

THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF OUTDOOR SWIMMING

# Swimmer



**MARATHON  
SWIMS**

# Editor's letter



**W**elcome to your Marathon Swims 'mini magazine' from Outdoor Swimmer – especially produced to celebrate your Marathons Swims Virtual Challenge. I have chosen a selection of articles from Outdoor Swimmer magazine to inspire you before, during and after your swim. Triple Olympian, Olympic open water silver medallist and double World Champion Keri-anne Payne gives her expert advice on how to prepare yourself for event day; sports

psychologist Helen Davis explains how mantras can help you get through these tough moments; Simon Griffiths shares some training sessions perfect to ease you back into the water after your big event; we look back at the 2019 Marathon Swims event to give you a taste of what is to come in 2021; and if you want to take your swimming outside this winter, swim coach Rowan Clarke explores the positive effects a cold water dip can have on our mental health.

Enjoy your 'mini magazine' and good luck in your Virtual Challenges!

Jonathan Cowie  
Editor

### Get in touch...

Email me at [editor@outdoorswimmer.com](mailto:editor@outdoorswimmer.com) or connect on social media. It's good to talk!

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# OUTDOOR Swimmer

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[mymagazinesub.co.uk/outdoor-swimmer](http://mymagazinesub.co.uk/outdoor-swimmer)

Outdoor Swimmer Magazine is published by ZG Publishing Ltd  
6 Maida Vale Business Centre, Mead Road  
Cheltenham, GL53 7ER

Distributed by Warners Group Publications plc, The Maltings, West Street, Bourne, Lincolnshire, PE10 9PH. Tel: 01778 395043

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**For advice on open water safety, please see:**  
[outdoorswimmer.com/open-water-safety](http://outdoorswimmer.com/open-water-safety)

# OUTDOOR Swimmer



Image: Yvette Helinski



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# PERFORMANCE PLANNING

Whether you are training for a one-mile open water swim or a 10k race, use Olympic open water swimming silver medallist **Keri-anne Payne's** performance planning technique to achieve your goals

**W**hen I was competing I would use a four-year performance plan to help me achieve my goal of winning an Olympic medal. You can use the same planning technique over a shorter time to help you achieve your swimming goals – whether that's a one-mile swim in open water or an Olympic medal! It isn't a training plan but a tool to help you achieve your future performance.

## Here's how I do it

Think about your goal and try to be as specific as possible with it. Imagine you are there on the starting line.

- When is it?
- What time of year is it?
- What kind of venue is it?
- What kind of course is it?
- Is it fresh or salty water?
- What's your ultimate goal time?
- What kit are you wearing?

Being as specific as possible will give you a better idea and understanding of what you need to do to achieve your goal. It also might help you to be a bit more realistic about the time you have left to train for it.

For example, your goal could be a one-mile skins swim in 32 minutes at the Outdoor Swimmer Henley

Swim Festival in July 2020. It will be summertime but could be raining. The course is point to point, swimming downstream in the river Thames.

Now you have a clear idea of what you want to achieve you can start to think about what you will need to prepare for in order to feel confident on the start line. Using the example above, things I will need to consider in my training might include:

- Is it always downstream?
- How much benefit will I/can I get?
- What is the water temperature likely to be?
- What time will my wave be?
- Will I have the sun in my eyes?
- What am I going to have to eat before I swim?
- How early do I need to be there?
- What swimsuit do I want to wear?
- Currently how far off my goal time am I?
- Have I ever swum in a river before?
- What's the furthest I've swam without stopping in a pool?

This section should be as detailed as you can possibly make it. Try thinking about each part of the day and all the kit you might need – down to the water bottle you will use on the day. Do some

research so you know exactly what you will do and how you will do it.

### Now ask yourself what will get in the way of training for your event?

- Home life
- Social life
- Work life
- Lack of motivation

### What can you do to minimise those things getting in the way?

**Home life** - get up earlier once a week to go swimming before your partner leaves for work to get at least one swim in a week.

