

Water Safety in Open Water

Around 85% of accidental drownings occur at open water sites. Many of these drownings occur due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of open water safety. The basic principles of open water safety, combined with knowledge and understanding of the hazards, can increase enjoyment of open water and significantly reduce the number of incidents that occur each year.

Open water swimming takes place in outdoor bodies of water such as, lakes, rivers, canals, reservoirs and quarries. Flat or still water is defined as water that has minimal movement, except for locally induced wind currents. Examples include lakes, lochs, ponds, quarry pool and reservoirs. Flat water found in lakes and lochs is the safest open water natural environment. However, water is by its very nature hazardous and care must always be taken when being near water margins.

Lakes and Lochs can vary considerably in size, but they are commonly large expanses of deep, cold water, formed when natural basins fill with water flowing from rivers and streams or from the water table.

Open Water Safety Tips

The conditions at **open water sites** change constantly:

- Always look for warning and guidance signs
- Swim parallel with the shore, not away from it
- Avoid drifting in the currents
- Do not enter fast flowing water
- Be aware of **underwater hazards**
- Get out of the water as soon as you start to feel cold
- Never enter the water after consuming alcohol
- Only enter the water in areas with adequate supervision and rescue cover
- Always wear a buoyancy aid or lifejacket for activities on the water or at the water's edge (such as when boating or fishing)
- Always take someone with you when you go into or near water. If something goes wrong they will be able to get help

- If someone is in difficulty in the water shout reassurance to them and shout for help and call the emergency services (call 999 or 112)
- Without endangering yourself see if you can reach out to them with a stick, pole or item of clothing – lie down to ensure you stay secure. Alternatively throw something buoyant to them such as a ring buoy or anything that will float

Did you know that those that walk or run near water are at potential risk, as this group accounts for the largest proportion of UK drownings.

Top 5 Open Water Safety Tips:

- Be aware of your surroundings and take notice of any warning signs when out and about
- When running or walking next to open water, stay well clear of bank edges. They are often unstable and this can create slips, trips and falls
- Try to always walk or run with a friend
- Always let someone know where you're going – take your mobile phone
- Learn swimming and lifesaving skills

In addition to the above tips, ensure you and your family know the SAFE code:

SPOT

Spot the dangers

ADVICE

Follow safety signs and advice

FRIEND

Stay close to a friend or family member

EMERGENCY

Shout for help and know the emergency number to call in the country you're in