



Preventing Illness

During the past few years, a high proportion of swimmers have been ill, particularly during the winter months. Whilst sometimes this is unavoidable, swimmers and coaches should do everything possible to prevent illness and stay healthy all year round, and especially during periods of hard training.

The purpose of this document is to provide strategies for swimmers in order to establish best practice in an attempt to minimise the incidence of illness and infection.

Strategies to Avoid Illness & Infections

- Avoid contact with people who have symptoms of infection (i.e. those ‘just coming down with a cold’) and may transmit the germs through airborne sources
- Minimise contact with children of school age and avoid large crowds
- Wash hands regularly, particularly after touching surfaces that are frequently handled by the public such as doorknobs, handrails and telephone receivers
- Avoid hand-to-eye or hand-to-mouth contact to prevent transferring microbes to sensitive mucosal tissues
- Maintain good oral hygiene – brush teeth regularly and consider using an anti-septic mouthwash in the morning and evening
- Avoid getting a dry mouth; this can be done by drinking little and often to maintain hydration
- Never share drinks bottles or cutlery
- Use properly treated water for drinking during swimming
- Avoid shared saunas, showers and Jacuzzis where germs can breed
- Be aware of vulnerability to infection after training and competition when the immune system is low, and especially during the winter months
- Remember good personal hygiene and thoughtfulness are the best defences against infection
- Moving from a hot environment (pool) to a cold one (outside) will weaken the immune system: wrap up well and stay warm!



Swimmers and coaches regularly ask 2 key questions:

1. How can I minimise the risk of getting ill?
2. What training can I do during and following illness to get back to normal as soon as possible?

The following tables may help to answer these questions outline the necessary strategies to minimise the affects of illness.



Training During Infections?

- Exercise tolerance may be reduced when the athlete has an infection
- Exercising with an infection may increase the severity and/ or duration of the illness
- Light exercise during recovery from illness may enhance recovery
- Iron supplements should not be taken during periods of infection
- Training should be stopped if the athlete has a fever or symptoms such as aching joints and muscles
- It is probably OK to continue light training if the symptoms are all above the neck
- Do not resume training at the same level; build up gradually
- Team members with infection should be isolated as much as possible from the rest of the team
- For more details, please follow the flow diagram on page 3

Personal Management

- Maintain a well-balanced diet adequate energy, carbohydrate, protein, fat, vitamins & minerals
- Carbohydrate solution pre-, during and post-training may help in reducing immune suppression
- Allow sufficient time between training sessions for recovery
- Get regular and adequate sleep every night (ideally 8-10 hours) and additional recovery at weekends
- Take advice on the use of additional supplements (see below). However, over-supplementation of vitamins and minerals can impair immune function
- Maintain good hydration
- Discuss the possibility of vaccination with an EIS or British Swimming doctor, usually in September each year
- Reduce life/social/psychological stress such as school/ University work; good time management is one of the most important skills an elite swimmer can learn

Supplements

Swimmers who already have a good balanced diet may take additional supplements in an attempt to boost immune function and prevent illness. Multi-vitamins, Cod liver oil, Vitamin C, Iron (e.g. ferrous sulphate), Echinacea, Glutamine, Zinc, Magnesium, and Octacosanol have all been suggested to help prevent illness, although swimmers taking any supplement should be aware of possible contamination of supplements and consult the BOA statement (www.boa.co.uk/statements) concerning the use of supplementation. Swimmers should also consult the UK Sport website and investigate any commercial products being taken; see <http://www.100percentme.co.uk> and check on the international Drugs Identification Database: <http://www.didglobal.com/page/PHPSESSID/287c50a52d9ae14dc83b815a389a20ad/category>



Further Reading

- Gleeson M. (2006) - *Immune function in sport and exercise*. Churchill Livingstone, Elsevier USA
- Whyte G., Budgett R., Jaques R. and Davies P. (2003). Avoiding winter illness. OMI bulletin



IDENTIFY PROBLEMS

Generally localised to above the neck:

- Dry sore throat
- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Slightly swollen glands in the neck

- Lifestyle rest
- Light swimming (50 BBM) 5-7 days
- Usually volume can be maintained

• **Symptoms completely resolved**

- **Build training over 3 days**
- **Full training on the 4th day**

Below the neck:

- Significant rise in resting Heart Rate (+ 20%)
- Coughing with phlegm
- General aches & pains
- Fever
- Excessive fatigue

- Consult doctor
- Lifestyle rest
- Complete rest 3-7 days

• **Major symptoms resolved**

- Lifestyle rest
- Light swimming (50 BBM) 5-7 days
- Usually volume can be maintained

• **Symptoms completely resolved**

- **Build training over 3 days**
- **Full training on the 4th day**

Conclusion

The incidence of illness among British swimmers is significant and a major factor in compromising training effectiveness and ultimately competitive performance. By good planning and best practice in self-management skills, the incidence of illness and infection can be kept to a minimum.