**Social life** - get some of my friends involved in my challenge to socialise with them at the pool instead of the pub.

**Work** - have a proper weekly planning session on a Sunday to find a time to go swimming and take kit to work. Get a session at lunch time.

**Lack of motivation** - get people on board to help or swim for a charity cause to have a reason to get out of bed!

Now you know what your goal looks like and feels like, you've assessed what you might need to add into your training, have identified potential barriers that might get in your way and have a plan of action to prevent that happening you can focus on the actual training! 🏊‍♀️



BEING AS SPECIFIC AS POSSIBLE WILL GIVE YOU A BETTER IDEA AND UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT YOU NEED TO DO TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOAL

Keri-anne Payne is a double open water world champion, triple Olympian and Olympic silver medallist in the 10k open water marathon at the Beijing Olympics in 2008. She created the Straight-Line Swimming methodology with her husband, triple Olympian David Carry. [straightlineswimming.com](http://straightlineswimming.com)

Next month – How to plan your training to achieve your performance goals

# THE MAGIC OF MANTRAS

Think positive words. Repeat over and over. Achieve your swim goals.

## 'Say & Do' Psychology

Bite sized strategies to support open water swimmers

'Say & Do' Psychology is a quick introduction to a Sport Psychology technique. You 'say' what you want and then you 'do' an action as a result. The 'Say & Do' aim is to initiate a process of change in some way. This month's 'Say and Do' psychological technique is Mantras.

Watch a video on Mantras by Helen and Outdoor Swimmer here: [youtu.be/41vbTdN7jVY](https://youtu.be/41vbTdN7jVY)

Each month Sport Psychologist Helen Davis will give a quick introduction to a psychological tip to support open water swimmers supported by a video. Check out 'Say & Do' Psychology to get the best out of your swimming: [youtu.be/vHrA8tRJx7s](https://youtu.be/vHrA8tRJx7s)

### TECHNIQUE

A mantra is an idea, concentrated in a short word or phrase to focus your mind and help keep you goal focused. Whenever you are finding something difficult or wanting to change your thinking to be more helpful, repeating a mantra over and over again will immerse you in the idea, helping keep you focused. It works best when it is really personal to you and resonates with you in some way.

### WHY IS IT USEFUL FOR OPEN WATER SWIMMERS?

A mantra can be particularly useful for open water swimmers who swim long distances where there is a lot of time to think and talk yourself out of something, for example putting in required effort to complete a distance. Research evidence shows an increased perseverance in athletes who use mantras. A mantra can help you achieve your goal or help push you towards an action. It reminds you of what you want to achieve.

A mantra I use a lot is "If not now, when" – particularly useful at the end of a 100m freestyle race! OS editor Jonny uses "Strong and smooth" to keep going and keep form.

