Why Swimming Is Great for Your Body, Mind & Soul

Most people know that swimming helps you to improve heart rate and blood flow and maintain a healthy weight. What most people don't know are the little benefits of swimming that separate it from other forms of exercise.

Swimming not only helps with general physical fitness, but it encompasses a host of other benefits such as muscle toning, breath control, and meditative qualities. With so many peripheral benefits in one workout, you can kill two birds (or should I say six birds!) with one stone. Here are the little-known benefits of swimming:

1. You can work out longer with less pain and strain on your body.

As water supports the body's weight, people with injuries, suffering from obesity, or at an advanced age can easily swim for longer periods of time without stress being applied to their joints and bones. In addition, swimming is one of the few sports that does not cause stress to the skeletal system. Being in a pool, you're less likely to contact hard surfaces that may strain your body, as your motions are cushioned by a barrier of water. Even better, if you're swimming in a heated pool, the heat will loosen joints and muscles that will help prevent injuries during your workout.

2. It tones your muscles.

Water is 12 times denser than air, making swimming more effective at toning your muscles than any other form of aerobic exercise on land. With swimming, you get the cardio portion of your workout while also working on an even body tone. Working out or swimming in water provides a certain degree of water resistance, which acts very much like weights do at the gym. However, submersion in water creates a more even, controlled resistance on the body so there's no concern about having to count or equalize repetitions when it's time for lifting. The amount of resistance is relative to how hard you are pushing against the water, this allows you

to control the degree of pressure and helps prevent the possibility of injuring yourself through the use of heavy weights.

3. Swimming improves flexibility.

Unlike a gym, where you're using machines to work out isolated areas of the body, swimming allows you to utilize most of the muscles in your body. The wide arcs of strokes target many arm muscles that are missed in basic exercises, while the scissoring of the legs forces the body to use more leg muscles in a variety of fluid motions. Swimming also helps to stretch out and elongate your entire body as you reach further out with every stroke. If you also work out and do stretches in water, you find that poses that are difficult to maintain on the surface are much more approachable underwater. With water support, you can balance all those tricky yoga poses you've been meaning to try.

4. You work on breathing.

Unlike the dry air of gyms and tracks, pools have a higher level of moisture in the atmosphere. The moist air makes it much easier to breathe, particularly if you suffer from asthma. Studies show that swimming regularly can improve asthma symptoms, even up to a year after swimmers have stopped their swimming routine. But even if you're not suffering from a breathing problem, swimming can also help increase your lung volume and force you to learn proper breathing techniques.

5. It helps your mental health, too.

If the idea of pounding around a track and crunching weights stresses you out, stress no more. Like other exercises, swimming boost endorphins that increase feelings of wellbeing. Plus, the rhythmic strokes and sound of water make swimming much more relaxing. It's been shown that swimming produces the same "relaxation responses" as yoga, and the stretching and contracting of your muscles can heighten this experience. Not only does swimming increase relaxation chemicals, it is also highly conducive to meditation. Without having to focus on traffic or other gym members, swimming allows you to focus on simply your strokes and breathing, effectively "drowning" out static thoughts.