

ASK THE EXPERTS

Sometimes you just have to ask for some help... Questions to our experts can be submitted by email to experts@h2openmagazine.com or posted on our [Facebook](#) page.

HOW CAN I CURE "THAMES TUMMY"?

I recently completed a 14km swim in the Thames which was a fantastic experience but I swallowed a lot more water than I've ever done on my usual shorter swims. The next day I came down with severe diarrhoea that lasted for seven days and couldn't be halted with Imodium. You hear a lot of stories about horrible diseases you can pick up in the water (particularly in rivers) and several suggested but unverified cures or preventative measures. In a previous issue you debunked the myth that drinking Coca Cola after swimming would help, so what can a poor swimmer do?

Reg, by email

Our high-performance swimming expert Steven Munatones says...

This is a huge subject that most people never even think about until they get sick. Swimmers can pick up a wide variety of illnesses through various means (water or airborne). However, resulting illnesses are especially prevalent if you swallow water in rivers where a variety of pollutants exist. These can come from boats, ships or residences, or industrial, agricultural and commercial

facilities along the river or any body of water. The risk is especially high after rainfall and even minute amounts can cause problems.

Fortunately, there are inoculations that open water swimmers can take with the consent of their doctors in order to minimise the risk of illness or infection. These can include hepatitis A, typhoid (occasionally combined with hepatitis A), hepatitis B, yellow fever, tetanus, diphtheria and polio (combined), and gamma globulin. Rifaximin is used on cruise ships and among travellers to treat diarrhoea caused by pathogenic E. coli. Swallowing these tablets the day before your competition can also be used as a precautionary measure.

When I was swimming around the world, I took these precautions and never once got sick. But I might have just been lucky. I also used mentholatum ointment on the insides of my nostrils when travelling, just to be extra safe. This is a prevention used by physicians and relief workers in disaster areas to lower the risk of airborne viruses. But, of course, you should first check with your physician before using any medication, and make sure to test rifaximin in practice so you do not experience any side effects on race day.

David Walliams also suffered from "Thames Tummy" during his swim



Photo © Rhian Ap Gruffydd

ACCLIMATISING TO COLD WATER INVOLVES VIRTUALLY NO PHYSIOLOGICAL ADAPTATION – IT IS PRIMARILY PSYCHOLOGICAL



Educating the body: just a case of mind over matter?

HOW CAN I ACCLIMATISE PROPERLY?

How much effect does body fat have on ability to swim (without a wetsuit) for lengths of time in cold water? Is it just a case of educating the body? What other factors can affect acclimatisation? I am currently building up (very) slowly trying to acclimatise for a two-hour channel relay qualifier with little existing body fat.

Lisa, by email

Our nutrition expert, Joel Enoch, says...

I have covered some of this in my article on page 32, but I would like to add some more information here. I haven't been able to find anything that suggests that a certain amount of body fat has a particular protective effect (i.e. 1kg gives you an extra hour in the water), and this is largely because everyone is different. These variations may be physiological, for example, a particular percentage of body fat seems to have less of a protective effect for women than for men, but also psychological, as some people report suffering from the cold despite no change in their core temperature.

This may be an important factor in acclimatisation. Greg Whyte (David Walliams' trainer), an expert in this field, has said, "Adapting or acclimatising to cold water involves virtually no physiological adaptation. It is primarily a psychological process." It could therefore be said, as you do, that "educating the body" is exactly what you need to do, rather than to pile on the pounds. That said, adding some body fat seems likely to help you deal with the cold.

A higher work rate will also keep the body warm, so train in a way that allows you to swim at a high intensity, as this will also help you to beat the cold. ▶▶

JOEL ENOCH

Our sports scientist and nutrition advisor
Formerly part of the Lucozade Sport Science Team, offering nutrition and sport science-related support to athletes and teams from grass roots to Olympians, Joel has a MSc in nutrition from Bristol University and is a qualified triathlon coach.