### WHEN CAN I USE IT?

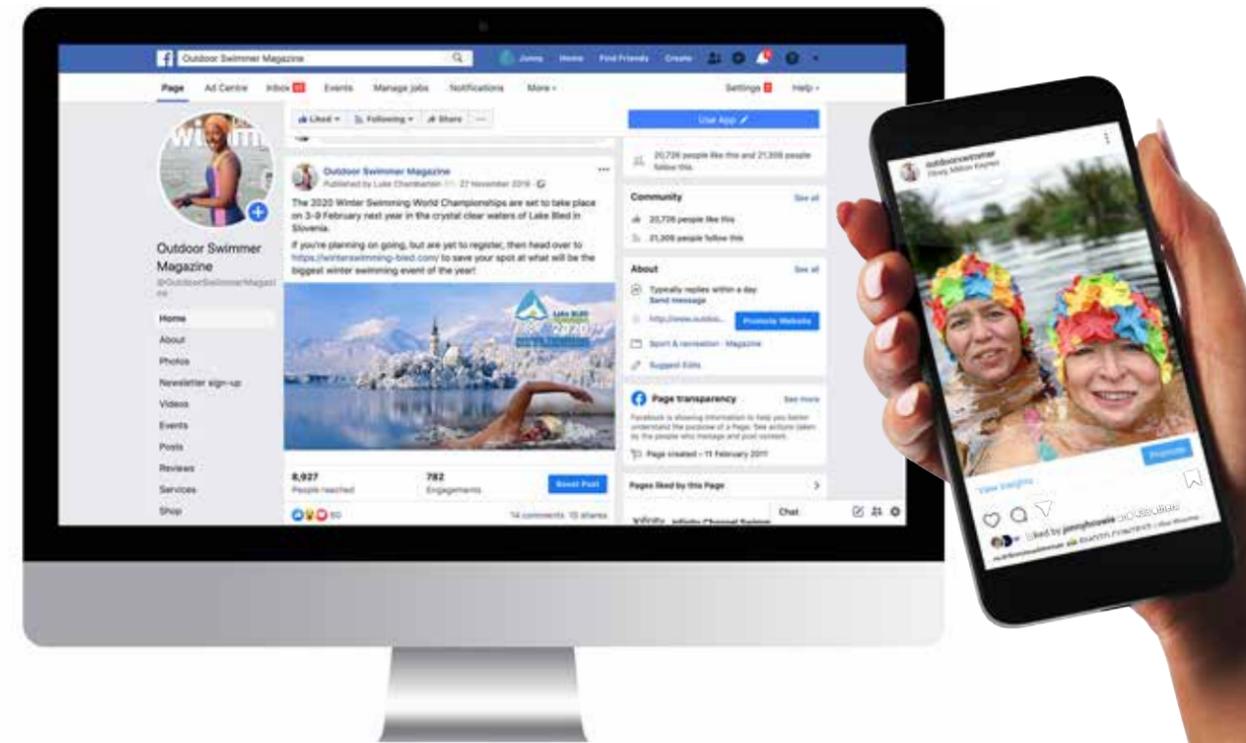
A mantra can be used before you enter the water, mid swim, when you are needing a boost or in training if you are finding something difficult.

### HOW DO I DO IT?

First, decide what you want to use your mantra for, for example it might be to keep you focused on a goal or for motivation. Next, write a list of words or short phrases that you would want someone to say to you if you were starting to struggle. Write down lots of ideas. Look over your list and choose the ones that resonate the most. Aim for your mantras to be short and snappy, memorable and positive 🙌

Helen Davis is a swimmer and chartered Sport Psychologist who works with individuals, teams and coaches on their sporting performance.

You can read more about Helen's work on her website [thinkbelieveperform.co.uk](http://thinkbelieveperform.co.uk) or follow her on social media:  
Twitter: @ThinkBPerform  
Instagram: thinkbelieveperform  
Facebook: thinkbelieveperform



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# POST EVENT TRAINING

Your big event is done but don't hang up your hat and goggles, says **Simon Griffiths**

**T**raining plans are designed to prepare you to take on challenges. But what do you do after you've completed that challenge? Celebrate and rest, obviously, but is that it? Should you just let all that hard earned fitness slip away or should you try to hang on to it?

After completing a tough event, it's likely you will be both physically and mentally exhausted, even if you feel euphoric and invincible. Your first job is to do an inventory of how you feel, both physically and mentally. Give yourself a couple of days to calm down and reflect before signing up to your next challenge. If you do any swimming, keep it short and unstructured – some fun, wild swimming dips would be ideal.

Depending on how you feel, allow yourself up to two weeks before returning to any structured training. Swimming is a funny sport and you lose speed, endurance and feel for the water very quickly if you don't swim but you also need to allow time for recovery to avoid injury or burnout. It's a difficult balance to achieve and everyone is different so trust your instincts but don't ignore friends or your coach if they signal they think you're doing too much too soon.

When you return to training, don't be surprised or worried if swimming feels a little unusual and your times aren't what they were before your big swim. This is normal. Relax, enjoy

## Training

### SESSION 1

#### WARM UP

400m easy pace, alternating 1 length FC and 1 length BA – relax, stretch out and focus on technique.

