

## FOR TEENS: MAKING WATER SAFETY A SPLASH

[http://kidshealth.org/teen/safety/safebasics/water\\_safety.html](http://kidshealth.org/teen/safety/safebasics/water_safety.html)

When the weather turns warm, everyone wants to be in or around the water. Hanging out with your friends at the pool or the beach on a hot day is a great way to beat the heat.

Between having fun and checking out the lifeguards, most people don't think much about water safety - but they should. For people between the ages of 5 and 24, drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death. It doesn't have to be that way, though. Most water-related accidents can be avoided by knowing how to stay safe and following a few simple guidelines.

### SWIMMING SMARTS

**"Buddy up!"** That's what swimming instructors tell us to do every time we go swimming. That means always swim with a partner, whether you're swimming in a backyard pool or in a lake. Even experienced swimmers can become too tired or get muscle cramps, which might make it difficult to get out of the water. When people swim together, they can help each other or go for help in case of an emergency.

**Get skilled.** Speaking of emergencies, it's good to be prepared. Learning some life-saving techniques, such as CPR and rescue techniques, can help you save a life. A number of organizations offer free classes for both beginning and experienced swimmers and boaters. Check with your YMCA or YWCA, local hospital, or chapter of the Red Cross.

**Know your limits.** Swimming can be a lot of fun - and you might want to stay in the water as long as possible. If you're not a good swimmer or you're just learning to swim, don't go in water that's so deep you can't touch the bottom and don't try to keep up with skilled swimmers. That can be hard, especially when your friends are challenging you - but it's a pretty sure bet they'd rather have you safe and alive.

If you are a good swimmer and have had lessons, keep an eye on friends who aren't as comfortable or as skilled as you are. If it seems like they (or you) are getting tired or a little uneasy, suggest that you take a break from swimming for a while.

**Swim in safe areas only.** It's a good idea to only swim in places that are supervised by a lifeguard. No one can anticipate changing ocean currents, riptides, sudden storms, or other hidden dangers. In the event that something does go wrong, lifeguards are trained in rescue techniques.

**Be careful about diving.** Teens are more likely than any other age group to suffer diving injuries, many of which can result in permanent spinal cord damage or death. Only dive in areas that are known to be safe for diving, such as the deep end of a supervised pool. If an area is posted with "No Diving" or "No Swimming" signs, pay attention to them. If you see a "No Diving" sign, that means the water isn't safe for a head-first entry. Even if you plan to jump in feet first, check the water's depth before you leap to make sure there are no hidden rocks or other hazards. Lakes or rivers can be cloudy and hazards can be hard to see.

**Watch the sun.** Sun reflecting off the water or off sand can intensify the burning rays. You might not feel sunburned when the water feels cool and refreshing, but the pain will catch up with you later - so remember to reapply sunscreen frequently and cover up much of the time.

**Drink plenty of fluids.** It's easy to get dehydrated in the sun, particularly if you're active and sweating. Keep up with fluids - particularly water - to prevent dehydration. Dizziness, feeling lightheaded, or nausea can be signs of dehydration and overheating.

**Getting too cool.** Speaking of temperature, it's possible to get too cool. How? Staying in very cool water for long periods can lower your body temperature. A temperature of 70 degrees Fahrenheit (20 degrees Celsius) is positively balmy on land, but did you know that water below 70 degrees will feel cold to most swimmers? Your body temperature drops far more quickly in water than it does on land. And if you're swimming, you're using energy and losing body heat even faster than if you were keeping still. Monitor yourself when swimming in cold water and stay close to shore. If feel your body start to shiver or your muscles cramp up, get out of the water quickly; it doesn't take long for hypothermia to set in.

**Alcohol and water never mix.** Alcohol is involved in numerous water-related injuries and up to half of all water-related deaths. The statistics for teenage guys are particularly scary: One half of all adolescent male drownings are tied to alcohol use.