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These [General Water Safety Tips](#) will help you stay safe in, on, and around the water! Also check out our additional safety tips below for specialized aquatic activities.

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General Water Safety Tips

- Learn to swim. The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around the water is to learn to swim. Always swim with a buddy; never swim alone. The American Red Cross has swimming courses for people of any age and swimming ability. To enroll in a swim course, contact your [local Red Cross chapter](#).
- Swim in areas supervised by a lifeguard.
- Read and obey all rules and posted signs.
- Children or inexperienced swimmers should take precautions, such as wearing a U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (PFD) when around the water.
- Watch out for the dangerous “too’s” – too tired, too cold, too far from safety, too much sun, too much strenuous activity.
- Set water safety rules for the whole family based on swimming abilities (for example, inexperienced swimmers should stay in water less than chest deep).
- Be knowledgeable of the water environment you are in and its potential hazards, such as deep and shallow areas, currents, depth changes, obstructions and where the entry and exit points are located. The more informed you are, the more aware you will be of hazards and safe practices.
- Pay attention to local weather conditions and forecasts. Stop swimming at the first indication

of bad weather.

- Use a feet-first entry when entering the water.
- Enter headfirst only when the area is clearly marked for diving and has no obstructions.
- Do not mix alcohol with swimming, diving or boating. Alcohol impairs your judgment, balance, and coordination, affects your swimming and diving skills, and reduces your body's ability to stay warm.
- Know how to prevent, recognize, and respond to emergencies.

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Beach Safety

- Protect your skin: Sunlight contains two kinds of UV rays -- UVA increases the risk of skin cancer, skin aging, and other skin diseases. UVB causes sunburn and can lead to skin cancer. Limit the amount of direct sunlight you receive between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. and wear a sunscreen with a sun protection factor of at least 15.
- Drink plenty of water regularly and often even if you do not feel thirsty. Your body needs water to keep cool.
 - Avoid drinks with alcohol or caffeine in them. They can make you feel good briefly but make the heat's effects on your body worse. This is especially true with beer, which dehydrates the body.
- Watch for signs of heat stroke: Heat stroke is life-threatening. The person's temperature control system, which produces sweating to cool the body, stops working.
 - The body temperature can rise so high that brain damage and death may result if the body is not cooled quickly.
 - Signals of heat stroke include –
 - Hot, red, and usually dry skin, but in some cases such as during athletic activity while wearing a helmet, the skin may be moist
 - Changes in consciousness
 - Rapid, weak pulse, and
 - Rapid, shallow breathing.
 - Call 9-1-1 or your local EMS number.
 - Move the person to a cooler place.
 - Quickly cool the body by wrapping wet sheets around the body and fan it. If you have ice packs or cold packs, place them on each of the victim's wrists and ankles, in the armpits and on the neck to cool the large blood vessels.
 - Watch for signals of breathing problems and make sure the airway is clear.
 - Keep the person lying down.
- Wear eye protection
 - Sunglasses are like sunscreen for your eyes and protect against damage that can occur from UV rays.
 - Be sure to wear sunglasses with labels that indicate that they absorb at least 90 percent of UV sunlight.
- Wear foot protection. Many times, people's feet can get burned from the sand or cut from glass in the sand.

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Boating Safety

- Learn to swim. The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around the water is to learn to swim. This includes anyone participating in any boating activity. The American Red Cross has swimming courses for people of any age and swimming ability. To enroll in a swim course, contact your [local Red Cross chapter](#).

- Alcohol and boating don't mix. Alcohol impairs your judgment, balance, and coordination -- over 50 percent of drownings result from boating incidents involving alcohol. For the same reasons it is dangerous to operate an automobile while under the influence of alcohol, people should not operate a boat while drinking alcohol.
- Look for the label: Use Coast Guard-approved life jackets for yourself and your passengers when boating and fishing.
- Develop a float plan. Anytime you go out in a boat, give a responsible person details about where you will be and how long you will be gone. This is important because if the boat is delayed because of an emergency, becomes lost, or encounters other problems, you want help to be able to reach you.
- Find a boating course in your area (U.S. Power Squadron, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, US Sailing, etc) -- these courses teach about navigation rules, emergency procedures and the effects of wind, water conditions, and weather.
- Watch the weather: Know local weather conditions and prepare for electrical storms. Watch local news programs. Stop boating as soon as you see or hear a storm.

