



Why Swimmers Are Smarter Than You

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Middle school may have been a helluva lot easier if you had spent a little more time in the pool. New research out of Australia says that children who are taught to swim at an early age hit certain physical and developmental milestones faster than kids who learn later in life.

Over the span of three years, researchers surveyed the parents of more than 7,000 children age 5 and under and found that the age kids learned to swim correlated with when they began accomplishing certain skills.

In pre-school, early swimmers had better visual-motor skills (like cutting paper and drawing lines and shapes), but also fared better as they got older (i.e. understanding directions, math, and writing and reading skills).

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Turns out, some of what you learn in the classroom (or in your day-to-day experiences) is similar to what you learn in a pool, says lead study author Robyn Jorgensen, Ph.D., a professor and senior fellow at the Griffith Institute for Educational Research. There's a strong synergy between language and action with swimming that's essential for many cognitive and motor skills, she adds. Kids learn at an early age to hear language and make connections with their bodies (for example, counting to 10 while kicking).

And it doesn't take long to see the effects, either: When researchers observed swimming lessons, they found that the kids' eyes blinked in preparation for the ready cue -- "one, two, three, go!" -- a clear sign that young kids can understand language and react accordingly even if they can't communicate everything clearly.

Your move: Sign your kids up for lessons -- and keep 'em going. In Jorgensen's study, the earlier the child started and the longer they remained in the swimming lessons, the greater the gains, she says.

And it wouldn't hurt to jump in the pool yourself. Besides the added benefit of challenging yourself through switching up your workout, water is about 1,000 times denser than air, so a swim workout can be tougher on you. You'll burn almost the same amount of calories each minute as you would biking -- but you can kiss dodging traffic or worrying about your joints goodbye.

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