

# Guide for new to Open Water Swimming and Safety Points

- Tralee Bay Swimming Club welcomes new members and especially those who are new to open water swimming.
- Fenit is the main swimming/training spot for the club.
- Fenit (also known as Locke's beach) is a small, sheltered sandy beach, looking south onto Tralee Bay, with excellent views across to the mountainous Dingle Peninsula on the other side. Thanks to its sheltered location and calm waters, the beach is ideal for open water swimming.
- The beach is lifeguarded in June, July and August.
- For more advanced open water swimmers there is a circuit of buoys and on a full tide the circuit is approximately 1.5 km.

## Four Key Health Benefits of Open Water Swimming

- **Better Sleep**  
Open water swim training can result in a natural increase in the levels of a certain hormone called prolactin in the body which may help to improve the quality of your sleep.
- **Increased Happiness**  
Other hormones that stimulate the thyroid have been shown to be increased by more than 50 per cent after swimming. This has all kinds of benefits on regulating weight, body temperature, muscle strength but also can improve your mood, making you both healthier and happier.
- **Boosted Immune System**  
Open water swim training in colder water can reduce the potential over-production of certain hormones that can contribute to impaired immunity, in effect making your more body more robust and resistant to infection.
- **Preventing and Managing Long-term Health Conditions**  
Cold water and open water swim training can make other systems of your body more efficient and more effective, improving your body's defensive response to damage and therefore potentially reducing your risk of cancer, neurological disorders and chronic respiratory disease. It and can also help to improve the management of asthma and Type 2 Diabetes.

## **Safety Points for new members**

### **Do not swim alone**

It's the most important rule of open water swimming: do not swim by yourself. Whoever you bring with you doesn't need to get in the water, but they should keep an eye on you, should you need any help.

### **Make yourself visible**

1. Wear a brightly coloured silicon hat that is Pink, Orange, Yellow or Green. Every other colour in the water ranges from full camouflage to barely visible.
2. It's also strongly recommended to wear a brightly coloured tow-float. These are flotation devices that attach to your waist, then float behind on a leash as you swim. They come in a huge range of sizes and significantly increase your visibility, while also providing you with a float to rest on. Some also have pockets for you to store things, like water, snacks and medicines.

### **Get in slowly to avoid cold water shock**

1. All Irish waters are cold enough to cause cold water shock just about every day of the year. Those who swim regularly in these waters can acclimatise and reduce the reactions, but if that isn't you, you can avoid cold water shock by entering the water slowly.
2. Walk in up to your hips, splash your top half and face, then walk the rest of the way in. As you enter, you will gasp, and your breath will quicken rapidly. Take some breaststroke strokes, keeping your head out of the water and focus on controlling your breath. Once your breath is under control, keep moving steadily parallel to, or towards shore, and don't go out of your depth. After a few minutes, it's time to get out and warm up!
3. Next time you will be able to get your breathing under control quicker, and swim for longer.

### **Understand effect of weather & tides**

1. Weather will affect each body of water differently, depending on their geographical location. It's important to know how weather affects your swimming spot, and if it is tidal, how tides affect it.
2. Generally, it's safest to swim no more than an hour either side of high or low tide. This is when the flow of the current should be at its weakest.

However, all locations have their own dynamics, so it's best to research, and ask local safety teams or experienced open water swimmers.

3. If there are official weather warnings for wind or rain – do not swim – and heed any warnings from lifeguards, local councils, the RNLI and Coastguard.

### **Learn about rip currents**

1. Rip currents are strong, narrow currents that flow from the shoreline, through the waves out to sea. They exist to take all the water brought to shore by waves, back out to sea, and are most common on beaches suitable for surfing.
2. Rip currents are not always easy to spot, but generally present as a calmer, deeper channel going out to sea, with breaking waves either side. If you end up in this channel, try to remain calm, and either swim parallel to shore until you exit the current, or raise your hand directly upwards to attract attention from the lifeguards.
3. All lifeguarded Irish beaches that have rip currents, will have information about said rip currents at the lifeguard hut and/or on beach notice boards. Please read these, swim between the lifeguard flags, parallel to shore, and only when a lifeguard is on duty.

