

Tips for Swimming in Marine Lake during the colder months

Here are a few tips which will hopefully help if you're just starting winter swimming. I particularly feel the cold after winter swimming so there's a strong focus on lots of clothes.

The following is based on what helped me start and continue winter swimming, as well as some tips from other people. You just have to find out what works for you.

For further advice post on the Clevedon Lake and Sea Swimmers (CLASS) Facebook page.

What to take

- Lots of warm clothes that are easy to get on; layers are ideal, just make sure your finishing layer is big enough to accommodate any under layers
- Thermal leggings, vests and thick socks if you have them
- 1-3 hats; I wear a swim hat and a woolly hat whilst swimming in the winter and take another one to put on after! A thick swim hat is ideal to keep you warm, neoprene is the warmest
- Something to stand/ sit on when getting changed; I use a thermally insulated folding sit mat which you can buy via Amazon, or you can just use a bath mat or towels
- Goggles- even if you don't intend to put your face in the water goggles are great if the water's choppy
- If you're getting your head in the water consider buying ear plugs to avoid Surfer's Ear or any ear infections, such as Swimmer's Ear/ Otitis
- You may also want to buy neoprene gloves, booties and wetsuits if you don't have them already; wetsuits can help with buoyancy
- A changing robe or towel
- Flask; it's good to have something with honey or sugar in it if you are not having cake or something to eat after- chamomile tea with honey is my favourite; water with maple syrup has been suggested too
- Cake?!

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Before

- If you are pregnant, have an underlying cardiac condition, high blood pressure, asthma, diabetes or epilepsy, talk to your GP or treating consultant
- Keep an eye on the temperature by googling Clevedon Marine Lake temperature or posting on CLASS; be aware of temperature drops between swims and shorten your swim accordingly
- Try cold showers every day over a week, apparently this can help you acclimatise; try the 'cold water shower sandwich' - start with hot then turn down to 20 degrees or lower for 2-3 minutes and finish with hot; try singing or breathing deeply when the cold is on!
- It can help if you've eaten within the hour you are swimming; I find going after breakfast is a great time

During

- Have fun but make sure you only go a short distance from the steps when it's cold
- Always swim with someone or ensure you have someone watching out for you on the side
- Wear at least one hat
- When getting in some people find it useful to acclimatise first by walking in up to their knees and/ or splashing their face, back of the neck, wrists and face; this will prime your body for entry as these are sensitive parts of the body
- Remember to breathe and try to slow your breathing down by breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth; try to make the out breath longer than the in breath
- As you go into the water the ribcage contracts, at this point breathing out slowly can really help
- Try to focus on something positive as you enter the water, e.g. repeat something to yourself such as 'I can do this', 'I am warm'?!
- Think of something warm, e.g. snuggling up to a hot water bottle when you get home and a hot drink, or being on a beach on a really hot day

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- Remind yourself that the first couple of minutes are the worst after which it WILL get better
- ‘Begin with the end in mind’ and imagine the buzz you will feel when you get out
- It can be good to set yourself a goal; maybe start by just dipping then move on to a short distance, e.g. in the winter aim to go around the pontoon (the distance from the steps by the rocks, around the pontoon and back, is approximately 100 meters)
- Find something to focus on when swimming and count anything, e.g. each breath out, each time you do a stroke or you could repeat the number of the circuit you are doing (1, 1, 1 for the first, then 2, 2, 2 etc)

After

- When you get out you have around 5 minutes before the after drop (the drop in core body temperature resulting from the return of very cold blood from the extremities to the core)
- Changing robes can help speed up the ‘warming up’ process - getting your swim stuff off as quickly as possible, getting your core warm and socks and hats on are the most important first steps
- Once you’re dressed have a hot drink
- It can help to keep moving to speed up the blood flow from your core to your fingers and toes; walking, jogging and jumping can be good
- Please note some people have experienced severe after drop from having a bath or shower too soon after swimming causing them to faint or fall over
- Be careful about driving too soon; this can be dangerous if you’re experiencing after drop

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Other notes

- Small regular dips can help you acclimatise so that it becomes easier
- People recommend going at least once per week throughout the winter but if you can't do this it's worth giving it a try whenever you can; some people acclimatise more easily than others
- ENJOY every minute, it's so revitalising and is so good for the mind and body

p.s. Make sure you have no regrets! Dervla Murphy, a veteran travel writer, said that she never regretted going for a swim but often regretted not doing so 😊