



# Swimming challenge

Your swimming guide



**Alzheimer's  
Society**

Together we are help & hope  
for everyone living with dementia



# Hello, and welcome to the team!

Thank you so much for signing up to swim for Alzheimer's Society. We hope you're looking forward to the challenge ahead.

The big day is going to be tough and you'll certainly need to get your training in. But you needn't worry – we'll be here for you every step of the way and we'll make sure you triumphantly complete your challenge.

Our expert coaches have put together the following guide to help you along the way – you can use this as a general guide to your training.

It's important that you develop a plan that works for you and your schedule so it's easier to stick to.

If you have any questions, drop us an email to [events@alzheimers.org.uk](mailto:events@alzheimers.org.uk) and we'll be happy to help!

The Events Team



# Top tips

1

## Patience

Allow the time you need to improve slowly and ring-fence your training hours. Your body takes two to three weeks to absorb and adapt to training so be patient and you'll see your fitness progressing over a period of weeks. The early sessions might feel a bit tough and that's OK. Trust that consistency will pay off.

2

## Have a routine

Your body likes to work hard. Give it a routine and it will adapt and start to become fitter. Get used to being an athlete in training and being organised with sleep, food, fitting in the training, stretching and exercises. Plan each day and think ahead to fit it all in.

3

## Set small and achievable targets

Your training plan may contain many weeks of training. Set some realistic targets within this journey to your challenge day. These targets will motivate you and help you check your progress.

4

## Have a plan and training schedule

Have a look at our swimming training plan which will help guide you and provide structure. There will be days when you can't train due to work or tiredness, and this is totally normal but use the plan as a guide for what to aim for each week. It will give you structure and confidence.

5

## Be safe and build confidence

If you are new to swimming look to build confidence with pool-based training before you think about tackling your first open water swim. It takes time to build confidence in the water so ensure you are safe and sensible in the early weeks, and swim in monitored and controlled environments.





# Top tips

6

## Listen to your body

Your body is amazing. It tells you how it feels and what it needs. If you are sore, you might need some extra rest, stretch more, have a massage or train at an easier intensity. Eat well and check our nutrition tips to help you recover and replace lost energy. Follow the training plan but always listen to your body.

7

## Don't just swim

Try to use other forms of exercise to keep you strong and complement your swimming. You need to be strong so try to include circuit training in your weekly plan. Have a look at the exercises we detail within this guide which can be completed using your own body weight at home or in the park. A strong swimmer is less likely to tire and pick up injuries.

8

## Treat rest and nutrition seriously

Your body needs to recover from any training to become fitter and stronger. Clever athletes sleep up to eight to nine hours a night and eat carbohydrates, the correct levels

9

## Surround yourself with positive people

Training regularly can be tough and most of us find it easier if we train with friends or family. You can share your journey and help to keep each other motivated. Surround yourself with people who believe in you and who are interested in your journey and training. Positive people make you feel good and help you to train well.

10

## Keep it social and have fun

This is the most important part to being a successful swimmer and achieving your goal. Make it fun and share the journey with other people by hitting the pool or lake with friends or a local club or group. Swimming is a healthy choice, and we want you to train and have fun for many years!

of protein and plenty of fruit and vegetables. Check out the 'training triangle' on the next page for more on this. Treat rest and nutrition seriously while training and you will improve.

