

Beginner's Guide to Cold Water Swimming in Switzerland

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Are you feeling down, depressed, or simply cannot seem to get out of bed? Have you ever taken a cold shower and shook that feeling off? Cold water swimming might be the perfect remedy for you.

The benefits of cold water exposure have been documented by doctors and scientific studies. I am neither a doctor nor a scientist, but a mere mortal. In my blog post, "Have you considered cold water swimming in Switzerland?", I am letting you in on all the positive effects this hobby has had on my health and well-being.

This guide should help you get prepared to take the plunge. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me via newlyswissed.com.



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Prep work

- If you have medical conditions or worries, consult with your doctor.
- A cold shower work wonders for prep work. It gets your body accustomed to the cold. Once you can stay in the cold shower for 1 to 2 minutes, you are ready.
- Use rubber or neoprene shoes while swimming. I realize this is kind of cheating. But when your feet become numb, it is easy to step on sharp rocks or bump into things without realizing it. I once came out of the water with blood on my feet. I did not realize I had hit a rock while getting out of the water...
- Use a beanie to keep your head warm. When I first started, I used it a lot.
- Bring warm clothes to change into.
- Bring a towel. (Duh!)
- Bring shoes that you can easily slip into after the swim. Getting dressed will become the most difficult part of the cold water swims. I no longer dread the swim, I dread getting dressed.
- Bring hot tea or hot water to both drink and wash your hands and feet with.
- Be close to your home/office - a place to warm up quickly.
- Avoid alcohol consumption the day/night before and the day of your swim.

Optional:

- Bring a waterproof bag or floaty to assist you in the water.
 - Practice the Wim Hof Method.
 - Wear bright swimwear. In the River Aare, I wear a red beanie/cap. This way, if something goes wrong, people will hopefully find me more quickly. (It's a small surf competition trick I brought to Switzerland.)
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Before the swim

- Implement the Buddy System by swimming with a partner. Or have someone onshore watching.
- Better yet, swim with a group. There are many cold water swimming groups in Switzerland. Search them out, make friends, connect and have fun.
- Check the water temperature, the weather, etc. But don't get scared off when you see the temperatures.
- I wear my swim shorts under my pants so when I undress, it is instant. No second-guessing myself because it takes too long to undress and put my swim shorts on.

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- I like to do push-ups and then jog to the lake or river as a way of warming up.
- When undressing, I carefully place my clothes, socks, shoes in a way that makes it easier to get dress again.
- I also set up where I can sit. I can't stress how difficult it can be to get dressed.
- Put your mindset that you are swimming in the summer.

If you constantly tell yourself that you are cold and that you are actually swimming in the cold, it's going to be cold... You are close to done. Pack your bags and go home.

During the swim

- The first two minutes are the most painful and will feel the hardest. It's the showstopper that gets many people to quit.
- Take your time entering, but don't dip your toes to test the water. Power through and enter with the thought that there is no stopping you now. It's now or never.
- Avoid big movements in the beginning. You are not going to win a race.
- To get through the first two minutes, I use the Wim Hof breathing method. I stand still or float still and take 30 deep slow breaths, counting them on my fingers. On the 30th breath, I hold it for a couple of seconds, squeeze, and imagine the hot/warm air spreading across my body.
- Do two sets of these and before you know it, the two minutes have passed. I have tried other things like talking to people, counting the ducks, counting windows, etc. I found that counting my breaths is the easiest way to pass the time.
- After the initial two minutes, it can feel as if you are swimming in the summer. A couple of times it felt like I was in a hot tub - minus the bubbles. Your skin will tingle. Your tummy might get warm. It's great. Feel free to move around after two minutes.

If you did decide to have a couple of drinks before the swim, the two minutes will be three minutes - and feel harder. This is from personal experience.

My swimming group in Bern will swim one minute per degree Celsius. So, if the water temperature is 10°C, we would float down the River Aare for ten minutes. This year, I have been pushing myself with two minutes per degree Celsius.

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Gage your own body and do what feels most comfortable. In the beginning, do not worry about time. But I do stress getting past those initial two minutes. I see many swimmers dip and run. It is better than nothing, but I feel exponential benefits by staying in longer.

Optional advice 1: I like to scream, cheer and yell when entering the water, especially in the Aare. It ramps up the energy. It gets everyone excited. It gets people in a great state.

Optional advice 2: I started saying mantras to myself: "*Brosience – I feel like the cold can tap into your unconscious mind.*" I tell myself I can do all things. The universe is working in my favor. All those self-help motivational things. And sometimes, I go into Goggins mode: "Who's going to carry the boats?! You thought you had me! You don't know me mother#@\$\$%er!" It's a little extreme or hoopla, but try it!

After the swim

1. If you did your homework, all your clothes are laying in a way that you can dress quickly. Try tying your shoe when you can't feel your hands. Good luck.
2. Feel great! Feel proud!
3. Take your cold water **walk-of-fame** slowly.
4. Repeat.

Going at least once a week will get your body acclimated.

If you skip a week or two, it will be tough when you re-enter the water.

Try it once and try to get past two minutes. If you don't like it, quit.

If I can do it, I truly believe almost anyone can.

(As long as you have no medical conditions.)