### **Know the signs of hypothermia**

1. Hypothermia is not related to cold water shock and creeps up gradually. It occurs when the body's core temperature drops below 35C, and can first present in swimmers as persistent shivering, feeling cold, and having low energy.
2. It's paramount that this swimmer's heat loss is reduced immediately, and warmth restored gradually to ensure symptoms do not progress to more severe issues like uncontrollable shivering, confusion and loss of coordination.
3. Even before hypothermia sets in, cold can be dangerous if for example it causes you to lose dexterity in your hands, preventing you getting dressed and warmed up.
4. To avoid these symptoms or worse, keep moving in the water at all times, get out as soon as you feel you are getting colder, and dress as quickly as you can.

### **Wear a watch to monitor time in water**

It's good practice to wear a watch in the water so you do not lose track of how long you have been in. It's a particularly important practice if you are new to swimming in Ireland's cold waters, or an experienced swimmer dipping in winter.

### **Swim parallel to shore**

No matter your experience, it is always safest to swim parallel to shore. Taking this route makes you most visible to those on land, tends to keep you furthest away from motorised boats and jet skis, makes your own navigating easier, and gives you quicker exiting options in the event of an emergency.

### **Respect wildlife**

Whatever creatures you encounter in and around the water live there, and you are their guest. Always respect their space and observe from a safe distance; let them come to you if they wish to interact - it should never be your decision.

### **Leave no trace**

For those that live there and for your fellow humans, please take everything you bring to a swim spot home with you. Do not leave rubbish, or unwanted towels, or swimsuits, or even banana skins.

### **Bring extra layers for after and a hot drink, or soup**

1. There are few days in Ireland when you will not be glad of having brought an extra layer and a hot drink to swimming with you. Your body temperature is likely to have dropped after your swim, so what you arrived in might not be warm enough to get you back to normal. With an extra layer and a hot drink, you'll be right as rain in no time.
2. Always respect the Open Water, know your own limits and listen to advice from officials regarding weather and water conditions.

### **Open Water Swimming Safety Checklist**

Above are our general Open Water Swimming safety tips, but we've also put together this Open Water Swimming Safety checklist. Even the most experienced open water swimmers will mentally check off this list each time they go swimming. Make a habit of doing the same.

#### **Before you go**

1. Know where you are going to swim – what location?
2. Check the weather – are there official warnings? How do the winds affect this location?

3. Check the tides – remember it is best to swim up to an hour either side of high or low tide, but some locations are not suitable at certain tides, particularly low tides. Download a tide app.
4. Book a swim buddy – always take at least one person with you, even if they are just going to keep an eye on you from shore.
5. Valuables – plan how you will keep these safe. Some tips in our kit list below.
6. Tell someone remaining on shore where you are going and how long you will be – do this every time you leave the shore.
7. Remember to pack extra layers for afterwards – and a hot drink or soup

### **At the swim spot**

1. Check lifeguard information – it is recommended that you only swim at lifeguarded spots, that way you will always have safety cover, professionals to ask advice, and clear guidance about water conditions that day.
2. Assess conditions – are there any warnings? Is it safe for you, not any other swimmers, to get in, swim, and get out?
3. Beware of strong currents and underwater hazards – can you notice any? Can you ask another swimmer who has already been in?
4. Do not swim in fast flowing water – this is easiest to see in a river, but the sea can have fast currents too.
5. Decide on a route – it is always safest to swim parallel to shore and within designated swimming zones. If you are dipping, not swimming, instead decide how long you will stay in.
6. Make a plan to check in with each other at points along the route – this keeps the group together and helps everyone keep an eye on each other.
7. Get in slowly to avoid cold water shock – jumping or diving might be great craic but getting in slowly is the best option in cold water, particularly during winter and at new locations.

### **After swimming**

1. Take care exiting – put your goggles up, go slowly, get your land legs back.
2. Prioritise dressing – chit-chat and drink tea only when you are fully dressed.

3. Get moving – you will warm up quicker if you go for a brisk walk.
4. Do not drive/cycle before you have recovered – shivering, numb hands and feet, and ice cream head are not conducive to safe driving or cycling. Go for that walk or stick on the car heaters for a few minutes before you drive away.