Otter Aquatics Newsletter No 49. September 2019

Dear swimmers and others

Welcome to the September 2019 edition of the Otter Aquatics newsletter, your digest of all things to do with swimming: training tips, history, holidays, events here and overseas – and lots of other stuff.

Look inside to find:

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- Learn-to-swim instruction, stroke correction and swimfit coaching – all levels
- Open water swimming instruction and training
- Swimming as therapy
- Swimming-based tourism – domestic and international

Don't forget that our Sunday Adults Learn-to-Swim, Stroke Correction and Swimfit sessions return to Murrumba Downs on 1st September

From next Sunday, **1st September** – the first day of spring, our Learn-to-Swim, Stroke Correction and Swimfit sessions return to our usual summer venue of Murrumba Downs Aquatic Centre. The pool is at the corner of Ogg Road and Dohles Rocks Road Murrumba Downs and is, in our humble opinion, one of the nicest swimming pools in Brisbane.

Our normal arrangements apply: three one-hour sessions commencing at 9am. I assume that the winter swimmers will maintain their current time slots but please let me know if you would like to change. For new or returning summer swimmers, also please let me know which time slot you would like.

Video stroke analysis

Many of us would benefit from watching a video of our swimming technique. I can take such a video and give you my comments on your stroke. It is probably best if I use your phone so you can watch it whenever you like, but I can use my own phone or camera if you prefer and email you the file. I can also take underwater videos if you wish but these have proved to be not as useful in the past as shots taken from the pool deck.

Let me know if you would like a video taken.

International and domestic swimming holidays

I have the travel bug once again – or still - especially for another swimming holiday. Always on the lookout for new swimming tour venues in wonderful places in the world, or to repeat some of the successful tours of recent years, such as Sydney, Italy's Lake Orta or Lake Constance in Germany (and other countries), a few months ago I listed a few ideas on the Otter Aquatics website (http://www.otteraquatics.com.au/swim-tours.html).

Some of the new ideas I listed included swimming in the northern Finnish lakes (in summer of course) and a relay swim across the Straits of Gibraltar, but there are others which might be of interest. The company I booked with to swim the Hellespont (aka the Dardanelles) in 2014 are offering a trip to Sri Lanka. This trip would involve swimming in the mornings and sightseeing in the afternoons and is in support of Australian efforts to train local swimming instructors and lifeguards. If we can get enough takers, we could negotiate a special rate for our group. Let me know if you are interested. The other idea is to come up with something completely different … read on.

A possible new European swimming tour, the Triple Swiss: Switzerland's Lake Zürich, Lake Neuchâtel and Lake Leman/Geneva

The Triple Swiss is actually a Swiss culinary delicacy and involves three different cheeses but this article is about a swimming holiday which is likely to be somewhat lower on the cholesterol intake.

The broad intent would be to fly into **Zürich**, spend a few days there experiencing northern Swiss culture and swimming in wonderful Lake Zürich and the excitingly fast-flowing River Limmat. We would then travel by train to the thousand year old city of **Neuchâtel** and the lake of the same name, situated about half way between Zürich in the north of Switzerland and Geneva in the southwest. The northern German-speaking Swiss call it something else but, in Neuchâtel, *on parle français*, as it is at the northern end of French-speaking Switzerland. We then travel again by train to that international of all cities, **Geneva** (aka Genève or Genf), and its Lake Léman (but most English speakers call it Lake Geneva). We can go directly to Geneva by train or we can hug the lake shore calling in to such places as Montreux and Lausanne. Once we have 'done' Geneva, we could return to Oz or continue travelling elsewhere in Europe.

All three places have excellent swimming opportunities but they also excel in cycling and walking activities – either around the lakes or further afield. Swimming may be within the confines of a formal swimming area or anywhere else such as point-to-point swims or, with a bit more planning, more adventurous cross lake swims. Distances can vary depending on inclination but they would mostly be moderate, e.g. up to 2k (the cross lake swims are somewhat longer!).

The trip can be taken as a whole and consecutively, or you can take just one or two components. My current thinking is to spend five to seven days in each of the three locations.

At this stage, I am looking for general expressions of interest with perhaps some suggestions from you of places you would like to go, non-swimming things to do and options to include. When I have your input, I will put together a draft program, including tentative costs. Using past European trips as a guide, one week would likely cost between $2,500 and $3,000 (everywhere in Switzerland is expensive). I would need a minimum of six people to make it viable.

As for dates, the best time would be the Australian winter of 2020 which, of course, is the European summer. Many Europeans like to take their summer holidays over the month of August, so July might be the best time for us.

Please let me know soon-ish if you are interested as it is less than one year away and much planning needs to be done.

Zürich

Neuchâtel

Geneva

Swimmers' pesky ears: more on Swimmers' Ear

Why do those auditory attachments to the sides of our heads often cause us swimmers grief? What can or should we do about swimmer's ear, and what should we not? This article is based on one published recently in the British open water swimming magazine, *Outdoor Swimmer*, but

with significant medical inputs and corrections by Dr Noel Fraser. It is intended as an update to our previous one on swimmers' ear in May 2018.

