



Dementia and swimming

This fact sheet is full of information, tips and advice about how you can help an individual participate in swimming, if living with dementia.

What is dementia?

Dementia is a common condition that affects about 850,000 people living in England. Your risk of developing dementia increases as you get older and the condition usually occurs in people over the age of 65.

The word 'dementia' describes a set of symptoms that may include memory loss and difficulties with thinking, problem-solving or language. These changes are often small to start with, but for someone with dementia they have become severe enough to affect daily life. A person with dementia may also experience changes in their mood or behaviour.

What swimmers need to know about dementia and swimming

- Swimming can offer a sense of mental wellbeing, something which cannot be easily measured but is often anecdotally mentioned by participants.
- It clears the mind, encourages positivity in individuals and builds a sense of self-worth. It can make people feel better than they otherwise might. Swim England identifies this as 'social health'.
- Swimming can soothe agitation and reduce anxiety, relax the body and support the body in a relatively weightless environment.
- Swimming pools are meeting points, which can reduce loneliness, introduce friends and offer opportunities to socialise.

Tips for swimming with dementia for carers

These tips are for swimmers and their carer's, who want to take part in the sport if living with dementia.

Do:

- ask for a familiarisation session at the pool where the swimmers wants to participate. This will allow you and the swimmer to ask all the questions you need to
- take part in swimming if they feel they can't be active because of joint pain, swimming is a low impact form of activity, so is easy on the swimmer's joints
- seek the advice of a medical professional if they have any concerns for the swimmer.

Don't:

- let them feel that because of the diagnosis they have, they don't need to stop doing activities they enjoy or trying new things.

Tips for operators supporting swimmers living with dementia

Do:

- display temporary free standing signage and pop-up banners. These can be placed outside the pools for specific dementia sessions. This will help aid recognition because the same dementia logo in signage will be used in all publicity materials
- have clear permanent indoor and outdoor signage indicating directions to and from locations such as pools, toilets, changing rooms and exits. Footsteps stickers can be placed on floors directing people to changing facilities and the pool
- consider colour, size, images, wording and the level above ground for all signage
- simplify door codes and methods of access wherever possible
- simplify locker systems and consider use of locker 'saddles', wrist bands and larger locker number plates
- include grab rails and towel hooks on poolside
- use less severe lighting
- use relaxing, age-appropriate music as opposed to loud fast paced music
- ensure uniforms make staff easy to identify
- provide extra seating at key points for carers and people with dementia waiting for sessions
- avoid 'clutter' around the facility.

Additional advice

The Dementia Friendly Swimming Hub:

swimming.org/dementiafriendly

Dementia-friendly sport and physical activity:

alzheimers.org.uk/sport