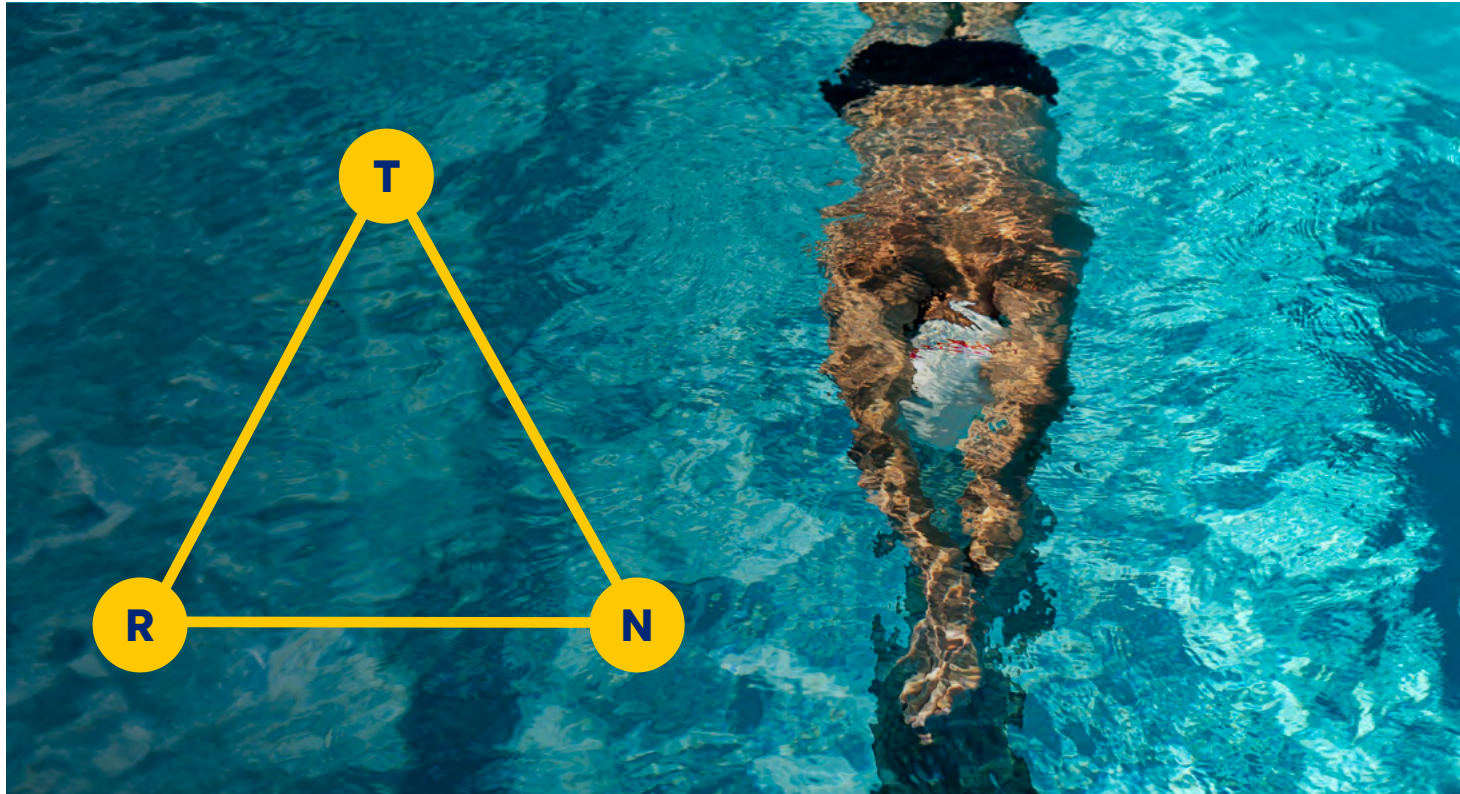


# The training triangle

## Keeping it all in balance

Performance training, and developing your fitness can seem complicated at times with lots of information and conflicting advice. In truth it can be kept pretty simple. The key is the training triangle you see to the right. Most of us think about the training sessions we need to do to become stronger, fitter or faster.

In reality you won't really make gains until the other two sides of the triangle – the nutrition, rest and recovery – are also considered and given as much focus. As you increase your training keep the triangle in balance by improving your nutrition. Listen to your body and respect its need to rest in order to improve. In the next few pages we cover each of these areas in turn.



## Training

Your swimming, cross training and conditioning. The early part of this guide will cover top training tips.

## Rest

Elite swimmers consider rest and recovery between sessions to be as critical to success as the training itself. Your body improves and progresses during these rest phases, rest days and as you sleep. We provide our top tips in the second part of this guide.

## Nutrition

Nutrition and hydration is a huge area. You need to fuel your training and recovery correctly to ensure you have the right macro and micro nutrients in the body to both have the energy to train hard, but also heal muscles and cells between sessions and keep your immune system, blood and bones strong.



# Stretching – a guide



## Glutes (maximus and minimus)

Sit with one leg out straight. Cross the other leg over, keeping your knee bent. To feel the stretch in your backside, hug your bent knee into your chest. Keep your back straight.



## Hamstring (belly or middle of)

Lay on your back. Keep one leg on the ground. Raise other leg holding the back of your calf. Bring your leg up to feel the stretch in the middle (or belly) of your hamstring. Use a rope or towel around your foot to help if you need to.



## Hamstring (origin point in buttocks and glutes)

Lay on your back. Pull one leg up to your chest and hug with both arms. Keep one leg straight on floor keeping your ankle flexed.



## Hamstring (insertion point – behind knee)

Repeat stretch number three but this time with a straight leg. Flex your ankle to feel the stretch behind your knee. Use a rope or towel around your foot to help if you need to.



## Lower back / IT band

Lay on your back. Bring one leg up to your chest and rotate, then lower your knee to the floor using your opposite arm as a weight. Keep one leg straight on the floor keeping your ankle flexed and keep your shoulders on the floor. Your other arm should be straight out at shoulder level.

# Stretching – a guide



## Groin stretch (adductors)

Keep your back straight, take your foot to one side and take your knee over but not further than your foot, transferring weight to the bent leg. Feel the stretch on the inner thigh of your straight leg.



