



Greetings!

We hope your 2023 is off to a great start! COMSA swimmers have competed in 2 meets so far this calendar year and there are several more to come! Check for more details below on all upcoming meets.

The short course yards' season would not be complete without the COMSA State Meet, which is scheduled for March 31 to April 2. COMSA is looking to clubs, teams, workout groups and swimmers to help with timing again this year. It's a great opportunity to give back to our swimming community and have "the best seat in the house!" More details on the "Call for Timers" below.

Happy Swimming!
Katie Glenn
COMSA Secretary

Upcoming Events

CU Buff Spring Invitational

- Sunday, February 19th
- Veterans Memorial Aquatic Center (VMAC) Thornton
- Registration closes February 15th
- [Meet Information](#)

Foothills Masters Fun Meet

- Sunday, March 5th
- The Ridge: 6613 S Ward St, Littleton, CO 80127
- Registration opens Feb. 2nd and closes March 2nd
- [Meet Registration and Information](#)

FAST Masters Meet

- Sunday, March 12th (warm up 8:00am / meet starts 9:00am)
- Ft. Collins
- Registration is open and closes March 6th
- [Meet Registration and Information](#)

COMSA State Meet

- March 31-April 2nd
- VMAC, Thornton
- More information coming soon so watch www.comsa.org for more details!

USMS Short Course Nationals

- April 27-30th
- Irvine, California
- [Meet Registration and Information](#)

For a listing of events around the country, you can always check out USMS's [Calendar of Events](#).

CALL FOR TIMERS!

Timer Reward System/Back-Up Timers Required For COMSA State Meet

COMSA will utilize the
successful Timer Reward

System implemented in 2022, to ensure that the 2023 COMSA State Meet is run in compliance with USMS sanction requirements (two back-up, hand-held timers, are required per lane for all lanes for all events). Swimmers, family members, friends, fans, and spectators will be enlisted to ensure timing equality for all swimmers.



A financial reward based on time and participation, will be distributed to each workout group at the end of the meet. Workout group timing suggestions will be published with the Psyche Sheet based on workout group size. Workout groups are encouraged to adopt one hour blocks of time increments (two, three, or maybe four continuous hours) and groups of lanes (two or three lanes side-by-side) in advance to streamline the process. On-deck timer training will be provided as needed. On-deck adjustments will be made as necessary, as the meet progresses.

Please contact 2023 State Meet Timer Facilitator Hugh Duffy: duffyfamily7@comcast.net or [303-981-5120](tel:303-981-5120) to volunteer as a Leader (swimmers, family, friends, fans and spectators welcome!) for your Team or Workout Group, or for more information.

The Mind-Boosting Benefits of Winter Swimming

Why converts to this trending sport say it makes them feel ‘alive’

If getting in a pool at a normal temperature is hard enough in the morning, then how do you explain the growing legions of people getting into ice water in the winter—sometimes after chopping a hole in a lake or river with an axe—and loving it?

Over the past few years, winter swimming has become suddenly hot. Many people do it in cold water in their own communities (sans wetsuit is most common), and some are committed enough to travel to places like Bled, Slovenia, for the International Winter Swimming Association’s World Championships. In 2010, the event had 790 swimmers; by 2020, there were 1,042. In the U.S., the Memphremagog Winter Swimming Festival—basically, an outdoor swim meet in February in a two-lane pool cut into the ice in Newport, Vermont—is a similar gathering of enthusiasts. (Water temperature: about 31. Air: Usually about 9.)



What’s the draw? Some research hints there may be physical benefits to winter swimming—maybe an increased tolerance to respiratory infections and possibly helpful effects for blood sugar regulation and for the cardiovascular system—although one 2020 review dubbed it “a continuing subject of debate.”

But people who do it tend to say that the mental benefits are a huge reason they do it again and again. Some of the benefits are immediate; others are more long term, they say.