COLIN HILL

Our long-distance swimming expert
A passionate pillar of the open water swimming community, Colin Hill is the marathon swimming technical operations manager for London 2012 Olympics. He devised the Great Swim series and swam the Channel in 2009.



JACK ALLISON

Our wetsuits expert
A passionate swimmer and triathlete, Jack Allison founded Tri-Wetsuits (tri-wetsuits.co.uk) in 2010 to help people find the best wetsuit for their swimming style, body type and goals. He believes the right advice can make a huge difference.



STEVEN MUNATONES

Our high-performance swimming expert
Steven Munatones was the 1982 World Long-Distance Swimming Champion. He has coached the USA National Open Water Swimming Team, was the NBC swim commentator for the 2008 Olympics, and founded openwatersource.com.



PAUL HOBROUGH

Our sports injury rehabilitation expert
Ex-international kayaker Paul Hobrough is the founder of Physio & Therapy UK (physioandtherapy.co.uk), which specialises in sports injury treatment and injury prevention for athletes. His clients include people of all abilities, even Olympians!



MIDGIE THOMPSON

Our mental performance expert
The founder of Bright Futures Coaching (brightfuturescoaching.com), Midgie works to help individuals develop strategies to be the best they can be, while maintaining a healthy balance in sporting, professional and personal lives.



WHAT BRACE SHOULD I USE FOR TENDONITIS?

I have tendonitis in my right shoulder which is fine when I swim in a wetsuit as it acts like a brace around my shoulder. However, when I swim without a wetsuit it's really painful. I want to swim during the winter in a pool, but will need a shoulder brace. Anyone any experience with these? Tried resting (several months last winter) and as soon as I start pool swimming it sets it off again. I've done loads of wetsuit swimming since May and not a twinge, but I know as soon as I shed the wetsuit it'll set it off again, grrrrr!

Clare, via Facebook



Our sports injury and rehabilitation expert Paul Hobrough says...

This is a shoulder control issue, not a brace issue. What is required is some strengthening and muscle-timing work to address the cause of the pain. There are some great exercises that strengthen the rotator cuff, but I would begin with some scapular (shoulder blade) setting exercises.

These are small movements of the upper limbs while holding the scapular against the back – basically you need to pull your shoulders back a bit and then push them down a bit, as if attempting to put the shoulder blade down towards your back pocket.

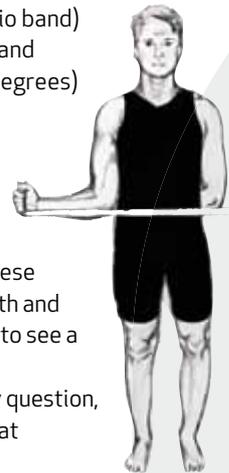
With the scapular now set, try and work on the muscles holding the lowest part of the shoulder blade in position while you do some simple tasks, like pressing your hands down onto a flat desk, or lifting small objects off the desk. Gradually build this up to larger movements such as a standing press up against a wall.

The rotator-cuff exercises are often performed with a piece of theraband (stretchy physio band) holding your elbows in tight to your side and rotating the forearm (elbow bent to 90 degrees) both outward and inward against the band's resistance.

Reps and sets will loosely be about 10-15 reps three times a day, but see a specialist for personalised advice and fine tuning of the techniques described. These exercises should develop both the strength and control of the shoulder and you will begin to see a reduction in shoulder pain quite quickly.

Any questions on this or any other injury question, please go to my online consultation page at

physioandtherapy.co.uk



HOW DO I TRAIN FOR A 10KM?

I'm training for a 10km swim, which I would like to complete comfortably rather than race. The furthest I've swum to date is 5km, once outside and once in the pool. Wetsuits are compulsory for this swim. Any hints and tips for training over the final four weeks would be most welcome.

Charlotte, via Facebook

Long-distance expert Colin Hill says...

I like your attitude about swimming – to complete the distance comfortably is a good aim to have. Long-distance swimming can mean different things to different people: some like to race or set fast times, others just like to complete the swim.

