Swimming: Good for weight loss? [1]

Dear Alice,

I've read that swimming may be a great exercise, but not for weight loss? Is it true?

?Fat swimmer

Answer

Dear Fat swimmer,

Swimming can be a wonderful form of exercise. It uses almost all the major muscle groups, and places a vigorous demand on your heart and lungs. It develops muscle strength and endurance, and improves posture and flexibility. The buoyancy factor makes it especially useful for people who are pregnant, have injuries such as leg or lower back problems, or who find high-impact exercise uncomfortable. It is a great sport for people of all ages and all proficiency levels. In order to lose weight, you might want to keep your swimming regime (speeding up your pace a little bit and increasing the length of your swimming sessions, if necessary), and supplement it with some good-paced, arm-swinging walks.

Research on swimming and weight loss, however, has produced inconsistent and contradictory results. Studies have found that swimmers lost weight (and body fat), gained a few pounds, and had no weight changes at all. In most of the cases where swimmers gained weight, it was lean body mass (muscle) and not fat.

One study found that people who swim in cold water may consume more calories post-workout than people who swim in warmer water. So if you're swimming primarily to lose weight, make sure that you aren't inadvertently consuming unneeded calories during post-workout snacks and meals. In addition, the number of calories you burn while swimming depends on how fast you go and for how long. At a slow pace, twenty laps may burn only fifty calories ? little more than simply staying afloat. On the other hand, a swimmer doing a brisk forward crawl will often burn as much as eleven calories per minute.

Swimming in a pool may be more conducive to the type of workout you're looking for than swimming at a beach or lake; pools often have lap swim hours, and you won't have to contend with rolling waves or boats. If you're in New York City, check out one of the free swimming pools [2] maintained by the city. For a guaranteed workout, you can also join up with a United States Masters Swimming [3] group near you.

In the end, weight loss is dependent on a simple formula; more calories are burned than are
consumed. No one exercise is necessarily better than another for weight loss; what matters is
that you eat a healthy, well balanced diet and remain regularly physically active. Swimming
can be a fun activity to add to your workout routine, whether you’re a novice or a master.
Enjoy!

Alice!
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