Anatomy of the ear

Everyone's ear is unique in its shape, size, ear lobes, depth, angle and diameter of the ear canal, and amount of ear wax produced. The ear is a delicate organ and hearing is a vital sense. Correct care will help minimise ear problems.

The external ear canal has a thin, delicate skin lining with glands that produces ear wax known as *Cerumen*. As the wax gradually exits the external ear canal, it transports dead skin cells and foreign materials to the entrance of the ear canal so keeping the canal clear and clean. It protects the skin of the canal from water, physical damage, insects and, because the acidity of the wax, viruses, bacteria and fungi.

The ear drum is the physical structure that separates the outer/external ear from the middle ear. It prevents water and particulate matter entering the middle ear cavity. If the ear drum is damaged (perforated or burst), the fragile structures of the middle ear will be exposed to injury or infection. This will impair hearing and balance.

Water in the ear

In most cases, the natural structure of the ear and its ear wax will facilitate the exit of water from the ear. However, some features such as narrow ear canals or accumulated skin/ wax debris result in water becoming trapped. The trapped water dissolves the protective wax layer, softens and damages the skin barrier of the canal (maceration) and paves the way for painful fungal and bacterial infections.

Swimmer's Ear

The swimmer first notices an itch, irritation or mild soreness which could resolve spontaneously or progress to increasing soreness and then on to deep, sometimes severe, earache. At this stage swallowing and movement of the ear will be painful. Any persisting discomfort warrants medical review to ensure the canal and middle ear are intact. The clinical term for this type of ear infection, commonly referred to as Swimmers' Ear, is *Acute Otitis Externa (AOE)*. Some swimmers suffer this condition frequently, others never.

In Australia, over 500,000 people a year suffer the pain and experience the inconvenience and disruption to normal life that comes from an ear infection. It is a cost burden to the health system estimated at $70m per year, plus time off work, broken nights of sleep and two weeks out of the water while an infection resolves.

Some people incorrectly think that swimmers' ear is due to non-treated water. While swimming in non-treated water (e.g. ocean, fresh water rivers, etc) might be a higher risk, the key culprit is the retention and repeated exposure of water in the ear canal that erodes the protective wax layer. This even applies to fresh water exposure as in showering.

*Preventing Swimmers' Ear – **before** you swim*

Physical barriers such as swimming caps (if they cover the ear), ear plugs or silicone putty plugs attempt to prevent the water getting into the ear in the first place. As ears vary greatly, it is difficult to find an ear plug that fits comfortably and properly seals. Most people find them inadequate. In addition, there is always the likelihood of them not sealing and leaking water into the ear or becoming completely dislodged, fall out and are lost. An obvious drawback with ear plugs is that you cannot hear what is going on around you, either in or out of the water. In

addition, children in swimming classes will be distracted with the instructor's guidance going unheard and time, money and effort is lost. Of importance to surfers and paddle boarders, the insertion of ear plugs into the ear can impact balance.

*Preventing Swimmers' Ear – **after** you swim*
Simple things first. Just by tilting the head after swimming can help drain water from the canals. The use of a hair dryer on low heat held 30 cm from the ear has been recommended as a simple solution. For those susceptible to water related outer ear irritation or infection, ear drops can be used, but only **after** leaving the water, not before. Commonly used products, such as *Aquaear* and *Earclear*, consist of isopropyl alcohol and acetic acid. The alcohol promotes drying while the acetic acid restores the natural acidic environment that inhibits the growth of fungal and other invasive micro organisms. These drops can be used in normal ears to prevent Swimmers' Ear as well as to treat the condition in the early stages. As the condition advances, the canal becomes inflamed, very painful, swollen and narrowed. Time to seek medical assistance.

What not to do
The use of cotton buds in the ear to try to soak up retained water should be avoided at all costs because they can impact the ear wax in the ear; it is very easy to slip or push too far down and perforate your ear drum. Also, the fibres of the cotton can remain in the ear and rolling them around in the ear does cause abrasions of the ear canal lining providing an environment for an infection.

As the saying goes, the smallest thing you should put in your ear is your elbow!

Exercise boosts longevity in middle and old age, regardless of previous activity levels

A recent study has found that there are longevity benefits in middle to old age, regardless of previous activity levels. There are significant benefits with a moderate increase in physical activity but there are considerably greater benefits with more-than-moderate exercise. The study classified participants into three categories:

- **Low:** Those who didn't meet the World Health Organisation (WHO) minimum physical activity guidelines
- **Medium:** Those who did the equivalent of the WHO **minimum** physical activity guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week
- **High:** Those who met the WHO recommendations for **additional** health benefits of 300 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week, or equivalent

People who maintained a medium level of activity had a **28 per cent** lower risk of mortality compared with those who had low activity levels at both time points. Twenty-eight per cent is quite a big effect and is what makes public health researchers jump up and down with joy. It is slashing your mortality risk by more than a quarter. And there were increased benefits for those who didn't simply maintain, but increased, their activity levels over time.

