BENEFITS OF SWIMMING

Swim Wales’ National Learn to Swim Manager shares the benefits of getting little ones in the water.

We all know that swimming is good for our physical health. It keeps our heart rate up, builds endurance and muscle strength. And it gets our little ones’ limbs moving, so that they have a little workout and they (and us) can get some much needed rest! Introducing your little one to the water can do wonders for their development:

Physical benefits:

- Being in the water helps your baby move independently before they can crawl or walk. It’s a safe place for them to explore their balance, meaning they’ll become a lot more coordinated out of the water too – so less bumps as they learn to stand on their own two feet!
- Cross-lateral movements (ones that cross the midline of the body) like reaching for a ball help with hand-eye coordination.
- Activities like chasing toys (or grasping hold of them to give them a chew) in the pool help with those finer motor skills; those smaller movements that occur in the wrists, hands, fingers, feet and toes.
- Swimming strengthens their heart and lungs as well as their arm, leg and neck muscles.
- Not all babies are greatest fan(s) of tummy time but in the water they can really develop their head control and are able to hold their head clear of the water’s surface.
- Bouncing and splashing in the water stimulates the vestibular system, aiding balance.
- Baby swimming is proven to help with little one’s eating and sleeping patterns.

Intellectual and social benefits:

- Research has indicated that baby swimming results in increased social, academic and personality development.
- Increases confidence. The thrill of grasping a new skill or achieving something they’ve been working on will give your little one the confidence to try and learn new things.
- The focused time in the water strengthens the bond between you and your baby, through holding them close and that skin-to-skin contact in the comforting warmth of the water. Your baby can smell you, feel your heartbeat, hear your breathing, which all helps calm and relax them (and you). This stimulation all reminds them of the security and safety of the womb. The warmth of the water is the perfect place to connect with your baby, away from the pressure of daily life. And, it’s also a place for you to have fun too.

Keeping them safe

Drowning is sadly one of the leading causes of death in children. There’s no better peace of mind than knowing that your little one can keep themselves safe both around and in the water. Introducing them to the water from birth will help prevent a fear developing later and make them feel confident should they ever be in an emergency situation. Lots of the skills that are taught in Learn to Swim Wales Bubbles and Splash programmes have multiple benefits, one of the most important of which are the early water competence skills including getting in and out of the water safely.
Swimming is one of the best loved family activities. It is the largest participation sport in the UK and many children say it is their favourite family pastime. Water is all inclusive. A place where anyone and everyone can flourish and have fun in a non-competitive environment. Swimming has a whole range of benefits for babies and toddlers with disabilities and learning difficulties. As well as the physical rewards swimming brings (things like the buoyancy in the water helping to reduce pressure on the bones and joints), it also helps improve their confidence. By focusing on the achievements of your little ones and not their limitations, their confidence will grow and grow.