on the cardio-respiratory system." (*Int J Sports Med* 2006;27.)

Wave Good-Bye to the Weight

Swimming and other aerobic exercise play a critical role in the loss and maintenance of body weight because dieting does not change metabolic rate. So, while eating right is key, adding swimming to your routine will jump-start a weight loss program.

"Exercise programs of low to moderate intensity, long duration and high frequency seem to be most beneficial" in creating long-term weight loss (*Nurse Pract* 1993;29). Swimming fits these criteria consummately.

Keep the Weight Off Kids Too

Swimming also helps kids ward off obesity.

For instance, in one study, 21 children with moderate to severe obesity, aged between 8 to 13 years, joined a four-week summer camp that provided the children with dietary restrictions, exercise, swimming and group therapy to achieve an initial weight loss of 5 percent (*J Med Assoc Thai* 1995;78:238-46).

Organized swimming lessons are a fantastic avenue to introduce your youngster to water-based fitness. If your youngster doesn't like to put his or her face in the water, invest in a kickboard.

Start Summer Out Swimmingly With a Chiropractic Check-up

Before initiating any exercise regime, it's essential to undergo a complete chiropractic check-up. Our office is committed to assisting members of our community in achieving optimal wellness. Make your well-being a priority: Call today to schedule a chiropractic evaluation.