

The Complete Guide to Ocean Swimming

Beginner to Winner!

Welcome to the world of ocean swimming, you're going to love it! We've prepared our top 10 tips on how to make the move from the pool to the ocean, or how to get back into the speedos (probably a wetsuit now we think about it) after an ocean swimming hiatus.

1 The right wetsuit for the job.

Wetsuits are one of your best pals while ocean swimming; they provide warmth, buoyancy and reduce friction caused by winter indulgences.

That surfing or diving wetsuit hanging in your garage might not be the best idea for a long-distance ocean swim. Your arms will tire quicker, you'll chafe in places you don't want to chafe and you'll need to put in more energy to get around the swim course. We highly recommend you get yourself an ocean swimming wetsuit!

Getting the right fit is also very important; too loose and the water will flow through and create extra drag, too tight and you'll feel suffocated. The best idea is to try before you buy.

Helpful Hint Put socks on your feet and hands when putting on your wetsuit, this will save you a lot of grunting and groaning, and stretching of your wetsuit!

2 The right goggles for the job.

Sighting while ocean swimming is much more difficult than in the swimming pool. You're going to want a good pair of ocean swimming goggles to avoid losing site of the next marker buoy, faffing around trying to defog them during a race and basically having a forgettable day in the ocean.

The main reasons you'll buy ocean swimming specific goggles (some pool goggles now have these features) is because they'll have increased peripheral vision, comfortable straps, gaskets (the

bit that suctions to your face) and crystal-clear lenses. Above all, find a pair that are comfortable and make sure you have tried them out BEFORE race day!

To keep them in top condition rinse them with fresh water after being in the ocean, keep them in a protective case and never touch inside the lenses.

Helpful Hint Put your goggles on before you put your swim cap on, it'll reduce the chance of getting them knocked off by another swimmer.



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3 Avoid Chaffing!

Chaffing is caused by your wetsuit rubbing against your skin during a swim and salt in the oceans multiplies the effect of chaffing. Don't be caught out, the last thing you want during an ocean swim, especially a long-distance swim, is to be in pain when you should have just lubed up! Use a wetsuit approved lubricant like suit juice on areas prone to chaffing, like your neck or underarms.

Helpful Hint Lube up. First time. Every time!

4 Safety - Swim in an event or with a group

It's a good idea, whether you're a beginner or an advanced swimmer, to train in the ocean as part of either an event like the Beach Series with water safety (ie. lifeguards) or with a group of people.

A solo swimmer in the ocean can be very difficult for a boat to see. You also won't have anyone around to help if you get cramp, or a more serious medical condition.

Ocean swim events (preferably events with Surf Life Saving lifeguards) have water safety in place with a designated swim area. All you need to do is raise your hand if you're feeling uneasy and lifeguards will have you in their boat in no time.

5 Breathing on both sides

In the pool you can get away with breathing on only one side, but in the ocean you're going to need to be able to breathe on both sides.



Being able to breathe on both sides will allow you to breathe away from ocean chop, see where other swimmers around you are and give you a better chance of swimming in a straight line by keeping your stroke more even.

If you can't do this, practice in the pool until you're comfortable doing it.

Helpful Hint Try breathing every third stroke when ocean swimming.

6 Hydration & Cramp

We're not going to give you a big spiel about 'high protein, low carb', or whatever today's pre-race fads are. We'll just look at hydrating for ocean swimming, as swimming in salt water can quickly dehydrate you and also the common toe-twisting, white-fang presenting, body-builder squealing joy that is cramp.

Dehydration is a danger during any sport, but it's more so during ocean swimming as you're not able to notice you're sweating or losing fluid, because, well, you're surrounded by water. Increasing electrolytes before and after ocean swimming with help keep you hydrated and will reduce your chances of cramp.

If you're prone to cramping it could be a good idea, on top of electrolytes, to purchase magnesium tablets to help reduce your chances of getting cramp while ocean swimming. * Seek medical advice, as we're not even close to being doctors.

7 Preparing for colder water

Remember back to the sound track of the 1986 classic Top Gun, "Take my breath aaaa-waaayyyy". This is exactly what instant cold water might do to your brain.

There are two ways to prepare for colder water. One is to purchase blueseventy skull cap, gloves and booties (don't forget your wetsuit from helpful tip #1), which will surely keep your core toasty and warm. The second way (feel free to combine both ways) we recommend before any ocean swim (race especially) is to go waste deep into the water and put your face and head under the water while blowing bubbles. This will help with the instant shock to the brain of the colder water.

Alternatively, there's always the admission-free, zero evidence, highly appealing, yet short term approach to keeping warm, of weeing in your wetsuit. It'll be your little secret...



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8 Sighting

How to sight effectively and efficiently is one of the most important skills to master in ocean swimming. There's no black line on the ocean bottom to follow like in the pool. You'll need to sight to make sure you're on the right line for the next marker buoy, or to the finish line.

The best way to sight is to lift your head and look forward (do not breathe when looking forward) and then roll your head to the side to take your breath. Lift your head only as high as necessary (goggles just out of the water), too far and your hips will sink. Try and sight at the top of a wave or swell for the best view of the course.

Sight 2 to 3 times in a row (during every other stroke). Use the first sight to locate the buoy, the second sight to adjust your angle and the third to confirm your direction. Swim for 30 seconds and then do it all over again.

Landmarks are your best friend when sighting! If you can locate a big tree, a house, an office building or a red Ferrari in line with where you need to be heading, it's going to be a lot easier to get there in a straight line.

Helpful Hint Make sure the red Ferrari isn't moving... HA!

9 Swimming with other people around you.

Another main difference between pool and ocean swimming is that you're going to have flailing arms and legs around you - other people's hopefully! You can control how large of a pack you want to swim in by either moving to the



back or the outside of the pack. The outside of the pack is best so you avoid being sandwiched when participants turn and bunch to go around a marker buoy.

The same applies for race starts (whether on the beach or in-water starts), if you're after a bit more space start at the back of the pack or to the outside.

Helpful Hint Ladies, have a bit of length in your nails so you can give those testosterone-filled men a little scratch and wake up if they get too close or boisterous!

10 Drafting

Drafting, in basic terms, is following the swimmer in front of you and using their momentum to help propel you along. Drafting can help you conserve energy during a race, saving it for the final push to the finish line

where you unashamedly pass the person you've been drafting off.

The best place to draft someone is between their 4-5 O'clock or their 7-8 O'clock (between their ankles and hips); not directly behind them. Directly behind them you'll be in their disturbed water, and might get a foot in the face.

Three key drafting points to keep in mind:

1. The faster the lead swimmer, the more beneficial the draft will be.
2. The larger the lead swimmer, the more beneficial the draft will be.
3. The closer you are to the lead swimmer, the more beneficial the draft will be.

Helpful Hint Trust (or maybe hope) that the person you're drafting off is heading in the right direction. This way you'll be able to sight less and conserve even more energy.



Final words

You're in a safe environment when doing an event. Put up your hand if you feel uncomfortable. Start with a short distance and build up to longer distances throughout the series.

And finally have fun, smile, enjoy the peacefulness of ocean swimming and enjoy making new fish-like friends!

Your Beach Series Team

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For more information on how to get involved in either the Takapuna or Orewa Beach Series events (or both!) head along to www.beachseries.co.nz

We'd love to have you part of the family!

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