**8 x 25m FC + 10s rest.**

**Start each length slowly and accelerate to finish strong (but not full out sprint)**

#### MAIN SET

8 x 50m FC + 10s rest. Steady pace. Relax and focus on a different technique point for each 50m. For example:

- 1 & 5: Head position, and keeping one eye under water while breathing
- 2 & 6: Hand entry (hand enters slightly wide of the shoulder and travels forward in a straight line – doesn't cross in front of the head or swing out wide)
- 3 & 7: Hand path under the body
- 4 & 8: Straight legs (i.e. kick from the hips, not by bending the knees)

**4 x 25m BA + 10s rest. Relax!**

4 x 100m FC + 15s rest. Steady pace. Try breathing every 5 or 7 strokes.

**4 x 25m BS + 10s rest.**

**Try to do as few strokes as possible per length.**

2 x 200m FC + 30s. Steady swim,

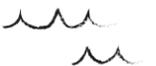
4 x 25m BA or BS + 30 rest. Sprints.

#### COOL DOWN

200m FC or BA. Easy. Stretch out. Total: 2400m



AFTER COMPLETING A TOUGH EVENT, IT'S LIKELY YOU WILL BE BOTH PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY EXHAUSTED, EVEN IF YOU FEEL EUPHORIC AND INVINCIBLE



being in the water and focus on technique – your speed and feel for the water will soon return.

Try out these light training sessions to ease yourself back into things.

Also, even if you haven't taken

on any major challenge this year, remember it's good to ease back and take stock occasionally – and at the end of a summer of open water racing is a good time. These sessions are good to get you restarted after a short break

# Marathon Swims – 10km in the pool

The phrase “don’t knock it until you’ve tried it” springs to mind with Marathon Swims’ 10km pool swim concept, says **Simon Griffiths**

**D**iccon Loy, the brains behind Marathon Swims, is on to something with the concept he’s developed for a 10km pool swim. It does it in an innovative way that’s surprisingly enjoyable to swim.

Here’s how it works. Starting in the bottom right hand corner of the pool, you swim two lengths in lane 1, always keeping to the right. At the end of the second length, duck under the lane rope and do the same thing in lane 2. Repeat until you’ve done two lengths in each lane, bringing you to the bottom left end of the pool, for a total of 20 lengths or 1km. Exit the pool, walk or jog back to the start, repeat.

I admit, I was sceptical before I tried it. The few 10km swims I’ve done in the pool have been of the 100 x 100m variety (and once 25 x 400m) in a single lane, and they’ve been mentally and physically tough. The idea of doing 10 x 1km was therefore not appealing. The lane changing struck me as an unnecessary complication and the getting-out-and-running-back-to-the-start as plain wrong.

Now having taken part in the event for the first time, I’ve changed my mind. The formula works well. Firstly, traversing across the pool with each 100m gives you a marker of your

progress, with the bonus that there is no need to count lengths. Secondly, rather than being stuck in a lane with the same people for several hours and risk conflict by repeatedly overtaking or being overtaken, you rarely encounter anyone more than once or twice. Thirdly, exiting the water after each kilometre is a good chance to stretch your legs, grab something to eat and check your progress on the live reporting screens.

## RECORD BREAKERS

The event has grown quickly and sold out for two full days at the London Aquatics Centre. This year, Oliver Wilkinson became the first person to break the 2:20 barrier with a sharp 2:19:49 swim, while previous record holder Hayley Moore beat her last-year’s time by three minutes to finish first woman in 2:25:03. In total, 233 people completed the 10km. The median time was just under four hours and the longest was a determined 8:14.22. Marathon Swims has clearly attracted a wide range of swimmers. I heard of one participant who only learnt



to swim in June and completed the 1km swim. There are also options for 5km and team 10km challenges.