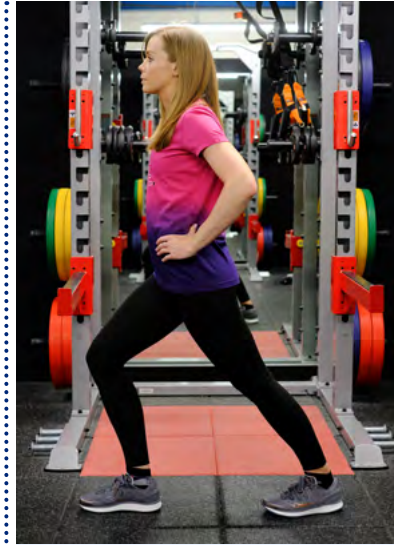
## Quads

This can also be done lying on your side in a straight line. Grasp the top of your ankle with the same side hand and bring your heel to your backside. Your hips should be pushed forward.



## Hip flexors

Kneel on one knee. Take the other leg forward with a large stride. Push hips downwards until a stretch is felt in the front of the hips/quads.



## Calf stretch (gastrocnemius)

Stand with your feet shoulders width apart. Take one foot forward and keep your feet parallel. Maintain the arch in your forward foot by pressing down with the toes to stop your foot rolling in. Straighten your back leg and feel the stretch in the top area of your calf.

## ► Remember

Don't forget to stretch both legs and repeat holding stretch for 40-45 seconds each time.

Never stretch cold muscles. The main benefit for endurance athletes is stretching after a session.

Unfortunately training makes your muscles shorter and tighter.

A good stretching routine will help to restore the muscle balance and allow you to be more flexible.

Do not underestimate the value of cross training, massage and stretching in your schedule.

## ► Upper body

Obviously a full set of upper body stretching and flexibility exercises is critical to releasing tightness that builds up when swimming. Look to complete the exercises in the linked video after each session or when you feel particularly tight or sore.

# Strength and conditioning



## The finger crusher

Get into a sit up position, find the natural arch in your back, place your hands under the arch, engage your lower abs and pelvic floor and push your spine down on to your hands, trying to crush your fingers into the ground.

**The next level:** Do small alternate leg lifts, while still keeping the pressure on your hands even.



## The plank

Lift your body up with your weight on your elbows and toes. Keep a straight line from your neck down through the legs to your ankles, engage all your core muscles by sucking your belly button up towards the ceiling. Keep your chest over your elbows. Hold for 30-60 secs.

**The next level:** Add in small alternate leg lifts. If this is too hard to begin with, you can avoid lower back pain by doing this with your knees on the ground.



## The side plank

Make a right angle with your supporting arm, your feet together and your stomach strong. Rise up, making sure you squeeze your glutes and push your pelvis through. Hold it for 30-60 seconds.

**The next level:** Lift your free arm into the air, keep your side really strong, and don't let your middle sag.



## The bridge

From the sit up position, keep your stomach strong, engage your glutes and push your hips up into a 'bridge' position. Your shoulders remain on the floor. Keep your hips high by squeezing your glute muscles.

**The next level:** Make this tougher by crossing your arms over your chest. When you feel confident with the standard bridge, try extending one leg at a time, trying to keep your hips high and level.



# Strength and conditioning



## Press up

Press-ups are a key exercise to improve your upper body strength. They work your pecs, triceps, abs and lower back. Place your hands shoulder and a half's width apart. Get into the plank position, lower your chest to the floor and push back up, not just pushing through your chest and arms, but also through your core.



## Split leg lunge

This works the leg muscles in a full chain movement. Point your toes forward, keep your back heel lifted and with hands on hips, lunge down, squeezing the glute of your rear leg. Make sure everything goes down in the centre and not forwards. Your knee should NOT be over the front of your toes, lunge forward with a bent back knee.

**The next level:** Once you've nailed this move, you can progress to driving the knee up from the lunge and stepping into a lunge on the other leg to form a walking lunge.



## One legged squat

This also works everything in a full chain movement. Stand on one leg, engage your glute on your standing leg, keep your hips facing forward and aligned with your knee and toe. Send your hips backwards whilst bending at the knee. You don't want your knee to roll inwards, so go down as far as you can without that happening before moving back to a tall standing position. Repeat 8-15 times before changing legs.

# What is cross-training?

There are two types of cross-training we all need to know about.

One is your conditioning work, which focuses on strengthening muscles but won't make you aerobically fitter. This could be Pilates, core conditioning, weights and floor work such as the plank or press-ups (see the page on strength and conditioning for more). It's very important and we need to be strong with a great posture to swim well.

The other is aerobic conditioning such as running, walking, cycling, aqua jogging (yes running in the pool with a buoyancy aid!), rowing and other machines. These exercises work the heart and muscles and will definitely keep you aerobically fit.