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Home Pools

- Learn to swim. The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around the water is to learn to swim--this includes adults and children. The American Red Cross has swimming courses for people of any age and swimming ability. To enroll in a course to learn or improve your ability to swim, contact your [local Red Cross chapter](#).
- Never leave a child unobserved around water. Your eyes must be on the child at all times. Adult supervision is recommended.
- Install a phone by the pool or keep a cordless phone nearby so that you can call 9-1-1 in an emergency.
- Learn Red Cross CPR and insist that babysitters, grandparents, and others who care for your child know CPR.
- Post CPR instructions and 9-1-1 or your local emergency number in the pool area.
- Enclose the pool completely with a self-locking, self-closing fence with vertical bars. Openings in the fence should be no more than four inches wide. The house should not be included as a part of the barrier.
 - The gate should be constructed so that it is self-latching and self-closing.
- Never leave furniture near the fence that would enable a child to climb over the fence.
- Always keep basic lifesaving equipment by the pool and know how to use it. Pole, rope, and personal flotation devices (PFDs) are recommended.
- Keep toys away from the pool when it is not in use. Toys can attract young children into the pool.
- Pool covers should always be completely removed prior to pool use.
- If a child is missing, check the pool first. Go to the edge of the pool and scan the entire pool, bottom, and surface, as well as the surrounding pool area

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Keeping Children Safe In, On, and Around the Water

- Maintain constant supervision. Watch children around any water environment (pool, stream, lake, tub, toilet, bucket of water), no matter what skills your child has acquired and no matter how shallow the water. For younger children, practice "Reach Supervision" by staying within an arm's length reach.
- Don't rely on substitutes. The use of flotation devices and inflatable toys **cannot** replace parental supervision. Such devices could suddenly shift position, lose air, or slip out from underneath, leaving the child in a dangerous situation.
- Enroll children in a water safety course or [Learn-to-Swim classes](#). Your decision to provide your child with an early aquatic experience is a gift that will have infinite rewards. These courses encourage safe practices. You can also purchase a [Water Safety Handbook](#) at the Red Cross Store.
- Parents should take a CPR course. Knowing these skills can be important around the water and you will expand your capabilities in providing care for your child. You can contact your [local Red Cross](#) to enroll in a [CPR course](#).

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Lakes and Rivers

- Learn to swim. The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around the water is to learn to swim--this includes adults and children. The American Red Cross has swimming courses for people of any age and swimming ability. To enroll in swim course, contact your [local Red Cross chapter](#).
- Select a supervised area. A trained lifeguard who can help in an emergency is the best safety factor. Even good swimmers can have an unexpected medical emergency in the water. Never swim alone.
- Select an area that is clean and well maintained. A clean bathhouse, clean restrooms, and a litter-free environment show the management's concern for your health and safety.
- Select an area that has good water quality and safe natural conditions. Murky water, hidden underwater objects, unexpected drop-offs, and aquatic plant life are hazards. Water pollution can cause health problems for swimmers. Strong tides, big waves, and currents can turn an event that began as fun into a tragedy.
- Make sure the water is deep enough before entering headfirst. Too many swimmers are seriously injured every year by entering headfirst into water that is too shallow. A feet first entry is much safer than diving.
- Be sure rafts and docks are in good condition. A well-run open-water facility maintains its rafts and docks in good condition, with no loose boards or exposed nails. Never swim under a raft or dock. Always look before jumping off a dock or raft to be sure no one is in the way.
- Avoid drainage ditches and arroyos. Drainage ditches and arroyos for water run-off are not good places for swimming or playing in the water. After heavy rains, they can quickly change into raging rivers that can easily take a human life. Even the strongest swimmers are no match for the power of the water. Fast water and debris in the current make ditches and arroyos very dangerous.

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Ocean Safety

- Learn to swim. The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around the water is to learn to swim--this includes adults and children. The American Red Cross has swimming courses for people of any age and swimming ability. Contact your [local Red Cross chapter](#) for information on courses.

- Stay within the designated swimming area, ideally within the visibility of a lifeguard.
- **Never** swim alone.
- Check the surf conditions **before** you enter the water. Check to see if a warning flag is up or check with a lifeguard for water conditions, beach conditions, or any potential hazards.
- Stay away from piers, pilings, and diving platforms when in the water.
- Keep a lookout for aquatic life. Water plants and animals may be dangerous. Avoid patches of plants. Leave animals alone.
- Make sure you always have enough energy to swim back to shore.
- Don't try to swim against a current if caught in one. Swim gradually out of the current, by swimming across it.

