

Wild Swimming Safety at a glance

for river and lake swimmers

Before entering any open water it is advisable to carry out your own risk assessment of the site. This list is provided to help you do this. However, it cannot be comprehensive. Perhaps even more important is local knowledge. Talk to a local swimmer, or better still swim with one.

Accidents spoil the fun of wild swimming.

1. Make sure you can get out before you get in.



2. "He never came up." Is the water cold? If so, and you jump in, you may involuntarily breath in underwater and drown. Safer to walk in from shallows.

3. "He got into difficulties." Considering swimming across a river or lake? Stealth chilling or a faulty estimate of your ability, the distance & the conditions could cost you your life. Safer to swim along the shore.

4. Some weeds can trap you. Avoid, but if caught, swim downstream with arms only.

5. Is the river in spate? Brown water or sticks floating down are a sign of this. If so, do not swim then or for a few days afterwards to allow pollution to run away.

7. Does the bed shelve abruptly, or is it unstable? This could be fatal for weak or non swimmers.

8 "He broke his neck." Check for obstructions before jumping in and especially diving.

9. Will you be swimming below a weir or waterfall where there is a midstream reverse surface current? Most likely you cannot escape. With an undercut scoured cavity you are even more surely doomed.

10. Horizontal rotation however simply takes you round to the strong current in the middle, and then downstream. Do you want this?

11. Is there a sluice or natural "siphon" (usually upstream of a rock formation and difficult or impossible to see)? Check with canoe sites for the location of "siphons".

12. Do you have a cut? Worse still a cut to the face? Weil's Disease. (Low but serious risk in UK, much more so abroad, especially France.) Consider not swimming or wear waterproof plaster. Be aware of the symptoms: flu like with a sudden onset after 7 - 26 days. Get tested immediately.

13. Can you swim faster than the current? If not, you may be carried to places where you do not want to be, or become entrapped.

14. Do you get Cramp? Add buoyancy with a 5mm wetsuit, keep in your depth, take stretching exercises beforehand or drink tonic water.

15. Contact the Environment Agency to find out the rating for the place you intend to swim. Graded: A(best) to E(worst). Avoid swimming after severe rainfall as land "wash off" can be polluted.

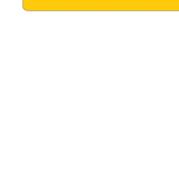
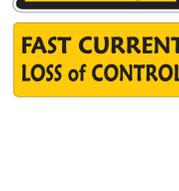
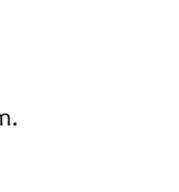
16. Is there a foul smelling blue-green scum? Greater risk in stagnant or slow moving water, especially lakes and canals.

17. Watch out for boats. Using a snorkel increases the risk. Powered craft (especially those propellers) increase the damage. Have a friend look out and wear a conspicuous hat.

18. Bombers. Avoid hazard areas. If you jump in, swim away from any hazard area before surfacing. Wear a conspicuous hat. Be aware.

19. Youths & young men are at by far the greatest risk . Calm down or opt for life changing surgery!

20. Quicksand? Keep moving— forwards or backwards. Don't get stuck. Do not stand and sink. Lie down and roll out of it. Well, this sounds a bit messy, but that's what the Queen's Guide to the Sands (Morecambe Bay) says and it assumes you value your life above a bill for laundering your clothes.



Accidents are so boring