Your heart doesn't know the difference between going for a swimming or cross training.



## So why is cross training relevant?

You might not think of swimming as particularly injury prone, but like any activity as you increase your volumes and intensity of exercise so you can risk over doing it and picking up small niggles or soreness that can hold your training back.

It might also be that in the early weeks, until you start to develop your technique, you find it hard to sustain longer periods of swimming or pushing to high intensity. This is where you can work to improve your cardiovascular fitness by supporting your swimming with other non-pool or open water based exercises.



# What to do when life takes over

Something is always better than nothing

Keep 'ticking over' with easy paced, stress free swim sessions of 30 minutes. Once life returns to a level of normality so too can the more structured sessions.

## ► Get organised

Aim to predict your week and then place your sessions within it.

## ► Grab opportunities

Be spontaneous and always have your kit to hand.

## ► The Key elements

Identify the key elements of your training and make them the priority.

## ► Maximise your weekends

Use weekends for longer quality swim sessions or longer cross training sessions.

## ► Less travel more speed

Be creative and set your own sessions if you can't get to a local swim club or group.

## ► Be flexible and listen to your body

Be prepared to adapt.



However much we love and prioritise our swimming and make sacrifices in order to complete our sessions, there are times when life will be more important than training.

Review what's going in life and rationalise the situation. Step back and ask yourself whether this might be a period in life when

you simply can't fit in or complete as much training as you would like to. If the answer is yes then back off and accept it and work out what you realistically can fit in by using some of the tips in this training guide on how to maximise your time. There is nothing wrong with doing a little less for a while if it is essential to work, family and life harmony.

# Nutrition and hydration



Consider nutrition as one of the cornerstones of your training and the third area of our triangle. Balancing nutrition and hydration with your training and recovery is the key to improving. You cannot progress if you do not have the energy to train hard and you will not recover correctly if your diet is not giving you the nutrients you need to heal and refuel.

Here's some very basic tips – it's a huge topic so for more detailed advice get in touch with us.



## Never hungry, never over-full

Split those big main meals into five to six smaller meals, with mid-morning and mid-afternoon snacks to ensure blood sugar levels are balanced.

## Protein rich, carbohydrate clever

Protein from healthy sources of lean meats, fish, cheese, eggs, nuts and seeds as well as grains such as quinoa is vital to helping your muscles build and adapt to training. Carbohydrate is a vital source of energy for swimmers, particularly for the high intensity efforts. Look to draw carbohydrate from healthy, complex sources such as sweet potato, vegetables, and whole grains.

## Nutrient timing

Timing your meals and snacks is critical. If you go for longer than two to three hours without topping up your energy stores you risk hitting your next run deplete and low on energy. Latest science suggests that getting some form of carbohydrate and protein (such as a recovery shake) into the system within 5-10 minutes of a swim, and long training sessions, can significantly boost your recovery.

## Breakfast

For the majority of challenges you will be eating breakfast on the day of the event. You need to work out a breakfast that will work for you by trying different options out before key sessions. Whilst porridge is popular, the key is to look for high quality, slow release carbohydrates.

## Don't forget your micro-nutrients

It is easy to get caught up thinking about carbohydrate, protein and fat – it's what the media obsess about. We'd ask you though to spend more time focusing on getting enough vitamins and minerals into your diet to support your cellular repair, immune system and energy levels. Vitamin C, E, b12, calcium, magnesium, iron and zinc are all vital to the healthy functioning body of an endurance athlete. Look to draw them from natural sources where possible including multi-coloured fruit and vegetables which also contain high levels of anti-oxidants, leafy green veg such as kale, nuts and seeds and lean red meats and fish. Take care with alcohol and caffeine which can inhibit your body's ability to absorb these crucial nutrients.

## Healthy, rounded diet FIRST

All the supplements, protein shakes, gels and vitamin pills in the world won't help sort out a poor day-to-day diet. Focus on drawing most of what you need from a high quality, balanced diet.

## Hydration

Aim for minimum of two to three litres of fluid each day and consider using electrolyte tablets (such as High5 Zero). If you are well hydrated you don't need to drink bottles and bottles of water in your sessions and on event day.



# Thank you

We just wanted to take a minute to say a massive thanks for signing up to this epic challenge – we know you're going to absolutely smash it!

When your training gets tough, just remember that every swim is helping people affected by dementia. It's thanks to inspiring people like you that we are able to help those who need it, fund groundbreaking research and campaign to make dementia the priority it should be.

If you need anything at all, please do get in touch with the team on **events@alzheimers.org.uk**, and we'll be delighted to help you!

We'll be in touch again soon, but until then – keep swimming!

Best wishes,

The Events Team  
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**Alzheimer's  
Society**

Together we are help & hope  
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