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Personal Watercraft (Jet Skis)

- Learn to swim. The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around the water is to learn to swim. This includes anyone participating in any water sport or boating activity. The American Red Cross has swimming courses for people of any age and swimming ability. To enroll in a swim course, contact your [local Red Cross chapter](#).
- Know your local laws and regulations. Some states have special laws governing the use of personal water craft (PWC) which address operations, registration and licensing requirements, education, required safety equipment and minimum ages.
- Operate your PWC with courtesy and common sense. Follow the traffic pattern of the waterway. Obey no-wake and speed zones.
- Use extreme caution around swimmers and surfers. Run your PWC at a slow speed until the craft is away from shore, swimming areas, and docks. Avoid passing close to other boats and jumping wakes. This behavior is dangerous and often illegal.
- Coast Guard-approved life jackets should be worn by the operator of the PWC as well as any riders.
- Ride with a buddy. PWCs should always travel in groups of two or three. You never know when an emergency might occur.
- Alcohol and operating a PWC doesn't mix. Alcohol impairs your judgment, balance, and coordination. For the same reasons it is dangerous to operate an automobile, people should not operate a boat or PWC while drinking alcohol.

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Sailboarding and Windsurfing

- Always wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket.
- Wear a wet suit in cold water to prevent hypothermia.
- You need good physical strength and swimming ability. The American Red Cross has swimming courses for people of any age and swimming ability. To enroll in a swim course, contact your [local Red Cross chapter](#).
- Take windsurfing lessons from a qualified instructor.

- Know local weather conditions. Make sure the water and weather conditions are safe. Because water conducts electricity, it is wise to stop swimming, boating or any activities on the water as soon as you see or hear a storm. Also, heavy rains can make certain areas dangerous.

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Skin and SCUBA Diving

- Receive instructions/take lessons from qualified divers before participating.
- Get a medical examination and take a swim test before learning SCUBA diving.
- Once certified, do not dive in rough or dangerous waters or in environments for which you are not trained. Ice, cave, and shipwreck diving require special training. One can easily get lost or trapped and run out of air.
- Never dive by yourself.
- Learn to swim. The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around the water is to learn to swim. This includes anyone participating in any water sport. The American Red Cross has swimming courses for people of any age and swimming ability. To enroll in a swim course, contact your [local Red Cross chapter](#).
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Snorkeling

- Practice in shallow water.
- Check the equipment carefully and know how it functions.
- Learn how to clear water from the snorkel.
- Learn how to put your mask back on when you tread water.
- Be careful not to swim or be carried by a current too far from shore or the boat.
- Never snorkel alone.
- Learn to swim. The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around the water is to learn to swim. This includes anyone participating in any water sport. The American Red Cross has swimming courses for people of any age and swimming ability. To enroll in a swim course, contact your [local Red Cross chapter](#).
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Surfing

- Take lessons from an experienced individual.
- Wear a wet suit when in cold water.
- Never surf alone.
- Learn to swim. The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around the water is to learn to swim. This includes anyone participating in any water sport. The American Red Cross has swimming courses for people of any age and swimming ability. To enroll in a swim course, contact your [local Red Cross chapter](#).
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Tubing and Rafting

- Always wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket.
- Do not overload the raft.
- Do not go rafting after a heavy rain.
- When rafting with a tour company, make sure the guides are qualified. Check with the local chamber of commerce for listings of accredited tour guides and companies.
- Learn to swim. The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around the water is to learn to swim. This includes anyone participating in any water sport. The American Red Cross has swimming courses for people of any age and swimming ability. To enroll in a swim course, contact your [local Red Cross chapter](#).
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Waterparks

- Learn to swim. The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around the water is to learn to swim--this includes adults and children. The American Red Cross has swimming courses for people of any age and swimming ability. To enroll in a swim course, contact your [local Red Cross chapter](#).
- Be sure the area is well supervised by lifeguards before you or others in your group enter the water.
- Read all posted signs. Follow the rules and directions given by lifeguards. Ask questions if you are not sure about a correct procedure.
- When you go from one attraction to another, note that the water depth may be different and that the attraction should be used in a different way.
- Before you start down a water slide, get in the correct position -- face up and feet first.
- Some facilities provide life jackets at no charge. If you cannot swim, wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket. Check others in your group as well.

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Water Skiing

- Wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket.
- Be sure the boat and ski equipment are in good shape.
- Always turn the boat motor completely off when you approach a fallen skier.
- Watch the water ahead of you at all times.
- Have an extra person aboard to watch and assist the skier.
- Run parallel to shore and come in slowly when landing. Sit down if coming in too fast.
- Use proper hand signals to signal boat operator.
- Do not ski at night or in restricted areas.
- Learn to swim. The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around the water is to learn to swim. This includes anyone participating in any water sport. The American Red Cross has swimming courses for people of any age and swimming ability. To enroll in a swim course, contact your [local Red Cross chapter](#).
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