Even if people were completely inactive when they started, if they manage to increase their activity level a little bit they can reap benefits.

Stroke tip of the month: more on freestyle breathing

(The wording of this article probably seems ridiculously contrived and awkward, but I can think of no other way to describe the breathing process. In any case, it becomes second nature with practice. For a discussion on whether to breathe bilaterally or unilaterally, see the August 2019 newsletter).

Breathing is a rather important activity of course, and not only for swimmers, but when and how to breathe in freestyle is perhaps the most difficult part of the stroke to perfect and the single most common issue that non-competent swimmers have difficulty with.

Breathing in freestyle swimming is exceptional among all types of physical exercise simply because, to be effective, it must be highly disciplined and highly regulated. That is because freestyle is done on the front (hence the term 'front crawl' commonly used in the UK for what should really be 'Australian Crawl', because it was developed here in the late 19th Century),with the head in the water, so inhalation can only be undertaken when the mouth and nose are moved out of the water. As obvious as this sounds, it is an action that takes the beginner some time to master. While exhalation can theoretically be done with the face out of the water, that will only upset the rhythm of the stroke (spending too long with your mouth and nose out of the water to effect both exhalation and inhalation) and waste valuable time. Remember that breathing, whether you breathe bilaterally or not, must fit in with the timing of the arm strokes, not the other way around. So we exhale with our face in the water (i.e. blowing bubbles), leaving the time with the mouth out of the water just for inhalation.

Remember the maxim: exhale completely every time your face is in the water, for the whole time your face is in the water and in as relaxed and smooth a manner as you can.

I often say to beginners that exhalation is more important as inhalation. Clearly we need both – we need the oxygen-rich air we get from inhalation to feed our muscles - but we can't take in a full inhalation if we do not first exhale fully. In other words, we need to completely empty our lungs with each exhalation in order to give space in our lungs for a full inhalation to take effect. If there is still air in our lungs after we have come to the end of the time allowed by our arm strokes for the exhalation phase of our breathing, we cannot take a full inhalation. There is a second reason which is to ensure that the CO_2 that is a normal part of respiration is expelled from the lungs. We inhale a minuscule amount of CO_2, but CO_2 makes up about 5% of our exhaled breath. If we hold our breath – and thereby prevent the CO_2 exiting, we risk becoming unconscious and if we are unconscious in the water, we drown.

Because the arm strokes are inextricably linked to breathing (we can only turn our head to the side when the arm on that side is pull rearwards), we should time our inhalation to coincide with our arm stroke. When should we commence inhaling? We should start the process of inhaling - the first part of which is to roll our head, together with our body – to the side. As soon as one

arm commences its passage to the rear (i.e. when we start the 'catch' component of the freestyle stroke), we should start to roll our head to the side. Then we should complete the exhalation phase as our mouth rises above the surface of the water and we commence inhaling immediately afterwards. Many swimmers leave commencing the inhalation process too late which results in a quick gulp of air, an incomplete or less-than-full, inhalation and a jerky stroke rhythm.

Should we exhale through our mouth or our nose or both? This is very much a matter of personal preference but most competent swimmers exhale through both mouth and nose – yes, it's possible, but it does need practice. There are at least a couple of reasons for this. The first is to stop water going up the nose or swallowing it - if air is coming out of our nose or mouth, water cannot come in. And, secondly, exhalation, particularly through the nose, is a tried and proven method of relaxing. But most people are unlikely to be able to exhale fully in the time available with just the nose, so we probably need to use mouth as well. So try it and see what works for you.

While all this may seem to be far too detailed to think of when we are swimming, do think about the process, but in a relaxed way. Anxiety and breathing do not go well together at all. Breathing should be relaxed, complete and, of course, a vital part of freestyle swimming.

Past newsletters

Don't forget, you can read all our past newsletters online. There is also a subject index covering the 49 issues of the newsletter produced over the past five years. Go to: http://www.otteraquatics.com.au/newletters.html).

Quiz of the month

Last newsletter's quiz question was: name two occasions when you may choose *not* to breathe bilaterally. Don Pezet ('Mr 180-man') was the winner with this correct response which earns him a free Sunday swimfit session:

One may choose not to breathe bi-laterally when either short on oxygen (so need to breathe every 2nd stroke); or when wind/waves from one direction make bi-lateral breathing too much of a chore.

This month's quiz question is: what are the two main reasons why we need to exhale fully with our head in the water before inhaling (this applies to freestyle as well as butterfly and competitive breaststroke)?

Quote of the month

'It is better to aspire to a goal and not attain it than to achieve it without effort'

Anon'

Thought of the month

'Life and its continuance is all about probabilities and relative risk'

Peter Doherty, Australian Nobel Laureate

Pic of the month

Switzerland's *Lac Neuchâtel* (about half way between Zürich and Geneva) – a possible future swimming holiday destination? Note: those snow-capped mountains are not photo shopped

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