“When I start to swim, I take on what I call a hyper-focus on my environment and how my body feels. It is an extreme meditative mindfulness—I must put all other thoughts out of my head in order to survive,” says

Martha Wood, a marathon swimmer who gets in the waters of Massachusetts year round with a group that calls itself the L Street Ice Swimmers and a member of New England Masters Swim Club. “I listen to my body and do my best to get out before danger of hypothermia.”

“I find the act itself to be exhilarating,” says Rick Born, a neurobiologist, an open water swimmer, and a winter swimmer in Massachusetts. “First, I love being in the water and especially the ocean. Second, the cold, after the initial shock to the system, gives this sense of purity and clarity and peace that appeal to me.”

They all say getting in never gets easier, which is part of the appeal. “I have learned to calm myself and relax each time I step into cold water. The relaxing takes conscious effort since the activity remains hard, even after eight winters of doing it,” Wood says, going on to explain that she feels “a personal confidence and a sense of well-being that comes from having put myself through a scary situation and coming out the other end not just all right but better for it.”

For marathon swimmers like Mary Stella, a member of the Delaware Valley LMSC, the challenges are actually the point. “Having to get in ice cold water to swim develops a sort of mental toughness I can draw upon at other times,” she says.

Scientists are trying to back them up, theorizing on why this might be. One is Mark Harper, a consultant anesthetist at Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals in the U.K., whose friends led him to cold water about 20 years ago when his pool was closed. He’s still swimming in it.

As a Ph.D. candidate, he started thinking about why, when you get out, you begin to understand what everyone’s raving about. He was studying how cold increases the stress response in your body when you’re having an operation. He wondered whether, if you can help your body adapt to cold, it would improve this stress response and improve outcomes in surgery.

Could adapting to repeated exposures to cold water improve your stress response to life in general? He thinks there may be something to it, and explores ideas and strategies around it in his new book, *Chill: The Cold Water Swim Cure*. Cold water may train your body to experience the stress of inflammation and then recover from it. “It’s like when you go for a workout in the gym and stress your muscles and they get stronger,” he says.

Daily life—depending on how you eat, move, sleep, and react—can put inflammation in overdrive. “It’s like pulling a muscle. But cold water adaptation keeps you in the zone where you’re getting stronger rather than damaging yourself,” he says. Inflammation has also been linked to some types of depression, and a case study he co-authored in the *British Medical Journal* describes how cold water swimming helped one woman reduce her symptoms of depression.

More immediately, “There’s this massive bodily response to all these neurotransmitters and chemicals that your body releases when you get into cold water,” Harper says. Science hasn’t figured out which chemicals might be related to the rush followed by calm that winter swimmers feel—if indeed they’re related at all. But he suspects noradrenaline and adrenaline are involved. “That’s what causes your blood vessels to shut down to keep warm,” Harper says. “They also make you feel good—cocaine is also something that gives you a release of these chemicals.”

So how cold is cold? To get the benefits, he says between 50 and 59 degrees is best. Dipping or swimming likely offers more benefits than just showering with cold water. “The two things that affect the degree of response to the cold are the temperature and the speed of cooling,” he adds. It’s hard to get a shower as cold as the open water is in the winter, and standing under a shower won’t cool you as quickly as immersing yourself.

Harper admits that the benefits may not even completely come from the cold. Physical activity itself has well-known mental health benefits, he points out. In fact, the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, describe how habitual exercise can reduce the risk of depression and long-term feelings and signs of anxiety and even dementia, and how short-term anxiety may be reduced right after you work out. There are also theories that being in or near water, sometimes referred to as “blue spaces,” may add to a sense of well-being too.

There’s also the value of flirting with danger and coming out ahead of it. A prominent researcher of cold water’s effects pointed out in a 2017 paper in *Experimental Physiology* that “for centuries, cold water has been regarded as both ‘hero’ and ‘villain,’ as having both beneficial and detrimental effects.”

Also, on the beneficial side is who you swim with and where you do it. “Being in a community and being outdoors and seeing the water—all these things contribute to the benefit. They’re also what keep you going back,” Harper says.

It’s hard to interview winter swimmers without their bringing up the community they swim with. They say there’s something about shivering together, zipping each other’s coats up, and feeling exuberant en masse that creates ties unlike any other sport they’ve known.

