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Why are swimmers some of the fittest athletes around? Because swimming is a total body workout. From your head to your toes, here are several reasons why swimming is such a great sport for health and fitness.

Arms – Each arm stroke starts with the catch phase of the stroke, where the forearm and hand form an anchor point in the water. You use your shoulder, upper arm and core muscles to pull your body past this anchor point. Think of how many arm strokes you take during a practice... Now that is a workout.

Lats – See those muscles along the side of your back? Those are your latissimus dorsi or lat muscles. They are very strong and help you in developing and maintaining a powerful arm stroke.

Core – The power in your pull and kick come from your core. A strong core – including abdominal and back muscles – can lead to better technique, faster swimming and a better body position in the water. Your core is also involved in the rotation of your body (side-to-side or up-down). Since the core has such an important role in swimming, these muscles really do get a workout during practice and meets.

Quads – To have a powerful kick, you need strong quads and hip muscles. These muscles – through the whipping action of the legs and with the help a strong core – help propel your body through the water.

Ankles and Calves – All those flip turns and push-offs from the walls increase ankle and calf strength, as well as quad strength. With each turn on the wall, your leg muscles contract, and then you jump off the wall with power and explode into your stroke. Think of how many push-offs you do during a practice. What a workout for your legs!

Aerobic and Anaerobic – Swimming can help you develop the endurance to do a long workout and also develop the speed for sprinting. When you swim at low to moderate intensities, you are building up your aerobic capacity, or the ability to swim for long durations. When you train at moderate to high intensities, you are building up your anaerobic capacity, the ability to blast a 100m sprint in a meet.

Cardiovascular – Your heart, blood vessels and lungs adapt to the many laps you swim in the pool. As your heart, blood vessels and lungs change with training and competitions, your fitness level increases.

Mental Toughness – Swimming works your mind. Getting through those tough workouts and staying focused not only helps your physical fitness, but also helps your mental toughness – not to mention the mental preparation and focus it takes to perform your best at competitions.