

# Swimming safety

## Know your limits



- **Never enter the water while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.**
- Choose safe places to swim like public pools and beaches with lifeguards.
- Always follow the venue rules, adhere to instructions given by lifeguards on duty, and know who to contact in an emergency.
- **Be cautious about peer pressure.** Just because friends suggest something doesn't mean it's safe.
- **Don't over-estimate your swimming abilities. Even if you're a strong swimmer, unexpected situations can arise.**

## Stay safe in water, including open water (such as sea, rivers, lakes, swimming ponds)



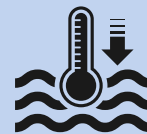
- **Avoid taking risks.** Swim in areas you are sure are safe for you and be aware of the dangers of swimming in open water or the sea: e.g. strong currents, deep and cold water, tides, rip tides, things under the surface that you cannot see, cold water shock, poor quality water. Always check the weather and tides.
- On beaches, **swim between the red and yellow flags** in areas patrolled by lifeguards. A completely red flag means it is not safe to swim.
- **Never swim alone in open water.**
- **Do not use inflatables** as they can be swept out to sea.
- Make sure you **know where you can enter and exit the water safely.**
- **Do not swim in canals**, they are often shallow, with unseen hazards and poor water quality.
- **Most reservoirs are not safe to swim in**, with many safety hazards.
- **Never jump or dive into open water.** It may be shallower than you think and entering the water this quickly can cause cold water shock.

## Open water swimming

If you plan to swim in open water, read this advice from the RNLI first: [rnli.org/safety/choose-your-activity/open-water-swimming](https://www.rnli.org/safety/choose-your-activity/open-water-swimming)



## Cold water shock



Even in high summer, the sea and rivers in the UK are cold enough to induce cold water shock, which can be a precursor to drowning. Cold water can shock your system and cause your body to react by drawing blood away from muscles, making it hard to move.

When swimming in open water, it's very important to enter the water slowly and allow time for your body to get used to the cold.

Alcohol increases the risk of cold water shock. Never enter the water after consuming alcohol.

**If you fall into cold water, follow the 5 steps to float to live:**

- 1. Float on your back, tilt your head back with ears submerged**
- 2. Try to relax and breathe normally**
- 3. Move your hands to help you stay afloat**
- 4. It's ok if your legs sink, we all float differently**
- 5. Spread your arms and legs to improve stability**

This helps keep your airways clear and allows the shock to pass. Then call for help or swim to safety.

Treat water with respect and visit [rnli.org/safety/float](https://www.rnli.org/safety/float) for more information about water safety and cold water shock.

## Water quality



Open water swimming can expose swimmers to poor quality water. The government has issued guidance on reducing the risk of illness from poor quality water when open water swimming, available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/swim-healthy-leaflet/swim-healthy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/swim-healthy-leaflet/swim-healthy)