

Why Every Runner Should Run in the Water

By: Lisa Keller

Water has long been the retreat for injured runners. Swimming is one option if you have a running injury. If you are a triathlete, swimming is already part of your weekly training. If you are a runner, maybe swimming is a cross-training activity that you are already using. However, swimming is lacking in that it is not specific to running.

Specificity is the training principle that states in order to become better at a particular activity, you must perform (train) that activity. So, in order to become a better runner, you must run. In order to become a better swimmer, you must swim. This doesn't mean that performing other complimentary activities will not help your performance. It is well-accepted that conditioning your core, and particularly your hips, will help build a better more resilient foundation for running. But to only perform conditioning without running will not help you maximize your potential as a runner.

Before the first women's Olympic marathon in 1984, Joan Benoit Samuelson was recovering from unexpected knee surgery, unable to run on the ground. To maintain and hopefully improve her readiness for this historic race, she turned to water running or more specifically, deep-water running. Of course, she went on to win a gold medal, proving that deep-water running can be a very effective tool in maintaining and even improving running performance. Ever since, elite runners have recognized that deep-water running is a training mode they can use not only when they are injured but also to add an additional running workout without the associated risk of pounding the pavement.

The equipment needed for water running is pretty simple: a bathing suit and a water running belt. AquaJogger is the go-to brand for running belts and is inexpensive and available on Amazon with Prime shipping. Your technique in the water should closely follow your land technique; upright posture with a very slight forward lean from the ankles, arms at 90 degrees with emphasis placed on driving back not driving forward, ankles dorsi-flexed (no Barbie feet), and a stride that is more focused on faster turnover rather than longer strides. Avoid using a bicycle motion (up and down) and instead reach slightly out in front of your body to slightly behind your body before pulling your leg forward again.



Workouts should be time based intervals of varying intensities.

A typical workout might look like:

- 10:00 easy warm up
- 10:00 of 0:30 "on," 0:30 "off."
"On" is faster turnover and "off" is slower turnover.
- 10 x 2:00 fast, breathing hard, unable to talk, r 1:00 easy
- 5:00 cool down

Multisport Training of Alaska offers a water running class at Service High School pool at 9:30 a.m. on Tuesdays.

Once high school swim season is over in November, an evening class will be offered. Starting in January both the morning and the evening groups will move to Thursdays.

These groups are instructor led with a different workout every week. Not only do you get a great workout but you also get to share the fun with a group!

About the Author: Lisa Keller is the owner and coach at Multisport Training of Alaska. She offers swim training groups, run training groups, and water run training groups as well as individual coaching sessions in training plan development and technique work in swim, bike and run. She is a certified level one USA Triathlon coach, certified level one USA Track and Field coach, and certified level one Road Runners Club of America coach. She has been participating in triathlon for over 30 years and coaching for over 20 years.