## BENCHMARK SWIM

For regular long-distance open water swimmers, Marathon Swims offers an opportunity to check your speed and fitness. Think of it as a warm, early winter benchmark training swim to see where you are after a summer outdoors. If you’re new to outdoor swimming and

thinking of trying out some longer open water swims in the future, this is a good opportunity

to see how you cope with the distance and experiment with nutrition. The original Marathon Swims event takes place each year in November at the London

Aquatics Centre, home of the 2012 Olympics. In summer 2019, a second event took place at Sandford Lido in Cheltenham and more venues are planned for next year 🏊

## TOP TIPS

- HAVE FUN** – you are swimming in the Olympic pool! Enjoy!
- READ** the event instructions and arrive early so you’re not rushing.
- PACING** – a marathon swim is all about consistency. Find your happy steady pace and keep with it. To maintain consistent technique work through a checklist of key elements, eg. head position, hand entry, catch, etc. so discrepancies don’t creep in as you get tired.
- MIND GAMES** – tactics to avoid boredom and keep focussed, eg. approach the swim in bite size chunks; give a theme to each kilometre – strong, powerful, peaceful; turn your internal juke box on and select something that helps you maintain a good stroke cadence.
- JUST BREATHE** – it can be easy to get flustered by other swimmers. When your breathing is relaxed, the body follows.
- 200 LENGTHS** means 200 opportunities to push and glide effortlessly across a decent fraction of each length and conserve energy.
- KIT** – event day is not the day to try out new kit. Know what you like and is comfortable. The pool is very warm, but you might want a towel or hoodie pool side.
- HYDRATION** and nutrition – use the fuel you are used to (eg. water, banana) and label it so you can easily identify it poolside.
- STRETCH** – before, during and after, to enhance performance and prevent injury.
- IN TRAINING** and post event, rest is absolutely key. You’re a marathon swimmer and it will take some time to restore your energy levels. There can also be an emotional low after realising a big goal. Get some social events in the diary, sleep, eat good food, and start researching your next adventure! [marathonswims.com](http://marathonswims.com)



# SWIM POSITIVE



Winter swimming at Hampstead Ponds



We're awash with anecdotal evidence that outdoor swimming helps promote good

mental health. As temperatures drop, Rowan Clarke explores the feel-good factor around taking a dip in cold water

It's easy to count the physical benefits of swimming. But arriving at outdoor venues to improve fitness, train for events, or enjoy non-weight bearing exercise, outdoor swimmers have discovered something more – incredible benefits for mental health.

As word spreads about these benefits, more and more people take to the water during the colder months to improve their wellbeing. And while the anecdotal evidence is compelling, science is really only just starting to unpick the physiological reasons why a chilly dip is so curative.

#### GROUP THERAPY

Standing on the edge of a tidal pool in North Somerset with a group of people of all ages, sexes, sizes, shapes, backgrounds and abilities, the sense of camaraderie is palpable. Led by psychologist and life coach Claire Paul, this group has gathered at Clevedon Marine Lake every Tuesday morning for a year. Unlike many swimming groups, its focus is wellbeing rather than swimming technique.

Claire was inspired by a 2016 BBC documentary that followed a young woman with depression who replaced her drugs routine with cold-water swims as her main form of treatment. "This was what inspired me to start the informal social open water swim, coupled with my love of outdoor swimming and working with people who have depression and all that goes with it," says Claire.

From a social point of view, the group's camaraderie is exactly the

kind of therapy doctors recommend for conditions like depression and anxiety. This, coupled with exercise and being outdoors, is self-care that has been prescribed for many years.

"I hoped to motivate people, provide them with the moral support to continue open water swimming all year and experience its amazing benefits," says Claire. "I also hoped that it may provide a confidence boost and help anyone who wanted to overcome depression and anxiety."

#### BLUE VIEWS

Exercise makes us happy. When you increase your heart rate by exercising, your brain recognises it as stress. Your body responds by releasing a protein called Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF), which helps protect and repair your memory neurons. At the same time, you release endorphins which block the discomfort of exercise and make you feel euphoric.

Exercising outdoors is even more effective. In 2015, researchers studied the effect of exercise with simulated views of natural environments. A group of post-menopausal women were asked to do 15 minutes on an exercise bike while facing either a blank wall (control) or watching project videos of urban (grey), countryside (green) or coast (blue) environments. The test showed the most positive psychological results in

SWIMMING OUTDOORS HAS A PROFOUND EFFECT ON OUR SENSE OF WELLBEING

the women who exercised in front of the blue video.

