

Technical Suits for Young Swimmers

“Technical suits” have become the rage in the world of swimming. These expensive swimsuits (\$200-\$600) have been touted as game-changers, and at a top level meet you don’t see an elite swimmer competing without one.

What makes these suits so desirable for elite athletes? First, the suits are designed to fit very tightly in order to compress the muscles. This can create a slimmer profile in the water and enhance the streamline. Second, the suit is designed to reduce drag. The fabric is substantially water-repellent; seams are fused together rather than sewn, further reducing friction in the water.

When properly sized, these suits look like they are painted onto the swimmer—there are no wrinkles or sagging. The downside is that the athlete has only a few swims in the suit before it becomes “stretched out,” losing much of its compression and water repellency. But until then, a technical suit might mean a meaningful drop of time to an elite swimmer.

“So, these suits will enable my 9-year-old to make a Regional/Sectional cut, right?”

Sorry. No suit will fix your child’s stroke, improve his/her starts and turns, or develop his/her kick. These are the things that are more likely to make your child faster in the pool.

Young swimmers typically drop time like crazy. They’re growing at a rapid rate; at the same time, they are practicing the fundamentals, mastering the skills, and learning the techniques of competitive swimming. At this age, personal bests will happen regardless of the type of suits they’re wearing.

While technical suits can be found in some small sizes, they are simply not designed for young swimmers. Muscle compression is one of the principal functions of a tech suit, so unless your age-group swimmer is muscularly developed way beyond his/her years, absolutely no benefit will be gained here.

Most manufacturers say a tech suit will last for up to 6 competitions. Even the top swimmers use them only for the most important meets, and they often get their suits for free since they’re sponsored by suit manufacturers.

We all want our children to develop a healthy work ethic. We tell them that hard work pays off. We want our kids to set challenging goals, to have a plan for achieving those goals, and to consistently give their best effort following that plan. The last thing we should be doing is giving them the impression that we can buy a shortcut, one that will make them faster without any effort—especially when that’s simply untrue.

Effective September 1, 2020, USA Swimming will ban the use of these suits for swimmers aged 12 & under at meets other than National Championship level meets. Pacific Northwest Swimming discourages the use of technical suits for our younger swimmers. We strongly believe that the minimal potential benefit does not justify the significant expense. We believe that our young athletes are better served by focusing on technique, fitness, work ethic, and sportsmanship.