The first question to ask is about the wetsuit, are you used to wearing one? Swimming 10km in a wetsuit can cause some serious friction burns around the neck and underarm chaffing. Make sure, if you have to wear one, it fits well and you have suitable lube – there are specific wetsuit lubricants on the market that are neoprene-friendly, also some people choose to wear a rash vest under their wetsuit to further protect against rubs. Wetsuits also change your



A swimmer embarks on the Dorney lake 10km this June

HOW DO I COMPETE AGAINST MY FRIENDS?

I'm perfectly happy taking part in an event and competing against hundreds of strangers but I get horribly nervous when I have to race friends or training partners, especially when the result could go either way. In fact, I avoid such races or I start dreaming up excuses in advance as to why I won't beat my friends on that day, although I know that's self-reinforcing negative thinking. Any suggestions on how to handle these situations better?

Sarah, London

Mental preparation expert Midgie Thompson says...

You're certainly not alone here. Lots of people get nervous at the thought of competing against friends or training partners rather than strangers. They might worry that being beaten by them means that are not as good as them, but these kinds of thoughts can become distracting and do not help you perform at your best.

The difference between competing against strangers versus competing against friends or training partners is that we often care about what our friends and training partners think. Thoughts such as, "Will I be good enough?", "How will being better or worse than them affect our friendship?" or even, "What if I do not meet their expectations of how I should perform?"

The key is to focus on what we think of ourselves. Remind yourself of what you have done in training, place your attention on thoughts that are positive and uplifting and remind yourself that you are doing this for yourself.

MAKE SURE YOUR THOUGHTS ARE POSITIVE IMAGINE YOU'RE ALONE IN THE RACE, AS IF YOU'RE IN A BUBBLE.



Before the race, it can help to simply stay away from conversations with those friends and racing partners about the race in question. Talk about anything else but the race. Make sure the thoughts you think to yourself are positive and help boost you up before the race. During the race, imagine yourself alone in the race, as if you are in a bubble. That way, it is as if those friends and training partners are not even in your race with you.

Pay attention to what you are doing and focus your thoughts on your own efforts and what helps boost you, rather than distract you. When you notice you have negative thoughts, replace them with positive and uplifting thoughts, such as: "I will be good enough whatever the result", "Our friendship will still be strong regardless of the outcome," or, "I need to meet my own expectations, rather than someone else's."

Just remember, we all have good days and not-so-good days, so just go out there and do your best on the day.

body position in the water and your 'feel' for the water so you need to practise wearing one. On the plus side they also make most swimmers at least one minute faster per 1,500m, and you'll be warm.

Swimming 5km in training is a great start. For me, this is the key to building up for long swims; even though you may not be interested in what time you complete the swim, it is important to keep up both pool and outdoor swims. Pool swimming is still ideal for working on your pacing. Whereas swimming outdoors is more about acclimatisation and building up endurance.

In the pool I have two types of sessions to prepare for a swim – one is with a swimming club where there is a coach on the poolside and I'm often doing shorter, faster swimming. I recommend everyone finds a friendly Masters club to swim with. The other is just me, when I try to work on my pacing over longer distances. This helps to prevent you from going off too fast in a 10km race, or too slow and getting cold! Also, and I think this is important, when people say swimming long distances in a pool is 'boring' I think they mean it's mentally tough, and that is something you need to train yourself to do.

For example, in a pool, you can find out your average steady 1km pace. If it's 20 minutes, then try to hold this for five sets of 1km,

taking a short rest in between for a drink. Or you can mix it up, for each 1km: 1000m paddles, 500m kick, 1000m pull, 500m kick, 1000m swim. That's if you have time, although I normally only fit in one or two of these sessions a week.

When outdoors, you need to increase the amount of time in the water. If you know that you swim a steady 20 minutes per km, say, then a 10km swim would be 3hrs 20mins, so you need to be building up to swims of 3hrs. Although outdoor swims are important, keep the pool work going; Thomas Lurz (world open water champion) does almost all of his training in a pool.