Bring together those three elements, camaraderie, exercise and blue views, and you start to understand why swimming outdoors has such a profound effect on our sense of wellbeing. But more recent research is starting to expand theories there are also physiological benefits from the cold water itself.

Clevedon swimmer, Pete White, has

been swimming throughout winter for a number of years. "I have always been a very sociable person and have been keen to take part in group sports," he says. "Whilst social interaction and walking, running, cycling, climbing etc.

supported moderate relief from depression and anxiety, nothing has provided the benefits that cold water has."

#### COLD WATER ADAPTATION

In 2018, the British Medical Journal published a case report about the theories around cold water adaptation as a treatment for depression. Co-authored by Dr Mark Harper, a cold-water swimmer behind the BBC documentary, the report looks at the physical responses to swimming in cold water.

The theory is around our stress response and inflammation. Immersing yourself in cold water puts your body into fight or flight mode. Starting with the cold-water shock response, dipping into cold water puts your body under stress. As you repeat this experience, you diminish this stress response. And having a better rein on your stress response means being able to better cope with life's many minor irritations that add up to chronic stress.

"Our bodies don't differentiate between types of stress," says Mark. "Every day low-level stresses make things worse, but the significant physical stress of getting into cold water attenuates our stress response as we adapt to it."



Pete with the South West Seals

*Our Ed, Jonny, enjoys the positive effects of coldwater swimming!*

← This diminished stress response is about activating the parasympathetic nervous system. Known as the ‘rest and digest’ system, the parasympathetic nervous system is responsible for slowing your heart rate and increasing intestinal and gland activity.

A key part of this system is the vagus nerve, which connects your brain to organs including your heart and lungs. It’s the tone of this vagus nerve that relates to mental health; if you have high vagal tone, your parasympathetic nervous system is working and that means that your body can relax faster after stress. One way in which you can stimulate the vagus nerve and increase vagal tone is through cold water adaption. And this has been shown to help a range of mental health and nervous conditions from depression and anxiety to chronic fatigue, tinnitus and Alzheimer’s.

We also have an inflammatory response to threat, including stress and infections. “Inflammation and depression are linked,” says Mark. “Anti-inflammatory drugs like ibuprofen have an effect on depression. But all drugs have side-effects. And we know that cold water adaptation reduces levels of inflammation.”

While some therapists suggest cold showers or immersing your face in cold water, it’s becoming clear that these techniques aren’t a patch on outdoor swimming. “Cold water swimming is a holistic therapy,” says Mark. “Exercise, being in nature, community – the cold water is an additional effect.”

**LOOKING FORWARD TO WINTER**

“I had been diagnosed with depression and anxiety at the age of 17,” says Pete, who is looking forward



**COLD SHOWERS OR IMMERSING YOUR FACE IN COLD WATER AREN'T A PATCH ON OUTDOOR SWIMMING**

swimming through another winter. “I took a cocktail of medication to be functional and mixed social activity and physical activity where I could.

However, cold water swimming really does appear to kick off a physiological reaction that in turn must affect chemical, hormones in the body and brain that led to me being able to be drug free at the age of 33. I’m currently dead excited about the temperature dropping – nuts, hey?”

As temperatures drop, Mark and his team will be looking for people who have used cold water swimming to help treat any condition or symptoms to help with next stage of his study. While water at 20 degrees Celsius certainly gives us many wonderful benefits, the plummeting temperatures have a much stronger effect. 🌊

**Thinking about trying cold water swimming?**  
Follow open water coach Rowan’s tips:

Join a local group for safety and that all-important camaraderie. Start now and dip at least once a week to stay acclimatised

**Get in quickly – it takes 90-120 seconds for the initial cold-water shock to wear off**

Never jump in – hyperventilating underwater is bad!

**Gently exhale as you enter the water**

Listen to your body and don’t stay in for too long

**Bring layers, a warm drink and a hat for afterwards**

