



Open Water Swimming Safety in Cold Water

Dear Member, with the summer months well and truly behind us, the St Andrews Lakes team are delighted that you're wishing to swim throughout the colder months.

With St Andrews Lakes being a NOWCA open water swimming venue, we encourage swimmers to swim **all year round** in open water, as it is a great fun thrill and can help circulation and wellbeing, among other positive aspects. Here we give you some advice/tips on how to take on cold water swimming safely, what you need to wear.

Cold Water Swimming Advice

By cold water swimming at St Andrews Lakes you can be assured that you are outdoor swimming at a safe and responsible NOWCA venue – with an element of fun and challenge involved of course! Your NOWCA safety wristband will ensure our team knows that you are in the water and for how long. They have experience of running cold water sessions and will advise on how far/long you should swim for (as the water temperature drops you should decrease the length of time/how far you swim in the water) to avoid cold water shock, hypothermia and all other swim safety aspects.

Recognise the signs in yourself before someone else. It is important that you do not push yourself to the limits with the time you spend in the water. The longer you're exposed to the cold the more dangerous it becomes; symptoms of hypothermia actually confuse you so you can't recognise them yourself and the situation can become critical. This sounds scary but with guidance and assistance from other people who know what they're doing reduce risks and you should actually enjoy each experience

Other things to consider:

- We would recommend that you acclimatise yourself to cold water swimming by attending regular open water swim sessions throughout Autumn and Winter. This way your body will get used to the water temperature as it falls.
- Another way to get used to cold water swimming is to have regular cold showers or baths - this will help you prepare your body for the temperature change.
- Use the breathing techniques you've learnt through your open water swimming coaching and experiences - deep, slow and steady breaths will help you acclimatise to the water.
- Entry to your cold-water swim session should be slow and controlled via the steps or beach – please don't jump or dive in to enter the water. The shock of a quick entry into cold water can be very dangerous and lead to cold water shock as the blood rushes away from the heart and brain to the skin.

- On exiting the water, we recommend that you warm up slowly. Wrap yourself up with plenty of layers of warm clothing and treat yourself to a nice hot drink.

What you need to wear:

- Your NOWCA safety wristband of course!
- A swim hat - You have to wear a bright swimming hat to be visible for water safety team...but it also helps preserve your body heat. Wear 2 silicone swim hats, or a neoprene swim hat, to help with this.
- Your usual swim kit – swimmers, goggles and towel.
- Good to have is anti-fog as a hot face in cold water will fog goggles quickly.
- Mask goggles definitely help reduce brain freeze and offer better vision.
- Wetsuit – we recommend that you have a wetsuit specifically designed for open water swimming (rather than a surfing wetsuit) for your swims, such as the Zone3 Advance wetsuits or that you may hire from Zone3 with us being a NOWCA partner.
- Neoprene gloves and boots – these extra accessories can help keep the extremities warm while you swim.
- A changing robe - Our partners at Swimzi have created the XK jacket especially for open water swimmers. It's not just a changing cloak, its design helps retain body heat pre and post swim to help keep you warm.
- Woolly jumper, hat and gloves, and layers of warm clothes – make sure you pack lots of lovely warm clothing to get all cosy in after your swim.

What water temperature is safe to swim in?

Swimming in cold water is all down to personal preference and is at each individual's risk/limit. For this reason, there are no set guidelines to state safe water temperatures to swim in. We have created a water temperature scale guide to shed light on how it could feel in the water at differing temperatures, what to expect and what to do to acclimatise so you can swim regularly in colder waters:

NOWCA Open Water Swimming Temperature Scale.

TEMPERATURE	CHARACTERISTICS	OUTCOMES
24+ degrees C.	Feels very warm and comfortable when getting in.	Some events restrict the use of wetsuits as it can add an overheating and dehydration risks on hot days
18-23 degrees C.	Anyone with experience of open water would think this is warm.	Anyone not relying on the buoyancy or extra speed of a wetsuit would prefer not to wear one.
14-17 degrees C.	Average UK summer open water temperatures.	Safe temperature to wear a wetsuit. Acclimatised skins swimmers are happy in these temperatures.
10-13 degrees C.	Generally found in early and late season open water.	Our advice is to wear thicker neoprene wetsuits and accessories. Spend time

		acclimatising before swimming.
Sub10 degrees C.	Cold water to most open water swimmers even in a wetsuit, Add caution and extra safety provisions.	Acclimatisation is and should be a prerequisite to anyone attempting to swim in these temperatures. This means regular and often incremental swims. Higher risk of hypothermia, take time to warm up slowly and be monitored.
Sub5 degrees C.	Known as ice swimming. Only for very experienced open water swimmers.	Start very short time periods and build up gradually. Swim near to the side and ensure you can grip steps and rail to get yourself out. Get out before you think you need to and ensure there is someone to question you, help you exit the water and monitor you as you warm up. Swim times vary but should be counted in minutes rather than tens of minutes. Avoid anything hot.

A poll of open water swimmers from the 'Open Water Swimming UK' Facebook group (run by NOWCA) asked what the lowest water temperature people would swim in and the response was interesting. Of those that responded, below 10 and 15 degrees were popular responses for preferable water temperatures and then responses for below 5 and below 0 were less favourable but still a consideration for some swimmers.



We must reiterate that you must only attempt cold water swimming if you have acclimatised yourself to declining water temperatures beforehand. The potential for cold

water shock and or hypothermia should always be in the forefront of a swimmer's mind. On the plus side though, there are so many positive health benefits to cold water swimming (it's a fantastic challenge!) that you shouldn't be scared to give it a go.

Winter Ban:

We operate a no-nonsense policy when it comes to swimmers knowingly endangering their lives and that of our team who would potentially have to enter the water to rescue them if they get into trouble or lose consciousness.

If a swimmer ignores the advice of our safety team e.g. acts in a way that could exacerbate cold water shock or overstay their time in the water against instruction triggering hypothermia, they will be issued with a winter ban from the venue.

NOWCA Membership:

Your NOWCA membership is valid for a whole year so you can enjoy safe swimming outdoors all year round. Log in to your NOWCA account to check it is up-to-date.

To keep up-to-date with all the latest cold water and swimming safe information from NOWCA, check out our dedicated webpage <https://nowca.org/cold-water-swimming/>