Have your last long swim two weeks before the event day, then start to reduce your training. Eat plenty of carbs in the build-up to the swim, then you just want to make sure you keep yourself injury free, for example don't suddenly change your stroke or increase gym work or yoga in the last few weeks.

Finally, you should have tried all the kit that you are going to use at the event a few times, be organised, work out how are you getting there and what time you need to leave... you don't want to be stressed on the day after all your hard work getting yourself there. Good luck! ▶▶

BE A CHANNEL HERO...

Shelley Taylor-Smith is a seven-time open water swimming world champion, an English Channel swimmer and a mental training coach. For our special Channel swimming issue, she suggests six ways to change your thinking to help you conquer the Channel (or achieve other goals in your life)

▶▶ A Channel swimmer is a unique character with one focused goal – to achieve what less than 2,000 people have ever achieved. This requires a peculiar combination of mind and body strength. You'll enjoy long periods of solitude, you'll need to stay calm and in-control when weathering a rollercoaster ride of emotions and be confident in knowing that carrying a few extra kilos means you're in the best shape for success. You'll embrace your wobbly bits, as you know your body will help you pursue your love affair with cold water.

BUILD YOUR TEAM

Step one: who do you trust? It is vital to have the right support team, starting with a coach who will create a specific training programme, check on your progress and analyse your stroke technique.

You'll need a support crew to assist and look after you on long swims. They need to know you, how you swim and how to feed you. The person responsible for feeding you should have the experience to recognise key indicators of when things are going great and when not going as well as expected. I would advise against any family members joining your support crew, although you will need their agreement before embarking on months of training.

The most important person to trust is your boat captain or pilot. They have the experience and knowledge of the Channel tides and currents, and will want to see you succeed as much as you do.

TUNE OUT THE NOISE

Once you've chosen your team of trusted advisers, avoid listening to other people's opinions. Whether on feeding, nutritional supplements, cold water adaptation or training, people all have different and sometimes equally successful approaches but overloading yourself with conflicting information will cause confusion and upset your planning.

PLAN AHEAD

If you need accommodation in Dover, book it 12 months in advance. International swimmers should aim to arrive five to seven days before their tide (pilots sometimes ask swimmers to bring their swims forward if the forecast for the planned dates is poor). Set up a meeting with your pilot to discuss your needs and swim speed. Go through your English Channel plan and confirm the following: your support crew's arrival, hydration and feeding plan, food shopping and swimming training programme in the Dover Harbour, Folkestone Beach and/or Dover Leisure Centre (indoor 25m swimming pool). Settle in and acclimatise to both the weather and the open sea.

PREPARE FOR DELAYS

The weather delays many swims. If it happens, you need to remain calm and discuss your options with the boat skipper. Mother nature has a way of playing tricks on you and your mind. Prepare for every scenario that may challenge you. Ensure you have a back-up plan for all contingencies, including the weather, change of support crew and a non-start. Accept what is within your control and what isn't.

Be prepared to play the waiting game. The English Channel journey is the rollercoaster ride of your life. If your tide is blown out completely check availability with your skipper for an opening in the next set of tides, later in the year or another year. Alternatively, put your swimming fitness to use on another challenge somewhere else.

SECURE FUNDING

A Channel attempt is an expensive undertaking. Ensure you have sufficient funds to cover extending your accommodation and other costs while you wait for good weather. Prepare your boss, business partners and family for an unpredictable return date and for the possibility that you have invested all this time and money for a non-start.

JUST SWIM IT

The pilot says, "Let's go!" Now what? Don't panic. This is *your day* in the Channel. Gather everyone together. Go through every part of your plan (that was prepared before you came to Dover with your support crew and coach) and get everything ready. Rest your body and put yourself in the mindset for your role as an English Channel swimmer. Turn everything else over to your support crew and focus totally on what you came to do. ●