“As Mariia Yrjö-Koskinen, the doyenne of Finnish winter swimming, puts it, ‘The colder the water, the

warmer the friendships,”” Born says. “It’s sort of true. I firmly believe, without a shred of scientific evidence, that it’s inherently healthy—both mentally and physically—to get together with friends, do something semi-crazy (but in a responsible way) and then celebrate afterwards. It’s good for the spirit. It’s fun. It gets one off the sofa and, at the very least, we know this is better for one’s health than being on the sofa.”

by Marty Munson
December 28, 2022

These three variables will take your swimming to the next level

Struggling to speed up your interval training can be frustrating if, no matter how hard you work, you just can’t move your main set to a faster interval.

Here’s how you can speed up your interval training.

The Rule of Three

When creating sets, focus on three variables: distance, interval, and velocity. Playing around with them can help you reach a higher level of fitness.

- **Distance.** This is how far you swim each repeat. What’s required of you to complete a 50 freestyle is much different than what’s required for a 200 freestyle. You’ll need to swim at a slower pace and with more efficiency for the latter.
- **Interval.** This is how much rest you get between repeats. Intervals are the most crucial element in upping your fitness level, and there are things to be gained from both long- and short-rest sets. If you’re working on building your speed, take longer rest; if you’re working on building your aerobic capacity, take shorter rest.
- **Velocity.** This is how quickly you swim. Remember: The faster you swim, the higher your stroke rate will be and the worse your efficiency will be. If you slow down, you’ll reduce your stroke rate and increase your efficiency.

How to Do It

Here are a few ways to use distance, intervals, and velocity to help you reach your goal. Here’s an example of someone who wants to go from doing 10 x 100s on 1:40 to doing them on 1:30.

Note: When setting your goal to go to a faster interval, realize that it’s going to take a lot of time and effort to get there. Set realistic goals, and don’t get discouraged. Even dropping 10 seconds, as we chose in the example to make for easier math throughout, can be an enormous undertaking.

- **Distance.** To build into doing 10 x 100s on 1:30, try covering a shorter distance on your goal interval. In this case, that would be 20 x 50s on 45 seconds. Once you’re able to do that, try 12 x 75s on 1:07 (even though it’s not the 1,000 total yards) before moving to 10 x 100s on 1:30.
- **Interval.** Try switching your 10 x 100s to 1:30 and see how it goes. You might only make two or three or five, but try the set again the following week with a goal to make one more. If you keep building on your progress, you’ll eventually get to your goal of doing 10 x 100s on 1:30. This is referred to as a test set.
- **Velocity.** Swimmers sometimes do what are called best average sets, which require them to swim the fastest times they can hold on a slower interval than they normally do. If you can do your 10 x 100s on 1:40 and hold 1:30, try doing 10 x 100s on 2:00 and holding 1:20 or 1:25. The extra rest will allow you to have a little more speed. Keep reducing the interval every week until you reach your goal interval.

Final Thought

One thing is for sure: You can’t swim faster without swimming faster. That sounds silly, but as Masters swimmers, we often show up and swim our same metronomic cadence because it’s comfortable. Step out of your comfort zone and try something new. No one ever gets better by staying where they are.

by Scott Bay

COMSA To Reimburse Club/Workout Group Registration Fees for Clubs/Workout Groups of 10+ Swimmers

COMSA's Executive Board voted and approved that COMSA pay the 2023 club/workout group registration fees for all clubs/workout groups with a 2022 membership of 10 or more swimmers.

Club/workout groups with less than 10 members, should contact the [COMSA Chair](#) for reimbursement requests.

COMSA Committee Open Positions

COMSA is looking for a few good people to volunteer with COMSA!

Executive Committee open position: Vice Chair
Appointed Committee open positions: Club Development Coordinator, Coaches, Fitness, Long Distance Open Water, and Safety

[Link to description of positions](#)

Anyone who is interested in volunteering and giving back to the sport of swimming, please contact [Doug Garcia](#).

Visit our Website

